

Station to Station Episode 2, “WORKPLACE WELLBEING”

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1. The first tape

(WE START FROM WHERE WE LEFT OFF. JONATHAN'S TAPE PLAYS.)

JONATHAN

I— I screwed this one up. I screwed this up real bad and I'm not asking you to fix it, but please, please just— be careful.

SOUND: THE TAPE STOPS. THE PLAYER CLICKS, THEN PLAYS AGAIN, LIKE IT WAS TAPED OVER.

JONATHAN

(HE IS BREEZY, CHEERFUL AND EXCITED — A DRASTIC CONTRAST TO HIS LAST MESSAGE)

—took us to the lab right after orientation. All the restaurants and stuff are right on the campus, but the whole place is covered in guards. We're not allowed to take anything out of the labs, so no pens, no notes, no voice recorders they haven't approved of. The equipment tends to fry a lot of the electronics, so we've gone all retro and been given these old tape recorders. I mean I see the point of it - no loss of data, not easily taken outside or replicated and...easy to destroy and erase. So. There's that.

Uh, the dorm's pretty nice. Waaaay nicer than any place I've lived at so far, anyway. No damp spot or mould, and I even have an en suite bathroom and a nice kitchen! It's a pretty sweet deal, and it's even included in the salary. Guess when you're making big bucks and busy turning the world into a post-cyberpunk tech haven, you can afford to shell out on your secret lab. Well, this is Costello, end of log two, over and out!

SOUND: THE TAPE CUTS OFF

2. The next day

MIRANDA

(WORN DOWN AND EXHAUSTED, MIRANDA STUMBLES OVER WORDS LIKE SHE'S LOST SENSE OF HERSELF)

Time passes differently here. Sometimes it's like an entire day just blinks by and sometimes...sometimes it feels like I'll never get back to land.

It's the sixth day of the cruise. I had two days off on the weekend so I had some time to myself to sort through...well, everything. I'm still— I guess I'm still processing it. The notes, the recordings, the files — they're a mess. No matter how I try look at it, they're just a mess in a different order. Rambling, random phrases, self-memos — whatever fleeting thought that passed through his mind, I guess.

(SHE SIGHS, FRUSTRATED)

Oh, god. So far in my inventory I have: three notebooks, one very creepy tape, a research paper (incomplete) and, I dunno, my plucky wits? Some research cruise this is turning out to be.

SOUND: IN THE BACKGROUND, MUFFLED BEHIND A DOOR THERE ARE SOUNDS OF PEOPLE RUSHING ABOUT, SHOUTING, THE CLATTERING OF EQUIPMENT. IN THE LAB, IT IS DEAD SILENT. MIRANDA IS ALONE

SOUND: THE TAPE CUTS OFF

MIRANDA

(SUDDENLY LIGHTER BUT INTENSE, AS IF TRYING TO DELIVER AS MUCH INFO AS SHE CAN IN A SHORT SPAN OF TIME)

Log fifteen, Monday, 0900 hours.

Montague's original team didn't recover much in the way of samples. It was the second expedition, about 2 years later, that brought in substantial data and testing platforms. It was lead by her too, with a team of handpicked scientists and experts — and they detected significant levels of element 720-alpha throughout the original contamination site, in both living and nonliving matter. Water, sand, fauna, etcetera. This was called the "stasis area".

720-alpha exists in two states: active and non-active. In its active state it is able to preserve any water-based area in time, but once removed from the stasis site, it very quickly destabilises, becoming non-active. The Juday engine has been able to re-activate it for short periods of time.

Laboratory objectives will be to compare effects of nerve paralysis in stasis-area sea life and sea life manually exposed to activated and non-activated 720-a.

Prior to this, research has found forms of nerve paralysis in certain organisms exposed to 720-a. No correlation to species, genus or family. We tried looking into diets, habitats, mating behaviour... there was no pattern to it. .5% margin of error were observed in — ah— damn!

This was something I was supposed to follow up with Costello before he disapp— ...before I left port. God, I totally forgot.

Right, I don't have time to faff around. We have a confirmed storm coming in in 8 hours, so I need to get this done before we all lock ourselves in our cabins for three days straight.

