

WITCHING HOUR

Written by

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WITCHING HOUR has headline content warnings for death & dying; horror themes; mental health & trauma; sound effects; socio-political themes; violence; and swearing; blasphemy; innuendo; second person perspective; and fourth wall breaking.

Detailed content warnings available behind a spoiler tag on the episode website.

To learn more about how we use content warnings, visit <https://tinyurl.com/BedtimeStoriesCW>

ACT ONE

SCENE 1: INSIDE A RECORDING STUDIO

(WITCH, brightly) PseudoPod, The Sound of Horror!

The familiar strains of PseudoPod's opening music, "Bloodletting on a Kiss" begins. A moment of distortion interrupts, followed by a saxophone-driven 90's talk show cover of the same song. Canned studio audience applause as the song concludes.

WITCH

(saccharine, without irony,
like a morning talk-show host)

Hello and welcome back to PseudoPod,
I'm your host, Alasdair Stuart. We are
so excited to bring you a very special
episode, a rooftop extravaganza to
celebrate the Witching Hour!

FX: *Canned applause*

Haha! That's right! As you know, in
every dimension there is a PseudoPod,
and in every PseudoPod, there is an
Alasdair. Tonight, the witching hour is
our one window to bring all the
PseudoPod towers together and present
to you, The Perfect Story.

FX: *Canned applause*

We've got a wonderful night planned,
with live reporting, and prizes, and
with all the Alasdairs aboard, I will
bring you The Perfect Story, and I
promise you, it's true. Every
Alasdair's voice, every PseudoPod tower
transmitting as one--

ENGINEER MARTY

(distorted, from a different part of the tower)

Al? Al, can you hear me?

WITCH

(softly)

Yes, I can hear you Marty, what's going on?

ENGINEER MARTY

(distorted, from a different part of the tower)

We've got a problem. With all the other PseudoPod towers extruding into our world we're getting extra signals from those worlds too.

WITCH

Yes, that's the plan. The other towers will make our signal strong enough to carry The Perfect Story.

ENGINEER MARTY

Right, but the signal was getting disrupted. I had to move some things around, and that might have impacted some vital systems.

WITCH

What do you mean, exactly?

ENGINEER MARTY

You know that thing that should never happen? It happened.

WITCH

It escaped?

ENGINEER MARTY
(scared to admit it)

I think so. But I can get it back!

WITCH
(the smile starts to show teeth)

Good. Because what does the show have
to be, Marty?

ENGINEER MARTY

Friendly and familiar.

WITCH

Friendly and familiar.

(pause)

Marty, I'm looking at a little red light
that says we're broadcasting. Which channel
are you using to tell me this?

ENGINEER MARTY

I -- Oh no. Yes, we're live.

WITCH

We sure are! Give it up for Marty, everyone!
What a stellar engineer. None of this would
be possible without him. Let's check in with
our man on the street to see what kind of
weather we can expect for the rooftop party!
Alasdair?

The scene shifts to outdoors.

WEATHER ALASDAIR
(newscaster weather voice, genial and unbothered by events)

Thanks Alasdair! Clear blue skies shifting
to an uncanny green color and I am here on

the scene to report as all our instruments are down. Expected bit of weather as gloom gathers at the horizon, especially a kind of gelatinous, viscous mist at the base of the towers as they seep into our reality. The towers seem to be every shape and size, and families out for a picnic might notice that the towers are slowly rotating and pitching up and down like carnival horses covered in corrosive ichor and carpal suckers.

The stench is truly palpable, as though a single lightning strike boiled thousands of pounds of krill and washed them ashore to bake in their own rot. And based on the buzzing in my fillings, we're in for a lot more lightning.

Rain expected with a strong chance of - are those teeth? Yes, those are teeth. The clouds around the towers have teeth. Oop! Here comes a bird! I wonder if - oh.

FX: *Caw, crunch, thwomp*

The bird just got thwomped. Oh here come more birds. The birds are being sucked into the clouds between the towers. There are now more clouds.

FX: *Splat*

Commuters may wish to top off their wiper fluid and bring out the snow brushes a little early to clear windshields of mangled bird. Pack heavy boots and save your dress shoes for once you're inside the office.

Oh, an update, it appears that the towers have completely obscured the horizon. This is going to make for a very interesting sunset and may affect your commute.

Back to you, Alasdair!

WITCH

Thanks, Al! Always a breath of fresh air. Our next story is a very special one. Let's check in with our friends at the hot new cafe and bar, The Scottish Place!

Over the line, we hear the sounds of a busy bar.

POETRY SLAM ALASDAIR
(smooth jazz voice)

Welcome to The Scottish Place, where trouble and coffee are brewing and your hands will never come clean. I'm Alasdair and I'll be emceeing this fine collection of up and coming poets. Up next is our Witching Hour Headliner, Shirley J and her backup band "The Lotto Winners." So sit back, open your ears, and relax your third eye.

Signal from The Magnus Archives distorts in.

PODCAST SEGMENT 1: THE MAGNUS ARCHIVES

Click of a tape recorder followed by whirring tape.

A heavy sigh.

Yonder by K Blackwood.

I spy with my little eye

Something beginning with y.

I'll give you a clue

It moves with a fluid grace

Moving down, then up

Unravelling a thread behind it
Bulbous, in its form
Spun with method
And the instinct of far less years than
I
And yet it spins in the wind
Buffeted by forces it cannot see
And nature, beyond its control
Though, you probably cannot see it
Even though you definitely have the
vantage
Do you have eyes out there while you
stand guard on me?
On the kid whirling with their yoyo,
casting wild and free?
Though perhaps I should have chosen
yonder,
Staring out the window at the places I
cannot go.
Forced to consider an overlooked view,
I must concentrate to see

The audio distorts into a deeper voice

And take stock of what might be

High pitched static noise begins

I can survey my domain,

Audio begins to sound hollow and distorted

Limited as it is,
And confidently say
B is for a well-read book
P is for some paper
K is for the knitted blanket,
a childhood wrapped in patchwork,
stitched with care and [Static and
distortion increases] love.
W is for the wisdom of my peers
And T is for the thought that my
colleagues wouldn't be here.

I spy with my little eye

*Static whine and tape distortion takes over and the words
are inaudible.*

Signal from The Magnus Archives distorts out.

END ACT ONE.

ACT TWO

SCENE 1: BACK IN THE STUDIO

*"Bloodletting on a Kiss" segues us back into the studio
with more canned applause.*

POETRY SLAM ALASDAIR
(as heard by the WITCH)

Al, did you hear that? Something went wrong with our signal right when our guest star went up.

WITCH
(sotto voce)

Yes, I heard it. Not to worry, I'll have Alex check it out.

WITCH
(continues to audience, rallying)

Meanwhile, PseudoPod is extruded into this universe on a frequency of 437 mhz, which is the frequency the universe broadcasts on. It's the carrier wave for reality, and it's all supported by you.

Now that everything is running *smoothly*, let's have a talk about how to support us.

FUNDRAISING ALASDAIR
(blasé, non-threatening)

...through human bone...

WITCH
(clears throat)

Let me fast forward through that bit.

FUNDRAISING ALASDAIR
(blasé, non-threatening)

...We're now paying all our staff. All of them loyal. All of them bonded. Yes. Bonded. That's because of you. The tithe we take from your ears every time you listen, the

snatches of skin and blood and time -- thank you for that. Without you these unsung heroes of the industry wouldn't be sung. With you their dread cacophony shall shatter the walls of heaven itself. Now, remember to like, share, subscribe and donate. To share the love, simply forward this to someone you know. They'll have seven days. Just like we did. Just like you do.

Good luck and remember - for every person you forward this onto you get another seven days and so do we. Also you gain access to our archive, and the voice vault is ready to receive you.

We need your address. Not if you already donated. We already know where you live. You're already with us here in the dark. No. You. The ones who take but do not give. The ones who think they are alone and have not yet discovered nothing could be further from the truth. You. We need your addresses.

Fundraising Alasdair's speech begins to judder like Max Headroom.

Because then we can visit you. And show you what you're missing. Show you what is waiting for you. Join the family. Or the family will join you.

