

[Intro:]

You're in a crowded bar on a Friday night.

The lights flash off and in the darkness you see glowing red eyes staring at you from across the room.

When the lights switch back on, the eyes are gone.

The lights go out again, and now the bar is filled with glowing red eyes - all fixated on you.

You need my help.

[AVFD theme fades in]

This is A Voice From Darkness.

[ACT I]

[AVFD theme fades out]

Hello, this is Dr. Malcolm Ryder, parapsychologist, coming to you from our studio here in the stormy, husky, brawling city of big shoulders— Chicago, Illinois. And speaking of Chicago, I'm happy to announce our show recently launched a Patreon. In our inaugural episode I answer a few questions about the Second City. So if you want to hear where I get pizza or know about the fabled Chicago bar, The Odd-Shaped Room, who's doors will only open for you once please feel free to join us over at: Patreon.com/vfdarkness. That once again is Patreon.com/vfdarkness.

With that out of the way, we have a very special episode tonight. My sister, Amelia Ryder, Professor of Occult Studies at Ravenswood University will be on the line later. It's been awhile since she's appeared as a guest on the show, and as she recently returned from an expedition, I'm sure she has something interesting to share with us. More on that later though. For now, let's delve into our National Alerts.

[National Alerts]

[NA music fades in]

There's only one National Alert for tonight, and it's for the Greenpoint Neighborhood of New York City. There's a movie theatre at the corner of Driggs Avenue and Leonard Street called The Luminous Spirit. A film currently playing there, titled: *We Are Always This Way*, should be avoided at all costs. Last night it was shown for the first time in nearly thirty years.

Outside the theatre you'll see a poster advertising the film - featuring a happy family all with blonde hair standing in a green field. Judging by the filmstock, color grading, and clothing the family wears - the movie appears to have been made sometime in the late 40s or early 50s.

We Are Always This Way opens with the camera panning across wide, grassy hills. A child whistles a cheerful tune. The song grows louder as the camera comes upon a blonde boy sitting on a tree stump, whistling, and whittling a stick with a small pocket knife. When the camera focuses on him, he stops. He places the stick next to him on the stump, neatly folds back the blade of his knife, and puts it in his pocket. He stares directly at the audience and asks everyone, one at a time, if they are happy.

The movie doesn't continue, the boy seemingly waits, until everyone in the theatre verbally answers him. If an audience member responds they are not happy, the boy probes further. He'll ask for the cause of their unhappiness. He asks: what would make them happy? Someone in a showing thirty years prior, a young woman, told the blonde boy she no longer loved her boyfriend. They lived together and she didn't know how to tell him. The boy smiled at her and said, "That's all right. I just want you to be happy!"

He continued to ask others in the crowd if they were happy. No one else responded that they were not. The blonde boy then walked off screen as the camera panned left. The rest of the blonde family from the film's poster: a mother, father, an older sister with a guitar, and a brother and sister a little older than the whittling boy began to sing as the elder sister played guitar.

The song had the same cheerful melody the blonde boy whistled at the start of the film. Partway through the second chorus, the blonde boy walked back on screen and joined his family. There was blood on his hands. He said nothing of this and neither did his family. The film ends abruptly without the song coming to an end.

The woman who'd told the blonde boy she was unhappy in her relationship went back to her apartment that night and found her boyfriend dead. Stabbed dozens of times with a small blade. A partially whittled stick was found next to the body. I repeat - do not see the film *We Are Always This Way* at The Luminous Spirit in Greenpoint, New York City.

That is our only National Alert for this evening

[NA music fades out]

Next-up is Today In Odd America, and then we'll be speaking to Professor Amelia Ryder about some of her recent research. The subject of which she's kept hidden even from me. So we'll be finding out what my sister has been up to together. But first...

[Today In Odd America]

[TIOA music fades in]

Today in Odd America we find ourselves in Granger, South Dakota. The year - 1991. Matthew Bast threw open the door of Baum's Bazaar. The small town bar was crowded that night and when Bast made such a loud entrance people turned his way. Bast was a big man, tall and imposing. He spoke loudly and confidently on matters as if his word were law.

"I saw scarecrows on the way here," Bast told the bar patrons. An old farmer laughed.

"Of course you did," he said. "We have them all over our fields." Bast eyed the farmer with contempt. He didn't like when people laughed at him.

