

Ninety Degrees South

EPISODE TWELVE: Nine Planets

INTRO MUSIC

RE-INTERVIEW IN PROCESS. HUM OF STATION BACKGROUND. FADE IN DR. VAN ZANDT SPEAKING AND BASS WRITING IN HIS NOTEBOOK

GUSTAV

I'm Doctor Gustav Van Zandt. I'm the head of the DSL lab and Cosmology program here on the station. This is my second season on the ice.

BASS

(focused)

Doctor Van Zandt, can you confirm that although you are not detained nor in custody, that I have properly advised you of your constitutional right to not speak with me or your right to have an attorney present at any time, you fully understand those rights and you have elected to freely provide this interview with no coercion from myself nor anybody else.

GUSTAV

Yes, that is correct.

BASS

Now, Doctor. . . .

PAGE FLIP

BASS

. . .You arrived shortly after Doctor Jovac did in the MAPO lab?
You were called by him?

GUSTAV

Also correct. My lab, the DSL lab is only a short walk from
MAPO. I could get there the fastest and Doctor Jovac knew I
always start my days at oh-seven-hundred. He knew I'd
respond.

BASS

And, what time did he call you?

GUSTAV

(PONDERS A BIT)

Somewhere between nine-twenty and nine-thirty, If I
remember correctly.

BASS

Would you please describe the scene when you arrive and
were shown to Doctor Rodney's office?

GUSTAV:

I don't think I've ever seen so much blood in my life. Doctor
Rodney was; his clothes were soaked in blood, and he was
already blue. (pause, shudder) Horrible, just horrible.

BASS:

And beyond this, there wasn't anything else of significance you can recall? Anything out of place or odd.

GUSTAV:

(stern)

Finding dead bodies may be a 'Thursday' event for you, Deputy Marshal, but I hope you understand after being called by Jovac to assist and seeing a dead and murdered colleague on the floor, I didn't exactly take the time toinventory the room!

BASS:

(deadpan)

I'm sure, Doctor. I was, of course, referring to reviewing the photos and video of the scene taken later that morning.

GUSTAV:

I've reviewed those photos and the video multiple times. By myself and, if you'll recall, in your presence during our first interview. I'm afraid there is little more I can offer.

2SP

STOPS WRITING, SOUND OF PEN PLACED ON TABLE

BASS:

(probing)

Tell me about the Ice Tunnels Doctor.

2SP

GUSTAV:

(Trying to sidestep)

What of them? Those are...maintenance tunnels, from what I've heard. Scientists don't tend to be down there.

SOUND OF CHAIR SLOWLY CREEKING BACK

BASS:

(relaxed) (Slow exhale)

Hrmm. I got the opportunity to visit the tunnels about a week or so past. Very impressive. (Pauses for effect) I liked the 'gravity well' sign somebody hung. Very humorous.

GUSTAV:

(Getting antsy)

If you say so.

BASS:

(reflective)

Funny thing, however. The back wall...

GUSTAV:

(Noise like he tries to say something but stops)

BASS:

(Acting confused)

It was... very odd.

GUSTAV:

(Anxious)

Look, I'm not quite sure what this may have to do with me, but I'm a very busy man ...with experiments...

BASS:

(cuts to the chase)

So then you aren't affiliated with Project Atlas?

SILENCE, JUST THE HUM OF THE STATION FOR SEVERAL SECONDS.

GUSTAV:

(very nervous)

I'm, ummmm, not familiar with that project, Deputy Marshal.

BASS:

(Feigned surprise)

Really?

SOUND OF CHAIR SLOWLY CREEKING TO THE FLOOR

BASS:

(curt and direct)

Because the look on your face, the sudden absence of color to your cheeks, increased breathing and sudden eye dilation tells quite a different story.

GUSTAV:

(nervous)

I uhhh, I'm...

BASS:

(forward, pushing)

Oh, come on, Doctor Van Zandt! Do you honestly think I would have been sent to this station without being fully briefed? Without being informed about Atlas. About Beauregard-Lowing Research and Development? About Madeline Dantes?

2SP

GUSTAV:

(Nervous, close to panicked)

At this time, I assert my fifth amendment right to remain silent as well as sixth amendment right to have counsel present.

BASS:

Funny...you'll talk openly about a murder investigation where you were in the vicinity of the deceased pre-discovery, at a minimum making you a potential suspect, but this...this you invoke your rights over?

GUSTAV:
(Trying to stay calm)
At this time, I assert by fifth amendment...

BASS:
(off-kilter a bit)
Yes, yes, Doctor. I acknowledge you have invoked your constitutional rights.

