

"THESE DARK BATTLEMENTS"  
*The Sheridan Tapes - Season 01, Episode 09*  
*Recording Draft - June 9, 2020*

Written by

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Based on story and characters from  
"Homestead on the Corner"  
By Trevor Van Winkle

BEEP.

A slightly crackling voice, compressed and pre-recorded.

SAM BAILEY

(flat)

Hello, you've reached Sam Bailey.  
Sorry I can't take your call right  
now, but please leave a message,  
and I'll call you back as soon as I  
can.

BEEP. Another voice. Voices and faint music behind.

BILL TYLER

(brightly)

Hey Sam, just wanted to make sure  
you're on your way. Yeah I know, I  
know, I didn't really want to call,  
but Robert asked me to make sure  
you're coming, so... Yeah. Just...  
Give me a call if you're running  
late, okay? Okay, by.

BEEP. A moment of silence. Then the phone rings again.

SAM BAILEY

(pre-recorded)

Hello, you've reached Sam Bailey.  
Sorry I can't take your call right  
now, but please leave a message,  
and I'll call you back as soon as I  
can.

BEEP. Same voice, different music behind.

BILL TYLER

(awkward, but still trying  
to be cheery)

He-ey Sam, just... Calling again to  
check in. Guess you must have got  
caught up at the station, or  
something. Yeah.

(beat)

Also, um... That bit about Robert  
asking me to call you? Yeah,  
that's, um... I kind of made that  
up. I just wanted to -- you know,  
you're not exactly making it easy  
for the rest of us. I was kind of  
hoping that -- we're trying to meet  
you halfway here, so if you  
could...

(beat)

(MORE)

BILL TYLER (CONT'D)  
 Please, just... Call me back. Or  
 text me, or something. I don't  
 care.

BEEP. Silence. Ringing.

SAM BAILEY  
 Hello, you've reached Sam Bailey.  
 Sorry I can't take your call right  
 now, but please leave a message,  
 and I'll call you back as soon as I  
 can.

BEEP. Quieter now -- Bill's outside the bar.

BILL TYLER  
 (angrily)  
 Dammit Sam. Where are you? I'm just  
 trying to help you, you know that,  
 right? I don't know what's going on  
 with you, but you've got to give  
 the hardboiled loner act a rest.  
 Everyone's worried about you and...  
 I'm worried about you. This has got  
 to...

BEEP. Someone picks up on the other end.

BILL TYLER (CONT'D)  
 Sam? Sam, is that you?

CLICK. DIAL TONE. Fades into...

MAIN THEME

INT. SAM BAILEY'S HOUSE - LATE EVENING

BEEP. The recorder starts. Rain plays lightly on the windows.  
 A clock ticks quietly in one corner.

SAM BAILEY  
 (bitter sarcasm)  
 A rainy Sunday evening. Perfect.  
 Just what the doctor ordered. God,  
 it's enough to make you wish you'd  
 gone out and done something  
 yesterday. Almost.

SAM GROANS, rubbing his face.

SAM BAILEY (CONT'D)  
 (tired and frustrated)  
 Look. Yesterday? Good day.  
 (MORE)

SAM BAILEY (CONT'D)

Pretty good, at least. Better than most. Today? Not so much. Didn't get to half the things I was supposed to do yesterday. Most of them weren't important, but I forgot the pharmacy's closed on Sundays, because apparently Wilford's still stuck in the 19 *fucking* 40's, so...

Sam stops, then BREATHES IN DEEPLY, trying to calm himself.

SAM BAILEY (CONT'D)

(trying to stay steady)

Doc said I'd see increased anger if this happened, so I've just been sitting here all day, trying to stay calm. Landlord's going to kill me if I put another hole in the wall. And trust me, the rain doesn't help. Not exactly soothing after... You know.

(beat)

Maybe it's not a good idea to be working right now either, but at least it's something to take the edge off. Keep me distracted, I guess? Hell if I know.

Sam picks up the tape in front of him.

SAM BAILEY (CONT'D)

(drained)

Let's see, we've got... ah. Number 0-0-1-3-5. God, even the tapes are running zeroes today.

The tape clatters as he feeds it into the player, then...

CLICK.

The familiar crackle of static. Someone shuffling around nervously.

