

INTERFERENCE: Malachi, ep. 3

OPERATOR

911, what's your emergency?

HOST

(distressed)

Someone left a package at my house, and it's a threat. I know it's a threat-

OPERATOR

Mam, what was in the package?

HOST

(sniffling)

A dog skull, or *head*... I don't know. Somewhere in between.

OPERATOR

Mam are you okay? Are you in any physical danger?

HOST

(hysterical)

No, oh god... There are so many flies.

OPERATOR

Did you see who left this package?

HOST

It was dark, but it was definitely a man. I didn't get to see his face, he was crouched over-

OPERATOR

Did this man leave a message?

HOST

(crying)

Yes.

<we hear the host shuffle around her home, and then a muffled wailing>

HOST

(crying)

Oh god... is this blood?

OPERATOR

What was the message?

HOST

It was...

OPERATOR

Ma'am?

HOST

Let sleeping dogs lie.

INT. HIGHSCHOOL RADIO STATION

ANCHOR

Wake up, Hounds! Let's get ready to howl! Junior class president, Malachi Hawthorne, is starting an FDA club, so lets give him a warm welcome today.

<hound dog howling sound effect>

MALACHI

Hey Hounds! I'm starting a Future Doctors of America club. If you're interested in learning about biology, pharmacology, or neuroscience, come join us in Room 306 next Monday at 5 PM.

INT. HIGHSCHOOL RADIO STATION

ANCHOR

Morning, everyone! It's a great day to be mustang!

<Stampede sound effect>

ANCHOR (CONT'D)

Now, if your a thinker or a tinkerer, you're gonna love this next announcement from Leslie O'Donnell, president of the science club.

LESLIE

Hi mustangs! I'm excited to announce that I'll be presenting a new segment on our morning news called "*The More You Know*" where I share weird and wacky science facts.

ANCHOR

Is that starting today?

LESLIE

You bet it is! Have you ever wondered why your dreams feel so real, even though you're asleep?

ANCHOR

Not particularly, but tell me anyways!

LESLIE

It's because of a scientific phenomenon called *perceptual synthesis*.

ANCHOR

What does that mean?

LESLIE

Perceptual Synthesis is the process through which the subconscious brain constructs perceptions for the conscious brain to experience. In the context of dreaming, perceptual synthesis allows the brain to create immersive and vivid dream experiences by synthesizing sensory input, resulting in the perception of a realistic and coherent dream world. Basically, your subconscious brain creates the world that your conscious brain experiences, simultaneously!

<WOW sound effect>

ANCHOR

The more you know!

INT. DENVER7 NEWS STATION

EMMA

Good evening, everyone! I'm Emma Sanchez, bringing you the latest Boulder and Denver news. Tonight, we have an uplifting story about two neuroscience Grad students from the University of Colorado Boulder.

<Denver7 News Intro Theme>

EMMA (CONT'D)

At just 24 and 25 years old, local residents Malachi Hawthorne and Leslie O'Donnell are making waves in the world of technology and neuroscience. Just yesterday, the dynamic duo received a grant to develop an innovative technology called **the Neural Network**.

<static begins as an interview clip of Leslie plays>

LESLIE

Yeah, so it's called the Neural Network. I actually came up with the idea in the middle of a lecture and immediately started developing my thesis around it-

EMMA

That's right. Leslie wrote her thesis on the theoretical foundations and potential applications of this concept. Leveraging her academic work, Malachi, alongside one of his professors, began working on the development of the first prototype. Following the successful creation and patenting of their initial design, the couple presented their concept to potential investors. Impressed by their innovative approach and the potential impact of the Neural Network, they secured a \$2 million dollar investment to establish their own research facility dedicated to advancing this technology in the field of neurodegenerative disease.

<static fades out as all audio clips fade>

INT. HOST'S STUDIO

HOST

When I first became an investigative journalist, I made a promise to myself. I would never investigate anything that put me or my loved ones in direct harm. Today, for the first time in my career, I'm going to break that promise.

VOICEMAIL TONE

Leave a message after the tone.

<voicemail beep.>

MALACHI

Hello, this is Malachi Hawthorne. I've been keeping up with your podcast, and I'm calling because I think I have some information you might find valuable. I can understand if you might be hesitant to talk to me, considering the personal testimonies you've heard, but I promise you, *the truth is a lot less interesting... and a lot more sad.* If you're interested in discussing further, feel free to reach out. I'll be available tomorrow at 11 AM.

HOST

This voicemail really bothered me. I listened to it several times. The distressing thing about it is that he seems very genuine. It's 11 AM now, and I'm waiting to receive a call-

<a phone rings, the host picks it up>

HOST (CONT'D)

Hello, is this Malachi Hawthorne?

MALACHI

Yes, that's me.

HOST

Nice to meet you, Malachi.

MALACHI

Same to you. I hope you're doing better, after last weeks incident.

