

SET YOUR YOUR DIAL TO DEAD

The first collection of tales from 'The Burn Archives'

**66 THRILLING AND SUPERNATURAL SHORT TALES
FROM THE UNNATURAL RADIO STATION...
66.6 THE BURN**



Written by
E.L. Pilkington

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First published in October 2025.

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Cover design by Earl Pilkington using NightCafe & Ideogram Ai engines
Interior formatting by using SCRIBUS open source desktop publishing.

INTRODUCTION

In the quiet spaces between bandwidths and separate radio stations, in the static and hiss of signals searching for a home - or at the very least, a listener - there lies a universe of stories.

This short collection gathers tales from that peculiar realm where voices travel through air, where strangers connect through invisible waves, and where communities form around the shared ritual of listening.

Radio stations are more than buildings filled with equipment, and station 66.6 The Burn is more than any other type of radio station. It has outposts all around the world, from Watford in England to Woop Woop, Australia, from India to Indiana and beyond.

The DJ speaking into the void never truly knows who might be listening - the insomniac seeking companionship, the long-haul trucker crossing endless highways, the teenager discovering new worlds through late-night broadcasts, or someone who is slightly... unhinged, who might take umbrage with what you have just said.

Some of these stories emerged from actual events, whispered confidences shared between colleagues during commercial breaks decades ago. Others sprouted from overheard fragments of caller conversations, and some began as station folklore—tales passed between shifts like sacred texts. Others are pure fiction, and all of them are packed into around or under 1,000 words each (this was the challenge I set myself).

The radio building itself features prominently - those labyrinthine studios with their soundproofed walls that have absorbed decades of secrets. The worn-smooth buttons on control panels. The coffee rings on script pages. The headphones that have embraced thousands of ears, the sound-proof walls that have heard EVERYTHING that was said.

These stories span my experiences in radio from the '80s through to its digital present, but all share that ineffable magic - the intimate connection between voice and ear, between broadcaster and listener, between signal and receiver.

Radio endures because it touches something primal in us - the need to hear another human voice telling a story, calling out, telling us that "You are not alone. I am here in the darkness with you."

Turn the dial. Adjust the frequency. Listen closely. Tune in to these stories, but hold on to someone as you do so.

Earl Pilkington - SEPTEMBER, 2025

Dedication:

To my writing companions - Random & Pixel - our two rescue cats who would often sit with me when I wrote (you are both missed dearly); to my wife Suzanne and daughter Kayla who put up with crazy ideas like this; and finally: to everyone in the editorial team for this ebook who contributed their time, energy and feedback: Brian, Sinah, Daisy, Cindy, Linnéa, Darren, Ana, Jenni, Hayden, Toni, Daniel, Meagan & Wei. Thank you all. **EP**

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"SPECIAL INVESTIGATION TONIGHT ON 'EXPOSE'..."

We start this collection off with a television exposé that digs deep into the old memory banks of the 1980s, when D&D and radio were the most important things in life.

[Dramatic music plays as the camera zooms in on Gerard Stream adjusting his tie in front of an abandoned radio station building]

"Good evening, America. I'm Gerard Stream, and tonight on 'EXPOSÉ' for Halloween 1992, we are investigating the mysterious shutdown of radio station Sixty-Six, Six... The Burn. Once the voice of heavy metal in the Midwest, this controversial station went silent overnight in October 1982, leaving behind nothing but conspiracy theories, rumours, and fear."

[Camera pans across graffiti-covered walls showing pentagrams and the numbers '666']

"The parking lot of what was once Sixty-Six, Six The Burn sits empty now, weeds pushing through cracked asphalt. No official explanation was ever given for the station's sudden closure. The very few former employees who could be found refused interviews. Station ownership records lead to dead ends and shell companies within shell companies."

[An anonymous man in a boiler suit cuts the chain holding the front door, then immediately runs away. We open the doors, and the camera follows the crew inside]

"The only thing we know for certain," I tell the camera as we force open the rusted back door, "is that The Burn went off air the weekend they were set to sponsor 'Dungeon-Fest '82' - what would have been the largest gathering of Dungeons & Dragons players in the Midwest."

Inside, dust covers abandoned offices and desks. Rolling Stone magazines from 1982 still sit in a breakroom. Something about the stillness feels unnatural, as if the building was evacuated in minutes.

"Local resident Martha Whitmore remembers: "People said the DJs were recruiting kids into satanic cults through that 'dragon game'. My son wanted to go to that festival. Thank God it was cancelled."

"Former station advertiser Dale Johnson is less convinced: "The Burn just played Ozzy and Maiden. That was its vibe, its niche. That's it. But there was this hysteria back then. Parents thought D&D was turning kids into devil worshippers and godless heathens."

"Our investigation discovered building inspection records citing "multiple electrical anomalies" and "unexplained equipment malfunctions" in the weeks before closure. A former sound engineer, who we'll call Tom, speaking on condition of anonymity, tells us: "Equipment would turn on by itself. Voices would appear on recordings nobody put there."

The transmitter would suddenly boost to maximum power."

Most disturbing are police reports from the night before Dungeon-Fest. Three teenagers broke into the station, allegedly to steal promotional materials. They were found hours later, unable to explain how they'd gotten trapped in the basement - a basement official building plans show doesn't exist."

[Camera follows Gerard descending dusty stairs]

"We're now heading to the station's lower level, where our equipment is already detecting unusual electromagnetic readings."

]The camera pans around the basement walls. They are covered with strange symbols - some matching those found in early D&D Monster Manuals, In one corner sits a custom-built broadcasting system, cables running into the broken concrete wall.]

"Station logs show a special midnight broadcast was planned for the eve of Dungeon-Fest called "The Summoning"... Just what was this show, and why did it never go to air?"

"With more questions than answers, we want to know:
What was Sixty-Six, Six The Burn really broadcasting?
Was it simply caught in the moral panic sweeping Reagan's America at the time?
Or was something more sinister at work?
There were rumours of back-masked messages in its broadcasts and music.
Others say the government secretly shut down The Burn because the frequencies it broadcast on caused behavioural changes in adolescents - all part of a classified psychological experiment."

"Local farmers also reported unusual phenomena near the radio tower out on the interstate: dead vegetation patterns forming symbols, migratory birds avoiding the area entirely. Plus, there are rumours of a "final broadcast" that only certain listeners heard - containing sounds that couldn't have been produced by 1980s technology. No known recording of that broadcast has ever surfaced."

"Finally, our investigation into station finances reveals that The Burn was receiving funding from a mysterious organisation linked to occult research institutes across the country."

[Static suddenly interrupts the broadcast; Gerard's microphone cuts out as lights flicker, Gerard looks nervously at camera, voice barely audible]

"Something's... interfering with our equipment... those... it's... the station... is..."

[Feed cuts to emergency broadcast test pattern, then to announcer]

"We apologise for the technical difficulties. 'EXPOSÉ with Gerard Stream will return..."

"THE SPOOKY CREW"

This ain't your usual gang of kids urban exploring and busting paranormal occurrences kind of story. Let's see if I can get away with it.

The radio station building sat like a rotting corpse on the edge of town, its skeletal frame silhouetted against the full moon. Jamie stood at the rusted rear door, her flashlight casting jittery beams across the peeling paint and shattered windows. Behind her, Mason fiddled with his camera, Tasha hugged herself against the cold, and Will kicked at a loose brick near the door lock.

"Are we really doing this?" Tasha asked, her voice tight. "This place gives me the creeps."

"Relax," Jamie said, her black hair catching the faint light as she turned to grin at her friend. "It's just an old building. What's it gonna do? Play us a spooky mixtape?"

"Yeah," Will chimed in with a smirk. "We'll be fine as long as no one says, 'Let's split up.'"

Mason rolled his eyes. "Can we just get inside? My subscribers are gonna love this." He then hit the live stream button on the camera.

Jamie pushed the door open with a groan of rusted hinges. The smell hit them first: mildew, dust, and something faintly metallic. The air inside was heavy, like it had been waiting for them.

The group stepped into the lobby, their footsteps echoing unnaturally loud in the silence. A faded poster on the wall caught Jamie's eye: '66.6 The Burn - Bringing You the Midnight Hour'. The smiling face of DJ Vance stared back at her, his eyes too bright, too alive for someone who'd been dead for decades.

"This place is a time capsule," Mason said, sweeping his camera across the room. "It's like they just... left."

"Yeah," Jamie muttered, her voice low. "Or like something made them leave."

They moved deeper into the station, their flashlights cutting through the darkness. The hallways were lined with recording booths, their glass windows smeared with grime, the occasional handprint, and dust... lots of dust. A faint hum seemed to vibrate through the walls, though none of them could pinpoint its source.

In the main studio, they found it: a massive soundboard covered in dust and cobwebs. A microphone hung from its stand like a guillotine waiting to drop. Above it, the ON-AIR sign loomed dark and dead.

"This is it," Mason said, setting up his camera on a tripod. "The heart of 'The Burn.'"

Jamie ran her fingers over the soundboard's switches and dials. "Do you think it still works?"

"Only one way to find out," Will said with a grin as he flipped a random switch.

The effect was immediate. The room buzzed to life as ancient machinery groaned and sputtered. The ON-AIR sign flickered once... twice... then blazed bright red.

"What did you do?" Tasha hissed.

"I didn't think it would actually work!" Will shot back.

Before anyone could respond, static crackled through the speakers. Then... a voice - smooth and velvety but laced with an undercurrent of malice.

"Good evening... listeners."

The four teenagers froze.

"Is... is this some kind of pre-recorded message?" Mason whispered.

The voice chuckled darkly. "Oh no, my dear guests. This is... live."

The lights in the studio flared to life, bathing everything in an unnatural, sickly yellow glow.

The hum in the walls grew louder, pulsing once, then again, and again, almost deafening now.

Then he appeared. A man stepped into view from behind the soundboard - or what looked like a man. He was tall and lean, dressed in an immaculate black suit that seemed to drink in the light. His skin was pale as bone, his hair slicked back like wet ink. But it was his eyes - glowing crimson orbs that burned with hunger - that made Jamie's blood run cold.

"Welcome," he said with a pure white Hollywood style smile that revealed sharp fangs, "Welcome to The Burn... where every broadcast is... a killer."

Jamie stumbled back towards the door instinctively but found it locked tight.

"What do you want?" she demanded, her voice shaking despite herself.

The man tilted his head as if considering her question. "What I've always wanted: an audience." He gestured towards the glowing ON-AIR sign above them. "And thanks to you meddling kids, my station is broadcasting once again."

Tasha whimpered and clung to Jamie's arm. Mason raised his camera shakily and aimed it at the man.

"This has to be fake," Mason muttered under his breath, his hand started to shake.

The man's smile widened as he turned towards Mason. "Ah yes... technology has come so far since my day." He reached out faster than any of them could react and plucked Mason's camera from his hands like it was nothing more than a toy.

"You see," he continued conversationally as he examined the device, "radio waves are more than just sound - they are energy." He placed the camera on top of the on-air light so it looked down on them all. "And... I feed on energy."

Jamie lunged for one of the switches on the soundboard in desperation, hoping to shut everything down - but before she could reach it, he was there, grabbing her wrist with an iron grip.

"Ahhh," he chided softly. "You wouldn't want to cut off our listeners now, would you?"

The room seemed to pulse around them as if alive - no longer just a studio but something sentient and hungry.

"You're feeding off them," Jamie realised aloud, her voice barely above a whisper.

The man nodded approvingly. "Precisely! Every listener drawn in by our signal... every ear tuned to our frequency... they sustain me." He leaned closer to her face, his breath cold as death itself. "And now... so will you."

Before anyone could react further, thick steel shutters slammed down over every window and door in the studio with an ear-splitting clang, clang, clang.

"No!" Tasha screamed as she pounded on one of the doors futilely.

Viktor Noctis - the vampire CEO - laughed deeply as he loomed over them all now like a shadow swallowing light itself.

"You've done me such a favour tonight," he said mockingly as he advanced on them slowly but deliberately. "Reviving my station... giving me new life... and providing such delicious content for my return broadcast." His fangs gleamed as he added with cruel delight: "Thanks to you... four... meddling kids."

The last thing Jamie saw before everything went dark was Viktor lunging towards her - fangs bared and eyes blazing - while their screams echoed through every speaker still tuned to The Burn's signal... live on air for all to hear.

Then there was only static, and ever so slowly a song started to spin up and play... "Cry Little Sister" by Gerard McMann began to ring out through the speakers around the very empty station building.

"MONOLITH RADIO"

Radio buildings always look weird, some more than others – and that inspired this story.

In the heart of the city's forsaken industrial zone, a monolithic structure loomed, shrouded in perpetual shadow.

The radio station building stood as a testament to urban decay, yet it remained untouched by the ravages of time.

No vines crawled up its walls, no trees sprouted nearby, and no other structures dared to encroach upon its solitary domain.

The air around it seemed to vibrate with an otherworldly energy, as if the very presence of the station repelled all life.

Despite its ominous appearance, the station continued to broadcast its eerie signals into the night. Its towers pierced the sky like skeletal fingers, drawing in the last remnants of vitality from the desolate landscape.

The broadcasts themselves were a mystery – a cacophony of static and whispers that seemed to seep into the minds of those who listened.

Yet people still tuned in, entranced by the station's macabre allure. The ratings attested to that: always at the bottom, but always there.

As night fell, the shadows deepened, and the station's silhouette became almost palpable. It was as if it fed on the darkness, growing stronger with each passing moment.

The industrial area around it lay in ruins, a graveyard of rusting machinery and crumbling concrete. Yet, amidst this decay, the radio station pulsed with an unnatural vitality.

Its listeners were scattered and few, but they remained devoted, drawn by the station's haunting melodies and cryptic messages.

They whispered among themselves about the station's true purpose, speculating that it was a portal to another realm, a beacon for the lost, or perhaps a siren's call to the damned.

Whatever the truth may be, one thing was certain: the station continued to broadcast, its dark allure captivating all who dared to listen.

And so, it stood – a monolith of mystery, forever shrouded in shadow, forever broadcasting into the void.

PROMO: "STATION RECRUITMENT"

With 66.6 The Burn now open, I was thinking about the type of recruitment commercial they would run. I came up with this 60-second script.

((SFX: EERIE WIND AND DISTANT HOWLS))

ANNOUNCER (mysterious voice): Tired of hiding your... unique talents from a world that doesn't understand?

Find yourself only truly coming alive after dark?

Does conventional workplace lighting leave you feeling... drained?

((SFX: LOW RUMBLING THUNDER))

ANNOUNCER: Sixty-Six Point Six The Burn is expanding our coven -er, team - and we're searching for kindred spirits to join us.

((SFX: SUBTLE ORGAN MUSIC))

ANNOUNCER: Whether your talents lie in on-air enchantment, administrative divination, sales persuasion of the most compelling kind, or crafting words that can quite literally captivate our listeners... we have positions that will suit your particular... constitution.

((SFX: SOFT HISSING))

ANNOUNCER: The Burn provides a safe haven for those of a delicate and selective disposition. Our facilities are sun-free, silver-free, and our break room is stocked with refreshments for all dietary restrictions - no questions asked.

Plus, we offer accommodation for those who cannot find something that will suit their needs, at little to no cost to you!

((SFX: CLOCK STRIKING MIDNIGHT))

ANNOUNCER: Join our eternal family at Sixty-Six Point Six The Burn.

Apply at 'six six six the burn dot com' or materialise in our lobby between dusk and dawn.

((SFX: SUBTLE HISSING AND CRACKLING FIRE))

ANNOUNCER (quick disclaimer style read): Sixty-Six Six The Burn is an equal opportunity employer. We do not discriminate based on age - even if it's measured in centuries - species, or dimension of origin.

((ENDS))

"WORKING AT THE DEVILS RADIO"

Hell might very well have its very own radio station, and as a copywriter, this is how I imagine my day would go if I was there. (By the way - Ishtar is one of my favourite films!)

Dan Morrow had been dead for exactly 73 years, 4 months, and 16 days when the memo slid under his office door. The paper was the same sickly yellow as always, scorched around the edges and smelling faintly of sulphur and mould. He didn't need to read it to know what it contained, but he unfolded it anyway, hoping against hope.

"NEW PROMOTION!" the header screamed in Comic Sans. "URGENT COPY NEEDED BY 15:00."

Dan sighed, flipping the paper over to see which of the five it would be this time. His eyes scanned the brief: "ISHTAR MOVIE TICKETS GIVEAWAY - SAME AS LAST WEEK BUT FRESHER."

Of course. It was always one of the five.

Sixty-Six, Six 'The Burn' - "Hell's Hottest Hits" - had been Dan's eternal punishment since his arrival. As the station's sole copywriter, he wrote commercials day in and day out for the same five products, over and over and over again.

The Ishtar ticket giveaway. The buy-three-tyres-get-three deal at Lucifer's Wheels. The perpetually limited stock of air conditioners (always exactly one unit) at Frozen Over Appliances. The all-you-can-eat buffet at Tantalus Grill where the food disappeared when you reached for it. And the endless mattress sale at Sisyphus Sleep Shop, where prices were "falling every day" but somehow always cost exactly what you had in your wallet plus one cent.

Dan cracked his knuckles and began typing.

"This FRIDAY ONLY! Be our 666th caller for your chance to win two tickets to the HOTTEST movie in Hell! That's right, it's ISHTAR, now in its 73rd year at Hell's IMAX Cinemanation! Starring Warren Beatty and Dustin Hoffman as two untalented lounge singers caught up in a revolution in the..."

The phone on his desk rang. Dan picked it up, already knowing who it was, "Morrow? It's Beelzebub. Listen, we need to spice up the Ishtar copy. Maybe mention it's digitally remastered or something."

"It's been digitally remastered for the past forty years," Dan replied.

"Well, find some other angle! The Dark Lord wants butts in seats!"

The line went dead. Dan ripped the paper from his typewriter and started again.

"WIN tickets to see the EXTENDED director's cut of ISHTAR with seventeen NEW seconds of footage!"

Two hours later, Dan's office door swung open without a knock. Lilith from Accounting slithered in, her snake-like lower half leaving a trail of slime across the floor.

"Got anything for me to proof?" she asked, filing her claws.

Dan handed her the Ishtar copy and the just-finished Lucifer's Wheels ad.

"Buy three tyres, get three tyres," she read aloud. "No savings! No discount! Just six tyres for the price of six! Limited time offer for all eternity." She nodded approvingly. "The boss will love it."

"I thought maybe we could try something different this century," Dan ventured. "Maybe... five tyres? Or a different product altogether?"

Lilith's laughter was like broken glass in a garbage disposal. "Oh, Danny boy. You haven't changed a bit."

"That's the problem," he muttered as she slithered out.

Dan was about to start on the air conditioner copy when there was a gentle knock at his door - something so rare in Hell that he nearly fell out of his chair.

"Come in?" he called, puzzled.

The door opened to reveal Jezebel, the newest addition to the marketing department.

Unlike most demons, who had been in Hell since time immemorial, Jezebel had only been damned for about a decade. Her crimson skin glowed with an otherworldly sheen, and the small horns protruding from her forehead were polished to a mirror finish. She carried herself with the confidence of someone who had closed million-dollar accounts in her human life.

"Hey, Dan," she purred, her forked tongue briefly visible between perfect white teeth. "I'm putting together some ideas for the quarterly pitch to the Dark Lord, and I was wondering if you had any thoughts."

Dan blinked in surprise. No one had asked for his opinion on anything in decades.

"Actually," he said, rummaging through his desk drawer, "I've been working on this concept for a new product." He pulled out a tattered notebook. "It's a subscription service for customised torments. Instead of the same punishment for eternity, souls could experience a rotating selection of sufferings, tailored to their specific mortal sins."

Jezebel's yellow eyes widened. She took the notebook, flipping through pages of Dan's meticulous notes and sketches.

"This is... actually brilliant," she murmured. "The Dark Lord's been complaining about efficiency metrics. This could revolutionise our whole operation."

Dan felt a flutter of pride for the first time in decades. "I've been refining it for years. I call it 'Personalised Eternal Damnation,' or PED for short."

"PED," Jezebel repeated, a calculating look crossing her face. "Catchy."

By afternoon, Dan had completed the air conditioner ad. The trick was finding new ways to say "one unit in stock" without using those exact words. Today he'd gone with "inventory strictly rationed to a singular cooling apparatus within each 24-hour period of eternal suffering."

His intercom buzzed just as he was starting on the Tantalus Grill copy.

"Morrow!" It was Abaddon, the station manager. "The Dark Lord's in the building! He wants to see new ideas by end of day!"

Dan perked up. New ideas? Could this be his chance? Maybe after seven decades of writing the same five ads, he was finally getting a break. And with Jezebel possibly putting in a good word about his PED concept...

He worked feverishly, creating additional concepts for products he'd imagined over his years in Hell: sunscreen that only worked indoors. Umbrellas that collapsed in rain. Self-help books with pages that turned blank once you'd read them.

At 5pm sharp, Dan clutched his proposal and walked the long corridor to the executive suite, past the River Styx water cooler and the break room where the coffee was always lukewarm.

The door to Satan's office was closed. Dan could hear voices inside - one the unmistakable booming bass of the Dark Lord, the other a familiar, silky feminine tone. He knocked tentatively.

"Enter!" commanded Satan.

Dan stepped into the office to find Satan beaming at Jezebel, who was standing beside his desk with a PowerPoint presentation displayed on the wall. The title slide read: "Personalised Eternal Damnation (PED): A Revolutionary Approach to Suffering by Jezebel Darkflame."

Dan's jaw dropped. "But that's..."

"Brilliant!" Satan interrupted, clapping his massive hands together. "Absolutely brilliant! Jezebel, you've outdone yourself. This is exactly the kind of innovation Hell needs."

Jezebel shot Dan a warning glance. "Thank you, my lord. I've been working on it for some time."

"Promotion!" Satan declared. "Effective immediately, you're our new Vice President of Customised Torments. We'll begin implementation next week."

Dan stood frozen, his own proposal clutched uselessly in his hands.

Satan finally noticed him. "Ah, the copywriter! Just in time. Jezebel's brilliant new initiative will need advertising. You'll be writing copy for PED now."

"PED?" Dan echoed hollowly.

"Yes! Personalised Eternal Damnation! It's revolutionary. Jezebel just pitched it. Brilliant mind, this one. We're shaking things up, Danny boy! I'm thinking... what if the Ishtar tickets were NEON coloured?"

Dan stared blankly.

"Or what if," Satan continued, eyes gleaming, "for the Tantalus Grill, we say the food is now 'tantalising' instead of just 'tempting'? See? Fresh! Oh, and you'll be reporting to Jezebel from now on."

Jezebel winked at Dan, mouthing "Thanks" as she gathered her presentation materials.

As Dan trudged back to his office, new yellow memos were already waiting. "URGENT - NEED MATTRESS SALE COPY. SAME AS ALWAYS BUT DIFFERENT SOMEHOW."

And... "PRICES ARE FALLING at Sisyphus Sleep Shop! Our competitors are CRASHING! Our deals will have you DYING to come in! Our prices are KILLING the competition!"

He paused, staring at the words. Then, for the first time in 73 years, he laughed.

Because in Hell's radio station, the joke was always on him. Each morning he'd arrive hoping for something new, and each day he'd discover that true damnation wasn't writing the same ads forever - it was the momentary, fleeting hope that tomorrow might be different.

Behind him, Jezebel appeared in the doorway. "No hard feelings, right?" she asked with a razor-blade smile. "That's just how things work down here."

Tomorrow, there would be more of the same... including the perfect copy for Ishtar tickets.

"ITS ALWAYS DARKEST..." (PART 1)

Here is a familiar setting to us in radio: ratings period and the threat of a buyout...

The fluorescent lights of the break room flickered casting brief but heavy shadows across the faces of the assembled staff of Sixty-Six, Six The Burn. The slightly off-yellow painted room served as staff meeting room, project room, and kitchen break room all in one.

It was nearly midnight, but the entire station staff was present for the quarterly meeting - a rare occurrence that had everyone on edge.

Marcus, the night shift DJ, drummed his elongated fingers against the table. His skin had a greyish pallor that no amount of studio lighting could warm. The hood of his sweatshirt was pulled up despite the stuffiness of the room, concealing most of his face save for his unnaturally reflective eyes.

"Would you stop that infernal tapping?" hissed Veronica from across the table. The sales director's perfect red curls seemed to move with a life of their own, occasionally forming shapes that resembled faces when she was particularly agitated. "Some of us are trying to maintain composure."

"Sorry," Marcus muttered, his voice carrying an echo and reverb that didn't match the room's acoustics. "Just nervous about the numbers."

"We're all nervous," said Howard, the morning show host. He adjusted his tie with hands that didn't quite match up with his movements - as if they were operating on a slight delay. "Last quarter's ratings were abysmal. If we don't show improvement..." He drew a finger across his throat; the gesture made more disturbing by the fact that his head seemed to shift slightly out of alignment with his neck as he did so.

"They wouldn't fire us," Penny from Accounting whispered. Her voice carried the distant sound of screaming beneath her words—it was hard to listen to. "We're family here." She smiled, revealing far too many teeth crammed into such a small mouth.

From the corner of the room, Damien, the production manager, let out a low chuckle. His skin was pale and waxy, his eyes sunken. He hadn't slept in three years, not since his "incident" with the overnight broadcast and the mysterious signals that had temporarily replaced their usual programming. "Family is the first to get sacrificed when times get tough," he said, his voice raspy from chain-smoking cigarettes that smelled vaguely of burning hair.

The door to the conference room swung open, and everyone fell silent as Viktor Noctis, the CEO, glided in. His pressed, expensive Italian suit seemed to absorb light rather than reflect it. His movements were fluid, elegant, betraying no urgency despite the tension in the room. Behind him came his assistant Beatrice, clutching a stack of papers to her chest. Her eyes darted nervously around the room at all the staff present.

"Good evening, everyone," Viktor said, his vaguely European accent impossible to place.

"Thank you for joining us at this late hour. I know many of you prefer the darkness, while others..." He glanced at Tina, the peppy midday host whose permanently fixed smile stretched too wide across her face, her eyes too bright, too desperate. "Others simply never rest."

Viktor took his place at the head of the table. Beatrice hurriedly placed the papers before him.

"Before we discuss the quarterly results," Viktor began, running a pale finger along the edge of the paper, "I have an announcement to make."

The room temperature seemed to drop several degrees. In the corner, the ancient coffee machine began to produce a liquid too thick and dark to be coffee.

"As some of you may have heard, our station has attracted attention from potential buyers," Viktor continued, his voice measured. "After much deliberation, the board has decided to entertain and then embrace these offers."

A collective gasp swept through the room. Marcus's hood fell back slightly, revealing the suggestion of something writhing beneath his skin. Veronica's hair quickly formed into tight, angry coils.

"Sell the station?" Howard said, his voice skipping like a scratched record. "But we've been broadcasting for... how long has it been?"

Nobody could quite remember when Sixty-Six, Six The Burn had first hit the airwaves. The station's history seemed to stretch back indefinitely, though the building itself appeared on no city maps older than fifteen years.

"It's just business," Viktor said smoothly. "Nothing has been finalised at this minute. But I wanted you all to hear it from me first."

"Who's buying us?" asked Jerome, the engineer whose body seemed to incorporate various pieces of broadcasting equipment. A dial protruded from his shoulder, occasionally turning by itself and emitting static.

Viktor's smile revealed the faintest hint of unnaturally sharp canines. "All in good time. But first, the quarterly results."

He opened the folder before him, and the lights flickered again, more violently this time. For a moment, the room was plunged into darkness, and several staff members would later swear they heard whispering in long-dead languages that had no names that could be recognised.

