

CUMULUS

*The Sheridan Tapes - Season 01, Episode 21*  
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Based on story and characters from  
"Homestead on the Corner"  
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COLD OPEN - RADIO WEATHER INTRO SOUND

DAWN

(much too happy)

Good morning Nevada! Dawn here with Morning Dawn Weather for the Weekend, here to give you this weekend's forecast. And it's a weird one-thunderstorms! Tropical storms surging along the Baja coast will carry moisture northward through the Gulf of California into the Desert Southwest and Southern California. Expect muggy air and increased thunderstorm activity through the whole of Southern Nevada, which, strangely enough, seems to be a pattern across the country, with high levels of storm activity across the Midwest meaning we're all in for a wild weekend. Thunder only happens when it's raining, so get out of that pool and get indoors! June is a little early in the season for all this charged air here in Nevada, but we'll gladly take that moisture, won't we? Now back to Skip for your Daily Update.

OPENING THEME

The inside of Dr. Ren Park's office in ISPHA, quiet except for the occasional sounds of thunder outside.

Video recording starts.

REN PARK

(nervous)

Okay, got the video started, and... here we go. Ugh, is that really what my shirt looks like? I was going for cool science dad, but it's a little... divorced dad who just wants to see his kids again.

(beat)

Time to retire this shirt, then.

(he walks back, adjusts his stance, sighs)

Dr. Caldwell thought a video of myself speaking would help with the nerves, but...

(MORE)

REN PARK (CONT'D)

it's Stanford, so how much is this really going to help?

(beat)

Once again, I've had too much caffeine, and I'm weirdly giving my own exposition for me and only me.

(walking back to computer)

Ooookay, deleting this one...

Silence for a moment. Then, video recording starts again, and we hear Ren shuffling back from his camera to get in place for the video.

REN PARK (CONT'D)

(starts nervous, gains confidence as he talks)

Hello and welcome, students of Stanford!

Outside, a massive thunderclap.

REN PARK (CONT'D)

Jesus!

(sighs, laughs a little, the ominous nature of that opening is a bit funny)

So my competition is Enough Electricity to Power New York City for 26 Minutes. Piece of cake.

(sighs, charging into battle against his nerves)

Thank you for joining me here today, especially since it required coming back to campus during your summer break. I hope you feel that this talk ends up being worth it! Most of you probably haven't heard of me, so I'll tell you a little about myself. My name is Doctor Ren Park, and I work at the Institute for Stellar Propulsion, Heuristics, and Aeronautics, better known as ISPHA, in Ventura, California. I have a background in aerospace engineering, like some of you, and my work now involves a lot of research in physics as well, like many of the rest of you. Congratulations on making it this far! I know first-hand how difficult being a grad student is.

(MORE)

## REN PARK (CONT'D)

I hope that as you carry on into your career or perhaps the further reaches of academia, you'll be able to glean something from my talk today.

(beat)

When I was invited to speak to you, my future competitors, my challenge was actually in figuring out how to narrow down my topic. There are a million things I could talk about, and actually, if you catch me after this, I'm happy to go on and on and...

(clears throat, shuffles notes)

Um, but... when I was invited to speak with you, after narrowing it down, I decided that what I wanted to leave you with was a sense of excitement for what's to come after you leave school. Things may seem wild now, as many of you are beginning your studies and research into more contemporary and abstract topics, but I want to tell you, without giving too much away, that it gets even stranger.

(beat)

A few years ago, I had an experience working in my office alone one night that I can only describe as... unexpected. It was one of those nights when the breakthroughs were nearly outpacing my research, which, unfortunately, I'm not authorized to tell you about today. But what I am allowed to tell you, at least in part, is where that night led me next.

(beat)

Take a moment to think about everything you know about mushrooms. Or to put it scientifically, mycology. What are some things that we know about fungal life?

(shuffles cards, mumbling)

Yes, very good point-no, you're thinking of bean sprouts-no, they don't give you an extra life-yes, good.