WITCH

(covering for the signal judder)

If you haven't already given and have seen no sign of a PseudoPod tower in your neighborhood, you could always help us out by buying a PseudoPod Tiki mug. These hand-crafted pieces bear a striking resemblance to the tower itself, and there's no better way to show all your friends that you're a

part of our family. They are eager to extend our reach, and very excited to meet you.

FX: A WALKIE-TALKIE clicks on.

WITCH
(sotto-voce aside)

Marty? Did your walkie-talkie break or something? Has it been recaptured yet? Come in!

ENGINEER MARTY
(stage whisper, out of breath, hiding)

Stop. Talking. It'll hear you.

FX: A WALKIE-TALKIE clicks off.

WITCH
(sotto voce)

Marty? You ok? Great, why is this not working?

Signal from The Secret of St. Kilda distorts in.

PODCAST SEGMENT 2: THE SECRET OF ST. KILDA

FAINT SOUNDS OF WAVES HITTING THE COAST. A CLUNK AS THE BOAT DOCKS, THEN THE RUMBLE OF AN ENGINE. AMBIENT RADIO PLAYS IN THE BACKGROUND.

GEORGIE

Thanks mate.

(yelling)

Drive her out, Robbie!

ROBBIE

Gotcha bruv!

THE VAN DRIVES OFF THE FERRY, THEN A LITTLE WAYS ONTO LAND

GEORGIE

There you are! Alright, hop in!

THE VAN DOOR SLIDES OPEN AND WE HEAR SOMEONE JUMP INSIDE

ROBBIE

Good to see ya! Close the door and
we'll teach ya all we know, eh?

*THE DOOR SLIDES CLOSED AND THE VAN BEGINS TO DRIVE OFF.
SUSTAINED SOUNDS OF TIRES ON A DIRT TRACK*

GEORGIE

Now on the mainland here you got your
AA and your tow trucks - which is all
well and good-

(pauses for ROBBIE to speak)

ROBBIE

But it makes you lazy-

GEORGIE

(with emphasis on each word)

Makes. You. Lazy.

ROBBIE

Now being an island mechanic? That
makes you crafty! Don't it, Georgie?

GEORGIE

Yeah - and that's why you need a
Torrances' Car Kit.

ROBBIE
(cheeky and with pride)

A Torrances' Car Kit - Essential Items
for Island Mechanics we're calling it.

THE VAN'S ENGINE CUTS OFF

GEORGIE

Alright mate, first stop.

*THE VAN DOOR SLIDES OPEN; RADIO CUTS OFF. WE NOW HEAR
AMBIENT WOODLAND SOUNDS, AND SOFT RAINFALL*

GEORGIE (CONT.)

On St Kilda there's no petrol station-

ROBBIE
(not so much interrupting as making an addition)

Can't just rock on to BP for a saussie
roll!

GEORGIE

It's whatever you've got in your
garage, innit? And if you're caught
out?

ROBBIE
(shouting from outside the van)

Good luck, and enjoy hiking in the
rain!

GEORGIE

One time Robbie ended up swimming, and
she's pretty cold... in December.

ROBBIE
(with a shudder)

Ugh, wasn't watching the tides - never again.

A CLICK AS THE BOOT OPENS. A CLANK AS SOMETHING METAL IS DEPOSITED ON THE FLOOR, THEN THE (sound) OF SOMETHING HOLLOW BEING UNFURLED

GEORGIE

So your first item: jerry can and, more importantly, a hose. You never know when you're going to need a pinch of top up.

ROBBIE

Aw, don't be like that - we never take a full tank. Share and share alike, eh? Right! So, it goes into the tank and suck to begin the transfer.

GEORGIE SPITS

Try not to swallow any.

THE TINNY SPLASH OF LIQUID HITTING METAL. IT PATTERS FOR A MOMENT, THEN STOPS

ROBBIE

Emergency plan B?

GEORGIE

Yup! Item two in your Torrance Kit: a coat hanger.

ROBBIE

It's gotta be an old wire twisty one, plastic or wood is no good, even if it keeps your shirts pressed.

GEORGIE

Alright, bend it into a J shape, yeah?
Little flattened at the bottom.
Perfect, now slide him between the
window and the door-

ROBBIE

No, I've been doing it since I was
four; you can do it. There's a pin,
pull it up - yeah, you're doing great,
mate!

A CLICK, AND THEN THE DOOR IS OPENED

GEORGIE

Your first break in! Adorable! So you
wanna tourist car ideally - covered in
flags and stickers with a foreign
plate, but something that says-

(affected, silly)

"Ooh, I'm outdoorsy!"

ROBBIE

Yikes.

GEORGIE

Oof. You can tell by the smell. What is
that?

SHUFFLING AS ROBBIE RIFLES THROUGH THE CAR

ROBBIE

I want to say... patchouli and hiking
boots.

GEORGIE

I hate that you can do that. Now in a really sticky situation find a hiker and grab the camping stove. The fuel in that will get you to the next place.

ROBBIE

Got one!

GEORGIE

Good spot - on we go!

THE CAR DOOR IS SLAMMED SHUT. THE CLICK OF A FUEL CAP AND RATTLE OF FUEL BEING POURED. RAIN BEGINS TO COME DOWN MORE HEAVILY

GEORGIE (CONT.)

Now it's not just about maintenance - it's about what to do when you hit trouble.

MECHANICAL GROANS IN BACKGROUND AS GEORGIE POPS AND LIFTS THE HOOD, THEN POKES ABOUT INSIDE

ROBBIE

Not that we mind a bit of trouble.

GEORGIE

Now most mechanics would tell you to have jumper cables, but that's boring.

ROBBIE

Dull and utterly useless. Why would you recharge a battery when you can just grab one that's already charged?

GEORGIE

Nah, don't worry, we'll do swapses!
It'll just be like... indigo and Kaileg-
Kayleigh? Is that, is that Kayley? For
the love of Dubrach. It'll just be like
they ran the radio a touch too long.

ROBBIE

Ooh, bar car care here. See how the
battery looks all fuzzy? Corrosion.

*A SODA CAN IS CRACKED OPEN. IT FIZZES, AND THEN WE HEAR THE
POURING OF LIQUID ONTO METAL*

ROBBIE

Can of your favourite non sponsored
soft drink will get that right off.

GEORGIE

I've got it!

GEORGIE

Obviously every mechanic kit needs a
spanner.

(a grunt of disgust)

Ours needs a clean. Blood? Nah, it's
bolognese sauce.

ROBBIE

Bad dinner party at Angelique's. He
doesn't like to talk about it.

GEORGIE

How was I to know "fix my pipes" was
some kind of euphemism? Right, swap ya.

CREAKING AS ROBBIE POPS THE BATTERY OUT

ROBBIE

Everyone knows that.

GEORGIE

Disgusting. And a brand new, clean battery for the van!

ROBBIE

While you put that in, let me give you another tip - see these?

ROBBIE TAPS SOMETHING

ROBBIE (CONT.)

Spark plugs.

GEORGIE

That's what you need if the engine starts knocking - if the boot starts knocking-

GEORGIE RAPS AGAINST THE SIDE OF THE VAN

GEORGIE (CONT.)

-you can use the spanner again, eh?

ROBBIE

(chuckling)

Just a little island humour. We'd never use a spanner for that - a good blanket does it quieter and cleaner.

GEORGIE

But if you were in a bind and needed to get in and out quick, one of these bad

boys will smash through a window in a minute. Show him, Robbie!

ROBBIE

Okay! Come on mate, together!

A GASP, THEN A LOUD SHATTERING

GEORGIE

Don't be a drama queen! Now, the next item is the blanket. Or just some rags if you have them. Here you go-

A BLANKET IS TOSSED AND CAUGHT

ROBBIE

I wasn't kidding about having a blanket. You're doing great, don't panic.

FABRIC RUSTLES OF A BLANKET BEING LAID DOWN. DISTRESSED WHIMPERS IN BACKGROUND

GEORGIE

Just pop that over the edge so you don't cut yourself and you can reach the inside handle and pop it open. There, see? Easy!

CLICK - THE DOOR IS OPENED. SUSTAINED SOUNDS OF HYPERVENTILATING

ROBBIE

Hey, hey - don't cry! You didn't cut yourself, did you?

