

What's the Time, Mr. Wolf?

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What's the Time, Mr. Wolf?

by [Sixteenthdays](#)

Summary

[GRIAN]

(A little uneven, with static) I said I wanted your *statement*, Scar.

(Statements of Scar Goodtimes, Joel Shadowlady, and Tango Tek, regarding a certain event.)

Notes

WOOO FINALLY!! uhhhh i would highly recommend being caught up on the series as a whole to read this, because it's a climax of sorts (to at least some of the plot) but if nothing else DEFINITELY read [werewolf games](#), [end condition](#), [the anniversary](#), and [red light green light](#) before reading this. otherwise it may not make much sense.

Blind Man's Bluff

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

[Click]

(Inside a moving car)

[IMPULSE]

Yeah, somewhere around- ugh, I have directions but they're not good.

[GRIAN]

Yeah, because you got them from *Zedaph*.

[IMPULSE]

I *think* it's a left here?

[SCAR]

Oh, there's the ranger station! I don't see anybody... I'm surprised there aren't more campers around.

[GRIAN]

Well, it is almost winter. I think it's right around the tail end of the hiking season.

[SCAR]

Does it look like it might rain to you guys? Those stormclouds are looking mighty ominous to me.

[IMPULSE]

Yeah... weird, it wasn't in the forecast. Hey, speaking of, we're not going to be camping out, are we? I didn't exactly pack for that.

[GRIAN]

No, if we can't find anything today we'll just head back and stay the night in the town. We have a hotel room if we need it.

[SCAR]

Hey- did you guys see that?

[IMPULSE]

What?

[GRIAN]

Eyes on the road, please-

[SCAR]

There was a car crashed off the side of the road just back there, past the tree line.

[GRIAN]

So someone else *is* out here.

[SCAR]

That's not really what I was trying to say. Uh, you don't think-

[IMPULSE]

(Suddenly, panicked) Is that a- oh guys hold on-

(Tires skidding)

(Screeching crash; the sound of bones snapping can be heard)

[Click]

[Click]

(Ambient nighttime forest noise. In the distance, wolves are howling, and someone is shouting. Continues for several seconds.)

[Click]

[Click]

(Background forest noise; leaves and branches rustling)

[SCAR]

Um- hey! *(Nervous laughter)*

Was wondering where you'd gotten to!

You're looking a little, ah-

[GRIAN]

(A little uneven, with static) I said I wanted your statement, Scar.

[SCAR]

And you can have it! Absolutely! But you don't think we should maybe, uh, get out of here first? I haven't seen you in almost a full day.

I'm glad you're... okay?- but I think we're kind of in over our heads, here-

[GRIAN]

You were *dead*.

[SCAR]

What- oh, the car crash? Nah, I just got a little bounced around! I'm sure it looked a lot worse than it was. If you'd stuck around-

[GRIAN]

I woke up in the car, Impulse was gone, and your head was twisted around until it was almost *backwards*, Scar. You were *not alive I checked!*

[SCAR]

...Ah-

[GRIAN]

Tell me the truth.

[SCAR]

(Sounding slightly panicked) Now, Grian, let's-

[GRIAN]

From the start!

(Pause)

[SCAR]

I died when I was eight.

(Pause; Scar continues, sounding distressed)

I hit the bottom of a pool head first and broke my neck. I drowned.

(Anxious laughter)

I've died working for you... twenty or thirty times by now, I think? To be honest, I never really kept count. The combustion case, the mysterious tremors, the *bugs*... once or twice I've gotten hit by cars leaving work.

I even died the first time we met.

But you knew that already, didn't you?

When you think I'm not looking sometimes you stare at me like I'm a dead man walking- which I am! But nobody's supposed to *know*.

But you do.

Sometimes I still get headaches, you know! Right here. Some deaths stick more than others.

(Long pause; then, sounding nervous)

Um, hey, do you want to maybe back up a bit? Just getting a little-

Or not, that's fine too! *Totally* fine.

[GRIAN]

Tell me what you remember from the car crash.

(Pause)

[SCAR]

...I saw the other car first, veered off the side of the road and sort of crumpled up against a tree. Doors open, airbags blown. It went too fast for me to really see, but I didn't think anybody was inside, living or not.

I started to think we should stop and go back. But before I could even really get that sentence all the way out, there was a...

I don't know what it was. A wolf? Or a bear? You probably had a better view than I did. I just

remember seeing a huge black shape barrelling at us through the trees, and then the whole car sort of *rolled*, and my head snapped back, and-

Well. (*Giggles nervously*)

You know, dying of a broken neck usually isn't instant? A lot of the time if you get someone to a doctor they can even make a full recovery, if damage to the spine is minimal- though I didn't have any shot at that, because you and Impulse were both out, and my damage was definitely *not* minimal, because I couldn't feel anything down past my chest.

I sort of blurred in and out for awhile, as I was dying. At one point, there was someone else there- nobody I knew, I don't think, but they levered the door open and pulled Impulse out of the driver's seat. I couldn't really get a good look at them, since I couldn't move my head. I think they were blond. Probably a man?

You were still there when I finally died, but by the time I woke up again you were gone.

[GRIAN]

(*Quietly, intently*) What's that like? Dying.