ANNA SHERIDAN

(nervously)

Okay... Looks like... Alright, yes. It's recording. Great. Bit of a gamble, this old thing, but I figured it was worth a shot at least now that the old one's gone, but... Geez Sheridan, calm down.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)  
 It's just like your old recorder. A  
 bit clunkier, but still.

A long beat as she tries to figure out where to start.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)  
 (a little awkwardly)  
 Alright, um -- basics, I guess.  
 This is Anna Sheridan, and it's  
 about 9 o'clock at night on April  
 15th, 2009. I've been camped  
 outside Green Bank, West Virginia  
 for the last ten days. Kate's here  
 too -- my sister, Kate Sheridan, I  
 mean. She just left the van to get  
 some fresh air. I told her it might  
 not be safe out in the dark, but  
 she ignored me, as usual. God,  
 we're in dire straits when I'm the  
 voice of reason.

(beat)

Kate just got here this morning,  
 and of course she brought that  
 ridiculous RV her husband talked  
 her into buying. Thankfully he's  
 not here with her... But I doubt  
 she left him behind for my sake.  
 More like she didn't want to be  
 embarrassed by her sister's screw-  
 up. Again.

(beat)

Not that she was over the moon  
 about why we're actually here,  
 either...

Someone knocks on the door, gently tapping the glass.

KATE SHERIDAN  
 (cautiously)  
 Hey Anna? You still in there?

ANNA SHERIDAN  
 (sarcastic)  
 Where else would I be?

KATE SHERIDAN  
 (ignoring the remark)  
 I'm about to go to bed... Are you  
 sure you don't want to stay in the  
 RV tonight?

ANNA SHERIDAN  
 ("I'd rather sleep on the  
 ground")  
 (MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)  
 No, I'm fine in here, thanks. Don't  
 want to cut in on your space.

KATE SHERIDAN  
 (trying to convince her)  
 It's not a problem, you can just  
 sleep on the foldout. I won't even  
 notice you're there.

ANNA SHERIDAN  
 (muttering)  
 When do you ever...

KATE SHERIDAN  
 (genuinely can't hear her)  
 Huh?

ANNA SHERIDAN  
 (full volume, excuse)  
 I've still got some work to do out  
 here... Probably be up all night.

KATE SHERIDAN  
 (concerned)  
 Anna, you need to get some sleep...

ANNA SHERIDAN  
 (trying to get rid of her)  
 I'll get a nap in when I can. Don't  
 worry about me.

KATE SHERIDAN  
 (reluctantly)  
 O-kay... I'll just leave the door  
 on the latch if you change your  
 mind, yeah?

ANNA SHERIDAN  
 (trying to end  
 conversation)  
 Great. Thanks.

After a moment, Kate's footsteps retreat from the van. ANNA  
 SIGHS IN ANNOYANCE, then continues.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)  
 (trying to be gracious)  
 She means well. She really does.  
 Most of the time, at least. I mean,  
 it's annoying, but... She just  
 doesn't get that I don't need it. I  
 mean I do: I called her and said I  
 needed help just... Not like that.  
 (MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

I don't know why I called her in the first place, she doesn't...

(beat)

No. I do know. It's because she might be the only person left who really knows me. Knows me well enough that if this all goes sideways...

Anna cuts off, then gets back to where she was before.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

(explaining, storytelling)

We're here because of a voice. That's how this all started. A voice that began showing up on AM radios in Cody, Wyoming about a year ago. At first, it was a weak signal, only showing up occasionally in the static between the stations. Most of the people who heard it could only make out one or two words at a time, but they seemed to be cut out of a longer message. There were a few dozen recordings posted online by the time I found them: single words just barely audible through the static. "Help." "Listen." "Alone."

(beat)

Of course I couldn't resist. It took a bit of stumbling around the backcountry with my scanner to figure out where the signals were coming from, but I eventually tracked them to Spirit Mountain Cave. It's an old national monument that was abandoned back in the 50's, so it's gated off and managed by the BLM now. It took a little finagling, but I managed to get a permit to explore the cave on my own. The ranger who helped me get there, Kirk, stayed on the walkie talkie the entire time, but I didn't mind... At least, not until the voice on the radio turned into one that sounded like his, but wasn't.

(beat)

I still don't know what to call the entity I found.

