

EPISODE 1 THE STORM AND THE ARRIVAL

PROLOGUE

[SFX: MUSIC - TRANSITION THEME]

NARRATOR

Some point out that storms and drought are common. They deny the planet is changing. We, the enlightened, of course know the difference between profound climate and shallow weather. We smile at each other during dinner without parting our lips. But weather too can be deep, radical. Floods can erase whole villages leaving a world permanently changed for the survivors. As seasons pass and disasters come and go. The hardy rebuild. The fortunate just move away. It can't flood everywhere. Can it? Now.

Remove the flood.

Remove the quake, the tornado.

Replace them with a question, falling everywhere like hail.

And ask yourself.

What survives the answer.

[SFX: MUSIC - MAIN THEME]

THE STORM

[SFX: WINTER STORM - WIND, HAIL FALLING]

NARRATOR

It was midnight in the neighborhood and it had been snowing. Mid-October 1999- so, not even winter. The snowbanks piled up so thick and high- in places you could lean against them, have it compress into a frigid lounge and maybe light up. Early storms like this happened every other year or so yet the city was always unprepared for them. There'd been talk of buying snowplows, but this year? No. Software updates for Y2K were paramount. Snow melts.

That night though the weather had taken things too far. There was enough freezing rain and snow to bury the area for a week. Now the streets wore ice like armor, and residents slid home with bruised elbows and kneecaps, cursing nature's mood swings.

INTRO TO MORGAN

[SFX: WINTER STORM BEHIND INTERIOR BASEMENT APT AMBIENCE- DRIPS, REFRIGERATOR HUM.]

NARRATOR

Snow covered Morgan's window. When it melted it would seep through the foundation to his room in the basement. The damp would encourage the moss and fungus growing into a shelf from the wall. A health hazard. Though surrounded by the right accessories it would be a design feature and would bring the outside in. Morgan had a name for the difference. Prosperity.

Tomorrow was his Saturday and it would take the night and the morning to forget his work. He smelled of baloney. His fingers remained greasy despite the double hand washing and the deli clung to him like he'd passed gas. He sat on the edge of the bed and was tempted just to fall back and pass out. But instead sat

still, certain that was a bad idea. That was going to bed sloppy. He'd best undress and brush his teeth. If he slept now he'd have to digest his troubles in his dreams which would lead to a restless night.

[SFX: TRANSITION TO DELI AMBIENCE- SHOPPERS, DELI SOUNDS, WHIRRING BLADE- SLICING. SOUND IS MUFFLED AND ECHOING, AS IF INSIDE MORGAN'S HEAD. THE HYPNOTIC, METALLIC WHIRR OF THE SLICER BLADE DOMINATES THE MIX]

NARRATOR

What weighed on him was that mountain of cured meat, cheese, veggies he had to put through the slicer. The stealthy hum of its blade made window panes of ham, coins of salami. There was the chatter of his coworkers playing their favorite game- baiting the manager.

DELI WORKER 1

Hey Mike, are we getting new label makers?

MORGAN

(V.O./ INTERNALLY)

Four pounds of mortadella- enough for the lunch rush.

DELI WORKER 2

Can't change these to 2000. No 2. Not enough zeros.

DELI WORKER 1

Does that mean the meat goes bad come January first?

MORGAN

(V.O. / INTERNALLY)

A pound of lean corned beef..

MORGAN

Thank you. Come again.

MIKE

You guys may smirk, but what happens when the bug's not fixed and the global infrastructure, power grids, banking systems experience a critical cascading failure?

DELI WORKER 2

Oh no! Not a critical cascade!

DELI WORKER 1

Guess I can't make it into work if the buses aren't running.

DELI WORKER 2

Hey Mike, are you scheduled to work New Years Day?

**[SFX: THE SLICER BLADE HITS THE HAVARTI - A WET, DRAGGING
GUMMED-UP SOUND: WHISK, WHISK, SWILSH]**

MORGAN

(V.O. / internally)

Havarti always gums up the blade. Great. I'll have to wipe down this spinning metal razor.

MIKE

Ha Ha. I'm telling you they're just waiting, just waiting for it all to go tits up... And then the powers that be... Well you think you have it bad now. The collapse is coming.

NARRATOR

Morgan wondered which pundit had got to him? Mike was usually pro-tech- with his luminous apple green laptop. Tech had trashed the Soviets, while streaming Britney's voice through a billion headphones. But one fuck up, one oversight might send us back to handweaving broomsticks. Morgan had tried to keep his mind on cheese. Slice gouda, wrap gouda, sell gouda. No implications, no meaning. 'Thanks for shopping Primo'. Morgan couldn't keep it straight.

He'd silence all of their chat if he could. Y2K would pass and whatever the outcome, they would label prescience when it was only hindsight. Whatever the outcome, the deli would survive- his personal worst case scenario.

[SFX: OLD TV, MOVIE THEME]

NARRATOR

He turned on the TV and his mood lifted. An old movie channel was showing Avalanche. These oldies, where the building burned or the ship flooded, always left Morgan relieved. Late seventies disaster schlock, just what he needed. It's a movie Homeless Hannah might watch with glee
She'd say something like-

HANNAH

You shouldn't build a ski resort in a snow slide prone area. Ha ha! You're in for it guys

NARRATOR

Grateful for the shared sentiment, Morgan would respond with-

MORGAN

Ha, idiots.

NARRATOR

He watched till the movie reached the climax, the snowpack near collapse. Then the power failed.

Morgan cracked his outside door and tried to see through the blizzard. Downed power line. He stood as long as he could, feeling the storm's offensive, scouring the city. Sweeping away the extraneous. Morgan wondered when it might get to him.

Anxious, exhausted, and off balance, he plopped his lanky frame, still dressed, onto the bed he'd had since before his adolescent growth spurt. A talented sleeper, Morgan could ignore his keys jamming into him through his pockets and the straightjacket of his clothes. He avoided the headboard and the footboard by half folding like a pocket knife. He lay there, listening to the leftover sounds of his room. His watch buzzed its hourly alert. The blizzard drummed at his window. He fell into a deep sleep though he must have sensed something of the real world. He dreamt fitfully of snow, ice, storm, blizzard.

[SFX: ROOM/STORM SOUNDS - A DRAFTY ROOM, WIND, PIPES CREAKING, DRIPS]

NARRATOR

The pipes creaked, surprised by the sudden, unseasonable cold. The sounds of the midnight room- the bed's groaning, the sheets rustling commented on the evening just passed. Tsk, tsk, tsk. By mutual agreement they invited a new member.

[SFX: UNEARTHLY CRACK - CEMENT SPLITTING FOLLOWED BY THE ORB APPEARANCE - INCREASING, THEN DECREASING]

NARRATOR

A new sound. A rumble, a crack like a fault line shifting. In the corner of the room, the concrete floor birthed a large crystal, about the size of a bread box. It resembled a huge hard candy-one of those suckers, rough hewn like quartz just released and washed from the dirt. What light there was from the window-blue white, reflected on its surface the entire spectrum, which is what you might have expected. Though just tilting your head, might make it seem to pulse with its own light, like some cosmic lava lamp. Morgan's closed and dreaming eyelids glowed red. It sat there and waited.

THE CITY RESPONDS

[SFX: MUSIC - TRANSITION THEME]

NARRATOR

The wind whipped the falling snow into wispy tornadoes which chased the night owls down the street. Unlucky pedestrians waved their hands around as if to part the storm like a curtain. Along the river a drawbridge seized, frozen mid-ascent.

[SFX: A CHORUS OF SIRENS- FIRE DEPARTMENT , POLICE, EMERGENCY BROADCAST, NATIONAL GUARD]

[SFX: WALKIE TALKIE STATIC BARK]

OFFICER

Hey chief

CHIEF

Hey.. Listen, they're sending in the feds.

OFFICER

Christ! The Guard is bad enough. What the hell's going on?

CHIEF

Just plow the street and stay out of the way.

OFFICER

And the sidewalks?

CHIEF

Leave' em.

OFFICER

It's snowpocalypse out here. Everybody's trapped with no power...and burst pipes.

CHIEF

Then they're trapped. For the best ...considering. Just do the job.

OFFICER

...I just plow streets. God!