[SCAR]

...It's dark. I remember it being cold the first time, but it's not like that anymore. Like... when you've jumped into a pool a few times, and it starts feeling warmer than the air.

(*Pause*)

[GRIAN]

Keep going.

[SCAR]

Well... I woke up.

I hauled myself out of the car- turned out to be really lucky Impulse's friend had pried the driver's side door open, because none of the other handles were working. I tried looking for footprints, his or yours or *anyone's*, but the fall leaves were so thick on the ground I couldn't find any. So I just started walking.

The sky was still dark- no rain, but the clouds were so thick and heavy the sun only barely made it through. It can't have been long past sunset by then, but it felt more like midnight.

And there was something in the air. Some sort of... tension. Something prickling on the back of my neck, like I was being watched.

And hey, I'm used to that! I work with *you*. At this point, it makes me feel right at home. But...

Well, that was about the point I remembered about the thing that had been big enough to roll our car right over, and the fact that it was still around, somewhere close.

And, right on cue, the howling started up.

You, um... well. You know me. You know I'm not so great at the whole, uh, *running* thing. It's the knees. And they're always particularly uncooperative when I've just died, so...

I actually managed to keep ahead longer than I thought I would. And fortunately I still had my watch with me, so I could track the time. I just wanted to find you and Impulse and get out of there,

but except for when the moon occasionally got out from behind the clouds, it was so dark I could barely see my hand in front of my face.

I still haven't seen Impulse. I've caught glimpses of the wolves, here and there. Once I thought I heard some people talking, not voices I recognized, but I wasn't able to find them. And once...

Well. One of them caught up with me. One of the- wolves, except it wasn't, really. It backed me up against a tree, growling, and it was so dark I could only see its outline, and the moonlight on its teeth. Teeth- you know, it's kind of funny, I always hear people talk about how sharp teeth are, when they're talking about, uh, predator animals, but when I saw these all I could think of was that they weren't *that* sharp, and they were for tearing, and it would *hurt*.

And then the light shifted, or a cloud crossed the moon, and the outlines of what I was looking at changed. I still couldn't see well at all, but I can tell you it wasn't a wolf at all. It was a person. The teeth were the same. I held very still for what felt like a very long time, and then when the moon came out again whatever it was was gone.

(Pause)

Eventually, the sun rose, and the world got a little brighter, though the clouds have still stuck around. I actually feel like they've gotten thicker, over the night. I haven't been able to find the road again, which is- heh, a little bit *deja vu*. It made me feel a little bit anxious, to say the least!

And then I ran into you. And I was relieved, at first, to see you, but now I can't seem to stop talking and I'm not entirely sure why, and my personal bubble is not exactly being respected, and I can't say I'm *terribly* fond of the way you haven't blinked once looking at me.

(Long pause)

When I first saw you again at the Institute, I wasn't sure if it was really you. Not because you didn't seem like you remembered- nobody ever does. And *I* wouldn't even be sure it had really happened if not for the three hours I had to walk back to civilization after waking up. Not easy on bad joints, I'll tell you that.

No, I thought maybe it wasn't you because your eyes were different.

Out there, in the forest, when we first met- there *was* something about them. Some light. Something hungry, I'd say. But they were normal eyes. Dark enough brown they almost looked black. Human eyes.

When I saw you for the first time in the Institute, after you got hired, I honestly wasn't sure at first it was even the same person. It was the eyes. They weren't right.

You shouldn't be able to remember seeing me dead. Nobody ever does. But there's something about you, isn't there? Not the *same* thing that's wrong with me, but...

It's those eyes of yours. They looked different when we first met. They looked different before you stopped wearing your glasses all the time.

And they look different now, too.

(Pause)

[SCAR]

That's all. That's all I've got for you.

[GRIAN]

Hm...

[Click]

[Click]

(Running footsteps on soft dirt. Someone trips, landing with an 'oof')

(Rustling leaves)

[SCOTT]

What was- oh. Oh, no.

(Footsteps, rustling)

(Much closer) Grian, if you can hear this, get out of here. We've got it *under control*.

[JIMMY]

We have not-

[SCOTT]

And you think him being here will *improve* things any, do you?

(Pause)

Listen, I'll even come in and give a statement after if that's what you want. Just *get out of here*.

[Click]

[Click]

(Shifting of blankets)

[IMPULSE]

...Ow.

[TANGO]

Hey, you're up! And breathing! Uh, how's your head? Do you know what year it is?

[IMPULSE]

Tango? ...2022. What happened? There was a... bear?

[TANGO]

Yeah! Uh, a wolf, actually, I think. You almost drove straight into the Doom Zone. Sorry, I should've added that in my instructions, but I was like, *all* over the place trying to get here in time and also keeping Zed out of, uh, a twelve mile radius of the entire region so this whole place didn't turn into- anyways! You made it!

Welcome to, uh, my little field study camp! I've mapped out the borders of the zone as best I can- I want you to check my math, actually, just in case I messed something up, but we should be safely

out of the affected area up here.

[IMPULSE]

...You brought me here? Did you see Scar and Grian?

[TANGO]

Right. Yeah. Um, so, they were there when I came and found you, but they both looked hurt- the tall guy especially- and I didn't want to try and move them on my own, so I got you out first, but by the time I tried to go back it had already started. Couldn't get close again.