SOUND: THE TAPE CUTS OFF

MIRANDA

(SOUNDING SLIGHTLY MORE PERKY, BUT IN THE FAKE WAY YOU DO WHEN YOU'RE TRYING TO KEEP UP APPEARANCES TO BULLSHIT AUTHORITY)

Log sixteen, Tuesday, 1300 hours. They're already battening down the hatches. I grabbed some samples from the wet lab, and I think I should have enough time to get through everything — really should have planned this one better.

SOUND: THE TAPE CUTS OFF

MIRANDA

I'm running out of time, I don't think I can get this done as quick as I planned to. The storm's expected to hit today and I've wasted too much time—

SOUND: THE TAPE CUTS OFF

MIRANDA

Log seventeen, Tuesday, 1800 hours. It is getting really frantic up here — everyone's been tying down anything and everything they can get their hands on, shoving what they can into closets or drawers or—

(SOMEONE KNOCKS INTO HER)

Whoa, hey! Careful. This is going to geophysics, right? The stairs going down is the other way, and the lab's been locked already, I saw them clearing out. I can help you carry it — nope, okay, she's gone.

MIRANDA

(BREATHLESS)

Log eighteen. I went for a walk to get some air — decided to get to the cafeteria to stock up on some snacks, and it is pandemonium in there. It's like every zombie movie I've ever seen. Grabbed some crisps, though. It'll probably last me 'til dinner.

I feel like I'm running out of time.

SOUND: THE TAPE CUTS OFF

JONATHAN

Log three, day ten. The Corinthian has a tendency to fry just about anything with a microchip that comes within 20 feet, as we suspected. Most of the stuff management supplied is really old-school as well— it's almost like walking back in time when you enter the lab, which is...kinda apt, given the givens. Some of the new stuff works, some doesn't. We're trying to upgrade where we can, and then we'll get to work.

SOUND: THE TAPE CUTS OFF

3. Memory loss

MIRANDA

Current experiment samples are now held in the wet lab, in the calibration chambers. Subjects are four samples of *Gadus chalcogrammus*, weighing about 0.4kg each.

The prerogative is to follow the tests conducted last year, same methodology. Previous year's results also found in appendix.

This research will forgo detailed examination of the "time freeze" that 720-a has on the nervous systems. Detailed notes have already been made by...by...

(SHE PAUSES)

Hmm. Uugh, **brainfart**. I worked on this for my dissertation, I should be able to recite this from memory.

SOUND: THE TAPE CUTS OFF

MIRANDA

(MORE WORN DOWN AGAIN)

Jonathan left three notebooks. Each one is progressively messier and more difficult to read than the next. I've labelled them N1 N2 and N3. One consistent phrase I've seen used is "red string". "Complete project red string". Like a code word, but...I really don't know what it references.

But — if I've got this right, he started working for Mallux in September, there's this bit about celebrating something in February, I think towards the end of it? And Red String I think was created in early March. So, February. Late February is a key date. That means I now have a time frame.

There are only pieces here and there, but "All calibrations can be said to exhibit the same properties, and I can assume that based on previous work back home—" Wait, previous work? What previous work?

SOUND: THE TAPE CUTS OFF

Scene 4: Reva

MIRANDA

(YAWNING)

I'm finally wrapping up the last batch of labs. It's all very last-minute, but this is all the time I have before the storm hits. Everyone else has already tied down their equipment and stuffed what they can in the lockers and I guess I should be getting a move on.

In summation:

Sample A, control. A came from stasis area. No changes were made, and it was held in the control tank for 8 hours. After 720-a deactivated, sample A died. Tissues are degraded. No symptoms of nerve paralysis.

I am so glad this thing is only found in water.

MIRANDA

Sample B - came from stasis area, held in active chamber for 8 hours. No degradation, sample still alive.

Sample C - came from outside stasis area. Exposed to active 720-a, kept in active chamber for 8 hours. Definitely exhibiting signs of paralysis and nerve damage. Time of death shows...5 hours prior to recording. Aside from that, all cellular structures and tissues are not degraded.

Sample D - Exposed to non-active 720-a. Sample still alive. No nerve damage, but...oh. Tissue degradation is noticeably slower. That's interesting.

