

Alan Grimaldi and the 183

A short sketch

By
Bob Hammond

**Copyright © April 2021 Bob Hammond and Off The Wall
Play Publishers**

<https://offthewallplays.com>

This script is provided for reading purposes only Professionals and amateurs are hereby advised that it is subject to royalty It is fully protected under the laws of South Africa, the United States of America, the British Empire including the Dominion of Canada and all other countries of the Copyright Union. All rights including but not limited to professional amateur film radio and all other media including use on the worldwide web and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved and any unauthorized use of the material may subject the user to any and all applicable civil and criminal penalties. For any information about royalties or to apply for a performance license please click the following link :

<https://offthewallplays.com/royalties-and-licensing-of-plays-sold-by-off-the-wall-plays/>

Alan Grimaldi and the 183

(A rather scruffy, non-descript office. Barry and Sandra are sitting at the table, heads together, with an open crossword puzzle book in front of them.)

Barry: **(Indicating with his pencil.)** Look, if we can just get fifteen down, that'll help.

Sandra: Barry, we can't get fifteen down, can we? How long have we've been trying? Admit it, we're not very good at these cryptic crosswords.

Barry: I know. I prefer the general knowledge ones, but we shouldn't give up. We mustn't let it beat us, you know.

Sandra: It's easier when you can understand the question.

Barry: Yeah, you're right. **(Throws his pencil down.)** Still, this is nice, isn't it? A quiet moment for a change.

Sandra: They don't last, though, do they, these quiet moments?

Barry: No, but it is nice to have a bit of peace occasionally.

Sandra: It is that. They'll be hammering on the door, soon enough.

Barry: Yeah, so to speak. But for the minute, why don't we just sit back, relax and enjoy the peace. I fancy a cup of tea right now.

Sandra: Oh, what I wouldn't give for a cup of tea. Cup of tea and an Eccles cake.

Barry: Ha. You and your Eccles cakes.

Sandra: Takes me back to when I was a girl, y'know, does an Eccles cake. **(Pause.)** Now, Barry, listen, while we've got a minute. You are going to try to be a bit more sympathetic in future, aren't you?

Barry: **(Sighs.)** Well... I suppose so.

(Sandra glares at him.)

Barry: Yes, alright, Sandra, I'll try.

Sandra: Good.

(Noises off.)

Barry: Oh, listen up, it's starting again.

(The door (the one without the handle) opens and Alan's head appears around it.)

Alan: Hello?

Sandra: Come in. Come in. Don't just stand there.

(Alan enters, shuts the door behind him but stays by the door and looks around anxiously. He is dressed in a business suit.)

Barry: **(Rising.)** Welcome. Come and take a seat.

(Alan hesitates.)

Alan: Where am I?

Sandra: Come along and sit down.

Alan: No. I want to know where I am. What am I doing here? Come on, tell me, I want to know.

Barry: **(Moving to Alan.)** Yes, I'm sure you do. Come and sit down and we'll explain everything.

(Barry takes Alan's arm and leads him to a chair at the centre table. Alan sits reluctantly.)

Sandra: **(Opening the lap-top and logging in.)** Right. First things first. What's your name?

Alan: What? Why do you want to know my name?

Barry: Please, just tell us your name. It's not difficult.

Alan: I know it's not difficult but why? Why should I tell you my name? I want to know where I am. Why am I here? What am I doing here?

Sandra: **(Firmly.)** Name first, if you please.

Alan: **(Sighing.)** Alan. Alan Grimaldi.

Sandra: **(Typing.)** Thank you.

Barry: You related to the clown?

Alan: Pardon?

Barry: The clown. You know, that nineteenth century clown, the Great Grimaldi.

Alan: No idea.

Barry: Oh. Well, how about the House of Grimaldi then? You know, that lot down in Monaco.

Alan: Don't know.

Barry: Don't know? You mean you never tried to find out? You know, trace the family tree and all that stuff?