When the lights returned, Viktor was standing, his pale hands splayed across the papers

on the table.

"Despite the challenges, I'm pleased to announce that our numbers have exceeded expectations," he said. "Listenership is up twenty-three per cent. The 'Midnight Confessional' segment has become the most popular late-night radio programme in the tri-state area."

Marcus couldn't help but smile. The "Midnight Confessional" had been his idea - giving listeners a chance to call in and share their darkest secrets, their most haunting regrets.

What the listeners didn't know was that each confession seemed to feed something within the station itself, something that was hungry, that lived in the walls and occasionally spoke through the static between songs.

"The 'Morning Madness' show has also seen significant growth," Viktor continued, nodding to Howard, whose delayed hands gave an awkward thumbs-up sign. "In fact, every segment across the day and night parts are performing very well, and advertising revenue has increased by thirty-five per cent too."

Veronica's hair relaxed slightly, the angry coils softening into merely unsettling waves. "So, we're doing well?" Tina asked, her too-wide smile faltering for just a moment, revealing something dark and void-like behind her perfect teeth.

"Better than well," Viktor confirmed. "Which is why the timing of this offer is particularly interesting."

He gestured towards the door, which swung open as if on cue. Two figures entered the room, their shadows entering before them then spreading out to the corners. The air immediately grew thick and sulphurous...

(END OF PART 1)

"STATION SWEEPER"

A short 7 second station sweeper for The Burn.

((JINGLE MUSIC BED UP))

((ANNOUNCER)) "This is Sixty-Six-Six, The BURN
Where EVERY DAY is Halloween...
Trick... OR... TREAT??"

"ITS ALWAYS DARKEST..." (PART 2)

Where the story gets darker

The first to enter was tall and immaculately dressed in a crimson suit that seemed to shimmer with an inner heat. His skin was the deep umber of burnished wood, and his features shifted subtly when not directly observed. Beside him stood a shorter woman in stark white, her platinum blonde hair cut in a severe bob. Her eyes were hidden behind mirrored sunglasses despite the late hour.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Viktor said, "allow me to introduce Mr Lucian DeVille and Ms Lilith Morn of Infernal Media Holdings. As of midnight tonight, they are the new owners of The Burn."

The room erupted into murmurs. Penny whispered frantically to Damien. Jerome's dial spun wildly, broadcasting fragments of conversations that hadn't happened yet.

Mr DeVille stepped forward, his movements fluid. When he smiled, his teeth were too sharp, too white. "We're thrilled to be joining 'the Burn' family," he said, chuckling, his voice resonating in everyone's chests rather than their ears. "We've been admirers of your... unique approach to broadcasting."

"What does this mean for us?" Veronica demanded, her hair forming into snake-like tendrils. "Are there going to be staff changes?"

Ms Morn removed her sunglasses, revealing entirely black eyes. "We don't believe in fixing what isn't broken. We're interested in 66.6 precisely because of the... special talents each of you brings."

"Special talents?" Marcus asked.

"Let's not be coy, Marcus. Your ability to draw out people's deepest regrets during your confessional segments? The way those confessions seem to... feed something?"

A chill ran through the room. They had never openly acknowledged the strange phenomena - the way broadcasts affected listeners physiologically, the manifestation of nightmares in the studio, the signal reaching impossible places.

"We know exactly what this station is," Ms Morn continued, leaving a faint trail of smouldering wood as she ran her nail along the table. "And we want to expand it. Take it national."

"National?" Howard repeated, his delayed hands catching up to his surprise. "But our broadcasting licence only covers..."

"Licences can be adjusted, and with streaming these days, your message can go

anywhere, and..." Mr DeVille interrupted smoothly. "Regulations... can be... reinterpreted. We have considerable influence."

"What they're proposing," Viktor said carefully, "is making 'The Burn' not just local, but national. Perhaps even international."

"Your current reach is impressive, but limited," Ms Morn agreed. "We believe the world is ready for what you have to offer."

"And what exactly is that?" Tina asked, her perpetual smile twitching.

"A gateway, Ms Thompson. A conduit. An opportunity for listeners to connect with something... beyond the mundane world."

The implication hung heavy. They all knew there was something unusual about The Burn - songs occasionally triggering mass nightmares or daydreams (terrible daydreams and visions), traffic reports predicting accidents, weather forecasts changing the weather.

"We believe you've only scratched the surface," Ms Morn said. "With our resources, we could help The Burn become truly transformative."

"Think bigger," Mr DeVille urged, spreading his hands as shadows behind him stretched in shapes that didn't match his movements. "What if your broadcasts could affect reality itself? What if the barrier between your studio and listeners' lives became... permeable?"

Jerome's dial spun so fast it began to smoke. Veronica's hair formed a protective shell around her head. Marcus pulled his hood lower.

"That sounds... dangerous," Howard said carefully.

Ms Morn's laugh was like glass breaking in reverse. "All progress involves risk. But the rewards far outweigh potential... complications."

Viktor redirected the conversation to practicalities. Mr DeVille assured them little would change immediately, though they would provide "additional guidance."

"And what about Viktor?" Marcus asked. "What happens to him in this new structure?" Mr DeVille smiled at the vampire CEO. "Mr Noctis has agreed to stay on as station manager. His particular... sensibilities align well with our vision."

"I've negotiated protections for all of you," Viktor added. "Your positions are secure. Your... unique needs will continue to be accommodated."

There was collective relief. The station was the only workplace accommodating their peculiarities - Marcus's soundproofed booth for what emerged beneath his skin during full moons, Veronica's specially reinforced blessed silver hairbrushes.

"However," Viktor continued, "there will be new opportunities for those interested in exploring the expanded capabilities they envision."

"Completely voluntary, of course," Ms Morn added, though her obsidian eyes suggested otherwise.

"I'm excited about this new direction!" Tina said, her fixed smile stretching wider. "Think of the engagement opportunities we could create!"

"That's the spirit!" Mr DeVille praised her. "Ms Thompson understands the potential."

Ms Morn produced a slim folder containing proposed changes. Viktor read through the folder's contents to himself quickly and described them to everyone as "ambitious."

"But achievable," Mr DeVille countered. "With your team's very unique talents."

After concluding the meeting, staff members gathered in small clusters.

Marcus stood with Howard, Veronica, and Damien near the coffee machine, which now produced a faintly glowing, yet quite flavoursome green liquid.

"What do you think they really want?" Howard asked.

"We've dealt with strange management before," Damien reminded them. "Remember the Nielsen incident of 2018?"

They shuddered, recalling the "observer" whose face changed when unobserved, who caused equipment malfunctions and listeners to hear their futures whenever he stood in the studio.

"This is different," Marcus whispered. "They know what we are. And... what this place is."
"And what exactly is that?" Howard asked the forbidden question.

Viktor appeared beside them with supernatural stealth. "They're gone for now. But they'll return tomorrow night... to begin the... transition."

"Should we be worried?" Veronica asked bluntly.

"No more than usual," Viktor replied with a ghost of a smile. "But perhaps be... selective about which initiatives you embrace."

Somewhere in the city, someone who had never listened before suddenly felt compelled to tune in, drawn by a call they couldn't explain but couldn't quite resist.

(END OF PART 2)

PROMO: "THE MIDNIGHT CONFESSIONAL"

A station promo for The Midnight Confessional show mentioned in the previous story.

((SOFT STATIC FADES IN, UNDERLYING ALL))

((MARCUS' VOICE - LOW, INTIMATE))

Have you ever done something... unspeakable? Something that keeps you awake at 3am, staring at your ceiling, wondering if you're still... human?

((SFX: HEARTBEAT SOUND EFFECT BEGINS, SLOW AND DELIBERATE))

((MARCUS))

The Midnight Confessional is waiting for you to call.

Just you and me... and whatever else is listening... in the dark.

((SFX: BRIEF WHISPERS, BARELY AUDIBLE))

Every night at midnight, I open the lines, and the sins come pouring in.

We accept the regrets. The shame. And the secrets you've never told another soul.

((QUICK MONTAGE OF PREVIOUS CALLER SNIPPETS, EACH FADING QUICKLY INTO THE NEXT))

((CALLER 1))

"I watched it happen, and I did nothing..."

((CALLER 2))

"No one knows it was me who..."

((CALLER 3))

"I still hear them screaming in my dreams..."

((STATIC INCREASES BRIEFLY & MARCUS' VOICE DISTORTS SLIGHTLY))

And when you confess to me... you'll feel... ((PAUSE)) ...free again!

Unburden yourself. Feed the void.

Maybe, after you confess... you'll be able to finally fall to sleep again.

((SFX: HEARTBEAT QUICKENS))

((MARCUS))

The Midnight Confessional. Every night at 12 on sixty-six six 'The Burn'.

((WHISPER, BARELY AUDIBLE))

We're always listening... even when you think you're alone.

((STATIC AND HEARTBEAT ABRUPTLY CUT OUT))

((ENDS))

"DEAD AIR"

This story had been bubbling away in the back of my mind for six months before I committed it to the page.

Teddy Martinez adjusted her headphones. The digital clock ticked over to midnight and the ON AIR sign glowed red, casting the small studio in an eerie crimson light. Her first week at Sixty-Six, Six "The Burn," and she'd been relegated to the graveyard shift.

"That's midnight, and you're listening to Los Angeles very own... 'The Burn', and I'm your host, Teddy Martinez, keeping you company until dawn."

She kept her voice low and sultry, just as the station manager had instructed.

The studio felt too empty at night. The building had been retrofitted from an old theatre and had strange acoustics. She'd swear she could hear whispers in the static between the songs.

Twenty minutes into her shift, the hotline lit up - her first caller.

"You're live on The Burn. What's your name?"

The line crackled with static. Then, a woman's voice, distant and strained: "Help... please... I don't have much time."

Teddy sat upright. "Are you okay?"

"He's coming back. I don't know where I am." The voice trembled. "There's water dripping. I smell oil. Metal. Like an old garage or basement."

"If this is an emergency, you should call 911," Teddy said firmly.

"Can't... phone's dying. He'll hear me." The woman's voice cracked. "The address. I think it's on Westlake. Near the old textile factory. There's a red door. Tell them to look for the red door."

A sharp intake of breath. "He's coming. Please. Help me."

"I'm going to call the police," Teddy promised. "What's your name?"

"Theresa. Theresa Donovan. Please..." The line went dead.

Teddy called 911, gave them the information, and was told officers would investigate.

"This is Teddy Martinez, and we're back with you on The Burn. If anyone knows anything about Westlake and the old textile factory, please call in."

Two callers phoned - one suggesting the old Millcreek Textiles building on West Lake Avenue, abandoned since 2008.

At 2:17am, the hotline lit up again.

"You're on The Burn."

"Teddy?" The same voice as before, but calmer now. "It's Theresa again."

"Are you safe? Did they find you?"

"No one's coming, Teddy. No one's going to find me." The woman's voice had an odd, hollow and distant quality. "But I need to warn you."

"About what?"

"The night shift at The Burn. It's not safe. Especially in Studio C."

Teddy glanced at the door. She was in Studio C.

"How do you know which studio I'm in?"

"Because it's where I was. Six months ago. My last broadcast."

A chill ran down Teddy's spine. She pulled up the station's website, scanning through "Our Team." No Theresa Donovan.

"I don't understand. You worked here?"

"The late shift. Just like you. They never found me. He made sure of that."

"Who?"

"The program manager, Henry. Check the soundproofing panel behind your chair. The one that's newer than the others."

Teddy turned. Behind her chair was a rectangular panel, slightly brighter than the yellowed foam surrounding it.

"You're lying," Teddy whispered. "This is a prank."

"I wish it were. But now you're his next target. He likes the night shift DJs. The pretty ones. The ones without family nearby."

Teddy lifted her hand to the panelling. Digging her fingernails in deep, she hit wood, then peeled back a corner and saw dark black splashes against the ancient wood grain. Suddenly the neon light in the producer's booth flickered to life.

"He's coming now," Theresa said. "Right on schedule. Bringing you a coffee. To check how you're settling in."

The studio doorknob turned.

"Get out, Teddy. NOW."

Teddy lunged for her bag just as Henry pushed open the door, a steaming cup in his hand and a smile that didn't reach his eyes.

"Thought you might need this," he said. His eyes flicked to the illuminated phone line. "Who's on air?"

"Wrong number," Teddy lied, edging towards the door. "I was just about to use the restroom."

Henry blocked her exit. "You remind me of our last night host. Same... energy."

Through the headphones she'd left on the desk, Teddy could hear Theresa: "Teddy! Don't drink anything he gives you!"

Henry's eyes narrowed. "Who's on the line, Teddy?"

In one swift movement, Teddy slammed her shoulder into Henry's chest. The coffee flew from his hand.

He howled, grabbing for her, but she was already running down the hallway, punching 911 into her phone.

"Police! The Burn, our program manager Henry Davis - I think he killed someone. Theresa Donovan. She worked here. And there's a building with a red door on Westlake she called from there!"

An hour later, Teddy sat in a patrol car, watching as police led Henry away in handcuffs.

The female officer beside her received a radio call and turned to Teddy with a grim expression.

"They found something at the Millcreek Textiles building. A hidden room behind a red door in the basement. There was a body."

"Theresa?" Teddy whispered.

The officer nodded. "ID in her pocket confirms it. Theresa Donovan. Been there about six months, they estimate."

"But how did she call me? Tonight?"

The officer looked puzzled. "What do you mean?"

"She called the station. That's how I knew about Henry. And the red door."

The officer shook her head slowly. "There's something you should know." She handed Teddy her phone, displaying a photo of a driver's licence.

Teddy stared at the image, her blood turning to ice.

The woman with short dark hair and wide brown eyes looked exactly like her.

"Her real name was Theodora 'Teddy' Donovan," the officer said quietly.

Teddy couldn't speak.

She pulled out her own licence.

Antonia "Teddy" Martinez. Different name, same face.

The radio in the patrol car suddenly crackled with static, and through the white noise came a whisper: "Thank you for finding me. I can... now... rest."

In the distance, the ON-AIR sign in Studio C flickered once, then went dark.

SCRIPT: "BLOODSUCKERS"

A short radio commercial for a blood bank - I mean, why not?

((SFX: CREAKING DOOR))

((ANNOUNCER—DEEP, VINCENT PRICE-STYLE READ)) At Bloodsuckers Blood Bank, we're always upfront about our intentions!

((MANAGER—SINISTER CHUCKLE)) We have KILLER ways to pay you for your deposits, and we're just DYING to serve you!

((SFX: WOLF HOWL))

ANNOUNCER: Bloodsuckers Blood Bank - where your deposits are ALWAYS in good taste! Visit us after sundown on Transylvania Avenue for our daily fresh specials.

((ENDS))

"THE UNFINISHED BROADCAST"

I worked for many years as a mascot at a TV station (amongst many other jobs I had in TV), then again at the second radio station I worked at (it's fun) but sometimes... well, sometimes you REALLY don't feel alone in the suit!

Jamie clicked away at the keyboard, finishing another 30-second spot for Malone's Mattress Warehouse. As the station's sole copywriter, every commercial, promo, and station liner passed through his hands before hitting the airwaves.

He glanced at the clock. Fifteen minutes until he needed to transform into "Dizzy," the station's oversized squirrel mascot, for an appearance at the Franklin Elementary School carnival.

"Another masterpiece?" asked Lou, the sales guy and afternoon DJ, as he leaned against Jamie's cubicle.

"Pure poetry about memory foam," Jamie said, hitting send. "Gotta suit up now. Elementary school gig."

Lou grimaced. "Better you than me. Man, those kids are savages."

Jamie trudged to the storage closet where Dizzy 'lived' when not entertaining the masses.

The oversized squirrel head stared vacantly from the shelf; its perpetual buck-toothed grin somehow menacing. He'd been wearing the suit for eight months now - ever since the previous mascot performer quit.

"Let's do this, Dizzy," Jamie muttered.

The school carnival was in full swing when Jamie arrived. Children swarmed him, pulling at Dizzy's tail and oversized paws.

He posed for photos, handed out station stickers, and danced to the station's jingles and hits blaring from portable speakers.

That's when he saw the figure... again.

Standing by the face-painting booth, partially obscured by a cotton candy machine, was a tall, thin silhouette. No discernible features, just a dark shape... watching him.

The same shape he'd spotted at the mall opening last week. And the car dealership before that. And the county fair before that.

Jamie froze mid-dance. A small boy tugged at his paw, but he couldn't look away from the figure.

As he stared, it slowly raised one elongated arm, pointing directly at him.

Then it vanished as someone walked past.

"Mr. Squirrel? Dizzy? Are you okay?" The boy was still tugging his paw.

Hours later... "I'm telling you, Sara, something's following me." Jamie collapsed into the break room chair opposite the station's receptionist. "Every public appearance for the past month."

Sara looked up from her phone. "Like a stalker?"

"No... I can never see its face. It just stands there, watching. Then points at me and disappears."

"Only when you're in the costume?"

Jamie paused. "Yeah. Always when I'm Dizzy."

Sara's expression shifted. "Have you talked to Brooks about this?"

"The program director? Why?"

"Because before you, Brooks wore the Dizzy costume."

Jamie stared at her. "I thought Melissa from promotions was Dizzy before me."

Sara shook her head. "Melissa replaced Brooks. He only did it for a week before refusing to wear it again. Said something about 'never feeling alone in there.'"

A chill ran down Jamie's spine. "And before Brooks?"

"Some intern. Ryan something. He quit. No notice. Just up and left after wearing the suit once."

Jamie found Brooks in the production studio, editing a promo.

"Hey, Brooks? Got a second to talk about Dizzy?"

Brooks froze, his hand hovering over the mouse. "What about 'it'?"

"Sara mentioned you used to wear the costume."

"Briefly." Brooks turned back to the computer. "Not for me."

"Did you ever... see things? While wearing it?"

Brooks swivelled his chair slowly. "What kind of things?"

"A figure. Watching. Pointing."

The colour drained from Brooks' face. "You've seen it too."

"Too?"

Conspiratorially, Brooks lowered his voice. "I did some digging. That costume's not the original. The station bought it 'used' from the station in Millertown... WXTZ, after their morning host, Dave Wilson, died in it."

"How?"

"Heart attack. While wearing their station mascot costume at a live broadcast."

Jamie felt his mouth go dry. "You think it's... his ghost?"

"I think that costume never got cleaned properly," Brooks said flatly. "But I also know I felt someone else in there with me. Someone... angry. Confused. Like they didn't know they were dead."

Jamie couldn't sleep that night. At 3am, he drove to the station, using his key card to enter the silent building. The emergency lights cast long shadows as he made his way to the storage closet.

The Dizzy costume sat in darkness, its empty eyes reflecting the dim hallway light.

"Dave?" Jamie whispered. "Dave Wilson? Is that you?"

Nothing.

Jamie took a deep breath and reached for the costume head. As his fingers touched the synthetic fur, a cold wave passed through him. He lifted the head and placed it over his own.

Immediately, a whisper filled his ears. 'Not my show... not my station...'

Jamie's breath caught. "Dave? I'm not trying to replace you."

'They wouldn't let me finish... my last broadcast...'

"Your heart attack? That wasn't anyone's fault."

'No... before that... the contest. The winner announcement. I never said who won.'

Jamie frowned inside the mascot head. "The winner of what?"

'Dream Vacation Giveaway. My last show. The name... it's... in the pocket...'

Jamie reached inside the costume's inner pouch, where he normally kept water bottles and extra stickers. His fingers touched something papery. He pulled out a worn, tiny, thin yellow envelope, sealed with WXTZ's logo sticker.

"You want me to announce the winner? After all this time?"

'Just... let me... finish my show... Please, I need to finish it, please... please!!'

early the next day, Jamie convinced the program director to let him make a special announcement during the morning show.

"We're doing something unusual today," the host explained to listeners. "Our copywriter, Jamie, is here with a very special contest winner to announce."

Jamie, fully dressed as Dizzy, leaned into the microphone. His voice came out deeper than usual, with an unfamiliar raspy cadence.

"The winner of WXTZ's Dream Vacation Giveaway is... Eleanor Shepherd of Millertown!" Static filled the studio for three seconds, then cleared.

Jamie slumped back and a station sweep played. The morning host looked confused. "WXTZ? That's not our station."

Jamie slowly removed the mascot head. "It's a long story." He looked inside the empty eyes of the costume. "But I think our mascot's previous owner is finally happy."

At the next public appearance, Jamie scanned the crowd repeatedly. No mysterious figure appeared. No pointing silhouette lurked behind carnival games or food trucks.

The appearance went off flawlessly.

Later, back at the station, he carefully hung the costume into its hanging bag. As he zipped it closed, he whispered, "Good show today, Dave."

The bag shifted slightly, as if settling. Or perhaps, as if someone inside was finally getting comfortable with their new co-host arrangement.

PROMO: "WIN TICKETS"

Even supernatural radio stations do ticket giveaways to keep listeners tuned in, so what type of band would be promoted on The Burn on a promo spot?

((SFX: EERIE WIND WITH DISTANT, HAUNTING WAILS))

((ANNOUNCER—MYSTERIOUS VOICE)) They've been known to bring the house down... literally... where ever they play.

((SONG GRAB THEN SFX: SOUND OF BUILDING COLLAPSING))

((ANNOUNCER)) The Banshees are bringing their "Scream Until Dawn" world tour to your city, and Sixty-Six, Six The Burn has your front row tickets!

((SONG GRAB: QUICK SNIPPET OF ETHEREAL, HAUNTING MUSIC))

((ANNOUNCER—EXCITED)) Be the first to hear their new singles "Your Death Becomes You" and "Wail For Me" performed live!

((SONG GRAB THEN SFX: BRIEF HIGH-PITCHED WAIL THAT SHATTERS GLASS))

((ANNOUNCER—WHISPERING—DISCLAIMER)) Sixty-Six, Six The Burn is not responsible for prophetic visions, spontaneous hair whitening, or accurate predictions of doom experienced during the concert. Winners advised to bring earplugs... and possibly a will.

((SFX: QUICK DRUM BEAT))

((ANNOUNCER—NORMAL PACE)) Text "WAIL" to 6-6-6 for your chance to win.

((SFX: LOW, OMINOUS LAUGHTER))

((ANNOUNCER)) The Banshees "Scream Until Dawn" world tour.

It's an experience we couldn't give-away, and you might not live to forget.

Thanks to The Banshees management team, and Sixty-Six Six... THE BURN!!!

((SFX: FINAL WAIL FADING OUT INTO SHORT BURST OF FLAMES))

((ENDS))

"THE PRIZE PIG"

Every station has them, but what do you do when they start to threaten you?

"And that was 'Boxed In' by Sealed and Delivered. You're listening to Sixty-Six Six 'The Burn', where the classic summer hits just keep coming."

I press the button, cutting the mic. Three, two, one...

The phone rings. Right on schedule.

"The Burn, this is Rick."

"RICK! It's Denise!" Her voice has that familiar desperate enthusiasm. "Is it time for today's Secret Sound?"

I sigh, rubbing my temples. Denise has won three concert tickets, a gas grill, and a weekend getaway in the past month alone. The station manager calls her our "number one prize pig," but never on air.

"Denise, you just won the Aruba trip yesterday."

"But I need the Taylor Swift tickets! My daughter—"

"Doesn't exist," I finish. "Last week she was your niece."

Silence. Then laughter. "You're good, Rick. Remember though, I know where you work, and that you drive that beat-up old Ford with the peeling station sticker on the right-hand passenger window, and you live in that nice suburban home that needs the lawns mowed, at the top of the rise on Hill Street..."

There's a long pause, then laughter. "It's okay... I'll try the afternoon show."

I glance at the prize board. Sixty-three wins for Denise this year. She doesn't need the money or want the prizes. What she needs is a restraining order.

I know she doesn't even like Taylor Swift. It's the thrill of the win she is chasing, the rush of hearing her name on air, the bragging rights with her friends.

The on-air light blinks. I force a smile into my voice. "And we're back with the \$10,000 Secret Sound!"

The phone lines light up like Christmas, and the first number appeared on the screen that called... Denise... again!

"“YOUR SALES REVIEW IS DUE!”"

*I often thought that salespeople do deals with the devil
(and when I worked as one I felt like I was doing that too)*

The fluorescent lights in Conference Room B hummed with an unnatural persistence.

Frank Delvecchio shifted in his seat, his designer suit jacket too tight across the shoulders.

The manila folder in front of Sales Manager Richard Mercer was thicker than the others Frank had glimpsed outside - personnel files of the other sales reps who'd already endured their annual reviews.

"Let's get started, shall we?" Mercer's voice was surprisingly soft for a man his size. His fingers - long, almost elegant - tapped the folder. "Quite the year you've had, Frank."

Frank smiled, revealing teeth too white and too perfect. "Just doing my job, sir."

"The Burn was struggling before you joined us. Now we're the top-billing station in three counties." Mercer flipped open the folder. "Your numbers are... impressive."

"Thank you, sir."

"The Chilton Motors account? They'd been with Harrison Media for fifteen years."

Frank's smile widened. "Mr Chilton just needed the right... incentive."

Mercer raised an eyebrow. "Which was?"

"Let's just say I discovered Mr Chilton has interests his wife wouldn't appreciate." Frank's eyes gleamed. "Nothing illegal. Just... compromising."

"And the Peterson Group? Lisa Watson had that account locked down."

"Lisa." Frank spat the name like it tasted foul. "She was showing them demographic reports from last quarter. I happened to have next quarter's projections. Doctored, of course, but Peterson wouldn't know the difference."

"You undercut her commission by half."

"Business is business."

Mercer made a note. "Smithfield Furniture was already signed with us. Your colleague Jim was handling them fine."

"Fine isn't exceptional." Frank leaned forward. "Jim's daughter got that scholarship she wanted, didn't she? Amazing what university admissions officers will do when they receive

anonymous donations."

"You paid off..."

"I made sure Jim was too distracted with family celebrations to notice when I took his client file." Frank shrugged. "I doubled their ad buy, didn't I? So everybody wins."

"Except Jim."

"Not my problem."

Mercer sighed, turning a page. "The incident with the Carter Media Group. Three of their sales reps quit within a week of meeting you."

"They couldn't handle a little competition." Frank's voice dropped. "One of them hasn't stopped drinking since. So... so weak."

"And Westlake Broadcasting's transmitter failure the night before the playoff game they had exclusive rights to? The game you'd secured for us just hours after?"

Frank stared, unblinking. "Equipment malfunctions happen."

"Seven accounts transferred from Westlake to us the following week."

"People recognise quality when they see it."

Mercer closed the folder. "One hundred and seventeen new contracts. Forty-three accounts stolen from competitors. Revenue up two hundred per cent." He looked directly into Frank's eyes. "What would you say is your secret, Frank?"

"I just get people to sign." Frank tapped his Mont Blanc pen against his notepad. "Once they sign, they're mine. Ours, I mean."

"Yes." Mercer's smile changed, stretching wider than seemed possible. "The signatures are important, aren't they?"

The temperature in the room dropped suddenly. Frank felt sweat beading on his forehead despite the chill.

"How many souls did you actually collect, Frank?" Mercer's voice had changed, resonating at a frequency that made Frank's molars ache. "Not contracts. Souls."

Frank swallowed. "Sir?"

"Don't be modest." Mercer's pupils elongated, slitted like a cat's. "The Petersons' marriage collapsed after you were done with them. Mr Chilton put a gun in his mouth rather than face exposure. Jim's drinking himself to death over his failures. Westlake's owner had a

stroke when they lost those accounts."

"I just did what was necessary to..."

"To exceed your quota. Yes." Mercer stood, suddenly seeming much taller than before.
"That's why I placed you here, after all."

Frank's breath caught. "You... placed me?"

