

Stream of Consciousness

by

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FADE IN ON:

INT. PRIVATE OFFICE - EVENING

A shoe box sized room, furnished with the barest of necessities. Diplomas hang on the walls, next to scientific charts and diagrams.

DR. SAUL AARON (72) sits at a scuffed wooden desk. He scribbles notes feverishly, and looks frustrated.

SAUL
Equation's off again. Damn it.

He glances out the window at a darkening sky.

A trembling hand reaches into the desk, pulls out a pill organizer. He dry swallows two capsules.

SAUL
Something's not right.

He lays his forehead down on the desk.

After a moment, he looks up. On the desk is a picture of an older woman with short white hair, and a twinkle in her eye.

Despite himself, Saul smiles.

SAUL
You were right, Lillith. I always did work too hard.

A YELL from an adjoining room draws his attention.

DOUG (O.S.)
Saul, you gotta get in here. Now!

Saul rises from his chair, and limps towards the door.

INT. MAIN LAB - CONTINUOUS

Saul stands framed in the doorway. The room before him is more expansive than his office. And far more modern.

SAUL
What now? Another calibration?

The centerpiece of the lab stands six feet tall. A glowing blue sphere sits perched above the cylindrical base. A circular grid floats freely across the surface. It HUMS like an air-conditioner.

DR. DOUG PERRUTHERS (40s) stands several feet away. His face glows with excitement as bright as the globe.

DOUG

Hardly. Listen to this.

Doug dials a series of numbers into a stand-alone keypad.

The grid on the sphere slides across the surface. The air directly above it looks somehow distorted.

CRACKLING STATIC fills the room. Followed by a female voice; filtered but audible.

VOICE #1

Does he know I'm here? So quiet now. So calm...

Saul purses his lips in concentration.

He wanders to the other end of the lab, and the only other entrance.

He sticks his head in the doorway. The room's empty.

Doug raises a finger.

DOUG

That's one sine wave combination. Now, if I alter it a bit...

The grid slides across the globe. The voice fades away, replaced by that of a younger male.

VOICE #2

Back at home. I must be back at home...

More codes are punched in. This time, the voice is distinctly foreign.

Saul raises an eyebrow.

SAUL

Is that...?

DOUG

Yeah. Cantonese. Can't make out the details, but it's definitely a coherent thought pattern.

Saul stares at the device as it powers down.

SAUL
We finally did it.

DOUG
That's not sound waves we're picking up -
it's electromagnetic signals. We're
reading minds, actual thoughts. After
all this time, we finally cracked the
code!

He grins at Saul, a spark of mischief in his eye.

DOUG
And they said telepathic communication
was an impossibility. Looks like you'll
get that chance to retire after all. And
rub it in the noses of those bastards at
Dunning Institute.

Saul sticks his hands in his lab coat, and smiles.

SAUL
Funny. I knew you'd say that.

INT. REC ROOM - LATER

Barely larger than a closet, the rec room is furnished
with a table and a few folding chairs.

Saul and Doug sit at either end, a half-finished bottle
of whiskey between them.

DOUG
Think of the possibilities, once the
technology's more portable. Blue tooth
headsets. Use 'em like cell phones.
Imagine being able to dial into a group
mind, like a one big mental chat room.
Or the enhancements to sex, if you stop
and think about it.

He waves a hand across the table.

DOUG
This is going to revolutionize the
communications industry. Or replace it
completely.

SAUL

And cause more privacy issues than any other invention in the history of mankind.

DOUG

Eh. We'll password protect the system.

Saul smiles at his younger companion.

SAUL

Didn't work so well with your e-mail account, did it?

Doug grins drunkenly at Saul.

DOUG

You worry too much, old man. Besides, it'll be years before it's miniaturized enough to be an issue. Until then, we market the tech to government. And rake in enough money to buy ourselves an island.

Saul's face darkens imperceptibly.

DOUG

What, worried that the military's going use it for nefarious purposes?

SAUL

Wouldn't surprise me. But it's not that. Something's been troubling me about the calculations.

DOUG

Why? It's obviously works.

SAUL

Yes, it does. But I wonder if we're misinterpreting what we're hearing.

Doug shakes his head, points towards the lab.

DOUG

No way. That thing in there isn't a glorified microphone. Those are definitely thought waves. A different one, for each pattern that we program into the database.

SAUL

I know. But you're assuming that what we're hearing are the thoughts of live human beings.

Doug grabs the bottle and tops off both drinks.

DOUG

What else would they be? Rocks?

Saul looks down into his glass, and says nothing.

Doug squints at him, frown lines etched into his face.

DOUG

Please don't say you're implying what I think you're implying...

Saul shakes his head, and doesn't look up.

