

THE FUGUE

Written by

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INT. ROOM

DIANA

Dreams never die. That's what I've been told all my life. I have memories of always wanting to go there. Of waking up every morning to see Jupiter in the sky. In the same spot. Some people like change. Seasons. Not me. Seasons are like the slow minute hand of a clock, marking the passing of time. The thought of the constant, gigantic presence fixed to a spot in the sky, where any time I could step out and, there it is. The same place it was yesterday, and the day before. With so many things constantly in flux, to have that one constant. Yeah. I guess that's what was at the core of my decision to go. It was our first manned trip to Callisto so I was just honored to be chosen among the two dozen crew members. Thinking back on it, I should have been more concerned when they made me peace officer. We're all scientists, engineers. And routine work rotates between us all. But peace officer was fixed to me. I thought that meant just... keeping the peace. With twenty-four people crammed into a rotating can for a few years on the way from Mars to one of Jupiter's moons, of course tempers would flare. The occasional scuffle is bound to break out. Those are to be expected. But I didn't know... I don't think anyone could anticipate... the horrors. The bodies. The things that would come out of the dark. Out there. Where day and night have no meaning.

INT. STUDIO

PAUL

From QRX you're listening to The Big Loop. I'm Paul Bae. Today's episode, "The Fugue." We begin with Part One.

INT. ROOM

DIANA

They designed the Fugue around the centrifuges. So the whole ship looked like a cylinder with these large hexagonal plates on either end. Apparently, the designers initially called it The Counterpoint. Something having to do with music theory. But they changed it to The Fugue. Same idea but sounded nicer, I suppose. And we slept in the hexagons for three years of our journey from Mars. And during that time, Apollo downloaded all our cerebral coding. They'd been working on this for decades, and finally, they had it. They described it to us as if the ship now had blueprints to how our minds worked. And the ship would use it to make sure all our needs were met to make sure we made it to Callisto. Personally, I've never liked the name for our AI, Apollo. It's...it carries too much historical weight in the space community. It's a constant reminder of heritage instead of looking ahead. And Apollo was the future. Apollo was working on another level entirely from other AI technology. It took quantum computing to extraordinary levels. It just downloads everything from your brain and takes a few years to design the algorithm so that the ship can take care of all our needs. It was the first truly psychologically ergonomic space voyage. Kind of like how they used to make cars ergonomically contoured to our bodies last century so they could drive laying down or standing up...whatever they wanted. This was going to be the same for space travel, except it was ergonomically fitted to our psychological states so that all our deepest needs were met. The reason was that in previous missions, crew members reported that the hardest part of space travel was the mental strain. The challenge of long stretches of boredom.

(MORE)

DIANA (cont'd)

Of coping with the vastness of space.  
Of dealing with each other while  
living in cramped quarters for years  
at a time. So Apollo designed an  
algorithm using all our uploaded  
memories, desires, needs. It was  
supposed to be the engineering  
breakthrough space travel needed.

DIANA (cont'd)

It was different in training. Because  
Apollo picked up on everything in  
your psyche. So training on Mars was  
nothing like the mission itself out  
to Callisto. On Mars, we knew we were  
home. Our minds were rested. There  
were no subconscious worries that  
stood out. And we were all tested  
rigorously for psychological  
impediments. We couldn't have anyone  
with mental cracks as they called it.  
Just one weak member would throw the  
whole mission off.

DIANA (cont'd)

On our first tour of the Fugue, we  
stood in Apollo's central memory. It  
was a huge wall of monitors. They  
told us once the voyage was under  
way, each one of us would have a  
dedicated screen representing a bank  
of liquid drives. It's what gave  
Apollo the personal touch. Apollo  
didn't speak. I mean, he could, but  
you had to manually command him to  
speak and only from this room where  
his central memory was stored.  
Because the whole point of Apollo was  
to go unnoticed. We were to forget he  
was even there because the trick to  
successful space travel is to not  
notice the things keeping you alive.  
Because so many things can kill you  
out here.

DIANA (cont'd)

At first, I thought they were making  
a mistake making me peace officer.  
Why not put a psychologist here? To  
keep the peace? To resolve conflicts?  
What's a quantum comp engineer going  
to do if a fight breaks out in the  
galley?

(MORE)

DIANA (cont'd)

But my first incident resolution... well, at the risk of bragging, I resolved it quite quickly. Two crew members were bickering and I flew into the middle of it, had them air their grievances, and pinpointed for them exactly where the miscommunication lay. Turns out, I was quite good at being a peace officer.