(Blankets rustling)

[IMPULSE]

What do you mean? What started?

[TANGO]

The, uh... I'm still workshopping names. Zed likes *singularity*, but I'm leaning towards *concentrated spookification event*.

[IMPULSE]

And we can't get in? Are they going to be okay?

[TANGO]

Uh, we could probably get *in*, but we wouldn't be able to get *out* again until it ended, and I'm not... I don't know if it... does? End? So...

[IMPULSE]

...*Got* it.

[TANGO]

Also, I was waiting for you to wake up, but there's a couple other guys also lurking around outside the edges of the affected zone? If you feel like you can stand up without throwing up, I figured we might go say hi.

Oh, also, do you know what this is? I didn't bring it.

[IMPULSE]

Oh- this is one of Grian's- is it *recording*? Hold on.

[Click]

[Click]

(Background forest ambiance)

(Sudden inhale; several seconds of ragged breathing)

[SCAR]

...Grian?

[Click]

Chapter End Notes

i've been planning this literally since the second statement. SO excited (and a lil bit nervous) to finally start posting it!! there are two more parts to this, obviously- one is mostly written, the other is presently just outlined. if you want more fta content while i finish those up, as always, i must suggest the [podfic](#). the voice actors and editors are SO cool they do such a good job.

to be clear, this isn't the climax of the full story, but it's part of it. there will be more story and more statements after this!! but i do consider this to be the big Event of the narrative, for several reasons. i hope you enjoy!

this fic (and the chapters within it) follow a naming pattern! werewolf games and red light green light both have a 'game' theme, and 'what's the time, mr. wolf?' is a type of tag. i got SO excited when i realized i could use it as the title.

What's the Time, Mr. Wolf?

Chapter Notes

this chapter will also probably call for you to have read [répondez, s'il vous plaît](#) in other to make any sense at all.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

[Click]

(Forest ambiance)

[JIMMY]

Hello?

Scott? Where'd... *(Louder)* Scott? Lizzie?

(Silence)

[JIMMY]

I knew it. I knew it! I knew this was a bad idea. I don't want either of them to say I didn't tell them so, because I *did*. What else was I supposed to do? I *had* to come, or else-

(Cuts off, sighs)

(Pause)

(Wolf howls)

(Sprinting footsteps for several seconds, followed by a trip, and a heavy fall)

[Click]

[Click]

(Forest ambiance)

[IMPULSE]

(Quietly) Okay, so this... singularity.

[TANGO]

Spookification event.

[IMPULSE]

How does it start? You said it was... like... a lot of energy in one place?

[TANGO]

Sort of. Uh, it's like-

(Rustling, sound of stick dragging in dirt)

Think of it like radiation. It might literally *be* radiation, ask Zed about *that* sometime, he's got *theories*- but anyways, there's some of it everywhere all the time and most of it's harmless. Sometimes, you get a- an x-ray machine or a microwave. That's your... Zed, or Grian, or any other place or person where this radiation is concentrated enough in one place to *do* something. And that can scale up to, like, a nuclear reactor, or something.

So you have these sources in the world of this... man, I hate saying *magic*. Whatever is going on here *does* follow rules, which makes it science- I'm gonna keep saying radiation. You have sources of radiation that are more concentrated, but also more unstable.

And... this is where my understanding gets a little flimsier, but it seems like if something happens that can... *escalate* one of those sources, sort of turn it up to the next level, you get something like... this. An exclusion zone.

[Click]

[Click]

(Footsteps approaching through dry leaves- they pause, then break into a run)

[SCOTT]

Thank *goodness*.

Lizzie- Lizzie, can you hear me? Are you hurt?

(Pause)

(Soft, rising growl)

[SCOTT]

Lizzie?

[Click]

[Click]

(Background forest noises; footsteps)

[GRIAN]

(Hushed, a little out of breath at the start)

There are wolves around.

I can't tell how many there are. They're big, when I catch sight of their shadows and silhouettes behind the trees. I don't know if wolves are supposed to get that big; I've never seen one, before this.

There aren't supposed to be wolves in England.

Scott said that, back in his old statement about Joel. There aren't any wolves in England, they're

extinct. And he's right. I checked. There aren't.

I don't know what that makes these. But I know they're hungry. I can hear them growling. Hear them howling.

I'm...

Well.

Earlier, I was hungry, too. Very hungry. So hungry my teeth hurt and I couldn't think and I could feel every feather in my skin. I think I did something that I'm going to have to deal with... later. Presuming we get out of here.

I haven't seen Impulse since waking up. Scar... Scar will be fine. He always is. *(Laughs)* He always...

(Pause)

I'm not sure how long it's been. Scar said a day, when we spoke, but I don't know how long ago that was. And it feels like longer. It feels like I got here a long time ago. Like maybe I could stay here forever.

(Pause)

I don't exactly know what I'll do if I start feeling like that again. Hungry. It's already creeping in, a bit, I think. It's something about this place. It's done something to my head. I still can't quite think right. I can taste iron in my mouth.

Sometimes they catch sight of me. The wolves, I mean.

