

SHATTERED

BY LESSER OF 2 WEEVILS – 2022

Language advisory on this episode – some adult language is used

Episode 12

[Shattered theme music]

NEMO: In the early 1900s, the great and good at the Paris Opera buried an urn full of “living voices”—Gramophone recordings of famous opera stars—to be disinterred after a century. When those urns were opened, mysterious recordings, similar to experiments done by Alexander Graham Bell at the Volta Laboratories in Washington D.C. in 1881, were discovered. Who made them? And why?

NEMO: Over the months since I first digitized and listened to the two Volta Lab-like cylinders left in the urn buried beneath the Paris Opera, I think I’ve come to a conclusion about who made them and why. A Parisian ex-police chief, Hosein’ali Khan, and his friend, or frenemy. Someone called Erik, an extremely gifted composer and musician—

[Parléophon recording, piano and soloist.]

NEMO: --an enthusiast of new technology such as sound recording—

[Phonograph recording]

DUDE A: You’ll believe me when I play it back.

NEMO: --a paranoid man who wanted to spy on other people in the Opera House—

LAILA: “He wanted to install recording horns secretly in the Paris Opera, in the managers’ office, in the scene-shifters’ area, in the *foyer de la danse*, but the sound quality was too primitive for his liking.”

NEMO: --and possibly a murderer, too.

[Graphophone recording]

DUDE C: I thought you condemned Erik, as a murderer, as a kidnapper, as a man of many crimes.

NEMO: You might be paranoid, too, though, if your frenemy kept threatening to bring the law to your sanctuary, and if your legacy was being threatened by mysterious government agencies. What has always puzzled me is the place where the recordings were supposed to have been made, “the house beside the lake.” Well, now, I think I have finally discovered what this is, and solved the mystery behind the mysterious skeleton buried beneath the Palais Garnier.

[FERRER and HERB’s audio is compressed and distorted.]

NEMO: So what should I call you?

FERRER: What about you? You are known as Nemo.

NEMO: Yes.

FERRER: But that is not your name. So, similar to us. Call me Ferrer.

HERB: *Et moi, mon handle est VVV_urbex, donc, dit “Herb.”*

FERRER: ‘E wants to be called Herb.

NEMO: Okay, not a problem. Thank you for agreeing to meet and agreeing to speak.

HERB: *Ce n’est pas de problème.*

NEMO: Can you please explain what it is you do?

HERB: *Alors, nous, nous sommes les personnes qui font l’urbex.* [Okay, we, we do Urbex.]

NEMO: Urbex, from “urban exploration.”

HERB: *En français c’est l’exploration urbain.* [In French it’s “l’exploration urbain”]

FERRER: We have an interest in exploring abandoned sites and photographing them.

HERB: *Mais, tu sais, ce n’est pas très nouveau, ce truc est des années 90s au moins. Ouais.* [But, you know, it’s not a new thing, it’s from at least the ‘90s. Yeah.]

NEMO: Is this a dangerous, like, hobby?

HERB: *Alors, ça, c’est plus comme une mode de vie, quoi.* [It’s more like a way of life.]

FERRER: Sometimes you find you are breaking some rules.

NEMO: And some laws?

FERRER: *Bah ouis, de temps en temps.* [Yeah, sometimes.]

HERB: *Oui, tu sais, c'est un peu comme l'honneur parmi les voleurs.* [You know, it's a little like honor among thieves.]

FERRER: There are cardinal rules. "Take nothing but photos" and "Leave nothing but footprints." We are not vandals.

NEMO: And you are both also *cataphiles, aussi?* [also?]

HERB: *Alors, un cataphile c'est une personne qui aime explorer des lieux souterraines, très, très profonds.* [A *cataphile* is a person who likes to explore subterranean places, very deep underground.]

NEMO: So you've been underneath Paris?

FERRER: For me personally, I prefer underground pipes.

NEMO: Pipes?

FERRER: Fewer people disturbing you and smaller risk of discovery than the catacombs.

NEMO: The Parisian catacombs are illegal to access—

FERRER: There is more than just what you can take a tour on from near Montparnasse. That is tourist stuff.

HERB: *Oui, mais, tu sais, il y a un système de tunnels complexes. Il y a plus de 280 kilomètres de long. Oh la la.* [Yeah, but you know, there's a complex system of tunnels. Longer than 280 kilometres.]

FERRER: We have to be careful what we talk about and with who.

NEMO: Okay, but *you* got in touch with *me* . . . ?

FERRER: We want to clear our name. No real urbex would have stolen from the Palais Garnier. We want the authority crackdown to stop, because we didn't do it.

[In the background, a recording of a trek through underground tunnels. Footsteps and dripping liquid and conversation.]

NEMO: Ferrer and Herb didn't want to be recorded talking about what they had seen, because they didn't want amateur urban explorers—people who go in and vandalize rather

than observe and preserve—trying to copycat them. So they wouldn't share any specific details about where they had gone and how they had gotten there. However, they did give me permission to play the soundtrack of one of their subterranean explorations and let me explain, in my own words, what the connection was to *Shattered*.

HERB: (on recording) *Et voilà, ça c'est les rivages du lac.* [And here, the shores of the lake.]