TAPPING THE BODYCAM

BASS:
It's all documented on the formal record as well, so sit at ease. I'm going to go on talking even though you have no obligation to answer.

PAPERS BEING TAKEN FROM FOLDER AND DROPPED ON TABLE

BASS:
Doctor Van Zandt, were you aware that Doctor Rodney was formally applying and aggressively seeking to take over your grant when it renewed next year?

2SP

BASS:
According to those documents, he petitioned NSF to be awarded the position of MAPO *AND* DSL division head and had...well, let's just say a less than professional opinion of your scientific capabilities.

2SP

BASS:
Oh, you can feel free to look through those Doctor. Those are eight pages of submissions to the Office of Polar Project leadership with his formal critique of you and lack of leadership over the other scientists.

2SP

BASS:

(poking at him)

And I'm still not clear on what 'fatuousness' even means.

GUSTAV:

(angry)

Enough! I have no intention to remain here and be insulted.
Am I free to leave Deputy Marshal?

BASS:

(feigned defensiveness)

These aren't my words, Doctor; they're Doctor Rodney's.
However...it does make for the potential for a solid motive to
commit murder, wouldn't you say?

GUSTAV:

I wish to leave, am I free to go?

BASS:

You are not detained Doctor, this interview is voluntary, and
you are free to leave at your discretion.

SOUND OF CHAIR BEING PUSHED BACK, DOOR OPENING AND THEN
CLOSING BEHIND.

BASS:

(Formal)

Deputy Marshal Bass Marlow, Interview of Doctor Gustav Van
Zandt suspended at the interviewee's request. Has invoked
constitutional rights. Seven December 2021. 11:30 HRS.

ROBOTIC VOICE – RECORDING STOPPED

3SP

ELECTRIC BEEP

STATION HUM ABOVE, CLOSED QUARTERS, BASS' BERTH

BASS:

(VO)

Diane, it's 12:30, and I'm in my quarters. I have to admit I have mixed feelings about returning here. While I'm confident the chemical contamination has been dealt with, returning to the scene of the crime, figuratively & literally, is something entirely different.

2SP

BASS:

(VO)

It took me several days, but I finally convinced Zeke to stop providing me with round-the-clock guards. His heart is in the correct place, but it's entirely unnecessary. The drop ceiling has been fortified with a mesh grid above the ceiling tiles to ensure nobody else can drop anything into my Berth. Beyond that, I have to accept that little more can be done.

SOUND OF SOMEBODY WALKING DOWN THE HALL, AND THEN A DOOR OPENING AND CLOSING.

BASS:

(VO)

I'm feeling almost back to normal. This week my breathing hasn't been painful at all, and there was only one instance where I had to use the inhaler. The nauseous feelings went away after a few days, and I'm not getting winded so quickly. I don't know if the cold, dry air helped or hindered, but I'm certainly happy to be back.

SIP DRINK

BASS:

(VO)

Completed re-interview of MAPO Department head, Doctor Gustav Van Zandt. I rattled his cage reasonably well, and while the responses he demonstrated showed he was holding back, I don't think it was about the murder, only this 'Project Atlas' they're working on.

DESK DRAWER SLIDING OPEN AND THEN CLOSED

BASS:

(VO)

Also reasonably confident I can clear him as a suspect in the murder of Doctor Rodney as well as my attempted murder. If he had been the one to take back the thumb drive, he would have looked at it first; wanting to know what I had. He would have seen the emails and references to Project Atlas. When I mentioned it to him in the interview, facial color pallor, respiration, perspiration, and pupil dilation showed fear. He wouldn't have acted that way had he already known I was aware of Atlas.

DEEP BREATH

BASS:

(VO)

Here is how I predict this will go. It's been one hour since I spoke with Van Zandt, two hours since talking with Jovac. By this point, one of them will have run to Waynewright, worried how I could have learned about Project Atlas, Madeline Dantes, and the rest. If those emails I found are to be believed, only four people on station knew about Atlas. Waynewright, Jovac, Van Zandt and Rodney. With Rodney

dead, they'll be paranoid of each other, and potentially whoever was sent down to replace Rodney.

2SP. SOUND OF BALLPOINT PEN CLICKING, WRITING IN NOTEBOOK

BASS:
(aloud to himself)(VO)
Figure. out. who. replaced. Rodney

BALLPOINT PEN CLICK

BASS:
(VO)
Their paranoia will be at an all-time high...(guessing), which will lead Waynewright to contact his pal at BOLO?

BASS:
(VO)
No, no...no, Diane, that's not Waynewright's style. He's primarily concerned with his image. His own PR. Telling BOLO I found out means security down here was breached, which would directly reflect his ability as station manager. No, he'll wait a bit. (*thinks it out*) He'll wait to see if *I* approach *him* with Project Atlas.