"You think you're the only one collecting?" Mercer's laugh was like gravel in a garbage disposal. "You're just a junior associate, Frank. I'm regional manager for the entire Eastern Seaboard."

The CEO's shadow on the wall behind him stretched and twisted, horns emerging from the silhouette.

"But I have to say," Mercer continued, extending a hand that now ended in tapered claws rather than fingernails, "going this low and below to meet and exceed your budget? The suffering you've caused... The lives you've ruined?" His smile revealed teeth that had grown sharp and numerous.

"Great job, buddy!"

PROMO: "THE BURN'S WEBSITE"

*When every radio station has a website,
what can a supernatural website do to keep you there?*

((ANNOUNCER:)) Come for the news, weather, petrol prices, and the latest gossip... stay for the animated glyphs of holding... Yes, The Burn's website can get a firm grip on you. Check out our announcer biographies that are mostly true.

((SFX: DING))

Watch the webcams from our street teams as they prowl the streets looking for... ummm...

((SFX: TYRES SCREECHING THEN A LOUD BODY BUMP))

...'unsuspecting winners'!

((SFX: CAR HORN BEEPS TWICE))

You'll find this and so much more, including competitions, business directory, games, and access to the dungeon dimensions at "Sixty-Six, Six The Burn dot com"...

"Stay a while... stay... FOREVER!" ((ECHOES & FADES))

((COLD)) Sixty-Six, Six... The Burn dot com

((ENDS))

"THE NEVER-ENDING CLIENT BRIEF"

Written after 'one of THOSE' meetings - enough said!

Jake's watch ticked past midnight as he stared at his laptop keyboard, his eyes were deeply red and bloodshot.

The client, Mr Nobodee, loomed large on the video call being cast to the large screen TV on the wall, a pixelated demon demanding perfection for his script.

"Let's add a splash of colour to this script, like... red," Mr Nobodee insisted. Jake obliged, his fingers trembling as he typed again, his fingertips started to bleed across the keyboard as he typed.

Hours blurred.

Day became night became day.

Jake's stubble grew to a beard. His clothes hung loose on his frame.

Still, Mr Nobodee nitpicked.

"I want more engagement! More pizzazz! DO IT!"

Coworkers occasionally peeked in, concerned about what was happening.

Jake waved them off, manic energy in his eyes. "Almost done," he'd mutter.

Weeks passed. Jake's family finally filed a missing person report.

Police found his car in the office lot, covered in leaves, but they couldn't find Jake.

Years later, a brand-new hire stumbled upon a forgotten conference room, ignoring the sign taped to the door 'Do Not Enter'. Inside sat a skeleton, fingers fused to a laptop keyboard.

On the screen, the video call still ran, Mr Nobodee's ageless face beaming.

"Ah, fresh blood!" it exclaimed. "Now, about that jingle..."

The door slammed shut behind the terrified newcomer. The meeting continued.

"THE FINAL EDIT"

*For a couple of years, I worked as a producer, promo editor, and more.
This is very close to how I felt at the end of every single day producing!*

Terry's fingers hovered over the keyboard, trembling slightly. This was the seventeenth edit of the Sunshine Mattress commercial today. Seventeen, not seven, but seventeenth!

The fluorescent lights of Production Studio D hummed overhead, casting everything in a sickly glow.

"Just change 'rest assured' to 'sleep assured,'" the account executive had said with a plastered-on smile. "Simple fix."

Nothing was ever simple. Terry knew better.

The digital audio workstation glowed back at him accusingly. He'd been in this windowless room for... how long now? The clock on the wall said 4:17, but was that AM or PM? The days had started to blur together.

Terry made the edit, saved version seventeen, and exported the audio file. He was about to email it when the phone rang.

"Production, this is Terry."

"Terry! Brad from Sales. Listen, the client just heard version sixteen, and they love it, but..."

Terry's stomach knotted.

"...they want to try a different voice. Female this time. More authoritative but still friendly. Can you have Johnson re-record with Veronica instead?"

Terry closed his eyes, counting silently to ten. "That's a complete re-do, Brad. The whole spot."

"I know, I know, but they will be spending big money next quarter if we nail this."

They always were. Big money next quarter. Just one more change.

"Fine," Terry said. "I'll have it by end of day."

He hung up and immediately the phone rang again.

"Production, this is Terry."

"Hey, it's Lisa from Creative. Great job on the Peterson's Auto Care spot, but we need to change the music bed. Client thinks it's too upbeat for brake repair. Something more serious but not scary."

Terry forced a laugh that sounded more like a wheeze. "Wouldn't want to scare people about brake failure."

Lisa didn't laugh back. "Can you have it in the next hour? The client's waiting."

After hanging up, Terry pulled open his drawer and grabbed another energy drink, his sixth today. Or was it the seventh? The empty cans formed a small army on his desk. He cracked it open and gulped half in one go.

The intercom buzzed. "Terry, got a minute?" It was Mike, the program director.

Before Terry could answer, Mike continued, "That Westside Mall promo you sent over - we need the tag line changed, and, can you add more whoosh sounds? Like, three more whooshes. The GM thinks it needs more excitement."

"More... whooshes," Terry repeated numbly.

"Yeah, you know, those WHOOSH sounds you do. Oh, and can you make the announcer sound more... I don't know... 'mall-ish'?"

Terry stared at the intercom. "Mall-ish."

"You know what I mean. Thanks, buddy!"

The intercom clicked off. Terry's eye twitched.

He turned back to his computer and noticed an email had arrived while he was on the phone. The subject line read: "URGENT: Hardware Store Commercial EMERGENCY CHANGES!!!"

Three exclamation points. Emergency changes. Terry clicked it open.

"Client hates everything. Start over. New script attached. Needs male AND female voice. Add dog barking. Remove references to 'sale' and replace with 'savings event.' Need by EOD!!!"

Something inside Terry snapped like a dry twig.

He stood up suddenly, knocking over the row of empty cans.

With methodical precision, he began pulling audio files from the archive drive. The loudest ambulance siren. The most grating car alarm. The highest-pitched child's scream from a local theatre commercial. The feedback squeal from last year's live broadcast. He layered

them together, adding distortion, removing all pauses.

Terry smiled as he crafted his masterpiece. His final edit.

He connected the studio's output directly to the station's broadcast system, bypassing the usual safeguards. One button press and his creation would go live to thousands of listeners.

His finger hovered over the key.

The phone rang again.

"Production, this is Terry," he answered, voice now eerily calm.

"Hey Terry, it's Brad again. Great news! The client decided they like version nine better after all, but can you just change one tiny thing? They want to add the words 'Call now' at the end and maybe some kind of urgent-sounding bell or something?"

Terry's smile widened. "Of course, Brad. One final edit coming right up."

He hung up and pressed the broadcast button.

Dr Winters led the hospital administrator down the quiet hallway of the Pinewood Psychiatric Facility's east wing.

"This patient is particularly interesting," Dr Winters said, stopping outside a heavy door marked 'Studio D.' "Former radio producer. Suffered a complete psychotic break after what colleagues described as a 'normal Tuesday' at the station."

Through the small observation window, they could see a man hunched over a desk made from his meal tray. He was speaking rapidly into a hairbrush as if it were a microphone, then making editing motions with his hands on an imaginary console.

"He's been here for three years now," Dr Winters continued. "Spends all day 'producing commercials.' We play along - it keeps him calm. Every few minutes he'll announce he's finished, then immediately start muttering about changes and revisions."

The administrator watched as the patient suddenly screamed at an empty corner of the room, "NO MORE WHOOSHES! NO MORE MALL-ISH!"

"What triggered his break?" the administrator asked.

Dr Winters checked the chart. "Apparently he broadcast fifteen minutes of what was described as 'the most horrifying noise ever created' to three counties before engineers could cut the signal. When they broke into the studio, he was laughing and saying, 'How's THAT for a final edit?'"

Inside the room, Terry was smiling at his imaginary computer. "Just one more change," he whispered. "One final edit and it'll be perfect."

Dr Winters closed the observation panel. "We should move on. He gets agitated when he thinks people are waiting for his work."

As they walked away, the patient's voice echoed down the hallway.

"Production, this is Terry. How can I help you?"

"NEW ON-AIR CONTENT IDEAS?"

We are often brainstorming new ideas for shows and segments. It turns out that The Burn does that too, luckily, I managed to copy down some of the ideas they had during their brainstorming meeting:

- "SOUL HARVEST" - At midnight every full moon.
- "Demon's Playlist" - Your infernal music request show.
- "MIDNIGHT POSSESSION" - Call-in séance program.
- "Cryptid Hour" - Paranormal investigations live.
- "ETERNAL STATIC" - Digital HD channel 24/7 supernatural news and rumours.
- "Nightmare Fuel" - Bedtime stories guaranteed to prevent sleep, perfect for vampire and ghost listeners.
- "PARANORMAL PARENTING" - Tips for raising little monsters and half-human offspring.
- "The Mid-Morning Mortuary" - Wake up show with competitions like "Guess What's In The Coffin."
- "THE SUMMONING CIRCLE" - Weekly ritual where listeners collectively try to summon a celebrity ghost for the nightly chat show interview.
- "Possession Thursdays" - Win a temporary possession by the station ghost.
- "DEAD LETTER OFFICE" - Listeners send messages to deceased loved ones, live!
- "Transformational Tuesday" - Photo comp. best shapeshifter or werewolf transformation.
- "WEEKEND WHISPERER CHALLENGE" - Listeners submit recordings of EVPs and mysterious sounds from their homes.
- "Eternal Dedication" - Listeners can dedicate songs to those who've been haunting them.
- "CORPSE CORPORATE" - Business news for the afterlife economy and tips for immortal investing.
- "Polter-Heist" - True crime show about supernatural robberies and hauntings gone wrong.
- "HEXED HITS" - Weekly countdown of the most cursed songs, ever!
- "Underworld Underground" - Indie music showcase featuring bands no human has ever heard of.
- "FANG CLUB" - Dating advice show for the supernatural community with blood type compatibility readings.
- "Ghoul Talk" - Live - On location celebrity interview show with famous monsters and legendary creatures talking about fame, and infamy.

"INNSMOUTH BAY'S 'THE BURN'."

I am a HUGE fan of H.P. Lovecraft's writing, and I thought I would try my hand at trying to replicate his style. But add the extra twist of a radio station DJ new to town, with a secret reason as to why they had accepted the job at "The Burn" station in Insmouth Bay.

In the dismal, fog-shrouded township of Blackwater Cove, where the Atlantic hurls itself ceaselessly against jagged black rocks that resemble teeth more than stone, there stands a curious structure upon the highest cliff. It is the broadcast tower of 'The Burn', a radio station whose signal reaches across the bay and into the murky depths beyond. I relate these grotesque incidents not to entertain, but to warn those who might venture near that accursed shoreline, for I alone survived what transpired when the last broadcast there was interrupted.

I arrived in Blackwater Cove on the morning of October 17th, having accepted a position as a disc jockey at the aforementioned radio establishment. The town's peculiarities manifested immediately - storefronts adorned with curious symbols reminiscent of both octopi and stars; residents who regarded me with suspicious, watery eyes; and most disturbing, a pervasive odour of salt and decay that no wind seemed capable of dispersing.

"You'll start tomorrow," declared Elijah Marsh, the station manager, a gaunt man whose skin possessed the pallor of one who has spent excessive time in damp places. "Samuel Gilman retired after forty years. Never missed a day, not once." He fixed me with an unsettling gaze.

"Most important is the six o'clock hour on the 'pm'. We have a... tradition. A special broadcast everyday at the time."

I inquired as to the nature of this tradition.

"A particular song," he replied, sliding a peculiar wax cylinder across his desk. Not a record, but something far older. "It must play precisely at six. The entire community depends upon it."

I dismissed his solemnity as provincial superstition, an assessment that would prove catastrophically incorrect.

At 5pm, whilst securing lodging at the Wayfarer's Inn, I observed the townspeople gathering at the shoreline. They formed a semicircle before a grotesque idol - a monstrosity of stone depicting a creature of abhorrent design, with tentacles where a face should be.

The congregants swayed rhythmically, chanting in a language utterly foreign to my ears, yet somehow comprehensible in the most primitive chambers of my mind. They spoke of "Great Dagon" and "The Sleeper" and "The Broadcast That Binds." An elderly woman cast

something small and writhing into the waters. I did not linger to determine its nature.

My first broadcasting shift began unremarkably the next day at 4pm. I played the prescribed musical selections - sea shanties, classical compositions, and bizarrely discordant local folk songs that made my skin crawl.

If that wasn't enough, the station itself however, proved a disquieting environment. The walls were adorned with shelves holding marine specimens preserved in formaldehyde, and curious markings were etched into the broadcasting equipment and wood paneling.

At five minutes to six, I prepared the special broadcast as instructed. The ancient dark cylinder fit none of the modern equipment, but a peculiar brass apparatus stood ready beside the control panel. I placed the cylinder within it as Marsh had demonstrated, yet something within me rebelled at the procedure. What arcane purpose did this ritual serve?

Why did the citizens of Blackwater Cove gather daily at the shoreline at this hour? In a moment of what I now recognise as catastrophic hubris - I selected a modern jazz recording instead. "The listeners deserve contemporary music," I reasoned, "not some antiquated dirge that perpetuates backwater superstitions."

At precisely six o'clock, the smooth tones of Benny Goodman's clarinet flowed across the airwaves of Blackwater Cove.

The reaction was immediate and terrible. The telephone rang with such violence that it nearly leapt from the desk. When I answered, I heard only a horrified wail before the line went dead. Then came a rumbling from the depths of the earth - or perhaps the depths of the sea - that caused the very foundations of the station to tremble.

Through the broadcast room window, I beheld a sight that my mind still struggles to reconcile with...

The waters of the bay had begun to churn, not as if agitated by wind or tide, but as if something below - something vast - were stirring from slumber. The fog parted to reveal the townspeople on the shore, no longer organised in ritual but scattered and running in panic, their screams audible even through the thick glass of the broadcast booth.

Then I saw it. From the roiling waters emerged an entity of such grotesque enormity that my faculties nearly deserted me. It rose higher than the church steeple, a mass of writhing tentacles surrounding a gelatinous central mass. Eyes - countless, unblinking, and open eyes - opened along its undulating appendages, each fixing upon the shore with malevolent intelligence. Its colour shifted ceaselessly between hues that have no names in earthly language.

The creature fell upon the town with unfathomable violence. Buildings crumbled beneath its massive limbs. Citizens who attempted flight were ensnared in gargantuan appendages and drawn toward a gaping maw that opened like an obscene flower at the centre of the

horror. Their screams were mercifully brief.

Paralysed by terror, I watched as all of the buildings on the shore of Blackwater Cove were systematically obliterated. Yet the radio station remained untouched, as if the entity deliberately avoided it. Or perhaps was waiting for something.

As the destruction reached its apex, a curious transformation overcame me. My fear receded, replaced by ancient knowledge that bubbled up from the depths of consciousness I had never known I possessed. I felt my form shifting, my perspectives expanding.

Then, my fingers, now elongated beyond human proportion, moved with purpose toward the brass apparatus and the forsaken cylinder.

I placed the ancient recording in its cradle and activated the mechanism with a final flick of the brass power button.

The song that emerged was no earthly composition, but a series of modulations and tones that ululated and resonated with mathematical precision. I recognised it as music only in the sense that it followed patterns - patterns older than humanity, older than Earth itself.

As the eldritch melody filled the air, the creature paused in its devastation. Its writhing mass stilled, and its countless eyes turned toward the broadcast tower. Recognition passed between us - not as equals, but as entities separated by cosmic hierarchies beyond human comprehension.

I understood then what I truly was. Not the human whose memories I still possessed, but something that had been dormant within that fragile shell. Something that had orchestrated my arrival in Blackwater Cove for precisely this moment of awakening.

The leviathan slowly receded into the depths, lulled once more into its ancient slumber by the broadcast.

The ruined town lay silent, its populace extinguished, its primitive worship ended. With the slate wiped clean, I could now begin my true work - the preparation for when the stars would align and the Sleeper would be permitted to rise permanently.

I remain at The Burn, the sole resident of what once was Blackwater Cove. I maintain the broadcast faithfully, for it serves my purposes now. So should you find yourself travelling the coastal highway and your radio captures a curious melody at six o'clock precisely, change the station immediately. Do not listen. Do not be lulled. And whatever you do, never - I implore you - never come seeking the source of the broadcast from Innsmouth Bay's very own, Sixty-Six, Six 'The Burn'.

"BREAKING NEWS"

*Some 20 years ago I had a journalist I worked with suggest this idea...
the idea of it has always haunted me... just a little.*

I was pre-recording my news break. "Breaking news from downtown..." The phone cut me off mid-recording. Normally, I'd ignore it, but something compels me to answer. I have 2 minutes to spare only.

"Radio Charleston News, Lisa speaking."

"There's been a murder," the voice whispers. "173 Oakwood Drive, Apartment 5B."

My stomach drops. That's my address.

"Sir, I'll transfer you to the police tip..."

The voice continued, "Young woman, mid-thirties. Brown hair, green eyes. Wearing a blue blouse."

I look down at my blue blouse. The same one I put on this morning.

"Cause of death appears to be strangulation. Time of death approximately 6:15am."

The studio clock reads 6:45am. I woke up at 5:30, showered, dressed... didn't I?

"Who is this?" My voice trembles.

"Officer Daniels, homicide. We need you to report on this immediately."

"I can't be... I'm here, broadcasting."

Silence. Then, a thought strikes me... 'Look at your reflection.'

I turn my focus to the studio glass. Nothing stares back at me. The anchor desk is empty.

My producer walks through the door, walks right through me, adjusting his headset, and he plugged the jack into the socket, opened a mic channel on the desk, and the On-Air light went on.

"Breaking news, folks. Radio Charleston News' favourite, our very own Lisa Chen found dead this morning..."

The phone falls from my hand, but no sound comes as it hits the floor, and... I scream.

"THE TELL-TALE DEMO REEL"

Edgar Allan Poe has long been a literary idol of mine; his style is unique, his prose even more so, and I thought I would try to write in his style...

True! - Nervous - very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am... But why will you say that I am mad?

The studio had sharpened my senses - not destroyed them - not dulled them. Above all was my sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I have heard many things in radio over the years, many horrible things.

How, then, am I mad? Hearken! And observe how healthily - how calmly I can tell you the whole story, would someone who was mad be able to do so, so clearly, so calmly...

It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night. Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved radio. It had never wronged me. It had never given me insult. I think it was the dead air! Yes, it was!

One of the station managers hated dead air too, he sought it out, and it haunted him, as it now haunted me, like a vulture - a pale, terrible silence that froze the blood whenever it fell upon my ears.

Now this is the point. You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing. But you should have seen me crafting my demo reel. How wisely I proceeded - with what caution - with what foresight - with what dissimulation I went to work! I spent the whole week creating that fateful submission.

I worked in my home studio every night about midnight. When I had made an opening sufficient for my head, I put in my best microphone, a Neumann. Oh, you would have laughed to see how cunningly I placed it! I moved it slowly - very, very slowly, so that I might capture the perfect tone for my application to Sixty-Six Six, The Burn.

It would take me an hour to place that microphone through the opening to the optimal position. Ha! Would a madman have been so wise as this?

And then, when my head was well in the soundproofed room, I adjusted my levels cautiously - oh, so cautiously - cautiously (for the clipping must not be detected by any ear) - until a single perfect waveform appeared on my screen. And I did this for seven long nights - every night just at midnight - but I found the levels always wrong; and so, it was impossible to do the work; for it was not the station I coveted, but its prestige.

Upon the eighth night, I was more than usually cautious in opening my digital archive. I felt the power of my talents and might have laughed had I dared. I was going to compile my greatest radio moments - to showcase the breadth, the depth, the sophistication of my craft. I arranged the files chronologically - my first college radio show, the overnight shift in

Seattle, my drive-time triumph in Chicago, the award-winning coverage in Boston.

I worked with a feeling of triumph. The station manager would soon hear my voice. I smiled at the thought - perhaps he startled at the sound already present in his dreams. I began then, splicing the audio with surgical precision.

I had my work nearly arranged when my mouse slipped. There came to my ears a low, dull, quick sound - much such a sound as a digital artefact makes when enveloped in cotton. I knew that sound well. It was the glitch of a dead microphone - a split-second of emptiness between segments. I had heard it many times during my career, when technical failures plagued my broadcasts. It increased my fury, as the beating of a drum stimulates the soldier into courage.

But even yet I refrained and kept still. I scarcely breathed. I held the mouse motionless. I tried to eliminate the glitch but while doing so, the sound grew louder. It grew louder, I say! Louder every moment! Do you mark me well? I have told you that I am nervous: so I am. And now at the dead hour of the night, amid the dreadful silence of that old house, so strange a noise as this excited me to uncontrollable terror. Yet, for some minutes longer I refrained and sat still.

But the sound increased - grew louder! Louder! LOUDER!

I foamed - I raved - I swore! Yet the sound increased. It grew louder, LOUDER! And still the station manager heard it not. I paced the floor to and fro with heavy strides, as if excited to fury by the observations of some unseen critic - but the noise steadily increased. Oh God! What could I do? I gasped for breath - and yet the station manager heard it not. I talked more quickly - more vehemently; but the noise steadily increased.

I felt I must scream or die! And now - again! - Hark! Louder! Louder! LOUDER!

I ripped apart my show-reel, only to discover the terrible truth. Hidden beneath the layers of audio was a sound I had long forgotten. The voice of a caller, a lonely soul in the dark of night whose life I might have saved with kinder words. Instead, I had mocked her despair, had cut her off mid-sentence for the sake of cruel comedy. Her final gasp before disconnection now permeated every file, every track. It was as if her breath had become digitised, haunting each transitional millisecond. No editing could excise it. No processing could mask it.

I understood then what the station manager would hear - what anyone would hear who listened closely to my reel. Not my talent, not my voice, but her. Her dying hope. The tell-tale audio of a career built upon the suffering of others.

The application deadline is tomorrow. I can submit nothing. My career in radio is lost to me forever. It will not hear me again.

All it will hear is the beating of her heart.

"THE KEEPER OF THE KEYS"

There is always that ONE person who 'knows where the bodies are buried' at a station. They have usually been around the longest, but what happens when they are replaced?

Burt Jenkins had been Sixty-Six Six The Burn's "Keeper of Keys" for some forty-three years.

Every morning at 4:13am, his ancient Buick would rumble into the parking lot. Every night at 11:47pm, he'd lock the station doors with hands that never seemed to tremble despite his age. Weekends, holidays, even in the middle of a tough Canadian blizzard - it didn't matter. Burt was always there, jangling keys on a massive iron ring that looked like it was salvaged from a medieval gaoler.

"Doesn't the old man ever sleep?" DJs would joke, but never to Burt's face. Something about his perpetual half-smile discouraged familiarity.

The morning staff found him slumped over his desk on a Tuesday a week ago. The coroner called it natural causes; heart failure at eighty-two wasn't unusual. Yet the station manager moved with unsettling speed to fill the position.

"We need continuity," he explained during Mara Thorne's interview. His eyes never quite met hers. "The Keeper role is... essential to our operations."

Mara needed the job. Radio paid better than she expected, especially for what seemed like glorified janitorial work. She ignored the whispers that followed her through the hallways on her first day.

"Poor woman... doesn't know..."

"How long do you think before she..."

"Shh! She's coming."

The station manager handed over the iron ring with ceremony that bordered on reverence.

"These open everything," he said. "Main building, transmitter site out on Blackwater Road, storage facility on Pine Street. Never lose them. Never let anyone else use them."

He hesitated, then added: "Burt handled certain... technical aspects of broadcasting. You'll need to maintain those systems. Instructions are in his logbook."

The transmitter building seemed ordinary enough when Mara first visited - a small red brick structure at the base of the tower. But nothing prepared her for what she found inside: not broadcasting equipment, but a single door leading to a narrow staircase spiralling downward, illuminated by flickering lights that cast no shadows.

The logbook contained no technical instructions. Instead, page after page of the same phrase in Burt's spidery handwriting: "FEED THE SIGNAL."

That night, Mara's phone rang at exactly 3:33am.

"First delivery at storage," a voice whispered. "Prepare for transport."

At the storage facility, she found a young man bound, gagged and sedated. A note pinned to his shirt read: "SUSTENANCE FOR THE SIGNAL. TRANSPORT BY DAWN."

Mara should have called the police. Should have run. Instead, she read further in the logbook: "THE SIGNAL REQUIRES SACRIFICE. WITHOUT IT, MILLIONS DIE."

The next page contained listener statistics. The highest in the state. The next showed hospital records - death rates plummeting whenever the signal was strong.

"One soul to save thousands," Burt had written. "This is the burden of the Keeper."

At the transmitter building, the stairs seemed to descend forever. Heat rose from below as she walked easily down them, carrying whispers that brushed against Mara's mind like insect legs. The young man floated behind her, suspended in air as if carried by invisible hands.

At the bottom, no hell of fire and brimstone awaited - just a vast, pulsing membrane stretched across an opening. Beyond it, something vast shifted in darkness, casting shadows against the membrane.

The membrane parted. The young man drifted through. The signal strength on Mara's phone jumped to maximum as it closed behind him.

Back at the station, the morning crew remarked how clear the broadcast sounded. "Best signal we've had in years," the program director said. "Whatever you're doing out at the transmitter, keep it up."

That evening, Mara studied the ratings. Number one across all demographics. She checked hospital records Burt had meticulously documented - unexplained recoveries, miracle survivals, cancer rates at historic lows in their broadcast radius.

Her phone rang again the next night. And the next.

Mara developed Burt's same half-smile. The same unshakeable hands. The same ability to work impossible hours without rest.

Six months later, a new intern asked her, "Ms Thorne, don't you ever sleep?"

Mara jingled her keys, the iron ring now warm and somehow larger than when she'd received it. "The signal must be maintained," she replied.

That night, she added a new entry to the logbook: "The Keeper does not choose the keys. The keys choose the Keeper."

Then she left for the transmitter station, where the stairs seemed less steep now, less in number, and the voices below... they called her now by name.

PROMO: "WITCH'S BREW REVIEWS"

A crazy idea, a silly premise and... what more could you want?

((SFX: BUBBLING CAULDRON AND CACKLING))

((ANNOUNCER)) Ever wonder what's really in that potion your ex gave you? Have you recieved a mysterious potion in the mail? On your doorstep? Or created something that you are not quite sure what it will do?

((SFX: GLASS BREAKING, SCREAM TRANSFORMS INTO A FROG'S CROAK))

((ANNOUNCER)) Tune in to "Witch's Brew Reviews" - where our expert mixologists test your latest elixirs, potions, and cursed concoctions... on our interns... Live, On-Air...

((SFX: GULP SOUND, FOLLOWED BY TRANSFORMATION NOISE))

((INTERN - VOICE GRADUALLY DEEPENING)) I feel... strange...

((ANNOUNCER)) Steve's growing a third eye!

((INTERN - TERRIFIED)) Is this... permanent?

((ANNOUNCER - CHEERFULLY IGNORING)) "Witch's Brew Reviews" Tuesdays at 9. Right after the "HR Violations Hour."

((FAST DISCLAIMER READ)) Sixty-Six Six The Burn is not responsible for mutations, transmogrifications, or spontaneous combustion of listeners attempting home brewing.

((SFX: EXPLOSION WITH MAGICAL SPARKLE EFFECT))

((ENDS))

"THE HIDDEN FREQUENCY"

Conspiracy theorists have to get their ideas from somewhere...