(shuffles cards back together, clears throat)

(MORE)

## REN PARK (CONT'D)

One property of mushrooms that you probably haven't thought of is that they may hold a secret to our understanding of time. I know, you probably weren't expecting that one! Should have dosed up before class, am I right-

(to himself)

No, I can't say that...

(stats again)

Ah, you probably weren't expecting that! This is a field of study that has remained somewhat out of the spotlight until recently. You may or may not be familiar with the work of mycologist Paul Stamets. He has a quote that I think opens this topic beautifully: "Fungi are the interface organisms between life and death."

(beat)

Stamets' work with the military is hardly open for public knowledge, but many of his stories are contained in his books and in interviews available online, which I'd encourage you to check out. Among some of his more famous stories about the power of psychedelic mushrooms, or psilocybin, are some frankly unbelievable accounts of people allegedly gaining back senses that had been lost, overcoming speech disorders, healing trauma from their early lives, and even predicting the future. That last one actually has quite a bit to do with some of the work that I'm currently-

(shuffles cards)

Nope, can't say that either...

(starts again)

Did you know that the largest and oldest organism on earth... is a mushroom? *Armillaria ostoyae*, or what I like to call the "Humongous Fungus," is a fungal colony that covers 2200 acres of Malheur National Forest, Oregon. It's calculated to be up to 8,650 years old, weighing thousands of tons.

(MORE)

## REN PARK (CONT'D)

Imagine, if we were working on decoding this organism's experiences, what we could learn about the Earth.

(pauses)

Ooh, wait...

(starts again)

Imagine, if we could decode this organism's experiences, what we could learn about the Earth. Already, hundreds of research projects are being conducted on fungal life in the Pacific Northwest, and many of these projects have interesting implications for how we can solve everything from our climate change crisis, to the survival of the bees, to the future health of humanity. But so far, there's one problem that science hasn't even been able to touch... do we know what that is?

(beat)

Entropy.

(beat)

In your study, you have learned that a state of total entropy is the natural conclusion of everything in the universe. But... what could we learn from an organism that may be able to resist entropy? In their very nature, fungi are involved in the decomposition of other living beings, so decay does not have the same stranglehold on them as it does other life. There is evidence to suggest that fungi is capable of storing all of its learned information so that even when a colony is impacted or destroyed, the spores that are released ensure the survival of its knowledge. In other words, mycelial networks potentially house indestructible information.

(beat)

Imagine, even further, if we were able to transmit information on a potentially indestructible network?

(beat)

According to Stamets, it may be possible.

(MORE)

## REN PARK (CONT'D)

Quote: "I see the mycelium as the Earth's natural Internet, a consciousness with which we might be able to communicate. Through cross-species interfacing, we may one day exchange information with these sentient cellular networks."

(beat)

The future of scientific discovery is quickly becoming cross-disciplinary. It's high time for all of us, but especially our emerging leaders, to embrace topics that we might not have considered before. Which is why I'm here speaking to you today.

(beat)

So here's the proposition I'd like to present to you in this lecture:

(speaking a bit slower,  
ominously)

If fungi resists the pull of entropy, and our understanding of the passage of time is based on an ever-increasing amount of entropy, what does that say about mycelium's abilities to resist the passage of time itself? And what could we accomplish if we were able to communicate with that network, inside... or outside... of time?

The THUNDER rolls.

## EXT. CAMPGROUND - NIGHT

We are at a campground in central Wisconsin, the sound of rain lightly hitting a tarp above a tent where Kate Sheridan is resting.

## KATE SHERIDAN

(exhausted)

I am so... so... soooooo tired.

(groans) Peter and I thought this would be a nice weekend away as a family: you know, take the RV out to Wisconsin, Andrew will get to burn off all that 4-year-old energy he has, we'll all get some fresh air, I'll get a break to recover from busy season... yeah, no.

(beat)

I mean, maybe it'll get better.