CHIEF

Don't lose it now. It will all be over soon.

[SFX: SONIC COLLAGE — A JUMBLE OF DISTANT EMERGENCY TELEVISION ALERTS, RADIO STATIC, AND MUFFLED STREET SHOUTS FILTERED TO SOUND AS IF HEARD FROM DEEP INSIDE MORGAN'S BASEMENT.]

STREET PREACHER (OFF-MIC)

(distorted, shouting through the storm)

For the great day of his wrath is come!!

CITIZEN (OFF-MIC)

(panicked, muffled)

This is crazy!

NEWS ANNOUNCER (FILTERED)

(through a tinny, low-quality radio speaker)

Officials are stumped, but urge avoidance and caution.

RADIO EVANGELIST (FILTERED)

(competing over the static)

Fear God and give glory to Him!

[SFX: THE NEWS MONTAGE REVERBERATES, THEN ABRUPTLY SHIFTS FOCUS AS THE HUM OF AN ORB RISES IN THE FOREGROUND.]

[SFX: MUSIC - TRANSITION THEME]

MORGAN DISCOVERS HIS ORB

[SFX: JUMBLE OF ALERTS, NEWS REPORTS, SHOUTS, MUFFLED (HEARD FROM MORGAN'S BASEMENT)]

NARRATOR

Morgan cracked one eye, noted the confusion outside and sighed... Later. It was his day off. As he dozed, the new thing grew brighter, vibrated, hissed, then settled back down.

[SFX: EPA ALERT, MUFFLED AND FADING HEARD FROM MORGAN'S BASEMENT]

NARRATOR

Later, waking, Morgan lay swaddled, with his head covered against the daylight, occasionally stretching and thinking. A day off with nothing to do. Two days off, five days on. Two days off again.

His mental calendar reeled before him. Years enforced on him by nature right up to the ether of death. Dramatic.

Morgan turned over and lifted his head from the covers. He could tell it had snowed because the air from the drafty walls was sharp and the room was brighter than normal. He saw the crystal lit by the window light.

MORGAN

Wait... What

NARRATOR

He blinked over and over. He put his head under the covers thinking he might still be sleeping.

MORGAN

What is that?

[SFX: ORB SOUND]

NARRATOR

Carefully, Morgan got up and moved toward the thing. He sat down, Zazen in front of what was for all he knew, his and his alone.

The object appeared sedate, matter of fact. Morgan thought he'd never seen anything more... real. All of his senses bore in, while his mind ran through the facts.

MORGAN

Sober? - yes. Sure? - yes. Carried it home? - no

[SFX: PHONE RING IN THE BACKGROUND]

MORGAN

Oh just some ice from the storm? Somehow? - it's not melting.

[SFX: PHONE RINGING]

NARRATOR

It had been ringing, on and off, for some time, pulling him back to the familiar.

[SFX: PHONE RECEIVER CLICK / LIFTED]

MORGAN

(into phone)

Hello

MIKE

(filtered, through phone; frantic background noise and shouting)

Hey Morgan, I need you to come in.

MORGAN

It's my day off

MIKE

It is not your day off. You're on call. Just come in. I need everybody to help with this shit. The Y2K bug wasn't enough.

MORGAN

What's going on?

MIKE

Where have you been? Turn on the news for Christ's sake. No! Just get down here. I need you. It's all hands on deck!

(aside, off-mic to a staff member holding an Orb)

Get that away from me.

(back to the phone, recovering)

Dammit Morgan, I need my best guy!

MORGAN

It can't be that bad... I'll be in... in a bit.

MIKE

Now! Morgan, Now!

NARRATOR

Morgan hung up. Mike's daily catastrophe. The freezers were off, A shelf collapsed. They'd survive. Three messages from Harry.

[SFX: DIGITAL ANSWERING MACHINE – REWIND CHIRP, THEN A LOUD ELECTRONIC BEEP]

HARRY

(filtered, through answering machine tape compression)

You okay?

[SFX: ANSWERING MACHINE BEEP]

HARRY

What's happening there? Any shown up?

[SFX: ANSWERING MACHINE BEEP]

HARRY

Well, we're opening up as usual. You coming in? You're probably sleeping through the whole thing.

[SFX: ANSWERING MACHINE CLICKS OFF]

MORGAN

(yelling across the empty room)

Well fuck you too! Sleeping through what?

MORGAN HAS AN ORB EXPERIENCE

NARRATOR

He returned to it. Jagged, irregular.

Looking into it, getting lost in it, he saw facets labeling his life- Primo, a damp basement, the storm, Harry. All contained.

Morgan tried to find the exit.

It felt cold in his hands, and wet. Or was it oily? Was it still
or was it vibrating
Heavy and cold,

MORGAN

Dry ice?

NARRATOR

It didn't burn.

MORGAN

Am I still dreaming?

[SFX: ORB SOUND- GROWING DEEPER AND MORE INTENSE]

NARRATOR

The space heater glowed red. The TV sputtered on. The power was
back. The stone in Morgan's hand darkened-like the lights
dimming at the Paramount. In wonder he peered at it. Now it was
an obsidian mirror. He could see his reflection.

[SFX: ORB SOUND- GROWING DEEPER AND MORE INTENSE]

NARRATOR

Avalanche, The Movie, was still playing, but without sound. The
air in his lungs, hostile now, grating like fiberglass. The
film had reached the point where the disaster began. Olympic
skier Bruce Scott is racing downhill desperate to not be
overtaken by the mass of snow and ice bearing down on him.

Morgan fixed his eyes on the screen, suddenly feeling himself standing on the mountainside waist deep in the snow, fused with the reckless man in the red ski suit trying to out pace the deluge. He was in his mind-Bruce Scott. He was observing him. He/They raced and dodged, running but skiing, from what? A tomb of snow? The new year? Y2K? A pile of meat slicers erupted from the snow, right in his/their path. Their blades spun with lethal speed. The pile grew taller atop a base of chainsaws, ripsaws, wood chippers. It lumbered toward them- the horrible metal slicing thing needed its amputation of human fingers, hands and limbs. Which would overtake them, bloody dismemberment or icy grave.

Morgan's crystal grew heavier, now as weighty as stone.

[SFX: ORB SOUND SHREEKING]

VOICE

(off mic in the distance, but urgent)

Jump Morgan, Just jump

The order's origin was unclear, but to Morgan it seemed good advice.

MORGAN

Yes, just avoid it, dodge!"

NARRATOR

A leap right, the sacrifice of a few seconds allowed the snowslide to overtake him. Poor Bruce Scott, his skills, a joke in the face of this trial. They tumble over and over until buried under the snow.

The sound of the spinning blades grew distant, thank God.

Morgan feared snowblindness as everything turned white and for a moment he was face to face with the skier, both trapped in their icy cell.

[SFX: ORB SOUND - DIMMING BACK TO NORMAL]

Something grabbed him, shook him loose and him out. The camera of his vision whirled 360. The mountainside was gone. He rose, free of his alter ego Bruce. Morgan looked up from the fading vision. Shaken but strangely calm. An hour had passed. His first thoughts were.

MORGAN

I don't ski.

Shivering as if he'd just come in from the cold, Morgan remembered what was in his hands. Dry now, and room temperature, pale green, jagged but seamless. A projector? Unthinking, he held the impossible thing close to him like a treasure.

HARRY'S IN TROUBLE

[SFX: PHONE RINGING, RECEIVER CLICK / LIFTED]

MORGAN

Hello

HARRY

(filtered through phone lines)

Hey I'm trapped here.

MORGAN

What?

HARRY

I'm snowed in. Can't open the door. Can't even see much outside.
I need you to come shovel me out.

MORGAN

I have to go into the deli.

HARRY

Didn't you quit? I need you to come help me out.

NARRATOR

A crisis for Harry was not opening his emporium for the day,
storm or no storm.

MORGAN

Besides, I've got a weird thing happening.

HARRY

You and everybody else.

MORGAN

No really... What do you mean? You have...

[SFX: PHONE STATIC INCREASES, HARRY'S VOICE IS INDISTINCT]

HARRY

(audio cuts out sporadically)

Yes, I've.....one, two,...five...too.... to count...so.....you
g....down.... here?

MORGAN

Wait..Uhh... that's not possib....