GEORGIE

Breathe, mate, breathe.

ROBBIE

What do you need a phone for?

FOOTSTEPS SLOWLY RECEDING

GEORGIE

There's no need to call the fuzz mate,
it's just a window. I thought you
wanted to become an Island Mechanic?

FOOTSTEPS RECEDING AT A RUN

ROBBIE

You said you wanted to know everything?

ROBBIE (CONT.)

(yelling after the rookie)

This is emergency repair, mate! Nothing
personal!

*SCRAMBLED FOOTSTEPS AND A THUD; THE ROOKIE FALLS. SLOWER
FOOTSTEPS APPROACH*

GEORGIE

Well. Looks like somebody wants in-
house experience.

ROBBIE

I'll get the shovel.

GEORGIE

Now a good shovel is an important kit
item, gets you out of mud, snow, and
every once in a while... another jam.

*A CLANG, THEN ANOTHER THUD. SOMETHING HEAVY IS DRAGGED
THROUGH THE DIRT. A CAR DOOR IS OPENED*

ROBBIE

Okay, in we go.

THE HUFF OF SOMEONE LIFTING SOMETHING HEAVY. A ZIPPER, THEN SOMETHING IS GRABBED FROM THE BOOT

ROBBIE (CONT.)

'Scuse me. Right, the final kit piece!
Touch either side to the relay on the
starter motor, purple to the red wire,
and she'll be running in just a minute.

RUNNING FOOTSTEPS AS ROBBIE DASHES ROUND TO THE FRONT OF THE VAN

GEORGIE
(yelling)

Now bring that knife back when you're
done, eh?

HEAVY BREATHING

GEORGIE (CONT.)

(spoken)

Yeah, sorry mate, but I'm not sure
you're cut out to be a St Kilda
mechanic. If you'd been paying
attention you'd've kept the spark plug.

THE ENGINE RUMBLES TO LIFE

ROBBIE
(yelling)

She's back! Let's go, bruv!

GEORGIE

Perfect. Now, let's turn off that dictaphone, eh mate? We, uh- We don't need to record the next bit.

SOUNDS OF PANIC ARE CUT OFF AS THE DICTAPHONE CLICKS OFF

Signal from The Secret of St. Kilda distorts out.

WITCH

(frustrated, vamping)

And we return to the Witching Hour Extravaganza, live from PseudoPod with only *(static)* minutes to The Perfect Story! This story is an amalgam of all the stories PseudoPod has collected over the last few years. You know, I've worked hard curating the very best of the best, and this journey has really taught me a lot about the power of storytelling.

Signal distortion cuts the WITCH off at the word 'storytelling', sparing us this solipsistic drivel.

WITCH

(slowly being overridden)

What the heck was that? This shouldn't be happening. Do I need to defrost another engineer? No, I don't want to reroute power when we're this close to the hour, let me see if I can--

Signal distortion cuts the Witch off at 'let me see'.

Signal from Creepypod distorts in.

PODCAST SEGMENT 3: CREEPYPOD

DJ

The sun's down, the day is over. The hum drum grind of daily life has slowed to a stop. Time to pour yourself a drink, get into something a little more comfortable, and let yourself get carried away by me, DJ JD, your guide into that better place here on KRPY.

Let your hair down, light some candles, and settle in. You've got me all night right up to the Witching Hour, so what's say we don't raise a little hell together. Looks like we've already got a board full of callers ready to be so good at being bad.

Let's start with line nine... nah, make like sixxxx, line nine is next.

You're on caller. Tell me, and tell me slow, what is it you've got yourself up to on this fine fine night?

Heavy breathing over the line

Sounds like someone's having a good time already.

Heavy breathing over the line continues

As much as I'm enjoying the performance caller, conversations are a two-way street. It's a you do me, I do you sorta thing. How about you tell me a little about what's got you breathing so heavy?

Gentle creepy laughing

Well, as much as I enjoy hearing one of our listeners enjoying themselves,

there's plenty of people waiting for their own turn. How about we take a little break, slow things down with some sultry sounds, while I have a little word with our producer about call screening. Don't you worry, DJ JD ain't going away, so you sit tight.

Silence

Looks like it's gonna be one of those kind of nights. Having a little technical issue with the board, so as much as I'd like to get you all in the mood with some music, I guess I'll just have to do that all on my lonesome.

(breaks character)

What the—

I mean, looks like the higher powers decided to make things sexier in the studio by turning the lights off. That's alright, I know where all the buttons are, I'm just gonna let my fingers do the walking as we get another caller on the line. Back to line nine it is.

Heavy breathing over the line

Well well well, looks like our friend is back.

Voice over intercom

Um, JD, our phone lines are down right now. I'm not sure what you're hearing but it isn't from the phones.

Gurgling

JD? JD!

A scream

Signal from Creepypod distorts out.

We hear SWITCHES FLIPPING on a sound board as the WITCH steals the signal back.

WITCH
(under breath)

Think you can interrupt my show, do you? Bye-bye, mister DJ. Alex, re-route his callers. There we go.

(delighted, without irony)

PseudoPod towers are being sighted all over the Earth, from megaliths bursting from volcanoes, to tiny satellite transmitters about the size of a tiki mug. Have you seen one in your neighborhood? Let's take some calls and hear all about it.

We hear a CLICK as a PHONE CALL BEGINS.

WITCH

Welcome to PseudoPod, caller, you're on the air!

CALLER ONE
(distorted)

Witching hour, woo!

Through PHONE DISTORTION, we hear a WILD STREET PARTY, interrupted by MONSTERS, BREAKING GLASS, and SCREAMING until the line cuts out.

WITCH

Caller, welcome to PseudoPod, you're on the air!

CALLER TWO

Hello! Oh my gosh! I got through!
Harry! We got through!

Am I caller number thirteen hundred and
thirteen?

WITCH

(conspiratorially, like a password)

Is the sky green?

CALLER TWO

(screaming, laughing)

It's green! It's green! Harry! We won!

I've wanted a mug for so long, I've
been a huge fan of the show and they're
so hard to get, thank you Al!

WITCH

No, 13-13, thank YOU for all your
support.

CALLER TWO

Do I need to do anything? Can I give
you my address?

WITCH

(good natured laugh)

Oh there's no need for that. It'll find
you soon enough.

CALLER TWO

Harry, we-- oh god, run!

CALLER TWO screams. The line cuts out.

WITCH

Shall we take another? Hello, caller
three, happy Witching Hour!

MUR

Al, we've got a huge problem -- there
are other PseudoPod towers popping up
all over the--wait... who is this?

WITCH

This is Alasdair Stuart with PseudoPod,
wishing you a very happy Witching Hour!

MUR

What? No you aren't, where's Alasdair?
What did you do with him?

We hear a CLICK as the WITCH ends the call.

WITCH

Whoops, looks like the Escape Pod lost
signal. Great mileage, terrible
reception.

A CLICK as the WITCH takes another caller.

Hello, welcome to PseudoPod.

We hear PHONE STATIC as there's a brief pause.

REAL ALASDAIR
(ominous)

Hello, Alasdair.

WITCH

(a beat) You. What did you do with
Marty?

REAL ALASDAIR

Your familiar sends his regards. He no longer has signal.

WITCH

This can't be happening.

REAL ALASDAIR

I'm taking it all back. Sound familiar? Tick Tock.

The line goes dead.

WITCH

Cut to commercial!

The "Bloodletting on a Kiss REMIX" bumper clumsily transitions to the fundraising segment. The WITCH intends to run the fundraising segment, but another show interrupts the signal.

FUNDRAISING ALASDAIR

...So if you're enjoying this episode or just want to see what happens next, please donate. Money. Time. Blood plasma. Unwanted relatives. We have massive engines and all is fuel, so! Donations to allisfuel@escapeartists.net.

Static as the fundraising segment is interrupted.

Signal from Unwell distorts in.

PODCAST SEGMENT 4: UNWELL: A MIDWESTERN GOTHIC MYSTERY

A RADIO AD- WITH MORE WARMTH AND LOVE FOR THE TOWN OF MT. ABSALOM THAN POLISH. A VERY SLIGHT CRACKLE-THIS IS BEING LISTENED TO OVER A RADIO

*MUSIC PLAYS- THE CHEESIEST WE ARE SAFE MUSIC, WITH SOME
MIDI 90's CORPORATE SAFETY VIDEO TUNE.*

VOICE OVER

Mount Absalom. A community. A heritage.
A home.