SAUL

Just hear me out. The success of our amplifier hinges on the idea that consciousness is defined by the existence of a specific pattern of electromagnetic waves...as individual to each person as a fingerprint. And if energy can be neither created nor destroyed, then it's possible for the signal to survive apart from the body.

Doug sits back in his chair.

DOUG

Fuck me. You're talking about ghosts.

SAUL

In a sense, yes. But a bit more scientific than that.

Doug looks less than impressed.

DOUG

But if a person's body is destroyed, that terminates the signal. Like turning off a flashlight. End of story.

He snaps his fingers to emphasize the point.

Saul shakes his head emphatically, his arms crossed.

SAUL

Continue the analogy. A beam of light keeps going, long after a flashlight's turned off. Maybe it's the same with consciousness. Who knows? That might even be the basis for reincarnation. The return of the individual, once a body is born that generates the exact same electromagnetic pattern.

Doug SIGHS softly, leans across the table.

DOUG

Saul, I know you'd want that to be true. Really, I do. I know what you went through with Lillith. She was a beautiful person.

Saul frowns, his eyes glued to the bottle of whiskey.

SAUL

This isn't wishful thinking. Give me a little more credit than that. What concerns me is the vagueness of the signals. If these were broadcasts from live human beings, there'd be some degradation, depending on the distance between the person and the receiver. But the broadcasts are all coming in crystal clear. With no variation due to direction. That doesn't make sense.

Doug heads towards Saul's end of the table.

DOUG

Occam's Razor, Saul. The simplest explanation is always the best. There's no reason to believe that we're hearing anything more than the thoughts of real human beings. Nothing supernatural. No echoes of ghosts - as much as you'd like to think so.

He places a hand on Saul's shoulder.

DOUG

You're just tired. We've been working at this forever. Give the success some time to sink in...along with the alcohol. You'll be thinking clearer in the morning.

Saul rises from his chair, every movement old and creaky.

SAUL

You're right. I am tired. You are, too.
We should both get some sleep.

He smiles at Doug, his lips pressed into a thin line.

SAUL

We've got a report to submit tomorrow.
And a press release to hand deliver to
Dunning Institute, personally.

Doug grins widely.

DOUG

That's the bastard I know and love. See
you in the morning.

Saul waves, and watches him leave.

The door CLICKS shut. The smile slips quickly from
Saul's face.

INT. OFFICE HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Doug pulls a battered jacket from a hook; somewhat
unsteady on his feet.

He snaps instantly alert at the sound of the amplifier,
HUMMING to life in the other room.

Doug drops the jacket, and races back towards the lab.

INT. MAIN LAB - CONTINUOUS

Doug bursts in to find Saul at the keyboard - rapidly
entering numbers.

The globe starts to glow as the machine warms up.

DOUG

What the hell do you think you're doing?

SAUL

Running some tests.

DOUG

Don't bull shit me. I know you too well.

Doug steps forward, an anxious look on his face.

DOUG

You're too close to the generator. Get some clearance!

Saul punches in additional coordinates. The circular grid swivels, and focuses on a spot three feet from Saul.

The air shimmers, as Saul limps dangerously close.

SAUL

You mean, like this?

Doug edges around the device carefully.

DOUG

You're drunk. And you're not thinking this through. I'm not sure what you think you're doing...

SAUL

A simple reversal of the equation. That which can be condensed, can also be extracted. We're using the amplifier as a receiver. No reason we can't use it to broadcast as well.

Doug grimaces. He points to the globe, now glowing an intense blueish-white.

DOUG

You see that distortion? That beam is disrupting molecules in the air. You get any closer, it'll rip you to pieces.

SAUL

With this body, who cares? Doesn't work too well, anyway.

Saul leans to one side, favoring his better leg.

SAUL

Can you imagine it, Doug? Being a free floating beam of thought? No pain, no worries. No limits.

DOUG

Saul, step away from the amplifier. Now.

SAUL

You were always the practical engineer of the group. Couldn't grasp the wider concept, only the applications. But I can. I'm right about this one, Doug. You'll see.

Saul looks into the beam, his face illuminated.

SAUL

And when I'm proved right, Lillith will
be waiting.

Doug steps forward, careful to keep a safe distance from
the amplifier's beam.

Saul looks up, and grins.

SAUL

Goodbye, Doug. You can keep that island
for yourself.

DOUG

No!

Saul steps into the beam. His body ripples, then blows
into pieces. Dust-like fragments dissipate in the air.

The amplifier overloads, then short circuits. The lab is
plunged into darkness.

The HUM of the amplifier fades, then dies.

Silence reigns...except for the sound of Doug's shoes,
TAPPING against the floor.

DOUG

Saul? Saul, are you there? Can you hear
me?

FINAL FADE OUT