They howl when they see me, and I have to run, and hide, and it's terrifying, but there's also something about it that's almost... not fun. Exhilarating, maybe. It almost makes me want to bait them out, for the sake of the chance at escaping by the skin of my teeth.

But what it really makes me want, more than that, more than anything, is to be the one doing the *chasing*.

There's something in the air here that sets my teeth on edge and makes them sharp. It makes my fingers itch. There's something sticky under my fingernails.

(Pause)

False. It's good False isn't here. False and her eyes.

(Pause)

What did Scar say about my eyes, again?

There was something. I was so *hungry*. I'm still... hungry. When I... slow down like this, and think about it, it's worse. It's like an itch under my feathers. And it's, it's *been* there, this isn't *new*, but it's so much... more.

I just want... to close my eyes, and tear something open, and *pull all its insides out*.

(Pause, then, a little unsettled)

Is that what I did to Scar?

(Pause)

Scar- Scar will be fine. He's always fine.

I'm... trying to remember what I'm doing here. I was... looking for someone. Coming to meet someone. I know there are other people around here, in this dense little knot of jungle. The clouds haven't changed. They've only gotten darker. They're circling, I think, like hurricane clouds, like vultures.

I'm hungry. Every time I see someone they run. I don't know...

I don't know if I've slept. It must have been... it's been more than two days. Maybe three. Or four, even. I must have slept if I don't feel tired. But...

Pearl doesn't sleep anymore, I know, not really. Most of the time she just stays awake. And even when she lies down, she closes her eyes and goes walking, goes dancing, wandering through dreams and stretches of stars.

(Pause)

I don't even remember the last time I-

(Twig snaps)

(Silence, except for tense, quiet breathing)

(Growling, nearby)

(Cracking of crunching wood, running footsteps, dry leaves underfoot; something much larger and heavier chasing something much smaller)

(A crashing impact)

[GRIAN]

Ah!

(Growling)

[GRIAN]

(Out of breath) Wh- wait, wait, wait, I don't, you don't want to, hold on-

(Gasping of breath; static begins droning in the background)

You know me, you know me, you know me, *Joel you know me-*

(Heavy static)

I- um-

Statement! Of- Joel Shadowlady, regarding- whatever is going on right now. Please!

(Pause)

(Tenor of growling shifts; lightens, eventually quiets to nothing)

(Long pause)

[JOEL]

(Hoarsely) Grian?

[GRIAN]

(Relieved exhale; still out of breath) Hello, Joel. Ow.

[JOEL]

Wow, you look terrible.

[GRIAN]

Thanks. Nice to see you too.

(Rustling of leaves)

[JOEL]

Like, really atrocious. Goodness.

[GRIAN]

Okay, I don't have to take this from you.

[JOEL]

I'm sure I don't know what you mean.

[GRIAN]

Haven't checked a mirror in four years, have you?

[JOEL]

Around there. Oh, jeez, do you have a rash or something? That's not contagious, is it?

[GRIAN]

No, uh, just- um. Spreading, it's not- don't worry about it. It's fine.

[JOEL]

...Looks like it hurts.

[GRIAN]

I said don't worry about it. (Pause) I guess you being here explains some things.

[JOEL]

What are *you* doing here? You're not supposed to be here.

[GRIAN]

...I don't remember. I think I was looking for someone? But I haven't been able to find them.

[JOEL]

Huh. That's kind of funny, because-

(Pause)

[GRIAN]

Joel?

[JOEL]

Have you seen Lizzie?

[GRIAN]

...Lizzie? No, I... wait.

Have I? Is she here? Joel?

[JOEL]

She's somewhere around here. I've been trying to find her- she's been trying to find me. I'm- I need to-

[GRIAN]

Wait, wait, wait, calm down. *(Static)* What happened?

[JOEL]

I...

I remember... different towns, different forests, different people's bloody bones. And I remember seeing her, more than once. I remember our house.

She came here to find me. Her and Scott and Jimmy. And something happened... I don't know. But there's something in the air that just- you feel it too, don't you?

[GRIAN]

...Yeah. Yeah, I know what you mean.

[JOEL]

It makes you just want to... chase. And kill. And chase and kill and chase some more. And eat. And Lizzie...

Ow.

[GRIAN]

Joel?

[JOEL]

(Muffled) M'fine. My head just...

(Growl, soft but gaining volume)

[GRIAN]

(Alarmed) Joel!

(Bones cracking, leaves crunching)

[Click]

[Click]

[IMPULSE]

Okay. I think I get it. Is that why you had so many questions about what happened with Pearl?

[TANGO]

Yeah! Yeah, exactly. See, I don't think that was really a proper spookification event, but I think it *could've* been, if it developed a little further.

[IMPULSE]

If Pearl had stayed- if she hadn't woken up, you mean.

[TANGO]

Right. Probably your Institute would've ended up sort of reminiscent of what's happening here, now. With the storm that's not stopping, and the forest getting thicker. But instead you had intervention from- Grian, right? And she got stopped and stabilized in time.

So like I said earlier, the question is whether this *will* stop. There's... I think five people in there? Or six? There's your friends, and the people who started it, who prompted the escalation, and the source- the wolf. Uh, presuming they're all still alive, and not... eaten. It's been... what, three days now? But there must still be *something* alive in there, or it would be withering away already.