NEMO: The *cataphiles* claim that the system of catacombs in Paris links to the cellars beneath the Palais Garnier. This is not only the area where the urns from 1907 and 1912 were buried and exhumed, but also, say Ferrer and Herb, the site of the house on the lake.

NEMO: Tell me about the lake.

FERRER: Is not really a lake.

NEMO: There was, like a built-over river called la Grange-Batelière.

FERRER: Maybe it is so. The lake is very small. There are fish in it.

NEMO: Fish?

HERB: *Oui. Les poissons-rouges et aussi . . .* [Yes. Goldfish and also . . .]

NEMO: Goldfish? Beneath the Paris Opera?

FERRER: They were introduced by the workers in the '60s. Carp also and JoJo.

NEMO: Who's JoJo?

HERB: *Alors, JoJo c'est le nom du poisson-chat.* [It's the name of the catfish.]

FERRER: But he hasn't been seen in many years. Probably dead.

NEMO: And is it cold down there?

FERRER: *Oh, euh, douze degrés.*

NEMO: Twelve degrees Centigrade. That's about 50 degrees Fahrenheit. And what is the house on the lake?

HERB: *Alors, ca c'était une belle petite maison du XIX-ième siècle, je crois, oui? C'est près des cachots de la Commune.* [Okay, it was a pretty little 19th century house, I think. It's close to the Commune prison.]

FERRER: Okay, so, there is only a foundation left, but there was a small and lovely little house by the lake.

NEMO: Where someone lived?

FERRER: *Bah oui, apparemment.* [Apparently.]

NEMO: Why? Why would someone live under the ground?

HERB: *C'est la maison du fantôme, où il habite, quoi.* [It's the ghost's house, where he lived, innit?]

NEMO: Why does a ghost need a house?

FERRER: That is a good question. The ghost was mortal once and had a house. Now he's a skeleton.

HERB: *Attends, il est la pire qu'un squelette. C'est vraiment un démon.* [Hey, he's worse than a skeleton. Really a demon.]

NEMO: Or, an angel, perhaps?

[A recording of a trek through underground tunnels. Footsteps and water sounds.]

NEMO: It was hard to understand exactly what the *cataphiles* were talking about. I think they hold me slightly responsible, because the rumor is that a listener to the podcast found the house on the lake . . . and the skeleton.

FERRER: (on recording) *Oh merde! Voilà! Il y a un vachement grand trou! Voilà! Viens!* [Shit! There! There's a freakin' big hole! There! Look!]

FERRER: We just want whoever did this to fix it, to put it back.

NEMO: What do you mean?

FERRER: Bad things are happening. Things have been . . . disturbed.

HERB: *La musique qui brûle . . . l'ange de la musique est devenu un ange de vengeance. Pourquoi on le donnerait la vie sans l'amour? En consequence, il prend la musique qui brûle, la voix qui vous rend fou!* [The music that burns . . . the angel of music has become an angel of vengeance. Why was he given a life without love? In consequence, he takes the music that burns, a voice that drives you crazy!]

NEMO: When I tried to press them for more information, they wouldn't say more. The suggestion, of course, is that someone who listened to this podcast disturbed the skeleton described by Monsieur Xavier in rumors about the building, and stole something, which tallies with the police report in *Le Figaro*. The cataphiles aren't responding to any of my messages. But they did send a URL to a YouTube link, without any kind of context. Which I'm going to open now.

Okay, it looks like it's a silent film in black and white. There was an intertitle there, I couldn't read what it said.

Oh—there—that's because it's in German.

[Heavy rain. Phone dialling.]

PHIL: (recording) You've reached the voicemail of Phil Donan. I can't take your call at the moment, so please leave a message.

[Beep of message. Hangs up phone. Phone dialling.]

PHIL: (recording) You've reached the voicemail of Phil Donan. I can't take your call at the moment, so please leave a message.

[Beep of message. Hangs up phone.]

NEMO: Phil, you are not going to believe this. Have a look at this link on YouTube. I've also taken these screen captures of the intertitles. They're in German so maybe you know someone who can get them translated? I think it's pretty clear that this is *Das Phantom der Oper*. The prints exist somewhere. The clip is only ten minutes long and seems to be from the end of the film. I would love to hear from you. Nemo."

[Electric lights flicker.]

NEMO: Alicja? Alicja, are you there? The lights are—oh, they're back on. N-never mind!

[ALICJA stomps into the room.]

ALICJA: What now?

NEMO: Sorry, it's just the lights were . . .

[ALICJA exclaims in surprise.]

ALICJA: Oh my God! What you done? You've written all over my wood floor!

NEMO: Sorry—I'm so sorry. It's pencil, though, I can erase it, see?

ALICJA: What does this *bordel de merde* [shit] say? "Angels and monsters are two sides to the same coin"?

NEMO: Sorry, I'm going to clean it up right now. I've just been—

[The Toccata and fugue ring tone interrupts.]

ALICJA: If you pick up a call from him, I swear, you are going to have to leave.

NEMO: I—

ALICJA: *Non.* Even Phil agrees with me.

