

# **BADLANDS COLA - 106 - “REWIND”**

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## **SCENE 106.1**

**MUSIC THEME: “FEW COLOURS” BY OTNO.** An ominous, building track featuring a wary electric guitar and the keens of a theremin.

**STRATHCONA:** Badlands Cola. Episode Six: Rewind.

**FADE IN.**

**EXT. COMFORTINA PARKING LOT / INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT - D4**

*A lone set of FOOTSTEPS echoes through a deserted parking lot.*

*Music: Skittering, anxious guitar plucks.*

**SUNNY:** *(To the audience)* I find myself, somehow, back at the Comfortina. It’s dark out. How is it dark out?

*A motel room door is hastily OPENED and CLOSED, shutting out the hum of CICADAS. Inside, the air-con HUMS, but it’s all a little too quiet. A shaken SUNNY still tries to move about their nighttime routine, the SOUNDS of which permeate their thoughts...*

**SUNNY:** *(To the audience)* Closing the motel door behind me should feel safe. But tonight, the click of the lock echoes hollow in the too-small room, the darkness suddenly reminding me of when I was a kid, running up the basement stairs after the lights went out. I punch on the overhead lamp, I deadbolt the door. I don't think about the VHS tapes stashed in my backpack. I don't think about what's on them. I don't.

I use the room's amenities like a shield. Strip the day's clothes, make some instant coffee, drink some instant coffee, shower. It all goes by too quickly, and I'm left standing half-wet in the centre of the starkly furnished room, dripping onto the aging blue carpet. Briefly, the thought of trying to report everything I've just seen flashes like lightning through my mind, and I almost scream in frustration and horror.

It's too fucking quiet.

***The radio CLICKS on to a tinny blare of psychedelic late night MUSIC laced gently with STATIC.***

**SUNNY:** *(To the audience)* The town might only have the one radio station, but it does help. Slowly, I feel myself loosen up enough to get into an old t-shirt and crawl under the covers. It's another twenty minutes before I can turn off the lights.

***The SONG on the radio warbles away, fading and echoing as time stretches on...***

**SUNNY:** *(To the audience)* Three hours later, I'm still wide awake. Partially because I'm a genius who downed two cups of shitty instant coffee right before bed, but mostly because my mind is racing. I

have too many questions. If only the crooning voices on the radio could answer them....And then I realise.

**FADE TO BLACK.**

**SCENE 106.2**

**FROM BLACK.**

**EXT. BADLANDS / INT. RAPTORBUS - NIGHT - D4**

*On a familiar patch of desert dirt on the outskirts of town, SUNNY shivers in the cold WIND and KNOCKS impatiently on the door of the Raptorbus.*

**SUNNY:** *(Shivering)* Come on...

*At last, the door CREAKS open wide.*

**STRATHCONA:** ...Hi?

**SUNNY:** Hey.

**STRATHCONA:** You know, I was about to crack a joke about you forgetting to feed yourself again, but you just look miserable.

Why is your hair wet?

**SUNNY:** Sorry to disappoint on so many fronts.

**STRATHCONA:** Is there a reason you're dropping by at 2 AM, or...?

**SUNNY:** Yes. Sort of. I don't know, it's...

**STRATHCONA:** *(Interrupting)* Get in. You're letting all the heat out.

**The door CLOSES and SUNNY steps into the insulated silence of the Raptorbus. STRATHCONA leads them to the rear of the bus, where he works. Here, the current stream of MUSIC bumps along gently beneath a hypnotic chorus of radio CLICKS and STATIC bursts.**

**SUNNY:** *(To the audience)* The instant I step foot into the bus-turned-radio-station, I'm hit with a blast of warm air that sponges the desert chill from my damp skin.