HOST

I am, for the most part. Anyways, when I heard your voicemail, I was very interested to speak to you. I was also curious about what compelled you to reach out?

MALACHI

Well, you're trying to get to the bottom of the January 17th distress calls, right?

HOST

Yes.

MALACHI

And you believe MindSight is responsible?

HOST

Yes, that's the lead I'm currently following.

MALACHI

Well, then, I'm here to help. I'm here to answer any questions you have. MindSight has been tangled up in legal issues for a while now, but I can assure you, none of it has to do with the distress calls.

HOST

Okay, so you're alright with me asking questions?

MALACHI

Yes, go ahead.

HOST

Okay so, have the labs, in fact, been shut down?

MALACHI

Temporarily.

HOST

Do you think there are people who are pleased about that?

MALACHI

Of course. There are plenty of people who don't understand or endorse what we do. MindSight, as an institution, is an experimental treatment facility. There currently is no cure for neurodegenerative diseases.

HOST

Oh really?

MALACHI

Yes. These people sign up for experimental treatments and then try to sue us when they don't work-

HOST

But people have claimed that it made their conditions worse-

MALACHI

All patients and their families are informed before treatment begins that these are trial therapies.

HOST

Some patients feel they've been misled?

MALACHI

I can assure you, they haven't been. It's very similar to drug trials. For many, being able to access this care earlier is lifesaving, for others it's not.

(MORE)

MALACHI (CONT'D)

The truth is that many of these patients had already come to us with no chance of recovery. That is a reality of having a neurodegenerative disease.

HOST

Dr. Hawthorne, with all due respect, there seems to be a pattern here. Patients signing up for treatments, facing adverse effects, and MindSight Labs claiming no responsibility. Can you understand why people might find that concerning?

MALACHI

Yes, I can understand that. I'm merely stating the reality of medical research. There are risks inherent in any experimental treatment, but without taking those risks, we'll never advance our understanding of these debilitating diseases. In some cases, our treatments have made conditions worse, but we also aren't liable for that. Every body reacts differently to new medication. That's the entire premise of experimental treatment.

HOST

What do you have to say for Sarah Harper, your head psychologist? She said your patients shaved their heads to avoid scrutiny from you. She also said you hired her knowing she was underqualified-

MALACHI

Yeah, of course she'd say that. After she lied on her resume about her qualifications.

HOST

She said you knew she was a yoga teacher when you hired her-

MALACHI

Yeah, I heard what she said on your podcast. She lied. Point blank. The mandatory psychologist onsite had nothing to with me. One of the young ladies who shaved her head tried to take her own life in the bathroom. I have access to every room, so I unlocked the door to get to her, which no, technically, I'm not allowed to do, but I would do it again. Now, we have a psychologist on site who *legally* can bust down a door if a patient threatens their own life.

HOST

Oh... That makes a lot of sense, actually. I'm sorry for assuming.

MALACHI

It's okay. I do appreciate the apology. I also understand why you'd believe Sarah. I don't believe she's bad intentioned...

HOST

So that's why you hired so many mental health professionals?

MALACHI

Yes... after that, I felt responsible... so I hired a whole team; psychologists, therapists, life coaches... because clearly, only considering my patients medical health was not enough.

HOST

That makes a lot of sense-

MALACHI

Yes, it does, which is why it's so frustrating to hear everything I did warped and distorted.

HOST

Why do you think people felt compelled to warp and distort your actions?

MALACHI

Because I tried to help people, and sometimes I failed. The medical field is hard, cause when you can't save someone, people feel this urge to turn you into some kind of monster.

HOST

They need someone to blame.

MALACHI

Yes. People need someone to direct all their negative emotions.

HOST

I think there's a lot of truth to that.

MALACHI

God forbid they actually face their own grief.

HOST

May I ask something...

MALACHI

Yes.

HOST

If your patients weren't shaving their heads to avoid you, why were they doing it?

MALACHI

Well, many of our patients muscles have atrophied, and that makes it very hard to brush and maintain hair. Some of the women just choose to shave it.

HOST

That makes a lot of sense. I assume that although this may have helped them hygienically, it likely had unintended emotional effects?

MALACHI

Yes. I didn't think about it then, but many women associate their their hair with their femininity and youth. I can see why it might be really demoralizing to lose it.

HOST

Especially if she's a young woman, who should still be in the prime of her life.

MALACHI

Yes. Especially then. I didn't understand this, so I encouraged one of my younger patients to do it.

HOST

You encouraged her? What do you mean? Don't you try to let all your patients make their own decisions?

MALACHI

Well, you don't understand. Sometimes, when people are on the mental decline, they revert back to how they acted when they were younger. They become more reliant on others, sometimes dependent.

HOST

That's an interesting way to describe that.

