

INTRO

Dark ambient drone.

RYDER

You're rummaging through a rarely visited antique shop. A full length mirror covered in dust catches your eye. When you wipe your palm across the mirror's surface, a hand reaches from within and clutches your wrist.

A beat.

RYDER

You need my help.

DARK AMBIENT DRONE CHANGES TO:

INTRO MUSIC

RYDER

This is A Voice From Darkness.

Intro music continues, but gradually fades out.

ACT I

RYDER

Hello, this is Dr. Malcolm Ryder, parapsychologist. On our last episode, things left off somewhat abruptly with Amanda. She'd remembered The Traveling Salesman had been the one who'd introduced her to The Black Door. And she'd begun dreaming of him - or rather - he's been appearing in her dreams. In the distance - watching her. Waiting for her to open the door. She said she'd attempt to make contact with him in her dreams... against my advice. I have not yet heard back from her. Amanda, if you're listening, please call in - let us know you're safe. Let us know you haven't opened the door.

A beat.

2.

RYDER

But let's move on. We have a caller on the line. Hello caller, who are you and what otherworldly situation have you found yourself in?

All of Derrick's dialogue has the phone SFX.

DERRICK

Hello, Dr. Ryder? This is Derrick. I've a... I've found a new city.

RYDER

What do you mean?

DERRICK

I was driving through New Mexico along Route 60, and I saw hundreds of skyscrapers - maybe thousands - sprawling out in all directions. I've been to LA, Chicago, New York... I've never seen a city this large before. Especially out the middle of nowhere.

RYDER

Derrick, we need to contact authorities immediately. And whatever you do - do not enter the city.

A beat.

DERRICK

What would- what would happen if I've already gone into the city?

RYDER

How far in are you?

DERRICK

(concerned)

I'm driving now. Several blocks in.

RYDER

What do you see when you look at the people? The people walking the streets, going about their days, the people driving?

DERRICK

I... I'm trying not to look at them. Trying not to stare.

3.

RYDER

So you've seen what's wrong with them?

DERRICK

Yes. I mean no. I've been driving all day and night. I don't know what I've seen.

RYDER

They look normal, don't they? The people. That is, until you stare at one of them for too long. You've done that, haven't you? You held your gaze on someone in the city for maybe a second longer than you should have. And when you did, their face caved-in. Turned into an endless tunnel descending into them. Lined with rows and rows of sharp teeth. Almost like the mouth of a lamprey eel.

DERRICK

How'd you know that?

RYDER

Friends of mine in college - a brother and sister. They loved to travel to strange places. Sometimes I'd join them. But they went to the city you're now in - I didn't go on that trip. They were trapped there for months. Missed an entire semester at Ravenswood. When they got back, they described the city, its inhabitants, and its... its master to me.

A beat.

DERRICK

Doctor, what is this city?

RYDER

It's not a city. Not really. People - real people - don't live there. Don't work. There's no homes or businesses or culture. Nothing we'd normally define a city by. What it is - it's twists and turns. Large structures you cannot see around.

Pathways you lose yourself in when you go down them wrong. It's a labyrinth.

4.

A beat.

RYDER

Can you turn your car around? Do you remember the exact number of turns you made to get where you are?

DERRICK

I... I'm not sure. I just went with the flow of traffic.

RYDER

Turn your car around. Drive back the way you think you came. If traffic or crowds try to block you - that's a good sign that's the right way. It won't want to let you leave.

We hear the turn signal as well as the car making a U-turn.

DERRICK

What won't want to let me leave?

There's a sound in the distance - a warhorn perhaps. Something menacing.

DERRICK

All the people - have stopped what they're doing. They're watching me now. Staring. I don't want to stare back. To look at any of them. See their faces change. There was a sound in the distance.

RYDER

It knows you're trying to leave. That was quicker than I anticipated. Derrick, drive. Drive as quick as you can out of the city. Never mind the traffic. Never mind the inhabitants. Do that - and we're going to cut-to Today In Odd America. Stay on the line - we'll be right back.

5.

TODAY IN ODD AMERICA

TIOA music plays.

RYDER

Today in Odd America we find ourselves in New Hampshire. The year - 2016. Yes, today marks the tragic third year anniversary of the New Hampshire Fog.

A beat.

RYDER

On this day three years ago, a fog descending across the entirety of New Hampshire. Strangely it remained within the borders of the state. The invisible, man-made boundaries seemingly keeping the fog trapped within.

A beat.

RYDER

Thousands of New Hampshire residents who worked in neighboring states failed to arrive that morning. Those that ventured into the state for work or school- I'm sorry to say have not been heard from since. Before noon on this day three years ago, National Guard members from Maine, Vermont, and Massachusetts were dispatched to the state borders. Barricades were put in place to prevent further entry into the state. An expedition group led by the Vermont National Guard journeyed into the fog. All contact was lost before they'd made it five hundred feet across the state line.

A beat.

RYDER

Two days later, not a single word had come from anyone within New Hampshire. Not one body came out of the fog. The Massachusetts National Guard made an attempt at entry.

Those who went had rope tied around their waists - to pull them back out if and when contact was lost.

6.

A beat.

RYDER

And contact was lost - again before they'd even made it five hundred feet. The Massachusetts expedition was extracted. They were all comatose. Cause - unknown. To this day, those men and women remain in this condition.

RYDER

Further attempts were made to breach the state's borders - on ground and by aircraft. Not a single attempt to date has proven successful. The last expedition was conducted by Elon Musk's Boring Company - where they created a tunnel beneath the state. Eighty of Musk's workers are now comatose. Musk himself remained at the border of Vermont. He is healthy and fine.

A beat.

