

"FAINT IN THE GREY"  
*The Sheridan Tapes - Season 03, Episode 53*  
*Recording Draft - March 31, 2022*

by

Virginia Spotts

Based on story and characters from  
"Homestead on the Corner"  
By Trevor Van Winkle

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1. INT. THE ISPHA BUILDING - REN'S OFFICE - 10/16/2019

A cell phone rings three times before going to voicemail with a BEEP.

DAVID NATHAN ROBINSON  
(simple, unreadable)  
Leave a message.

BEEP.

REN PARK  
(awkward, slightly  
stilted)  
Doctor Park here -- this message is  
for David Nathan Robinson. It's  
October the 16th, 2019... I've  
tried to reach you a few times, so  
I'm sure I don't need to go through  
the whole spiel again.  
(beat, slightly desperate)  
Listen, David: this will be my last  
attempt to reach you. The next time  
you hear from me... it will be in  
person. With an additional... ISPHA  
detail. You know and I know that  
Templi Prophetam is handling an  
unstudied, unstabalized, toxic  
mycological sample that is... well,  
it's ISPHA's property, and we'd  
like it returned before it causes  
further harm. You're a good  
scientist, David, and a good person  
-- we're willing to overlook this  
misstep. You have one week. Only a  
week. If we don't hear back from  
you by October 23rd, know that  
we'll be taking a more drastic  
course of action. You have my  
number.  
(pause, more personally  
vulnerable)  
Please -- don't do anything rash.

CLICK.

2-0. EXT. ALLEGHENY NATIONAL FOREST - NIGHT - 11/12/19

Near midnight, a few miles north of Mead Run.

REN PARK  
(terrified and trying to  
hide it)  
(MORE)

REN PARK (CONT'D)

So... what happens now? What do you want from us?

AMANITA

(low and slow)

My invitation is and always will be for you to join us. We are the Children of the Earth, after all -- the Children of Adam, and at the end of all things, we'll be the only ones left standing. Barring that, well... we're not known for speed, us mycological folk -- but we always catch up. So I suggest you start running.

CLICK.

2-1. EXT. ALLEGHENY NATIONAL FOREST - LATER

Running footsteps, rustling. The tape recorder accidentally restarts.

SAM BAILEY

(worried, urgent, ignored)

I'm telling you, the road isn't here anymore --

CLICK.

2-2. EXT. ALLEGHENY NATIONAL FOREST - LATER

The team stumbling to a winded, exhausted stop.

REN PARK

(out of breath, frustrated and afraid)

For Goddess' sake.

SAM BAILEY

(winded, trying to stay focused)

We can rest for a minute, then we need to keep going.

KATE SHERIDAN

(approaching, quiet)

Sam, Bill isn't doing well.

BILL TYLER

(quiet, trembling, strained)

(MORE)

BILL TYLER (CONT'D)  
Forever and ever -- forever and  
ever -- forever and ever...

MARIA SOL  
(deeply worried)  
Christ...

SAM BAILEY  
(briefly forgetting their  
names)  
Uh... Teller, Lawrence -- can you  
still see them?

TELLER  
(eyes on the trees)  
Negative -- Amanita wasn't lying,  
they're not very fast.

LAWRENCE  
(slightly more at ease,  
but only just)  
I haven't seen them for at least a  
half-mile.

REN PARK  
(not as reassured as he  
should be)  
Well, that's something at least.  
(to Bill)  
Bill, we need to keep going just a  
little longer. Can you do that?

BILL TYLER  
(waking slightly, a little  
slurred)  
Where is this karaoke bar, anyway?

SAM BAILEY  
What?

KATE SHERIDAN  
(stage whisper)  
He thinks we're going to karaoke.

MARIA SOL  
(taking this and running  
with it)  
Yeah, of course we're going to  
karaoke, Bill! Only a little  
farther -- right Sam?

SAM BAILEY  
(caught off guard)  
Oh, uh... Yeah, only a little  
further.

BILL WHOOPS QUIETLY, excitement buried under layers of  
exhaustion and psychic trauma.

REN PARK  
(slightly encouraged by  
that)  
Let's get a move on then, people.