(MORE)

## ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

Normally I would call it a poltergeist: it was non-visible, non-corporeal, and able to physically interact with the world... Violently, if need be. But then it didn't seem to have a voice or an identity of its own. If it was really the ghost of someone who'd died in that cave, then it wouldn't need to steal voices to speak: it would have its own. And it wasn't a monster, creature, or any other supernatural entity based in biology. Most paranormal phenomena I've dealt with create some kind of electromagnetic interference... That's why I have my scanner with me all the time. Early warning system. But as far as I can tell, this entity didn't create EM radiation... It was the radio waves I detected. An intelligence made up of indistinct, shifting energy fields, but somehow still able to influence and reshape physical matter.

(beat)

When I found it, it was trapped in one of the lowest chambers of the cave system, but it seemed to escape with me when I climbed out. As far as I can tell, it's able to infect any electronic device that receives a large enough amount of its signal pattern. It got into my walkie-talkie, left the cavern, and then -- somehow -- it created a body for itself.

(beat)

Well, maybe "created" isn't the right word. Copied? Xeroxed? Stole? Whatever it did, it walked out of the cave looking exactly like Ranger Kirk -- with the real Kirk standing right there in front of me with a stunned expression on his face. He freaked out a little bit, and he had a gun on him so... Yeah. I'm guessing you can figure out the rest.

(beat)

I just assumed that was it. The creature, ghost... *whatever*, was dead.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

Or at the very least stuck in that cave without a body. I left Cody the next day, feeling pretty good about myself -- if a little unnerved by the whole experience. I found what I was looking for, fought it, survived it, and beat it... With a little help from Kirk. Tied that chapter off with a neat little bow. And that was the end of it, as far as I could tell.

(beat)

But then I started checking the forums again. People were still posting recordings, and not just from Cody. They were picking up the same signals in remote areas of South Dakota, Nebraska, even a few areas around Kansas City. The voice was moving east, getting stronger and clearer the further it went. That was disturbing enough. What made it even worse was the fact that the voice had changed. I thought that if the entity had survived, it would keep Kirk's voice. That was one of my biggest miscalculations. I lost my old recorder somewhere in that cave, with years and years of old audio files stored in its memory. The Echo -- that's what I've decided to call it -- stole Kirk's face, voice, and body with nothing more than what it heard on the radio. How easy would it be for it to steal mine?

ANNA BREATHES, then starts with a more personal statement.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

(slower, deliberate)

This is my fault. I know that. If I hadn't ignored all the red flags and just stayed away, then it would probably still be trapped there. But no: I let this thing loose because I couldn't leave it well enough alone. And I have to be the one to fix it.

(beat, then back to storytelling mode)

The Green Bank Radio Telescope is a few miles up the road from here.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

When the sun's out, you can see it clear as day towering over the trees. It's taller than the Statue of Liberty at its highest point, and its collector dish is more than 300 feet across. The whole thing is just an enormous mechanical ear pointed at the sky, listening to the stars -- and it's enormously sensitive. It's so sensitive it basically created the National Radio Quiet Zone... Well it, and the massive military listening station over at Sugar Grove. Hundreds of miles of federally regulated quiet right in the middle of the US. That's not to say there are no radio signals at all... They're just controlled and monitored. But the closer you get to the telescope, the more restrictions there are. In Green Bank itself, there's no Wi-Fi, Cell Phones, or overhead power cables. Even tiny electrical shorts get picked up by the telescope sometimes, and the observatory has to send out patrol cars to fix them. I turned my phone off a few miles back, but if I tried to drive the van any closer to the telescope, I couldn't. They only allow diesel cars that close to the dish: the spark plugs in this thing would be enough to set off all kinds of alarms. Yeah: that's how quiet it is out here.

Anna moves, picking up her scanner.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

The scanner's been running the whole time I've been talking. If I was anywhere else, it would be beeping almost constantly. We're swimming in radio waves. Everyone wants to talk to everyone else all the time, and it takes a mind-numbingly huge number of transmitters and receivers to make that possible. But out here -- that's all gone. The world is quiet. Absolutely still.

Anna pauses, and a gentle wind blows past.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

(down to business)

So. If our friend the Echo decides to come calling, I'll know right away. Any signal, any at all, and I'll be able to track it to its source, find out how its spreading, and get rid of it once and for all. Make things right. Even if I have to stay here for months, I'll find...

Kate knocks quietly on the window.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

(surprised)

Ah!

Kate knocks again, and Anna unlocks the door and slides it open.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

(angrily)

What the hell, Kate? I thought you were going to bed?