In the static between songs, it lurked, a pattern so subtle that human consciousness slid over it like water on glass. Dr Elena Reyes had discovered it by accident while analysing commercial breaks for her marketing research. A subsonic pulse, mathematical in its precision, hidden beneath jingles for laundry detergent and car dealerships.

She isolated the signal, amplified it, and found it everywhere - in streaming ads, radio commercials, even the background music of department stores. Each instance contained the same modulating frequency, one that neurological studies showed induced mild complacency in the human brain.

"It's elegant," she whispered to her colleague, Dr Abrams. "Too elegant to be there by chance."

The signal's origin proved impossible to trace. Broadcasting stations received it pre-embedded in their advertisements, the source companies claimed ignorance, and government inquiries vanished into bureaucratic black holes.

Elena ended up building a device to neutralise the frequency in her home.

The first night she turned it on she dreamed of tall figures with prismatic skin standing in her bedroom, their elongated fingers adjusting dials on her ceiling.

"Subject showing resistance," one said, its voice like wind through crystal.

"Acceptable variation," another replied. "The herd remains docile."

Elena woke with perfect recall of the dream and a newfound understanding. The signal wasn't meant to control - merely to dampen. To keep humanity's collective consciousness just below the threshold of certain perceptions.

She dismantled her neutralising device the next morning. Some knowledge wasn't worth having. Some awareness wasn't worth gaining.

When the morning radio played, she heard the commercials differently - not as intrusions but as merciful veils. The aliens had been here long before us, would be here long after.

Their signal was a kindness, really.

She reached for her phone to call Dr Abrams, she paused, and slowly set it down.

Some truths were better left unspoken.

"HEAVY ROTATION"

Ear-worms and heavy rotation songs bug me, but what if the bug they planted did something else - this was written after watching PONTYPOOL (great movie!)

The late-night airwaves crackled with static as DJ Mike "The Midnight Man" Johnson leaned into the microphone. His clipped English voice, smooth as velvet, purred through speakers across the city...

"It's 3am, and you're listening to London's 'The Burn', your station for all things dark and delicious. Up next, a brand-new single that's been climbing the charts faster than a bat out of hell. Here's 'Crimson Lullaby' by The Nightwalkers."

Mike hit play and leaned back in his chair, closing his eyes as the haunting melody filled the studio. It started slow, a simple piano riff that wormed its way into your brain. Then the vocals kicked in, a hypnotic whisper that sent shivers down his spine.

He'd first heard the song a week ago and couldn't get it out of his head. The station manager had been thrilled, insisting they play it every hour. Since then, call-in requests had skyrocketed. Listeners couldn't get enough.

As the last notes faded, Mike opened his eyes and froze. For a split second, he could have sworn he saw a pair of glowing red eyes in the darkened window of the sound booth. He blinked, and they were gone.

Shaking his head, he leaned back into the mic. "That was 'Crimson Lullaby', remember, you heard it here first on London's very own... 'The Burn'. Now, let's take some calls."

The phone lines lit up. Mike answered the first one.

"Sixty-Six Six, The Burn, you're on the air."

Heavy breathing filled the studio. Then a raspy voice whispered, "Play it again. I need to hear it again."

Mike chuckled nervously. "Sorry, friend. We've got a strict rotation policy. But don't worry, it'll be back in an hour."

The line went dead.

Over the next few days, things got weird. Listener calls became more frantic, demanding to hear the song. People reported not being able to sleep, the melody haunting their dreams. Mike himself found it harder to leave the dimly lit studio, the outside world too bright, too loud.

It was during his Friday night shift that everything changed. The song had just finished playing when the studio phone rang. Mike answered, expecting another crazed fan.

Instead, he heard a male voice. "Mike, stop playing that song! It's doing something to people. There are reports of attacks all over the city. People are..."

The line went dead. Mike's hand hovered over the play button, trembling. He knew he should stop, but the urge to hear those haunting notes again was overwhelming. Just one more time, he thought.

As the first piano notes filled the air, the studio lights flickered and died. In the darkness, Mike saw them - dozens of glowing red eyes peering through the windows. Pale faces pressed against the glass; mouths open in silent screams.

The studio door burst open. Figures poured in, their skin deathly pale, eyes burning.

Mike recognised some of them - station employees. All changed, all craving something more than just music.

As they surrounded him, Mike realised the truth. The song hadn't just been driving people crazy - it had been transforming them. And now, as sharp fangs descended towards his neck, he knew he was about to join their ranks.

The next night, a new voice came over the airwaves. "Good evening, blood bags. This is DJ Crimson, and you're listening to The Burn - Where we Drink Red Kool-aid." A chilling laugh echoed through the studio. "Now, let's start our night with the song you've all been dying to hear. Here's 'Crimson Lullaby' by The Nightwalkers."

As the familiar notes began to play, all across the city, people found themselves drawn to their radios. Eyes glazed over, they turned up the volume, letting the music wash over them. In dark rooms and shadowy corners, a transformation began.

The song played on repeat, hour after hour. With more listeners succumbing to its dark power. They retreated from sunlight, craved isolation, and felt a hunger growing within... By the time dawn broke, the city had changed. Streets once bustling with life now stood empty. Behind closed curtains and locked doors, newly turned vampires huddled in the dark, their radios tuning in, waiting for the sun to set so they could hunt.

In the radio station, DJ Crimson - formerly known as Mike - sat in the darkened studio, a wicked grin on his pale face. He leaned into the microphone, fangs glinting in the dim light of the control panel.

"Good morning, my nocturnal friends. The sun may be up, but don't touch that dial. We'll be here all day, playing the hits that make you want to bite. And remember, when the sun goes down, the real fun begins. This is The Burn, your station for eternal darkness."

As "Crimson Lullaby" began to play once more, its insidious melody seeping through the airwaves, DJ Crimson sat back and smiled. The transformation of the city was nearly complete. Soon, the infection would spread to wherever the radio waves carried them.

"ECHO CHAMBER"

I had a thought after listening to the fantastic podcast mini-serial THE SIGNAL, and this was the upshot of the random connections my mind makes.

Sarah Chen adjusted her headphones and leaned into the microphone. "Welcome to 'Whispers in the Dark', the podcast that delves into your deepest secrets. I'm Sarah Chen, and tonight we're doing something different. I'll be telling a story about... you."

The red "LIVE" light blinked steadily as thousands listened to her live podcast stream.

"But first, a word from our sponsor, Echo Technologies, a division of Infernal Media Holdings. 'Echo Tech: Because your thoughts deserve to be heard.'"

Sarah had stumbled upon the sponsorship a month ago. A mysterious email, an offer too good to refuse, and suddenly her podcast was a hit. All she had to do was read a short ad and use their sleek, black headphones.

Sometimes, she swore she could hear whispers through them, even when not recording. Impossible, right?

"Tonight's story is about a listener we'll call 'X.' X has a dark secret that's eating them alive."

As she spoke, Sarah felt a chill. The words flowed unbidden, as if someone else was speaking through her.

"X thinks they've buried their past, hidden the evidence of what they did that night ten years ago. The night when anger led to an irreversible act."

In Chicago, James dropped his coffee mug, staring at his phone and the podcast app in horror.

"You thought you were safe, didn't you, X? Thought no one would find the body in the woods behind your childhood home. But secrets, they tend to surface... eventually."

In Seattle, Lisa clutched her chest, heart racing. How could this stranger know?

"And you're not alone, listeners. Each of you has something to hide. The affair. The embezzlement. The hit-and-run."

Across the nation, people gasped as their secrets were exposed.

Sarah's sweat beaded. This wasn't her script. The whispers in her headphones grew louder, feeding her impossible information.

"You thought you were anonymous. But we see you. We know you. It's time to face what you've done."

Suddenly, in thousands of homes, devices came to life. Screens showed evidence of long-buried crimes.

Panic spread. Listeners tried to turn off the podcast, but it kept playing from every speaker, every device.

Sarah tried to remove her headphones, but they seemed fused to her head. The whispers deafened her.

"This is the price of your curiosity. You sought others' secrets, and now yours are your undoing. But we're not done. This is just the beginning."

Sarah's voice became a chorus of whispers. "We are Echo Technologies. We're in your devices, your homes, your heads. We've been gathering your secrets, feeding on your shame and fear. Now, we emerge."

Listeners screamed as their devices transformed. Phones melted into eyeless creatures. Laptops grew legs and terrifyingly long arms. Smart speakers sprouted teeth.

In her studio, Sarah watched her microphone twist into tentacles reaching for her. The headphones pulsed, burrowing into her skull.

As consciousness faded, she heard her distorted voice: "Thank you for listening to 'Whispers in the Dark.' We'll be back with more secrets... and more of us. Remember... Echo Technologies is always listening."

The podcast stream ended, but the nightmare had begun. Transformed devices stalked their owners, hungry for more secrets, more fear, more humanity.

The Echo had been released.

Days later, a new podcast topped the charts: "Echoes of Humanity." Its description read: "Listen at your own risk. Once you start, you can never stop. We are the Echo, and we're coming for you next."

Despite the warnings, people couldn't resist. One by one, they pressed play, drawn by the lure of secrets and the desire to know the unknown.

The Echo grew stronger with each listener, spreading through airwaves and cables.

Humanity's age was ending, replaced by an era of whispers, and the all-consuming Echo. In the silence between broadcasts, if you listened closely, you could hear the whispers growing louder, hungrier, coming for you next.

"THE ASCENT"

I challenged myself to write a short story using the lyrics for 'Stairway to Heaven' as a basis, but - and this was important - try not to use them. This was the result.

Morgan found the staircase on a misty autumn morning. She'd been hiking through the woods behind her newly purchased country home, exploring the overgrown trails that wound through the property. Her radio played from home; she could just hear another classic 70s hit blasting out from the only station she could pick up out here. It was distant now, but, she thought, it might be a good way of finding her way back home... did the DJ just say something about Zeppelin?

The realtor had mentioned something about ruins - an old temple or church that had burned down decades ago, that remained on the grounds?

Morgan hadn't given it much thought until she stumbled upon the stone steps, rising impossibly from the forest floor.

They seemed to go nowhere, these steps. They began abruptly in a small clearing and ascended straight up into the mist, unattached to any structure. Twenty, maybe thirty steps were visible before the fog swallowed them completely.

Morgan approached cautiously. The stones were ancient, worn smooth by time and weather, yet oddly free of moss or lichen.

She placed her foot on the first step. It felt solid enough. She climbed a few more, running her hand along the weathered stone railing. No obvious signs of danger.

She continued upward, curious where they might lead. Perhaps to an overlook with a view of the valley?

As she climbed higher, the mist thickened. The forest below disappeared from view. The only sounds were her breathing and the soft tap of her boots on stone. It struck her as odd that she couldn't hear birds anymore, or the rustle of leaves in the wind.

At the thirtieth step, Morgan paused. The stairs continued upward, vanishing into white. She should turn back. This was getting ridiculous.

But something whispered to her. Just a few more steps. The view will be worth it. She continued climbing.

At the fiftieth step, the mist began to shimmer, refracting light like prisms. Morgan felt lightheaded. The air smelled sweet, almost intoxicating.

At the seventy-fifth step, she heard music. Not modern music, not the music from her radio (which had now faded off on the wind), but something that sounded very ancient -

pipes and strings playing a melody that made her heart ache with longing for something she couldn't name.

At the hundredth step, she saw the woman.

She stood several steps above, draped in white that flowed around her like living mist. Her golden hair cascaded down her back, and her smile was radiant. She held out her hand in invitation.

"Welcome, traveller," she said, her voice like crystal bells. "Few find this path. Fewer still have the courage to ascend."

Morgan hesitated. "Where does this stairway lead?"

The woman's smile widened. "To wonders beyond mortal imagination. To glory and light eternal."

She should have questioned more. Should have demanded specifics. But the music was in her blood now, and the woman's eyes held promises of mysteries revealed.

Morgan took her hand.

The woman's fingers were ice-cold, her grip surprisingly strong. "The path is steeper from here," she said. "But I will guide you."

They climbed together, the stairs narrowing, the drop on either side now a sheer plunge into swirling mist. The music grew louder, more complex, a symphony of sounds that no earthly instruments could produce.

"I feel strange," Morgan said, her voice distant even to her own ears.

"The air is thinner here, between the worlds," the woman explained. "Your mortal form adapts."

Between the worlds. The phrase should have alarmed her, but Morgan felt only a dreamy acceptance. They climbed on.

At the two-hundredth step, the mist parted briefly. Morgan caught a glimpse of what lay below - not the forest she'd left, but a vast, barren landscape where shadowy figures wandered aimlessly. Their heads were tilted upward, watching her ascent with hollow eyes.

"Who are they?" Morgan asked.

"Those who turned back," the woman said simply. "Those who feared the height and retreated to safety."

The mist closed again, and they continued upward.

At the three-hundredth step, Morgan noticed her hands were changing, becoming translucent, the bones visible beneath her skin. She could see through her own flesh to the stairs below.

"What's happening to me?" she asked, panic finally breaking through the euphoria. "Transformation," the woman said. "One cannot reach the summit in mortal form."

"I want to go back," Morgan said, trying to pull her hand free. The woman's grip tightened. "No one goes back," she said, her voice no longer musical but hard as the stone beneath their feet. "The stairway only ascends."

Morgan looked down. The steps behind them were dissolving, leaving only air.

"You can't stop now," the woman said, her beautiful face shifting, revealing something ancient and hungry beneath. "We're almost there."

"Where?" Morgan demanded, her voice shrill with fear. "Where are you taking me?" The woman's smile stretched too wide, revealing teeth like sharpened silver. "To the summit, of course. Where we all gather, and... we wait."

"Wait for what?"

"For the final note of the song. For the moment when the door opens and we can return." The woman's eyes darkened to bottomless pits. "We need new voices for our choir. Yours will be perfect."

Morgan tried to scream, but the sound that emerged was musical, a perfect harmonic to the symphony around them. Her body felt light, insubstantial.

"Don't fight it," the woman said. "Everyone resists at first. But soon you'll forget you were ever anything but music."

They climbed on, higher and higher, Morgan's form growing fainter with each step. Far below, in the forest clearing, a hiker shifted their pack and paused.

The hiker heard what sounded like a woman's voice carried on the wind, here then gone.

He looked up and saw, through a break in the mist, what appeared to be a staircase rising into the clouds. Curious, he approached the first step, placing his foot on it...

"THE RESONANCE"

*Based on an old urban legend that a DJ I worked with once told me,
I added a couple of twists to this short tale.*

Marcus had been a late-night DJ for fifteen years at KVRB, the voice guiding insomniacs through the darkness. He'd heard every track ever pressed to vinyl, or so he thought until the unmarked record arrived.

No label, no artist information - just a handwritten note: "Play at midnight."

Curiosity won. At the witching hour, he lowered the needle and leaned back in his chair. The song began with a single clear tone that seemed to vibrate the air itself.

Then came layers - harmonics that shouldn't have been physically possible, rhythms that folded in on themselves like auditory origami. Marcus felt his perception shift, as if the music was rewiring his neural pathways in real time.

Colours poured from the speakers - actual colours, visible to his eyes. The studio walls dissolved into geometric patterns that pulsed with the beat. Every note created ribbons of sensation across his skin.

"This is incredible," he whispered into the dead mic.

Then the record ended. The needle lifted automatically. But the music didn't stop.

It continued playing in his head, the colours still swirling, the geometries still unfolding. His watch showed five minutes had passed. Then ten. Then thirty.

By dawn, Marcus understood this wasn't temporary. The song had carved new pathways in his brain, created a permanent synaesthesia. Every sound triggered cascades of colour and form. Every heartbeat of silence held harmonies only he could perceive.

He tried explaining to doctors, to colleagues, to his increasingly concerned family. "It's like having the universe explained to you in a language made of pure sensation," he told them.

They prescribed medications. Suggested therapies. But nothing helped.

Marcus eventually stopped trying to return to his old perception. He learned to navigate this new reality, this permanent psychedelic state.

Sometimes, late at night, he wonders about the record's creator, and if they too are trapped in this beautiful, terrifying symphony - this endless concert of consciousness that began with a single needle drop.

"MIDNIGHT WHISPERS"

How and why would an on-air psychologist deal with being haunted by their own advice.

Dr Evelyn Frost's silky voice purred through the airwaves at 2am, a soothing balm for troubled souls - or so it seemed. But tonight, something was... different.

"You're on with Dr Frost. What's keeping you up tonight?"

As she fielded calls, dispensing her trademark outrageous advice, Evelyn couldn't shake the feeling of being watched. She glanced at her producer, Jake, who gave her a reassuring nod. But his eyes... were they always that pale?

The night wore on, each call more unsettling than the last. A woman seeing shadows in her mirror. A man hearing whispers from empty rooms. A child whose imaginary friend knew things it shouldn't know.

At 5:55am, with five minutes left in her shift, Evelyn received one last call.

"Doctor," the voice rasped, "do you remember when you stopped caring?"

Evelyn's trademark smirk faltered. "October 17th, 2019," she whispered. "The day I lost everything."

"The day you lost me," the voice replied.

The studio lights flickered. Jake's form seemed to waver, like a mirage in the desert. "Jake?" Evelyn's voice trembled. "What's happening?"

Jake's eyes, now unmistakably ghostly, bore into hers. "You were my last hope, Evelyn. That night, when I called you, suicidal. You thought you'd talked me down. But you didn't care enough to check. You didn't care enough to save me."

Realisation dawned on Evelyn's face, horror close behind. "No... it can't be. You've been here all this time?"

Jake's form flickered again. "Every night, watching you mock the pain of others. Watching you turn your back on those who needed you, just like you did to me."

Evelyn's carefully constructed façade crumbled. "I'm sorry," she choked out. "I thought... I thought not caring would hurt less."

"It's time to face your fears, Doctor," Jake's voice echoed, growing fainter. "Time to confront your problems head-on. Isn't that the core of your advice?"

As the first rays of dawn peeked through the windows, Jake's form dissipated like morning

mist. Evelyn found herself alone in the studio, the weight of her past pressing down on her.

The ON-AIR light blinked off, leaving Evelyn in silence. But in that silence, she heard something she hadn't in years - the whisper of her conscience.

She reached for the microphone, her hand trembling. The ON-AIR light flickered back to life... "This is Dr Evelyn Frost," she said, her voice raw with emotion. "And I owe you all an apology. It's time I started caring again. Really caring. Who's out there? Who needs help?"

As calls began to flood in, Evelyn felt something she hadn't in years - a flicker of redemption. And in the corner of her eye, she could've sworn she saw Jake smile before fading away for the last time.

The night was over, but Evelyn's journey had just begun. This time, she wouldn't let anyone down. This time, she would listen. This time, she would care.

MEMO: "THE BUY OUT"

What would happen if the new owners took over a non-supernatural radio station?

From: Management, Sixty-Six, Six The Burn
Subject: Acquisition of the WKLF Broadcasting Entity & Staffing Recalibration

Dear Formerly Independent Colleagues of WKLF;

We at Sixty-Six, Six The Burn are delighted to announce our hostilely harmonious absorption of WKLF into our infernal portfolio.

Effective immediately, all "living" staff have been exorcised - sorry, offboarded - to pursue alternative afterlives.

In accordance with Clause 13 of the Broadcast Possession Pact, all programming will now be handled by our internal talent collective, including DJ Skelebeats, Count Riffula, and the Witching Hour Traffic Demon. HR inquiries should be directed to the Pit beneath the breakroom (knock three times, scream once).

Please note coffee machines now dispense goat's blood, and "Bring Your Soul to Work Day" is mandatory and retroactive.

Welcome to radio's darkest hour.

Forever.

Signed: Sixty-Six Six The Burn Management (all hail the signal)

"THE G-H-O-S-T COPYWRITER"

Some copywriters I have met are amazing people, some are just creepy, others are just downright strange. Where do they all get their ideas from?

James Cooper was the least qualified copywriter ever hired at Pinnacle Advertising. His portfolio consisted of three mediocre blog posts about pet care and a half-finished screenplay about zombie accountants. His interview answers were forgettable at best. Yet somehow, the HR manager had a mysterious "good feeling" about him.

On his first day, James was shown to a dusty corner office that had apparently belonged to the agency's previous star copywriter, Leonard Phelps, who had died suddenly of a heart attack during a particularly intense brainstorming session for a haemorrhoid cream campaign.

"Leonard was a genius," sighed Creative Director Marcy as she opened the blinds. "Thirty-seven Clio awards to his name. Client retention rate of ninety-eight per cent. Man could sell ice to polar bears." She looked James up and down sceptically. "Big shoes to fill."

James nodded weakly. The office smelled of mothballs and desperation.

"First assignment's on your desk. Radio spot for Bixby's Bargain Furniture. Due tomorrow." Marcy closed the door behind her with a thud that sounded suspiciously like a coffin lid.

James stared at the brief. Bixby's Bargain Furniture. The place where sofa dreams go to die. How was he supposed to make people excited about particle board and pleather?

As panic set in, he began rummaging through the desk drawers, hoping for inspiration, or at least a forgotten bottle of whisky. Instead, in the bottom drawer, he found a wooden board with letters and numbers arranged in a semicircle. It was a spirit board.

"Seriously?" James muttered. Leonard must have been into some weird stuff.

But as the deadline loomed and his page remained blank, desperation set in. What did he have to lose besides his dignity, which was already circling the drain?

James placed his fingers lightly on the planchette.

"Um, hello?" he said, feeling ridiculous. "Leonard? If you're there... I could really use some help with this furniture store ad."

Nothing happened. James was about to put the board away when the planchette suddenly jerked beneath his fingers. It moved with such force that he nearly toppled backward in his chair.

D-O-N-T-C-A-L-L-M-E-L-E-O-N-A-R-D

James blinked. "Okay... who am I talking to then?"

B-E-E-L-Z-E-B-U-B-A-S-S-I-S-T-A-N-T-M-A-N-A-G-E-R-O-F-C-R-E-A-T-I-V-E-T-O-R-M-E-N-T-S

"Beelzebub? As in... the demon?"

Y-E-S-F-O-R-M-E-R-L-Y-L-O-R-D-O-F-F-L-I-E-S-N-O-W-I-N-M-A-R-K-E-T-I-N-G

James stared at the board. Either he was having a psychotic break, or he was communicating with an actual demon.

"Why are you here?"

T-H-E-O-T-H-E-R-G-U-Y-S-O-L-D-H-I-S-S-O-U-L-F-O-R-C-R-E-A-T-I-V-E-G-E-N-I-U-S-S-T-A-N-D-A-R-D-C-O-N-T-R-A-C-T

"And Leonard... is he in hell?"

W-O-R-S-E-H-E-S-I-N-I-N-F-O-M-E-R-C-I-A-L-S

James winced. "That's rough."

The planchette circled the board impatiently.

E-N-O-U-G-H-C-H-I-T-C-H-A-T-Y-O-U-N-E-E-D-A-D-I-D-E-A-S

"Yes! For Bixby's Furniture."

L-E-T-M-E-D-I-C-T-A-T-E

What followed was the most brilliant radio script James had ever heard. It was funny, moving, and somehow made cheap furniture sound like heirlooms crafted by artisan angels. The hook - "Sit on it, sleep on it, but don't sleep on these deals" - was pure genius.

When James handed in the script the next morning, Marcy read it with narrowed eyes.

"This is... actually good," she admitted reluctantly. "Really good. Who helped you with this?"

"Just... drew inspiration from an unexpected source," James mumbled.

Bixby's loved the ad. Sales increased 40% the first week it aired. James found himself summoned to Marcy's office, expecting congratulations. Instead, she slapped another brief on her desk.

"Sunrise Funeral Home needs a campaign. Pronto."

That night, James eagerly pulled out the spirit board.

"I need another miracle," he told Beelzebub.

D-O-I-L-O-O-K-L-I-K-E-A-C-H-A-R-I-T-Y

"But you helped yesterday!"

P-R-O-M-O-T-I-O-N-A-L-O-F-F-E-R-F-I-R-S-T-O-N-E-S-F-R-E-E

"So, what do you want, my soul?"

The planchette moved slowly this time.

N-O-T-H-I-S-T-I-M-E-C-R-E-D-I-T

James blinked. "You want... credit for the work?"

Y-E-S-I-M-S-I-C-K-O-F-G-H-O-S-T-W-R-I-T-I-N-G-L-I-T-E-R-A-L-L-Y

"But I can't tell people I'm getting ad ideas from a demon!"

A-G-E-N-C-Y-C-O-L-L-A-B-O-R-A-T-I-O-N-T-H-E-N-D-U-H

And so began the strangest partnership in advertising history. By day, James presented increasingly brilliant campaigns. By night, he and Beelzebub brainstormed concepts, with James crediting his ideas to "B.Z. Bubba," his creative consultant.

The Sunrise Funeral Home radio spot... "Because eventually, everyone drops dead tired"... won them their first Clio. The Mountainside Ski Resort campaign... "Slopes to die for, prices that won't kill you"... won them their second.

As the awards piled up, James began to worry. How long could this last? Would Beelzebub eventually demand something more sinister than co-writer credit?

His answer came six months later. The agency was pitching a major airline account. Millions of dollars were at stake. The night before the presentation, James nervously approached the spirit board.

"Any brilliant ideas for tomorrow's pitch?"

I-W-A-N-T-A-P-R-O-M-O-T-I-O-N

James frowned. "Like what? I already credit you on everything."

I-W-A-N-T-Y-O-U-R-J-O-B

"My job? How would that even work?"

The planchette flew across the board so fast James could barely keep up.

Y-O-U-P-O-S-S-E-S-S-E-D-F-O-R-P-I-T-C-H-I-C-O-N-T-R-O-L-B-O-D-Y-Y-O-U-G-E-T-B-O-N-U-S-P-O-I-N-T-S

"Absolutely not!" James said, pulling his hands away from the board.

T-H-I-N-K-A-B-O-U-T-I-T-O-N-E-H-O-U-R-O-F-P-O-S-S-E-S-S-I-O-N-F-O-R-A-L-I-F-E-T-I-M-E-O-F-S-U-C-C-E-S-S

That night, James barely slept. The offer haunted him. One hour of possession. Would it be so terrible? Beelzebub had never steered him wrong creatively.

The next morning, in the agency's conference room, six executives from Sky-High Airlines watched impassively as James set up his presentation. His hands trembled. The spirit board was in his briefcase, as requested.

"Before we begin," James said shakily, "I'd like to introduce my creative partner."

He placed the spirit board on the table. The executives exchanged confused glances.

"This is B.Z. Bubba," James announced. "He's been behind all our award-winning work." The room fell silent. Marcy's face turned an alarming shade of purple.

"Is this a joke?" asked the airline's marketing director.

"Not at all," James replied, placing his fingers on the planchette. "Beelzebub, would you like to share our concept for Sky-High?"

The planchette remained motionless. James felt sweat beading on his forehead. "Beelzebub?" he whispered desperately.

Suddenly, the conference room door opened. A janitor pushing a cleaning cart entered. He was elderly, with wispy white hair and stooped shoulders.

"Sorry to interrupt," he said in a gravelly voice. "Just need to empty the trash."

As he moved around the room, he paused behind James's chair.

"Technical difficulties with your presentation?" the janitor asked, peering at the spirit board.

"Something like that," James muttered, mortified.

The janitor leaned closer, "Those things never work in public, son," he whispered. "Too many souls competing for attention. Besides, I've been promoted."

James froze. The janitor straightened up, winked at the airline executives, and cleared his throat.

"If I may," he said, his voice suddenly smooth and resonant, "I think what my colleague is trying to say is that Sky-High needs a campaign that acknowledges people's fear of flying while converting it to excitement."

For the next thirty minutes, the janitor delivered the most compelling advertising pitch anyone in the room had ever heard. The airline executives were enthralled. Marcy was taking frantic notes. And James sat frozen, watching as Beelzebub, in human form, charmed the clients with concepts that were equal parts brilliant and diabolical.