"I know you've got scarecrows in your fields," Bast said. "I'm not simple. I'm not talking about them. I'm talking about the ones *running around town*."

"People in costumes?" Someone yelled.

"Likely so," Bast said. "Probably from the city. You know how they hate us."

Sioux Falls was the nearest city, and some folks in Granger believed the nearby city folks looked down on them. No evidence for this belief was ever stated. But it was a belief many in the small town had— including Matthew Bast.

"Don't worry," Bast assured the crowd. He withdrew a pistol from a leg holster. "I scared them off. Chased them back to Sioux Falls." Bast expected applause or for the bartender to shout that drinks were on the house. But that's not the reception he got.

"Put that damn thing away," the bartender said. Bast reluctantly obliged.

"Why would folks from Sioux Falls come all the way down here dressed as Scarecrows?" Someone asked. Bast made his way to them. There was a half-full pitcher of beer which Bast took and poured a generous amount of into an empty glass.

"They're mocking us," he said. "Our small town ways. Our lifestyle. You hear about these things all the time on the radio."

"I never heard about any of that on the radio," someone said.

"Cause you ain't listening to the right frequencies," Bast said. "Don't worry. I do. I listen all the time. I know how this world works. These people from the city hate us. They hate themselves even more. And they can't stand that we're out here living a simple life, free and easy, nice and happy. So they figure they can come out here dressed in costumes meant to mock our farms and fields, and maybe make us scared of our rural ways."

Most in the bar doubted Bast and ignored him. But a handful paid for his drinks, kept his glass full, and asked him to talk more about what he'd heard on the radio and more about these scarecrows from Sioux Falls.

A week went by and Bast claimed to have seen scarecrows around Granger doing various misdeeds. A fair number believed him on his word alone. Community patrols were started. Folks would roam the streets with guns openly displayed and stop vehicles they didn't recognize. The

Sheriff asked Bast and his posse to stand down. Said that what they were doing was unnecessary— and illegal. Bast disagreed.

A month later, all the shops on main street had their windows broken. Tires slashed on cars that'd been parked overnight on the street. Bast held an informal town meeting at Baum's Bazaar. He showed pictures he took of scarecrows doing all the destruction. Someone was quick to point out that all the scarecrows were about Bast's height and build and were wearing the same outfit except for a different hat in each picture. The skeptic was escorted out of the bar.

“But what's to be done?” Someone shouted. Bast didn't answer right away. He took a long drink first.

“What Sioux Falls does to us, we gotta do tenfold to them,” he said. He was asked to elaborate on what he meant. And so he did: “These city slickers think we're scared of scarecrows. Us country bumpkins believe they come alive at night and wander around. They believe we're that stupid. We need to make them feel that way. Make them know we'll never be scared of them, but they should be terrified of us.” The crowd cheered.

Bast laid out a plan— everyone present would dress as scarecrows. Not simple ones, but frightening and awful ones. Disgusting and hideous ones. They'd travel to Sioux Falls and do as much damage as they could. With pitchforks, scythes, and guns. They'd show the people of Sioux Falls they needed to fear the folk who lived out in the country.

The sky was black the following night. There was no moon. Bast met with all his followers in front of Baum's Bazaar. Though each used only simple material to make their costumes - old clothing that'd turned to rags, coarse twine, burlap sacks - each person appeared unique and haunting in their own ways. Some had stuffed themselves with hay to give extra girth. Others painted nightmarish eyes and smiles on their burlap faces.

They didn't get far out of Granger. The Sheriff had blocked the road. Said he'd go easy on them all if they turned around and went back to their homes. Everyone could forget this whole thing. For a moment, the scarecrows considered the sheriff's offer, thought maybe they were going too far based on too little information.

But a low static hiss rumbled from the sheriff's radio. Bast tilted his head like a dog trying to make sense of human words. Then a high-pitched, unnatural squelch burst from the machine, causing it to explode. Bast laughed.

He stabbed The Sheriff through the torso with his pitchfork and carried the law man off to the side of the road. Bast threw The Sheriff onto the soil.

“Your radio,” Bast said to the dying man, “Your radio defies you. Says we ought to move on with our plan.”

“It's just noise, Bast. Loud, angry noise,” The Sheriff said.