Maybe any of them could do something to interrupt it, but I'm not sure. Maybe it'll just keep developing.

And if it does end, how?

[Click]

[Click]

(Slightly further from the recorder, which has been dropped)

(Two sets of ragged breathing)

[JOEL]

Hi, honey. I'm home.

(Pause)

Okay, that wasn't funny. Sorry. Missed you.

(Pause)

Are you going to get it over with, then?

(Much longer pause)

(Long exhale. Something heavy is dropped to the dirt.)

[Click]

[Click]

[SCOTT]

(From a distance, approaching) Lizzie! Lizzie, don't-

[LIZZIE]

I'm not. I'm not. I'm not. I'm fine. I'm here.

[JOEL]

Going to get off of me, then?

[LIZZIE]

(Laughs, a little hysterically) I don't know, do you want me to?

[SCOTT]

(Out of breath) Oh, god, should I just leave again?

[JOEL]

Well, I'd prefer without the knife, I think.

[LIZZIE]

(Starts laughing again; starts crying halfway through)

[JOEL]

Oh, hey, hey, hey- I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Here, come on. I'm here. *(Rustling)*

[LIZZIE]

(Crying)

(Sound of someone sitting down heavily)

[SCOTT]

...Sun's come out.

[Click]

[Click]

(Forest background noise)

[TANGO]

Impulse!

(Rustling, tent entrance unzips)

[IMPULSE]

What? Did something change?

[TANGO]

The clouds are clearing! And listen.

[IMPULSE]

...I don't hear anything?

(Pause)

Wait. I don't hear anything. No wolves.

[TANGO]

No wolves!

[IMPULSE]

I should- I should go see if I can find Scar and Grian. Wait here, I'll be back if I need help moving them.

[Click]

[Click]

(Engine rumbling)

(Car window rolls down)

[SCAR]

Hey! Any chance you're headed back to town? I've been a bit stranded, and I can't find my ride.

[JIMMY]

Yeah, I'm actually just- hey, wait, aren't you one of Grian's assistants?

[SCAR]

Matter of fact, I am! Scar Goodtimes, at your service.

[JIMMY]

Oh, yeah, I've heard all about you. I'm Jimmy. *(Pause)* Uh, Grian calls me Timmy, if that's-

[SCAR]

Oh! I've seen pictures of your cat!

[JIMMY]

Yeah, Grian says he's my best quality. Uh, so, what're you... doing out here?

[SCAR]

Kind of a long story. What about you?

[JIMMY]

Uh... oh, who cares. Would you believe me if I said I got disemboweled by a werewolf, woke up fine at home, and then came back here to give my friends a ride home, presuming they're all still alive?

[SCAR]

Oh, you'd be surprised what I'll believe. Mind if I get in? My knees are killing me.

[Click]

[Click]

(Sounds of fabric, paper shuffling around)

[TANGO]

Where do these keep coming from?

(Distant rustling, footsteps)

[TANGO]

(Louder) Hellooo? Impulse? Etho? Who's there?

[GRIAN]

Tango Tek!

[Click]

Chapter End Notes

WOOO LETS GO. PLEASE TELL ME WHAT YOU THINK. im QUITE proud of how this has come together. hopefully everything makes sense and is not too confusing... these live action sections tend to really test my commitment to the audio transcript-only format.

one more chapter to go! i'm going to aim to have it up on the next Limited Life Friday, but it may take a little longer? we'll see. there's... quite a lot of information to cover in it.

and in the meantime, as always, you should listen to [the podfic](#)! it's so good. we've just posted the joe hills podcast and you all MUST hear our voice actor for mr hills.

Everything Tag

Chapter Notes

for this part of the story, i would highly *highly* recommend having read [concerns from the academic record of mr. tango tek](#).

additional statements you don't strictly HAVE to read but are directly discussed here are [experimental methods](#), [the red king's tragedy](#), [immersive storytelling/nonfiction](#), and [the other eye](#).

and, uh, maybe [blight](#) and [hypomyces](#) while you're at it, why not

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

[Click]

(Forest ambiance, somewhat muted)

[GRIAN]

Right, let's talk, shall we?

[TANGO]

Oh, another one of those!

(Hasty rustling; sound gets much closer)

Iiinchrusting. Do they just manifest on their own or do you have to try? And can you hear through them? Like, if I went around the back of a building and talked into this, would you know what I said?

[GRIAN]

...I think I'm getting why you and Zedaph are friends.

[TANGO]

Hm?

[GRIAN]

Nothing. So... well. *(Pause)* Honestly, I've been wanting to speak to you for so long I'm not really sure where to start. I'm a big fan of your work.

[TANGO]

Awww, shucks! Really?

[GRIAN]

Yes! I wanted to ask- well, I've heard about quite a few of your projects, though I've only experienced one in person. I used to be a student of architecture, before- um. Life got in the way. But I'm *fascinated* by the sort of effects you've managed to create in your buildings.

I guess I just want to know- how you do it? And what are you doing *here*?

[TANGO]

(Laughs) That's a long answer!

[GRIAN]

Perfect.

[TANGO]

Okay, well... I won't bore you with all the backstory. But, uh, I got interested in this stuff when I was a teenager. I found a spooky door near my house, went inside it, it was all dark and weird inside- I thought it was the *coolest thing I'd ever seen*.

