

STATION 151

EPISODE 1.0
“ON THE ICE”

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BASED ON THE SERIES BY

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INT. HELICOPTER - DAY

SFX: chopper NOISES

PILOT

Palmer Station this is One Niner Eight Two Juliet.

SFX: static

PILOT

This is One Niner Eight Two Juliet calling Palmer. Unreadable.

OPERATOR

Roger, Eight Two Juliet. This is Palmer Station. Morning, Richard.

PILOT

Good mornin', Adrienne. Eight Two Juliet departing charter ship Signy Therese in Marguerite Bay. I am VFR inbound to the old Ablation Point research station on Alexander with one passenger, a Mr. Wayne Robertson, arriving as filed. After I drop him, I'll be returning to Palmer hopefully ahead of the weather.

OPERATOR

Acknowledged, Eight Two Juliet. We have your inbound flight plan and passenger manifest. Wayne Robertson confirmed. Be advised the weather forecasting IFR with severe wind advisories in affect. Winds forecast 55 gusting to 75 east southeast variable. Temperature advisory in effect. Forecast temperatures -50 Celsius. Visibility forecast less than a mile with blowing snow. So, plan to get to Palmer as fast as you can. Talk to you soon. Be safe.

PILOT

Roger that, Adrienne. Here's our guy. Over and out.

OPERATOR

Over and out.

SFX: hangs up

SFX: chopper door OPENS

SFX: helicopter blades whirring LOUDER

PILOT
(shouting)
Wayne Robertson?

WAYNE
(shouting)
That's right, how are ya?

PILOT
(shouting)
Name's Richard. I'll be flying you in. Hop on in, you can take shotgun. Toss your duffel in back
and put on your headphones.

WAYNE
(voice normal)
How long's the flight?

PILOT
About fifteen minutes.

WAYNE
(relieved)
Thank GOD.

PILOT
First time in Antarctica?

WAYNE
First time in the southern hemisphere.

PILOT
How was the crossing? Did you get your sea legs?

WAYNE
(laughs)
Not at all. It's been 48 hours since we left Argentina and I've been puking my guts out ever
since.

PILOT

The Southern Ocean is a real son of a bitch. If you wanna hurl, there's some puke bags in the pocket by your leg.

WAYNE

I don't think there's a drop left in me, but I'll keep one on standby.

SFX: helicopter blades whirring FASTER

PILOT

Good, because we might be in for a rough ride to the next stop. Updated forecast just came in. There's a wicked storm headed our way. Temperatures are gonna drop to negative 50 and the wind will be gusting from 55 to 75 KPH.

WAYNE

Damn, is that normal?

PILOT

Which part?

WAYNE

The 75 kilometer-an-hour winds?

PILOT

Oh, that's nothing. 100 is about average. 160 on a bad day. The highest recorded winds in Antarctica were a little over 300.

WAYNE

Holy shit.

PILOT

(laughs)

Every day's a party. So, where you from?

WAYNE

I grew up in New Mexico, but I've been living in Connecticut for the last ten years or so.

PILOT

Greenwich?

WAYNE

New Haven. I work in the astronomy department at Yale.

PILOT

Ahh, that explains things.

WAYNE

(uncertain)

How do you mean?

PILOT

Well, the station we're headed to—Ablation Point—was an old UK research station, and a few years ago a new crew came in, razed all the old buildings, built out a new station and started putting up all these satellite dishes—not the little ones, mind you—the big mother fuckers. There's like hundred of 'em out there right now.

WAYNE

Actually, it's about fifty.

PILOT

(pause)

Okay, fifty. But... the weird thing is—nobody knows anything about this place. Antarctica is huge, sure, but there's only a couple thousand of us down here. Word gets around when a new station is going in. This place, though? *Nothing*. They don't fly a flag, there's no radio chatter, nothing about it on the web. We figured it's some top-secret, way off the grid black site or something.

WAYNE

(joking)

Or something.