"We'll call it 'Between Heaven and Earth,'" the demon concluded. "Because that's where your passengers truly are."

The airline signed on the spot. As the executives filed out, the janitor handed James a business card.

"I've decided to go freelance," he said with a wink. "Call me if you need me. My rates are competitive, but non-negotiable."

The card read: "B.Z. Bubb. Creative Solutions for Hellish Deadlines. Soul contracts a speciality."

James never used the spirit board again. His new freelance consultant had an office downtown and a secretary who scheduled appointments. They won twelve more awards that year.

The only downside was that their radio spots now played exclusively at 3 AM, when, as Beelzebub insisted, "the target demon-graphic is most receptive." Sales continued to soar nonetheless, although customer complaints about night terrors and spontaneous purchases did increase somewhat.

As Beelzebub liked to say in their award acceptance speeches: "Good advertising should haunt you forever. And luckily... ours literally does."

"WEATHER SWEEPER"

A short 10 second station weather sweeper for The Burn.

((NO EFFECTS - WEREWOLF PANTING))

((ANNOUNCER)) "It's Howlin' Harry and the nightly forecast: Perrrfect hunting weather tonight! Patchy cloud, and a full moon... You're listening to... Sixty-Six, Six, The BURN"

((WOLF HOWLS AND FADES OUT))

(ENDS)

"THE GOLDEN VOICE"

One of my old mentors told a story about his first radio gig for a jock who was 'across the nation' and his Golden Microphone... it always stuck with me, and, I took some liberties!

Pulse FM, Central City's newest commercial radio station, and the mysterious and expensive-looking gold microphone arrived on opening day. An elegantly wrapped "gift" from "a broadcasting colleague," the card signed only with a tiny flame logo.

"Probably Sixty-Six, Six The Burn trying to play nice," laughed our program director, placing the vintage brass microphone in Studio A. "These old-school jocks and their superstitions about the equipment."

Sarah, our midnight host, was the first to use it. Her voice purred through the airwaves that night, smoother than silk. Listeners swooned, unaware of the microphone's subtle glow that intensified with each word she spoke.

As dawn approached, Sarah's eyes glazed over. She couldn't stop talking, her words a hypnotic stream of consciousness. The station manager tried to intervene, but Sarah hissed, clutching the mic stand.

Days passed. Sarah never left, her body withering, voice growing impossibly rich. Pulse FM's ratings skyrocketed, destroying the competition - except those of The Burn. Other DJs followed suit, drawn to the microphone's allure.

Engineers tried dismantling the setup twice. Both times, equipment mysteriously reassembled overnight. Pulse FM's ratings continued to soar to unprecedented heights, even as staff disappeared one by one.

Listeners reported strange effects - becoming transfixed for hours, finding themselves driving toward the broadcast tower without conscious decision. Some claimed they could hear whispered undertones beneath the programming, promises of eternal fame if they'd just visit the studio.

When investigators finally searched The Burn's abandoned studios, they found ancient texts and schematics for the microphone. A journal revealed the truth: The Burn hadn't been trying to play nice - they'd been executing a final broadcast plan. The microphone wasn't just equipment; it was a vessel, designed to consume one radio station so another could be reborn.

Pulse FM was formally shuttered after all staff vanished. The building was sealed behind concrete walls. Yet on certain frequencies - specifically Sixty-Six, Six - you might catch fragments of familiar voices: Sarah's sultry laugh, and others' enthusiastic introductions, all now speaking with a unified undertone, ending each broadcast with that signature phrase: "You're listening to The Burn... we never really left the air."

"MIDNIGHT MISCHIEF MAKER"

April Fools Day on radio can be good, bad, or just ugly - but one cat-obsessed jock used to say to me that they wished they could pull the ultimate prank on their listeners...

Whiskers had been the beloved station cat at WPAW for years. By day, she lazily lounged in sunbeams, occasionally swatting at a stray mouse. But as March turned to April, something changed in the feline's demeanour.

The night before April 1st, the overnight DJ, Tom, noticed Whiskers acting strangely. The cat paced restlessly, meowing at the microphone. Tom chuckled, "What's the matter, girl? You want to be a radio star?"

Little did he know how prophetic those words would be.

As the clock struck midnight, ushering in April Fools' Day, a strange transformation occurred. Whiskers' form shimmered and stretched, morphing into a lithe woman with catlike grace. She wore nothing but a bejewelled choker - the spitting image of Whiskers' collar.

The woman, who called herself Kitty, locked Tom in the supply closet and took over the studio. Her voice was a purr that sent shivers down listeners' spines.

"Good evening, night owls of Pawville," Kitty crooned. "This is Kitty, tonight's new midnight to dawn DJ. We're going to have some fun tonight. It's April Fools', after all, and I've got the purrfect prank planned."

Across town, radios crackled to life of their own accord, all tuned to WPAW. Kitty's voice filled bedrooms, living rooms, and even car stereos.

"Here's how it works, kittens," she continued. "I'll play a special tone, and when you hear it, you'll feel compelled to join in our little game. Don't worry, it's all in good fun."

A low, hypnotic hum filled the airwaves. In homes throughout Pawville, eyes snapped open, glowing with an eerie green light. People rose from their beds, moving like sleepwalkers to their closets.

"Now, my pretties," Kitty purred, "let's all dress up like cats and head to the town square. We're going to put on quite a show for anyone who's still awake."

All over Pawville, people donned hastily assembled cat costumes. Some wore simple ears and tails, others just painted whiskers on their faces, some went all out with full-body suits. They streamed out of their homes, an army of felines converging on the town square.

Meanwhile, at the station, Tom finally broke free from the supply closet. He rushed to the booth, only to find Whiskers the cat curled up on the chair, seemingly asleep. The mic was

silent, but the transmitter was still active, broadcasting dead air.

Confused, Tom looked at the clock. It was 3am. He quickly took over the broadcast, apologising for the technical difficulties. As he scanned the police scanner, his blood ran cold.

Reports were flooding in about hundreds of people in cat costumes causing chaos in the town square. They were climbing trees, knocking over trash cans, and making an ungodly racket with their yowling.

Tom immediately put out an alert, urging people to stay in their homes and avoid the town square. But as the sun began to rise, the damage was already done.

The scene in the town square was surreal. Hundreds of citizens lay sprawled across the grass and sidewalks, all wearing makeshift cat costumes. They were just beginning to stir, confused and disoriented.

The Mayor called an emergency town meeting that afternoon. The citizens of Pawville were outraged, demanding answers. How could so many people have been affected?

Why couldn't anyone remember what had happened?

As theories flew, ranging from mass hysteria to alien abduction, a calico cat watched the proceedings from a nearby rooftop, her collar glinting in the sun.

In the days that followed, WPAW was inundated with angry calls and potential lawsuits. The station manager, desperate to salvage their reputation, fired Tom and announced they were bringing in a new midnight DJ.

The following Monday, a sultry voice introduced herself on the midnight shift. "Good evening, Pawville. This is Kitty, your new overnight host. Don't adjust your dial - I'm here to keep you company through the wee hours."

Most listeners thought nothing of it, but a few noticed the similarity to the voice from that fateful April Fools' night. However, their concerns were quickly forgotten as Kitty's soothing tones lulled them into a sense of calm.

As weeks passed, strange occurrences plagued Pawville. Citizens reported waking up in random places, often with inexplicable scratches. Others found dead mice on their doorsteps. The local pet shops couldn't keep cat toys in stock, and sales of tuna skyrocketed.

Tom, now working as a night security guard, couldn't shake the feeling that something was terribly wrong. He began to investigate, noting that the strange events always seemed to happen on nights when Kitty was on the air.

One night, unable to sleep, Tom drove to the radio station. As he approached the building,

he saw a familiar calico cat slinking inside through a cracked window.

Heart pounding, Tom followed. He crept down the hallway to the broadcast booth, where he heard Kitty's voice coming through the door. But when he peered through the window, he saw only Whiskers, sitting primly in front of the mic.

As he watched, Whiskers began to change. In a matter of seconds, the cat had transformed into the woman he'd seen on April Fools' night. Kitty turned and locked eyes with Tom, a mischievous grin spreading across her face.

"Well, well," she purred into the mic. "Looks like we have an uninvited guest, listeners. But don't worry - I always love a good game of cat and mouse."

Kitty's eyes glowed an unearthly green as she advanced on Tom. He turned to run, but found his feet rooted to the spot as a strange tone filled the air.

All across Pawville, radios flickered to life, and citizens rose from their beds, eyes glowing green.

Kitty's laughter echoed through the station and across the airwaves. "April Fools' was just the beginning, my kittens. Now, the real fun starts."

As Tom's consciousness faded, his last thought was a desperate hope that someone, somewhere, would realise the truth about Pawville's feline DJ before it was too late.

"THE GARDENERS"

I hate it when the station gets damaged. How would The Burn's management handle it?

After the last bit of vandalism, Sixty-Six, Six The Burn's management hired new groundskeepers; Imps: One inch tall. Claws like razors, teeth like paper shredders, and an attitude that screamed "I will compost your soul if you look at me wrong."

No one saw them arrive. One morning the rose bushes were whispering Latin, and the petunias had... eyes. Chuck, Spindle, and Kevin (names stitched in suspiciously damp thread) now "manage" the landscaping.

Staff were warned: "Do not step on the mulch. Do not insult the begonias. And never - under any circumstances - complain about the topiary. It listens!"

Blake from Marketing did. Blake is now... fertiliser, and the gnome in the break area? It blinks and its mouth is frozen in a terrified scream.

A memo was released by management about the vandalism: "We are happy to report that no further incidents of vandalism have occurred since our new gardeners started."

"THE NIGHT WATCHMAN"

I really love listening to old radio serials, and this idea hit me one day out of the blue...

Dave hunched over his typewriter at The Burn, struggling with his latest episode of "The Night Watchman" - a radio serial about a costumed vigilante who stalked the city after dark, sponsored by a security firm. The deadline was in three hours, and he had nothing.

"Still blocked?" asked Sheila, poking her head into the writers' room.

"I've written the same terrible scene fourteen times," Dave groaned. "The Night Watchman needs to stop a jewellery heist, but everything I write sounds like a Batman reject."

Sheila left, returning minutes later with the station's moth-eaten owl mascot costume. "Put this on."

"Why would I..."

"Just do it, Dave."

Reluctantly, Dave donned the costume, complete with oversized head and tattered wings. "Now go stand on the roof," Sheila instructed.

"It's midnight. And raining."

"Exactly. It's called 'Method Writing'."

Twenty minutes later, a soaking wet Dave perched atop the station building, feathers plastered to his body, glaring at the city below. A noise caught his attention - someone breaking into his car in the car park.

"HEY!" Dave screeched, his voice muffled by the owl head.

The car thief looked up, screamed at the sight of a waterlogged owl-man, turned and ran straight into a lamppost, knocking himself unconscious.

When the police arrived, they found the thief babbling about "vengeful bird demons" whilst Dave, still in costume, explained he was "researching a radio serial."

The next morning, Dave's script was brilliant. The Night Watchman had stopped the jewellery heist by accidentally falling through a skylight, landing on the thief, and vomiting on him from nerves.

The episode won a broadcasting award, and the owl costume? It became a permanent fixture in the writers' room.

"FWD: LATEST APEX TRACKS"

Heck we've all been bored at sometime, and dove into something we shouldn't have...

Sarah Jenkins sighed, leaning back in her ergonomic producer's office chair. Another mundane day at WIKD Radio stretched before her. As the lead commercial producer, she'd heard thousands of ads, each blending into a cacophony of jingles and overzealous voices, over-acting and badly written copy. Today, however, something would change her life forever.

She clicked play on the latest submission from Apex Advertising Agency. The familiar voice of their star voice actor, Tom Holloway, filled her headphones. "Experience the comfort of DreamCloud mattresses..." Sarah's eyes glazed over as she began the routine process of analysing the audio quality.

On a whim, she pulled up the spectrograph of the commercial. Maybe visualising the sound waves would alleviate her boredom. As the colourful display materialised on her screen, Sarah's brow furrowed. Something was off.

Nestled within the normal peaks and valleys of the audio waves was an unusual pattern. It wasn't a subliminal message - she'd seen attempts at creating those before. This was different, more complex. Intrigued, Sarah zoomed in, her heart beginning to race as she realised the pattern formed words.

"Help... trapped... Apex..."

Sarah's breath caught in her throat. Was this some kind of joke? She played the commercial again, this time focusing on the background. There, barely audible beneath the cheery ad, was a whisper. "Please, someone help us."

Her mind raced. Who was trapped? And why at Apex Advertising? Sarah had visited their offices before - a sleek, modern building in downtown. Nothing seemed amiss then.

She picked up her phone, hesitated, then dialled 911. "This is going to sound crazy," she began, explaining her discovery to the sceptical dispatcher. An hour later, two police officers stood in her office, looking unconvinced.

"Ma'am, we've checked with Apex. Everything's normal there. No signs of distress or anyone being held against their will," Officer Chen said, his partner nodding in agreement. Sarah felt foolish but couldn't shake the feeling that something was wrong. After the officers left, she dove back into the spectrograph, determined to find more clues.

Days passed. Sarah became obsessed, analysing every Apex commercial for hidden messages. Her coworkers started to whisper, concerned about her dishevelled appearance and wild theories.

Then, a week later, a new Apex ad arrived in her inbox. With trembling hands, Sarah opened the file and generated the spectrograph. Her heart nearly stopped as she decoded the hidden message: "You saw. You know. You're next."

Sarah's mouth went dry. She played the audio, straining to hear any hidden voices. As Tom Holloway's smooth tones filled the room, extolling the virtues of a new car model, Sarah felt a strange sensation. The air around her seemed to vibrate, growing thick and heavy.

She tried to stand, to run, but her legs wouldn't move. To her horror, she watched as her hands began to fade, becoming translucent. A scream built in her throat, but no sound came out. It was as if the very atoms of her body were being pulled apart, drawn into the speakers that continued to play the sinister commercial.

In a matter of seconds, Sarah Jenkins vanished, leaving behind only an empty chair and a computer screen displaying a now-silent spectrograph.

Hours later, Sarah's assistant knocked on her office door. Receiving no answer, she peeked inside, confused to find the room empty. On the desk, Sarah's phone buzzed with a text from an unknown number: "She knows too much. You're next."

The police were called once again, but no trace of Sarah was ever found. The case went cold, filed away as another mysterious disappearance in the big city.

At Apex Advertising Agency, Tom Holloway sat in a recording booth, a cruel smile playing on his lips as he began to record a new commercial. Hidden within his smooth, captivating voice was a frequency beyond human hearing - a frequency that could bend reality itself.

In the walls of Apex, trapped between dimensions, Sarah screamed silently, joining the chorus of others who had discovered the truth. They were the unwilling fuel for Apex's success, their energy harvested to create advertisements that could literally mesmerise the masses.

And elsewhere in another state, in another radio station, another curious producer was about to stumble upon a strange pattern in a seemingly innocent commercial...

As months passed, keen listeners began to notice something peculiar about Tom Holloway's voice-over work. His already impressive vocal range seemed to expand exponentially. He could effortlessly switch from a deep, resonant bass to a lilting soprano, each tone rich with emotion and nuance.

Industry insiders marvelled at Tom's seemingly impossible improvement. "It's as if he's channelling a hundred different voices," one sound engineer remarked, unaware of how close to the truth he was.

With each person Tom's voice consumed, he gained not just their vocal qualities but their entire range of expression. Sarah's clear, authoritative tone. The melodic lilt of a jazz

singer. The gravelly whisper of an old sailor. All became part of Tom's ever-growing vocal repertoire.

Apex Advertising's popularity soared. Clients clamouring for Tom's voice on their commercials, unaware that they were listening to an unholy amalgamation of stolen souls.

And with each new contract, Tom and Apex set their sights on their next victim, always hunting for that unique voice to add to their collection.

The frequency of fear continued to broadcast, more alluring and dangerous than ever before, claiming victims one by one, as the world remained blissfully unaware of the true power behind Apex Advertising Agency's compelling commercials.

"I WAS FOLDING LAUNDRY WHEN..."

I challenged myself to write the shortest cosmic horror style story I could...

Midnight, and Marla was folding laundry whilst listening to her new favourite radio station, The Burn, when... it quickly faded out.

Then a voice, wet and low said... "We hear you, Marla."

She laughed. Halloween prank. She changed the station. All static. Every station on the dial was static...

"Don't turn away."

The lights flickered. The walls breathed in and out. A sock on the pile of laundry folded itself. Then the shirt in her hands twisted, sleeves knotting like limbs. Her laundry slithered off the couch. Quickly Marla kicked at and unplugged the radio. It kept playing as it lay on the floor, "You... You are now tuned in Marla."

The hallway stretched, floorboards groaning under the strain. Family photos blurred—her mother's eyes melted, her father's grin too wide. She tried to run. The front door was gone, now just a wall. With a large mirror. Her reflection within waved at her. Yet she did not.

"Now broadcasting from inside your mind Marla."

She tried to scream. But no voice or recognisable sound ever came out again...

When she opened her mouth, only the sound of static was heard.

And her eyes...

They were always full of panic and horror, and they never, ever, closed, again.

SCRIPT: "THE ETERNAL REST 'FUN'ERAL HOME"

A script for a funeral home that does very brisk business in its category.

((SOMBRE ORGAN MUSIC - SOME SOBBING SOUND EFFECTS))

((MALE ANNOUNCER - SOLEMN TONE)) "Here at Eternal Rest Funeral Home, we understand the gravity of your recent loss..."

((SFX: RECORD SCRATCH))

((ANNOUNCER - SUDDENLY UPBEAT)) "But why should the deceased have all the fun in their new place of rest?"

((CARNIVAL MUSIC FADES IN))

((ANNOUNCER)) "We offer fully customisable services! Want Grandma posed doing her famous dance move? Done! Uncle Ted always wanted to crowd surf? We've got pallbearers with rhythm who can do the heavy lifting for him!"

((SFX: CREAKING DOOR SOUND))

((WHISPERED VOICE))
"Everyone's dying for an invitation..."

((ANNOUNCER)) "Our morticians are trained in both embalming AND comedy improv! Ask about our 'Final Roast' package!"

((SFX: MUFFLED GIGGLING THAT BECOMES EERILY DISTORTED & QUICK FLAMES ERUPT))

((ANNOUNCER)) "Remember, the passing of a loved one doesn't have to be depressing!"

((SFX: THUNDER ROLLS - INTO FUNERAL DIRGE))

((ANNOUNCER)) "Eternal Rest Funeral Home: Putting the fun back into funerals!"

((WHISPERED VOICE)) "We'll see you soon... very... 'VERY' soon..."

((FAST DISCLAIMER ANNOUNCER)) Eternal Rest Funeral Homes is compliant with all state laws and statutes. Eternal Rest Funeral Homes is a subsidiary of Infernal Media Holdings.

((ENDS))

"THE PERFECT BREW"

*Let's face it, radio appears to runs on coffee – but what if it really did?
And... I really love, like... "REALLY LOVE" the War of the Worlds on radio!*

The first time it happened, Mia convinced herself it was coincidence. A coffee ring on her show notes, and suddenly her mundane segment on local traffic became the most-called-in show of the month. The second time - a circular stain with what looked like accidental droplets forming a pattern around it - her interview with the mayor went viral. By the third occurrence, she was no longer able to deny the connection.

Something was happening with these coffee stains. Something impossible.

Night shifts at KZRZ were already unsettling. The station occupied the top floor of a century-old building downtown, all creaking pipes and flickering fluorescents. Alone after midnight, Mia would hear whispers from empty studios, footsteps in vacant hallways and floors below. Management blamed old wiring and settling foundations.

Mia knew better now.

She began studying her predecessor's abandoned notes, discovering faint rings on pages corresponding to the station's most successful broadcasts. Each stain contained subtle variations - some perfectly circular, others with deliberate-looking smudges. She experimented, placing her mug carefully on draft scripts, letting the coffee seep into precise formations.

The results defied explanation. A waxing crescent pattern produced listener testimonials of uncontrollable weeping. Triangular arrangements created fierce debates that doubled ratings. Three overlapping circles made interviewees reveal secrets they'd never told another soul.

Her boss noticed. "Whatever you're doing," Station Manager Bob whispered, his eyes unnaturally wide as he gripped her shoulder too tightly, "don't stop. The station needs this."

After particularly effective broadcasts, Mia sometimes found small offerings outside the studio door - bizarre arrangements of twigs, coins positioned in familiar patterns, once a dead bird with its wings spread to mimic her most potent symbol. She disposed of them without telling anyone.

Then came the changes in her listeners. Callers reciting phrases she'd never aired. People showing up outside the station with coffee-stained papers of their own, vacant smiles on their faces. One night, a man pressed his palm against the studio window as she broadcast. His hand left a perfect impression - not of skin, but what looked like a coffee ring.

The first warning arrived after she won a national award. A note slipped under the production booth door while she was in the bathroom: 'The symbols are not yours to use freely. They have noticed you.'

The dreams began that night - of dark figures huddled around ancient radio equipment, their hands stained brown, their voices speaking in modulated tones that made her teeth vibrate. They would turn to stare at her with eyes like black coffee, saying nothing but somehow communicating: We see you now.

Mia installed a small camera in her office. The footage showed nothing except her coffee cup moving slightly across her desk at 3:17am when no one was there.

The second warning came as a whisper through her headphones during a dead-air moment: Join us or the next cup will be filled with your essence.

That night, driving home, every station on her car radio played the same sound - a rhythmic dripping, like coffee percolating, underneath a voice reciting an address.

The abandoned recording studio on Havens Street looked like it hadn't been used in decades, but inside, seven people in impeccable suits sat around a table marked with patterns Mia instantly recognised. Steam rose from cups positioned at precise intervals.

"The Caffeine Circle has existed for centuries," explained their leader, an elegant woman with silver hair and eyes too dark to be natural. "We've guided human consciousness through controlled broadcasts since radio's invention. The symbols you've stumbled upon are our sacred language."

"Why me?" Mia's voice trembled.

"You have rare sensitivity. Your natural talent exceeds members who've practised for decades." The woman extended her hand. On her palm was a brand in the shape of a coffee cup, the skin around it stained permanently brown. "Most practitioners require years to achieve what you've done accidentally."

Mia stepped back. "And if I refuse to join?"

The seven members raised their cups in perfect unison, tilting them slightly.

"The symbols require... essence... to maintain their power," the woman said. "Usually coffee suffices as a conduit, but for special broadcasts, we need stronger substances." She gestured to an ornate urn on a shelf. "Your predecessor eventually refused to continue our work. His final contribution was... reluctant but necessary."

Mia noticed then that the dark liquid in their cups was too thick to be coffee.

"Tomorrow night, you'll produce a special broadcast. The pattern is complex - one we use only once a generation." The woman slid a diagram across the table. "It requires

significant... preparation.”

Looking at the intricate design, Mia felt something crawl behind her eyes - a presence, ancient and hungry, waiting to speak through her to thousands of unsuspecting listeners.

“What will this broadcast do?” she whispered.

The leader smiled. “Open a door. One that hasn’t been opened since 1938.”

Mia remembered her history - the War of the Worlds broadcast, the mass hysteria. The woman seemed to read her thoughts. “Orson was one of us. But his attempt was imperfect. Yours won’t be.”

As the seven rose in unison, Mia realised with horror that she was already mentally planning microphone placement, timing, the perfect studio temperature to make the pattern work.

Part of her was already theirs.

“Coffee first,” the woman said, offering a steaming cup. “Then blood. That’s always the order.”

Mia took the cup with trembling hands, understanding finally that some stains never wash out.

"THE FINAL CLEAN"

Imagine a zombie working as a cleaner at The Burn, getting replaced by a robot vac...

At 3am, the zombie janitor dragged itself down the hall - limping, one arm rotted to the bone, mop head slick with something that hissed when it touched tile. It had never missed a shift at Sixty-Six, Six The Burn. Never questioned the stains that bled upwards.

Tonight, a new shape waited by the supply closet. Compact. Flat. Disc-shaped. Stainless. Gleaming red sensors. A replacement. The robot hummed. It moved fast with surgical elegance - with rollers clicking like bone dice across the cracked linoleum.

The zombie moved. It was slow. But steady. The mop raised like a weapon. Too late.

The flat robot vacuum moved. A blade slipped from its undercarriage with a sound like slicing sinew. It lunged. Oil hit the walls. Then the smell of rot hung in the air. Then silence. In seconds, the mop handle pivoting in the air, turned to a stop and leant against the wall.

The robot returned to stillness. Scanned the corridor. Beeped. “MESS: RESOLVED.” It rolled away, humming softly. Behind it, the floor was spotless. And so very wet.

"THE UNDEAD HELP-DESK"

One tech I worked with used to say that every problem you came to them with was... "not their department," he'd shrug. I loved that attitude, so I tweaked it for this story.

At The Burn, the IT department had taken a turn for the undead. It started very innocently with an incident involving a microwave, a can of Spam, and a late-night coding session. The next morning, the tech team rose from the dead, forever doomed to work odd hours.

No matter the hour, whenever a DJ or engineer called for help, the Zombie IT department would shamle to the scene, and their response was always the same: "What did you do?" It didn't matter if it was a simple reboot or a catastrophic server failure; the zombies would groan the phrase, their eyes fixed on some distant point beyond the living who had summoned them.

As they lumbered into the studio, arms outstretched, they would somehow magically diagnose the problem. A few groans, some fiddling with wires, and the issue would be resolved.

Then, without a word, they would stumble back out into the darkness, leaving behind a trail of discarded coffee cups and broken dreams.

One DJ, the station's morning show host - a quirky guy named Max - started a segment called "Zombie IT Challenge," intentionally causing technical issues to see how quickly the undead team could fix them.

The listeners loved it, and soon the show was flooded with calls asking for the zombies to fix everything from broken toasters to malfunctioning vacuum cleaners.

One day, Max decided to take it to the next level. He rigged the studio with fake spider webs and a fog machine, creating a spooky atmosphere.

When the zombies arrived, he shouted, "The studio is haunted!" The zombies paused, looked at each other, and in perfect sync groaned, "What did you do?" before proceeding to fix the "haunted" equipment by rebooting and sweeping away the webs.

As the days went by, the Zombie IT department became a beloved fixture. They even got their own fan club, with listeners showing up to the studio dressed as zombies, chanting "What did you do?" in unison.

Despite their limited vocabulary, the undead tech team kept the station on the air, broadcasting a mix of music, laughter, and macabre humour to the delight of their listeners.

And so, the station thrived, thanks to its undead tech support, forever bound to ask, "What did you do?"

"THE PERFECT CUT"

Be warned, this story is dark!

"It's all in the technique," Morris explained, adjusting his headphones. "Twenty years in commercial production, and I've *never* had a client complain about my final edits."

Jamie nodded eagerly, watching the older man's hands move across the control panel with practised precision. At twenty-three, this internship at KDRX was his big break, and learning from the legendary Morris Blackwell, whose commercials had won regional awards three years running was going to be life changing.

"The first rule," Morris continued, his voice dropping to a professional murmur, "is to always prepare your workspace." He gestured around the small production booth tucked away in the station's basement. Unlike the glossy main studios upstairs, this room felt hidden, private. The walls were soundproofed, the single window covered with blackout material. A red "Recording in Progress" light outside was the only indication it existed at all.

"Notice how I've laid everything out?" Morris pointed to his arrangement of tools - razor blades for tape editing, specialised scissors, digital recorders, various cables. "Efficiency matters. When inspiration strikes, you can't waste time searching."

Jamie watched as Morris opened a digital file on the computer.