The results are similar to that of the ones during...

Uh, During...

During- Uhm. I can't...remember.

MIRANDA

(EXTREMELY ALARMED NOW)

Why can't I remember this...?

(MIRANDA'S BREATHING BECOMES MORE AND MORE FRANTIC AS PANIC SLOWLY SETTLES IN)

SOUND: A DOOR OPENS, A WOMAN'S VOICE FROM RIGHT INTERRUPTS.

ENTER REVA SANTIAGO

REVA

(SHARPLY, IN A DISAPPROVING TONE)

Why are you still here?

MIRANDA

Oh, I— I'm sorry, I was just finishing up. There are some— er— some time-sensitive—

REVA

The captain's called a storm warning, which means you need to vacate the labs. You were told about the procedures 48 hours ago, and any experiments were supposed to be wrapped up *yesterday*.

MIRANDA

I know! I'm really sorry, I was— I was just..checking up on something, I— I thought—

REVA

You're putting yourself in danger, you know that? Storm's gonna hit in a couple of hours, once it does no one goes in or out of the cabins without special permission. Which means no. Activity. In. The Labs.

MIRANDA

I was just leaving! I swear, I didn't mean to cause trouble, and I wasn't trying to sabotage anyone's work! Just let me just—

SOUND: FRANTIC SHUFFLING. AS MIRANDA GATHERS HER PAPERS

MIRANDA

There! I'll go back to my own cabin! I'll go back right away

REVA

...you're bringing the dead fish with you?

MIRANDA

(PRETENDING THAT SHE MEANT TO DO THAT)

...uh huh! Yeah, they're... part of the experiment? They're the controls, and I'm done with this batch, but the wet lab's locked and they're gonna stink up the place if I leave them in the fridge, so I might as well.

REVA

Hey you forgot your recorder! ...She's gone.

(MUTTERING TO HERSELF, HER VOICE FADING AWAY AS SHE WALKS AWAY FROM THE RECORDER, AROUND THE LAB)

But at least she's gone, that's the last of 'em. I can't believe I got shepherding duty. These damn nerds, I swear to god. How the hell am I supposed to do my job if I can't guarantee the place will be empty when it's supposed to be? I don't get paid enough—

SOUND: FOOTSTEPS COMING BACK. MIRANDA RUSHES BACK IN

MIRANDA

I'm so sorry, I forgot this!

(SHE GRABS THE RECORDER AND TAKES OFF DOWN THE CORRIDOR, FORGETTING IT WASN'T SWITCHED OFF)

SOUND: FOOTSTEPS.

MIRANDA
(REALISING THE RECORDER WAS ON THE WHOLE TIME)
Oh damn—

SOUND: THE TAPE CUTS OFF

Scene 5: Miranda's cabin

(MIRANDA'S CABIN, EVENING.)

SOUND: THE STORM IS RAGING, BUT THE ROOM IS QUIET. YOU CAN HEAR THE WIND FAINTLY IN THE BACKGROUND

MIRANDA
Wednesday, nine o'clock. I...didn't get to finish everything. Obviously. Which means I just have to start over when the storm's passed, no biggie.

(SUDDENLY EXHAUSTED, RESIGNED)

I can't keep putting this off. I don't want to sort through this mess but—
There is some kind of order to the chaos. If I lay them out, I can almost get the cross-referencing notes he's made. It's not like him to be so messy, usually I'm the one with the notes that look like a hurricane went through it.

(SHE SIGHS)

MIRANDA, cont.
The storm's hit, and I think we're going through the worst of it. The howling outside, it's...it almost sounds like some sort of animal. Funny thing is, I can still hear people wandering about in the corridors now and then, like just...footsteps going by.

SOUND: THE TAPE WARPS AND DISTORTS

MIRANDA
I really don't want to be inside my own head right now.

SOUND: THE TAPE CUTS OFF

MIRANDA
(STEADIER, MORE DETERMINED)

The notes can be sorted into three piles.

Aside from the original experiment plans, there's also notes on the testing facility. Facility is Mallux-run, despite their usual operations and logistics being outsourced. Company provided local supermarket, two restaurants, a pub. He called it "like a university campus".