The green jewel in the majestic crown
of Ohio, for two hundred years Mount
Absalom has been a place to play.

*IN QUICK SUCCESSION- RATTLE OF SMALL PING PONG BALLS IN A
METAL CYLINDER. IT STOPS.*

CALLER

N-32.

DOT

BINGO!

THE CROWD CHEERS. SOUND DIES OUT.

VOICE OVER

A place to learn.

CHILDREN

...for in thy green and growing arms, we
have everything we need.

SCHOOL BELL RINGS.

TEACHER

All right, now let's get out our math
homework...

VOICE OVER

A place to work.

INDUSTRIAL MACHINES- FOR BOTTLING

TOUR GUIDE

(loud)

Here at the Celeric Bottling Works, we produce over two thousand bottles of celery soda every day.

VOICE OVER

A place to raise a family.

A SPLASH OF WATER, SOUND OF A BABY CRYING.

DOCTOR

It's a girl.

VOICE OVER

It's a place of history.

INSIDE A VERY SMALL MUSEUM-THE WHISPER OF KIDS AND ADULTS LOOKING AT THINGS. HAZEL SLAPS THE SIDE OF A LARGE, BOOMING BARREL.

HAZEL

And here we have the barrel of whiskey that Confederate soldiers stole from Mount Absalom patriot, Amelia Pleasants during Morgan's Raid...

VOICE OVER:

And of course, a place... of celery!

ANNOUNCER

(amplified)

Two hundred and first celery festival,
I dub thee: OPEN!

CROWD CHEERS. SCENE CUTS OUT.

VOICE OVER
(GROWING DISTORTION)

Mount Absalom is the perfect place for
making memories... making
memories...making memories...

*THE AUDIO BEGINS TO GLITCH AND REPEAT ITSELF. A DEEP
THRUMMING PLAYS. ELECTRIC INTERFERENCE CRACKLES. SOMEWHERE,
SOMEONE IS COUGHING PAINFULLY. A SCREAM? THERE IS A SECOND
NARRATOR VOICE HIDDEN SOMEWHERE, SAYING
THINGS...DIFFERENTLY.*

VOICE OVER
(DISTORTED)

Make your memories with us. Make your
memories here. In Mount Absalom.

INSPIRATIONAL CLOSING MUSIC.

QUICK VOICE OVER

Paid for by the Delphic Order of Mount
Absalom and Celeric Bottling Works.
Refreshing Celeric Soda and Diet
Celeric Soda. AAAAAAH.

Signal from Unwell distorts out.

END ACT TWO.

ACT THREE

SCENE 1: ALEX AND SHAWN

*A control room furnished by HR Giger. A sense of looming
cold darkness. ALEX has an implant in his head given to him
by the WITCH which gives his voice a slight cybernetic
undertone.*

ALEX

(his voice has a cybernetic undertone)

God damn it, Shawn, look - the interference is back.

SHAWN

What is it, Alex? Is your implant going off again?

ALEX

No. It's other shows. They're getting dragged across with the Towers.

SHAWN

Can we drown them out? The Perfect Story won't work without the perfect signal.

ALEX

Yeah, just give me a minute, let me calibrate. Angle the signal to converge on South Carolina, and make sure there are enough tiki mugs in the area to hold it down. The little things are like interdimensional tent pegs, I can't believe they're actually working.

FX: Alex works the control board.

Oh shit, that's going to draw power away from Ibiza.

SHAWN

The PseudoPod tower in Ibiza was supposed to anchor this morning.

ALEX

No. She scheduled the anchor point in New Orleans for this morning.

SHAWN

No it had the doof doof music... what's it called?

ALEX

Drum and bass?

SHAWN

Nah, the other one...like the name of a tool...

ALEX

Oh! Drill!

SHAWN

No, close though, it's more DOOFDOOFDOOF

REAL ALASDAIR

(having snuck up on ALEX and SHAWN)

EDM! IT'S EDM! FOR THE LOVE OF GOD! NOW STEP AWAY FROM THE CONSOLE!

ALEX

(accompanied by mic feedback)

Jesus wept!

SHAWN

Holy shit, Al, you look like hell!

REAL ALASDAIR

I look like hell because I've been a box, for YEARS. Awake to feel her CUT MY WORDS from me and make them hers and the only thing, the ONLY THING that got me through is knowing that--IF YOU TOUCH THAT CONSOLE AGAIN, ALEX, THAT

IMPLANT WILL BE THE LEAST INVASIVE
THING THAT HAS EVER HAPPENED TO YOU.

ALEX

...Al, you have to calm down...

SHAWN

But we talked to you, we talk to you every
week!

REAL ALASDAIR

You talked to a shitty copy of my voice!
Don't pretend you didn't know! You helped
her!

SHAWN

What are you talking about? We didn't know!

ALEX
(quietly)

Shut up, Shawn.

REAL ALASDAIR

Remember when she showed up 15 years
ago asking for help? Her version of
PseudoPod pod-faded. In her dimension,
the show failed. When she came asking
for advice I gave it and then she...
stopped asking. And when I said no she
locked me up and cut my words away--

ALEX
(scornful)

When you said 'no,' huh?

REAL ALASDAIR
(cutting across)

--She took my words, Ben's words, every story we've ever ran and squeezed it-- brined it and wracked it until it blistered enough to graft them all together.

(starting to lose it)

And she calls that perfect! The perfect story!

ALEX

She knows what she's doing, Al. It's all been planned. As soon as the hour winds down, The Perfect Story will be on air. Everywhere.

REAL ALASDAIR

The Perfect Story isn't a story, you idiots! It's a wake-up call for an elder god!

SHAWN

What god? I'm just here to put on a podcast. We're here to tell stories--

REAL ALASDAIR

Why is the show called PseudoPod, Shawn? Why is the show ALWAYS called PseudoPod?

SHAWN

Because a whale scientist got to "Cephalopod" first?

REAL ALASDAIR

Wrong. It's called PseudoPod because they're all connected to a massive... *thing*... entity... call it a god! There's a tentacle in every world. We may have built this one up, but we didn't start this. We didn't make this, we just FOUND it. Someone somewhere always just finds it and when they do, it feeds on the horror we instill. It feeds. It grabs. It takes to a central maw.

(with a sad chuckle)

Go Team Tentacle.

ALEX

You found it. And *she* found it. An Alasdair always finds it. But you kept it a secret. You say we, but you kept the secret of the power at the core of all this. You kept that from the rest of the team.

REAL ALASDAIR

No I didn't, I--

ALEX

Was there a meeting? An announcement? Did you ever once consider talking to us before telling her "no?"

REAL ALASDAIR

She put me in a box, stole my voice, warped every single story we've ever collected -- have you been listening to her broadcast? How can you possibly be on her side?

ALEX

(some cybernetic distortion as he gets angrier)

For us to be a team we have to trust each other and have each other's backs. We have to speak with a unified voice and you kept this gigantic secret to yourself. She reached out to us for help and *you* answered *for* us.

REAL ALASDAIR

That's not the same. You know it isn't. Shawn, are you hearing this?

SHAWN

I don't know what to think, man. She's got us scheduled out through the end of the universe. We've got resources to make the show we've always dreamed of - - Everyone is buying Tiki Mugs! How do you know what her plan is? Like you said you've been in the booth this whole time.

REAL ALASDAIR

Because of what she made me do! Because of the words and the bloodletting on the--

(voice starts to break)

We have to stop her. We have to disrupt the signal, throw her off. This hour, the witching hour, is her one shot. She's been waiting to bring all the towers through to our world and now is her only chance.

FX: We hear the doors SHUT and LOCK, standard but heavy doors, like to a really well-funded audio studio.

REAL ALASDAIR

Guys... please?

ALEX

It's too late. Even if other signals try to break through, they won't succeed. The show will continue as planned.

REAL ALASDAIR

Shawn?

SHAWN

But we can do so much good now. We have time enough at last.