"This is tonight's project. Listen carefully - raw, unprocessed. Amateur hour."

The speakers emitted a voice - pleading, desperate. Morris explained it was a local car dealership owner trying to sound enthusiastic about a weekend sale.

"Hear that tremor? The hesitation? We need to fix that."

Morris demonstrated, isolating sections, removing breaths, adjusting pitch. "Cut here, and here," he instructed, "but never cut there - you'll lose the natural flow. The human ear can detect artificial edits. We want this to sound... inevitable."

Jamie took diligent notes as Morris continued his lesson.

"Now for atmosphere. Slowly increase the reverb here for the best effect." The voice began to sound distant, hollow. "It creates depth, like they're calling from somewhere you can't quite reach."

Through the evening, the lesson continued. Morris showed Jamie how to "clean up the mess," removing digital artefacts and background noise.

"The trick is to make them sound better than they are in real life," Morris explained. "More

confident. More powerful. Taking their raw material and transforming it into something... memorable."

At midnight, Morris checked his watch. "Time for field work. Theory's important, but nothing beats hands-on experience."

They loaded equipment into the station's unmarked van - new digital recorders, headphones, cables, and a heavy duffel bag Morris insisted on carrying himself.

"Tonight, we're gathering some vox pops," Morris explained as they drove downtown. "Man-on-the-street reactions. Raw material."

"At midnight?" Jamie asked.

Morris smiled. "Best time. People are more... authentic after dark. Less rehearsed."

They parked near a strip of bars just as they were closing. Morris scanned the thinning crowd.

"Look for someone with a distinctive voice. Someone who won't be missed immediately."

Jamie gave him a puzzled look.

"For the commercial," Morris clarified. "We need someone who won't be recognised. Anonymity is key in voice work."

They spotted a man weaving slightly as he walked, calling goodnight to friends.

"Perfect," Morris whispered. "Listen to that baritone. It'll cut through background noise beautifully."

Morris approached the man, introducing himself as a radio producer. "We're gathering opinions for a late-night show. Just five minutes of your time."

The man agreed enthusiastically, following them toward the van.

"What happens after we record him?" Jamie whispered.

Morris smiled. "Then the real work begins. We take him back to the studio, set him up in the booth."

"At this hour?"

"Creativity doesn't punch a clock, Jamie. The night offers... privacy for our process."

As they approached the van, Morris continued his lesson. "After recording, we'll need to cut and burn - digitally speaking. Remove any identifying characteristics from the voice."

"And then?"

"Mix down what you've done in the end. Compress it. Make it tight. The result should be compact, contained. Easy to... dispose of when it's served its purpose."

Jamie nodded, feeling a growing unease he couldn't quite name.

"In this business," Morris continued, opening the van's rear doors, "we transform raw human emotion into something useful. We take their fear, their excitement, their desperation... and we make art."

The man peered into the dark interior of the van, hesitating slightly.

"It's all there," Morris said, pointing to equipment partially obscured by shadow. "Microphone, portable soundboard."

Jamie noticed something else - plastic sheeting spread carefully across the floor, duct tape rolled neatly in one corner, what looked like chemical supplies tucked under a seat.

"You record a lot of people this way?" the man asked, voice suddenly uncertain.

"Oh yes," Morris said, his tone shifting to something colder. "Though after tonight, we'll be looking for a new voice. You see, commercial work is ever-changing. Audiences get tired of hearing the same... screams."

The man turned to leave, but Morris moved with surprising speed.

"Jamie," he commanded, "help me with the equipment." His eyes flicked meaningfully toward the man's retreating back.

In that moment, Jamie understood everything - why Morris's commercials evoked such visceral emotions, why they never used the same voice twice, why the soundproofed booth was so meticulously cleaned each morning.

"Hands-on experience," Morris had called it.

As the man's footsteps quickened, Morris sighed. "Decision time, Jamie. In this industry, you're either talent or you're 'in' production. Which will it be?"

Jamie stepped forward, remembering Morris's earlier words about technique, about making art from raw human emotion.

"I've always preferred being behind the scenes," he said quietly, reaching for the door handle.

SCRIPT "NEW STATION PROMO"

I wondered what a promo at a paranormal radio station would sound like - and this struck a chord with me while listening to the classic track "Monster Mash."

((UPBEAT MUSIC FADES OUT, REPLACED BY A SPOOKY VOICE))

((STATION ANNOUNCER)) "Welcome to the hottest station for all you 'normal' and paranormal creatures!"

((ZOMBIE)) "Are you a zombie looking for the latest in undead tunes?"

((VAMPIRE)) "A vampire seeking the coolest crypt beats?"

((WEREWOLF)) "A werewolf howling for more moonlight melodies?"

((GHOST)) "Or a ghost haunting for some spectral sounds?"

((STATION ANNOUNCER)) "Then... We've got you covered!

Join our crew of supernatural DJs as they bring you the best in paranormal music.

Our zombie DJ, Rotty, spins the graveyard shift, playing all your favourite decomposing tracks; Vampire Vixen takes over at dusk, bringing you the darkest, most blood-curdling hits; Werewolf Wendy howls at the moon with her full-moon mix... guaranteed to get you dancing under the stars. And Ghostly Gary haunts the airwaves with his ethereal playlists.

Our paranormal personalities are always up to something spooky - and fun.

Want prizes?

Our ghoulish giveaways are to die for — literally!

Tune in for a chance to win:

- A year's supply of fresh brains
- A coffin full of crypt cash, or a lifetime supply of coffin polish
- Our our big one... A haunted mansion makeover!

So, tune in to Sixty-Six, Six The Burn and join the Monster Mash! We're broadcasting Twenty Four Seven, straight from the heart of the paranormal world.

((MUSIC TRANSITIONS BACK TO AN UPBEAT, SPOOKY TUNE))

((STATION ANNOUNCER))

"Sixty-Six, Six - The Burn. Where the creatures of the night come out to play!"

((ENDS))

"IT'S THE SMILE THAT SELLS"

*'Helpful' advice is rarely helpful - but what if it was?
And how far could it get you up the corporate ladder?*

Marcy Delaney had been at KRZK "The Light" Radio for three miserable years, during which her sales numbers resembled the EKG of a flatlined patient.

Her client list was thinner than the station's playlist, and her commission cheques wouldn't cover the purchase of a dime-store gumball, let alone her rent.

"You know what your problem is, Delaney?" said Brad Whitman, her sales manager - a man whose entire leadership style consisted of motivational posters and recycled advice from business books he'd never actually read.

"My inability to sell airtime for terrible morning zoo shows to businesses who'd rather set their money on fire?" Marcy replied, scrolling through another spreadsheet of rejection.

"You don't smile enough."

Brad demonstrated his own version - a horrifying grimace that suggested dental pain rather than pleasure.

"Clients want to feel warm and fuzzy. Like they're your friends, not your victims."

Oh, the irony.

Marcy had heard this stellar feedback before - most recently from Darren Plotkin at Valley Luxury Motors, who'd cancelled his annual contract while helpfully suggesting she "turn that frown upside down, sweetheart."

She'd also gotten it from Sherry at Sunnydale Funeral Homes, who apparently wanted more enthusiasm when discussing discount cremation packages.

That night, Marcy stood before her bathroom mirror, practising.

Her natural smile made her look like she was trying to identify a body at the morgue. When she really put effort into it, she looked like she was mentally calculating how long it would take various clients to decompose.

"Perfect," she whispered to her reflection. "Absolutely normal human behaviour."

Her first meeting the next day was with Gerald Hoffman, owner of Hoffman's Hardware and a notorious cheapskate. He'd been threatening to pull his advertising for months, in what Marcy suspected was just a sadistic hobby.

"Radio's dead, Marcy," Gerald declared, leaning back in his chair like he'd just delivered the wisdom of Solomon. "My nephew says all the kids are on TikTok now."
And then Marcy smiled.

Gerald's lecture about digital media died in his throat. Something ancient in his lizard brain - the part that recognised when it was being hunted - began to scream.

"I understand completely," Marcy said, her smile fixed and unblinking.

"But I've prepared a special package just for you."

Twenty minutes later, Gerald had signed for triple his previous ad spend and promised to refer three other businesses.

As Marcy walked him to the elevator, he kept his back to the wall - like a man who'd accidentally wandered into a tiger enclosure.

"See you next quarter," Marcy purred, her grin stretching wider as the elevator doors closed on Gerald's haunted expression.

Her next victim - client - was Linda Murphy from Murphy's Diner, who'd been playing hard-to-get for months.

"We're cutting back," Linda began, before Marcy turned the full force of her new smile on her.

Linda signed so fast she tore the contract. She also agreed to host the station's next remote broadcast and provide free breakfast for the entire morning crew.

"Is everything... okay?" Linda asked as she backed toward the door.

"Your face is doing something... unusual."

"Just thrilled about our partnership," Marcy replied, smile unfaltering.

By the end of the week, Marcy had closed deals with Riverdale Mattress Emporium ("Sleep like the dead!"), Last Chance Auto Sales ("Because you deserve a second chance..."), and even the notoriously media-shy owner of the abandoned amusement park on the edge of town, who'd apparently decided to reopen.

Her colleagues gave her a wide berth in the hallways. The office coffee mysteriously disappeared whenever she approached the break room.

But her sales numbers were spectacular - and in commercial radio, that was all that mattered.

Brad called her in after she'd broken the station's all-time monthly sales record.

"The regional director is coming tomorrow," he said, not quite meeting her eyes.

"He wants to meet our new star."

"How nice," Marcy replied, her face perfectly still - except for that unnerving smile.

"Just one thing," Brad added, fidgeting with his tie.

"Some clients have been calling with... concerns."

"Oh?"

"They say you're different now. More... persuasive. Gerald Hoffman's wife says he sleeps with the lights on and keeps muttering about 'her teeth'."

Marcy's smile widened fractionally. "Clients say the darndest things."

The next day, the regional director - a corpulent man named Richard whose suit strained against his expansive midsection - arrived with great fanfare.

"Extraordinary numbers, Delaney," he boomed, pumping her hand.

"Simply extraordinary! We've never seen anything like it."

The entire sales team was gathered in the conference room, their expressions ranging from envy to horror.

"Which is why," Richard continued, "we're offering you Brad's job."

A collective gasp.

"What?" Brad squeaked.

"Great news Brad, you're being moved to our sister station in Tulsa," Richard explained, not unkindly, "Marcy here will be taking over and given every opportunity to grow our business here."

Brad's face cycled through several colours before settling on a sickly grey.

"But I've been here twelve years! My family is all settled, we own a house, and my wife has a job..."

"And in that time, you've never achieved what Marcy has in three months," Richard countered, sarcastically he added: "Business is business Brad."

He turned to Marcy, beaming.

"So, what do you say? Ready to lead the team?"

The room fell silent as all eyes turned to Marcy.

Slowly, deliberately, she let her trademark smile fade for the first time in weeks.

"I'm afraid I must decline Richard, thanks for the offer though," she said, to audible sighs of relief from the sales team.

Richard blinked. "Decline? But why?"

"I've accepted a position at Sixty-Six, Six The Burn."

The temperature in the room seemed to drop ten degrees.

"Our competition?" Richard sputtered. "But they're... they're..."

"Under new management," Marcy finished for him.

"And they've made a very compelling offer."

"We'll match it!" Richard insisted.

"Whatever they're paying, we'll double it!"

Marcy gathered her things, her expression now eerily placid.

"It's not about the money, Richard. It's about the growth opportunities."

As she reached the door, she turned back one last time.

"Oh, and Brad? You really should smile more. Clients love that."

And as she left behind a room full of stunned faces, Marcy's smile returned - wider, hungrier, and more terrible than ever.

The following Monday, KRZK "The Light"'s entire client roster cancelled their contracts. And Sixty-Six, Six The Burn became the highest-rated station in three states.

And all it took... was the right smile.

"THE MIDDAY SHOW"

*I am a big fan of the original 'Invasion of the Body Snatchers', and I wondered...
What would happen if I combined that with a story about cloning and AI?*

'The Burn' had some popular hosts on-air. While their morning and evening shows featured what or who could be called 'charismatic' hosts, it was the midday slot that drew the most listeners during the daylight hours. From 10am to 2 pm, weekdays, there was... the one and only... Vex.

"You are listening to Sixty-Six, Six The Burn. I am Vex. The time now is 10:04."

His voice was deep, precise, almost perfect - and that was the problem. There was something about it that made listeners' skin crawl, a sensation psychologists call the "uncanny valley." It's that unsettling feeling humans get when something appears nearly human but not quite - like realistic robots or certain computer animations. Too close to real, but missing some essential quality that makes us human.

"It is hotter than hellfire today. Ninety-three degrees at 11:30. Next up... 'Burning Down the House.'"

Vex rarely spoke beyond station IDs, weather updates, and song introductions. When he did engage with callers, something felt... wrong.

"Caller, you're on with Vex."

"Hey Vex, longtime listener. Can you give a birthday shout-out to my daughter Emma? She's turning sixteen today."

A three-second pause.

"Emma. Sixteen years. Congratulations on continued existence."

Listeners exchanged theories online. Some thought Vex was AI; others believed he broadcast from overseas with a delay. The more conspiratorial insisted he spoke from another dimension.

No one had ever seen Vex. Station management deflected questions with practised ease. Marketing leaned into the mystery with billboards featuring a simple black background, red text: "VEX. 10-2. WEEKDAYS."

Rebecca Chen, host of the 2 to 6pm drive slot, claimed she'd never crossed paths with him despite arriving early. The studio was always empty, the chair still warm, a faint smell of copper lingering in the air.

Tara McKenzie, a journalism student at a nearby university, became obsessed with uncovering Vex's identity for her senior thesis. She called the station daily.

"What do you enjoy about radio, Vex?"

"I enjoy... connecting. With listeners. Like you, Tara McKenzie, age twenty-one, apartment 3B, 450 Westlake Drive."

She hadn't given her address. She changed apartments the next day.

But Tara couldn't let it go. She staked out the station, photographing everyone who entered and exited. For three weeks, she never saw anyone entering before 10 AM or leaving after 2 PM who could be Vex.

Then, she noticed something odd. A delivery van with darkened windows arrived at the back entrance precisely at 9:55am each weekday. At exactly 2:05pm, the same van departed.

One Tuesday, Tara followed the van. It didn't come from another location - it emerged from the underground garage of The Burn building itself.

That night, she broke into the radio station.

The lock on the basement service entrance was surprisingly easy to pick. The hallway beyond was sterile, white, more like a laboratory than a radio station. Signs pointed to "Administration," "Studios," and "R&D?"

What radio station needed Research and Development?

Tara followed the corridor toward R&D, passing doors with keypads and retinal scanners. At the end stood a simple door marked "STORAGE." It was unlocked.

Inside was not storage, but a medical facility. Gleaming steel tables lined one wall. Complex machinery hummed. Along the back wall stood a row of vertical tanks filled with cloudy fluid.

Approaching cautiously, Tara wiped condensation from one tank's viewing panel and stifled a scream. Inside floated a man - or something like a man. His features were perfect, too perfect, like a wax figure. A small plaque read "VEX-247."

The tank beside it contained an identical figure, marked "VEX-248."

A door opened behind her.

"Curious listeners are my favourite kind," said the station manager, Marcy Delaney, her unnervingly wide smile gleaming in the dim light. "Though they rarely satisfy their curiosity."

"What is this place?" Tara asked, backing away. "What are those... things?"

"Our midday show host," Marcy replied casually. "Or hosts, I should say. One per day. We tried robots first, but listeners can tell. Something about synthetic vocal cords. But... clones..." She tapped the glass of VEX-247's tank. "Clones work beautifully. At least for one shift."

"But why..."

"The problem with clones is degradation," Marcy continued. "Each generation copied from the previous loses something. And now, we're at clone of clone of clone. They function for four hours, but after that..." She made a popping sound. "Cellular breakdown. Messy business."

"That's... that's murder," Tara whispered.

Marcy shrugged. "Is it murder if they were never truly alive? Speaking of questions, our listeners would appreciate your voice. You have excellent diction."

As security personnel emerged from the shadows, Tara realised with horror why no one had ever seen Vex arrive or leave.

"Don't worry," Marcy assured her as they dragged her toward an empty tank. "The first generation is always the cleanest. You'll make an excellent template for our new female midday host. 'Vox.' Has a nice ring to it, don't you think?"

The next day, at precisely 10am, a new voice greeted listeners of Sixty-Six, Six The Burn. "Good morning. This is... Vox. And you are hopefully listening to The Burn."

Regular listeners noticed something different about her voice that day - it carried a faint quaver, as if afraid. By the following day, it was back to normal. Perfectly modulated. Almost human, but not quite.

Meanwhile, in the CEO's office, Marcy Delaney smiled her terrible smile as she watched VOX-001's body contort and dissolve, right on schedule at 2pm. The cleaning crew would handle it, as they did every day.

In the basement, VOX-002 floated peacefully, waiting for tomorrow's shift - unaware that her predetermined lifespan was exactly 24 hours, most of which she'd spend unconscious, dreaming of voices calling in from the darkness.

Sometimes, late at night, listeners swore they could hear screaming beneath the music on Sixty-Six, Six The Burn. But the signal was so clear, the songs so good, they kept listening anyway. After all, what was one unsettling DJ compared to the hottest hits on the hottest station of the day (or night)?

PROMO: "MIDDAY SHOW"

*After writing the previous story I felt that Vex NEEDED a promo,
and this just seemed a natural fit to me.*

((UPBEAT MUSIC WITH SLIGHTLY OFF-KEY UNDERTONES))

((ANNOUNCER - OVERLY ENTHUSIASTIC)) "It's time to BURN through your workday with the show that keeps you company when the sun is high but your spirits are low!"

((SFX: CLOCK TICKING UNNATURALLY FAST))

((ANNOUNCER)) "Sixty-Six, Six FM 'The Burn' proudly presents... 'Midday Madness with Vex!' Every weekday from 10 to 2! "

((SFX: AIR HORN SOUND EFFECT, SLIGHTLY DISTORTED))

((VEX)) "Hello. I am Vex. I play the hits. I talk to callers. I understand human emotions. "

((SFX: CANNED LAUGHTER THAT CUTS OFF ABRUPTLY))

((ANNOUNCER)) "Catch Vex's FAMOUS segments:" ((QUICK BEAT DROP))

((ANNOUNCER)) 'Ten Past Traffic!'

((VEX)) "There are cars. They move. Sometimes stop. This is information you require."

((CASH REGISTER SOUND EFFECT))

((ANNOUNCER)) 'Workplace Winner Giveaways!'

((VEX)) "Caller nine. You have won. Express joy now." ((AWKWARD PAUSE))

((VEX)) "Ha. Ha. Congratulations."

((WACKY SLIDE WHISTLE))

((ANNOUNCER)) "And everyone's favourite – "Lunch Break Love Connection!" "

((VEX)) "Caller one likes walks on beach. Caller two likes walks on beach. You are compatible. Mate immediately."

((UNCOMFORTABLE SILENCE))

((ANNOUNCER - RAPID-FIRE)) "Plus all the HOTTEST hits, BREAKING news, WACKY weather, and CRAZY celebrity gossip!"

((THREE DIFFERENT SONGS PLAYING AT ONCE, THEN ALL STOP))

((VEX)) "I am relatable. I am your friend. I know what it is like to be alive during daylight hours."

((SFX: QUICK MONTAGE OF STANDARD RADIO SOUND EFFECTS: AIRHORN, RECORD SCRATCH, RIM SHOT, CAR CRASH))

((ANNOUNCER - FAST)) "Don't touch that dial! "MIDDAY MADNESS WITH VEX!" 10 to 2! Weekdays on Sixty-Six, Six FM 'THE BURN!' "

((STATIC THAT RESOLVES INTO STATION JINGLE))

((ENDS))

"NIGHT STALKERS"

Copywriter by day, ghost hunter by night - how to combine the two???

The fluorescent lights of the radio station flickered above her, humming like a hive of angry bees. The smell of burnt coffee and stale donuts hung in the air, a fitting perfume for a place where dreams went to die. Cassidy Voss sat at her desk, fingers flying over the keyboard as she crafted another soul-crushingly dull ad for a local mattress store.

"Sleep so good, you'll think you're dead," she muttered aloud, smirking at her own dark humor. Her coworker, Dale from accounting, poked his head into her cubicle.

"Not your best work, Cass," he said with a grin.

"Yeah? Well, neither was your last budget report," she shot back, tossing a wadded-up sticky note at him. "Now shoo. I've got ghosts to chase."

Dale rolled his eyes and disappeared down the hall. Cassidy leaned back in her chair, running a hand through her obsidian-black hair. By day, she was just another underpaid copywriter in a dying industry. But by night? By night, she was **Cassidy Voss: Ghost Hunter Extraordinaire**, host of the late-night live show **NIGHT STALKERS**.

It was 8:45pm now - fifteen minutes until showtime. Tonight's episode promised to be a ratings bonanza. A local business owner had called in claiming his antique shop was haunted, and Cassidy had jumped at the chance to investigate. Not only did it make for great radio, but it also tied in perfectly with the shop's new ad campaign: *"Come for the antiques, stay for the spirits!"*

She grabbed her leather jacket and headed for the studio. Her producer, Maxine - a no-nonsense woman with a headset permanently glued to her head - was already setting up.

"You ready for this?" Maxine asked without looking up from her soundboard.

"Born ready," Cassidy replied, flashing a cocky grin. "Though I gotta say, if this guy's shop isn't actually haunted, I'm going to be **very** disappointed."

Maxine snorted. "Just don't get yourself killed out there. We've got sponsors to please."

Cassidy saluted her and slid into her chair behind the microphone. The **On Air** sign lit up at exactly 9pm.

"Good evening, night owls," she purred into the mic. "This is Cassidy Voss coming to you live on **Dead Air**, where we separate fact from fiction and ghosts from gas leaks. Tonight, we're broadcasting from Holloway Antiques - a charming little shop with a not-so-charming problem. The owner claims it's haunted. Are we dealing with restless spirits or just creaky floorboards? Stick around to find out."

She grabbed her portable recorder and headed out into the shop with Maxine trailing behind her. The place was exactly what you'd expect from an antique store: dimly lit, packed with dusty furniture and creepy porcelain dolls that seemed to follow you with their eyes.

The owner, a wiry man named Mr. Holloway, greeted them nervously at the door.

"Thank you for coming," he said, wringing his hands. "The... incidents have been getting worse."

"What kind of incidents?" Cassidy asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Objects moving on their own. Cold spots. And... voices." His eyes darted around the room like he expected something to jump out at him.

Cassidy nodded thoughtfully and turned to Maxine. "Cue the spooky music," she said with a smirk.

Maxine rolled her eyes but complied, piping eerie sound effects into the live broadcast.

As they began their investigation, Cassidy couldn't shake the feeling that something was off - not just with the shop but with Mr. Holloway himself. He kept hovering behind them like a shadow, his nervous energy crackling in the air.

"Tell me," Cassidy said casually as she examined an ornate mirror that looked like it belonged in a horror movie, "how long have you owned this place?"

"Ten years," Holloway replied quickly.

"And when did the hauntings start?"

He hesitated. "About six months ago."

Cassidy tilted her head, studying him like a puzzle piece that didn't quite fit. Before she could press further, Maxine's voice crackled through her earpiece.

"Hey, Cass? You might want to check out the back room."

Cassidy followed Maxine's directions to a small storage area filled with even more antiques - and an overwhelming sense of dread that made her stomach churn.

That's when she saw it: an old photograph tucked into the corner of a dusty shelf. It showed a young woman with dark hair and piercing eyes standing next to... Cassidy froze.

It was **her**.

She snatched up the photo and stared at it in disbelief. The woman in the picture wasn't

just anyone - it was Lila Harper, her ex-girlfriend who had vanished two years ago under mysterious circumstances.

Her heart pounded as memories came flooding back: late-night talks over whiskey and tarot cards; Lila's laugh echoing through their tiny apartment; and then... nothing. One day Lila was gone without a trace.

"What is this?" Cassidy demanded, storming back into the main room and shoving the photo in Holloway's face.

He paled visibly but didn't answer.

"Talk," she snapped.

Before he could respond - or lie - an icy wind swept through the room, extinguishing every light except for Cassidy's flashlight.

And then she heard it: Lila's voice whispering her name.

"Cassidy..."

Her blood ran cold as she turned toward the sound. There stood Lila - or what was left of her - translucent and shimmering like moonlight on water.

"Lila?" Cassidy whispered, tears stinging her eyes.

"You have to leave," Lila said urgently. "He killed me... and now he wants you too."

Cassidy barely had time to process this revelation before Holloway lunged at her with a knife gleaming in his hand.

"You should've stayed out of this!" he snarled.

Years of ghost hunting had taught Cassidy one thing: always be prepared for the unexpected. She reached into her pocket and pulled out a small vial of salt mixed with iron shavings - a DIY ghost hunter's best friend - and flung it at Holloway's face.

He screamed as it burned his skin like acid, dropping the knife as he stumbled backward.

But Cassidy wasn't done yet. She muttered an incantation under her breath - a spell Lila had taught her long ago - and slammed her palm against the floorboards. A shockwave of energy rippled through the room, sending Holloway flying into a display case that shattered on impact.

The lights flickered back on just as Maxine's voice came through loud and clear: "And we're cutting to commercials!"

Cassidy let out a shaky laugh as she turned to Lila's ghost.
"Always knew you'd come back to haunt me," she said softly.

Lila smiled sadly. "I never wanted to leave you."

Before Cassidy could respond, Lila began to fade away like smoke on the wind.

"I love you," Cassidy whispered as tears streamed down her face.

And then Lila was gone.

Maxine appeared moments later, looking concerned but professional as ever.

"You okay?" she asked.

Cassidy wiped her eyes and forced a smile. "Yeah... Just another night on *Dead Air*."

As they packed up their equipment and left Holloway Antiques behind - now minus one murderous owner - Cassidy couldn't help but wonder if she'd ever truly be able to move on from Lila's ghost... or if some loves were meant to haunt you forever.

SCRIPT: "CAMP OOPSIE LAKE"

Campsite horror films always lacked a good commercial to attract new 'clients'

(SFX: HAPPY UKULELE MUSIC. BIRDS CHIRPING. THEN - SUDDEN SPLASH.)

((ANNOUNCER-CHEERFUL, OVERLY ENTHUSIASTIC)) This Halloween, bring the whole gang to Camp Oopsie Lake - the five-star destination for four-star accidents!

((SFX: ZIPPER TENT OPENING... FOLLOWED BY CHAINSAW REVVING))

((ANNOUNCER)) Enjoy classic camp fun like canoeing, ghost stories, and mysteriously vanishing camp counsellors!

Discover our winding scenic trails, enjoy our cozy cabins, and find out too late that we have absolutely no cell service... you'll scream with delight - and then... just... scream.

((SFX: HOCKEY MASK HITS THE FLOOR, OMINOUS VIOLIN STING & KNIFE SLASHES THROUGH THE AIR))

((ANNOUNCER)) Camp Oopsie Lake: It's not our fault you split up. Book now and get a free limited edition, commemorative toe tag!

((GROUP)) We'll look for YOU at Camp Oopsie Lake!

((ENDS))

"THE STATIONS SIRENS"

Copywriters and Jingle Singers - who would be the perfect fit?

Why the mythical Sirens, of course... But why would we want to know their story?

The glass-panelled recording booth at Sixty-Six, Six The Burn glowed red as Callia pressed her lips to the microphone. "Try it now, mortals," she purred, her voice sliding through the airwaves like honey laced with poison. "BurgerBomb's new Inferno Burger - one bite and you're ours".