Alan: Look, what is this? What's it all about?

Sandra: Alan. May I call you Alan?

Alan: I suppose so. But . . .

Sandra: **(Looking at her screen.)** Ah, yes, look. Here we are. Alan Grimaldi. From Pinner in Middlesex. That you?

Barry: Thought they'd done away with Middlesex.

Sandra: Just shut up, Barry. **(To Alan)** Well?

Alan: Well, yes. But how d'you know that?

Barry: We know all sorts of things here, you'd be surprised. **(To Sandra)** Is he related to the clown?

Sandra: Er, no, not really. Well, vaguely but it's awfully distant. Different branch of the family, long way back.

Barry: And what about the Monaco branch?

Sandra: No, that's even more remote.

Barry: **(To Alan.)** Well, now you know, eh?

Alan: Look, that's all very well but... who are you and what am I doing here? And where is here?

Sandra: **(To Barry.)** You tell him, Barry. But remember what I said. Try and be gentle and more sympathetic. **(To Alan)** Alan. We have some bad news for you. And there's no easy way to tell you.

Alan: Tell me what?

Barry: You're dead.

(Alan looks stunned.)

Sandra: Barry. What did I tell you? Gentle. That wasn't gentle or sympathetic, now was it? We'll have to have another talk about this, won't we?

Alan: Dead? What do you mean I'm dead? I'm not dead.

Barry: Sandra, bad news is bad news, no matter how you dress it up. You can't turn bad news into good news by being gentle and sympathetic, you know. You've got to get it out there quickly. Get it over and done with, out of the way and move on. That's what I say. What do you say, Alan?

Sandra: I'm sorry, Alan. I do try.

Alan: Er... Listen, listen. How... how can I be dead? I'm here. I'm talking to you. You can't do that when you're dead. **(Beat.)** Can you?

Barry: That's what you think.

Sandra: Barry, be quiet. Alan, it says here **(consulting the screen)** that you walked, or rather ran, in front of a number 183 bus. The driver couldn't stop in time and here you are.

Barry: Dead.

Sandra: Barry.

(Alan looks baffled and looks down at and feels over his body and arms and legs.)

Alan: But ...

Sandra: Oh, there's nothing to show now. No, you see, when you get up here, your physical self reverts back to how it was before it, er ... happened.

Barry: She means before you died. Before you got squashed by that bus. I mean, come on, just think of the alternative. Can you imagine if everybody turned up here in the state that they died? We'd have blood, guts and body parts all over the place, wouldn't we? It would be worse than Casualty on a Saturday night.

Sandra: **(Despairingly.)** Oh, I give up with you, Barry.

Alan: Look, I remember leaving home. I'd overslept and I was worried I might miss my train, so I was in a hurry. I remember getting to the main road, opposite the station and well, that's it. Don't remember anything else. Then, suddenly, here I am with you two. Wherever here is.

Barry: **(To Sandra.)** He's over the shock already, see? I keep telling you, you've got to be upfront about these things. It's no good pussyfooting around. Isn't that right, Alan?

Alan: What? I don't know. It was a bit of a shock, I have to say. Still is. It's just as well for you I don't have a dodgy heart. I might have had a heart attack, breaking the news like that.

Barry: Well, that wouldn't have made a lot of difference, would it?

Alan: **(Looking puzzled.)** Eh? Why not?

Barry: Well, you're dead already, aren't you?

Sandra: Thank you for that insight, Barry.

Barry: Any time.

Alan: Just hold on a minute. Let me get my head round this. You're telling me I'm dead. I'm not sure I'm convinced about that, but for arguments sake, let's just say that's true. Now, who are you two? Or rather, what are you?

Sandra: Well, I'm Sandra and he's Barry

Barry: **(Holds out his hand.)** Nice to meet you, Alan.

(Alan looks suspiciously at Barry's hand and tentatively shakes it.)

Barry: See, it's real. We're real. And as to what we are, well, we're the Gatekeepers.