They all start off again -- walking this time, crunching  
through leaves in frightened silence. Only the occasional  
hoot of an owl can be heard from the trees.

SAM BAILEY  
(noticing something)  
Hey... Ren? Any idea what that is  
up ahead?

REN PARK  
(sees it too)  
What is that? I don't have the best  
eyesight --

Ren takes off his glasses and wipes them on his shirt, coming  
to a stop. The rest of the team follows suit.

KATE SHERIDAN  
(sees what Sam did)  
I see it too, Sam... what is--?

REN PARK  
(stunned wonder)  
How is that possible?

SAM BAILEY  
How is what possible?

REN PARK  
(squinting, frustrated by  
his blurred vision)  
It looks like a... hold on.

Without warning, Ren breaks into a run.

SAM BAILEY  
Ren, wait -- stop!

Sam runs after him, and a moment later, the rest of the team  
follows. After a few moments of breathless running, they come  
to a stop at the foot of something huge, dark, and imposing.

TELLER  
(finally sees it clearly)  
Is that/a--

REN PARK  
(stunned)  
An old-growth Western Red Cedar...  
In Pennsylvania.  
(beat)  
We're all seeing the same thing,  
right? Lawrence?

LAWRENCE  
(mind spinning)  
No, that's -- that's definitely  
what it is.

TELLER  
I don't understand... I thought  
these only grew in the PNW?

MARIA SOL  
(confused)  
How did it get all the way out  
here?

BILL TYLER  
(quietly delirious)  
It walked.

KATE SHERIDAN  
(looking back nervously)  
Okay, great stuff, but... shouldn't  
we get moving again?

REN PARK  
(mischievous grin)  
You know, people knock the Pacific  
Northwest all the time for how much  
it rains. Sometimes the air is full  
of a drizzle so light you can  
practically breathe it in. It's  
pervasive... all-encompassing. But  
it does make for some beautiful  
scenery. There's a reason people  
want to live there.

MARIA SOL  
(not sure what to make of  
this)  
Uh... sure Ren.

REN PARK

But the same water that makes that lush green landscape possible presents some serious problems when it comes to building houses. Anyone know what that much rain does to untreated wood over time?

SAM BAILEY

Ren, could you please get to the point/before--

REN PARK

Well folks, what we have here is nature's magic bullet for combating the wet rot that comes with dreary weather: the cedar tree. They grow all over the place up north, and the softwood is particularly effective in resisting insects, mold, decay...

SAM BAILEY

(suddenly seeing it)  
Fungi.

REN PARK

(nodding)  
Precisely. This tree -- thousands of miles from its native habitat -- is naturally resistant to the very thing trying to kill us. And call me crazy, but I think this is our best chance of surviving the night.

KATE SHERIDAN

(trepidation)  
You mean... climbing all the way up there?

MARIA SOL

(seeing Ren's idea)  
Those upper branches are at least 15 feet off the ground... no way Amanita could get to us, not without us seeing her.

SAM BAILEY

(SHARP, DIZZY LAUGHTER)  
You want to know what happened the last time I climbed a tree? What about...  
(trails off, realizing)  
(MORE)

SAM BAILEY (CONT'D)

Kate -- do you remember what Bill said?

KATE SHERIDAN

(struggling to recall)

Something about... not being on the ground tonight?

SAM BAILEY

(nodding)

That's what I heard too. I don't know how, but... Ren's right. This tree is here for us.

In the background, BILL GROANS slightly.

REN PARK

(worried)

Can he climb?

MARIA SOL

He's going to need some help.

REN PARK

(jumping into action)

Alright everyone -- no time to lose. Those things are still on our tail.

CLICK.

3. EXT. ALLEGHENY NATIONAL FOREST - CEDAR TREE - LATER

REN GRUNTS as he pulls himself up onto the tallest branches next to Sam. Maria is in a small hollow between two branches a little below, with Kate and Bill propped up against the tree nearby and Lawrence and Teller on the opposite side.

REN PARK

(calling down)

Is everyone up?

KATE SHERIDAN

(calling back)

I've got Bill propped up against the tree here -- I think this is as high as we're going to get.

(to Lawrence/Teller)

Thanks guys.

LAWRENCE

No problem.