RYDER

National Guard members are posted along the state borders to prevent entry by the public. Tens of thousands make their way there every year - most to pay their respects to loved ones.

A beat.

RYDER

But that's not where our story ends. It's impossible to talk about the New Hampshire Fog without also mentioning the 603 phone calls.

A beat.

7.

RYDER

On birthdays, holidays, days of personal significance, every person across the country - world - who was close to someone from New Hampshire receives phone calls from the state's 603 area code. In every case, when the call is answered, there is silence on the line. Silence for roughly 80 seconds, and the call ends. Some have expressed hatred for these calls. Have changed their phone numbers to cease receiving them. Others relish the 603 calls. For them, they offer hope. Hope that not all is lost. That their missing loved ones might someday return to them. That they are not yet gone from this world.

A beat.

RYDER

I, myself, receive a 603 call on a day of personal significance every year. And I am hopeful.

A beat.

TIOA MUSIC ENDS.

RYDER

This has been Today In Odd America. Now back to the main show.

ACT II

RYDER

And we're back. Derrick - are you still with us?

DERRICK

The inhabitants. I've never seen such hatred in my life. They're all staring at me - daring me to stare back. Look at them too long. And I have. More than once. I keep seeing into them. Seeing their faces cave-in - like you said. All their teeth.

The warhorn echoes across the city. Closer now.

8.

DERRICK

What's after me? What's making that sound?

RYDER

Nevermind that. Are you retracing the way you came?

DERRICK

I... I think so. I'm doing like you said - going where they don't seem to want me to go.

We hear the car make a turn.

A beat.

DERRICK

No... No... I was wrong. I took a wrong turn. It's a dead end. I can't back out. Too many of them - they're walking behind my car, following me. Staring.

The warhorn sounds again. Very close.

DERRICK

What do I do? What do I do?

RYDER

You can't drive? You can't go down any other way?

DERRICK

No. No, they're all blocking me in. Them, and skyscrapers. Them and skyscrapers as far as the eye can see.

RYDER

You need to abandon your car then. Get out and run.

DERRICK

If I leave my car - I'll be out there with them. Nothing separating us.

RYDER

Leave your car immediately. Run into the nearest building and go as high as you can. From there, try to get a sense of where you are.

How far away you are from the boundary - the way back to New Mexico.

9.

The car door opens and slams shut. Derrick is running to the nearest building.

DERRICK

(forced joking)

You make it sound like I'm not in New Mexico anymore.

RYDER

You emphatically are not in New Mexico - not in America - not anywhere in the world as you understand it. I'm sorry if I haven't properly conveyed that to you.

Derrick opens a building door.

We hear him quickly step across the tile floor to an elevator.

He hits the UP button several times quickly.

The elevator slowly descends to the lobby.

DERRICK

(under breath)

Come on. Come on.

A beat.

Outside the building we hear footsteps approach.

DERRICK

Oh. He's here. The man - thing - what's been following me.

The elevator dings open.

RYDER

Derrick, you need to get into the elevator. NOW.

DERRICK

He's not entering the building. Just standing outside. Watching me. His face - it's not like the others. It's not human either though. He's carrying a horn with him. Made of bone.

10.

RYDER

Derrick, you need to-

DERRICK

(interrupts)

Right, yeah.

Derrick gets in, hits the button for the top floor.

The doors close, and the elevator goes up.

A beat.

DERRICK

All right. Heading towards the top floor.

A beat.

DERRICK

You said you had friends who came here - on purpose?

RYDER

They did. But they sought out places like where you are. They were drawn to them.

DERRICK

And they were stuck here for months? How'd they get out?

RYDER

The way they took - you won't be able to.

DERRICK

Why not?

RYDER

They were different - the brother and sister. They could do things - travel to places - that others can't.

The elevator stops.

DERRICK

Think I'm here. At the top.

The door opens.

Derrick walks out onto the top floor.

11.

RYDER

Can you see the boundary? Do you see New Mexico?

DERRICK

No. I see buildings.

He slowly paces around the room.

DERRICK

Skyscrapers in all directions. For as far back as I can see.

A beat.

DERRICK

If I didn't know any better, I'd say I'm at the center. The center of a labyrinth. Probably why the thing downstairs. The thing outside the door - thing that found me, followed me - he didn't chase after into the building. He knows I can't possibly get away. Not from where I am.

A beat.

The warhorn sounds again.

RYDER

Derrick? What just happened? Are they entering the building?

DERRICK

No. No. The opposite actually. All the... things that followed me. They're dispersing. Moving away from the building I'm in.

A ticking sound can now be heard.

Derrick turns.

DERRICK

There's an old grandfather clock. I don't think it was here when I got off the elevator. The clock face is different. It's counting down backwards. There's only one clockhand - it's on a 13. Looks like it's counting down - but the final number isn't a number. It's a horn made of bone.

12.

RYDER

13 hours until the next hunt begins.

DERRICK

Yeah, wait...

Derrick pulls a piece of paper from the clock.

DERRICK

There's a note too. It says: Rule 1: You hide. I seek. 2. Find the Gateway - and you can leave. Do you know what gateway he's talking about? Your friends mention one?

RYDER

I might know-

DERRICK

(interrupts)

Oh, and there's a third rule - No more outside help.

Soon as he finishes the word - dial tone.

RYDER

Derrick!? Derrick?

A beat.

RYDER

Derrick, I sincerely doubt you can hear this - but please know - despite that last rule, I will do everything in my power to help you find your way out. Soon as the show's over, I'll be making some phone calls.

A beat.

RYDER

And on that note, I believe it's time we end the show tonight. Until next time on A Voice From Darkness.

Outro music plays.