NARRATOR

The contents of his hands. Lighter now?

HARRY

Come dig..... out!

NARRATOR

Morgan's chest twisted into a knot..

[SFX: PHONE STATIC INCREASES]

HARRY

Yes, so would youhere?

MORGAN

(incredulous)

No.....

**[SFX: SHARP CRASH OF SHATTERING PLATE GLASS THROUGH THE PHONE
RECEIVER]**

NARRATOR

Morgan looked again into the object he held. It darkened as he heard glass breaking and a crash through the phone.

HARRY

Jesus it's a fucking avalanche!

[SFX: REPRISE OF AVALANCHE RUMBLE THROUGH THE PHONE RECEIVER - RISING, THEN FALLING, THEN THE STATIC RETURNS]

MORGAN

Harry!

NARRATOR

In a flash Morgan's crystal felt too heavy, too cold to carry. He and Harry, tumbling down the mountainside, entombed in the ice.

MORGAN

Harry!

[SFX: TELEPHONE STATIC, DIAL TONE FADE INTO OUTRO - MAIN THEME]

[SFX: CLOSING THEME, CREDITS]

EPISODE 2

WILLARD PRESTON'S JOURNAL

PROLOGUE

[SFX: MUSIC - PROLOGUE THEME]

The most difficult response to a question, for any human, is I don't know. Evasion and falsehood don't temper the truth of this maxim. Our survival depends on making sense of things and the real unknown, like a new predator bearing down on us, fills us with anxiety. We say. It must be. It feels. God says. "I told you not to, but you had to go and bite that apple."

[SFX: MUSIC - MAIN THEME]

WILLARD (narration)

My name is Prof. Willard Preston II, PhD. Given the nature of the phenomenon, I am compelled to keep a more personal record alongside my formal notes. I've noted conversations of the evening, faithfully, I think.

12:00 I WAKE UP TO THE UNKNOWN

WILLARD (narration)

They knocked at my door early that morning. Very Andromeda Strain. But they were too slow. I'd already woken that night to, for all I knew, a big ore sample nestled between my wife and me. As it happened, I was almost out the door and on the way to my lab when the G-men arrived.

Dr McLeod, my old mentor- dead now thankfully, once told me that

opportunities in our field don't just drop into one's lap.
There's a cosmic joke in there somewhere.

They seemed more interested in me, my wife (whom they also woke), and the house, with several of them looking around. My first thought was. Don't you even see what's in my hands?

WILLARD

What are you looking for?

G-MAN

Don't worry, professor, just part of the procedure.

WILLARD (narration)

Then, noticing the sample in my hands (I hadn't put it down the whole time) said

G-MAN

You won't be able to take that with you.

WILLARD (narration)

I thought it was some military regulation. I couldn't let him take it. But as I turned to put it in a sample container, it performed, like a magician, its first sleight of hand.

[SFX: ORB PHASING TONE]

There was weightlessness as though I were holding a mass of soap bubbles. And I cannot be certain, but a small creak, like a man shifting nervously in his chair. That may have come from the dining room. Then it was just gone. . I looked up at the man like some begging indigent. Would it come back?

ANNE (yelp)

Willy! One of your rocks just appeared in our bed!

WILLARD (narration)

It faded? Evaporated? Turned invisible?

I've known samples that grow crystals, fluoresce, and combust spontaneously, but they cannot go anywhere.

G-MAN

First taste of the unknown Professor. Let's go.

WILLARD (narration)

I wanted to retrieve it. Had it changed? But the G-MAN was at my side.

WILLARD

Where?

G-MAN

Not to worry, we're just taking you to work.

WILLARD (narration)

He pressed my shoulder, I didn't have a choice.

G-MAN

Plenty more where that came from.

[SFX: STORM SOUNDS LARGE HUM V IDLING]

WILLARD (narration)

They'd plowed my steps and sidewalk- nice of them, and two held

onto my arms as I stepped outside like I was precious cargo. We entered a vehicle built to take on the enemy. I was pressed between the two leading officers- a general and I supposed his aide, while troops- who'd been waiting this whole time sat in the open flatbed, freezing.

[SFX: HUM V INTERIOR, MOTOR, DRIVING]

GENERAL HUNT

So Professor, you're going to figure this all out for us.

"All of this." I caught sight of one in the crook of an oak. One sitting on a fire hydrant.

The snowfall had blanketed them, but you could make out their glow, pulsing, strung out like Christmas tree lights

GENERAL HUNT

Jesus. They've appeared everywhere. There's one on the President's desk. Common as pinecones.

WILLARD (narration)

He didn't have much else to add. We watched as more popped into existence. I was counting them as we went. Did the colors signify? I judged the relative distance between them, the timing of their appearances. An elderly spruce lost half its canopy and lay across the road, its branches forming a claw. While the soldiers removed it, I noticed the night owls had discovered them and they were out, in their baker's white or their 4 shot stupors poking, picking them up as souvenirs. This alien invasion, more like a meet and greet. I wished we could go faster.

GENERAL HUNT

Your lab is SOC...uuh, Special Operations Command

WILLARD

Am I in charge then?

GENERAL HUNT

Of the science, yes. We will handle all the security and any announcements. We'll expect reports on the hour.

WILLARD (narration)

Military vehicles flanked the entrance to my building.

Granite-faced troops

lined the foyer and the hallway to my lab. They ignored the glowing aliens at their feet. I was patted down one last time, though what they expected to find, I couldn't say, a remote control?

Then they let me get to work. One senior officer handed me a document. SAP-CRUCIBLE NIMBUS UAC/M-A-286.

Just a signature and a handshake, and I was on my own. They were clearly following some rehearsed protocol.

There wasn't much to their report. Clearly, understandably, they knew nothing. The phenomenon was perhaps two hours old. Funny when you think about it. It's happening everywhere to everyone, and nobody seems to have a clue. There would have to be new laws. I admit it. I flushed thinking they could be mine.

[SFX: MUSIC - TRANSITION THEME]

1:00 THE ROCK GYM

[SFX:ROOM TONE OF A LARGE SPACE,LAB EQUIPMENT = LAB AMBIENCE]

WILLARD (narration)

We call my lab the rock gym because we are the geology department and it was once a basketball gymnasium.

[SFX: BASKETBALL PLAYING- BALL BOUNCING, COURT SHOES SQUEAKING, MIXED WITH SOUNDS FROM LAB EQUIPMENT-NOTE- THE TWO SOUNDS SHOULD MERGE AND BECOME ONE]

WILLARD (narration)

It became home to a number of cast off academic departments as the University became flush with donor money, generated by one near championship season. We still call it the rock gym because we got there first. It was mostly empty till half court. Lab stations lined one side. You might still be able to play a game.

It had already been commandeered. Soldiers were hanging thick vinyl sheeting against the collapsible bleachers which still lined the walls. I briefly imagined a military home decorating show.

The new arrivals populated the work stations, all glowing off and on.

They appeared ready to be tested, two grad students were intent on the samples, closely examining the impossible.

Liam, my assistant, had been pulling an all-nighter. He was due to defend a dissertation later this year. This is going to get in the way. He kept his head down, uneasy, being monitored so closely by men carrying sidearms.

Catching sight of my entrance, his face turned to a pleading, desperation. I headed toward my office and he followed. A guard stood by the door, unblinking, even as we entered. One of the

new rocks sat on my desk like a paperweight and I reflexively picked it up.

LIAM

What the hell is this? One minute nothing, then... This! They just showed up!

WILLARD

You saw them arrive?

LIAM

What are they? Yes, one popped up right on top of my monitor. Ha Ha! It was just there! Like suddenly! What are they?

WILLARD

What do you think?

WILLARD (narration)

I was only partially paying him any mind. The sample was too large for the gem scale.

LIAM

I don't know! I don't know! They move... I mean on their own!

WILLARD

Yes, I've seen that. Have you found anything?

LIAM

I don't know! They don't register.....What is it? Does the government know?

WILLARD (narration)

Through the loup, it seemed as plain as quartz. No clue as to the source of its random fluorescence.

WILLARD

No. They know nothing. That's our job.

WILLARD (narration)

Soldiers set up security stations with metal detectors. Cables for power and data laid across the floor like nerves and arteries. An officer was handing out security badges. When they encountered one of the new crystals, they paused and made a note. Like taking a census.