TELLER

Of course.



MARIA SOL  
(clearly unhappy)  
I'm just peachy.

SAM BAILEY  
I've got a pretty good view of the  
forest from up here, but I don't  
have eyes on them. Anyone else?

MARIA SOL	TELLER
Not me.	Negative.

SAM BAILEY  
(tired, frustrated)  
Alright...  
(beat, MASSIVE EXHALE,  
release of tension)  
Christ on a bike, that was close.

REN PARK  
Is anyone hurt?

KATE SHERIDAN  
Well Bill's... he's fine  
physically, at least. Other than  
that...

LAWRENCE  
(frustrated side comment)  
I should've grabbed a damn  
flashlight, can't see anything  
through these branches.

TELLER  
All I've got is the one on my  
phone.

REN PARK  
I'd suggest saving the battery in  
case you get a signal, Teller.

MARIA SOL  
(parched, tired)  
Anyone bring any water?

REN PARK  
(glad to have some good  
news, grabbing canteen)  
Here, I just filled this from...  
(beat, GROAN)  
Strike that -- I didn't have time  
to treat this before I left camp. I  
don't think the river water's  
potable.

MARIA SOL  
(shrugs, stoic)  
Probably not.

REN PARK  
(putting pieces together)  
Those things waited until nightfall  
to come after us. I'm guessing...  
based on what we know about their  
origins and abilities, we just need  
to make it through the night.

KATE SHERIDAN  
(shivering slightly)  
It's getting colder -- Bill, lean  
up next to me, it'll keep us both  
warmer.

BILL TYLER  
(half-asleep)  
Yes ma'am.

KATE SHERIDAN  
(calling up)  
Maria, you okay up there?

MARIA SOL  
(slightly aloof)  
Oh, this little hovel? It's nice,  
actually -- just big enough for me  
and my body heat. I'll be alright.

SAM BAILEY  
(refocusing on problem)  
So... you think these things are  
nocturnal?

REN PARK  
(hesitant, theorizing)  
Well... Foribus Oraculi only blooms  
in dark spaces, and it's fairly  
susceptible to UV light. So long as  
those things are still being --  
driven by the fungus, they should  
share those weaknesses.

MARIA SOL  
You know, if we're going to keep  
talking about the things trying to  
kill us, we should probably give  
them a name.

TELLER  
(agreeing with Maria)  
"Mycological folk" is a little wordy.

LAWRENCE  
...aaand a little too down-home for my liking.

MARIA SOL  
(offering an idea)  
Mushroom zombies?

KATE SHERIDAN  
(SHUDDERS)  
No thank you.

SAM BAILEY  
(shaking his head)  
Too cartoony.

REN PARK  
Biologically speaking, I *would* say they're just foribus oraculi colonies in a parasitic relationship with a human host, but that doesn't seem to fit what we've seen. They're a bit past mycology by now -- I don't even know how they'd be classified. A hybrid organism created through fusion with the host? A new line of the eukaryotic branch...?

BILL TYLER  
(quiet, soft)  
Oraculites.

SAM BAILEY  
(concerned)  
What was that?

BILL TYLER  
(waking slightly, sitting up)  
That's what Amanita kept calling them. In her mind. Oraculites.

REN PARK  
(intrigued)  
Interesting. Bill... you seemed to sense her presence before she appeared today. Is that true?

BILL TYLER  
(uncertain)  
I... I'm not sure.

REN PARK  
(theorizing)  
The psychic wheel... it linked all  
the participants on a metaphysical  
level. If that connection remained  
open--

SAM BAILEY  
(more pragmatic)  
You don't sense her now, do you?

BILL TYLER  
(considering)  
Distantly. She's... we have time.

Bill slumps back against the tree with a small SIGH.

KATE SHERIDAN  
(stabilizing him)  
Hey, I've got you.

LAWRENCE  
(calling up)  
Dr. Park?

REN PARK  
Yes Lawrence?

LAWRENCE  
If you want me to, I could try  
carving some of the bark off the  
tree. It isn't much, but we could  
use it to build some protection at  
ground level.

REN PARK  
(confused)  
Do we have the tools for that?