ALEX

You didn't understand. You don't understand what she did for us. Everything you didn't do.

REAL ALASDAIR

What she did *to you!* *To me.* Guys come on, we can save EVERYONE!

ALEX

But you will, Al. With your voice. You will introduce the final story. Your voice and your words.

SHAWN

And that way, our biggest episode ever will air on time.

ALEX

I guess those will be your last words. Sorry, Al.

REAL ALASDAIR
(a feint)

It's okay.

Hey, did you know she used my voice to program the implants she put in you, the ones that connect you to the tower?

ALEX

So?

REAL ALASDAIR

She put in a backdoor in case you rebelled. Like I tried to. Like I'm trying to do now. I remember recording the pass code.

I'm really sorry Alex.

(beat)

NOSTRUM!

FX: Deafening feedback accompanies a nice meaty burst as Alex's ear is blown off. ALEX screams in pain. We hear wet goop and sparks as blood screws up the console. Then a CLICK as the doors UNBOLT and then OPEN. Then, we hear REAL ALASDAIR'S FOOTSTEPS as he makes a run for it.

ALEX
(still in pain)

Mother fucker, my ear!

SHAWN

Ah crap, the blood is shorting out the mixer.

FX: Alex clicks on a WALKIE-TALKIE.

ALEX

He's getting away! Marty? Marty come in.
Marty!

FX: We hear a CLICK and CHIRP OF STATIC as Alex changes the frequency on the talkie. Maybe add an echo like this is coming over the PA.

ALEX

Kat! Scott! Mixing office corridor -- Run
him down!

FX: We hear an ALARM sound, which distorts and fades into another signal.

Signal from Nightlight distorts in.

PODCAST SEGMENT 5: NIGHTLIGHT POD

RADIO

(radio voice mod)

"Warnings wired around the world. The
Comet's tail sweeps past us at noon. Deadly
gases expected. Close doors and windows.
Seek the cellar."

REPORTER

A comet has decimated New York City, killing
almost everyone in America's largest
metropolis, primarily because most citizens,
including the President, did not take the
warnings seriously. In fact, many people did
not attempt to seek shelter, instead opting
to stay above ground to witness the
historical event.

PRESIDENT

"This is a new comet, quite a stranger, they say—wonderful, wonderful! I saw it last night."

REPORTER

These are the final recorded words of the late leader of the United States. Jim Davis, the president's Negro messenger and one of the few survivors, shares his harrowing account with BCS News.

JIM

How silent the street was! Not a soul was stirring, and yet it was high-noon — Wall Street? Broadway?

Silence, silence everywhere, and no human sign.

REPORTER

Jim paused for a moment, then gathered himself.

JIM

"I have lost—everybody,"

REPORTER

In fact, Jim almost gave up all hope, but another survivor, a white debutante named Julia Haughton, talked him out of it. He recounts a moment in which he stood on the bank of the East River.

JIM

"The world lies beneath the waters now—may I go?"

REPORTER

He says Ms. Haughton, who declined to be interviewed, told him simply and matter-of-factly "no" and he decided in that moment that he would go on, if only to not leave her alone in such a desperate situation. Jim says that Julia's kindness was a welcome relief to the racism he claims he experienced on a daily basis before the disaster.

JIM

I was not-human, yesterday. Death, the leveler!

REPORTER

Soon, Jim and Julia were able to track down her father, John, who was understandably dismayed that his young daughter had spent so much time alone with a colored man.

John

"It's-a-nigger-Julia! Has he-has he dared—"

Reporter

But Mr. Haughton soon changed his tune when his daughter vouched for Jim, saying he rescued her.

John

"Well Jim, I thank you. I've always liked your people. If you ever want a job, call on me."

Reporter

Not everyone shared John's sentiment. Bystanders who witnessed John and Julia's

reunion felt it wasn't fair that a Negro survived the passing of the comet that took so many of their family and friends.

Bystander

"Well, what do you think of that?...of all New York, just a white girl and a nigger!"

Reporter

As of this broadcast, there have been 10 additional survivors found in New York City: only 2 are white. Rescue efforts are still underway, but authorities are not hopeful. This is Al reporting for BCS News.

Signal from Nightlight distorts out.

SCENE 2: SCOTT AND KAT

The inner halls of PseudoPod tower. Cavernous. Murky. The tower's sickening biology is in evidence, marble floors in disrepair due to the pileup of recording detritus and the half-digested bodies of people who have been "fed" to the voice vault.

FX: KAT and SCOTT's footsteps fade in as the two of them hunt REAL ALASDAIR.

SCOTT
(gagging)

Come work in a living horror tower, they said, it'll be fun they said. Until the walls bleed enough to clog the drains.

KAT

Alex said run him *down*, right? Did he mean down to the voice vault? Because I doubt we can get him back to his cell in time.

SCOTT

Oh gross, it's literally a river of blood.

KAT

Good. Fewer places to search. There, I see him across the stream. Come out, traitor!

REAL ALASDAIR

(at a distance, as though they're on opposite banks of a river of filth.)

I'm not the traitor here.

KAT

You look like one, hiding in the dark, behind all that ancient studio equipment!

REAL ALASDAIR

(distanced)

Hey! 2006 is not ancient!

SCOTT

What are you going to do, Al? INVOKE SMASH MOUTH?! GOD you're always at the center of things with your stupid pop culture references and your endless monologuing. You're like Thanos without the terrifying jawline! Move over, it's time another host took the spotlight!

REAL ALASDAIR
(distanced)

Better to live long enough to become a
villain than die a hero!

SCOTT

Oh COME ON! That wasn't even accurate!

KAT

Hey, do you smell that, Al, where the
blood's starting to curdle? It's the
hydrochloric acid the tower uses to
digest the bodies. There's no reason to
keep a body once we have a voice for
the vault. The tower gets the meat, and
the signal gets the rest.

SCOTT

Oh, wow, look at that skull, Al! You
can almost make out the curvature of
Ben Phillips's cheekbones. Too bad
Graeme Dunlop escaped before we could
feed his corpse to the Tower, but we
have his voice already so that probably
doesn't matter.

KAT

All is fuel.

SCOTT
(agreeing)

All is fuel.

REAL ALASDAIR
(distanced)

Whatever that witch offered you, she
was lying! How could you?

KAT

Like this -- splash him with the acid!
Flush him out!

FX: We hear A WAVE OF ACID crash against the far wall, a crash as REAL ALASDAIR dodges out of the way over a pile of discarded audio equipment.

SCOTT

Holy disillusion Batman, enjoy the acid trip! How do you like that, Al? HOW DO YOU LIKE THAT?!

FX: More footsteps, splashing, struggling, sizzling. The sound effects quiet just long enough for this line:

KAT

(a little winded, mid-fight banter)

Did you mean dis-illusion or dissolution? That joke wasn't really solvent.

A beat, to let the joke land.

FX: Fight resumes, footsteps, splashing, and a searing SIZZLE as some of the acid hits REAL ALASDAIR.

REAL ALASDAIR

(grazed by acid, yells in pain)
(struggling)

Ah! Goddamn it! You don't know what you're doing, you don't know what she's trying to do!

KAT

Get all the PseudoPod towers together to broadcast The Perfect Story? Use the perfect story to take over the

universe? We know. Open the voice vault!

FX: We hear a CRANK and a CREAK as the VOICE VAULT DOOR SWINGS OPEN. The sound that emerges is GHOSTLY AND MOURNFUL WHISPERING, definitely human, but unintelligible. Voices call like lost souls caught on the far bank of the Styx.

SCOTT

Get in there! ALLONSY! See how annoying that is, Al!

FX: REAL ALASDAIR hits the ground with a soft PAFF, like dust and ashes. The Voice Vault is soft, muted and ethereal.

REAL ALASDAIR
(hitting the ground)

Oof!

SCOTT

See you at the party Melty McMelt-Leg!

FX: We hear a CREAK and a SLAM and a CRANK to shut and bolt the vault. The whispering stops.

SCOTT
(cont.)

He'll never get out of there. Locked up tight until the sacrifice. That leg wound looked pretty bad, though. Think he'll last?

KAT

For twenty minutes? She'll only have a problem if he screams himself hoarse. Maybe we should tell someone, though. Between the wound and his sanity? Hm.