My last visit here was such a rollercoaster experience that I hardly recognize it now, in full "radio station" mode. Strathcona's managed to scrape up a den of audio equipment from at least four different decades, plus a musty broken-in couch, and enough flickering dials and waveforms to make it look a little like Christmas. There's even a little stuffed Raptor perched on top of a box of old Nancy Sinatra records. Most of the mess from before has been cleaned up.

The man plants himself in a threadbare swivel chair near a bank of soundboards, and I'm struck by how different he looks. *Comfortable*, I realise with a start. He looks comfortable.

**STRATHCONA's chair SQUEAKS as he leans back and CRACKS one of his now-signature bottles.**

**STRATHCONA:** Cola?

**SUNNY:** Yeah, hard pass.

**STRATHCONA:** *(Drinks)* All right, gumshoe, what's up?

**SUNNY:** Yeah. Uh. I found something. Something big.

**STRATHCONA:** Cool; that only took, what, three days? What did you find?

*(Pause)* Sunny? Tell me what you found.

**SUNNY:** I don't know if I can. If I...if I should.

**STRATHCONA:** What's that supposed to mean?

**SUNNY:** I don't know if I can trust you.

**STRATHCONA:** Now? You're wondering that *now*?

**SUNNY:** I was talking to Hawthorne. She told me that you used to be a park warden like her.

**STRATHCONA:** ...yeah? For most of my twenties, sure.

**SUNNY:** She wouldn't tell me why you left.

**STRATHCONA:** Maybe because she's a good boss.

**SUNNY:** There's more. Someone *warned me* about you.

**STRATHCONA:** *(Serious)* Who?

**SUNNY:** The paleontologist. Doctor Gillespie.

**STRATHCONA:** Ah. *(Pained)* What did he...say?

**SUNNY:** He said you knew about the Sparville Incident. He said you were *there*.

**STRATHCONA:** ...Jesus.

**SUNNY:** Well? Were you? It sounds like you got *fired* from the park wardens; is that why?

**STRATHCONA:** ...Sort of.

**SUNNY:** Fucking hell, Strathcona!

**STRATHCONA:** (*Agitated*) Will you even give me a chance to explain?

**SUNNY:** What, after you lied to me?

**STRATHCONA:** I told you that what happened out near Sparville was a big, nasty, painful thing that no one likes to talk about. That's not a lie.

**SUNNY:** Then tell me what happened! Right now, I want to hear.

**STRATHCONA:** Okay. (*Deep breath.*) It was a few summers back, right? Way before anyone knew how bad things had gotten with Jasper. Mel had been gone for years, so it was only him and his parents. And that summer, he just...changed. Stopped showing up around town, didn't even seem to be living in the old family house. When the news came out that the Moon parents had died...they were a bit young, sure, but it seemed like enough of an explanation.

**SUNNY:** His cult was just hitting its stride; people from this town had already started to join up with him. We know that now.

**STRATHCONA:** Well, back then, no one did. The Moons were already an odd bunch, and this didn't exactly seem out of character. Everything felt like business as usual. Until we started getting weird calls at the Park office.

Mostly at night. People were hearing strange sounds in the Badlands. Seeing things. Strange...lights. Seemed like it was out near Sparville. Given the place has been abandoned for decades, it made no sense, but...ultimately it was the park, our responsibility, so Boss Hawthorne sent me out to investigate. She figured it was just the usual grad party bender, but something about it felt off.

**SUNNY:** You knew it was Jasper.

**STRATHCONA:** I didn't know *shit*. I saddled up and rode out there at first light, right after a big summer rainstorm had blown through. Right before I hit Sparville proper, there they were. Jasper huddled in the mud and the mesas with his...people.

**SUNNY:** His *cult*.

**STRATHCONA:** Again, I didn't know *what* it was. All I knew was I was suddenly looking at a makeshift campsite of a dozen soggy townfolk, plus a few I didn't recognise. They were...I don't know. Digging.