I left intending to come back with a camera and explore more, but when I went back the next day and tried to find the door again it wasn't there. I tried a lot of times. Could never find it. I knew I hadn't imagined it, so the best guess I could come with was that it had been some sort of... fluke. Like, some factors I couldn't understand had come together to produce that result, right?

It *fascinated* me. And no matter where I looked or who I asked, nobody- at least no resource I had access to at the time- could explain it.

So a couple weeks later, I sat down in my room, opened the first notebook of many, and started trying to figure it out myself.

I started with- hold on. (Pen scratching on paper)

I started with just these two, as- not even categories, really, but characteristics. I knew that place had been *dark*, and I knew it had been *hot*. I might've said something else for the second one at first? But those were the best ways I could sum up what was weird about that place, so that's what I started with.

So we've got 'dark,' and we've got 'hot.' And I figured, if those categories exist, the opposites probably do too, right? If it's possible for something to be *too dark*, it's probably also possible for something else to be *too bright*, right? I ended up with 'wet' and 'colorful' as my placeholder words, which, I know I'm bad at naming things, okay, don't say anything.

[GRIAN]

So you were sorting... what, exactly?

[TANGO]

I don't know if you guys have a name for them. Zed and I tend to just call 'em 'phenomena.' But you know what I mean, right? All of it. The stuff that can't be explained. I wanted to see if there was a way to generate those effects *consistently*. For science! And, uh. For fun. Also.

[GRIAN]

Why architecture?

[TANGO]

Well, that's where my first experience was! I didn't really realize you *could* have this stuff also attach itself to just people, or objects, or events, until a lot later. I was just thinking of it in terms of spooky buildings. And I was already interested in design and engineering, so it just sort of made sense to me.

I started with these four categories, but before long I started turning up instances that didn't fit into any of them. I've made a lot of lists and charts trying to sort them all out into some sort of system.

[GRIAN]

We've got a letter and some blueprints in the archives- first time I heard your name, actually- from an old professor of yours in university? About some projects in a design class?

[TANGO]

That's where those ended up? No way! I was always wondering where those drafts went. That was the library and... a couple others, right? What else?

[GRIAN]

The library, the twin apartment buildings, and the, uh, escape room? Thing?

[TANGO]

Right! Oh, man, what a time. Those were some of my first projects that actually went anywhere. I had a lot of attempts before that, but they were all duds. That was a great class.

[GRIAN]

So this system you've been working on- how would you sort out those projects in that, would you say?

[TANGO]

Oh! Yeah, sure! Hold on, let me just-

(Pen scribbling)

So I mentioned I started with four categories, and kept adding more as more specific stuff started coming up. Like, I think I was up to twenty at one point? But that got really unwieldy, so I've been trying to group them together in a way that makes sense and includes everything. It's, uh, a work in progress? Currently I've got nine. Ish.

So the library I would put under this category- I called it Big for awhile but Zed made fun of me for that so now it's Infinite. Working name! These are all working names. But that's... the sky, the ocean, caves and tunnels, things that are bigger or older than you can comprehend. Uh, that's why that one was a library! Cause you can never read everything in it, you know? It's about stuff that's overwhelming. From what Impulse has told me, your Pearl is definitely here.

Being lost more generally is also under this one for right now. I've sort of thought about splitting it off into its own thing, though. The problem is that a lot of these have, like, subgroups that could be rearranged into their own sections?

The apartment building I started on just after I met Zed. It was kind of inspired by his whole... deal. You know, things that should make sense but don't, things you can't look at straight on, logic that falls apart if you push on it too hard... That's the category that used to be Colorful. Now it's Science, tentatively. Subject to future change.

I've actually- maybe you'll have some thoughts on this? I've been trying to figure out if you guys at the Institute should also fit under this one, or if what you've got going on is something different.

[GRIAN]

Interesting. What's your reasoning?

[TANGO]

The research approach! The, um- studying the incomprehensible, I guess. It's a commonality. But the effects on you are pretty different than the effects on Zed, so I'm not sure. It could just be like... oh, what's the term. Uh. Convergent evolution?

[GRIAN]

If you want my opinion, I think there's definitely a difference, but... hm. What other categories have you got?

[TANGO]

Well, the escape room, that one's under what I'm calling 'Murder,' which is a pretty big category. That's all the killing, gore, blood and violence stuff. Like the spookification event, what just happened here, with the wolves- that's also Murder, for sure.

[GRIAN]

Okay, so- what *is* your explanation for what happened here? If you've got one. Because I'm- well, I was in there, and my head is a little clearer now, but it was definitely... yeah. Strange.

[TANGO]

Oh! I was just explaining this to Impulse. Think of it like... you said you studied architecture, right? You know live load and dead load?

[GRIAN]

Yeah, of course.

[TANGO]

Okay, perfect! Imagine you've got a bridge. And the bridge is reality. You have your dead load, which is like, most normal real things- your people, plants, houses, everything like that. Stuff that's always there, more or less, and the bridge is already adjusted to support all that so you don't have to worry about it collapsing. Okay?

