

Intercepted Transmission

By Gwendolyn Phair

1. SOUND: Heather's voice comes in warped and staticy, as if something isn't properly calibrated. There is a faint beeping representing someone playing with dials and knobs.

2. HEATHER: C'mon broadcast... This is the...

3. SOUND: Starts to fade out like the connection is being lost.

4. HEATHER: Nope... Hang on...

5. SOUND: The sound screeches as if it is being realigned and the static intensifies.

6. HEATHER: Work.. Please work... This is the...

7. SOUND: The static fades into the background enough to barely hear the words over them.

8. HEATHER: This is the deep space vessel 22X, transmitting on all frequencies – I hope. I just sent my 47th transmission back to mission control and I have received no replies for 36 days. This is a breach of protocol in the highest degree. I'm 51 days into a 90 day mission and... (Heather seems to forget where she is.)

9. SOUND: As if by some miracle the static almost completely dissipates.

10. HEATHER: The Station 447 B on Saturn was supposed to check in with me daily. I don't know why I can't reach mission control. That's where my mission control is located, on Saturn. Well, you know that every deep space vessel works out of Saturn. I'm sorry, that was unprofessionally formatted. It's just that. 37 days ago I picked up an energy surge from there. Like an explosion - or something. It's inappropriate to hypothesize with insufficient evidence. I know that. (soft like a curse.) Heather, you know that. It's bleak. Really bleak here. I mean I still think it's beautiful. I'm not considering a career change or anything, it's just... wow... wow...

(snaps back into professionalism.) My name is Heather Briggs. This is the deep space vessel 22X, transmitting on all frequencies. I am transmitting from my current coordinates electronically with this message and am in an auto pilot vessel traveling in an orbit around 134340 Pluto. I will dock at Spaceport 480 A on Saturn. I have been instructed to route my transmissions through to Station 447 B on Saturn. I would like confirmation that these have been received. I am now transmitting on all frequencies in line with standard emergency protocol. End transmission. (Indecisive silence.)

11. SOUND: The static once again flares then dissipates as if she's turned the machine off and on again. The faint beeping from the beginning can be momentarily heard.

12. HEATHER: Sorry. I'm sorry. It's just, I was sent out to survey an unidentified anomalous event and I really shouldn't be saying this, but it's been thirty seven days and it really looks like the station - Station 447 B on Saturn, yeah that one - I was supposed to be transmitting my findings to there and in every scan I do of there I just get a bunch of space junk, like it was blown up. This could be a fault in my long-range sensors. It's actually probably that. Everybody knows that these corporate-made ships are garbage, I don't know why America keeps buying them. But my team is there, stationed there. Yeah. And one of them, Lateia, was supposed to be here, instead of me. (makes a decision)

13. SOUND: The static once again flares as if she's moving closer to the proverbial mic/radio of the ship.

14. HEATHER: I'll probably get fired for this, but two years ago I saw the same anomaly. The same exact readings. I was working for Adamas Inc. yeah I know, but I needed the money and the government paid astronauts get all the glory, but their salary doesn't. So I sold out. Well my student debt doesn't think of it that way. It was a good decision, you have to understand. At the time it was. I still defend it.

I was in charge of sending out a vessel to look at it, the anomaly. I reported it immediately. That's protocol, every unidentified anomaly, UFO, piece of space junk goes straight to the Pentagon for review. But, I didn't wait for the government's all clear, go ahead, green light. Whatever you want to call it. I sent out a vessel instead. I mean my higher-ups kept telling me that the Government's go ahead was really just to stop the lawsuits - you know sue the Government not us - basically ceremonial meaningless protocol.

But I still sent out that vessel and you know when you do something wrong, but justifiable, people always just think of the justification. Not that it's wrong. So here I was caught up in the dreamlike fear of letting my supervisor's supervisor down - yeah this anomaly went all the way to the top, I think even the CEO was alerted - they were all just snakes hissing into my ear. Make the call Heather. I'd always followed the rules as a kid, it was why I liked math, rules to dictate our world, make up our universe, irrefutable cosmic truths. Obviously it's a lot more sophisticated than that. But yeah.

No one in my family cared about that order, they couldn't see that - you know that thing where you line dominos then tip them over and each knocks the other down - my parents thought they'd just fall sideways circumnavigating me entirely, a statistical improbability yes, but they were certain they were that. Because nothing that they did mattered. It only affected me if they said it did. I guess if anything this whole mess finally proved me right. We're all just dominos.

Maybe I wanted to see if my parents were right after all. I guess I wanted to be that gut-trusting movie cliché, or maybe I was tired of being told I was playing it safe, but safety protocols exist for a reason. Maybe, it was the corporate snakes in my ear begging me to take the fall for them - If I made the call then they would have to fire me if it went bad and if it went good, well then win win. I don't know. I'd rather feel culpable than feel like a pawn. Besides, I was the one who made the choice in the end. It was all on me.

You'd probably guess that they were annihilated. You'd be right. The vessel that I sent out, my crew was killed, the one I was solely responsible for. Radiated to be exact, and the vessel was blown apart. Those are the readings I'm getting from Saturn incidentally, the exact same readings. One of them managed to get into the escape pod. That's how we knew about the radiation, actually. Post-mortem analysis. I didn't go to the funeral.

I was also fired. But some strings were pulled and I'm now working here, for the government. So kill six people and see where it gets you. That's horrible! Forget I said that! In a horribly ironic sort of way, I'm the leading expert since I was the only one who lived through it, so it's not really a job. I'll be let go, and rightfully so, after it all gets sorted, I expect. The world isn't cruel enough to ensure a murderer's financial stability. I mean, my supervisor and all those guys lived through it too, but they're not scientists, they only want to see if there's a profit to be made.

Lateia, was supposed to go, she was, having the most space flight experience, it made sense. but I talked everybody into sending me instead. Thinking she'd be safer on the base. I really hope she is. I hope that something has gone horribly wrong with my sensors and yeah. They all better be alive, I can't be the survivor again. That's not how the world works, there's justice right?

It makes no sense to expend the ship's resources like this. I'm sorry. It's funny I never thought space could get lonely, with all the stars to keep me company. When I was young and my parents stayed out late, I talked with them, the stars, so I wasn't alone. Scientifically, many were already dead, I was talking to their ghosts. I better not be doing the same thing now. End transmission.

15. SOUND: The static once again flares and remains for a moment until fading to silence.

Copyright: 1-12719314752