

The Lonesome Sound

“Oh sweet Jesus.”

Captain Roderick Stark placed his hand over his slim mouth. He looked close to vomiting, but the old veteran of the circuit managed to maintain his composure. Yeoman Thai, the new guy sent over from the company’s administration post on Crater X-T9, went totally into the black. His jaw hung slack, his eyes went blank, and his hands created a greasy moisture that was cold to the touch. Both men, veteran and FNG alike, were horrified by the same thing.

There, seated at the solitary desk made out of marble and plastic, sat Corman, the company’s single employee at Substation Z-2Tango. Hanging from his stomach were his innards, which had been pulled out by Corman’s own hands. The rest of the office was covered in gore, gristle, and excrement. Captain Stark winced just thinking about the expensive and time-consuming clean-up.

“Thank Christ they’re about blow this place sky high,” Stark said to no one in particular.

“Why did he do this?”

Thai looked sheepishly at the older man. Stark shrugged his shoulders.

“Kid went crazy. I would too, being left here all by myself.”

“How long was he deployed out here?”

Stark looked over both shoulders, even though he knew that they were all alone (well, except for the eviscerated dead man). Stark whispered in Thai’s ear:

Benjamin Welton

“Just between us, the company totally forgot about Corman out here. His initial contract was for just two months, but they let five circuits start and end before they remembered that this poor bastard had not been relieved.”

Thai’s eyes widened in horror.

“That means that Corman must have used up all of his rations at least one month before we got this job.”

Stark shook his head in affirmation.

“This poor, wretched bastard.”

Stark kicked the corpse in the shins. Both men watched the bloody and limp body sway back and forth.

“Hey, what’s that?”

Thai pointed at a small red book tucked underneath Corman’s chest. Stark picked it up. His fingerprints on the book revealed that it was actually green in color, but had turned crimson because of the blood. Stark flipped through a few pages before handing it to his subordinate.

“It’s his log, but unsurprisingly he didn’t follow the correct procedure,” Stark said with a trace of venom.

Thai perused the book.

“He turned it into a personal journal. A lot of it is covered in blood, so I cannot make up much. A few pages are relatively clean, though. Listen to this...”

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Benjamin Welton

*It's nighttime. That's all I know. The worst part about living out here is that you never can tell the exact time. Well, that and the constant hum coming from somewhere in this station.*

*I heard it again just a few hours ago. Like before I was almost silent. I can't really compare it to anything on Earth or elsewhere. It is just a small low hum, almost electrical, but not quite.*

*I don't know if the sound has been here all along. It probably has, which means that there has to be some kind of explanation for why I'm hearing it all of a sudden now. Maybe I'm cracking up. Whatever. The company is pulling me out of here in two days, and I'll soon be back at basecamp with a fat check that includes not only my usual salary, but also overtime and hazard pay. My biggest problem will be finding some way to spend it all.*

...

*The sound moves. I know it sounds crazy, but I have spent the last three nights tracking the sound from one side of the station to the other. At first I found it coming up from the ground. That was comforting, as the only thing below me is space, and space makes weird, hard-to-define sounds. That would be logical. The problem is that, earlier tonight (or today?), I heard the sound coming from my computer.*

*I now believe that the hum is some kind of electric force. That's what it sounds like. However, every once and a while there are audible disruptions in the hum, like an interrupted connection. I can't really say what it is, but I have to investigate more. I need especially to figure out why the sound isn't static (pardon the pun). Is it me?*

*In other news, the company will hear a lot from me once I get out of here. It's ridiculous that I haven't been relieved from duty yet. I'm going to make damn sure that I get even more overtime pay for this SNAFU on their part.*

Benjamin Welton

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*I could not sleep at all last night because of a terrible dream. A nightmare really. In the dream I was alone in the station (naturally). However, the humming kept getting louder and louder. At one point I tracked the humming down to the other side of my pillow. There I found a hole in the middle of my bed. I first put my ear to the hole and heard the humming, plus a faint machine-like drumming. I reached into the hole and felt a cool breeze. I kept putting my arm deeper and deeper into the mysterious hole until half of my body was in the hole's mouth.*

*I wanted to go deeper, but that reptilian part of my brain (the deepest part) told me that something awful was down in that hole. It was waiting for me. It HUNGRED after me! I moved back to the safety of the bed.*

*Some crazy dream. I don't know if it means anything. Probably not. All I know for sure is that I'm going to sue the company into oblivion for leaving me to go stir crazy out here. Maybe I'll wind up owning the company.*

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*The noise is intelligent. It feels wrong to write that down, but it's true. The noise is intelligent, and it knows that I'm listening to it.*

*A few hours ago, the humming became a cacophony. Everywhere I went I heard the low rumbling of that damnable noise. But, when I pressed my ear to the floor (I don't know why I did that—I must be losing it big time), the sound shut off completely. I pressed my ear to the floor again and again, but I could not hear the noise. I was so relieved. I was ecstatic. Over the moon!*

Benjamin Welton

*My happiness did not last, for the noise returned when I tried to sleep. I was looking forward to sleeping again, but when my head hit the cold and stiff pillow, the noise bubbled up from Hell. I heard it in my left ear, then it moved to my right. I chased after the noise, and I even put my ear to floor again in the hopes that that would kill it off. Nothing worked. The noise is just playing with me, like I'm some kid of mouse in a cage.*

*Maybe I'm an experiment. Maybe I'm the subject in some kind of major study. That would explain why the company has left me out here to die.*

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*I have made a terrible discovery. This will be the last thing that I ever write.*

*I just figured out what the noise is. It came to me a second ago. I was sitting in my chair. I was staring at my computer screens. At first, my mind was blank. I may have been thinking about sleep, but nothing else. Then, all of a sudden, I began thinking about death. Suicide, specifically. Like a rush of cold water, thoughts about slitting my wrists or using my company-issued belt to hang myself began to wash all over. The feeling was both toxic and electric. For the first time in innumerable days I was wide awake. I was alert, but I was also sick. I wanted to vomit and cry all at once, but nothing came. I sat in my chair and thought about the vilest things imaginable.*

*That's when I heard it. It was sharp and clear. It was a click.*

*The noise was stopped briefly by a single click.*

*I knew immediately what that click was in my bones. It was the sound of a recorder being stopped. My God, something has been recording me this entire time.*

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Benjamin Welton

“Geez, the dude went whacko.”

Thai handed the blood-smearred book back to Stark. The older merc looked around the station’s workspace for some kind of envelope or bag. When he did not find one, he simply placed the book in one of his blouse’s pockets.

“The company will want this as evidence. I’m sure they’ll incinerate it after they blow this place to space dust.”

“What do you think about it?” Thai asked.

“About what? The company leaving one of their own high and dry? That happens all the time, kid.”

“No, I mean about the story about the noise.”

Stark took a second to answer. When he did, Thai was left too puzzled to ask a follow-up question.

“A couple of years ago another fellow, named Bight or Breit or something like that, went nuts too. He was at a substation in Outremer. Way out in Indian country. The company wanted him to operate a one-man listening post ahead of a mining expedition. For some reason, the company was worried that that part of Outremer was going to be trouble, so Bight or Breit went out armed. He eventually shot himself though, after six months. He did not leave behind a journal or anything, but he did leave behind a something written in his own blood on one of the station’s walls. ‘They’re listening to us,’ was all it said.”

Stark turned to leave. Thai followed him out into the desolate space.

