

NINE TO MIDNIGHT 6

TAPE STOPS

BY DYLAN GRIGGS AND HARLAN GUTHRIE

We hear the reverberant ambiance of the vault where HARLAN is keeping THE FEED and DAVID at bay. An old tape player switches from one tape to another, starting a new story. We hear DYLAN on the recording.

DYLAN

[RECORDING]

It was an inauspicious night, for the most part. The leaves had just begun to fall for the season and the air had a pleasant chill to the air. My neighbors had always wanted to see Boathenge, a Stonehenge made out of boats in Columbia Missouri, and had decided to take a weekend trip to visit it. I was more than happy to watch their dog and raid their fridge while they were out of town. They would do the same for me. I knew Pistachio already. He was friends with my dog and we would excitedly see each other on walks. But there was something strange about him this time. His normally blond fur had an odd tint to it. I texted the neighbors and asked if Pistachio had gotten into something that covered his whole body like that and they said they didn't think so. I got him in the light to make sure. There was no doubt about it. That was no normal color for a dog-

We hear the tape distort and break as the tape player grinds to a halt. HARLAN rushes over to the machine in a panic, trying to salvage the tape. We hear him move through the disorganized mess of the Vault, brushing past old pizza boxes, soda cans, etc.

HARLAN

[PANICKING]

Nonononono! C'mon. Stupid piece of junk. What the hell, did it burn the tape? [\[Like Nic Cage in Wicker Man\]](#) How'd it get burned!? How'd it get burned?

DAVID

[MOCKING]

What's wrong, Harlan? Did the tape run out? Nothing left to "feed the feed"? Well, I guess we couldn't avoid the consequences of our actions forever, could we?

HARLAN

Oh, shut up. You're lucky we need to keep you alive.

We hear HARLAN frantically dial his cellphone to call DYLAN.

DAVID

You may as well have killed me for all the good it's done you. The Feed is going to learn about your deception either way.

HARLAN

[FRUSTRATED]

Pick up, asshole!

DYLAN answers. We hear the sound of barking dogs.

DYLAN

[ON PHONE]

Can this wait, Harlan? I'm trying to source 99 dalmatian puppies for a... project... that I'm working on and it isn't going as smoothly as I had hoped, but I found this couple that have a litter of 15-

HARLAN

DYLAN! Get your ass back to the Vault! Your feeder broke and the feed is about 15 minutes away from breaking loose.

DYLAN

My "feeder"? You mean the cassette thing I set up? I thought that you were keeping up with that? We did rock-paper-scissors, you lost. It's your problem.

HARLAN

Yes, and I've been living *in the Vault for two fucking years*, making sure that the world doesn't end. But now the tape player is broken and the world really *is* going to end if you don't come fix your contraption, so it *is* your problem!

DYLAN

Okay, well these Radcliffe people aren't going to sell me these dogs anyway. Does the Vault have a helipad?

HARLAN

What? No! Just get here ASAP.

DYLAN

I'll make do with whatever you have. Be there in a sec!

We hear the call disconnect.

DAVID

[SARCASTIC]

Oh, don't worry Harlan. The hero sounds so enthusiastic about saving the day. I'm sure that he'll show up before the Feed gets hungry again. That could be several whole *minutes* from now.

HARLAN

Dylan wasn't like this when we started. Podcasting *changed* him. That's the real monster: podcasting.

DAVID

You will hear no disagreement from me.

We hear a loud, reverberant knock on the door to the Vault.

DYLAN

[OTHER SIDE OF DOOR]

Hello? Open up, Harlan! I thought you were in a hurry.

HARLAN

What? He's here!?

We hear HARLAN open the Vault door.

HARLAN

How did you get here so fast? I thought you were out making a dalmatian fur coat?

DYLAN

I never said "fur coat" did I? God, I hope I didn't. I wasn't supposed to. Anyway, I paid to get here as fast as possible. You made it sound like an emergency.

HARLAN

Paid... who? For what-

We hear DYLAN moving between the pizza boxes, cans, etc., to the tape player.

DYLAN

Damn, it's a mess in here! How many times did you need to order pizza?

HARLAN

I can't exactly leave.

DYLAN

Oh, why can't he [gesturing to David] go out and get food, then?

HARLAN

Who, David?

DAVID

I'll gladly go out for supplies if you untie me, Dylan. Harlan has been such a fuddy-duddy about this whole thing.

DYLAN

I could go for some takeout. Harlan?

HARLAN

David's tied up because he's a servant of the Feed. If we let him go, he'll cause chaos. If we kill him, he'll tell the Feed that we've been tricking him with a tape player all this time. That's why he's tied up like that. Now could you *please* fix the

tape player so that we don't get killed by an eldritch god this evening?

We hear DYLAN pulling out and examining the destroyed tape.

DYLAN

Oh, um... no. This is all fucked. I think that oil from the pizza probably got on the reels and caused it to set fire? This tape is completely destroyed and it jammed up inside the player, so it's destroyed, too. All of this is going to have to be replaced. You should have been more careful, Harlan. Never put me in your box if your shit eats tapes!

HARLAN

Well, we have to do *something*!

DYLAN

I guess I can start telling the story? What story was it? Sorry, it's been a long time. The whole point of this was set it and forget it, you know?

HARLAN

You were telling some sort of story about dogsitting the neighbors' dog...