Alan: The what? Gatekeepers? Gatekeepers of what?

Sandra: Heaven. The Gatekeepers of Heaven.

(Alan stops and stares at each of them in turn. He shakes his head, disbelieving.)

Alan: You're what? The Gatekeepers of Heaven? What sort of joke is this?

Sandra: No joke, Alan.

(Alan looks around.)

Alan: So you're trying to tell me this is Heaven, are you?

Barry: No, no, no, no, no. You're not there yet. Nearly but not quite.

Alan: Well, where am I then?

Sandra: In the back-reception office.

Alan: **(Looking round.)** The back-reception office. Are you trying to tell me that this is the reception office to Heaven? This dump?

Barry: The back-reception office, yes. **(Looking around.)** And I know it's a bit scruffy and perhaps not what you might expect. I do agree that it does need a coat of paint or two. Perhaps we should try and make it a bit more welcoming, Sandra. **(To Sandra.)** What d'you think?

Sandra: Well, it's a nice idea, Barry but we'd never get the funding.

Barry: No, you're probably right. Pity. You see, Alan, this isn't the main entrance to Heaven. Oh no. We're more like the side door, if you know what I mean. The main way in is round the other side, at the front. You know, the Pearly Gates. You've heard of them, I suppose?

Alan: Everyone's heard of the Pearly Gates.

Sandra: And that's where you would have gone, if anyone knew you were coming.

Alan: Eh? What do you mean?

Barry: Well, I mean to say, you can't expect the full treatment if you're not scheduled, now can you?

Alan: What's that mean, if you're not scheduled?

Barry: **(To Sandra.)** Oh, you tell him.

Sandra: It means if you're not expected. You know, if your arrival here isn't planned. Not forecast.

Alan: Forecast?

Sandra: Look at it this way. Poor old Pete's got a lot on his plate, right? You can understand that, can't you?

Alan: Pete? Who's Pete?

Barry: St. Peter to you. He's the one who greets you at the Pearly Gates. He's a lovely old boy. You'd like him. Everybody does.

Sandra: As I was saying, he's got a lot of his plate. There are thousands of arrivals. They just keep coming...

Barry: And coming and coming and...

Sandra: Yes, thank you, Barry. And he has to do all the 'meet and greet' stuff and make sure their names are in that big book of his before they're allowed through the Pearly Gates. You with me so far?

Alan: **(Nodding.)** Think so.

Sandra: Good. Now all these new arrivals have got to be scheduled in, you see? There's a timetable. I mean you can't go having thousands all arriving, all together, all at once, all at the same time, now can you? There'd be chaos. Utter chaos. Like the first day of the sales. And poor old Pete's not getting any younger.

Barry: On the other hand, he's not getting any older either is he?

Sandra: And the number of arrivals just keep going up and up. So his elves are kept very busy, in-putting data and making sure all the files are bang up to date.

Alan: **(Looking from one to the other.)** Elves? You're not going to tell me he doubles as Father Christmas as well, are you?

Barry: Don't be daft, Alan. Of course not. He hasn't got the time. And anyway, they're not really elves. They're only known as elves because they're his little helpers, see. And besides, elves only exist in fairy tales. They're not real, you know.

Alan: Yes. Of course. Silly of me.

Sandra: You see, they have to record everything about everybody so when they get here, Pete knows all there is to know about all of them. Got it?

Alan: Er, yeah, got that. But who are all these thousands that you're talking about?

Barry: Well, who do you think they are? People who've died, of course. We don't allow living people up here. Come on, we're rushed off our feet as it is.

Alan: But ... I don't understand.

Barry: What's not to understand? You die, you come up here. Simple.

Alan: Well, I've died, or so you say. So why aren't I round at the front door? At the Pearly Gates?