But Bast could no longer make sense of The Sheriff's words. They were distorted to him like radio static. Bast stabbed The Sheriff through his throat to stop the noise he made.

The convoy continued down the road into Sioux Falls. Over the next several hours, tens of thousands of dollars of destruction was done to the city. Businesses were broken into, cars destroyed, citizens of Sioux Falls attacked. Some killed.

Several of the Granger Scarecrows were shot in the street— by law enforcement and by citizens. The rest though... As the sun rose in Sioux Falls, beams of light hit the scarecrows, hit the people of Granger that Bast had convinced to come with him on this mission, they all froze in place. Stranger still, law enforcement found no evidence that these scarecrows were costumes with living, breathing people inside, but were simply sacks filled with hay. No different than any other scarecrow in the middle of a cornfield. Some speculated this was a trick Bast and his followers played. That they'd left behind actual scarecrows after they ran away from the city. But Bast and his group were nowhere to be found back in Granger.

The scarecrows were placed in an evidence locker until something further could be determined about what happened to Bast and the others from Granger.

A month later, when the night sky was without moon, the scarecrows disappeared from police storage.

Ever since that night, across the country, cities have reported invasions of scarecrows. Ones that attack on dark, moonless nights and disappear before the first beam of sunlight. Know this though, a warning sign always precedes them. On the night of a new moon, turn your radio on and tune it to empty static. If it squelches. If it makes inhuman, angry noises, then you should prepare yourselves. Your city is in danger that night. But do not listen too long to the radio signal you find... or it may convince you to join Bast and his cohorts. Listen too long and no human words will be able to talk you out of it.

This has been Today In Odd America. And now back to our main show.

ACT II

TIOA music fades out.

RYDER

And we're back. My sister Professor Amelia Ryder at Ravenswood University is on the line with us.

AMELIA

Hello, Malcolm. It's been awhile since you've had me on your show.

RYDER

The last time you were on things got a bit heated.

AMELIA

The time before that too, from what I recall.

RYDER

You put forward The Three Twins Conjecture. It's one of the least credible theories of supernatural metaphysics.

AMELIA

(defensive)

I didn't put it forward. I merely stated that it was possible.

RYDER

Possible, but no serious scholar holds that view.

AMELIA

There was one very serious scholar who held that view, but he's dead now.

RYDER

There's no reason to bring up Duncan, Amelia.

AMELIA

It's partly why I came on your show tonight, actually.

A beat.

AMELIA

I went back to the lake house.

2.

RYDER

That's incredibly reckless.

Malcolm takes a breath.

RYDER

For listeners' context, the lake house in question is The Holloway Lakehouse. A ridiculous estate built during the gilded age once occupied during the summers by Nicholas and Zelda Holloway before their tragic deaths. Along with their children Julian...

AMELIA

And Miranda.

RYDER

You went looking for her?

AMELIA

I had to.

RYDER

I strongly disagree.

AMELIA

If Julian's back-

RYDER

(interrupts)

That means nothing. His return in no way means she has returned. That she can return. Amelia, I'm sorry, but-

AMELIA

(interrupts)

You don't get to decide when, and if, I move on.

A beat.

AMELIA

If she's gone, truly gone, then where's her body? And why can't you tell me what happened that night?

RYDER

Amelia, we've been over this a thousand times-
3.

AMELIA

(interrupts)

And never once have you been able to answer my questions.

Malcolm sighs.

RYDER

This is not something I wanted to talk about publically.

AMELIA

Then you should have answered my questions better privately.

RYDER

I've told you everything I remember about that night.

AMELIA

You've told me everything except what I need to know: Where is Miranda?

A beat.

RYDER

I don't remember. I'm sorry that's not enough, but-

AMELIA

(interrupts)

If you two hadn't conspired against me she would-

RYDER

(interrupts)

Conspired against you? We protected you because of how much we care about you.

A beat.

RYDER

If we're having this conversation, and we are, then I at least want to make sure anyone listening can follow what we're saying. That they understand why I did what I did.

AMELIA

Say whatever you need.

4.

RYDER

Over a decade ago The Traveling Salesman was destroying towns across the country. People were disappearing in numbers and ways they never had before. He had to be dealt with before he brought this country to ruin.

AMELIA

Grandpa Duncan called us all together. All to the island.