(MORE)

KATE SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

Andrew is finally passed out in the RV, Peter's walking to the nearest gas station to get us some hopefully palatable red wine, and I'm decompressing in the tent under our canopy. Pretty weird to be sitting here actually, Anna would die if she saw me like this. Sitting in a real tent, sneaking a cassette recorder into the camping supplies—I can't believe I could even find one of these. I just thought...

(beat)

Well, I don't know. Ugh, I can't believe Peter actually thought it would be a good idea to tell Andrew that old camp story about the... what was it? Beechwood Monster? Apparently he heard it from his sister. I thought Andrew would be terrified, but... he wasn't. Actually, if he'd been scared, that would've been easier. He asked us questions for what must've been... an hour? No, probably twenty minutes, but it was unrelenting.

(beat)

"Does the Beechwood Monster live here too?" "When is his birthday?" "Is the Beechwood Monster as old as the dinosaurs?" "Does he have to take naps?" "Do the-is the-how we-can we when we see the Beechwood Monster?"

(SIGHS)

To make this weekend extra fun, I'm also fighting a deadline. Ren reached out to me for help with his taxes. Yeah, past the deadline. And it's a lot... a few years' worth. He has a pretty crazy work life. And a crazy idea of what counts as a business expense—he's saved the receipt for every single snack purchase he made in the past three years. Thankfully they were in order, but... have you ever seen a 300 page PDF of snack receipts? He named it "Research Fuel 2016-2018." I guess once you pop, you really can't stop.

(beat)

Oof, that was bad.

(MORE)

KATE SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

(beat)

Anyway, Ren threw me a shocking amount of cash for the job. And hey—a book of snack receipts is the most exciting thing to happen at work this year. Not that I'm complaining, I mean, who's really excited about their work, honestly?

(beat)

Well, Anna was... is.

A long moment of silence.

KATE SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

Why am I sitting in a tent on the ground in the middle of a thunderstorm? Talking to myself like Anna used to do? I would say this is the grief talking, but if I'm grieving, then that means...

(beat)

She's just been gone a long time. That's it. She's disappeared before, this is just... an extra-long break from the world. A classic Anna Sheridan retreat from reality.

(beat)

Without her van. Or her possessions.

(beat)

I'm so mad at her. I know I shouldn't be. Oh my God, she could be hurt. She could be trapped somewhere. That... thing that was pretending to be Anna could be... no, that's too awful. And it's been two years, it might be long gone. When Anna called last year, she didn't seem to be worried about it anymore. At least, she never brought it up, so...

(beat)

I can't... I can't believe that thing had Andrew. I can't believe I didn't notice something was wrong. How stupid am I? I spent three days with a... a... fake, cheerful Anna, like it knew somehow that's what I wanted to see.

(beat)

Although, I remember something now about those three days that I haven't thought of in a while.

(MORE)

KATE SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

I barely ever looked into her-its... eyes. (pause) While it was there with us. It's like some part of my brain was trying to warn me, but I didn't listen. I remember feeling at the time that those three days were some of the most peaceful that we ever had, and that's how I kept describing it, but now that I think about it... I wasn't calm. I was numb. I hardly felt... anything. It was like I was just floating above myself the whole time. And I remember when Anna finally called to check in on us, I was... angry. So angry.

(beat)

If that thing knew how to get around my defenses, what else did it know? What else was it able to... read? About me? What did it want?

(she shivers)

I can't. I can't go there. I saw what curiosity about this stuff did to Anna, and I can't-

(beat)

I feel so stupid for falling for it, though. Anna was so strong after that day. We never really got along, but after that, she just made me feel like... it wasn't my fault. To be honest, that's probably the closest I've felt to her. She didn't feel like my baby sister anymore, she was just... Anna Sheridan. I loved getting to see that side of her. She was strong, knowledgeable, sure of herself... I guess I can see why she does what she does. She's really grown up a lot.