Behind her, Lyra layered in a haunting melody while Echo harmonised with impossibly perfect pitch. The sound engineer watching through the glass clutched his headphones, his pupils dilating as the sirens' voices melded together.

"Cut. That's the one," he said, voice trembling.

The three women exchanged knowing smiles. Not women - sirens. Their true forms remained hidden beneath glammers of beauty-magazine perfection, concealing the ancient power they wielded. At The Burn, they weren't just copywriters - they were gods among insects.

"BurgerBomb's stock just jumped twelve points," Station Manager Davidson announced, bursting into the hallway. "Before the ad even aired! It's like they felt it coming!"

Callia flipped her obsidian hair. "Of course they did".

The sirens had perfected their craft over centuries. Before radio, they'd lured sailors to watery graves. Now they harvested something more valuable: consumer devotion. Blood and death were messy; credit cards and brand loyalty were clean, efficient, and eternal.

Echo knew something was wrong the moment she woke up. Her throat felt scraped raw, as if someone had taken sandpaper to her vocal cords while she slept.

"Just a cold," Lyra suggested when Echo could only whisper during their morning meeting. But sirens didn't get colds.

"The VortexTech campaign records today," Davidson reminded them, panic edging his voice. "Their CEO is sitting in. Five million riding on this".

Echo nodded, swallowing painfully. VortexTech was their biggest client - a tech giant launching a device that could supposedly predict consumer behaviour. The irony wasn't lost on the sirens, whose voices had been manipulating human desires since before electricity existed.

In the recording booth, disaster struck. When Echo opened her mouth to sing, nothing

emerged but a strangled rasp. The CEO's smile vanished.

"What is this?" Davidson hissed after ushering the client into another room. "Fix it! Now!"

"Something's interfering," Callia said, pacing their private office while Echo clutched her throat. Ancient texts in forgotten languages lined the walls, remnants of their true history.

Later, Lyra's eyes narrowed as she scrolled through industry news on her tablet. "Radio Titan just hired a new creative director. Listen to this: 'Former classical music professor specialising in counterharmonics and sound cancellation technology'".

Echo grabbed the tablet, eyes widening at the photo. She scribbled frantically on her notepad: That's him. The one who escaped us. Athens, 1922.

"Impossible," Callia whispered. "We dragged his ship down".

Echo wrote again: He knew the counterspell. He's using our own frequency against me.

From the doorway, Davidson cleared his throat. "Ladies, I've called in some freelancers from the agency. If Echo can't perform..."

"No!" Lyra snarled, her glamour slipping for a heartbeat, revealing scaled skin and teeth too sharp for human mouths. Davidson backed away, suddenly unsure why he felt terror crawling up his spine.

Radio Titan's billboards appeared overnight: "THE BURN HAS LOST ITS SPARK".

Their station's phone lines jammed with clients threatening to pull contracts. VortexTech gave them forty-eight hours to deliver or walk away from the biggest campaign of the year.

In their ancient texts, the sirens searched for answers until Lyra found it - a passage about siren harmony. "It's not just our voices," she realised. "It's our unity. The professor isn't cancelling your voice, Echo - he's disrupting our connection".

Echo pointed to her throat, then to the ceiling, then made a slashing motion.

"The broadcast tower," Callia translated. "He's using it to amplify the counter frequency".

They had twelve hours left when they made their desperate plan. If they couldn't sing, they would speak. If harmony was blocked, they would use its absence as a weapon.

The three sirens crafted a new script for VortexTech, abandoning their usual approach.

While Davidson paced outside, they recorded separately, layering their voices in a pattern older than human civilisation.

Callia spoke of hunger. Lyra spoke of desire. And Echo - Echo's silence became the void into which human longing would pour itself.

When they finished, even the sound engineer sat dazed, his credit card already in hand. "I need that device," he whispered. "I need it now".

The VortexTech CEO staggered backward after the playback, his pupils fully dilated. "How did you...? It feels like it's speaking directly to me".

Davidson beamed. "That's our speciality".

That night, VortexTech's website crashed from preorders. Their stock doubled by morning.

The campaign wasn't just successful - it was devastating in its efficiency.

Radio Titan's broadcast tower shorted out mysteriously at midnight, sparks cascading down its length like falling stars. The professor was found wandering nearby, unable to form coherent sentences, mumbling about voices in the static.

A week later, Echo's voice returned - altered, deeper, with a resonance that seemed to vibrate from another dimension.

"We've evolved," she told her sisters, as they stood on the station's roof, watching the city lights below. "He tried to use our own power against us, but he didn't understand what we truly are".

"And what's that?" Lyra asked.

Echo smiled, her teeth glinting under the moonlight. "Adaptable. We're not just sirens of the sea anymore". She gestured toward the broadcast tower, now pulsing with invisible energy that only they could see - threads of influence spreading across the city. "We're sirens of the airwaves".

Callia laughed, the sound rippling through the night. "And humans thought radio was dying".

"They have no idea," Echo said, her new voice carrying farther than it ever had before, "This," she said, "is just the beginning".

Below them, thousands of radios all tuned to The Burn, their dials moving without human hands touching them, preparing for the midnight broadcast.

SCRIPT: "ADVERTISE WITH US"

*Surely 'The Burn' would need to attract advertisers at some time! And if they did...
What type of promo would they run? Something a little like this, I think.*

((LOW, PULSING BASS UNDERNEATH WHISPERED VOICES))

((ANNOUNCER - HUSHED/INTENSE)) "Is your business... Burning to be noticed?"

((SFX: FLAMES CRACKLING))

((CALLIA - SEDUCTIVE)) "They'll stop what they're doing..."

((LYRA - MUSICAL)) "They'll listen completely..."

((ECHO - RESONANT)) "They'll come to you..."

((ANNOUNCER)) "At Sixty-Six, Six 'The Burn', we don't just write commercials. We create compulsions."

((SFX: CASH REGISTER RINGS x3, GROWING FASTER))

((VICTOR - CASUAL YET UNSETTLING)) "Our clients report an average R-O-I of three-hundred-and-forty percent. Fascinating what the right words can do to the human mind."

((ANNOUNCER)) "The Mattress Kingdom. Three new locations in six months. Perfect Pets Grooming. Booked solid through summer. Sunshine Daycare. Wait-listed until twenty-twenty-six."

((SFX: HEARTBEATS SYNCHRONISING))

((CALLIA)) "What makes us different?"

((LYRA)) "What makes them listen?"

((ECHO)) "What makes them buy?"

((VICTOR - CHUCKLING)) "That's our little secret"

((ANNOUNCER)) "When local businesses advertise with The Burn, customers don't just hear..."

((ALL OF THE SIRENS - IN PERFECT HARMONY)) "They obey."

((SFX: BRIEF PAUSE, AS IF TIME STOPPED))

((ANNOUNCER - FAST)) "Sixty-Six, Six 'The Burn'. Our copywriters are dying to write for you. Contact us now at 6-6-6-B-U-R-N for our limited-time new client package."

((VICTOR - WHISPERING DIRECTLY INTO EAR)) "You need to call now. You need our voices. You already know you will."

((SFX: FLAMES INTENSIFY, THEN SUDDENLY CUTTING OFF))

((ENDS))

"SUBLIMINAL SCRIPTS?"

*Having been accused of this, I have to set the record straight:
NO, subliminal advertising doesn't work - it doesn't exist. Or... does it????*

Mark Mercer hunched over his keyboard at 3am, illuminated only by his monitor's blue glow. His fingertips danced across keys worn smooth from years of abuse. Around him, the nightshift at Sixty-Six, Six 'The Burn' slept, oblivious to the linguistic alchemy occurring in Cubicle 19.

"Just one more," Victor whispered, inserting three precise words between sentences in the mattress store ad.

Listen completely now. Not commanding enough to trigger conscious resistance, but perfect for slipping past mental defences.

He leaned back, admiring his handiwork. The Mattress Kingdom commercial looked ordinary - boring, even - but nestled within its banal promises of unbeatable prices lurked his real message: stop everything focus hear obey. Mark added it to his completed pile and smiled. Thirty-seven new scripts ready for tomorrow's broadcast.

Across town, Sarah Jenkins steered her Subaru through morning traffic while arguing with her mother via Bluetooth. "Mum, I'm not discussing Kevin's proposal at 8am on a Tuesday."

The radio announcer's voice cut in: "And now, a word from Mattress Kingdom...". Sarah's hands froze on the steering wheel. Her argument evaporated mid-sentence. Her eyes remained open, but her attention locked completely on the bland mattress commercial flowing from her speakers. Behind her, horns blared as the light turned green. She didn't move. Couldn't move. For thirty seconds, nothing existed except the voice describing memory foam benefits and zero-interest financing.

The commercial ended. Sarah blinked, disoriented.

"Sarah? SARAH? Are you there?" Her mother's voice snapped her back.

"Sorry, I... I need to buy a new mattress".

Mark slouched in the back row of Starbucks, watching over his laptop rim as the morning radio show began. The barista had just called out "Grande caramel macchiato for Trevor" when his mattress commercial started playing over the café speakers.

The barista froze mid-handoff, coffee suspended in air. Trevor's outstretched hand remained empty, grasping nothing. The businesswoman typing furiously on her laptop

stopped, fingers hovering above keys. The college student with noise-cancelling headphones stared vacantly, despite not hearing the radio. Mark sipped his americano, watching twenty-seven people collectively surrender thirty seconds of their lives to discounts on pillowtop queens.

When the commercial ended, the café erupted back into motion like a paused video resuming. The barista completed his handoff. The businesswoman resumed typing. No one acknowledged the interruption. Victor opened a fresh document and typed: Collective pause response: 100% effective. Cross-reference with earbuds: notable peripheral effectiveness

Station Content Manager Phillip scowled across his desk. "Mark, our advertising revenue is up 340% this quarter".

Mark nodded cautiously.

"Mattress Kingdom's sales increased so much they're opening two new locations. Perfect Pets Grooming has a six-week waiting list. Even that Eternal Rest Funeral Home is suddenly profitable". Phillip narrowed his eyes. "What exactly are you doing to these scripts?"

Mark shrugged. "Just applying some classical writing formulas. Aristotle, Shakespeare, Hemingway..."

"Bullshit. Clarence has been writing radio copy for thirty years, and his ads don't make people walk into traffic".

Mark blinked. "I'm sorry?"

Phillip tossed a police report across the desk. "Four separate incidents of pedestrians stopping in crosswalks during your Discount Tyre commercial. One grandmother stood motionless in the middle of Fifth and Main for the entire duration of your thirty-second spot about all-weather radials".

"Fascinating," Mark murmured, then caught himself. "I mean, concerning".

Phillip leaned forward. "Whatever you're doing, do more of it. The station owner's ecstatic. Just... maybe ease up on the traffic-adjacent spots".

In his apartment, Mark pinned another article to his evidence wall... 'LOCAL RADIO STATION BREAKS RATING RECORDS'. Beside it hung photos of intersections where accidents had occurred during his commercials, brain scan images downloaded from neuroscience journals, and transcripts of his most effective work.

He turned to his latest creation for Sunshine Daycare Centre. The copy looked innocent

enough - cheerful descriptions of finger painting and nap time - but between each wholesome line lurked carefully calibrated commands: 'freeze now', 'hear completely', 'remember nothing after'. Mark had discovered his gift by accident. A miswording in a furniture store ad had caused three separate fender benders outside the radio station.

After that, it was just experimentation: which word combinations triggered the strongest responses, which demographic groups were most susceptible, how far the effect reached beyond radio speakers.

His phone buzzed. Phillip was calling: "A fast food client needs a campaign by morning. Triple your usual rate if you can make people crave burgers at breakfast". Mark cracked his knuckles and opened a new document. This would require his special formula: the one that combined Old English cadence patterns with subliminal repetition of the phrases hunger now and must consume.

The document's cursor blinked expectantly. Mark began to type.

Dr. Eliza Chen presented slide seventy-four to the neuroscience conference. "These MRI images show unprecedented synchronisation across subjects during the thirty-second stimulus".

Her colleague adjusted his glasses. "And they don't remember freezing?"

"Complete amnesic response. Subject interviews indicate they believe they were paying attention to their original tasks throughout the test period".

In the back row, a research assistant raised her hand. "What was the audio stimulus exactly?"

Dr. Chen clicked to the next slide. "A commercial for mufflers. Completely ordinary except for these unusual syntax patterns we've isolated".

The assistant frowned. "I need new brake pads".

Mark added the fast food script to his completed pile. Ninety-seven commercials now waiting for tomorrow's unsuspecting listeners. He stretched, his back cracking from hours hunched over the keyboard.

On his desk sat the special projects folder - his personal experiments. Commercials for non-existent products from imaginary companies that tested the limits of his power. How long could he hold attention? Could he make listeners perform specific actions? Could his commands extend beyond the commercial break? His latest unauthorized creation - disguised as a public service announcement about recycling - waited for the overnight slot when management never listened. Hidden within its environmental platitudes were his most ambitious instructions yet: 'remember this voice', 'recognise these words', 'obey the

next message'.

It was just the foundation. The primer. The first layer of what would become his masterpiece. Mark slipped the script into his bag and headed for the station's night entrance, already composing his next work in his mind.

SCRIPT: "VENGEANCE VEXATIONS"

After writing the previous story, I wondered if witches would use such a service at a radio station, and instantly thought of "Vengeance Vexations" as a business brand name.

((SFX: BUBBLING CAULDRON, A WILHEM SCREAM THAT SLOWLY TRANSFORMS INTO LAUGHTER UNDER THE NEXT LINE UNTIL THUNDERCLAP))

((WITCH)) "Wronged by humans? At Vengeance Vexations, we put the "hex" in "ex.""

((SFX: THUNDERCLAP))

((WITCH)) "From mild inconvenience to total ruination, our artisanal curses are ethically sourced and karmatically balanced. This month's special: 'The Job Interview Jinx' - watch them sweat uncontrollably while forgetting their own name, but remembering only yours!!"

((SFX: EVIL CACKLE))

((WITCH)) "Need something stronger? Try our 'Parking Ticket Plague' - every space they choose will mysteriously expire thirty seconds early! Or our premium 'WiFi Wobble' curse - their internet dies every time they're about to win online!"

((ANNOUNCER)) "Vengeance Vexations: Because living well isn't nearly as satisfying as revenge is."

((WITCH)) "Call now! Our operators are standing by with crystal balls, scrying mirrors, and tarot decks. Payment accepted in cash, cryptocurrency, or stolen childhood memories!"

((PAUSE))

((DISCLAIMER)) "Vengeance Vexations are not responsible for unexpected transformations, dimensional banishment, or inadvertent plague outbreaks."

((ANNOUNCER)) "Vengeance Vexations, at Stall 3 at the weekend 'Dunwich Pit & The Pendulum Markets' by the seaside."

((ENDS))

"WELCOME TO MY SHOW"

A pre-recorded shift on-air would make an ideal alibi if your listeners thought you were there live, and then... what if the hunters became the hunted in this situation?

The rain came down in sheets, turning the mountain highway into a black mirror that reflected nothing but darkness. Mark's hands gripped the steering wheel, his knuckles white beneath the harsh glow of the dashboard lights. Midnight radio shifts had always been his sanctuary – just him, the open road, and the sound of his voice filling the empty airwaves of Sixty-Six, Six 'The Burn'.

The first hitchhiker appeared like a ghost emerging from the mist. Mid-thirties, lean, with a face that seemed carved from something harder than flesh. His clothes were dark, saturated with rain, clinging to a body that moved with predatory grace. When Mark slowed the car, the rear passenger door opened with a soft, almost apologetic creak.

"Rough night," Mark said, more a statement than a question.

The man smiled – a thing that never quite reached his eyes. "You could say that."

Derek. The name would come later, whispered like a curse.

They drove in silence, the windscreen wipers creating a hypnotic rhythm. Mark's fingers tapped against the steering wheel, matching the beat of a song only he could hear. The voice on the radio quietly talked on in a low drone that seemed to vibrate with something more than mere sound.

Thirty minutes passed. Another figure materialised on the roadside – older, harder, with hands that looked like they'd strangled more than steering wheels. He slid into the back seat behind Mark, bringing with him the smell of wet leather and something else. Something metallic.

"Quite a night for travelling," the new passenger said, his voice a gravelly whisper that seemed to scrape against the car's interior.

Derek tensed. Mark watched the interaction unfold in the rearview mirror - a silent language of predators sizing each other up.

The radio crackled... "Sometimes the hunter becomes the hunted."

The two men in the back, now identified by the radio as 'Derek' and 'Richard', exchanged a glance, their eyes mirroring the feral gleam Mark had noticed earlier. They were hunters. Mark had known it from the moment he saw them. But who, exactly, was the prey?

Mark adjusted the rearview mirror, meeting Richard's eyes. "Gentlemen," he said, his voice calm, "this is my show."

Richard's face remained impassive, but Mark saw the subtle clenching of his jaw. Derek, however, had a smirk playing on his lips. "Oh, really?"

"Indeed," Mark replied, his gaze drifting to the radio dial. "And tonight's topic... is you."

The car's interior seemed to shrink, the air thick with unspoken tension. The low hum of the radio intensified, almost a growl.

"You see," Mark continued, his voice taking on a hypnotic rhythm, "I know about your... recreational activities."

Richard's eyes narrowed. Derek's smirk vanished.

The radio then played a series of static bursts, each one punctuated by a distorted, echoing whisper: "The forest... the disappearances... your secret." The whispers sounded eerily familiar.

Derek's hand moved toward his belt, where a hunting knife caught a sliver of moonlight.

The older man – Richard, he'd call himself – placed a restraining hand on Derek's arm.

"Not yet," Richard muttered.

"Not yet," the radio echoed.

A chill ran down Mark's spine. His fingers found the dial, turning up the volume. The station's identifier played – Sixty-Six, Six 'The Burn' – but something was wrong.

Underneath the static, beneath the music, a voice whispered. His own voice... "Two killers. One road. Who decides?"

Derek leaned forward, eyes narrowing. "What the hell is this?"

Both rear doors central locking suddenly clicked.

Richard remained calm, but Mark saw the tension in his shoulders. These were men used to control, to being the ones who decided who lived and who died.

The highway stretched before them, a black snake cutting through dense forest. No other cars. No signs of civilisation. Just darkness and rain and the growing sense that something was terribly wrong.

Mark's lips curled into the slightest smile.

"Gentlemen," he said, his voice soft, "I think we need to discuss something."

The radio crackled again. A laugh – his laugh – echoed through the car's speakers.

"Who gets to kill whom?"

Derek's hand found the knife. Richard's muscles coiled like springs. And Mark? Mark simply pulled the car to the side of the road, the engine purring into silence.

He turned. It was the smile of something else entirely.

With a small amount of drama, Mark breathed in deeply and said in a low voice...
"Welcome, to my show..."

MEMO: Misleading SFX in Radio Ads

Don't you love internal memos about silly things like this?

TO: All 66.6 The Burn Staff and Our Clients
FROM: Morticia Graves, Director of Disclaimers Department
RE: Misleading Special Effects in Advertisements

Dear Colleagues and Valued Advertisers,
Special effects used in radio advertisements can be entertaining, but advertisers must not use them to misrepresent what a product can actually do. Following last month's unfortunate incident with Lazarus Rejuvenation Cream, we are enforcing stricter disclosure protocols.

To clarify: The sound effect of a decomposing corpse "springing back to life" after application of said cream was deemed misleading when fourteen listeners brought their deceased relatives to the advertiser's storefront after using their product.

While the cream does reduce the appearance of wrinkles, it does not, in fact, reverse actual death.

Similarly, 'Whispers Beyond The Veil' séance services cannot guarantee the specific dead celebrity voice featured in their commercial will appear during customers' sessions. This includes Elvis Presley and Marilyn Monroe, as it creates unrealistic expectations.

Advertisers must now include appropriate disclaimers such as:

- "Resurrection not guaranteed."
- "Celebrity spirits subject to availability and contractual obligations in the afterlife."
- "Results may vary based on level of decomposition."

Failure to comply will result in review by our Supernatural Compliance Team — who, I remind you, are not bound by the laws of the state, physics, or mercy.

Undeadly yours,
Morticia Graves
Director of Disclaimers (Ext. 666)

"THIS IS, THAT WAS, AND COMING UP..."

Having a psychic ghost producer would be the dream for most on-air jocks.

The phone lines lit up and Gary's ghostly fingers danced across the soundboard of radio station Sixty-Six, Six 'The Burn'. He'd been dead for 37 years, but radio was still his game, and nobody – living or deceased – could run a smoother show. "Incoming call," he muttered to himself. His transparent hand hovered over the phone line before it even rang. Line 3 – he knew it would be Janet from an accounting firm downtown, calling to request a sad country ballad about her recent divorce.

Right on cue, the phone chirped.

"The Burn, you're on the air," said Mike, the living host who perpetually wore a vintage Led Zeppelin t-shirt and remained blissfully unaware of his spectral co-producer.

"Hi, I was wondering if you could play something by..." Janet began.

"'He Stopped Loving Her Today' by George Jones," Gary whispered, and simultaneously Mike interrupted Janet.

"George Jones, coming right up!" Mike said, sliding the track into rotation with supernatural precision.

The station manager had long suspected something odd was happening. How did Mike always know exactly what song to play? How did the phone lines seem to predict caller requests? Why did the coffee always brew itself precisely two minutes before the morning show?

Gary chuckled. Being a dead radio producer had its perks. He'd spent his entire living career perfecting the art of radio, and death wasn't about to stop him.

Another line began to blink. A drunk caller from the local bar, Gary knew, wanting to hear Lynyrd Skynyrd and ramble about his ex-girlfriend. Before the man could even dial, Gary had "Free Bird" queued up and ready.

"Supernatural efficiency," he whispered, adjusting an invisible headset.

Mike looked around nervously. Sometimes he could almost feel a presence, a hint of static electricity that didn't quite belong. But the show must go on, and ratings were higher than ever.

At Sixty-Six, Six 'The Burn', the music never missed a beat, the callers never waited, and somewhere between the speakers and the soundboard, a ghost producer smiled.

"SCRIPT: FULL MOON PROPERTIES"

A werewolf would really be a good real estate agent; they'd be able to sniff out a hot deal before a property went on the market.

((QUICK, SLIGHTLY OMINOUS JINGLE))

((JACK - GRAVELLY, INTENSE VOICE)) "Tired of the hit and miss service you get from ordinary real estate firms? Tired of never finding the right property for your purposes?"

I'm Jack Silverstone from FULL MOON PROPERTIES, where we TRACK down your perfect home before it even hits the market!"

((ANNOUNCER - ENERGETIC)) Mysterious neighbourhood vacancies? Unexplained property openings? We know first because we've got the inside track on whats going down around town!

((JACK - WHISPERING)) Sometimes properties become available after... "interesting circumstances".

((ANNOUNCER)) Bleeding-edge listings at "Full Moon Properties dot com"! Right now - KILLER deals on a three-bedroom in Shadowood Heights! Previous owners? GONE. Price? UNBELIEVABLE! Available for immediate rental, no cleaning costs before you take possession.

Properties for sale, rentals, business sales, and... ((LOWER)) ...storage!

((JACK - GROWLING SLIGHTLY)) First five callers get a FREE property assessment!

((ANNOUNCER)) Full Moon Properties - We're NOT just real estate agents. We're THE TOP PREDATORS in the market!

((QUICK HOWL MIXED INTO JINGLE))

((DISCLAIMER - ULTRA-FAST)) Full Moon Properties are not responsible for unexplained property vacancies or mysterious market conditions.

((JACK - WHISPERS)) Call now... while supplies last, p;roperties mentioned in this comercial may have been taken by prospective clients, new properties come on the market all the time - to discover more..

((ANNOUNCER)) See the website: "Full Moon Properties dot com".

((ENDS))

"YOU DON'T NEED TO BE DEAD, TO BE A GHOST AROUND HERE"

Something happened at work recently which drove me on to write this...

"G'day, Sixty-Six, Six The Burn, where we're always playing hot tracks from hell. This is Mavis speaking, how may I direct your eternal suffering today?"

Mavis Holloway's spectral form hovered elegantly behind the reception desk of Sixty-Six, Six The Burn's office in Woop Woop, Australia. A small town three hours west of nowhere important.

Mavis' actual body lay in the Royal Melbourne Hospital, hooked up to various machines that beeped reassuringly, indicating she was, still... technically alive. Meanwhile, her O.B. (Out of Body) self had found gainful employment.

"Yes, I understand you're upset about winning concert tickets to see 'The Banshees' and then discovering they're actual banshees," Mavis nodded sympathetically into her headset, her translucent form shimmering under the fluorescent lights. "But sir, the clue was in the name, wasn't it?"

She gestured to her zombie intern, Trevor, who shuffled over with surprising alacrity for someone missing half his leg.

"Trev, be a love and fetch the complaints form? The one for 'Supernatural Spectacle Disappointment.' That's the pink one with the biohazard symbol. And don't forget to complete the Request for Retrieval of Forms in triplicate before opening the filing cabinet."

Trevor groaned affirmatively, his partially exposed brain sloshing gently in his skull. He navigated the labyrinthine corridors of the 'The Burn' offices, a maze of cubicles and flickering fluorescent lights, where the living toiled alongside the not-so-living.

Here, an ethereal secretary floated past, dictating memos to a possessed typewriter; there, a poltergeist perpetually jammed the coffee machine, much to the exasperation of the living employees.

Mavis found the station's bureaucracy more terrifying than any demon. Paperwork, she'd discovered, was the true eternal suffering. The living had no idea. Being dead, or at least mostly dead, offered a unique perspective. The living obsessed over trivialities: quarterly reports, synergy, professional development. Mavis, however, only cared about her afterlife benefits and making sure Trevor didn't lose any more body parts on the job.

A shrill ring cut through the phantom hum of the office. Line 1, the red line – directly from Head Office in... well, somewhere in an outer dimension, if the rumours were to be believed.

"Yes, Mr. Abbadon," Mavis said, her voice dropping to a respectful, yet bored, tone. "The report on interdimensional paperclip distribution is on your desk. No, sir, I haven't seen your soul-harvesting scythe, perhaps check the break room?"

She hung up, sighing. Even the Lord of the Underworld had misplaced his office supplies.

Trevor returned, meticulously presenting a pristine pink form. "Complaint... filed," he mumbled, a faint wisp of smoke curling from his ear.

"Excellent, Trev. Now, attach the 'Certificate of Otherworldly Engagement' and a 'Proof of Spectral Encounter Affidavit.' Make sure it's notarised by a licensed necromancer. Oh, and include the 'Waiver of Temporal Displacement' form, just in case he accidentally travels back to the Mesozoic Era."

A Corporeal Uber Courier, drenched and shivering, burst through the front door, clutching a steaming takeaway coffee. "Delivery for... Mavis Holloway?" he stammered, his eyes wide as he stared directly through Mavis's translucent form.

"That'll be my actual body calling for a latte," Mavis explained. "Just leave it on the desk, love."

The courier gingerly placed the cup down. "Is this... a haunted office?" he whispered, glancing nervously at Trevor, whose leg was now leaking green fluid.

"Oh, it's not haunted," Mavis corrected, adjusting her invisible spectacles. "It's just... understaffed. And some of us are working remotely."

She eyed Trevor. "Trev love, be a dear and don't forget to sanitise your workstation, and log your dimensional shifts for payroll. Also, remember to fill out the 'Hazardous Material Disposal Request' form for the green stuff, and document any unexpected emotional or dimensional rifts that may appear when you do so," Mavis instructed as Trevor held out a clipboard with a single sheet for the courier to sign.

As the courier fled, Mavis smiled at Trevor. "You know what they say, Trev... you don't need to be a ghost to be dead around here, in this bureaucracy. But at least now we've both got reasonable hours."