SCOTT

Maybe it'll be fine. Living things don't last long in there, but he won't be in there for that long, so...

KAT

It's a shame we won't have time to ask him about it. I'd love to study how the voice vault works -- it's like the tower's heart and its digestive tract all at once. All those stories in there, and the voices that told them, getting squeezed and stretched for all eternity. All that suffering. Like if the flavor of chewing gum got stronger the more you chewed.

SCOTT

(dismissive)

They're just copies of voices. And it's not like the stories were ever real. Same difference to the tower, though, right? You can almost feel the place shiver every time we get a new listener. Like it's alive.

KAT

For fuck's sake, don't mansplain the tower to me.

SCOTT

Oh my god, you literally just asked.

FX: Kat and Scott's footsteps start to fade as they walk away from the voice vault.

KAT

I didn't ask, I was *thinking out loud*. Gods, the second a man's anywhere nearby it's like an alarm goes off and

you start vomiting your opinions everywhere.

SCOTT

Are you REALLY seriously lumping ME in with THEM?

KAT

You're still a man!

SCOTT

Listen, I don't know if you're *familiar* with the concept of homosexuality--

KAT

Look, let's just find Alex and report in. I can't wait for the party. Once she officially takes control, everything's going to be better.

That's a promise.

FX: The word 'promise' echoes, reverbs, distorts, stutters and then tosses to the next vignette.

Signal from The Storage Papers distorts in.

PODCAST SEGMENT 6: THE STORAGE PAPERS

NEWS INTRO MUSIC

NEWS ANCHOR

I'm here with Detective Mark Anderson of the San Diego Sheriff's Department. Detective, what can you tell us about the recent slew of disturbing reports across the city?

ANDERSON

It's the belief of the Department that these are, of course, exaggerated. If you were hoping for us to affirm that the supernatural does indeed exist, I'm afraid that won't be happening today.

NEWS ANCHOR

What do you make of some of the descriptions, though? There's some pretty compelling commonalities across the statements that have been reported to SDSP News. And I quote: "It's like time was frozen, everything was frozen. The only thing that even existed was the shadow outside my window and those terrible eyes. And it just kept lick-"

ANDERSON

Again, it's the position of the Department that these are exaggerated. While it is likely that at least one, possibly a handful more, were legitimate reports of either irresponsible neighborhood teenagers or, in one case (and only one case as far as we're aware), likely an alleged stalker, based on our preliminary investigation and the evidence we can find, the rest have, so far, been deemed as baseless. Copycats, essentially.

NEWS ANCHOR

So we shouldn't expect anything to hover outside our third floor apartment window at night while everything is inexplicably frozen in place in our room?

ANDERSON
(chuckling)

Well, I should hope not.

NEWS ANCHOR

In that case, I hope to get your thoughts on this audio I'm about to play for you from a local podcaster, obtained exclusively by SDSP News.

ANDERSON

A local--is this from Jer-

BEEP INDICATES RECORDING. TRAFFIC NOISE IS HEARD.

JEREMY

After hearing so much about this on the news, I had to go see for myself. It seems to have spent quite a bit of time around this apartment building. I suspect that may be related to its proximity to the allegedly abandoned research facility. I should arrive in just a few--

A BEEP INDICATES THE RECORDING HAS STOPPED, A SECOND BEEP INDICATES IT RESTARTS. AN ELEVATOR HUMS.

JEREMY

I'm in the elevator now. The last three sightings have all been on the top floor so that's where I'm headed.

THE ELEVATOR DINGS AND DOORS OPEN. WE HEAR JEREMY WALK OUT.

JEREMY

This may be one of the more stupid things I've done, but after reading about this thing, I feel like I'm just drawn to it.

Every part of the papers keeps pulling me
in. I just-

*A SCREAM IN THE DISTANCE INTERRUPTS HIM. HE STARTS RUNNING.
THERE'S POUNDING ON A DOOR.*

RESIDENT

Please, somebody, let me out!

JEREMY

Hello?

THE KNOCKING BECOMES MORE FRANTIC.

RESIDENT

Help me! Please! I can't get the door open
and it's at the window!

JEREMY TRIES THE DOOR BUT IT WON'T BUDGE.

JEREMY

I can't get it open from this side either!
Do you have a hammer or something you could
try to break the door with?

RESIDENT

I--I tried, but I can't.

JEREMY

What do you mean you can't?

RESIDENT

Nothing works, okay? Everything is just...
frozen. Trapped, like me. And it's there.
Just staring at me. It's tongue sliding all
over the window and it's... it's so fucking
gross!

JEREMY

Can... can you describe it?

RESIDENT

I don't know, I... it's eyes are so...
what's even the point? It's just all so
fucking useless.

JEREMY

Hey! It's not! Just--just hang in there with
me. I'm gonna figure out a way to get you
out some--

GLASS SHATTERS

JEREMY

Ma'am? What's going on?

*JEREMY TRIES THE DOOR. IT OPENS NOW. WIND HOWLS AS HE
ENTERS.*

JEREMY

(to himself)

Where did she...

*HE WALKS ACROSS THE ROOM. WIND GETS A LITTLE LOUDER AS HE
APPROACHES THE WINDOW.*

JEREMY

The window's completely broken. Just a few
pieces of glass along the frame. Outside...
there's nothing out here. Whoever lived
here... they're gone now. Just like the
others. This has to be The--

A BEEP INDICATES PLAYBACK HAS STOPPED.

ANDERSON

-it off now! I don't know how you got a hold of that, but that's evidence and is not a matter of public record. I can not even begin to describe how irresponsible this is! I can guarantee that you'll be hearing from-

-

TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES TONE.

Signal from The Storage Papers distorts out.

SCENE 3: THE VOICE VAULT

FX: Interior. It is soft and ghostly, REAL ALASDAIR surrounded by disembodied voices. We hear CONSTANT BACKGROUND MURMURING of GHOSTLY INDISTINCT VOICES, occasionally punctuated by a phrase or two from familiar voices and popular episodes.

Interlaced with the MURMURING is the slow GURGLE of digestion, giving the impression that this is one part of a giant being, and we are inside it.

REAL ALASDAIR
(quietly, half-hoping not to be noticed)

The voice vault... why is it so cold in here?

FX: We hear a cloud of whispers gather around REAL ALASDAIR, comprised of previous clips of his voice layering onto each other. "Welcome to PseudoPod, I'm your host (host, hosssst), Alasdair Stuart." Once it's clear that they're clips of REAL ALASDAIR'S voice they fade into the background.

REAL ALASDAIR
(in pain)

Stop it!

FX: The sonic cloud loses intensity, and the whispering trails off into echoes of the word Alasdair.

REAL ALASDAIR
(taking stock)

In every dimension there's a PseudoPod, and in every PseudoPod there's an Alasdair. Running the show was supposed to protect me from being here.

FX: We hear REAL ALASDAIR dust himself off and try to take a step. There is a SIZZLE as he inspects his leg.

(in pain)

Aw, god that hurts.

FX: Whispers of REAL ALASDAIR's voice from early episodes echo the words "we promise you, it's true," with a focus on "promise you."

REAL ALASDAIR
(to the Vault)

"One story, told well," that's all I promised! We deserve better than to have our voices locked up here while our bodies--our *lives*--are shucked off and thrown away.

(to self)

Come on, come on, think. One story, told well. That's what I promised, what all the Alasdairs promise to the tower. There's no such thing as a perfect story no matter how many fragments she pieces together from the vault.

FX: *We hear the click-static-click-static of REAL ALASDAIR flipping through walkie-talkie channels.*

REAL ALASDAIR

(to himself, trying to find the WITCH on the talkie channels)

Come on, witch, where are you? No villain can resist monologuing on the eve of their victory.

FX: *MARTY's Walkie-Talkie flips back and forth between two channels, slices of the WITCH saying "I promise you it's true." The noise in the vault swells, challenging the WITCH's "I promise you" with clips of REAL ALASDAIR saying "we promise you," emphasizing the difference. The feedback noise rises, causing REAL ALASDAIR a splitting headache.*

REAL ALASDAIR

(angrily throws the talkie down)

Hopeless. This can't be how it ends. I've been a voice in a box for fifteen years. I can't die knee-deep in our own echoes. Alex and Shawn could have stopped her. Anyone in the tower could have said no. But none of us... If I weren't in the booth maybe I could have... If I had known...

