

The Last Broadcaster

The static was a constant companion, a sound like frying bacon that filled the cramped radio booth. Elias tightened the headphones over his ears, leaning into the microphone's worn grille. Outside, the perpetual twilight of the dust-choked sky pressed against the reinforced glass. He was, as far as he or anyone else knew, the last broadcaster on Earth.

"Good evening," he began, his voice a familiar, calm baritone that he projected into the void. "This is Beacon 7, broadcasting on all emergency frequencies. If you're out there, you're not alone."

He'd been saying it for twenty years. Ever since the Collapse, when the sky had turned ochre and the cities had gone silent, one by one. He'd been a trainee then, a kid fetching coffee, left behind in the subterranean station when the Director made a run for the surface. The station was self-sufficient, powered by a geothermal vent that rumbled deep beneath the mountain. It had food for a century and water for a millennium. All it lacked was an audience.

Tonight, he read from a tattered copy of *Moby Dick*, his voice rising and falling with the tempestuous sea, a world of vibrant blue he could barely remember. He imagined someone huddled around a scavenged receiver, a family in a concrete bunker, a lone wanderer on the salt flats. He gave them stories. He gave them the weather report ("Dusty, with a high probability of more dust") and played music from the station's vast vinyl archive—Sinatra, Bowie, The Beatles—ghosts singing for other ghosts.

He never expected a reply. The equipment was strictly one-way, designed to punch a signal through atmospheric interference, not to listen. His job wasn't a dialogue; it was an act of faith. A testament that humanity had been here, that it had created art and music, that it had loved and lost and told stories about it all.

After the music faded, he signed off with the same words as always. "This is Elias Thorne from Beacon 7. I'll be here tomorrow. Don't lose hope. And goodnight."

He switched off the broadcast transmitter, and the booth fell into an unnerving silence, the friendly static gone. It was in this moment that he always felt the crushing weight of his solitude. He was a lighthouse keeper for a world without ships.

He was about to remove his headphones when he heard it.

It wasn't on the broadcast frequency. It was a faint crackle on the station's old, disused comms channel, a line he hadn't checked in over a decade. He held his breath, turning a dial crusted with grime. The crackle grew louder, resolving itself. Through a thick haze of interference, a voice, thin and reedy, pierced the silence of twenty years.

"...hope," the voice said, broken and distant. "We hear you. We have hope. Goodnight, Beacon 7."

The signal died.

Elias sat back in his chair, the worn leather creaking. He looked at the microphone, at the silent vinyl records, at the thick concrete walls that had been his prison and his sanctuary. A single tear traced a path through the dust on his cheek. He reached forward, his hand steady, and switched the broadcast transmitter back on. He leaned into the microphone, a smile spreading across his face for the first time in years. He had an audience. He cleared his throat and began to speak.