(beat)

I wonder... I wonder what kinds of things she's seen in her life? I feel like if she told me about it now, I'd probably believe her. If she wasn't high, at least.

She laughs, rueful.

KATE SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

She's tough, though. Wherever she is... I don't believe she's dead.

(MORE)

KATE SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

I know that's crazy, but I can't believe it. She fought everything, always. She fought me our whole lives, just as much as she fought with mom and dad. That's the thing, I was always in the same category as our parents with her. I never got that. She just assumed I was happy with... how things turned out. I'm just as stubborn as her though, and...

(beat)

I never found a way to tell her... what? It's not like I want to live in a van and go traipsing around the country to conjure up monsters and whisper around unholy graves, or whatever else, and then celebrate with a... what did she call it? Hotboxing. I think. But like... I wouldn't mind a road trip. Maybe even listen to some scary audiobook or something, to make her happy. Does that make sense?

(a small pause)

I think I could handle a Stephen King.

A small rustling noise in the woods.

KATE SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

Hello? Anyone there?

Only the sounds of the storm and the woods.

KATE SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

This better not turn into...

(sighs)

No, I'm okay. Everything is fine. There's animals in the woods, that's all it is.

(beat)

Huh... that reminds me of a line of Anna's that's always... well, haunted me I guess. For lack of a better word.

(beat)

(MORE)

KATE SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

"People say, 'Don't go out in the woods at night, there's a monster out there.' People say, 'Stay back from the edge, out of the dark, away from anything dangerous, unknown, or new...' and maybe they're right, if all you want your life to be is long."

(beat)

It's unfortunately lyrical, I know. I can't help but feel that she wrote it about me. If she could only see me-

The rustling is closer now.

KATE SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

(calling out, not yet worried)

This is really not the time! Whoever you are.

The rustling continues.

KATE SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

(insistent)

Hey, I-you need to leave us alone. You are NOT welcome here!

(aside)

I swear to God, you bring one cassette recorder on your family camping trip and-

The rustling continues, with a small noise that sounds something like Anna.

KATE SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

Anna? No, it can't...

The rustling is mixing with footsteps.

KATE SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

(worried)

Oh my God, not again. Not again.

(gasps, then, quietly)

Andrew!

Footsteps. Thunderstorm. An echo in the storm that sounds like Anna.

ANNA SHERIDAN (RECORDED)

"What... would... you..."

KATE SHERIDAN  
 (fierce, as she starts to  
 get up)  
 Okay, that's it.

She stuffs the cassette recorder in her jacket pocket, opens the zipper on the tent, steps outside. Light raindrops hit her jacket. The footsteps continue. Kate is fiddling with the switch on a flashlight.

KATE SHERIDAN (CONT'D)  
 This *stupid* flashlight.  
 (calling out)  
 If you think I'm going down without  
 a fight, you've got-

PETER SLATE  
 (calling out from the  
 distance)  
 Kate!

KATE SHERIDAN  
 Oh my God, Peter, I'm sorry. I  
 wasn't -- haha! Wow. Oh... Peter.  
 It's you! Of course it is. Who else  
 would it-  
 (CLEARS THROAT)  
 Did they have a good pinot?

CLICK

We are in Bill Tyler's house, Oslow County, Nevada. Thunder and rain raging outside.

VOICEMAIL TONE.

BILL TYLER  
 (awkward)  
 Hey mom... It's Bill. Uh... wow, it  
 is good to hear from you. I'm sorry  
 I missed you, I passed out almost  
 as soon as I got home from the  
 hospital--and by that I mean, I took  
 a nap, I'm feeling fine now. No  
 losing consciousness here. No sir-  
 ee... Man, it's dumping out there.  
 (beat)  
 Um, anyway, yeah... you can  
 probably tell my voice sounds a bit  
 tired, but it's not nearly as bad  
 as right after the accident. I hope  
 that eases your worries.  
 (MORE)

## BILL TYLER (CONT'D)

My lungs were damaged, of course, and they're not quite what they used to be. But the doctors say that my recovery has already been "unexpected," as they put it, so they told me to have hope and keep resting.