DIANA (cont'd)

We were three hundred million miles from home. Just forty million miles to Jupiter. It'd been seven months since coming out of our third stage of hyper sleep. Each time we were woken, Apollo got better at predicting what we needed. If I was in a bad mood, homesick, or just feeling fatigue, every room I walked into by myself had the light a bit brighter than usual. And chocolate. I was given more chocolate rations. You know, little things like that make a difference. Life is just a sequence of little things, tiny details, that make for a good experience, or bad one. And Apollo could read my moods given all the bio-sensors everywhere in the Fugue and all my psych data stored in the central drive.

DIANA (cont'd)

But yes. Three hundred million miles from Mars, and that's when the first major incident happened. Sector D. A health beacon went on. Someone was experiencing physical distress. By the time I got on the scene Douglas was already there with some other crew members trying to calm down Ray. He was a lab tech. And he was crouched in the corner of his room. Shivering. Naked. He kept pointing at his shower stall. The medic finally showed up and gave him a shot to calm him down. He kept pointing at the shower, saying someone was there. It was obviously empty but he kept saying someone was there a moment ago as he was about to step in. We asked him who it was.

(MORE)

DIANA (cont'd)

He said...he said it was a child. A child he'd never seen before.

DIANA (cont'd)

Now, children are not cleared for space travel. That would be ridiculous. But he swore there was a child standing in the shower, wearing what he called "Earth clothes." Which meant he was dressed poorly, in barely more than rags. But none of that mattered. I knelt down and asked him, describe the child. Was it a boy or a girl. And Ray said he didn't know. So I asked him, "How do you not know if it was a boy or girl?" And Ray said, "Because it had no face."

DIANA (cont'd)

I asked him to describe exactly what he saw standing in the shower. And he described a child, no face or hair. A bald head atop a thin child's body in rags.

DIANA (cont'd)

Ray went closer to inspect the child. And that's when the faceless child walked towards Ray. The curious part is that Ray claimed it moved *through* the shower glass. That's when Ray fell back and had that panic attack. The child was gone, but Ray swears it all felt quite real.

DIANA (cont'd)

The crew took him with the medic for a full bioscan. I searched the cams in Ray's room. I could see him jumping back, screaming. And then crumpling into the corner where we found him. But there was nothing in the room except him. The heat records indicate there was no one else in his room the entire time.

DIANA (cont'd)

There was that famous study last decade. The one where they researched what they called "residual life." What the writers called "The Ghost Papers."

(MORE)

DIANA (cont'd)

And they found that for every occurrence monitored, it was preceded by activity in the medial temporal lobe. The theory being that what we perceive as post-organic residual phenomena, or "ghosts"--it's all a kind of wish-fulfillment. Our minds being so powerful that if you want to see something badly enough, you can often make yourself see it. It doesn't make it real in any objective sense, but what does that matter to the observer? Because if he sees it, that's his reality. Until he seeks help, usually in the form of medical treatment. We don't have any Iso-Neuro Imagers on the Fugue to pull out data from Ray's brain, but we can scan it. And try to find out what's going on and maybe, *maybe*, find a temporary treatment. Because there's nowhere else to put him. We're all in this together. A thin sheet of metal protecting all of us...from everything out there. Such a fine line between everything that's alive, and everything else that works against that.

DIANA (cont'd)

We had Ray back at his station within twenty-four hours. I checked in on him and he was...he seemed normal. And by that I mean...he was acting as nothing had happened at all. As if it were just a bad dream and he'd rather forget the whole ordeal. During the whole check-up, I asked him the standard questions to make sure he was ready to return to work. And he kept shrugging the whole thing off. Which is understandable as it was a tad embarrassing for him, but...how does one cower naked in a corner one moment and act like nothing is amiss the next? But he did one thing that struck me as curious. Just when I had finished my follow-up with him, I left his room, and as soon as the door closed behind me, I heard him lock his door.

(MORE)

DIANA (cont'd)

Now, everyone's entitled to their privacy, but on the Fugue, there's no reason to lock your door. In space travel, everyone is respectful of their companion's privacy. It's unheard of to barge into any room unannounced. Without knocking. To lock your door...that was strange.

DIANA (cont'd)

The next incident happened in the gymnasium. As with all space flight, we're required to exercise to retain bone and muscle density. I got the call of an emergency there. I attended with two of our crew members and we found one of our flight monitors, Amanda--she was in the far corner holding a steel bar, swinging it back and forth, warning us to stay away. She was in hysterics, screaming for us to keep still. And she was looking around over her head, up at the ceiling. We had to sedate her. In the infirmary I waited for her to come to. And I asked what happened.

