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U.H.F. (ULTRA HIGH FREQUENCY)

Where the signal he had tuned into come from was of little importance to him. He was still trying to make a sliver of sense out of what was on his fresh, out-of-the-box "Waveformat-60" TV set. It was late, on a sulvid Wyoming winter night - it was a time when bathrobe and slippers sufficed for dress-wear, and there was little else to do than live out the voluminous side of the American Dream, sitting tranquil in front of the TV set. And here, on the cusp of yet another all-nighter, he was sitting in front of his brand new, chrome-edged model, with the grease-slicked dial set to... what number was it? He tried to draw his eyes away from the fascinating spectacle unfolding before him on the screen. He squinted. Even sitting a few feet away from the dial, he couldn't seem to make sense of what the dial was set on - he could see 15 and he could see 16, but the dial was settled somewhere between them. The dial wasn't in the middle space - it was on a number, nestled ever-so-naturally between 15 and 16.

A vague rippling sensation travelled up the length of his spine as he settled his gaze back onto the tubeface. His brain scarcely began to process the strange little reality of the dial, as the hi-resolution picture delivered further and further flashing images. What channel was this? What signal was he on...? At times, it seemed to be continuous streaming video of a prismatic shower, bouncing flashing lights seen through a filthy camera-lens - at others, it gave clear images of slow-motion footage of strange organic shapes - vegetables and cuts of meat - seemingly torn apart by themselves, mulched by invisible teeth. On and off, on and off were flickering, unfocused reels of black-and-white "B"-flicks, at points printed over with more of those burning circles of sickening colors. They weren't any single color - it seemed to be a number of them, stewed together, but at once, they seemed to be some unique color altogether, wholly apart and separate from any color he had seen before... Enraptured as he was, he at first didn't register the sound pouring out of the set's twin speakers. Soon, he began to pick up on garbled, unintelligible sounds - they were voices. How could those be voices...? They sounded like bullfrogs spliced with the whirrs, buzzes, and fuzzy crackling of an old computer-monitor. Still, between glowing pictures of close-shot human eyes blinking and large, spectacular fireballs going off in scorched, empty fields... he could pick up the sound of voices, crackling and slurred through the sound-system. They were addressing him. Calling him by name. Speaking.

Richard.

A rapid timelapse sequence of peat-moss growing over a bleached animal skeleton... but what animal could that be? What animal has six eyes, a bone-fused mouth, and petrified feelers lining its body's length...?

Yes, Richard. You.

A series of dazzling lights, all of that same strange color he still couldn't quite name... in the light, swimming in the blinding rays, were strange creatures... from what he had seen in old magazines and internet articles, they reminded him of abyssal creatures, palid-skinned things that floated in the deepest trenches of the ocean, squamous and malformed, slick with viscous slime...

That's right, Richard. You, the Richard watching this channel, at 631 Stanholm Drive, the only Richard watching this channel. Any moment now, Richard.

It was a face... it had been a face. How could he not have seen it?

Yes. Richard, the Richard sitting alone at home. Always so alone. The Richard on the cheap-looking couch. The Richard in the moth-eaten robe.

In an instant of focus, he realized that the images and visuals had been slowly coalescing into a pair of uncanny wall-eyes... a forced game-show host grin, toothy and white as toilet porcelain... a chiseled structure, strangely symmetrical and bone-framed. It was looking at him. It could see him.

We've been waiting so long to do this. Just stay still, Richard. This will only take a moment. You won't feel a thing.

He thought, as the face became clearer, and seemed to float closer and closer, that he could see every pore and in it's skin... but was it skin? It looked fake, a plastic film stretched over far too many edges, flecked with organic filth and crusted stuff. He should bolt from his seat, send his foot through the TV screen. He fumbled for the remote. Gripping it, it felt soft and cloying, like the skin of a worm, coated in a cold mucosal ooze. It squirmed wildly and began to squeal for a moment, before his hand shot back. He didn't dare look to see what the remote looked like. The TV still demanded his attention.

The face began to scream. It seemed to strain itself to open it's Tony Blair mouth of chalky teeth, but even from between the slightest crack he could hear it's ear-piercing shriek, continual and steadily rising. Reaching a nauseating crescendo, he found he had been foaming at the mouth, as a fragment of froth dripped down onto his robe. The face seemed to press against the screen now, bending it like rubber. Eyes still wide, mouth now wide open, jaws unhinged like a snake. He could see what was down its throat. The face changed, and he could finally see. He understood what he had been looking at.

A knocking at the door.

He couldn't take his eyes away, twitching and spasming as the TV screen grew in front of him, as the walls melted into a sea of liquid rainbow, as the floor seemed to pulsate beneath him, rising and falling with the heaving breath of a giant.

Another, louder knock.

He was screaming along with the face now.

Knocking becomes banging. Urgent. Desperate.

The door seems to crumple like paper as it splinters open. Colored light floods in, silhouetting something standing in the doorframe. The sound of the face's scream is drowned out by the sound of alien music.

With a final, painful push of mental strength, he manages to turn his eyes just so, to see what has just broken down his door.

Somehow, he isn't surprised. Unnaturally tall. Dressed in a fine pressed suit. That same game-show-host grin, wall-eyed and and leering. He stares at it for what feels like an eternity before it speaks.

"YOU'VE JUST ONE A FREE GUEST SPOT ON THE NEXT EPISODE OF OUR SHOW!
THANKS FOR TUNING IN! CONGRATULATIONS, RICHARD!"