1:30 A STATEMENT FROM THE PRESIDENT

[SFX: MUSIC HAIL TO THE CHIEF]

WILLARD

Duh duh duh.. Duh duh duh duh Duh duh duh dum.

WILLARD (narration)

He was not known to be an early riser. Nothing short of nuclear war was likely to get him up, dressed and presidential at this hour.

I have to give it to him. He seemed honest, that is to say baffled.

He made the right noises. Don't panic (though it seemed no one was.) We have our best people on it- me. They don't pose an immediate threat, (though how could he know?)

I hadn't voted for him.

[SFX:SUDDEN INCREASE IN BACKGROUND NOISE- VOICES, MOVERS]

WILLARD (narration)

New equipment was being hauled in. Diagnostic gear I'd dreamed of having. Computers, polarizing microscopes. An isolation chamber.

A collection of new people, people I recognised. Eminent faces, accompanied by their techs I supposed. They shuffled around the gym fascinated, yet giving the glowing specimens a lot of room. I got a kick out of their bafflement. They would generate a lot of data.

A thought struck me. Given their number, it was surprising that none of the "Orbs" seemed to be in the way. They were already placed where they needed to be.

I knew the best people should be allowed to just get on with it as there were too many to direct one on one. They'd undoubtedly do the same tests, take the same measurements I would. One more player dribbling the ball was pointless. My purpose was to knit it all together into some theory. Knowledge? I'd remain in my office, waiting for results and thinking.

3:00 AM FIRST G-MAN REPORT REQUEST

[SFX: RADIO STATIC]

Walkie talkies barked and chattered. Every five second one would cough some static followed by an indecipherable code

G-MAN

What's your SITREP?

WILLARD (narration)

I gave him my best confused look.

G-MAN

An after action report?

WILLARD

I've just arrived.

G-MAN

General Hunt would like a report on the hour sir.

WILLARD

Well... Strange new samples have arrived from somewhere. We don't know what they are. We hope not to remain in that ignorant state for much longer. But discovery is unlikely to keep to a schedule.

[SFX:BASKETBALL BOUNCING FADING/MERGING WITH EQUIPMENT SOUNDS]

WILLARD (narration)

Liam slipped papers under the door. A review of preliminary notes yielded, again, nothing much. I looked out at them, all brilliant minds, immobile, gazing as if fortune telling. The scene begged me to interrupt. I supposed I had better say something. I stepped out and over the P.A., addressed everyone.

WILLARD

Well, this is new don't you think?

WILLARD (narration)

I picked one of the new arrivals and held it at eye level. I felt it was becoming precious somehow, even though they were common and scattered over the lab. I might have been holding a gigantic ruby.

WILLARD

We know nothing, that's why you're here. I won't keep you. Let's get back to work.

3:50 FRUSTRATED TESTING

There were fifty thinkers at workstations and desks. Filled with crisis mission competence, spying on the other guy, unable to exhale. A parade of soldiers, making rounds, checking in. All the new analytic gear- spinning, blinking or buzzing . They'd hit a wall. Lab equipment read 'no data' or 'insert sample' or worse, 'standard'. A mass spectrometer gave a nonsense reading of 190084355. It was gold, it was neon, it was chalk. Our unearthly guests responded to no frequency, didn't appear on film, They weighed nothing. Zero point string of zeros. Couldn't be chipped, etched with acids or burnt. They did not displace water. Uniformitarianism, superposition, original horizontality, not applicable. It was becoming clear that we'd brought our chess game to the roulette wheel.

5:00 AM SECOND G-MAN REPORT REQUEST

G-MAN

The general is asking if there's anything new

WILLARD (narration)

I saw Liam, my graduate assistant walking from one station to the other with a looseleaf binder, pencil and a Newton message pad. He was juggling them, trying to decide on which to use. He had a sad and envious look about him. Poor lad, a competent researcher himself, he'd been reduced to taking notes.

WILLARD

No. nothing

5:30 MY REPORT TO THE GENERAL

WILLARD (narration)

I had to give a report to an impatient and sleep deprived General Hunt. I noted he was duck-footed and wore enormous boots.

GENERAL HUNT

You'd think people would start bashing each other over the head with them.

WILLARD

And?

GENERAL HUNT

No confirmed reports so far. Surprising right? You'd think they'd make such tempting weapons.

Not to put you on the spot or anything, but we're counting you guys to come up with something. Stumped is putting it mildly. They're all over the place. Too many to contain. Can't hide them, can't blow them up. With anything.

WILLARD

What about...?

GENERAL HUNT

Tried it . After the president gave the OK. Unholy mess.
Luckily we found one at an old testing site. Not a scratch.
They just sit there, they don't react, they just are there.
It's like they insist on it. That and nothing else. But early
days right Doc?

WILLARD (narration)

I felt sorry for the man, so unequipped for anything he couldn't
invade. I didn't have good news for him.

WILLARD

First off, we needed to call them something uh, noncommittal
Crucible seems... The term Orbs works. They do three things:
appear, ignore physics, and if moved, fade, only to reappear at
their original location. There's no consistency to that last
feature. It could be moments or hours.

GENERAL HUNT

And that's all you've got?

WILLARD

That's enough to unravel a civilization.

GENERAL HUNT

Does that make us incompetent?

WILLARD

Worse, that makes us irrelevant.

WILLARD (narration)

I let that sink in.

[SFX: MUSIC - TRANSITION THEME]

6:00 TEAM MEETING

My team, my panel of experts, had thoughts. Stellar matter, mass worldwide delusion, dark matter (but the math didn't work out.) Liam, standing, spoke up.

LIAM

Maybe they're not from here. They're just peeking through a lens. They're not all here. You know, extra-dimensional

WILLARD (narration)

His words interrupted the discussion but were soon covered over by the more well known. I found I couldn't focus. I spent a minute staring out a window. What now? The samples just sat there inert, passive, almost shy. Cooperative invaders - never in the way yet plenty to test. If there was a hazard, nobody could name it. Such an effort.

7:00 AM NEWS; I HEAR MY NAME. THINGS ARE GETTING PERSONAL

SE:MUSIC - NEWSROOM THEME (FADES UNDER WILLARD'S NARRATION)

WILLARD (narration)

The first time I was on TV was when I won a city wide spelling bee. I grinned from ear to ear. Since then I've edited my public

appearance to be more in line with that of an eminent scholar.
My interview on Mt St Helen's eruption was particularly
restrained.

Still, here, I was having problems.

INTERVIEWER

What message do you think this is sending?

WILLARD

We don't know that it's sending any message.

INTERVIEWER

But they must want something

WILLARD

Who

INTERVIEWER

The aliens... well, whoever sent them.

WILLARD

We don't know they're of alien origin. We don't know anybody
sent them.

INTERVIEWER

But they're all over. People seem to think

WILLARD

People... think a lot of things. That they are ubiquitous may
point to a heretofore undiscovered geologic phenomenon. That's
why we are here. Researching.

WILLARD (narration)

I was patient through the rest of the interview. So this was the 24 hour news cycle. Huh! The science was hardly the point. I parried the most provocative questions with a sober tone, urging the public to calm down. It was rather irksome that the reporter knew there was nothing to report. Everybody knew. Everybody had their own samples, their own scales, cameras, drills. The whole population could enter the science fair.

[SFX:LAB AMBIENCE]

7:30 AM LAB MORALE COLLAPSES

WILLARD (narration)

The Orbs sat still and that stillness mocked them. The researchers threw up their hands in frustration, cursed and stomped about, shaking. It reminded me of one of those charismatic church services where the parishioners feel the spirit. Only at this one, God was coming to collect.

8:00 AM THIRD G-MAN REPORT REQUEST

WILLARD (narration)

The sergeant just looked at me. They were sending men of lower and lower rank to bring back less and less. I wondered if that was protocol.

G-MAN

You know what I'm here for.

WILLARD (narration)

I looked over the gym. A renowned mathematician, a colorful

dresser, began stacking the Orbs, trying to fit their jagged geometry together. He flapped his arms about in his checkered lab coat. He called to it.

MATHEMATICIAN (distant shouting)

Be something. Do something!