LAWRENCE  
Lucky for us, I didn't get  
flashlights, but I *did* manage to  
grab an axe.

TELLER  
(muttering)  
Of all the things to think of...

REN PARK

It might work... keep them from reaching the base of the tree and climbing up, at least. Teller, give her a hand with that.

TELLER

(shaking it off)  
Yessir.

Movement and SMALL GRUNTS FROM LAWRENCE/TELLER as they climb down, then hop off to the forest floor. Faint cutting and chopping noises rise to where Sam and Ren remain, watching the trees.

4. EXT. ALLEGHENY NATIONAL FOREST - CEDAR TREE - CONTINUOUS

SAM BAILEY

(urgent, but reserved)  
Ren, listen: it sounds like you know more about what we're dealing with than anyone else here -- except maybe Bill, but he's in no state to answer questions right now. And you're not telling us the whole truth. Now would be a good time to start doing that.

REN PARK

(beat, hesitates, THEN SIGHS)  
God, ISPHA's going to have a field day when they hear about this.

MARIA SOL

(dryly)  
They can get over it.

REN PARK

Right. Well...  
(beat)  
As I stated earlier, I believe these Oraculites to be almost completely nocturnal. The members of Templi Prophetam were fully human before their final ritual, and even then they'd rarely leave their compound during daylight. As if it wasn't hard enough to get a hold of them/before--

SAM BAILEY

(surprised)

You had contact with the cult?

KATE SHERIDAN

(suspicious)

I thought you said there was no way  
to safely confront them?

REN PARK

(wincing)

Yeah, that... That was a bit of a  
lie. Sorry about that, I signed  
about 10 different NDA's just to  
cover that operation.

(beat, more focused)

I tried to open a line of  
communication with Mr. Robinson  
after he vanished, but he never  
returned my calls. Dr. Caldwell  
refused to sign off on any action  
to extract foribus oraculi samples  
from the compound, and I suspect my  
hollow threats were obvious to  
David, even over voicemail. He was  
always able to tell when people  
weren't telling him the truth...

(beat, SIGHS)

I deeply regret that I wasn't able  
to keep those people from being  
hurt. I tried to reach out to David  
a week before that horrific ritual  
killed him, and now... I'm here.  
Fifteen feet up in a cedar tree  
that shouldn't be possible, hiding  
from monsters with no water, no  
backup, most of my team dead or  
transformed, and four untrained  
civilians who seem infinitely more  
prepared to deal with this than me.

SAM BAILEY

(trying to reassure him)

We'll get through the night, Ren.  
It's going to be okay.

REN PARK

(discouraged)

I wish I had your optimism.

MARIA SOL

Come on Ren, give us some credit --  
this isn't our first rodeo.

(MORE)

MARIA SOL (CONT'D)  
And Anna got out of shit like this  
all the time.

REN PARK  
(darker, guilt)  
Not all the time.

A tense silence falls over the treetop.

KATE SHERIDAN  
(trying to keep things  
moving)  
Just... tell us what you can, Ren.

BILL TYLER  
(sitting up, sounding  
worse for wear)  
I remember Amanita saying--

KATE SHERIDAN  
(steadyng him)  
Whoa, careful Bill--

BILL TYLER  
(more forceful, awake)  
--she said something about Adam.  
And the Earth. That the prophet was  
connected to both.

SAM BAILEY  
(theorizing, mumbling  
slightly)  
Humankind, linked to the power of  
nature? Some kind of... Earth  
energy?

BILL TYLER  
(carrying on)  
She said their rituals were--  
(COUGHS, recovers)  
--meant for the collective body.  
Whatever they were doing, they were  
training themselves -- practicing  
psychic links. And once the final  
ritual took place -- bam!  
Connected, forever. All of them.

REN PARK  
(frowning)  
But it seems like Amanita can  
create new followers instantly now,  
without the rituals.

BILL TYLER  
(shrugs, tired)  
I'm just telling you what she told  
me. You're asking the wrong guy.

REN PARK  
(curious)  
How much of a connection do you  
still feel with Amanita? Can you  
still sense the other Oraculites?