Sandra: You're not listening, are you, Alan? The front door, as you call it, is for those who are expected. You were one of the "unexpected". No-one knew you were coming, did they? You weren't due. Your file here shows that you weren't scheduled for another... **(looking at the lap-top)** er, where are we? Ah... forty-three years, give or take a few months. It's a bit difficult to be spot on, over that period of time. Too many variables, you see.

Alan: Variables?

Sandra: Yes, variables. Things that might happen. You know, unexpected things.

Alan: What, like stepping in front of a bus, you mean?

Barry: Exactly. Now, you just turned up here, no notice whatsoever. So can do you expect?

Alan: Well, I don't know. Never thought about it before.

Sandra: No, most people don't. **(Turning back to the lap-top screen.)** Ah, look. Here we go. Good news. You've been approved.

Alan: Approved? What do you mean, approved? Approved for what?

Sandra: Approved for entry, of course.

Alan: Entry? Entry into where?

Sandra: Heaven. Where d'you think?

Alan: What, you mean... ? **(Pause.)** No. No, I don't know what I mean. I don't know what I'm talking about anymore. I don't know what you're talking about, come to that. Explain it to me, will you? Please?

Sandra: Barry, will you do the honours?

Barry: Certainly, Sandra. Now listen, Alan. Everyone who turns up at the front door, as you call it, well, their name and approval rating is already in Pete's big book. Right? Because their searches have already been done, in advance of their arrival. Because they were scheduled. That's what the elves do. OK? Now you. Well, you just turn up here, out of the blue, having had your ticket stamped, unexpectedly, by the front end of a number 183 bus. So our little elves have to do emergency checks to see if you can be approved for entry. Clear?

Alan: Er... yeah, I suppose so. But what is it, this approval? What does it mean?

Sandra: It means you've been approved for entry into heaven because you've been awarded **(checks the screen again)** two point two stars. And that grants you immediate entrance.

Alan: A two-two, eh? Huh, just like my degree. So that lets me in then, does it?

Barry: It certainly does. Congratulations. Top marks is three stars, you know. Not many get that, mind you. Now anything between two and three means immediate acceptance for entry. No question. You're cleared for lift-off, so to speak. Now if you get between one and two stars, well, you're up in front of the adjudication panel.

Alan: Adjudication panel?

Barry; Yeah, it's a bit the X Factor. But between you and me, they're a lot more lenient and chances are, unless you've really blotted your copybook, they'll give you a pass. But anything under one star, well that's a different outcome. That is a definite failure. There's no way back from that and that decision is final. It's straight to the other place.

Alan: The other place? What, you mean ...

(Sandra holds up her hand.)

Sandra: Ssssh. The other place. That's what we call it up here, the other place.

Alan: Oh. Right. Do many go there, to the other place?

Sandra: Mmm, quite a lot. You'd be surprised.

Alan: Would I? **(Pause.)** Does anyone ever get three stars?

Barry: Ooh, very, very few. Who was the last one, Sandra? Do you remember?

Sandra: It was probably Mother Teresa, but I'm not sure. **(To Alan.)** Trouble is, you see, we're a bit out of the loop back here, when it comes to up-to-date news. But I can check if you like. It's all on here **(fingering the keyboard)**.

Alan: No, no, no, just curious, that's all. Well, I think I've got the idea now. So you only deal with what you call the "unexpecteds" through here then, that right?

Barry: Yes. Spot on. People like you. And we get all sorts, I can tell you. You'd be surprised at what we see. And the reasons why some people turn up here, well, you would never believe.

Sandra: Like falling off mountains...

Barry: Or being eaten by tigers...

Sandra: Or trampled by elephants...

Barry: Or swallowed by sink holes...

Sandra: Or walking under ladders...

Alan: Eh? Hang on. Walking under ladders? I know it's unlucky but that doesn't kill you.

Barry: Well, it does if the bloke up the ladder drops a shed load of bricks on top of your head.

Alan: Oh yeah, I see your point.

Sandra: And Barry's speaking from experience.

Alan: Ouch.

(Barry looks at him and rubs his heads ruefully)