DYLAN

Right! Pistachio? Uh, okay. So, there I was, and I was watching this dog, named Pistachio. Who would not have made a good fur coat because he was old and his fur was all coarse. So, I was sitting on my neighbors' couch, with a big bowl of popcorn, watching Halloween Ends. It's not as bad as people say that it is, by the way. I'm friends with Rohan Campbell. He was Frank Hardy, you know. And I think he was in a Sabrina Carpenter video, but I haven't really followed her since she wrote that "Manchild" song about me, which I *did not appreciate*—

We hear THE FEED gurgle restlessly.

HARLAN

Dylan! Focus! The Story!

DYLAN

Right. So then it turned out that Pistachio was a vampire.
Right? That's the story where the dog is a vampire? What does
the tape say on it?

HARLAN

It says "My Neighbor's Dog Was Shrek."

DYLAN

Right. I was so into Shrek back then. Didn't I write another
story where the monster was Shrek? I was so different back then.
I would never write a story about Shrek now. Is it even scary if
the neighbor's dog was Shrek? Shrek isn't a monster. Well, he is
a monster, but the moral of that whole movie is that being a
monster doesn't preclude him from being a good guy. People like
Shrek.

HARLAN

NOT THE POINT, DYLAN-

We hear the FEED gurgle, something snaps and breaks down the
post that DAVID was tied to, freeing him.

DYLAN

Hey, David's thing fell down. Might want to fix that.

DAVID

[GRUNTS, LANDS ON THE GROUND, FREES HIMSELF]

You idiots have fun fighting each other over Shrek. I've got 2
years of lost time to make up for. Happy Halloween.

DAVID disappears, leaving HARLAN alone.

DYLAN

He... just disappeared. Is that bad? Do you need to fix that?

HARLAN

Do *I* need to fix that!? He's going to jumpstart the apocalypse,
fuckface! Because you couldn't stop talking about Shrek!

DYLAN

You were supposed to take care of all of this! It's not my fault that you let it go to shit! You're probably why it broke in the first place! Hey, let go of me-

DYLAN and HARLAN begin to fight, both grunting and crying out in pain during the fight scene. We hear the detritus from earlier being knocked over in the scuffle.

HARLAN

I'LL FEED YOU TO THE FEED, YOU FUCKING NARCISSISTIC-

DYLAN

HARLAN, PLEASE, I CAN'T BREATHE. DON'T THROW ME INTO THE FEED-

HARLAN

HERE'S A STORY FOR YOU, MOTHERFUCKER!

We hear DYLAN cry out as he is cast into the gaping maw of the FEED, which gurgles. HARLAN breathes heavily as there is a beat of calm, HARLAN being the last living human inside of the now-still Vault.

After a moment, HARLAN's voice can be heard in voiceover, playing over the scene.

HARLAN

[VOICEOVER]

And with that, Dylan was cast into the pit with The Feed. I watched as the darkness rose up and swallowed his body. He wasn't a story, but he would have to suffice for now. There was precious little time. David had escaped out into the world, ready to spread the gospel of The Feed all over again. This couldn't be allowed to stand. Someone would have to hunt him down and bring him back to the Vault. And, with Dylan dead, that someone would have to be... me-

We hear the sound of a tape player spinning back up.

DYLAN

Got it! Tape's fixed. You can quit storytelling now, Harlan.

DYLAN

[ON THE TAPE]

The dog was green. Shrek green, in fact. I knew, because I had recently watched all 4 of the Shrek movies- [continues faintly under the conversation]

He was green like the Shrek in Shrek 3, which was slightly different than the original film. I think it might have been the same shade technically, since I'm sure that the use of that shade of green is a registered trademark by Dreamworks, but the shading and textures were greatly improved over the years, so the shading made it look like a deeper, richer shade of green. That is the color that Pistachio was. He was Shrek green. When I realized this, I leapt out of my chair.

DAVID

Huh? What's going on? I was free! I was out there in the world!
I could feel the rain on my skin!

HARLAN

Yeah, a good story can make you feel that way, can't it? [HARLAN and DYLAN laugh like they're in a sitcom.]

DYLAN

It's a good thing that disciples of the Feed can't tell stories from reality. David might have been able to try and stop us if he wasn't so enamoured with your story. Great job, by the way, Harlan. Kind of made me look like a jerk, but it's just a story. Right?

HARLAN

Sure.

DYLAN

Okay, well the tape player is up and running again. Good as new. It shouldn't need any more upkeep for... I dunno. Maybe a year.

HARLAN

Thanks, buddy. I appreciate that.

DYLAN

Any time. Say, my plans are canceled for the evening. What do you say we hang out here and order a pizza?

HARLAN

I think I'd like that.

DYLAN

Awesome. Anchovies?

There is a deep rumbling from below. The FEED has not been fed adequately.

DYLAN

Do you hear that?

HARLAN

...It's the Feed...

DYLAN

Huh? No, we dealt with all that, remember? We did a story about a fight to the death and everything-

DAVID

[CACKLING]

It's not enough! It's never going to be enough! Not anymore!

The rumbling grows louder, more like a present entity.

HARLAN

We need to get out of here-

The FEED erupts, enveloping all three. DYLAN and HARLAN make sounds of terror. It sounds like the room is filling up with something: gas?

DAVID

You've really done it now!

DYLAN

[SLEEPY]

What... what is...?

HARLAN

[SLEEPY]

I... can't stay awake... Dylan... Don't let David...

DYLAN

I... so tired... Harlan, don't let David...

DAVID

That's right. Sleep, perchance to dream. There will be plenty of stories told in there.

We hear DYLAN and HARLAN fall asleep.

DAVID

[Hey, the ending isn't fully figured out yet, so if you could give us some death rattling for safety, that'd be great]