DIANA (cont'd)

She said she was using the resistance bands by the far wall, for her shoulders. And she had her eyes closed from the strain, and when she opened them, there was a person standing. Upside down. From the ceiling. She screamed. And the person turned around and ran to the opposite wall. Still on the ceiling. Then, the figure slowly walked down the opposite wall while Amanda stared in disbelief. And it just stood there, at the far end of the gymnasium. Its back to her. And then...and then it disappeared. Into the floor. I asked what she meant by that and she went into hysterics again, saying he had no eyes, no mouth, no nose. No ears. No features to speak of. Just... a head.

DIANA (cont'd)

When I asked her to describe it further, she had trouble gauging the height. Because it was upside down.

(MORE)



DIANA (cont'd)

I asked if it was a child or an adult. She couldn't say. But she did notice one thing as it sank into the floor. She thinks...she *believes* she saw a pair of eyes...for a moment. Freakishly large, almost cartoonish, as if a child drew them. But not where they should be. They appeared on the torso. Then, the figure disappeared.

DIANA (cont'd)

I found it strange that she could remember all that with such exacting detail, given she was in a panicked state. But I let her rest, figuring I'd have time for follow-ups later.

DIANA (cont'd)

But that was now two isolated instances of similar sightings. A boy. Or person. Without a face. Strange, most definitely, but not without precedent. I don't think there's ever been a long distance space voyage without some report of mental fatigue and stress. That's why so much money went into developing Apollo. For trips like this. And for the most part, Apollo was effective. But I was beginning to think that Apollo's constant catering to our every need and mood was spoiling us, somewhat. By that I mean, we are meant to struggle. That is part of being human. And what we're endeavoring to do--to travel this distance across space--that's unprecedented. And not a natural part of the human experience. Instead of avoiding the boredom and existential angst of floating beyond the reach of our family and loved ones, perhaps it would be best to struggle with it. To face all this, head on. To cope. And triumph over it, if you will. A lot of Apollo's resources are directed towards externalizing our innermost dreams and desires. Perhaps there was some form of breakdown in that process.

DIANA (cont'd)

I remember taking a break in the viewing alcove. The largest windows on the Fugue allowed this breathtaking view of this dot in space. It was Jupiter. It was quite comforting, seeing something familiar yet from a different vantage point. I recall thinking...isn't it strange how it only takes one familiar thing to anchor you to a place. Without Jupiter in view, I would have been staring out at a sea of blackness and unrecognizable stars. It creates a feeling of being unmoored, of drift. Some people feel a sense of panic, as if being lost at sea. I've never been to Jupiter, of course, but I know the planet. From books. From stories. And it's those memories that create this veneer of safety. Of being tied to a place. Of feeling we belong, as opposed to being out of place. We are where we shouldn't be. Yet here we are. Floating in space.

DIANA (cont'd)

Three days later. I was in my room when the alarm sounded. The map showed a health beacon set off in Sector E. And just as I was dressing, another beacon sounded. In Sector B. And then another. And another. There were four simultaneous beacons flashing on the grid. I called the captain but he didn't answer. So I assumed he was already on his way to Sector C. All hands were moving. I went to the first one. Sector B.

DIANA (cont'd)

I heard screaming in the hall even before I turned the corner. There were three crew members trying to restrain someone on the ground. It was another tech. Roger. His hands were over his face and he was screaming, trying to fight everyone off. There was a lot of blood. On the floor. All over the crew. And when we finally got hold of him and moved his hands, we saw it. Despite all the blood, you could still see it.

(MORE)

DIANA (cont'd)

His face. His eyes... His eyes...they were gone. They were just two bloody, empty sockets. And the way he was screaming... No wonder. The agony must have been... Well, we rushed him to the infirmary. And that's when the medic called me to hurry to Sector C. I was there in less than a minute. And like Roger, I heard the screaming before I got there.

DIANA (cont'd)

It was one of our captains, Sarah. But...but I didn't know it was her until after. Because when I arrived, I didn't recognize her. Her head was bloody, and her hair was gone. Clumps of it looked like it had been pulled out violently. With parts of her scalp. While they attended to her trying to sedate her, I looked into her room. And there on the ground by her bed, clumps of skin and hair. And there...under her bed...I saw something move. A shadow. Of... something. And then, as I looked, a long, thin arm...impossibly long...it reached out from under the bed...and grabbed the clump of hair, and pulled it back slowly under the bed.

DIANA (cont'd)

I moved closer. I...I bent down and peaked under the bed. And...nothing. There was nothing there.