WILLARD

And you know my answer.

8:15 ANNE CALLS

[SFX: PHONE RINGING]

WILLARD (narration)

I got a call from my wife. She had been trying to reach me all night.

ANNE

Willy, you must be in seventh heaven right now.

WILLARD

It's early days still hun.

ANNE

Humm, Now, I've been listening to the news and talking to colleagues. This... arrival. My own sense is that we're all taking this a bit too calmly.

WILLARD

You are. We're all running around like madmen

[SFX: A SOAP OPERA THEME]

ANNE

Willy!Listen... The reaction isn't normal

WILLARD

Sorry about that. I could probably bring you onboard if you like. But, like I said, we're up to our necks here.

ANNE

One is nestled in your trophy case by the way, It rather outshines the statuettes.

WILLARD

Okay hun, we'll get it figured out. I've really got to get back to it.

ANNE

And another thing. Why you?.... `

"Sigh" Okay I'm just giving you a head's up. I'm not trying to get in your way. Will I see you tonight?

WILLARD

I don't know. Let's play it by ear

WILLARD (narration)

She is really quite good at what she does. A first rate thinker. I concede that from what I've seen, there is something odd about the reaction. But that's not my job and not my business. Leave it to social services. "Why you?" That stung.

9:45 SOMETHING HAPPENS TO ME

WILLARD (narration)

The mathematician had cracked. The unknown was too much for him I guessed.

MATHEMATICIAN

You'd better come at them correct or they will fuck you up.

WILLARD (narration)

He caught sight of me and charged. He was stopped soon enough by two guards. They led him away.

MATHEMATICIAN

What now? What now hun big brains? Frauds! Frauds! Ha! All of this.....stuff! Ha ha!

[SFX: SOAP OPERA THEME, BALL BOUNCING, POM POMS, COURT SHOE SQUEAKS.THE SHAKE OF THE ROCK CRUSHER- LIKE THE SWISH OF POM POMS]

WILLARD (narration)

I reflexively picked up an Orb. In defence? It was clear as a window pane. It popped with a flash. On the other side of that window was the house I grew up in. I could see the hutch with the good china. My grandmother was on the phone. She turned to look at me. My old advisor, Dr McLeod stood behind her, stroking her hair. I tried to defend my dissertation. Dr McLeod said. "You've lost sight of the obvious Willard." Granny said, "Nevermind Willie. It's nothing." It was the biggest lie I'd ever heard. Everything turned black. And white- followed by a thousand colors I couldn't name- purple green, hesitant pink. A

vibration pierced my feet, and tunneled up to my brain, confusing everything.

From deep in the Orb a message formed- wordless, silent, but as concrete as the chiseling on a gravestone. "Who the fuck do you think you are?"

WILLARD

Did you see that

WILLARD (narration)

I'd said it so loud. My team thought I might be having a heart attack. They paused their theoretical back and forth, concerned their leader was losing his grip on the situation. I had.

LIAM

What? No. See what?

WILLARD (narration)

The Orb felt very heavy and I set it down. Has it caused this? Why me? Is it a witness? It had removed the floor from our world. It did nothing and yet left us standing on uncertainty. I don't remember getting to my office. I was at my desk. The door was closed and locked. Liam was outside.

LIAM

What's wrong? Are you okay?

WILLARD (narration)

I was no longer able to form questions. These aren't rocks. They had nothing to do with me, my work. The thought emptied me out. Liam slid some reports under my door. I stared at them as they fell loose, fluttered by some circulation. An hour perhaps went

by. Through my window I saw chaos. What was left? Faith?
Perhaps. Something was blooming in me like a dormant orchid. I
formed a mental map. Open the door, pass the stations, the
guard, colleagues. Out into the snow.

[SFX: CLOSING THEME, CREDITS]

EPISODE 3

JEWELRY OF THE APOCALYPSE

[SFX: MUSIC - INTO THEME]

PROLOGUE

NARRATOR

Let's face it, all we really want is for today to unfold no
worse than yesterday. Even the promotion, the new baby is enough
to make us stop and wonder what we might choose if we could go
back and reconsider. Sadly, time machines are prisoners of
fiction. We're stuck knitting our lives row by row, day by day.
In our final hours, we crawl into the garment we've stitched,
sigh, and feel how it fits. In the meantime. Don't pull on that
thread!

[SFX: MUSIC - MAIN THEME]

INTRO TO HANNAH

[SFX: STORM SOUNDS, BLEEDING INTO WHIPPING SOUNDS]

NARRATOR

Hannah sat on a bench, feeling, despite the weather she had nowhere better to be. The snow had come down for long enough, to bury her, wrapped up with an old duvet. You could make out only her great dark head peeking out with its topiary of 4C hair, raked into spears. Hannah had taken to decorating it, like a magpie, with small keepsakes. A baby's bracelet, a school locker key, a tiny glass amphora that once held an expensive perfume, an aquamarine charm. The leather flail she carried everywhere, peaked out from her lap occasionally flicking back and forth. From the street she looked like the underbelly of some frozen insect. She, in fact, welcomed the storm's disruption of the everyday.

Woah, boom. A man crashed down holding a shopping bag of groceries and a bouquet of frozen lilies.

HANNAH

Haaaaa haaaa. Hold on there!

A bruised ass is the least of it dirt-bag!

PASSERBY

Bitch!

HANNAH

How's your dot-com boom now? It's okay? Is it?

NARRATOR

It had been a productive day. She'd harassed several people down the street, always carefully 10 paces behind, whipping the leather flail and accusing. She was visibly, aggressively indigent, and the residents never met her eyes, regarding her as, at best, neighborhood color and at worst, a blemish. The passive, silent avoidance was heartening, but she was happiest when they objected, and shouted insults at her, or ran. Hannah watched the residents stumble through the storm. Like an ally, it made fools of the foolish.

[SFX: PERSON SKIDDING, A YELP]

HANNAH

Asssss hooooole! It'll get ya. It will get you!

NARRATOR

Her present state of mind was lucid. She had the feeling that it was the winter chaos around her that kept it afloat. Boredom, calm, quiet often tripped her up and she would descend into mania. That's what other people said it was. She never remembered. Her mind would surface, missing two, maybe three hours. For now, she knew where she was and was enjoying herself. An enormous Hummer inched along the frozen street like a rollerskating elephant. It lurched and finally slid into the parking strip.

[SFX: CARS, SKIDDING AND CRASHING]

HANNAH

Bumper cars! Keep your hand inside the vehicle folks.

NARRATOR

Morgan had asked her once "What's your deal?" She didn't have an answer. "Grief" she said finally.

MIKE AND THE ORBS AT PRIMO MARKET PT1

NARRATOR

He would be reduced to walking. Mike put on his mountaineering boots, and opened the Hummer's door. He half fell out onto the icy patch that had tripped him up. The right side of the H1 had climbed a snowbank and crushed the driver's side of a Caddy. He inspected the damage and did a quick insurance estimate. Costly. Here and there were colored masses glowing beneath the snow. He didn't understand. He blinked.

MIKE

Call in more staff. Morgan'll help. Labor numbers will take a hit, but what are you going to do?
(sigh) Jesus. Okay MIKE. Take a chill pill. We'll get through this.

NARRATOR

Two hiking poles lay in the back of the Hummer. He retrieved them. Primo was just a few blocks away but with the storm, it might take him a half hour.

[SFX: VOICE OF HANNAH- DISTANT]

Boyscout! That-a-boy! Ready for anything!!

NARRATOR

Two emergency vehicles came down the road toward him. Mike sneered at the low-tech chains on their tires, but had to admit they got the job done.

[SFX: ALARM/EPA MESSAGE]

Remain where you are. They pose a severe danger to the public.
Don't touch or engage in any way with these objects.

NARRATOR

A few guys leapt out with containers and a Geiger-Muller. Going through their minds was the inverse square law. One muttered "As Low as Reasonably Achievable" like a mantra. In a careful procession they approached and pointed the device. It was oddly silent. No clicks.

Mike had listened to the early reports. It was something the government couldn't keep a lid on. Rocks, crystals, whatever of unknown origin had appeared everywhere. But don't panic. He looked around at the people handling it. The wrong apocalypse. Mike walked on.