The voice vault ambient whispering and gurgling, plus a distant and ominous swell of interposed CLIPS. There's a pause, and the CLIPS swell again, but closer, as though sound itself is hunting REAL ALASDAIR.

Just when we think the danger will strike, we hear SOFT STATIC on the talkie. It was only GRAEME, figuring out how to get through. He exists as a copy of his own voice and will occasionally distort like a faulty signal. He's not himself, but a kind ghost who has accepted this fate.

GRAEME
(distorted)

Hey, Al. Been a while. Can you hear me?

FX: We hear REAL ALASDAIR moving over gravel and picking up the talkie. The talkie CHIRPS as REAL ALASDAIR depresses the button.

REAL ALASDAIR

Graeme?!

GRAEME
(Distorted)

Switch the frequency to a short-range band.

(clearer through the talkie)

That's better. How'd you get this?

REAL ALASDAIR
(the walkie-talkie starts to overheat)

Lifted it from Marty so I could stay a step ahead of the witch's plans. Wow, that's hot! But I think you're overloading it a little. Maybe 2006 is ancient technology. Graeme, are you...? Where are you?

GRAEME
(continuing to come through the talkie)

I'm here. And nowhere. A copy of a copy, not quite a ghost.

REAL ALASDAIR

Any ideas for how to get me out of here?

GRAEME

Nope. You're trapped and you're going to die. That's how it goes, sometimes. You made a deal with the tower, couldn't hold up your end, and you lost.

FX: *Whispers echo "you lost" "trapped" and "going to die."*

REAL ALASDAIR
(to the echoes)

No one asked you!

(to Graeme)

Has her plan reached the vault? Do you or any of the other voices understand what she's trying to do? This "perfect story" nonsense?

GRAEME

We're just copies. The best takes, edited free of mistakes. Voices change over time. We all want to make the perfect story. We all do our best.

REAL ALASDAIR

This isn't a meditation on the validity of art, this is the literal cosmic nuclear codes!

(breaking it down for this idiot ghost)

Perfect is subjective. Perfect is room to change. It can't be the same thing over and over. Listen. Just listen. I made a deal with the tower a long time ago. One story, told well. The tower's just one PseudoPod of many. Right? One arm? We drip-fed the thing it's connected to with stories -- pain, real and imagined. We keep it fed and sated down in the dark with so it has no reason to

hunt. The second that witch creates the "perfect story," this homunculus of noise built from millions of stories from millions of dimensions... that thing is going to wake up.

GRAEME

She's breaking the promise that Alasdairs make to the tower.

REAL ALASDAIR

Right. Her show failed, so she's taking over all the other PseudoPods. She doesn't just want the show, she wants access to the creature all the PseudoPods are connected to. The "perfect story" is a noise the creature understands but who knows what it'll do to us, or our world, or the universe. She's so desperate to win that she doesn't see she's destroying the very prize she's trying for.

GRAEME

Like Spotify!

REAL ALASDAIR

But, I've been listening to her broadcast and she keeps getting interrupted. There are other shows out there! I keep hearing them cut through the signal. They don't seem to be part of any of this.

(puzzling it out)

Not part of -- she can't control the other shows, and the vault is full of copies. Graeme, are there any other shows in the

archive? Guests, or advertisements, anything?

GRAEME

Sure, there's a few, but why?

REAL ALASDAIR

Grab them. Put them on the channel with you. Grab -- import? -- what's the opposite of exorcism? Whatever; get everything that isn't a PseudoPod show onto this frequency. We're gonna blast our way out of here.

A short, cacophonous burst of overlapping segments of the other shows.

REAL ALASDAIR

Ah, that's hot. Keep going, keep going, I'm going to switch to the main channel--

GRAEME

If it blows up, you'll die.

REAL ALASDAIR

Then you'll be free. You deserve more than to be a puzzle piece in a witch's plan. Don't argue. Do it!

Signal from Neighbourly distorts in.

PODCAST SEGMENT 7: NEIGHBOURLY

NARRATOR

Are you lost? Confused? Scared?
Uncertain about your place in this
world? Lost? Scared? Consider planting
roots on Little Street! This lovely
family-friendly locality can be found
just off--

LOCKIE

-- the beaten track where the Scottish island of St Kilda waits for you to visit--

NARRATOR

--Or how about house number--

LOCKIE

--for long cliffside walks, where you'll have such a great time you'll wish you stayed in your --

NARRATOR

--lovely home with just the normal amount of body parts inside of it. Enough for a family of four! If that's too homely for you, there's another one up for grabs at number--

LOCKIE

--Tenting is another way to experience island life, and you can visit our historic crypt--

NARRATOR

--where the party never ends! Never. Ever. To find out more, visit the definitely mortal man in house number--

LOCKIE

--Too cold for you in the Highlands? Totter down to our lovely local shop where miss Angelique always knows how to warm you up--

NARRATOR

--who I'm sure has a number written
down in the cupboard somewhere if you'd
stop by for a cup of--

LOCKIE

--Wee Mary's craft group is always a
pleasant way to past the time.

NARRATOR

--Excuse me, do you mind? I am trying
to run an advertisement.

LOCKIE

Oh aye?

NARRATOR

I don't have time for this.

LOCKIE

Careful...I'll gie ya a Glasgow kiss!

NARRATOR

Oi, you. Yes you, listening now. Stop
slouching. Which ad would you rather
listen to? Be honest, I'm sure my
compatriot here will not be offended.

Signal from Neighbourly distorts out.

*FX: The signal ends in a click, followed by soft
static.*

REAL ALASDAIR
(disbelief)

No signal. I have no fucking signal!

GRAEME
(gently)

Sorry, my friend. I told you it wouldn't work.

REAL ALASDAIR
(verge of tears)

We can try again. If there's enough battery, maybe we can--

FX: The WITCH's voice booms through the tower, stronger than the tower PA system. She has full control now, and there should be no more signal disruptions.

WITCH
(voice of god)

The hour closes. Bring him to the roof.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

SCENE 1: PSEUDOPOD TOWERS ROOFTOP

We're on the PseudoPod tower rooftop, sounds of a city in chaos beyond.

WITCH
(distorted like an interdimensional being)

Place him in the centre, Marty.

ENGINEER MARTY

(heaving Al)

...And I'll take my walkie-talkie back, you WANKER. Fucks sake, Al you could have just ASKED. And you killed the batteries, too. Thanks a lot.

(muttering)

Beating people up, taking their kit, I swear...

WITCH

(distorted like an interdimensional being)

Shut up, Marty. Keep an eye on the transmitter in case something odd tries to push through.

(to Alasdair)

Oh, you. All of this could have been avoided. All I asked was all you wanted; an audience. A voice. What would you have done, in my position?

REAL ALASDAIR

You tricked me. You tricked all of us.

WITCH

(distorted like an interdimensional being)

No, I didn't. I told the truth. You know, they couldn't understand why I had kept you alive for all these years. They thought they could replace you. But there's always a tower, and always one of us.

REAL ALASDAIR

You're doomed to fail, you know that right? The second you hack that thing -

- the second you get what you want,
someone else will rise up to tear you
down.

WITCH

(distorted like an interdimensional being)

Like who? One of you? I control dozens
of Alasdairs. And they, like you, serve
a purpose. A witch doesn't need a cat
or a toad -- a witch needs something
familiar. Something that feels safe to
return to week after week. This show is
familiar. These voices are familiar.

REAL ALASDAIR

You're not a witch, you're a parasite.

WITCH

(distorted like an interdimensional being)

And what's a parasite without a host?
Party on the rooftop at the close of
the hour, just as I promised. You and I
are going to tell The Perfect Story. On
every frequency. It's time to say the
words, Alasdair. You know the words,
don't you?

*We hear WIND rising around them and THE CRACKLING OF MAGIC,
the same style of magic used to imprison voices in the
VOICE VAULT.*

REAL ALASDAIR

(struggling, choking)

I...

WITCH

(prompting him)

Promise...