NEMO: Well, Phil isn't actually quite as perfect as we thought.

NEMO: What do you want?

PHIL: What do you mean, what do I want?

NEMO: Why are you calling if you have nothing to . . .

PHIL: . . . you're angry because I—

NEMO: I don't care that you included a clip of me . . . losing it on the last episode.

PHIL: Well, you've recorded enough candid conversations with people who probably didn't want their entire lives spat out to the whole world—

NEMO: It's hardly the whole world, isn't it?

PHIL: The point is you have problems with violations of people's privacy. It goes too far when you start recording everything—

NEMO: But didn't you watch it?

PHIL: That link—that link was a broken link.

NEMO: It worked fine for me.

PHIL: You saw what you wanted to see.

NEMO: But what about the screen caps I got of the intertitles in German?

PHIL: That could have been anything.

NEMO: What did you say? That I see whatever I want to see?

PHIL: You said you could hear a voice in the static and glitch. Yes. I think you are in denial about your own mental state.

NEMO: My mental state?

PHIL: You've let this podcast take over your life to a point where it's not healthy.

NEMO: You didn't seem to have any problems with it before.

PHIL: It's been fun and interesting. But given what you've said about your degree and your brother and Joel . . . and this Angel of Music and Shade stuff . . . maybe you need to go home and maybe . . . take some time away from all of this. Maybe get some help.

[Long silence]

NEMO: Funny that you would use that phrase, Phil, "you need to take some time away."

PHIL: What do you mean?

NEMO: Do you remember when you asked me to edit the interview with Professor Shahzad together?

PHIL: Uh, yeah. Sure. So?

NEMO: You said to get rid of everything before the three-minute mark because it was irrelevant?

PHIL: Well, it was.

[A recording of a phone conversation underneath. A dial tone.]

NEMO: I don't think so.

PHIL: What are you doing?

PROF SHAHZAD: (on recording) Hello?

NEMO: (on recording) Hi, is this Professor Shahzad?

PHIL: I can't believe this. This has reached a really unhealthy level. I'm going to hang up now.

SHAHZAD: (on recording) Yes, who is this?

PHIL: This is an unforgiveable violation of privacy.

NEMO: (on recording) I work on *The Shattered Podcast* with Phil Donan.

SHAHZAD: (on recording) With Phil Donan? I gave him that interview under duress. He called in a favor with my boss, but I really did not want to be talking to him. What has this got to do with--?

NEMO: (on recording) In the interest of setting the record straight, could you tell me why he left the University of Glenullen?

SHAHZAD: (on recording) Well . . . it's not a secret. I'm not telling you anything that isn't in the public record.

NEMO: (on recording) Go on.

SHAHZAD: (on recording) He. . . he had an affair, if you can call it that, with a student.

NEMO: (on recording) With a grad student?

SHAHZAD: (on recording) No, with an undergraduate. She was twenty-one years old.

NEMO: (on recording) So, he was fired?

SHAHZAD: (on recording) He resigned. It was kept very quiet.

NEMO: (on recording) So you wouldn't be entirely happy with him contacting young female students to work on projects?

SHAHZAD: (on recording) No, I—are you saying he asked Laila to work with him? If he has gotten within ten feet of her—if you're speaking to him, you tell him I will personally come down to Surrey or wherever it is he's retired to—if he's been in the same room as Laila—or any of my students—I will make sure everyone knows why he left Glenullen.

[Recording ends.]

PHIL: So you have to destroy what's left of my career. Publicly.

NEMO: You're not sorry for having seduced a vulnerable young woman?

PHIL: Seduced?! You don't know anything about it . . . You weren't there! Now can you please hang up and leave me--

NEMO: You really *hurt* me!!

So you think I'm crazy? *I'm* crazy? I'd say have a long look in the mirror at yourself, Phil Donan. Not so reliable, so mentally stable, are you?

PHIL: What is this? Are you jealous?!

NEMO: No, I— I just think everyone should see you as you truly are. And not be duped. Like I was.

PHIL: You're not upset about being duped or about me not believing you. This is because I wasn't attracted to you!

NEMO: No!

PHIL: You're lonely, and you reached out, and now you're punishing me because I didn't feel what you felt!!

NEMO: This isn't about me or what I felt . . .

PHIL: It is!

NEMO: Don't people deserve to know the truth about you?

PHIL: If you want to talk about mirrors, I've taken a long hard look at myself. I did resign, that's true. It was the only thing to do under the circumstances. I don't regret what I did because it was a consensual relationship. I'm not an angel, but I'm not a monster either. I have come to terms with my life. But you— oh just leave me alone.

[He hangs up.]

NEMO: Be wary of the shadows that move as your head turns,
And watch out for the music, the music that burns.

[A voicemail recording.]

DUDE C: This message is for the person known as Nemo. You've been playing this game long enough. Now is the time to cut your losses and go. This is no joke. Your interventions have already caused enough damage. This is your last warning.

[Shattered outro music]

End credits:

The Shattered Podcast is hosted by Nemo and Dr Phil Donan, with theme music by Katie Seaton. It is produced by Leslie McMurtry and is a Lesser of 2 Weevils production 2022.