**Music:** *Warbling, underwater guitar, barely audible.*

**SUNNY:** (*Disturbed*) What?

**STRATHCONA:** *Digging*. Not the delicate little excavations the paleontologists at the centre do; this was like...you know like that

book *Holes*. Shovels and work lamps and piles of mud everywhere. Amateur, but methodical.

Right smack in the middle of them was Jasper Moon. He walked up. Everyone just watched.

For a moment, it was like he didn't even recognise me. Then suddenly he just sort of...smiled at me. *Past* me. Asked how I'd been, like I'd bumped into him at the gas station, not in the middle of the desert circled up like a new age gold rush.

Right then, all I could think about was how miserable his life had turned out. Parents gone, house empty, sister...nowhere to be found.

I don't know. You try to rationalise things. I asked him if he and his friends were trying to set up camp or something, he said yes.

**SUNNY:** (*Incredulous*) Strathcona...

**STRATHCONA:** Look, I know. I told him he didn't have the permit to be camping out of Blue Dunes, or to be digging like he was, and he apologised. So I wrote up the biggest ticket I could justify, told him to keep it down after dark...and I left.

**SUNNY:** That was it? You just let him go?

**STRATHCONA:** I couldn't make sense of it in the moment, okay? The ticket was all I could wrap my brain around.

No one knew how bad I'd...

No one knew how bad I'd fucked up until later.

**SUNNY:** When four people went missing.

**STRATHCONA:** They had been with Jasper that day. At that "dig." Covered in sweat and mud, some of them still soaked to the skin, holding shovels and...gardening trowels and...

Their families started calling the Park office; begging us to look for them out there; crying. Doctor Gillespie was the only one who called in for Levesque.

**SUNNY:** Did you see him out there?

**STRATHCONA:** *(Bitter chuckle)* Do you have any idea how many times I've laid awake asking myself that? The truth is that I don't remember seeing him. But that doesn't mean much.

**SUNNY:** Were you the one who found them? The bodies?

**STRATHCONA:** No. The RCMP were.

*The music fades. STRATHCONA leans over to RUMMAGE around in a nearby filing cabinet. From it, he pulls a stack of photographs and hands them to SUNNY. The space they're in suddenly feels too small, the heated air too thick...*

**STRATHCONA:** Here.

**SUNNY:** What are these?

**STRATHCONA:** Photos that didn't make it into the papers. Don't ask me why I have them.

**SUNNY:** *(To the audience)* The bundle Strathcona hands me is thin: a stack of pristine photos taken the old fashioned way. I leaf through them carefully, holding each one with fingertips as I scan. The first few seem like mistakes; rectangles of near-perfect black slashed through with only sparse flashes of lighter greys and browns. Then I get to the middle of the stack, and my throat thickens at the sudden flash of a familiar colour: red.

A trickle of blood between two ridges of a mesa, as if the stone itself had been cut. An abandoned white van, overturned and somehow half-buried in sand streaked with black. A baseball cap flattened into sun-baked earth, surrounded by holes the size of sedans. A severed foot.

**SUNNY:** *(To the audience)* It's still in its sandal.

I throw the stack onto the floor; gingerly, Strathcona gathers them back up and puts them away without a word.

**STRATHCONA:** Sorry. I figured you'd already seen these. During your investigation.

**SUNNY:** No. I, um...my boss. Detective Nicholson didn't want...it was classified.

You were the last to see those people alive; you must have been a suspect.

**STRATHCONA:** Oh, big time. I did every interview, answered all their questions. I guess they realised Jasper was at large and let me walk. But the damage had been done; whether I knew it or not, I had let a killer loose. Hawthorne fired me from the Park office as a half-assed apology to the families, then resigned herself.

**SUNNY:** But it was an accident. You just misjudged.

**STRATHCONA:** Listen. Would I have let Jasper off with a ticket if I knew what was waiting for those people out there? Of course not. Was my judgment perfectly unbiased despite my history with the Moons? With Mel?