KATE SHERIDAN

(a little annoyed)

Never could sleep very well in the RV. I made some tea instead, thought you might like a cup.

ANNA SHERIDAN

(slightly embarrassed)

Oh. Um... Thanks.

Anna takes the mug from Kate and sips quietly.

KATE SHERIDAN

Still recording?

ANNA SHERIDAN

(slightly flustered)

Oh, yeah... I'll turn it off...

KATE SHERIDAN

(trying to keep her calm)

No, I don't mind. It's kind of cool, by the way. Retro.

ANNA SHERIDAN

I guess it kind of is, isn't it?

KATE SHERIDAN  
Thrift shop?

ANNA SHERIDAN  
Nah, Dad gave it to me for a  
birthday... God, must have been 20  
years ago now.

KATE SHERIDAN  
(a little skeptical)  
And it's still running?

ANNA SHERIDAN  
(joking)  
"They just don't make 'em like that  
anymore, do they?"

ANNA AND KATE SHARE A QUIET LAUGH, then fall into an awkward  
silence.

KATE SHERIDAN  
So, um... Any change?

ANNA SHERIDAN  
(surprised)  
What, you mean on the scanner? No,  
still nothing. But if it's out  
there, I'll find it.

KATE SHERIDAN  
(matter of factly)  
If.

ANNA SHERIDAN  
(wry)  
Ha. Yeah. Big if.

KATE SHERIDAN  
(trying to get to the  
heart of the matter)  
And if not?

ANNA SHERIDAN  
(matter of factly)  
Then I guess I keep looking.

KATE SHERIDAN  
(pressing the advantage)  
How long?

ANNA SHERIDAN  
As long as it takes.

KATE SHERIDAN

And if you never find it? I mean,  
when do you throw in the towel  
and...

ANNA SHERIDAN

(irritated)  
Not now, Kate.

KATE SHERIDAN

(annoyed)  
What do you mean, "not now?"

ANNA SHERIDAN

(losing control)  
That's always the question with  
you, isn't it? *When?*

KATE SHERIDAN

(exasperated)  
What the hell's that supposed to  
mean?

ANNA SHERIDAN

(imitating Kate)  
*"When* are you going to stop? *When*  
are you going to come home? *When*  
are you going to sit down and get  
your head on straight?"

KATE SHERIDAN

(frustrated)  
Well, when are you?

ANNA SHERIDAN

(exasperated)  
That's the point! You always think  
it's *when*, not *if*!

KATE SHERIDAN

(trying to walk this back)  
I was just saying that...

ANNA SHERIDAN

(cutting her off)  
You think everything just happens  
because you say so! You say you're  
going to college, going to get  
married, going to get a boring,  
mind-numbing job and make a shit-  
ton of money, and then it just...  
*Happens!* The way you want it to,  
*when* you want it to!

KATE SHERIDAN

(a little more forceful)

All I'm saying is you need to start taking life seriously and...

ANNA SHERIDAN

(angrily)

No, what you're trying to do is tell me how *my* life works!

KATE SHERIDAN

(bitterly)

You call this a life? You're living in a dream world, Anna, and it's high time you wake up.

ANNA SHERIDAN

(LAUGHING BITTERLY)

Seriously? A dream? It's a nightmare! I try to be like you, I try to make plans, and then all of a sudden *wham!* Shit like this happens, and I just have to deal with it.

KATE SHERIDAN

(older sister mode)

God, you're insufferable.

ANNA SHERIDAN

("excuse me?")

What?

KATE SHERIDAN

(bitter lecturing)

You really think you're the only one who's ever struggled? That nothing bad ever happens to me? Because let me tell you, it sure as hell hasn't been...

ANNA SHERIDAN

(this has been building up for a while)

No, no, you don't get to tell me that I just need to pick myself up by my bootstraps and try harder, because every *fucking* day of my life is already hard enough without your voice in the back of my head. You have absolutely *no idea* what my life is like.

KATE SHERIDAN

(bitterly)

And whose fault is that, huh? Did I decide to run away from all my problems? Remind me, which one of us spends half the year camped out god-knows where, writing and smoking and freaking out over shadows and ghost stories and voices on the radio?

BEEP. The scanner suddenly pings, cutting off their argument. They both fall silent.

KATE SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

(nervously)

Um... Anna... You told me there aren't any signals out here.

ANNA SHERIDAN

I know.