[SFX: GROCERY STORE MUZAC]

NARRATOR

Primo Market, at night normally quiet but for the sounds of restocking. Tonight, it was buzzing. They had called right away, per store guidelines. There were Orbs all over, taking up shelf space, yet not for sale. The crisis in front of him wasn't the alien rocks. The night crew was delighted with the break in routine. Better than the snow day they'd expected. They dropped the Orbs on deli scales which registered nothing. Convection ovens didn't heat them. Deep freezers didn't freeze them, (they hoped their tongues would stick, like with below zero metal. He'd have to handle this by himself.

MIKE

Move them all into the broom closet.

WORKER

They just come right back out again.

MIKE

Then at least cover them with something.

WORKER

We have been. It falls off eventually.

NARRATOR

The Orbs on the floor were tented by 'Caution, Wet'. As they were never in the way, this resembled milestones down the highway. Mike Mikey hadn't got to where he was without a certain tyrannical creativity. He never let facts get in the way of what he wanted. He thought of some idea- however ridiculous, and ordered the staff to be creative. In the end, it's not the 'what' nor the how that matters, it's the resolute, self-assured order.

MIKE

Make it so nobody notices. Make them go away.

NARRATOR

That would have to do for now.

HANNAH'S ORB APPEARS

[SFX: OUTSIDE, STORM SOUNDS, HANNAH'S WHIP CRACKING]

HANNAH

What lovely weather! Such a pleasant evening we're having!
Everybody, Winter Wonderland.(singing) In the lane snow is
glistening.

[SFX:AMBULANCE FADING INTO HOSPITAL SOUNDS]

NARRATOR

Hannah saw it a block away stuck helplessly on some black ice.
It wasn't ready for this. She felt some brief sympathy for it as
it screamed. A pause in her reverie, a crack. Snow and gusts of
wind obscured the struggling passersby. The blizzard erased
all color and froze the very hours. Tic, oblivion, toc, nothing.

[SFX: P.A. HOSPITAL CODE]

NARRATOR

The time and setting, even her posture. She'd held a thin, tepid
coffee. The waiting room painted an uplifting shade of blue.
The pastel chairs, upholstered also blue. Blue mural on the
wall, abstract. Designed for vigil. You can rest but you won't
sleep. The staff, passing by leaving her be. Pump, pump-the
scent of hand sanitiser wafted around her like a potion. The
chant of codes and the ping of monitors, like incantations.
One particular she prayed, still sounded among them. She
remembered the sound of a gurney rolling over an uneven tile
floor. Everyone went quiet as it passed.

[SFX: STORM SOUNDS]

NARRATOR

The wind picked up and the snow turned to freezing rain. A ghostly cold blew through her duvet and hardened against her. Tiny darts of ice spat in her face. They formed a crust around her, fusing her to the park bench. The storm was looking at her. "Yes...you too" She stood, cast off the duvet and there freezing, her hair ice crusted and shining, resigned to the punishing freeze, like a penitent, closed her eyes, hung her head. She did, after all, believe it was her due. She would wait in the blue room till dawn.

[SFX: ORB APPEARANCE, STORM / WIND DIES DOWN. ORB SOUND BEATING]

NARRATOR

But... that... Was that new? Some pulse, not the monitors. The respirators were silent. This pulse was higher. It called for Hannah to surface. It lay at her feet on the tile floor, a glow, off, on. She opened her eyes and saw the Orb. A pink one.

MIKE AND THE ORBS AT PRIMO MARKET PT2

NARRATOR

He took refuge in his office. An Orb sat on yesterday's sales report. Mike bared his teeth and gingerly pushed the Orb off with a pencil but could not sit down.

He turned and caught sight of a second one. It had taken up space on a bookshelf right in front of his countdown clock. The stoney invader sparked in time with the ticking seconds.

Outside his window, a ways away, he could see his Hummer, crashed. No government collapse, no earthquake, no bomb. Just a snowstorm. It hadn't even started yet. The Orbs? Just heralds. His breathing quickened. A tightness bloomed in his chest.

MIKE

Calm down Mike. Get ready, get ready.

Oh God, oh God, oh God! My bunker!

NARRATOR

A gut punch. He just couldn't hole up come New Year's Eve with one of these. Yesterday it was all going as planned. When the storm hit he thought he'd get a chance to inventory his provisions. It was all about being ready. Prepare today, survive tomorrow. But they were likely there too.

[SFX: VOICES]

Wooo, see that?

NARRATOR

He paced, listening to them having a grand old time. He'd never been a joiner, but now his staff were as alien as the Orbs themselves. Fleeting, a millisecond he thought Maybe the flaw is in me. What's the point of survival in hell? He put his fingers in his ears. He told himself he did it to concentrate.

MIKE

Can't they see the world turning to shit?

NARRATOR

They were busy, due to open soon and the die-hard regulars were at the door cupping their hands against the glass, peering in like at a Black Friday sale. Employees carried the Orbs from place to place watching them fade and reappear. They noticed soon off that a slight adjustment would not affect them and so went about styling the whole store.

Then they call Mike down to sign off on their work.

All Mike's instincts told him to abandon Primo. Enter the underground, close the lead lined hatch and sit for a while in the dark.

But mustering his courage, (and a bit of self-congratulation), he found the resolve to face the present crisis.

He was surprised to see Primo Markets wearing jewelry. Orbs glistened without objection on counter tops, display end caps. They were particularly effective in the floral department.

A regular commended his initiative. Most of the customers looked on with some approval, so Mike made peace with the plan and eventually begrudged its positive effect. After a while, the Orb decoration pleased him. It was a good thing he'd thought of it.

HANNAH MAKES PLANS / HEARS VOICES

[SFX: SIRENS, EPA IN THE DISTANCE]

NARRATOR

By morning, the storm passed to deliver its warning further inland leaving the city immobilized by the freeze. The neighborhood was flocked with snow or glazed by ice. The intense whiteness rendered the world overexposed, almost graphic. The pink stone in her hands beat. Her heart slowed and fell into its rhythm.

Hannah stared into it, closing her finger around it like you might the Holy Grail. She was grateful to have been released early. The hours after her Orb's arrival had been the quietest Hannah had ever known. The sirens, the yelps of citizens, had no

volume. She was quiet inside too. Examining her own mind, she could label the parts. The angry disruptor remained ready to be called. She saw the deep pit of her grief, set aside for now.

HANNAH

But, you should be blue.

NARRATOR

Reflexively, she took out the flail and began whipping herself. She hardly felt it anymore and it helped her think. She felt lucky to be divided into parts. Now she could let the disruptor take over while she thought of what to do next. Her senses took snapshots of the goings on

[SFX: CAMERA SHUTTER]

NARRATOR

The Orbs had brought out that part of the human animal that needed to share. The few bold or curious were coming out onto the street. What happened to you? Where did yours appear? Most gave the Orbs a wide berth, weaving this way and that to avoid them leaving a chaotic weave of footprints. They filed them under 'Weird' and were getting on with it. Several, on skis slid by, likely, Hannah thought, on their way to coffee.

[SFX: CAMERA SHUTTER]

NARRATOR

The official operation had hit nothing but snags. Blocking the road, a hazmat team paced in frustration over their inability to collect and clear the street of Orbs. A hazmat worker bent down in front of an Orb, regretting his career path. He knew they

didn't explode, but he'd heard people had visions, like LSD flashbacks. An experience he didn't want to repeat. Gingerly, using long tongs he lifted an Orb and placed it in a lead-lined container. As soon as it dropped, the Orb faded only to return to its birthplace. Startled, the man fell back onto the snow and crossed himself.

He radioed in.

EPA-MAN

Asset containment failed. Proceeding to Plan B.

HANNAH

I just love government overreach.

NARRATOR

Cracking her flail while she cradled her Orb, she remembered how she came to be here from birth through everything that had chipped away at her.

And though taken aback she regarded the object as inevitable. A sooner or later kind of thing. She listened for a while, casting about in her own mind for a cipher to its language, one which the sane could not uncover.

[SFX: VOICE FOR THE WRATH OF THE LORD (TRAILS OFF)]

NARRATOR

Yes, she'd often thought of that, Christ bringing retribution, but taking his sweet time. Well, now maybe she wouldn't need to wait on him.