DIANA (cont'd)

There were two other emergency beacons at the same time. One crew member nearly had his trachea crushed in, as if someone were choking him in bed. Another on the opposite side of the Fugue nearly bit her own tongue off. Later in the infirmary, when she was stabilized, she wrote down that she didn't bite her tongue. She claimed that something in the room was tearing her tongue out. Or trying to. She was in her bed and felt this immense weight on her chest, and she couldn't talk.

(MORE)

DIANA (cont'd)

And something reached into her mouth,  
and nearly tore her tongue out. She  
bit down to stop herself from  
choking.

DIANA (cont'd)

All these events. They happened at  
exactly the same time. And though  
none of them saw anyone in their  
rooms, they all claimed that they  
felt someone's presence. It wasn't  
some *thing*. It was some *one*.

DIANA (cont'd)

I had a theory of what was happening.  
It wasn't a crew member. There'd be  
no way for them to elude our sensors.  
And it wasn't some fugitive or  
stowaway, because that was  
impossible. All the signs, all the  
technology...it all pointed at one  
conclusion. Apollo had been churning  
out and refining his algorithms to  
accommodate all of our individual  
needs. But there was obviously a  
glitch. He had somehow confused our  
dreams, our desires...with our  
nightmares. Because nightmares also  
fulfill a need. A subconscious one.  
And these sums of our subconscious  
needs--these were conflicting with  
one another. Causing...residual  
phenomena. Not ghosts...but something  
like them. There was no way of  
shutting down or resetting Apollo  
without destroying the Fugue. So I  
only had one option. I had to try to  
convince Apollo...that he was wrong.

INT. STUDIO

PAUL

When we return, the conclusion of  
"The Fugue" after these messages.

[midroll]

INT. ROOM

DIANA

When people first heard of Apollo they assumed he'd be one of those talking AIs. Like a more advanced form of the kind you see in government stations. But he's not like that. There's no reason to verbally talk to Apollo. He already knows what we need. What we want. Besides, that would add another layer of complexity to his calculations, because we humans rarely say what we really want. We ask for things we believe we want. Very few of us are truly tapped into our own subconscious desires. Rare is the person who knows exactly what makes him happy. For me, it's space travel. That's been my only interest my whole life. I don't remember ever loving anything more than being out in space, exploring the outer limits of human reach and potential.

DIANA (cont'd)

I needed to access Apollo's central memory. Usually only the captain is allowed access, but since she was incapacitated, the acting first officer granted me limited access since he knew me to be working on fixing the bugs. I found myself standing in front of Apollo's visual banks. It's for engineers to access full visualization of what Apollo is processing. But it's not in code. That wouldn't make any sense to anyone at those speeds. No, this is entirely different. This was a visualization of what Apollo is trying to deliver to us. It's put up on multiple screens. One for every crew member. It doesn't make much sense, because it's like watching a first person point of view footage mixed in with strange impressionistic images, most likely from Apollo processing that person's needs. If Apollo felt you were having trouble sleeping, he would make sure every room you walked into alone would be lit perfectly to help lull you to sleep.

(MORE)

DIANA (cont'd)

If the journey was causing too much stress he would even release a certain scent from your childhood to help put you in a positive frame of mind.

DIANA (cont'd)

I could vaguely make out each person's screen. Every monitor had a crew member's name on top of it. I could see people looking at each other in some screens, bursts of colour in others. Wave forms, strange images. Memories in static form.

DIANA (cont'd)

But way down in the lower right corner, there was a blank screen. It was on, but nothing was showing. And just on top of it, on the name plate. Was my name. *Diana*. My screen...it was blank.

DIANA (cont'd)

It wasn't even showing my point of view. It should have been showing what I was presently seeing. But... nothing.

DIANA (cont'd)

I sat at the bank and opened Apollo's main command panel. I did a systems check. Everything was fine. There's a complicated protocol to follow to engage any of the controls because so much of the Fugue depends on Apollo running uninterrupted, but turning on the crew search function was relatively straight forward. So, I turned it on.

DIANA (cont'd)

This was the bank of personal histories of every member of the Fugue. I scrolled through looking for my name. But it didn't show up. I did a search alphabetically, by rank, by sector, by age. I used every search function available but I couldn't find myself.

DIANA (cont'd)

And that's when I noticed something on the bank of monitors. My screen lit up. It was suddenly like the others. Except mine was...it was different. It was a series of moving numbers, waves. Curves. And then, a flash of the outline of a person. It was there only for a moment. Like a silhouette. And then, several other screens turned red. About five of them.