KATE SHERIDAN

And that this thing you're hunting...

ANNA SHERIDAN

("be quiet now")

I Know.

Anna moves, picking up the scanner. It beeps again.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

(whispering)

Weak radio signal, coming this way. 900 meters off.

KATE SHERIDAN

(whispering)

Is it... You know, your...

ANNA SHERIDAN

(clearly ready for this)

700 meters. Closing fast.

KATE SHERIDAN

(urgent whisper)

Come on Anna, we need to go...

ANNA SHERIDAN

(determined)

No. I need to fix this.

Anna opens a drawer, pulls out a pistol, and cocks it.

KATE SHERIDAN  
 (surprised and alarmed)  
 Jesus Anna! Why do you have a gun  
 in here?

ANNA SHERIDAN  
 (annoyed)  
 Why do you think?

KATE SHERIDAN  
 (freaking out a little)  
 Don't you need a permit or  
 something to...

The scanner's beeping speeds up, cutting Kate off. Anna leans forward.

ANNA SHERIDAN  
 (a little shaky)  
 300 meters. 200. 100...

KATE SHERIDAN  
 (desperate)  
 Anna, we need to go, now!

ANNA SHERIDAN  
 (angrily)  
 No! You want to see what my life is  
 like, huh? Well this is it! This is  
 my life! So help me or stay out of  
 my way, but don't...!

KNOCK KNOCK. A gentle one-two rap on the window.

KATE SHERIDAN  
 Um... Anna...

NRAO PATROL  
 (through the window)  
 Excuse me, miss? Could you uh, roll  
 down your window, please?

ANNA SHERIDAN  
 (flustered)  
 Oh... um, right...

CLICK.

A little later. The car is running, and Anna is driving away.

ANNA SHERIDAN  
 (annoyed and deflated)  
 Well... Shit.  
 (MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

That went -- well, about as you'd expect, actually. Kate left as soon as the patrol did. It was just someone from the Observatory... They were picking up interference from my van and decided to check it out. That blip on the scanner was just *their* scanners, interfering with mine. Thankfully they didn't notice the gun, and we figured out what was wrong pretty quickly. Apparently, using a tape recorder from the 80's ten miles away from the world's biggest radio telescope wasn't my brightest idea. All it took was a few crossed wires, and a billion dollar telescope loses a night's worth of research... And I lose my best shot at stopping the Echo.

(beat, bitterly)

Sometimes that seems like all Kate and I have: crossed wires.

Interference. Old faults. We try, but -- I guess we're just too different now. Or too similar. Or just... Our own people.

(beat)

It was a mistake asking her to come out here. Even if the Echo turned up -- I doubt she'd be able to tell the difference between us anymore.

CLACK.

The tape runs out and ejects from the player. SAM SIGHS HEAVILY.

SAM BAILEY

(flat)

Echoes. Ghosts. Mirrors. Caves. Hellhounds. Fire. Black Holes, snow demons, and evil wishing wells.

(beat, then angrily)

WHAT THE FUCK DOES IT MEAN?

Sam stands, picks up his recorder, and throws it across the room. The sound crashes to static as it hits the wall, then the floor.

SAM BAILEY (CONT'D)

(from across the room,  
breathing heavily)

(MORE)

SAM BAILEY (CONT'D)  
 What's the point, huh? What's the point of any of this? Just to screw with me? Make sure my life's more of a goddamn nightmare than it already is? Because I'm done, I'm *do--ne*, with this bullshit.

KNOCK KNOCK. Someone at the front door, hesitant. Sam storms across the room, throwing open the door.

SAM BAILEY (CONT'D)  
 (breathlessly angry)  
 Of for godssake -- *Piss off...!*  
 (stops, then, confused)  
 What the hell?

RING. RING. The house phone. SAM GROWLS, slams the door, and crosses heavily to pick it up.

SAM BAILEY (CONT'D)  
 (ready to tear them a new one)  
 Do you have any idea what time it is...!  
 (beat, then quieter)  
 What? Hello? I can barely hear...  
 Who is this?  
 (listens, tone changes to disbelief)  
 You... It can't be... You're...

Through this, static is rising on the broken recorder. The last word just manages to break through.

SAM BAILEY (CONT'D)  
 (confused and fearful)  
 Sheridan?

The recording fails, turning into sharp edged digital distortion before...

BEEP. It cuts off.

END THEME AND  
 CREDITS