BASS:
(VO)(Considers)
Yes, I know this is the whole proverbial 'does he know, that I know, that he knows...' issue. (SIGH) I think the best thing to do is leave the ball in their court and see what they do with it.

SOUND OF POWER DISTORTIONLIGHTS AND FANS DIMMING AND THEN POWERING BACK ON. A POWER 'BLIP'.

BASS:

(VO)

We just had a power blip. Second one this week. Generally, at any other location, that would be a true non-event. Here, where life support depends on electrical supply constantly, a Power blip will be taken seriously. No doubt Zeke and his crew are scrambling to start diagnosing the system.

DRINK

BASS:

(VO)

Finally, Diane, on a personal level, and I know this will come as no surprise, the Yule spirit even strikes at the opposite pole from Father Christmas. In the halls and on the berth doors, I'm seeing decorations and lights going up. A few more days, and I expect to see ugly sweaters and a tree or menorah being put up in the galley.

2SP

BASS:

(VO)

I'm not one for holiday celebrations. Ever since...since my wife, I haven't had much need for celebrations, or people, or Yule time cheer. (slight chuckle) This year is different...I'll leave it at that. I'm hungry Diane, time to see what they're serving for lunch.

2SP, THEN ELECTRONIC BOOP

FADE IN, OBVIOUSLY BACK IN GALLEY, MANY PEOPLE MILLING ABOUT AND CHATTING. SILVERWARE ON FLATWARE. GENERIC CHRISTMAS MUSIC.

MIKHAIL

(Excited)

Ah, Tovarisch! Come...sit with me. Share my table and good holiday cheers.

BASS:

(Happy)

Thanks Mikhail, I appreciate that.

CHAIR SLIDING OUT

BASS:

What are you writing?

MIKHAIL:

Haiku. ...well, it will one day be haiku if I can get to ending. Is just 'Hai' right now.

BASS:

You write...Haiku poems?

MIKHAIL:

Nyet. I write half-finished poems. No matter how hard, I cannot come up with ending I like.

HISS OF A FIZZY DRINK BEING OPENED

BASS:

(Interested)

When, may I ask did you become interested in learning to write haiku?

MIKHAIL:

Meh! Is old story, same as with most people I suppose. I was traveling and saw writing in beautiful Japanese characters. I

asked man behind counter what it was, and he said...Haiku poems.

CRUNCH OF APPLE BITE

MIKHAIL:

(Mouth partially full of Apple)

Now...I know what you think and yes, I don't understand why haiku was in Aleppo, but I...

BASS:

(confused)

Aleppo? Syria?

MIKHAIL:

There is more than one Aleppo?

BASS:

No it's...You're at a market in Aleppo. Discovering a Shinto-based form of expression in a predominately Muslim country?

MIKHAIL:

(Annoyed)

Da, like I said...Story told many times!...May I?

BASS:

Of course! Of course! Please, you have my full attention.

MIKHAIL:

So... market man tells me, go down street, turn right, walk to man with monkey and organ, make right, on and on and on...until I get to beautiful temple.

2SP

MIKHAIL:

(Proud)

That is where I meet Haiku master... Steve Katzenberg!

BASS:

(Stifling laugh)

Forgive me...and I do not mean to profile at all...but I have to ask...in a Muslim country, and a name like that; I assume....

MIKHAIL:

Oh Da! He was Canadian.

BASS:

Ok, didn't see that coming. Please...go on.

MIKHAIL:

For three weeks, I visit him each day, and each day he shows me Haiku poems. Famous poems and newer poems show me the meaning and how they all deal with nature. Is very moving!

BASS:

(guessing)

So you asked to learn?

MIKHAIL:

I wanted to learn, da Tovarisch! I had already mastered painting, sculpture, woodwork, origami, glass blowing, weaving, but no art with words. This...this is Mikhail's goal!

BASS:

(ponders a moment)

Steve Katzenberg?

MIKHAIL:

To be fair...he did the study from Ogiwara Seisensui, and it was Master Seisensui' teaching that purist and most meaning haiku are written where season is harsh and long.

BASS:

So ...Steve Katzenberg went to the desert, where people would not understand him; oreven worse.

MIKHAIL:

You understand now! Harsh season. Long season! It is what I wish to do. To master, I must find most brutal and longest season of all. So...I come here.

BASS:

(Clarifying)

You came here, to the south pole, as a cust...

MIKHAIL:

Ehhhhhh!

BASS:

As a Janitor

MIKHAIL:

Spasibo.

BASS

To master the art...of haiku?