[SFX: ORB SOUNDS (CHIRPPING)]

HANNAH

Heh, heh, heh. Yes, well it's about time!

MORGAN MEETS UP WITH HANNAH

NARRATOR

She needed to get going. She wrapped up her duvet tighter and shook off the snow. She didn't know where she was going but felt sure of some sign. A figure a block away caught her attention. Morgan. Bumbling. Probably toward Harry's.

HANNAH

Sweet idiot.

NARRATOR

She strode toward him. Her determination gave her boots a solid purchase on the frozen street, covering the distance in a few seconds.

HANNAH

Hey cavedweller. What's new?

[SFX: MUSIC - INTRO THEME]

PROLOGUE

Have you ever walked down the streets of your neighborhood and not recognised them? The old landmarks remain, but what's that? A tanning salon? New residents, different dress. You furrow your brow. "We'll see." You feel a sadness for the passing of the familiar. Yet. A tasty new scent is in the air. Maybe you should try Indonesian food.

[SFX: MUSIC - MAIN THEME]

[SFX: MUSIC - NEWSRADIO THEME]

GEORGE KMNM

NewsRadio KMNM. Well, it looks like today will be a snow day, the whole city is shut down. Nobody out but cross country skiers.

CORA KMNM

You know? A day off, fewer accidents and less crime. What's not to like?

GEORGE KMNM

Folks, the government's advising people to stay home! Schools, and offices will be closed.

CORA KMNM

Except for the army and the EPA

GEORGE KMNM

Yes, our new residents are causing quite a stir. I wonder if the earth is a bit heavier? Cora, what's the latest?

CORA KMNM

Not much George, there isn't, as far as anyone can tell, any tragedy related to them. No one had reported tripping over one. No reports of them being used as weapons. Maybe they'll hatch little green men.

GEORGE KMNM

Well if it's an alien invasion, it's no Independence Day

CORA KMNM

It's not 'War of the Worlds' either. It's more like The Arrival, you know, chill.

GEORGE KMNM

1990 something Charlie Sheen, Lindsay Crouse?

CORA KMNM

Yeah, that one.

GEORGE KMNM

You call that chill?

CORA KMNM Charlie Sheen was awful in that one. Did you see the sequel?

GEORGE KMNM

No

CORA KMNM

Don't bother.

George KMNM

Ha ha always the critic!

INTRO TO FR FRANCO AND SR ALTHEA

[SFX:MUSIC - TRANSITION THEME, FADE TO LITURGICAL MUSIC]

NARRATOR

Father Franco stood in the hallway separating the rectory from the church proper. It was a fairly recent addition to campus, and was welcome. No rainstorms to charge through, no ice to slip on during the frequent errands from abbey to rectory to church. An Orb glittered in the light . Sitting on the floor as if it had been there forever.

What would Sister think? Perhaps it was wrong to call her instead of the Bishop. But he thought she would be sensible if not orthodox.

SR ALTHEA

We have several of our own Father

NARRATOR

Sister Althea had entered via the rectory door. She always entered from some unexpected place.

FR FRANCO

What do you think?

SR ALTHEA Just another, mysterious part of God's creation. At least that was the consensus around our breakfast table. We've found eight so far.

FR FRANCO

You stopped counting?

SR ALTHEA

We discussed it a bit after Mass but we had to get on with it.

FR FRANCO

But Sister

SR ALTHEA

It's a big convent.

FR FRANCO

Still.

Franco knelt down and picked up the Orb. The two religious walked into Franco's office where they usually consulted. Franco set the Orb down on the desk.

SR ALTHEA

The Bishop is not going to like it.

FR FRANCO

Sister, do you think they're miraculous?

SR ALTHEA

A pity if they are, no one to canonize.

FR FRANCO

Seriously, you have to admit they're a sign, some omen.

NARRATOR

Sister Althea leaned in so close her wimple, starched into a razor, almost cut the young priest's face.

SR ALTHEA

Of what? The second coming? Is Christ coming back on a spaceship?

NARRATOR

Franco sighed and fiddled with his rosary. It hadn't left his hands in hours.

FR FRANCO

I was thinking of blessing one at my next mass. They're at the altar after all.

SR ALTHEA

Good luck with that. Sorry Father, I shouldn't be flippant. They're remarkable, yes. But must we make them into something prematurely?

NARRATOR

In answer, the orb faded and reappeared in the hall where they'd first seen it. Father Franco and Sister Althea looked at each other.

SR ALTHEA

Yes, well I admit they make a unique exit.

[SFX: MUSIC - TRANSITION THEME

INTO TO HARRY

NARRATOR

Harry Park came downstairs the morning the Orbs fell. He would of course open the shop. There would be few customers, what with the storm. But he could count on some stragglers- those without power at home or those desperate for company. He was short on the mortgage. He'd stay open 24-7 if he, and Jane could manage it. But Harry's daughter had other interests. She was probably out rescuing a stray dog or cat... or Hannah. Maybe he could lure Morgan, poor kid. Morgan.

He saw one on the counter. A lump of glass? Quartz? Resin? Each as big as a breadbox and shaped like a block of stone from a garden wall. Someone was playing a joke. A consignment probably... with no paperwork. He'd have to ask Jane about them. He set up the espresso machine and made his coffee. He straightened out some magazines, did his usual survey of the shop, finding one, four, twelve. New inventory? Jane had found a deal. He beamed like an owner, a feeling he knew would wear off. A hole in the restroom wall needed repair. Yesterday's mail. A bill. A request for a donation from someone addressing him as a community leader. The siren call of another credit card offer.

HARRY

Enough of that

NARRATOR

He turned to the Orbs. He picked one up- a giant chunk of ruby.

HARRY

Door stop? Paper weight? No. Too big. Murder weapon.

NARRATOR

Harry started making tags.

HARRY

Rare extraterrestrial artifacts!

NARRATOR

He scribbled on tags, then reconsidered.

HARRY

Demon paperweights. Sooo twenty five bucks each?

NARRATOR

The radio brought news.

WILLARD

.....it wouldn't be overstating the fact that this is the biggest mystery we've ever encountered.

GEORGE KNMN

That was Dr Willard Preston, a spokesman for the Crisis response team.

Later in the program more from the scientific community. Is this just a big bookend for your shelves or is it the beginning of an invasion? Is it legal? Should we round them up and send them back? Cora, what are real people saying?

CORA KNMN

Well the response from the public seems muted, especially considering this unprecedented event. Here are a few on-line comments

Alexandra in Coral Gables Florida says.

ALEXANDRA

I think they're pretty. I wish they would light up more.

We should maybe be careful handling them- but hey YOLO .

CORA KNMN

And there's one here from someone who calls himself Russel the Prophet of the Luminous Dawn-

RUSSEL

She who waits is speaking. Listen or be damned to the colorless void.

CORA KNMN

But the consensus seems best expressed by Nick. From Phoenix Arizona he writes-

NICK

I shoved mine in a closet. Sorry, but I've got too much going on at the moment to be dealing with yet another issue.

GEORGE KNMN

Thank you Cora. I guess we're all a bit concerned.

NARRATOR

They were all over. Harry was crestfallen at not having an exclusive.

HARRY

So.. not a consignment.

NARRATOR

He found a patch of unobscured window and looked out onto the street. Groups of three or four surrounded other 'jolly ranchers' as he came to call them. Here and there, official looking people tried to shoo onlookers away.

Twisting his head. Harry peered through the opening, trying to see the state of the building outside. Fortunately, the awning had taken the brunt of the storm, though only God knew how it might hold, like his luck.

HARRY

Today's going to be interesting.

NARRATOR

The snow from the previous night had turned Harry's building into an igloo. He tried the door. No luck. He didn't feel trapped. Instead he imagined a line of customers thinking him closed and passing him by. It was the getting in that mattered.

HARRY

Good old Morgan. Time to come to the rescue.

[SFX: - DIALING PHONE - VOICEMAIL PROMPT]

MORGAN (through the phone)

This is Morgan. Leave a Message

HARRY

You okay?

What's happening there? Any shown up?

Well, we're opening up as usual. You coming in? You're probably sleeping through the whole thing.