**SUNNY:** *(Conceding)* Probably not.

**STRATHCONA:** But hey: now you know why I'm not popular at the paleontology centre. Doctor Gillespie thinks I'm a piece of shit for what I did; I can hear it in his voice every time he calls to tell me the place is still shut down. I guess it's up to you to figure out how you feel.

**SUNNY:** Why...why didn't you tell me this on day one?

**STRATHCONA:** Why didn't I immediately implicate myself as an accomplice to your cult leader, you mean?

**STRATHCONA** *idly CRACKS open another cola.*

**STRATHCONA:** Would you have believed me? I mean, do you...do you even believe me now?

**SUNNY:** Yeah, well. I haven't pepper sprayed you yet, have I?

**STRATHCONA:** *(Relieved, gently teasing)* There's still time.

**The two sit in nearly-comfortable SILENCE for a moment. Too long, STRATHCONA decides, as he presses a BUTTON on his soundboard**

*and the radio station's familiar RAPTOR SCREECH rips through the air, startling SUNNY.*

**SUNNY:** What the hell — ?!

**STRATHCONA:** Raptor soundboard. Good for breaking tension.

**SUNNY:** *(Under breath)* I hate you.

**STRATHCONA:** No you don't. Cola?

*STRATHCONA settles and CRACKS another bottle of cola. The tension wrought by the unsettling photographs eases into something more comfortable between the two; the bus once again feels cozy rather than stifling.*

**SUNNY:** Why not.

*A second bottle of the infamous bootleg cola opens with a carbonated HISS, which SUNNY grudgingly accepts.*

**STRATHCONA:** Cheers.

*The glass bottles CLINK.*

**SUNNY:** *(Drinking, choking)* Oh god, it's awful. And warm.

**STRATHCONA:** Yeah, it grows on you, I promise.

So, you gonna tell me about the big discovery that's got you so spooked?

**SUNNY:** I'm not "spooked"...

**STRATHCONA:** Sunny, come on. You were obviously freaked out when you got here, and my little Sparville horror story probably didn't help.

**SUNNY:** Yeah, well, It might be *connected* to your little Sparville horror story. I found something concrete on Melinda. Strathcona, I found *tapes*.

**STRATHCONA:** Like, video tapes? Of Mel?

**SUNNY:** Yes. I don't know how old they are. It wasn't just Mel, either. Jasper, too.

**STRATHCONA:** Jesus...

**SUNNY:** It was like they were using them to communicate with each other. Most of them are Jasper, spouting cult doctrine and begging Melinda to help him build a "beacon?" And to start digging.

**STRATHCONA:** Okay, the beacon sounds like standard issue cult crap, but *digging*?

**SUNNY:** Just like Sparville, I know. But that's not the craziest part. The last tape...I think it actually is Melinda. In the Moon house.

**STRATHCONA:** *What?* Was she...?

**SUNNY:** Alive. Paranoid. She said the beacon was built, the dig had begun, and they had "received" the first set of specimens and they were "waiting for the final fossil," whatever that means. It seemed like the last message sent.

Strathcona, I think we have to admit that Melinda might be helping her brother.

**STRATHCONA:** No. No, we don't know that yet. Jasper was sending fossils to Mel. That doesn't mean she knew why, or what to do with them once she found them.

**SUNNY:** yeah, we need to talk about the finding part. How was Jasper sending anything to her?

**STRATHCONA:** You said she "received" them by digging them up? So he was burying them somewhere for her to find.

**SUNNY:** Dude, *how?* He was in the city, *miles* away. He must have had hundreds of dinosaur bits stashed in that laundromat.

**STRATHCONA:** But they were all missing, weren't they? So he could have—

**SUNNY:** Listen, if our only theory as to how Jasper smuggled hundreds of invaluable fossils across the province is "weird Moon magic," I'd like to put a pin in the "how" question. I want to know *why*. What was the final piece Mel was waiting for?