PILOT

(laughs)

Yeah. So, you're the first person I've met that has anything to do with it. But if you're just an astrologer—

WAYNE

(interrupting)

Astronomer. It's astronomer, actually.

PILOT

Yeah, right. Astronomer. So, then maybe we've been overthinking it? Or is that just your cover and you're gonna have to kill me for asking too many questions?

WAYNE

(laughs)

Well, first of all, I promise I won't kill you... Yet.

PILOT

(amused reaction)

Yeah? That right?

WAYNE

(laughs)

And the station isn't called Ablation Point anymore, though that's a much cooler name. The new, official name is Station151.

PILOT

Station151. You're right, that is less cool.

WAYNE

I wasn't on the naming committee, unfortunately. I wasn't even a part of this whole thing until about two weeks ago. I uh... um... (clears throat)

PILOT

What's wrong?

WAYNE

Oh, nothing, I signed an NDA about the size of my dissertation and I'm trying to recall what I can and can't say.

PILOT

Oh, hey, don't worry about it. I don't want to get you into trouble.

WAYNE

Honestly, I don't really know much about the project myself. It's not some secret spy installation, though, I can tell you that.

PILOT

Which is exactly what you'd say if it was.

WAYNE

Hah, yeah, probably. Uh... Have you ever heard of the Telders Corporation?

PILOT

Telders, like Michael Telders? The weirdo billionaire?

WAYNE

That's him.

PILOT

This is *his* thing?

WAYNE

Oh, I'm not saying *that*. I'm just curious if you've heard of him.

PILOT

Ahh, I gotcha. That NDA's kicking in.

WAYNE

No idea what you're talking about.

PILOT

Uh huh. Didn't Michael Telders live in a submarine off the coast of Florida for like three years?

WAYNE

Well, *he* didn't. He picked thirty men and women to start an "underwater commune" on the sea floor. It didn't go too well if I remember correctly.

PILOT

Yeah, they all started murdering each other.

WAYNE

Yeah, that was unfortunate.

PILOT

So... speaking of that. That kind of begs the question...

WAYNE

(huffs)

I'm pretty sure I'm not joining some doomed commune down here. I'm going to be running the place solo for a year, then rotate back to Yale afterward.

PILOT

You gotta be fucking kidding me. You're going to winter over down here by *yourself*?

WAYNE

That's the plan.

PILOT

You know that's crazy, right?

WAYNE

Aw, it can't be that bad. I'm not exactly an extrovert anyways. I'm actually kind of looking forward to some alone time.

PILOT

(Scoffs)

Alone time? Wayne, *alone time* is a couple hours to yourself with a mystery novel and a cup of hot tea on a Sunday night. One year at the bottom of the world with no one else is a recipe for madness.

WAYNE

You think so?

PILOT

Hell yeah, even the greats went crazy down here. Ernest Shackleton—the legendary explorer—claimed a shadow figure followed him and his crew around after they lost their ship, and he said little voices tried to tempt him out into the frozen wilderness at night.

WAYNE

Whaaaat?

PILOT

Yeah! And members of Robert Scott's expedition heard the same voices calling to them outside their huts, and they reported knocking on the windows, but no one was ever there. And those guys weren't even alone! Wayne, I think what you're doing is fucking nuts.

WAYNE

Yeah, I can see how you'd think that, and it's pretty screwed up. But I'm not going to have a lot of spare time to chase ghosts. I'm gonna be pretty busy and when the day's over I can read or watch movies or chat with my fiancé. I'm good.

PILOT

Ah, fiancée, huh? What's her name?

WAYNE

Her name is Yumi. We met at Yale a few years back. Got engaged just last week actually.

PILOT

Ah, well congrats! So you got engaged and then bailed for a year, huh? Can't imagine she's super thrilled about that.

WAYNE

She wasn't, at first. But I'll be getting a huge payout at the end of my contract and that'll really set us up.

PILOT

Huge payout, huh? How much is the weirdo billionaire willing to pay you for a year on the ice?