But then you've got your live load, which is your spookiness. And any given part of the bridge is only rated for a certain amount of spookiness at any given time. A little bit is fine. But if you ever have too much spookiness in a certain part of the bridge- and probably specifically too much of a certain *type* of spookiness- it starts to, uh, collapse. Is my theory.

What happened here, so far as I can tell, is there was some sort of... confrontation or escalation with a creature that was already all wrapped up in Murder-flavored spookiness, and it was just a little bit too much for the bridge to handle. It didn't *collapse*, exactly, but it cracked, and that led to all the, uh, everything.

[GRIAN]

Yeah, that's Joel. Friend of mine. I think his wife chased him down?

[TANGO]

Ah! That'll do it.

The two things I'm trying to figure out now are- first of all, why did it stop? And second of all-

(Pause)

[GRIAN]

Second of all what?

[TANGO]

Well. This time was accidental, right?

What would happen if someone tried to do something like this on purpose? Break the bridge?

[Click]

[Click]

(Forest ambiance)

[IMPULSE]

So, uh... have any of you seen Grian?

[SCOTT]

Well, I'm pretty sure he tried to rip my throat out at one point, in the forest, but so did two other people here, so I don't hold it against him.

[LIZZIE]

I said I was sorry!

[SCOTT]

And I said I don't hold it against you!

[JOEL]

I'm not sorry.

[SCOTT]

Don't care, didn't ask.

[JOEL]

Anyways, I saw him awhile ago. Before everything ended, so we tried to kill each other a bit first, as you do. He was being all weird.

[IMPULSE]

Oh, that's not great. Weird how?

[SCOTT]

Can we talk about this somewhere else? I want a shower.

[IMPULSE]

I still need to find Scar, too. Did anybody else come out here with you?

[SCOTT]

Yeah, there was-

Wait. No, it was just Lizzie and I. Oh, but I had a message from Jimmy when the cell service came back. He said he was going to come pick us up. Do you need a ride?

[IMPULSE]

No, I've got one, I think. I'm getting picked up whenever my friend finds his way here- he just gets lost easily.

[LIZZIE]

If you're sure. Oh, also, Joel, when we get home, there's a girl sleeping on my couch who's got something following her that needs chased off. You can be useful for once.

[JOEL]

Wh- *hey*, I'm more than just a set of teeth, you know.

[LIZZIE]

But you'll do it, right?

[JOEL]

Well, *obviously* I'll do it-

[Click]

[Click]

[GRIAN]

So, your categories. You were talking about Murder. Would you put Dogwood Center under that one, too? The stage?

[TANGO]

Uh... so the *intention* with that project was actually a different one of my categories, but it wound up kind of crossing over with- hold on, two? Yeah, two other ones, one of which was Murder. Which I didn't intend. I don't actually design things to kill people! For the record! It just keeps happening. By coincidence.

What I was *trying* to do was work in a category I hadn't really gone into before, which I'm tentatively calling Social Situations. So that's stuff like loneliness and... I don't know, everything else about messy interpersonal stuff that scares people? I don't really get it. But I felt like a stage would be a good way to experiment with that, because it's literally about playing roles that aren't you, right?

But I, uh- *mea culpa*, okay, I sort of underestimated how *intense* people can get about plays. Theater people are *terrifying*. So when that first opening night happened- I don't know if you know about that, but it wasn't pretty! So after that I recategorized it under Murder. But then recently I broke off another category to match Science I'm calling Art, and I'm thinking about moving it there instead? I can't really decide.

[GRIAN]

Art. (*Pause*) Do you know Cleo?

[TANGO]

The scary sculptor! I know *of* her. I've never met her. Mostly for my own safety!

[GRIAN]

You're smarter than me. Which maybe isn't saying a lot, admittedly, but.

What are the rest of your categories? You said nine, I've heard five so far.

[TANGO]

Yes! Uh, so I also have one I'm currently just calling Bugs. Or maybe BUGS! All caps. That's... bugs. And other stuff, like parasites, spiders, and the fears that go along with, like, being controlled by things inside of you? But mostly bugs.

Then there's another one that used to be grouped together with BUGS! but that I split off into its

own thing. That's, uh, Immobilification. Which is like... being trapped, being stuck, not being able to see, having stuff grow on you. I had Cleo there for awhile before I moved her to Art, which is more, like, creative? Active? I guess? Immobilification is like, rot and mold and being buried. I've never really managed to do anything with it yet, construction-wise. I've got a buddy who was *not* big on the idea of a compost bin, so I sort of went back to the drawing board on that one.

And then, uh, what am I forgetting... oh! There's Inevitability. Or Death. I might just start calling it Death, because that's basically what it keeps boiling down to. I don't have much personal experience with that one either; honestly I'm not too eager to mess with it. Most of what I know comes from Joe.

[GRIAN]

... You're a friend of Joe's, then?

[TANGO]

Yeah! Honestly, I just assumed you two had probably met already, if you know Cleo.

[GRIAN]

I have *not, no*. Though not for a lack of *trying*. It didn't get me anywhere good. (*Rustling*)

[TANGO]

Oh, so the feathers *aren't* an Archivist thing? Thaaaat... makes sense. Though I wonder...

[GRIAN]

What?

[TANGO]

Nothing, nothing. I'm just thinkin' out loud all the time.