*(Pause, thinking)* I wonder...

**STRATHCONA:** What?

**SUNNY:** There was one bone — fossil, whatever — in Jasper's collection that looked...I don't know, more important than the others. It was in the background of all his internet recruitment videos. Part of a skull, maybe...like the jawbone or something.

**STRATHCONA:** You think *that* was the final fossil he smuggled out to Mel?

**SUNNY:** I don't know...I don't think it ever got to her. Like...like things got interrupted somehow. Something spooked Melinda. Something about the bones she found.

**STRATHCONA:** Please tell me you have the tapes with you.

**SUNNY:** (*Sarcastic*) Oh let's see: do I have the one scrap of hard evidence I've actually found on this case so far?

**STRATHCONA:** Yeah yeah, stupid question, just...let's see them.

***A TV is turned ON. STRATHCONA's unusually anxious energy is evident in the way he FUMBLES the first tape as it goes into the nearby VCR. Ancient buttons CLICK as he REWINDS the tape, only to be met by a wall of sharp STATIC.***

**SUNNY:** I don't understand...

***He tries FASTFORWARDING, to the same result.***

**STRATHCONA:** Were they all glitched like this? Just static?

**SUNNY:** No. No, they were fine before. Just try another one.

***The first tape POPS from the mouth of the VCR and is REPLACED by a second tape. STRATHCONA again SCANS back and forth on the tape, only to find the same disappointing GLITCHED footage.***

**STRATHCONA:** Come on...

**SUNNY:** They weren't like this, I don't know what happened.

**STRATHCONA:** Shit!

*His frustration spiking to an unexpected point, STRATHCONA SLAMS his palm down on the VCR. The static CUTS short.*

**STRATHCONA:** (*Frustrated*) Maybe it's just my VCR. The electronics store in town opens in (*checks watch*) seven hours, we can pick up a new one and try again.

**SUNNY:** Yeah. Yeah, sure, we can try that. I'm sorry. I know you want to see her.

**STRATHCONA:** (*Tense*) It's fine. Just meet me at the store tomorrow morning, okay?

**SUNNY:** Okay.

*Music: A lonely vintage guitar plucks anxiously over thin violin swells.*

*SUNNY leaves the bus, the door CLOSING behind them. They walk back to their truck, alone in the night.*

**SUNNY:** (*To the audience*) As I leave the dark, cramped, weirdly comfortable warmth of the Raptorbus, and step out into the wide-open freeze that is the Badlands at night, I feel something that's a little bit like...loss? I can't tell if it's because I'm suddenly alone in the desert, or if it's something closer to guilt.

I didn't tell Strathcona about my wire. That I might still have an audio recording of Melinda on it, even if I suspect it'll be just as scrambled as the VHS tapes. Not just because I doubt he'll be understanding

about the fact that I've been wearing it this whole time, but something else entirely: the look on his face when, just for a moment, he thought he might get a glimpse of his old friend.

Do I trust him? Yes...but that's right now. If Melinda Moon were standing right in front of him, the remains of her brother's cult in her outstretched hands, those coyote eyes gleaming...I'm not so sure.

I hate that I'm not.

***SUNNY's truck roars to life as they drive back to civilisation.***

**SUNNY:** *(To the audience)* I drive back to the Comfortina at half-speed the whole way, my throat only unclenching as I pull into the neon-drenched parking lot, alone. Again.

***The music strumming picks up, carrying through the credits...***

**CREDITS:** "Badlands Cola" is written, directed, and produced by Renee Taylor Klint. This episode was sound designed and mixed by Sarah Buchynski of Polarity Audio Works, and featured the voice talents of Liz Morey and Briggon Snow. Special thanks to our Artists' Representative, Giancarlo Herrera. Visit [badlandscola.com](http://badlandscola.com) and follow BadlandsCola on Twitter for show notes, announcements, behind the scenes content, and more.

Good night.

**END OF EPISODE**