Location: unknown. Very secretive. Very little chance for escape.

There is also an extensive map of the floorplan - or at least, a floorplan. Also blueprints of what looks like a...redesigned Juday engine?

SOUND: THE TAPE WARPS AND DISTORTS

MIRANDA

I don't know what to do, I don't— **nothing** makes sense and— and I— I just want to go **home**. If I could just get off this damn boat--

6. Second day of the storm

SOUND: THE TAPE CUTS OFF

JONATHAN

Day twenty. Work's getting heavy. I don't really remember the last time I got more 6 hours of sleep. There's always alarms blaring, always something going wrong that needs fixing. God, barely a month in and we're all close to burnout, but everyone's so into it. The people here, they're from all over the place, microbiologists, chemical physicists, geologists — and they're all from these niche fields, too.

The guy who works next to me keeps talking about his project back home — he says it's in Europe somewhere. We're not allowed to actually reveal where we're from, it's really — I don't know why, it's something about, uh, workplace equality or something? It's got to do with archaeobacteria, I think he calls them. Yeah, archaeobacteria.

SOUND: THE TAPE CUTS OFF

MIRANDA

Second day of the storm. Thursday. Breakfast was a nightmare. It's calmed a bit, but it's not over, so we all got boxes to take to our cabins.

SOUND: THE TAPE WARPS AND DISTORTS

MIRANDA

No. No, I can't abandon this, not now, not like this. I can't afford to. I'm— I'm **so close**. I don't exactly know what it is I'm looking at, but I am **so close** to finding an answer. I need to finish this.

SOUND: THE TAPE CUTS OFF

MIRANDA

Okay, I— I think I have a system, sort of. He grabbed three notebooks from the lab, and all of them are handwritten. Notebook one, which I think is the earliest, is entirely in black Biro, no additions or amendments. Notebooks two and three have cross-references, often to each other. I think both of these were later notes, because they get a lot messier and really—

(A GRUNT. THE STORM KNOCKS THE BOAT SIDEWAYS AND MIRANDA FALLS OVER.)

SOUND: A HEAVY THUMP AND CLATTERING SOUND, A FLUTTERING OF PAPERS.

MIRANDA

Oh great. Shouldn't be walking around while I'm doing this.

SOUND: THE TAPE CUTS OFF

Scene 7: Unravelling

JONATHAN

(WEARY, SHELL-SHOCKED, SOMEWHAT CONFUSED AND NOT REALLY READY TO ACCEPT IT)

Day thirty five. We had a...we had an accident in the lab today. A young woman, Laurel, she—er. We lost her. We...we lost her.

Results are still the same. I think I knew that this was coming, the dangers of the job, the- all the expectations that come with it. I knew— I knew. We all did. I just— I don't think any of us expected it to come so early. We all believed in something, when we went into it. We were all sold on some cause, that we were doing good and making changes, that we would leave a legacy. Goes to show, right?

We were given a few days off — management says it's so we can process it, but I think they're just trying to clean the lab and the — God — the equipment. There's— I don't even wanna talk about it. I, er. The management suggested that we might want to see counselling, just in case. I don't think anyone's taken up on the offer, though, because what we do is so goddamn weird, but who knows. One day, someone else is gonna break.

SOUND: SOUND: THE TAPE CUTS OFF

MIRANDA

So. Notebooks two and three were made later. N2 is written in the same black Biro, N3 uses a blue gel pen. In both N2 and N3, there are also scatterings of what appears to be a red felt pen. It's not present in N1. Notes 2 and 3 are of indeterminable dates, N1 can be dated from his contract start. My guess would be that 2 and 3 were made frantically, and close together. Project red string is first mentioned in his— in the notes from N2, which I would guess is about twelve to eight weeks before end of contract.

He found something. Halfway through, something changed.

SOUND: THE TAPE CUTS OFF

MIRANDA

There is also proof of correspondence with someone from outside the facility, last date Feb 17th.

SOUND: THE TAPE CUTS OFF

JONATHAN

(HE IS ELATED BEYOND MEASURE)

Day forty nine: we finally got the thing to work! It— it's amazing. It's a work of art! I can't even describe what I'm feeling right now. What we've done is gonna redefine humanity as we know it. This is the dawn of a new era. This is history in the making! The atmosphere in the lab today was just— it was indescribable!