WAYNE

The *Alleged* weirdo billionaire.

PILOT

Alright. Alright. How much? If you don't mind me asking.

WAYNE

(pause, clears throat)

A million?

PILOT

Dollars?

WAYNE

Yeah.

PILOT

Christ, Wayne, what are *doing* down here?

WAYNE

Well, like I said, I still don't have all the information, but the company that may or may not be The Telders Corporation has been working on a next evolution super wide-band radio interferometer. I mean, this thing is supposed to be light years ahead of anything we have right now. The VLA, MeerKAT, the square kilometer array... it's all going to be obsolete as soon as this thing goes public, and I'm telling ya—

PILOT

(cuts him off)

Let me stop you there.

WAYNE

Yeah?

PILOT

I have no idea what the fuck you just said.

WAYNE

Oh, sorry. Uh... so those satellite dishes you saw? Those fifty dishes, those are called a radio telescope array or a radio interferometer. They all combine to form one giant radio telescope that can pick up extremely faint radio signals from space—like billions of times fainter than what the VLA could pick up.

PILOT

So, like aliens, right? We're talking about aliens?

WAYNE

Pretty much.

PILOT

Really?

WAYNE

(he's certain)

From what I've been told, Station151 will not only be able to "see" into the depths of the universe like any other radio telescope, but it will also be able to pinpoint and reconstruct artificial signals from inside our galaxy, maybe even beyond. If there's intelligent life out there, and they've been transmitting, we'll fucking find them.

PILOT

Christ, so we're all going to be watching reality shows from Alpha Centauri in a few years?

WAYNE

(laughs)

Well, *that* technology is probably a ways out, but this will give us definitive evidence of alien life—intelligent alien life—if it exists.

PILOT

Or definitive evidence that we're all alone in the universe.

WAYNE

Yeah. I hope that's not the case, but yeah.

PILOT

Well, Wayne, I think you just blew your NDA.

WAYNE

Oh, shit. Now I *am* going to have to kill you. This is embarrassing.

PILOT

(laughs)

Don't worry, your secret's safe with me. I wouldn't want to jeopardize your nest egg. I never heard *anything*.

WAYNE

Thanks. Yumi would kill *me* if I screwed this up, especially on day one.

(laughs)

PILOT

(laughs)

I bet. Oh, hey we're almost there. Check it out. Those shiny blue things on top of that ridge. That's your station. You should be able to see the dishes down in the valley in a sec.

[...]

They're coming up now. See 'em?

WAYNE

I do. Oh, wow.

PILOT

So, this is a pretty big deal for you.

WAYNE

Yeah. Yeah, it is.

(brief pause)

Like I said before, I grew up in New Mexico, not too far from a radio astronomy observatory called the Very Large Array. That's kind of what got me into all this. I remember seeing those dishes for the first time as a kid. Twenty-eight gleaming white radio telescopes spread out across The Plains and pitched up toward the sky like they were patiently waiting for instructions from some great cosmic intelligence. It was the coolest thing I'd ever seen.

(pause)

That was the beginning for me. On clear nights, I'd spend countless hours on a blanket in the back yard staring up at the sky and imagining distant galaxies, strange planets, quasars, pulsars, supernovas, black holes... *everything*.

(pause)

And now this. This is the opportunity of a lifetime, and I can't believe this place is *mine* for an entire year.

PILOT

Well, it sounds like a great gig, Wayne.

Hey, uh, is there a reason the dishes are set up in a spiral like that?

WAYNE

Oh yeah, that configuration helps reduce the number of overlapping samples. See, with aperture synthesis in-ter-fer-ometry—

PILOT

Hey, hey, hey... I'm already lost.

WAYNE

(laughs)

Suffice to say that it just means better reception.

PILOT

That I understand. Alright, well, I'm gonna set you down right over here. Storm is coming in heavy, so I need to get to Palmer as fast as possible. But promise me, if you feel like you're going nuts down here, or just need someone to talk to, here's my card. That's got my email and my ham radio callsign. I'd imagine you've got a radio there somewhere.