MORGAN'S WALK TO HARRY'S

NARRATOR

Morgan left the house without a shower leaving his Orb behind. He wasn't sure why. Harry's call had a pull on him and he knew, just knew something else was up.

[SFX: - DIM, REMEMBERED - IN THE BACKGROUND, LIKE A GHOST, PHONE RING]

MORGAN

Hello

HARRY

Hey I'm trapped here.

MORGAN

What?

HARRY

I'm snowed in. I can't open the door. Can't even see much outside. I need you to come shovel me out.

NARRATOR

Upon locking his door and turning, he saw the rest of them pulsing here and there. He felt suddenly grateful for not being the only one and getting to his friend's place gained a sense of urgency.

[SFX: - DIM, REMEMBERED - IN THE BACKGROUND, LIKE A GHOST - PHONE STATIC, HARRY'S VOICE IS INDISTINCT]

HARRY

Jesus Morgan!

Yes, I've.....one, two,...five...too.... to count....so.....you g....down..here?

[SFX: - DIM, REMEMBERED - IN THE BACKGROUND, LIKE A GHOST - BREAKING WINDOWS]

HARRY

Jesus it's an fucking avalanche!

NARRATOR

He trudged through the snow on his way to Harry's. It was still deep but by then piled by the side of the road. The National Guard was clearing the main streets searching- vainly and fruitlessly trying to contain the unknown. Morgan figured he'd trail a block behind and let them make his walk easier.

HANNAH

Hey cavedweller. What's new?

MORGAN

Oh God, not now. Here?

NARRATOR

Morgan needed time with his own thoughts. He didn't have it in him to keep one eye on Hannah, wary of the likely change in her. She was catching up to him.

HANNAH

See them holding church back there. This is wild!

MORGAN

Yeah, I got one at my place. You?

NARRATOR

Hannah gave him a wry smile which he regarded with suspicion. He was ready to run.

HANNAH

I saw them appear last night in the park.

MORGAN

You were out in that?

HANNAH

Yeah, a bunch appeared in the park last night. They were all blinking like they were doing a headcount, then they stopped.

MORGAN

What do you think they are?

NARRATOR

It was less a question than a tactic. He wanted to keep Hannah talking.

HANNAH

Oh, justice.... You're on your way to Harry's

NARRATOR

Despite warnings, the public were out doing their own investigations. Morgan noticed a group of people kneeling down in the snow. Some of them had made bed sheets into fake togas and sari-lite garments . Morgan watched them bob their heads and chant. He couldn't hear what exactly but there was no doubt it was liturgical.

He scoffed at them

MORGAN

Already? Seriously?

HANNAH(to the worshipers)

Blessed be!

NARRATOR

She took off toward them. Morgan took the chance, rounding a corner. The street ahead was unplowed, it was tough going but he'd made an escape. He was rather embarrassed at his reaction. She couldn't help it. In her lucid periods he hung out with her at Harry's. She could be fun at times.

Morgan could barely make out Harry's Emporium at the end of the block. The snow and ice had made it a fortress. Long

threatening icicles hung from the edge of the roof. Trudging his way there he imagined them on guard.

But he had to stop. Both to rest Morgan was nobody's first choice for such a taxing mission and to take everything in. It was calm white and mild like a snow globe scene- where glitter had settled, the house and pine trees, the family of four, the snowman.

[SFX: - WHIPCRACKING]

HANNAH

See see see!

NARRATOR

Her screams shattered his little peace. She whirled her ever-present leather bullwhip in the air

HANNAH

Coming, coming, coming, coming!

NARRATOR

Morgan leapt through the snow drifts suddenly as fit as an Olympian. He felt a bit of pride as he noticed her fall behind.

But Hannah's frenzy was pure and powered by spite and adrenaline. She pursued him like a curse; barreling and screaming through the snow drifts stopping only to give her whip a crack or two as a warning to what was coming.

At last, her fever spent for a moment, she fell backward into a snowbank and cheered.

He reached Harry's Emporium, panting.

Fortunately, the awning had taken the brunt of the storm, though only God knew how. The door itself was almost clear of snow, it was, however, frozen shut.

Harry appeared behind the smashed window and waved. He threw Morgan a shovel and a chisel.

Morgan began hacking away. Ice fell from the door in big chunks, like those you might get at a high-end cocktail bar.

This is the best thing that could ever happen Morgan thought. We can start over . Everything we thought we can now throw out. The Orbs are cleaning us out. They have rendered us impotent, helpless, and they're not even in the way.

VOICE

Just jump. Just jump!

NARRATOR

The warning had returned. And as before he leapt sideways just as a massive icicle fell from the eaves like a personal executioner. It struck the ground and stood upright like a monolith. Morgan paralyzed in the snow and waited for another shoe to drop. But it was still. And the air was fresh and the sky was blue.

MORGAN

So that's near death?

NARRATOR

From a pile of snow Morgan looked at Harry who mouthed through the door glass.

HARRY

Close one.

NARRATOR

Morgan saw an Orb peeking out from under a snowdrift as if winking. He started. Not yet. He wasn't quite ready for meaning. A shaken Morgan gave Harry's front door a shove. It gave but the woodwork cracked and splintered.

HARRY

Well .. I needed to spend another couple grand this week

[SFX: - WHIP CRACKING]

HANNAH

You have them! You have THEM!

NARRATOR

HANNAH's ambush was not over.

Morgan and Harry glanced at each other, confirming telepathically, We want no part of this. They tried to slam the frozen door shut—only for Hannah to ram it from the outside, her wild eyes locked onto the Orbs inside. She was stronger than she looked, managing to wedge her boot in the gap before they could shut her out. The butt of her whip cracked against the frame as Harry threw his weight against the wood. Morgan braced beside him, but lost to Hannah's determination. The door bursts inward, sending them stumbling back.

She stood on the threshold, chest heaving, her gaze darting between the Orbs scattered across the floor. For a breath, the

shop is silent. Then she stepped forward and fell to her knees.

The Orbs did nothing. No glow, no hum, no defense. They sat inert as Hannah's hands hovered over them like a priestess over relics.

Harry and Morgan exchange a glance

MORGAN

Where do you think they come from?

NARRATOR

Hannah's fingers twitched.

HANNAH

From out there. It's the cosmos. She's coming home

NARRATOR

The three of them each in their own thoughts wrestled with this and everything they knew to be true.

HARRY

Hannah you're full of shit.

NARRATOR

Harry looked down at the now lucid Hannah, the one he knew from long ago had surfaced. Her features like the bistable image of the mother-in-law resolved into the young lady. This might last a day or for five minutes.

HANNAH

Heh, heh, heh, You know me so well.

**[SFX: - ORGAN MUSIC- BEGINNER PRACTICING.- THE MISTAKES ARE
EERILY SIMILAR TO ORB SOUNDS]**

FRANCO STRUGGLES

NARRATOR

Father Franco had just got off the phone. He hadn't done anything wrong, not yet. Franco had seen them arrive, a fact he hadn't mentioned to Sister. He could kick himself.

[SFX: - ORGAN MAKING A SCREECH]

[SFX: - MUSIC TEACHER (IN THE BACKGROUND)]

Oh. Sorry Father. (to student) Street shoes? Really?

[SFX: - ORGAN = REPEATING ORB-LIKE CHORDS]

NARRATOR

He'd been in the little chapel the night before, just beside the main sanctuary. He was fretting over some lapse, (he couldn't remember what), and was halfway through the rosary when he felt, suddenly, sated and grateful, as after having a really good dinner. He opened his eyes to see a space, there above the tabernacle slowly filling with something luminous. He rose and approached it. An Orb floated for a minute, then settled on the sacred reliquary. His eyes had widened, appalled.

It was wrong, he knew it. But from the cross above, Jesus had looked down, unbothered.

[SFX: - ORGAN MAKING A SCREECH]

[SFX: - MUSIC TEACHER, ORGAN (IN THE BACKGROUND - TO STUDENT)]

Relax, you'll get it eventually.

NARRATOR

The Father tried to remember Althea's advice, but oh, the storm, Orb, rosary, tabernacle, they all orbited in his thoughts and could not keep them apart.

FR FRANCO (to himself

Revelation

[SFX: - FOOTSTEPS]

VOICE

Good Morning Bishop.

[SFX: - MUSIC - CLOSING THEME]