RYDER

He did. At his request, the best scholars at Ravenswood searched for anything that might stop Julian. Charlotte Price, the most powerful oneironaut of our generation, convinced those like her, with a supernatural gift who'd been trained at Ravenswood, to join the cause.

AMELIA

I was at that initial meeting of "The Ravenswood Conspiracy" or whatever Grandpa Duncan labeled it. And several after. I thought I was part of the conspiracy...

RYDER

You were a vital part.

AMELIA

Five months after that first meeting, I had a nightmare. I was in bed, and Miranda appeared before me out of nowhere. Holding herself. She was soaked in blood. And in terrible pain. I asked her what was wrong. She looked at me and said: "Malcolm. Lake house." After those words, she vanished.

A beat.

AMELIA

I tried calling you. You didn't answer. I tried Miranda. I wanted to see if I'd just had a bad dream. She didn't answer. I tried Grandpa Duncan. No answer. Dying, disappeared, and dead. That's what you all were. I didn't know it at the time, but you were bleeding to death at the lake house, Miranda had vanished, and Grandpa Duncan was already dead.

5.

RYDER

Amelia, I'm sorry. I know that night was traumatic. But I feel you-

AMELIA

(interrupts)

I found you in a pool of your own blood, the life drained from your face. Next to the corpse of our grandfather, who'd practically raised me. And spread throughout the rest of the estate were a dozen more bodies. People from the university I knew and loved like family. You brought them, you brought Miranda, all there to die that night. But you didn't bring me.

RYDER

Because we wanted you to survive. Miranda and I made that call together. You, Charlotte, and a handful of others had to be excluded from the confrontation at the lake house in case we failed. Charlotte knew our plan. She would have-

AMELIA

(interrupts)

-What? Helped me bury you?

RYDER

Four people fell dead the moment Julian materialized. Two more were dead with the wave of his hand. Duncan shot him once with the revolver used to kill the Veiled Prince of Saint Louis. If it could kill one dark and immortal being- why not another? But Duncan only grazed him. Barely caused Julian to flinch. Duncan was dead before he could take a second shot. If you'd been there, you would have been killed too.

Both of us would be dead now. There's no alternative to that reality.

6.

AMELIA

(confused)

There were three bullets fired from the revolver. And it was in your hand. I know. I took it from you. I still carry it with me in case I ever see Julian.

RYDER

Julian slammed me against the wall. Broke my ribs. Punctured one of my lungs. But he threw me next to Duncan's body. I grabbed the revolver. As Julian came close, to kill me, I fired. That's all I remember. I woke up three days later in a hospital with you next to me. Amelia, I've told you all this before. Dozens of times. Miranda's role in that night was to lure Julian there and then perform a ritual to trap him. To bind him so he couldn't travel away. In the chaos of it all, I have no idea what happened to her.

AMELIA

I just need to know... If Julian's back... if she's out there somewhere, and I'm not looking for her... what does that say about how much I love her if I don't look for her?

RYDER

Did I tell you what I did a year ago on June 8th? I'm not sure that I did.

AMELIA

June 8th?

A beat.

AMELIA

Your 603 day. I'm sorry, I almost forgot.

7.

RYDER

It's all right. I don't like to talk about it. But a year ago, I read a rumor online. A single forum post with no corroboration saying that if you went to the border of New Hampshire, spent the night there when you'd normally receive your 603 call... you'd dream of the person you're missing.

A beat.

AMELIA

Did you dream of her?

RYDER

I did. But I don't know if I spoke to her in a dream. Or if only dreamed of speaking to her. But that's not even the point of sharing this. I meant to say is, I understand why you have to keep looking. I support you. Just please don't go back to the lakehouse. At least not alone.

AMELIA

I don't have any intentions to. Nothing had changed. I don't think anyone has been there in years. Possibly since that night. But I won't stop looking for Miranda. If Julian's back, she has to be.

RYDER

And I hope you find her.

A beat.

RYDER

Well that was not what I expected us to get into tonight. Before we go, do you have any final words?

AMELIA

Miranda, if you can hear this... please know that I love you. I don't know where you are, but I'll do everything I can to find you.

8.

RYDER

And we'll end things there. Next time, if you're experiencing any supernatural, paranormal, or otherworldly problems be sure to call in, next time on: A Voice From Darkness.

AVFD OUTRO THEME