WAYNE

I'll do that. Thanks, man. And if not, I guess I'll see you next year on my way out?

SFX: helicopter blades whirring SLOWER as they wind down

PILOT

Probably. I'm the only one driving the bus in these parts.

[...]

Alright, don't forget your bag, and stay low until you're clear of the rotors. Don't want you chopped up into fish food.

WAYNE

Solid advice. I'll take it.

PILOT

Oh, hey!

WAYNE

Yeah?

PILOT

I almost forgot to give you this.

WAYNE

A box? You giving me a going away present?

PILOT

Uh, no. Some suit from your company gave it to me this morning. He told me to make sure you got it and (and I'm quoting here) to make sure you "put it in" before you get out of the chopper.

WAYNE

What're you serious?

PILOT

Yeah, serious.

WAYNE

Are you hazing me or something? Is this what you do to all the newbs?

PILOT

Hey, not at all, man. The guy met me at Palmer Station right before I took off. Never even seen him before. He told me to give it to you. And he also wants a recording of you opening the box and, *uh*, putting it in. Whatever that means.

WAYNE

(scoffs)

We'll see about that. You got a knife? It's taped up pretty good.

PILOT

Oh... yeah.

SFX: SHUFFLING noises followed by CLICK of the knife blade

Here ya go. So, I guess I'll, uh, start recording?

WAYNE

(immediately)

Whatever.

(pause)

This so weird.

SFX: box OPENING noises, paper CRINKLING

WAYNE

(at a bit of a loss)

Well, it's... an *Earwig*.

PILOT

Earwig? What the hell is that?

WAYNE

I have no idea, but that's what it says on the card.

(reading the card)

Earwig, by The Telders Corporation.

PILOT

Ehhh. Looks like an earbud that's been shit out of a cat. *Are those hairs?*

WAYNE

I don't know *what* those things are. Oh, what the fuck...

PILOT

What?

WAYNE

It just started vibrating. Am I supposed to put this fucking thing in my *ear*?

PILOT

I guess...

WAYNE

To hell with that.

PILOT

But you gotta do it.

WAYNE

I don't have to do *shit*.

PILOT

The guy said—

WAYNE

(cutting him off)

I don't care what the guy said! No one told me anything about *this*.

PILOT

No, I mean the guy said that I can't give you the station's access card if you don't. Said I have to take you right back to the ship if you don't comply.

WAYNE

Are you fucking serious?

PILOT

Yeah, I'm serious!

Look, buddy. You're right, that thing is real weird. I wouldn't put it in my ear. It looks like it was grown in a lab or something. Toss that thing out the window if you want, and we'll get the hell out of here.

(pause)

Wayne?

(louder, empathetic)

WAYNE?

WAYNE

Hang on. Jesus Christ. It's like... *undulating*.

PILOT

Ohhhh, that's not right. Wayne, get rid of that fucking thing, and let's just go.

WAYNE

No....

PILOT

No?

WAYNE

Nah, fuck it. It's goin' in.

PILOT

Seriously?

WAYNE

I can't just turn around. I mean this is pretty fucked up, but what's the worst that could happen? It's an earbud. A really *weird* earbud, but if I hate it or whatever, then I'll just take it out after I go inside.

PILOT

I guess that makes sense. (exhales) Alright, have at it.

WAYNE

Okay, what should I do with my headset?

PILOT

Hang on, I got it.

SFX: helicopter gets LOUDER

WAYNE

(shouting a bit)

Here we go.

(pause)

Oh man, that feels weird. Ugh. *Shit.*

PILOT

What?

WAYNE

No, it... ow, it fucking stings. I think those hairs are like pinching—ow!

PILOT

It hurts?

WAYNE

Yeah it's like—OW! FUCK!

PILOT

Wayne? Wayne?

WAYNE

(HUGE SCREAMS FADING TO...)

WILKINS

Wayne.

Wayne.

Wayne.

THE END