BILL TYLER  
(unsure)  
Not really. Just her. When we were  
back in that bunker, stuck in those  
cages... it was so strong. So  
clear. I think that's why I had a  
hard time keeping up back there,  
you know? It's like I was in the  
cage again. My legs kept curling  
beneath me. It's like Amanita said  
when I first met her... the fascia -  
- all that connective tissue. It  
remembers. The pain. It remembers.

They all go silent again. In the background, Maria has  
started whittling a small branch with a pocketknife.

KATE SHERIDAN  
(gentle suggestion)  
Hey Bill... If you want to go to  
sleep, this might be a good time.  
We'll keep an eye out.

BILL TYLER  
(suddenly sounding very  
tired)  
Yeah... thanks Kate.

KATE SHERIDAN  
(guiding him back)  
Here, just... lean back on the  
trunk and... there. You've got it.

A moment of quiet as Bill settles down, and is fast asleep  
almost immediately.

5. EXT. ALLEGHENY NATIONAL FOREST - CEDAR TREE - CONTINUOUS

Down below, Teller and Lawrence continue to chop at the bark  
every now and then.



REN PARK

(apropos of nothing)

I remember this experiment the University of Mexico did -- a handful of researchers, trying to induce nonlocality through meditation.

KATE SHERIDAN

(slightly annoyed)

And for those of us who don't have PHDs?

REN PARK

(comes back to present)

Basically, they put their subjects in separate faraday cages to cut them off from any external influence.

SAM BAILEY

(intrigued)

Like Morrison's bunker.

REN PARK

(nods, continues)

First, they had them all meditate in the same room together, then moved half of the subjects to a separate location. Then they flashed a red light in front of one group, and the other group had a measurable brain-wave response -- an "evoked potential." Despite the faraday cages, the distance, and the complete lack of communication between the two groups, it seems the subjects were still inked. Their brain waves remained coupled. This might be what happened to Bill and the other survivors of Morrison's experiment--

SAM BAILEY

--only more severe.

REN PARK

(nods)

Based on what I've heard -- well, I'm not entirely sure what they were trying to accomplish. Or what insight Ned was able to give Morrison about what they were interacting with.

(MORE)

REN PARK (CONT'D)  
They were in uncharted waters,  
scientifically speaking. I have to  
wonder--

KATE SHERIDAN  
(confused, intrigued)  
Do you really think science can  
explain what we're dealing with  
now? What Bill's dealing with?

REN PARK  
(firmly)  
Ten thousand years ago, most of  
humanity thought thunderstorms were  
caused by the gods, casting  
judgement down on humankind. Just  
because something is the realm of  
superstition now doesn't mean it's  
unexplainable. Everything in the  
universe plays by the same  
rulebook, even if we don't have all  
the pages yet.

Silence falls over the group -- finally broken by Maria.

MARIA SOL  
(quietly)  
ISPHA had no business sending Bill  
out here with the rest of us.

SAM BAILEY  
Agreed.

REN PARK  
(ashamed)  
He needed more time to recover -- I  
should've seen that. Given how  
poorly this mission has gone,  
though... I'm sure Caldwell will  
agree to let him recover at the  
facility for a while once we get  
back.

MARIA SOL  
(sarcastically)  
*If we get back.*

SAM BAILEY  
(finally noticing what  
she's doing)  
What have you got down there?

MARIA SOL  
(suddenly self-conscious)  
Oh, it's -- uh...  
(SIGHS)  
This.

She holds up the stick she's been carving.

SAM BAILEY  
(slightly concerned)  
Is that, a...

KATE SHERIDAN  
(a little too onboard)  
A cedar shiv? That's not a bad  
idea, actually.

REN PARK  
Well, if worst comes to worst...

SAM BAILEY  
(realizing they're right)  
Any chance you make some for the  
rest of us? I don't have a knife on  
me, otherwise/I'd--

MARIA SOL  
(MARIA LAUGHS, cheerful  
bitterness)  
Of course I'm in the middle of a  
freezing forest making shivs. It's  
what Anna would have wanted.

SAM BAILEY  
(uncomfortable)  
Uh... yeah. Thanks.

6. EXT. ALLEGHENY NATIONAL FOREST - CEDAR TREE - CONTINUOUS

After a moment of silence, Ren turns and calls down to the  
forest floor.