Miranda, I wish you were here with me. By rights, you should've been here. I'm already practising my Nobel prize speech, which is arrogant, I know, but a guy can dream, right? Oh man, this is what we were working for all along, this makes it all worth it! Defying the laws of the gods and getting away with it, how's that for hubris? It's been a long week and I haven't been sleeping as much as I should so I should get some rest before tomorrow. We're doing the first big test and after that— who knows?

SOUND: THE TAPE CUTS OFF

MIRANDA

(PANICKING)

I can't remember what he looks like. I tried to — I was listening to the tape, and I tried to think of his face and — there's nothing there. I can't picture any of it.

I know he was there, I know he existed but there is just a— there's this, this, giant empty space, where he used to be, this human-shaped void that I'm trying to make sense of and—

And I can't.

SOUND: THE TAPE CUTS OFF

MIRANDA

Last note: "Project red string is finalised. Montague has started it, I have to finish it. Her notes are all here, but she's gone, I can't count on her any more."

Montague...? **Adelaide** Montague?

M...was not stable? I don't know what that means.

Other notes include: something about being left with the rest of her belongings and notes, all shipped to a container somewhere. "Address encrypted, location hidden. They contain key to solving, must not let M get ahold."

Uh, that mean me? ...Or Mallux? Hmm.

The last note correlates to...last page in notebook one. "Breakthrough in activation process, element is now stable when..."

(WITH DAWNING HORROR)

...oh.

SOUND: THE TAPE CUTS OFF

MIRANDA

(SHAKEN)

...I think I figured out what he was doing. Why none of the theories made sense, why the more I tried to solve it, the more stuck I got, why everything looked like it was going round in circles.

SOUND: THE TAPE CUTS OFF

JONATHAN

We poured out a drink for— for the girl who died. It feels weird, saying it out loud. We hadn't talked about it for weeks, until today. It all just happened so fast, and the algorithm started coming together and we didn't have time to mourn.

She was a good scientist. She had a family, and a cat, and she wanted to make it big one day, so she could be on Sesame Street — you know, explaining science to kids. God, it all feels so heavy all of a sudden. This cause, this job we've dedicated ourselves to — we all knew that it wasn't going to be easy, we all knew the risks. But how do you prepare for something like that? It — it was — that one accident just shook us. I guess I know why we all tried not to acknowledge it for so long.

SOUND: THE TAPE CUTS OFF

MIRANDA

(ODDLY CALM, ODDLY LEVEL-HEADED LIKE SHE'S MADE PEACE WITH THE CONSPIRACY SURROUNDING HER)

It's been about six hours. The storm is passing. I've found answers that I don't particularly like, and from what I can piece together, the big picture doesn't look good.

So far, 720-a has been restricted to water and water-dwelling creatures only, both in its activated and non-activated states. It evaporates with the water, and any attempts to put land-dwelling organisms in the activation chamber have yielded no results.

But there have been...rumours of attempts. Electricity going haywire, results disappearing overnight, entire facilities being shut down. But rumours were all it were. Closest attempt

was in 2014, by a private facility in Copenhagen — there was a bit of PR fluff, some word-of-mouth gossip about it blowing open a rip in reality or something.

Truth was, people were dropping off the project like flies. It was underfunded, understaffed — it was a long shot, and the experiments stopped when their Juday engine collapsed in on itself. But it was the closest anyone had gotten.

And Mallux... Mallux came closer. This is what they were working on.

Jonathan realised that whatever the results, the facility was...I dunno, killing people or hurting people or making people disappear. Red string was an attempt to — I think it was an attempt to undermine them. It looks like a virus in the Juday engine programming, one that would render the active element non-active. It would destabilise...everything.

(A TENSE PAUSE, AS MIRANDA DIGESTS THIS. SHE LETS OUT A BREATH))

You selfish **tit**, Costello. This...**this** is what I've been basing my experiments on. This is worth three years of work that he just destroyed behind my back. My entire academic career— and now I find out that it's killing people

SOUND: THE TAPE WARPS AND DISTORTS

MIRANDA

I'm running out of **time**.