MIKHAIL

(Modestly)

Well, and to pick up and clean after smarty-pants science people; but...Da...for haiku as well. Until I can finish most perfect Hikau, I will keep the station clean and pure, and in time, station will reward me.

BASS

(Deep sigh)

Mikhail, I used to think you were among the most interesting people I met on this station. Now, you may be top three in my life.

MIKHAIL

(modest)

MEH, this means you need meet more people if *I* am most interesting.

BASS

And you seriously learned how to paint, weave, and sculpt?

MIKHAIL

Is not hard. Art, is a reflection of your inner you. More you learn, richer the inside of you, the...the guts become.

BASS

Do you mean...soul?

MIKHAIL

(considering aloud)

Meh, maybe yes...mayybeeee no. What do *you* believe, Tovarisch? When what you see and what you experience, make questions to you on what you accept is truth. What then, are you believing in?

2SP

BASS:

More wisdom from Buddha?

MIKHAIL:

Neyt, is Philosophy. I master that also. Lived in Fiji for two years.

SILVERWARE ON PLATE

MIKHAIL:

Happy to tell you this story too but have to get back to janitoring.

SEAT SLIDES OUT

MIKHAIL:

Station does not clean itself. Haiku not inspire without service.
(considers, mumbles that sentence and counts syllables) Neyt,
too many syllables.

BASS:

Good luck Mikhail!

BASS

.....Steve Katzenberg?

PA OPEN SOUND

CHERLY-LYNN:

(VO , Overhead PA)

Doctors Howard, Fine & Howard, please report to conference
room B235. Conference room B235 Doctors Howard, Fine &
Howard. Thank youuuuuuuuuuuuu

PA CLOSE SOUND

SOUND OF UTENSILS ON PLATE AND BOWL. CONTINUED BACKGROUND
CONVERSATION, WHICH SHOULD GO ON THROUGHOUT THE ACT. AN ODD
STATIC SOUND STARTS LOW AND THEN BUILDS IN FREQUENCY.

SANDRA:

(Apprehension, audio distortion)

Deputy Marshal (distortion abates) Do you have a quick
moment?

CHAIR SCOOTS OUT

BASS:

Absolutely, please, join me.

SANDRA:
(Slight embarrassment)
Oh, there's no need to stand.

BASS:
Manners are their own reward, Ms. Derecha. Now, how can I help you?

SANDRA:
(hesitant)
Well, I'm, hrmmm. I'm not sure if this is something big or important to your investigation, but I thought I should mention something, just in case.

BASS:
Any detail, no matter how small, may have significance Ms. Derecha. Please, what is it?

SOUND OF SILVERWARE PLACED DOWN ON PLATE

SANDRA
The power flickers we've been having. The flash of lights. It was the same in my Amundsen-Scott before I arrived here.

BASS
(Confused)
Same as...ah I apologize. I forgot for a second. At the Amundsen-Scott in *your* dimension.

SANDRA
(Slightly offended)
I'm sorry, I knew this was a mistake

BASS

Wait, wait, please! I apologize. I hope that didn't come off as condescending. Please explain. I want to hear this.

SANDRA

Ok. (deep breath) In the two or three weeks before...I found (distortion start) myself here at this station, I recall (distortion ends) the lights would occasionally flicker, and directly afterward there would be this, well I don't know what it's called. It's a purple and blue... mist around the light fixtures.

2SP

BASS

(Confused)

Well...I've absolutely seen the lights flicker several times this week, but ...I don't recall seeing any mist around the bulbs afterward.

SANDRA

How could you not? It swirls around every bulb in sight for two to three minutes after the flickering ends.

BASS

A visual instance like this would be difficult to miss. Has anybody else seen this...mist you know of?

SANDRA

No. after it happens, I don't see anybody looking at them like it's just a common accepted occurrence. (considers) Although I never thought it could also be because they don't see them as I do.

BASS

(Reassuring)

It could all be a straightforward explanation. Some people have been known to have reactions to blinking or pulsating lights. It's not uncommon at all. Have you seen or spoken to Doc Ambrose?

SANDRA

No

BASS

If for no other reason, it would rule out eye problems or sensitive reactions to light. Ms. Derecha, I'm curious. I'm told there are... differences between the reality you come from and this one. Could you give me some examples?

BACKGROUND LAUGHING, SLIGHT DISTANCE OFF.

SANDRA

You believe now, in alternate realities?

BASS

I'm...curious. Just curious for now.

SANDRA

(Chuckles slightly)

Well, I can't say I know all the differences between the two. Most are tiny things. A television show is known as X hyphen files instead of Xfiles, one word. People thinking John Lennon was shot after he autographed a Double Fantasy album when in reality, it was Walls & Bridges.