DIANA (cont'd)

A health beacon suddenly sounded. Then another. And another. I checked the locations. They were all over the Fugue. I ran as quickly as I could to the closest one. It was one of our techs. Glenda. On the floor of her room, right by her bed. No blood. No apparent injury. I bent down and asked what happened. She said, she was at the mirror, and a figure appeared in her mirror behind her. She turned and screamed. Because it had the head of a baby, but the body of a full grown man. And no arms. Just...a torso and legs. And the face kept shifting, with the eyes moving down to where the mouth should be and the mouth floating to the ears. She said it looked like it was melting, or morphing.

DIANA (cont'd)

When others showed up, I ran to another sector beacon. There were others there who told me what happened. One of the engineers, Thomas, was having what seemed like a panic attack. He described exactly what Glenda had seen. Except for his, he claims the figure made sounds. Like a baby crying. And his had arms. Long arms that dragged on the floor behind him.

DIANA (cont'd)

I was about to run to the next beacon but instead, I made my way back to Apollo's central memory room.

(MORE)

DIANA (cont'd)

I went to the monitor bank and found every member affected. I turned on their room cams and replayed what happened for each person. And again, like the others, I couldn't see anything except the crew members panicking at...nothing. But as if they'd seen someone in their rooms and they were desperate to get away.

DIANA (cont'd)

And out of the corner of my eye, I saw something flashing on the monitor bank. It was my screen. It was flashing red. Slowly. And each time it flashed, a silhouette emerged. A figure. Every time it flashed, a different figure showed. A small head. On a long body. And then long arms. And then one with long legs. It kept changing.

DIANA (cont'd)

There was something wrong. With me. Maybe...maybe Apollo had processed my subconscious, and something... something was wrong with me. With my mind. Perhaps...I was going mad.

DIANA (cont'd)

I couldn't access Apollo's memory. I needed to find out what was happening to me. And then it occurred to me: the captain's journal. She was still in the infirmary. Her second was most likely preoccupied with the various emergencies. So, I snuck into the captain's quarters. Fortunately, no one locked their doors.

DIANA (cont'd)

Her work log was sitting on her desk. It was still on. I suppose she'd been working on it when the beacon went on that day. I navigated her work history. Looking for anything that would indicate what happened to me. I kept scrolling back through the work log, back to our departure, back to our first tour. Finally I ended up at our recruitment.

(MORE)



DIANA (cont'd)

Every crew member had an ID tag and the reasons for recruitment. Personal biographies. Histories.

DIANA (cont'd)

And then, I found mine. There was no biography. Instead...there was a work order. A work order...for me. For my production. And I could see...the parts ordered. My quantum drive. My neuro-processors. My body. My...mouth. My hair. My...my eyes.

DIANA (cont'd)

For you see...I wasn't recruited. I was...built. I wasn't just the peace officer on the ship. I was the AI. I was the physical component...to Apollo. I was his counterpoint. I kept reading. About the way they designed me. About what was programmed into me. [pause] Memories. [pause] But something was happening that our engineers hadn't anticipated. Apollo was designed to read our needs and desires. What no one anticipated...was that I, too, would grow these things. I was artificial, with no history before my production. But they implanted memories in me, just enough to make it convincing. But my mind, if you will, had to evolve, to convince itself it was as real as anyone else on this ship. So, I began...to want. To desire. To...to dream. And in building my own memories, in shaping my own history, my dreams...became nightmares. For the others.

DIANA (cont'd)

And Apollo, being my counterpoint, tried to help me building a past. My past.

Pause.

DIANA (cont'd)

And there's no way to stop it. Because how do you stop a person, even an artificial person, from dreaming?

(MORE)

DIANA (cont'd)  
From wanting...to be? Because...you  
can't. You can't. Unless...unless...

LONG PAUSE.

COMPUTER BUTTON SOUND EFFECTS

COMPUTER VOICE  
Warning. The sequence three-seven--  
three-zero will terminate programming  
of Diana four-two-six. You are not  
authorized to run this sequence.

MORE PANEL EFFECTS

COMPUTER VOICE (cont'd)  
Warning. The sequence three-seven--  
three-zero will terminate programming  
of Diana four-two-six. You are not  
authorized to run this sequence.  
Please enter the captain's sequence  
to override.

MORE PANEL EFFECTS

DIANA  
Dreams never die. That's what I've  
been told.

MORE PANEL EFFECTS.

COMPUTER VOICE  
The captain's sequence has begun.  
Termination of Diana four-two-six  
will begin in five, four, three, two,  
one.

MORE PANEL EFFECTS.

COMPUTER VOICE (cont'd)  
Diana four-two-six has now been  
terminated.

Diana slumps to floor.

SHIP'S AMBIENT BEEPS AND BLIPS CONTINUE.

FADE OUT.