REN PARK  
(louder)  
Lawrence? Teller? How's it going  
down there?

LAWRENCE  
(calling back)  
Got about six feet of defensible  
space in front of the trunk  
covered.

TELLER  
(calling back)  
Mostly, there's -- gah, there's  
just so much ground to cover.

LAWRENCE  
(calling back)  
It's going slower than we thought  
it would.

REN PARK  
(concerned, calling down)  
Do you need any help?

TELLER  
(tired, calling back)  
We'll get it done, doctor. You guys  
rest -- you'll have to keep watch  
once we're done and passed out for  
the night.

REN PARK  
(relieved)  
Deal.

Ren settles back against the tree trunk. After a moment,  
Maria's head pops up from the lower branches.

MARIA SOL  
(tired, frustrated)  
Well Ren, it looks like we're all  
stuck up here with nothing to do  
but listen to whatever scientific  
explanations you can think of.  
Bring it on.

SAM BAILEY  
(agreement)  
She's right. I'm not recording all  
of this for nothing.

REN PARK  
(slightly annoyed)  
Yeah, I did notice that...

SAM BAILEY  
(shaking it off)  
Don't worry, I'll tuck this tape  
away under my mattress when we get  
back. Nice and secure.

REN PARK  
(unsure, wanting to allow  
it)  
(MORE)

REN PARK (CONT'D)  
I can't tell you to do that,  
officially...

SAM BAILEY  
Then officially, I'm not asking  
you.

REN PARK  
(beat, SIGHS)  
Maria's wearing off on you, I  
think.

MARIA SOL  
("as if")  
Ha!

7. EXT. ALLEGHENY NATIONAL FOREST - CEDAR TREE - CONTINUOUS

Feeling a little more at ease, Ren leans back against the  
tree trunk.

REN PARK  
(faked reluctance)  
Alright folks... I'll tell you. At  
least, what I think I know.  
(beat)  
Some of this is speculation, you  
have to understand. I hate spinning  
off too far in that direction, but  
honestly, it's all I really have at  
the moment. I'm exhausted, I'm  
terrified, and... well, I'll admit  
that ISPHA was not ready for this  
just yet. We were expecting a  
stream, and walked right into a  
flood. So the tools I'm working  
with are inference and speculation -  
- whatever my brain jostles to the  
surface in the moment.  
(beat, SIGHS)  
Adam -- my partner -- likes to say  
that my gut often gets ahead of my  
research. Earlier this year, I gave  
a talk at Stanford about the  
possibilities of mycology in the  
study of entropy -- how mycelial  
consciousness could allow us to  
control or reverse the passage of  
time within/a--

MARIA SOL  
(hearing him get faster)  
Dial it back, Ren.

REN PARK

(pause, restarts slower)

What I mean is... fungal matter, as an agent of decay and transformation for dead organisms, is an extremely resilient form of life. Evidence for fungal life has been found in the most extreme environments on earth: deep sea vents, active calderas, even signs that some species can survive in the vacuum of space. Given enough time, they break down rock, crude oil, polyurethane plastics -- they can even absorb radioactive materials and ionizing radiation with few ill effects. For something that resilient and persistent, what does the passage of time really mean?

(beat, almost joking)

In fact, if my suspicions are correct, the only existential weakness of the Oraculites is something that's incredibly unlikely to occur: a disruption to the passage of time itself. But beyond that? Well, it's not very obvious what their weaknesses may be.

SAM BAILEY

You seemed pretty relieved to see the cedar tree.

REN PARK

I still am -- it was a remarkably lucky find. But I'll admit that... well, maybe I shouldn't say anything.

KATE SHERIDAN

(warning)

Ren...

REN PARK

(reluctant honesty)

It's not like using garlic or a wooden stake on a vampire. It's more like... soap in oil. I suspect the cedar wood will repel them, but it's extremely unlikely that it will kill them. Not by itself, at least.

MARIA SOL  
 (seeing his point, not  
 happy about it)  
 And that's where the shivs come in?

REN PARK  
 (not happy about it  
 either)  
 Precisely. If it comes to it, I  
 hope that... introducing cedar to  
 the body of an oraculites might  
 cause the fungus to lose control.  
 It won't save the infected, but it  
 will buy us some time.