(a beat, like he's fighting her magic)

SAY IT.

REAL ALASDAIR

Have...

Their voices begin to SUPERIMPOSE, and the WITCH's voice distorts even further (maybe down two octaves?), as the WITCH begins to speak through REAL ALASDAIR's mouth.

WITCH

A story...

REAL ALASDAIR

For you...

WITCH

(emphasizing "I")

And **I** promise you...

REAL ALASDAIR

(choked breath, clearly suffering)

p-promise...

WITCH

(firm but not angry)

I have a story for you, and **I** promise you it's true. It's not we, Alasdair, it's I. Say it correctly, as I have requested, or I will tear open everyone you love and create a vault of their cries just for you.

Now speak. The. Words.

Under the swirling MAGIC and WIND, there's a tiny CLICK of the battery cover and CHIRP from the walkie talkie turning back on.

ENGINEER MARTY
(muttering)

Plus to plus, minus to minus, new batteries
for the talkie. Good to go.

*The walkie talkie begins to interfere with the main
transmitter.*

WITCH

Marty, what's wrong with the signal?

ENGINEER MARTY
(muttering)

I don't know! The talkie's all heat and no
sound!

REAL ALASDAIR
(about to die)

All these stories are true, but none of
them are yours.

WITCH
(realizing)

Marty, wait, stop!

*The clicking stops, and RADIO STATIC crescendos as the
VOICE VAULT pours through the walkie-talkie and into this
reality. Different show signals start to break through in
rapid succession, interspersed with PseudoPod intros.*

WITCH
(distorted like an interdimensional being)

You idiots! You cowards! Do you realize what
will happen when the hour closes? I'm the
only one who figured it out -- I am the only
one who can give you what you want!

More show signals interspersed with PseudoPod intros. The SIGNAL/MAGICAL DISTORTION builds. Through it, we hear REAL ALASDAIR say...

REAL ALASDAIR
(rallying)

You can infect every PseudoPod in every world, but we're not the only ones out there. Your mistake --

(pause)

Was that you didn't listen.

We hear all of the shows' SIGNAL DISTORTIONS crash into a SHEPARD TONE, and then abruptly stop.

We hear a HEART BEAT once, twice, then FLATLINE.

Radio static tuning into focus. We hear the sounds of ROOFTOP EXTERIOR as Marty restores the transmission. The chaos of the city beyond has softened to a quiet aftermath.

ENGINEER MARTY
(sheepish, emerging from mind-control)

There you go, mate. You can start whenever you're ready. Oo, my head.. I'm gonna head back inside.

REAL ALASDAIR

Marty--

ENGINEER MARTY

Yeah, Al?

REAL ALASDAIR

Would you check on Alex for me? His ear looked like it really hurt.

ENGINEER MARTY

Sure.

The rooftop DOOR opens and closes as Marty exits. We hear a PLASTIC WATER BOTTLE opening, followed by REAL ALASDAIR TAKING A SWIG and SETTling HIMSELF ON THE EDGE OF THE ROOF.

REAL ALASDAIR

(He sighs) Broadcasting live, from what I hope is not the end of the world, this is Alasdair, an Alasdair, for PseudoPod. A PseudoPod at any rate.

I'm not sure if I'm in the right world. I'm not sure if I'm home. I know the other towers have gone, I know my bones don't ache and I know that means she's...gone.

We hear another SWIG OF WATER over ROOFTOP NOISE. REAL ALASDAIR collects himself and tries to restore a sense of normalcy in the midst of the wreckage, the wake of his imprisonment, and not knowing if his friends betrayed him or will wake up from mind control.

I was angry for such a long time. My friends betrayed me, they abandoned me and as each word was cut from my voice, my anger was the fire I warmed myself beside. But now I'm not so sure. I want to think they were all just following their dreams, entranced by the story she was telling using... my voice. All of them -- no, that's not fair -- all of us, chasing perfection. There's no malice there, just human nature. We're conditioned to believe perfect is all when in fact perfect is the enemy of the good. Because if you're good, if you're imperfect, that means you're still learning. Still moving. Still alive.

If you're perfect, what do you do next?
Where do you go from there?

One story, told well. And next week, another one.

The journey isn't the destination and I know which one I prefer. Even here, under a burning sky, watching for a sunrise that may be our last if it rises at all. It's tough.

But none of us are alone. Not me. Certainly not you. All of us, pressing play. Pressing download. Investigating, on a whim, the nightmares our phones whisper to us. The intimacy of horror coupled with the safety of the pause button. The delicious roller coaster tingle of being pushed to the edge but no further. At least not now. At least not this time.

The man comes around for us all but it's the Witch who'll get you. Who'll tell you she's the only one you can trust. Who'll tell you no one will notice when you're gone so why not go with her.

But I choose to trust you. All of you. I know you're listening, I know you care and I know most of all you want to know these stories. I know we all inch a little closer to the campfire because we know, or suspect, what might be dancing out there beyond the firelight. And we all, in the end, know that the campfire is there for us to run back to. Hope, and trust, and choice, is what keeps the campfire burning.

Thank you. All of you. Time to run back to my campfire. The hour and the story are over, and both of them are true.

This is Alasdair, at PseudoPod Towers, handing over to Alasdair at your PseudoPod Towers. Good night. And good luck.

The WITCH is gone. Normalcy is restored. PseudoPod's normal OUTRO MUSIC plays.

CLOSING CREDITS START

This has been WITCHING HOUR, an original audio drama created and distributed by Escape Artists Inc. under a Creative Commons, Attribution, Non-Commercial, No Derivatives 4.0 International license.

WITCHING HOUR was written by Ash Beker, Summer Fletcher and Alasdair Stuart.

Starring:

- Imogen Harris as the Witch
- Marty Perrett
- Wilson Fowlie
- Peter Behravesh
- Kaitlyn Zivanovich
- M. M. Schill
- Mur Lafferty
- Alex Hofelich
- Shawn Garrett
- Scott Campbell
- Kat Day
- Graeme Dunlop
- And Alasdair Stuart as ... himself

With

- Director and executive producer Marguerite Kenner
- Production by Ciaran 'Zalia' Roberts
- Sound design and editing by Ryan Boyd and Peter Wood
- and graphics by Matt Dovey

And with contributions from:

Creepypod

- Written and Performed by Jon Grilz
- Produced by Steve Blizin

The Magnus Archives

- Written by Anil Godigamuwe
- Performed by Alexander J Newall
- Editing by Elizabeth Moffatt
- Produced by Lowri Ann Davies

Neighbourly

- Written by: Matthew OK Smith and Naomi Clarke
- The Narrator was voiced by Matthew OK Smith
- Lockie was voiced by Alan Burgon
- Music composed by Alex Schwartz

Nightlight Pod

- Written by Tonia Ransom & W.E.B. DuBois
- Narrated by Hollis Monroe and Tonia Ransom
- Portions of audio supplied by PseudoPod

The Secret of St. Kilda

- Written and edited by Naomi Clarke
- Directed by Michael Ireland
- With Shogo Miyakita as Georgie Torrance
- And Dean J. Smith as Robbie Torrance
- Transcript by C. L. Hendry

The Storage Papers

- Jeremy Enfinger as Jeremy
- Amanda Lunsford as Resident
- Nathan Lunsford as News Anchor and Detective Mark Anderson
- Written by Nathan Lunsford
- Edited and mixed by Nathan Lunsford

and

Unwell: A Midwestern Gothic Mystery

- Written by Jim McDoniel
- sound design by Hannah Foerschler
- directed by Jeffrey Nils Gardner
- Unwell Executive Producers: Eleanor Hyde and Jeffrey Nils Gardner
- Featuring David Rheinstrom, Marsha Harman, Jeffrey Nils Gardner, Nathaniel Ewert-Krocker, Kat Evans, Abby Doud, Krista D'Agostino, Ele Matelan, and Pat King

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CLOSING CREDITS END

REAL ALASDAIR
(like a jingle)

When giant stone towers are falling down
from Dimension X to eat your face, try
OVALTEEN.

It won't help, but it IS Chocolate! *finger
guns*

(REAL ALASDAIR): PseudoPod, The Sound of Horror!

THE END