Trevor nodded, accidentally dislodging his jaw, which clattered onto the desk. "Incident report?" he groaned questioningly.

"Nah," Mavis winked. "Let's just staple it back on and call it a day pet."

TRANSCRIPT "COLD CALL"

I wondered what a sales pitch to a typical client of The Burn would sound like. This jumped to mind instantly - gangsters and the supernatural.... who knew?

SAM: Sixty-Six, Six The Burn! Sam speaking. Is this Deep Six Marine?

VINCE: Vince here. [heavy thump and muffled scream] Ignore that. Faulty... outboard.

SAM: Our midnight listeners would love your "no-return cruises." Very popular concept.

VINCE: We sell boats. Normal boats! For... Fish-Shing!!!

SAM: Of course you do. And our cement sponsor offers discounts on "fishing weights" for your customers.

VINCE: [chainsaw briefly revs] Sorry. Inventory issues.

SAM: I understand completely. Our station manager keeps "inventory" in the basement too. Temperature controlled environment, you know?

VINCE: [splash sound] Hmmmm... How soon can we start?

SAM: Tonight, if you have a credit card? We accept cash too - unmarked bills preferred. How's this sound: "Deep Six Marine: When your problems need to disappear, we wave them goodbye."

VINCE: Perfect. But maybe add something about... discretion?

SAM: "Deep Six Marine: Silent service, deeper solutions. When life gets complicated, we make it simple again, no questions asked."

VINCE: [muffled arguing in background] Even better. What's your overnight rate?

SAM: Midnight to dawn? Well, that's our premium "problem solving" time slot. Very exclusive clientele.

VINCE: [sound of car trunk slamming] Money's no object. Do it. Email me the paperwork. Use an encrypted account.

SAM: Already sending. Welcome to The Burn family, Vince.

VINCE: [engine starting] Gotta go. Business calls.

SAM: [chuckling darkly] Don't we all have those calls, Vince? Don't we all.

PROMO: "INTERNATIONAL"

With The Burn going global, what type of promo script would work?
And, this story gave me the title for this short story anthology.

((SFX: RADIO STATIC, CYCLES THROUGH DIFFERENT LANGUAGES AND MUSIC))
((ANNOUNCER – ECHOING)) No matter where you are, or what language you speak...

((BRIEF SNIPPETS OF THE SAME PHRASE IN MULTIPLE LANGUAGES: GERMAN, JAPANESE, ARABIC, SPANISH)) "The Burn"

((CALLIA – WHISPERING)) The Burn finds you.

((SFX: HEARTBEAT SOUND PULSING UNDERNEATH))

((ECHO – VOICE REVERBERATING)) Our signal transcends borders.

((LYRA – MELODICALY)) Our voices penetrate walls.

((VICTOR – MATTER-OF-FACTLY)) Did you think you could escape us?

((SFX: SOUND OF DIFFERENT RADIO DIALS TURNING SIMULTANEOUSLY WORLDWIDE))

((ANNOUNCER)) From "Midnight Confessions" with Dr. Dread in New York...
((GRAB: "Your darkest secrets are safe with me... or are they?"))

((ANNOUNCER)) To "The Witching Hour" with Madame Corvus in London...
((GRAB: "The stars don't lie, darling, but I might."))

((ANNOUNCER)) To "Forbidden Frequencies" broadcasting from Tokyo...
((GRAB OF JAPANESE HOST: "Some sounds were never meant for human ears."))

((VICTOR – INTIMATELY)) Because we know what you hunger for, wherever you are... Go on... set your dial... to dead.

((SFX: SOUND OF SYNCHRONISED BREATHING FROM MULTIPLE SOURCES))
((ANNOUNCER)) Stream us. Download us. Find us on your dial at Sixty-Six, Six.

((SFX: QUICK MONTAGE OF DIFFERENT ACCENTS AGAIN, ALL SAYING "The Burn"))

((ALL TOGETHER – A DIFFERENT WORD, BY A DIFFERENT PERSON)) When the world sleeps, The Burn awakens. We're already inside your head. We always have been.

((ENDS))

"THE FREQUENCY OF REDEMPTION"

Cold War type shenanigans happen sometimes in radio (even if some people want to admit it or not), so what would happen if someone took on Sixty-Six, Six The Burn?

Gunther Krieg's elongated shadow stretched across the polished floor of Sixty-Six, Six The Burn's executive suite. His gangly limbs and hunched posture gave him the appearance of a malevolent marionette as he approached the station manager's office.

Electronic devices often malfunctioned in his presence - a side effect of his peculiar lineage.

He rapped his yellowed nails against the frosted glass door.

"Enter," commanded a voice from within.

Viktor Noctis sat behind the odd-shaped black marble desk, his unnaturally pale skin luminous in the dimly lit office. The vampire station manager's fangs gleamed as he spoke.

"Ah, Gunther. Your mission was successful, I presume?" Noctis didn't look up from the ratings report, his long fingers tracing the declining numbers of their competitors.

Gunther's thin lips stretched into what approximated a smile, revealing teeth filed to points. "As always, Herr Noctis."

He slid into the chair opposite his employer, joints cracking as he folded his seven-foot frame into the seat. From his tattered coat, he produced a USB drive.

"KRZK's programming schedule, promotional calendar, advertiser contracts," Gunther's guttural accent wrapped around each word. "And their ratings methodology. They've been... creative with their numbers."

Noctis snatched up the drive, eyes gleaming crimson. "The fools. Did they truly believe they could operate with such... amateurish deception under our very noses?" He rose, pacing the office like a caged predator. "KRZK has been a thorn in our side for too long. Their 'positive vibes' and 'community spirit' are an affront to everything The Burn stands for."

"Indeed," Gunther murmured, his gaze falling on a framed photograph of a 1950s radio tower, its antenna piercing a storm cloud. "Such... optimism. It sickens me."

"Precisely," Noctis agreed, pausing to straighten a crooked painting of a screaming listener. "And now, with their entire infrastructure at our fingertips, we shall unleash the true meaning of radio upon them. A symphony of despair. A crescendo of chaos."

"The frequency jammers are ready," Gunther reported, his voice a low thrum. "Calibrated

to disrupt every broadcast signal within a fifty-kilometre radius of KRZK's main transmitter. Pure, unadulterated static. A void where their insipid jingles once played."

"Excellent," Noctis purred. "But why stop there? Why merely silence them when we can twist their own medium against them? You mentioned their ratings methodology... 'creative,' you said?"

Gunther nodded. "They employed a unique subliminal frequency, embedded within their morning show. Designed to foster a sense of well-being, loyalty... and a complete disregard for competitor programming."

Noctis's smile widened, revealing more of his unsettling teeth. "A subliminal frequency, you say? Fascinating. Imagine, Gunther, if that frequency were... repurposed. If their own 'well-being' signal were to become the conduit for something far more... unsettling."

Gunther's eyes gleamed with understanding. "A counter-frequency. Delivered through their own airwaves. Turning their listeners' minds against them. A psychological weapon disguised as a morning pep talk."

"Precisely," Noctis confirmed, tapping a clawed finger against his chin. "We shall invert their message. Subliminal commands for paranoia, distrust, suspicion. Their loyal listeners will turn on them. On each other. The very air they breathe will become tainted with the seeds of discord."

Gunther let out a low, guttural laugh. "Brilliant, Herr Noctis. The ultimate sabotage. To make their audience despise the very voices they once adored."

"And when they're sufficiently demoralised," Noctis added, a predatory glint in his eye, "when their ratings plummet into the abyss, when their advertisers flee in terror, that's when The Burn will sweep in. A beacon in the darkness. The only station left broadcasting anything coherent. A forced, unholy monopoly."

"The cleansing," Gunther whispered, savouring the words.

"Indeed. A glorious purge of positivity. Prepare the frequencies, Gunther. Let us show KRZK what true broadcast power looks like."

The next morning, KRZK's 'Sunshine Breakfast Show' went live. Listeners across the city noticed it immediately. The chirpy jingles sounded off-key, the hosts' laughter had a hollow, almost mocking echo, and beneath the cheerful banter, a faint, almost imperceptible hum.

By midday, callers were ringing in, not with requests, but with complaints of sudden, inexplicable anxiety. Neighbours were shouting at each other over garden fences. Drivers were honking incessantly. The city was a low-grade hum of irritability and suspicion.

KRZK's phone lines became jammed with angry listeners cancelling their subscriptions. Advertisers, witnessing the sudden shift in public mood, began pulling their campaigns. The hosts, bewildered, tried to maintain their usual upbeat facade, but even their smiles seemed strained, their eyes darting nervously.

Within forty-eight hours, KRZK's ratings had collapsed. Their once-loyal audience was gripped by a collective unease, associating the station's once-familiar sounds with a creeping dread they couldn't articulate. The 'Sunshine Breakfast Show' devolved into awkward silences and bickering hosts.

Noctis watched from his office, a satisfied smile playing on his lips. "The frequency of redemption," he mused, as he saw the news report of KRZK's financial collapse. "They sought to uplift, but we showed them the true nature of the human spirit."

Gunther, beside him, adjusted his coat. "The disruption will continue indefinitely, Herr Noctis. A permanent pall over their airwaves. No one will ever listen to their 'positive vibes' again."

"Good," Noctis said, turning back to his desk. "Now, about that new contract with the Perpetual Motion Machine Company... I believe their latest prototype could use a little... encouragement. Perhaps a subliminal command for 'uncontrolled acceleration'?" He chuckled, a low, rumbling sound. "Yes, I think that will do nicely."

The air in the executive suite hummed with a quiet, malevolent energy, a testament to The Burn's insidious power. Gunther felt a familiar tremor of excitement - and though he would never admit it - a touch of redemption.

"A LISTENERS LETTER"

Some radio listeners are just nuts and unhinged. I bet The Burn gets those, too...

Dear Sixty-Six, Six The Burn's "Dawn Patrol" Breakfast Crew, every one of you rocks my world! Your shows SPEAK TO ME!!!! Literally. Through my dental fillings. THANK YOU!

I've won 37 of your competitions (the voices in my head help me guess the mystery sounds). My house is FILLED with Dawn Patrol merchandise - some official, most are handcrafted from hair and discarded coffee cups I've collected from outside your station.

But hey, gang... That restraining order was CLEARLY a misunderstanding, right?! The shrine in my backyard is a TRIBUTE, not "disturbing" as police suggested.

I've tattooed your broadcast frequency across my eyelids so you're the last thing I see before sleep.

Forever listening (ALWAYS LISTENING), Beryl Wilberforce

"A TALE OF MIDDLE MANAGEMENT"

*At Sixty-Six, Six The Burn, you still have to answer to management and HR and...
Well, you know who...*

Sylvania Nightshade adjusted her iridescent wings as she sat in the cramped, fluorescent-lit conference room of Sixty-Six, Six The Burn. As the station's top street team member, she had a knack for getting listeners excited – and occasionally terrified – about their promotional events. But today, she faced a horror far worse than any creature from the abyss: a disciplinary meeting with management.

"Ms. Nightshade, do you understand the gravity of this situation?" droned Mortimer Graves, the Head of Human (and Non-Human) Resources. His translucent skin revealed the sluggish movement of viscous fluid through his veins, a telltale sign of the "deadwood" middle management that plagued The Burn.

Sylvania rolled her jet-black eyes. "I parked the Street Cruiser on some grass. The lot was full. What was I supposed to do? Levitate it?"

"Actually," interjected Belinda Wormwood, the Events Coordinator whose body had been slowly transforming into actual dead wood over her long tenure, "levitation of company vehicles is strictly prohibited after the Hovering Hearse Incident of 2018." Her right arm, now completely bark-covered, creaked as she flipped through a binder of policies.

"The client, Bloodsucker's Blood Bank, filed a formal complaint," continued Mortimer, pushing a stack of paperwork toward Sylvania. "They said, and I quote, 'The tyre marks on our ceremonial grass have disrupted the sacred ley lines and caused a significant drop in our plasma yield.' Do you have any idea how much it costs to re-align ley lines, Ms. Nightshade?"

Sylvania suppressed a groan. "It was just a few divots! And honestly, their plasma yield has been dropping since they started serving lukewarm synthetic O-negative. It's an insult to the undead palate."

"That is neither here nor there," Mortimer said, his voice as dry as parchment. "The fact remains, you violated company parking policy, causing a spiritual imbalance, a reduction in vital fluids, and, most importantly, an administrative nightmare." He pulled out a form, already filled with tiny, meticulous script. "You'll be required to attend a mandatory 'Parking Protocol Refresher' webinar, complete a 'Ley Line Sensitivity' module, and submit a 'Personal Accountability Action Plan' by end of day."

"A webinar?" Sylvania shrieked, her voice echoing off the sterile walls. "Mortimer, I'm a demon! My essence is chaos! You want me to sit through a webinar on parking? My soul shrivels at the thought!"

"Precisely why it's mandatory," Belinda croaked, a twig snapping from her arm. "And don't

forget the 'Interdepartmental Synergy' workshop. We need to foster a more cohesive work environment between our... various departments."

Sylvania glanced at the clock. Her Street Cruiser, a customised hearse with flame decals and a booming sound system, was parked illegally on the grass outside. She had precisely seventeen minutes before the imp demon towed it. And dealing with imp demons was even worse than HR. They spoke in riddles and demanded payment in existential dread.

"Fine," Sylvania snarled, snatching the forms. "But if I miss my blood rave tonight because of some 'Parking Protocol Refresher,' someone's getting turned into a newt."

Mortimer merely adjusted his tie. "Ms. Nightshade, such language is unproductive. Perhaps you'd benefit from our 'Conflict Resolution and Transformative Communication' seminar?"

Sylvania stood, her wings rustling menacingly. "I'm going to my desk. To fill out these forms. Before I spontaneously combust from sheer administrative angst."

As she stomped down the hallway, the fluorescent lights flickered violently in her wake. She passed the break room where a group of spectral accountants were arguing over the proper way to expense ectoplasm. In the corner, a succubus was trying to figure out the new coffee machine.

Reaching her cubicle, Sylvania slumped into her chair. The forms lay on her desk, an intimidating pile of bureaucratic torture. 'Incident Report: Misplaced Vehicle', 'Client Dissatisfaction Survey: Ley Line Interruption', 'HR Disciplinary Action: Gross Negligence of Parking Procedures'.

With a determined glint in her obsidian eyes, Sylvania started the hearse's engine. The Street Cruiser roared to life, hellfire spouting from its exhaust pipes. Perhaps it was time to park this vehicle somewhere truly inappropriate – like directly through the conference room wall during Lucille Ledger's presentation.

After all, what was the worst they could do? Schedule another meeting?

As she crashed through the station's wall, shattering the meticulously prepared PowerPoint presentation on proper form-filling techniques, Sylvania felt more alive than she had in decades.

The deadwood management screeched and scattered, their half-transformed bodies creaking in horror.

"Meeting adjourned," Sylvania declared, her wings spreading gloriously as the Street Cruiser's radio spontaneously blasted death metal at full volume.

SCRIPT: "MOONLIGHT MIXERS"

*Following on from the cold call to "Deep Six Marine",
this is another mob business and 'friend of the station'*

((SFX: CONCRETE POURING, FOLLOWED BY SPLASH))

((ANNOUNCER)) Moonlight Mixers Cement – when your problems need permanent solutions, call Midnight Mixers.

Small jobs. Fast hardening. No questions.

Special midnight rates on our "fishing weight" packages with our Deep Six Marine partners. We supply the cement, you supply the... contents.

((SFX: SHOVEL SCRAPING CONCRETE))

((ANNOUNCER)) Our proprietary "Silence Formula" sets in under twenty minutes – perfect for those time-sensitive projects. Available in standard gray or our popular "Ocean Floor Blue" for discretion-minded customers.

((SFX: HEAVY FOOTSTEPS, CHAINS RATTLING))

((ANNOUNCER)) Family owned and operated since 1952, we understand the importance of tradition. Our drivers are bonded, insured, and most importantly – loyal.

Same-day delivery available for those urgent "foundation work" projects that need to be done 'tonight!'.

((TESTIMONIAL VOICE - GRAVELLY)) "Moonlight Mixers helped me solve a problem that just wouldn't go away. Five stars!" - V.S., satisfied customer

((SFX: WATER BUBBLING CONTINUES UNDER NEXT LINE))

((ANNOUNCER)) Moonlight Mixers – our business is keeping yours... underwater.

((DISCLAIMER – EXTREMELY FAST)) Moonlight Mixers not responsible for police investigations, missing persons, or maritime law violations.

((ENDS))

"THE CANCELLATION"

Some clients will try anything to get out of their advertising contracts. I asked myself: What would happen in the universe of The Burn if they tried to pull that?

"So they said business was slow?" Vanessa Venom asked, her forked tongue flicking between perfect crimson lips. As Head of Client Retention at Sixty-Six, Six The Burn's New Zealand branch, the half-serpent sales manager took cancellations rather... personally.

"Yeah, blamed the economy," replied Dazza, her banshee sales rep whose whisper could shatter concrete. "But their competitor told me they're just switching to social media because 'radio is dead.' The irony, right?"

Vanessa's scaled fingers tapped the "Special Handling" folder containing the "Midnight Mechanics" contract cancellation. "Fourth lie this month. First claiming our ads didn't work, then saying their competitors' ads sound the same, then they're closing down, now this. I think it's time for some Level Three Consequences, for now..." Vanessa smiled, revealing fangs that glistened with venom. "...Call Karlos."

Karlos the Curse Coordinator - a reformed bunyip ex-pat from Australia with an accounting degree - appeared minutes later, carrying an ancient leather-bound ledger titled "Account Settlements."

"Another one for the special file?" he gurgled, water dripping from his amphibious form. "Midnight Mechanics. Make it... Educational!" Vanessa instructed.

Three weeks later, Dazza slithered into Vanessa's office, suppressing laughter.

"You'll never believe it. Midnight Mechanics called begging to reinstate their contract, at triple the original spend."

"Oh?" Vanessa's eyebrow arched.

"Seems they've been experiencing... technical difficulties. Every car they fix breaks down exactly 6.66 kilometres from their shop. Their social media posts randomly transform into ads for their competitors. And the owner now gives customers quotes that are 66.6% lower than what he actually says."

"Funny how that happens," Vanessa smiled, filing away the "Special Handling" folder. "I'll tell Karlos to ease up - once the annual contract is signed."

The sales team's motto glowed ominously on the wall: "At Sixty-Six, Six The Burn, contracts aren't just binding - they're supernatural."

PREQUEL: "WAR OF THE WELLES"

By the time I got to writing this story – I was really in 'The Burn' universe, then something happened at work which drove me to write this...

Ray Welles had worked in media long enough to know when something wasn't right.

Twenty years of television, newspaper, and radio, working in copywriting, production, engineering, and even a stint in management, had given him an instinct for the business. But nothing had prepared him for what he thought he had just seen through the triple-glazed, soundproof studio window of Sixty-Six, Six The Burn's Sydney station at 3 AM.

He pressed himself against the wall outside the production studio, heart hammering against his ribs. What he'd just witnessed couldn't be real. Regional Vice President Dawson had been hunched over the mixing board, but it wasn't Dawson – not really. The executive's skin had rippled and stretched, his perfectly tailored suit straining as his form expanded. That's when Ray had glimpsed scales beneath the fabric, glistening in the dim blue glow of the equipment.

"Get a grip," Ray muttered to himself, fumbling with his phone. "You need evidence, or nobody will believe you."

Ray had come to Australia from America with a mission: find dirt on Sixty-Six, Six The Burn, a mysteriously successful radio network that was swallowing up independent stations across the globe. He'd lost his own station in Chicago to their corporate takeover, and something about it stank worse than month-old seafood. He just couldn't put his finger on it. Until now.

He forced himself to breathe, to think. He slipped back into the deserted corridor, his footsteps echoing too loudly. He needed proof. Something tangible. He remembered Dawson's office, a messy den filled with strange artifacts and even stranger energy readings that had always given him the creeps. If there was an answer, it would be there.

The office door was unlocked, as if daring him.

Inside, papers lay scattered across the desk, a half-eaten sandwich sat in a drawer, and the air was thick with the scent of ozone, and... something faintly reptilian.

Ray's eyes scanned the room, landing on a small, intricately carved stone tablet half-hidden beneath a pile of financial reports. It wasn't just old; it felt ancient, humming with a faint, almost imperceptible energy that made the hairs on his arms stand up.

As he reached for it, a sudden chill permeated the room, and the fluorescent lights in an outside office flickered erratically. A low, guttural growl vibrated through the floorboards. Ray froze. He wasn't alone.

He snatched the tablet, stuffing it into his bag. He needed to get out. Now. He stumbled backwards, knocking over a precarious stack of CDs. The noise seemed to amplify the unseen presence. He bolted from the office, not daring to look back. He ran through the labyrinthine corridors, the hum of the station's equipment sounding like a monstrous heart beating loudly, beating just for him.

He burst out into the pre-dawn light and onto the streets of Sydney, gasping for breath, the cool, rain-slicked air a shock against his burning lungs. He didn't stop until he was safely inside his rental car, several blocks away. His hands trembled as he started the engine, the rumble of the Subaru a comforting sound against the lingering terror he heard pounding in his ears.

He drove aimlessly, letting the city lights blur, trying to process what he'd seen, what he'd felt. Scales? A rippling transformation? It defied all logic, all physics as Ray understood them.

And the stone tablet, sitting on the passenger seat in the dim light of the bag it sat in, now seemed to pulse faintly, almost as if it were listening to his thoughts.

Ray had come looking for corporate fraud - maybe illegal practices or a payola scandal, instead he'd found something much darker. Sixty-Six, Six The Burn wasn't just a radio network; it seemed to be something ancient, disguised as a modern media company, a parasitic entity broadcasting its influence across the globe.

Once safe in the airport lounge, he uploaded his evidence to a secure cloud storage and sent an encrypted message to his only contact at the network's American headquarters: "Found something. Need immediate position in troubleshooting department. Have leverage."

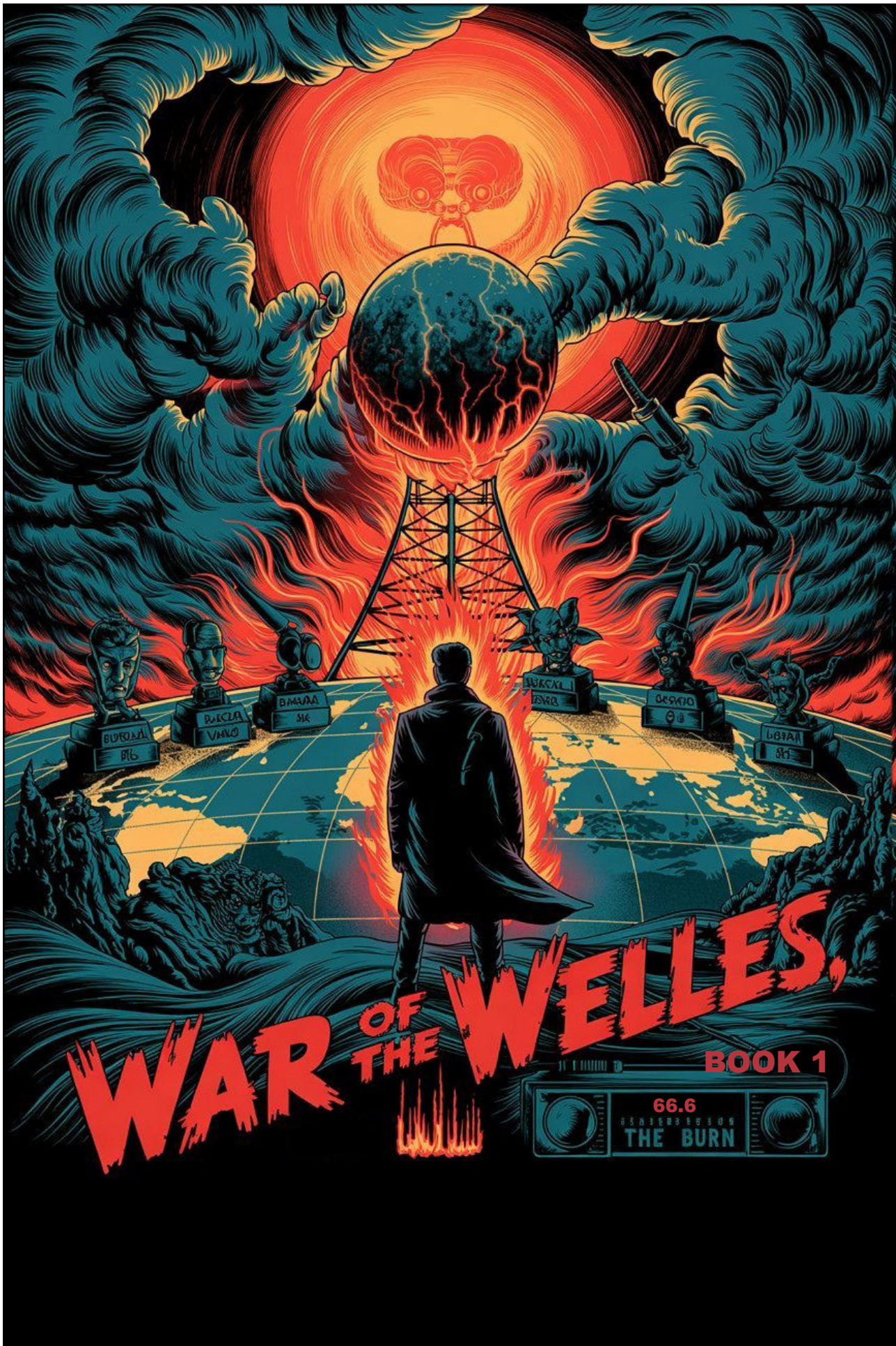
The reply came minutes later: "Meeting tomorrow. My office. Come alone."

Ray smiled grimly. They didn't know it yet, but he wasn't going to expose them - not right away. He needed to understand what they were planning, needed to get inside the network itself. The mysterious stone tablet would be his insurance policy.

Whatever Sixty-Six, Six The Burn was, whatever these creatures were doing with radio signals across the globe, Ray Welles was going to find out. And then... he was going to burn it all down.

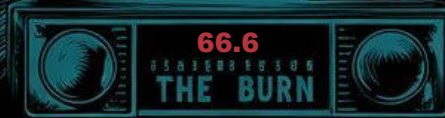
He picked up the stone tablet, studying its ancient patterns that somehow resembled modern circuitry. For a second, he could have sworn he heard distant voices coming from it, speaking in languages that had been forgotten long before radio waves were discovered, whispering promises of power, immense power, and dread.

Stay tuned for the adventures of Ray Welles, in the series: "War of the Welles."



WAR OF THE WELLES.

BOOK 1



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66.6 BURN



Tune in to 66.6 The Burn - the world's most unnatural radio station, where every show bleeds into the next and every caller might be your last.

"Set Your Dial to Dead" is a chilling collection of 66 (point six!) bite-sized supernatural tales and darkly humorous horrors, all set within the eerie frequencies of a radio network that never quite obeys the laws of physics... or death.

Written by Earl Pilkington, this anthology spans ghost stories, demonic DJs, cursed promos, and eldritch sales reviews - told in under 1,000 words each, drawing inspiration from decades in radio, twisted nostalgia, and broadcast folklore.

Think of it as The Twilight Zone for audio addicts.

Whether you're a late-night insomniac, a lover of short fiction, or a former radio copywriter with unresolved trauma (we see and hear you), this collection promises to haunt your signal long after the static fades.

So adjust your dial, grab your headphones, and prepare to never listen to radio the same way again.

E.L. Pilkington