BASS

Not sure I would have known the difference myself, but ok. Anything major, significant differences?

SANDRA

(Considers)

Only two significant differences I know of thus far, I mean, I haven't (distortion start) exactly been reading history books,

but just from (distortion ends) news reports and speaking with people. Germany wasn't reunified until 2004. The Berlin wall didn't go down in 1989 as it did here. The other significant difference I've seen was who your last president was. We had a WHOLE different person. Night and day difference, let me tell you!

BASS

So the minor differences are what you run into more often?

SANDRA

Correct. Little things like...hmmm. Pluto's status as a planet...that's different. Toys R Us stores, that's not the same. And Zuckerberg, the Facebook guy. Should he be wanted for tax evasion by the Feds and hiding out in China to escape extradition? Differences like that.

DISTANT SILVERWARE ON PLATES

BASS

Honestly, I think the little things kind of outweigh the more oversized items. (pause) wait...who *was* the last president in your reality?

SANDRA

(Distortion massive and renders what she says inaudibly)

BASS

No way! Seriously?

SANDRA

From my perspective, it happened and was still happening when I arrived here. It was the first time I knew things were off when somebody said the president's name

BASS
(PONDERS ALOUD)

It makes one wonder how different things could have been!

SANDRA

Thank you for hearing me out. I hope it helps your investigation in some way?

BASS

My pleasure Ms. Derecha. Keep in mind what I said and considering seeing the Doctor.

SANDRA

I will. Thank you.

CAFÉ CONVERSATIONS AND THEN FADE OUT

FADE IN, BASS' OFFICE. OVERHEAD STATION HUM

BASS

What about one of the summer huts, the Jamesway huts?

ZEKE

Naw, no good lawman. We don't use em in the winter. Too cold and too remote to the main station.

BASS

(Sighs deep)

I'm hoping that I won't still be here over the winter, but if I don't catch this suspect and the investigation goes into winter. I'm going to need a place to secure them once they're caught. You can't just put them in a berth with a guard. We need something...how about a cage?

ZEKE

(Considers)

Not all that hard, I guess. Just need thick rebar, metal slats and a locking mechanism. But where we build it?

BASS

Think Franklin wants a roommate?

ZEKE

(serious)

You don't want that thing getting all up in some killer's head. He'll make the situation ten times worse.

BASS

Inside one of the offices in admin?

ZEKE

(Epiphany)

Yo? How about my office? Don't ever use it.

BASS

It's central to the area; we could reinforce the walls if we had to. A suspect could yell and fuss all they wanted, which would be hard to hear. Damn Zeke, not bad!

ZEKE

Told ya I was more than just a pretty face!

DESK PHONE RINGS

BASS

When I find this person, how long for you to weld it all together and be ready?

DESK PHONE RINGS

ZEKE

Say... half a day. Full day max.

DESK PHONE RINGS

BASS

Perfect.

CLICKS SPEAKER PHONE BUTTON

BASS

Go ahead.

MALE VOICE

Washington DC, sir. Route to your desk?

BASS

Patch 'em through.

2SP THEN CLICKING SOUND

BASS

Deputy Marshal Marlow speaking.

JOCELYN

(Speakerphone)

S'up Deputy Marshmallow?

FAST PICKING UP OF THE PHONE HANDSET

BASS

Why the hell are you calling me?

JOCELYN

(False happiness, VO Phone)

Because you, ya dumbshit, just managed to piss off the big bosses' in the D.I.A.

BASS

What the hell are you talking about? Why call me. You hate me and please...please believe me when I say I owe you a bullet to the Nine-ring.

JOCELYN

Still the worst foreplay ever, huh Marshmallow? Look, I'm calling out of professional courtesy. Call it me protecting my assets to make sure I get to erase you, not some crewcut in a polyester suit and seven brain cells. Drop. Atlas!

BASS

(Bluffing)

And just what the hell...

JOCELYN

(Cuts him off)

I am not shitting around with you. You know. I know. You ran your mouth off in the interview. Bad form Marshmallow. Amateur hour time down there huh? Should have played that to the river! Your Texas Hold 'em always did suck.

BASS

(fake pleasure)

Well, I can't tell you just how happy I am you called... bitch.

JOCELYN

Only warning. Be a good boy and stick to your dead egghead. Find the badguy. Eat a donut. Remember, when you get comfortable. When you let your guard...

HANDSET SLAMMED DOWN IN THE DESK PHONE RECEIVER.

ZEKE

Everything ok over there, Marshmallow?

BASS

(DEEP SIGH) Fuck!

Outro and credits