(beat)

I was lucky that Sam was there, with how quickly that fire sprung up and with how bad my insides were burning, there's no way I could've...

(beat)

Uh, well, I don't need to go into that. I guess you could say there's been more than our fair share of strange things happening around Oslow lately. Some light officer impersonation, mysterious disappearances, ghostly whispers, ominous coworkers, bar fires... I'm sorry, that's flippant of me, I guess that's how we tend to... handle this kind of stuff.

(beat)

I don't want to worry you, we've got a good team here, and we're all looking out for each other. People say and do a lot of crazy things, that's all. You wouldn't believe half the stuff I've seen in this job. It's enough to make you doubt your own sanity sometimes, but... I don't want you to worry, we've got this handled. We'll figure out who's responsible. Someone is responsible.

(beat)

Anyway, I'll pass along your thanks to Sam, I'm sure he'll-well, he's a private person, but I'm sure it'll mean... something... to him.

(no longer awkward)

I was surprised to see that you called, actually. It's been a long time. The last time was... not great. I know that this is a lot to put on a voicemail, but...

(beat)

Well, mom, I'm still with Robert. I'm still exactly who I told you I was back then. To be honest...

(MORE)

BILL TYLER (CONT'D)

I was kind of relieved that you didn't pick up so I could just talk.

(beat)

Maybe you've... well, not exactly changed your mind, maybe, but... I just need you to know that I love my life. I do. I love Robert. He has taken such good care of me. And I'm happy.

A moment of silence.

BILL TYLER (CONT'D)

I think you would love Robert. If you ever want to meet him. He loves Antiques Roadshow as much as you do. Maybe more! If you can believe that.

(beat)

Anyway, this is a long message!

(LAUGHS)

Sorry if I rambled, these meds are -  
- I'm just surprised to hear from you, that's all. It's brought up a lot of memories. Maybe, if... if you can hear me. Really hear me. I'd love to talk again.

(beat)

And I love you too, mom. Thank you for saying it.

He ends the call. We're now in audio drama mode, stepping out of found footage mode.

He lets out a sigh that must've been inside during that whole voicemail. He stands up, walks through his front door, and stands on his porch to watch the thunder and rain.

He snuffles a bit, feeling emotionally heavy, the intensity of the weather and the voicemail stirring up memories from his past.

BILL TYLER (CONT'D)

(singing softly, to himself)

And am I born to die?

To lay this body down?

And must my trembling spirit fly

Into a world unknown

(MORE)

BILL TYLER (CONT'D)

And must my trembling spirit fly

Into a world unknown

A land of deepest shade

Unpierced by human thought

The dreary regions of the dead

Where all things are forgot

The dreary regions of the dead

Where all things are forgot

A massive thunderclap.

INT. SAM BAILEY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

We are in Sam Bailey's house, Oslow County, Nevada. The thunder and rain are just as loud here.

Sam is hyperventilating, but he does begin to get control of his breath. Shaky breath in, shaky breath out. The sounds of the storm begin to intermingle with sounds of Anna and DeWitt.

SAM BAILEY

Just a storm...

Shaky breath in, shaky breath out. The Beechwood monster and fire add to the sounds of the storm.

SAM BAILEY (CONT'D)

It's *just* a storm...

Slightly smoother breath in, slightly smoother breath out. The sound of waves joins the cacophonous storm. He gulps. He continues breathing, feeling more in control. The noise builds to a crescendo.

ANNA SHERIDAN (RECORDED)

"save... yourself..."

KNOCK KNOCK. The only other sound is the natural sounds of the storm, a bit quieter.

MARIA SOL

(beyond the door)

You ready to go?

SAM BAILEY  
Be right there, Maria.

A long pause.

MARIA SOL  
Uh... You good, Sam?

SAM BAILEY  
Yes. Let's go.

ROLL END THEME  
AND CREDITS