Uh, so the last category is a weirder one, and I'm still not sure about it, but right now I'm calling it Climate Change? That's the one that used to be Dry and Hot at different times, but it also has a lot to do with fire, weather, destruction, devastation- I guess now that I'm saying that, maybe it should just be called Change?

[GRIAN]

So you don't have a category for... sorry, let me start again. You said you'd put this whole-bridge-breaking event under Murder, right?

[TANGO]

Right!

[GRIAN]

You don't have a category for like, chasing? Not necessarily violence, but being chased, being followed... watched?

[TANGO]

I *don't*. Right now that would all just go under Murder- or maybe Social Situations, depending on the circumstance. Do you think I should?

[GRIAN]

... Yeah, actually. I've thinking about the difference between me and Zedaph, since you asked about it, and I think it's that.

I've recently had a... well. Recently, I found out that people I talked to about their experiences

have been having recurring nightmares. About being watched. Uh, by me.

I also... I've had, um, an encounter myself with something I think definitely fits under Murder. Before I worked at the Institute. And that was definitely very different from both my experience working there and, uh, this event here, with Joel.

[TANGO]

(Scribbling)

Okay, okay! So you'd put this event with the wolves in the same category as the Institute?

[GRIAN]

Maybe? I'm not sure. I think that's a shared aspect, for sure. There's also... well.

[TANGO]

There's also...?

[GRIAN]

There are a couple outliers I've encountered that I don't think fit anywhere under your categories.

[TANGO]

Hit me with 'em! Nothing improves a system like stress-testing.

[GRIAN]

You said spiders are under Bugs, right?

[TANGO]

BUGS! For now, yeah.

[GRIAN]

There's a man who came into the archives- he goes by Doc, I don't know his full name- who had an encounter with something... spidery, and came away with some very weird ideas about, uh, the nature of reality. Which, you know, maybe he just got a bit cracked in the head, but he did know some things he shouldn't necessarily have known, so I've been wondering about it.

[TANGO]

Huh. Are you sure they're related to the same encounter?

[GRIAN]

I wondered about that, but based on his account it seems to have been a pretty direct cause and effect from the one to the other, so I'm assuming so.

[TANGO]

Hmm. Yeah, I haven't really encountered spiders as a recurring element on their own. They just haven't been all that significant, compared to bugs generally. I *did* think about spiderweb designs at one point, like radial constructions...

What was your other outlier?

[GRIAN]

Uh, an older one. From a century or two back. There was... um, someone... who conceptualized of a- what he called a god. (*Faint static*) A 'creature of knowledge.' Which seems to have granted him some... let's say secret knowledge. Including a technique for prolonging his own life.

I can't tell you that much more. But I can tell you that he was... associated with the Institute.

[TANGO]

Oh, now *that's* something new. So that's involved with the Institute... knowledge, huh? I wonder...

Hey, what have your experiences been with eyes?

(Pause)

[GRIAN]

Eyes? Why?

[TANGO]

Well, Zed was telling me about a time recently he dropped by and visited you. And he's... well, you know how he is about explaining things. But one thing he was very clear about was that when you looked at him, he felt- uh, the phrase he used was pulled-apart.

(Pause)

[GRIAN]

Seems everyone's got things to say about my eyes, lately.

[TANGO]

They're very striking!

[GRIAN]

I- *how*? I don't understand! They look the same as they always have. Don't they?

[TANGO]

Well... first of all, I can't tell what color they are? And your pupils have also gone a little funny, if you weren't aware. Like, uh, increasingly, as we've been talking. They looked sort of sharp when you came in here? Like a bird's, or a cat's. Now they're more... rectangle.

(Pause)

[GRIAN]

...Huh.

(Pause)

[TANGO]

Zed told me when you were asking him questions, it was the most together he'd felt in ages. And he couldn't not answer.

[GRIAN]

...Yeah.

(Pause)

I wonder...

[TANGO]

What?

[GRIAN]

Um, nothing. (*Rustling, standing*) I need to go. I've got... something I need to look into.

[TANGO]

Do you want to wait here until Impulse comes back? He was looking for you.

[GRIAN]

No! I mean- no, I can- uh, tell him I'll meet them back at the Institute. I've just got something I need to do first.

[TANGO]

Uh, okay... oh, and don't forget this! It is yours, right?

(*Rustling of the recorder being picked up*)

[Click]

Chapter End Notes

[you can see tango's notes here!](#)

YEAHHHHH WOOOOOOOOO ITS DONE

well there's still going to be more statements obviously. and more fallout from these events. wink wink. but. this particular section of the story is concluded!! i really hope you all enjoyed and are excited for what is coming next! we're really in the home stretch of the story now.

a few people have commented on the fact that none of the entities have been called by name. this is why! sometimes the guy in your robert smirke role got too distracted making spooky buildings and is only now getting around to the categorization bit of his gig, and he's doing it as only tango tek could do

and in case it's not clear to people- the web is not native to this universe! its sticking its little spider claws in from the canon universe and just is not doing very well at it. L or whatever. the only person it managed to get to was doc because he's prone to megalomania and universe-destroying existential crises anyways. but it's not really behind anything else here

yes shubble has been sleeping on lizzie's couch

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