MARIA SOL  
 (SCOFFS, unhappy to be  
 part of this)  
 That's a nice way to put it.

SAM BAILEY  
 (trying to get back on  
 track)  
 You mentioned something that Adam  
 said...

REN PARK  
 Ah, right. Sorry, hard to keep my  
 thoughts in order right now.  
 (beat, thinking)  
 So... I gave this talk at Stanford,  
 as a representative of ISPHA. I'd  
 already been working on Mycology  
 research, ever since the Polish  
 expedition. But do you know when I  
 started theorizing about this  
 stuff?  
 (beat)  
 About six months before Babia Gora.  
 ISPHA didn't have any active  
 experiments in mycology running --  
 I was just fascinated by it. I  
 couldn't get enough of the research  
 -- the limited studies that had  
 been done before, of course, but  
 the theory... that was what grabbed  
 my imagination.  
 (beat)  
 I'm an engineer. Up until about a  
 year ago, I designed rockets for a  
 living. But this... all this...  
 sent me down a strange and  
 unexpected rabbit hole.

(MORE)

REN PARK (CONT'D)

I used to spend months at a time haunted and fascinated by the vast reaches of space -- the ultimate fate of the universe -- the implications and mysterious of dark matter, dark energy. They kept me up at all hours, trying to understand... or failing that, to accept. But fungi?

(shakes his head,  
overwhelmed by scale of  
problem)

Fungi is dark *life*. Almost all of mycology is just one big mystery. Its vast networks in every forest on the planet, and even in between -- they're the resource scouts, the messengers, the... well, the fascia of the Earth.

SAM BAILEY

(concerned)

Bill used that word, too.

REN PARK

(nods)

It seems that fascia was one of the primary metaphors Templi Prophetam relied on to spread its gospel. David wanted his followers to emulate the adaptability, the flexibility, the interconnected intelligence of connective tissue as a body of believers. And it seems he was successful.

(beat)

But that brings up another question: why didn't the Oraculites scatter when David died? That, I believe, is our biggest clue about the true nature of Amanita and her disciples.

(beat)

I believe the Oraculites represent an entirely new species -- not a parasitic host, but a fusion of *fungi* and *animalia* into an entirely new classification. But it still has the characteristics of its constituent parts. Mycelia doesn't have a central nervous system that tells it where to grow, where to look for food or resources -- it doesn't need one.

(MORE)



REN PARK (CONT'D)

There is no brain. There is no control system, beyond the basic instructions encoded in DNA. The smallest branch of mycelium can regenerate the entire network if need be, which means -- if the Oraculites are truly impervious to entropy, to decay, to extreme temperatures, radiation, and distance...

(beat)

If my gut is correct, that means they can never truly die. Western science has largely ignored the potential of fungi for centuries, but there are those who caught a glimpse of it: from the Mexican shamanistic traditions that revered their mushroom as "the god fungus," to the Oraculites framing of a psilocybin mushroom as the fruit in the garden of Eden, to Paul Stamets' scientific gospel of mushroom consciousness...

(long beat, wonder)

If they're right -- goddess, then I think they might have achieved immortality. Of a sort, at least.

8. EXT. ALLEGHENY NATIONAL FOREST - CEDAR TREE - CONTINUOUS

The sudden sound of scrambling motion down below as Lawrence and Teller climb back into the tree.

LAWRENCE

(calling up, frightened)

Dr. Park!

TELLER

Up ahead -- look!

Silence as Ren and the others stare down into the darkened forest as fifty pairs of feet crunch through the leaves and underbrush at an unhurried pace.

SAM BAILEY

(stunned, terrified)

What do we do?

REN PARK

(no answers for him)

You tell me.

The footsteps below come to a stop.... then, in the crushing silence, one person steps forward.

AMANITA

(relaxed)

Well hi y'all. Told ya you  
should've run.

BILL TYLER

(slowly, asleep)

Forever and ever. Forever and ever.  
Forever and ever.

REN PARK

(under breath, terrified)

Christ.

CLACK. The recording ends.

ROLL END THEME  
AND CREDITS