MALACHI

Regardless, I didn't consider her feelings, and I think it was so shocking to see herself that way that she... you know. This is why I hired mental health professionals, because I don't always catch that stuff. It's not my field, and I didn't want that to harm my patients.

HOST

I think that was a wise choice, but do you ever think that maybe you overdid it with the holistic approach?

MALACHI

To some degree, yes, but I do think it improved the overall atmosphere of the facility. They kept things positive and that allowed me to deliver the harsh medical news when it was necessary.

HOST

But initially, you said that you *did* overdo it. Why did you say that?

MALACHI

Well, I'm someone who likes to solve problems. If I identify one, I quickly brainstorm solutions, and throw everything I have at it. My wife says this can be a bit extreme. I can go too quickly in one direction without considering a milder approach.

HOST

Is that what you did with the treatment that harmed patients?
The Neural Network?

MALACHI

No, actually. My wife developed the Neural Network Interface.

HOST

What did the Neural Network do?

MALACHI

The Neural Network allowed seamless two-way communication between the brain and an external communication system. The interface would map a patient's entire neural network in a day.

HOST

How did you think that would help patients?

MALACHI

Initially, we believed this would revolutionize patient care, because we could give each patient a tailored treatment plan.

HOST

What made you realize it wasn't working?

MALACHI

Well, after a while, we started noticing the patients were growing less coherent. As they declined, we started relying on the NNI for insights as to what was going wrong, and by the time we realized it was the cause-

HOST

It was too late.

MALACHI

Yes.

HOST

What about a Neural Network Interface could possibly cause patients to decline at such a rate? It's essentially just a chip applied to the temple, no?

MALACHI

The only working theory we have was that there was some kind of Electromagnetic Anomaly-

HOST

So their brains got fried-

MALACHI

No, it just increased the progression of their disease-

HOST

Which fried their brains-

MALACHI

That's not a scientifically accurate way to describe it-

HOST

But it's the same thing essentially, and you continued to use it on patients after you realized this-

MALACHI

Because we didn't know they were correlated!

HOST

Isn't that just standard practice? Once a patient starts treatment, you screen them for decline and adjust their treatment accordingly-

MALACHI

The Neural Network gave us valuable data. It was helping us map parts of the brain we had never seen before-

HOST

So that's really why you continued using it-

MALACHI

No! That's not what I said-

HOST

It's what you implied-

MALACHI

For fuckssake! The second we realized it was hurting people, we shut it down!

<theres a long pause as the host processes this outburst>

HOST

I don't understand why you'd be getting sued for that if so. From what I've been told, there are laws in place to protect researchers who run clinical trials. You shouldn't be getting sued for medical malpractice if the clinical trial was just unsuccessful-

MALACHI

Well, we are. I don't know what to tell you.

HOST

You don't know what to tell me? How about the real reason you're getting sued.

MALACHI

I have!

HOST

Well, I'm sorry, but that doesn't make sense.

MALACHI

Maybe not, but it's what happened.

HOST

You're just talking in circles at this point.

MALACHI

You know what? Fine. I didn't want to say this live, because it really isn't relevant to your show, but if it will convince you that we had nothing to do with this, then I will tell you why we're getting sued.

HOST

Okay, why?

MALACHI

She knew.

HOST

What?

MALACHI

My wife. She knew, okay? That's what MindSight is getting sued for, not the distress calls. I came on here, and I answered your questions. You know we aren't responsible. Isn't that enough?

<In the background, we hear a soft wailing, it sounds like someone is in distress>

MALACHI (CONT'D)

Oh, I'm sorry about that. Give me one moment...

HOST

What... is that...

<the wailing gets more pronounced, and then something shatters>

HOST (CONT'D)

What's happening? Who do you have with you?!

MALACHI

(to the person in the background)
No, no, it's okay, it's gonna be okay-

HOST

Who is that?

MALACHI

It's my wife. We're being too loud, she's getting upset-

HOST

That doesn't sound like your wife. What did you do to her?

<we hear Malachi cooing at the woman in the background, trying to soothe her>

HOST (CONT'D)

Tell me right now, or I swear to god-

MALACHI

She's sick.

HOST

Tell me the truth. What did you do to her?!

MALACHI

I didn't do a goddamn thing! She's sick! That's why she went into this field! That's why we made MindSight. Leslie did her thesis on neurodegenerative diseases because her family suffers from extreme early onset Alzheimer's... *She just turned 39, and I'm already her caretaker.* Now, would you please stop yelling, she's getting upset.

HOST

So that's why she kept going once she knew.

MALACHI

Yes. She was trying to cure herself.

HOST

That's heartbreaking. Did you believe that she could?

MALACHI

I really believed that she could do anything...

<the wailing in the background gets more pronounced>

MALACHI (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Look, she's very upset with me. I think she needs to take her medication. I can't continue the interview right now.

HOST

Oh, okay. Well, thank you for your time.

MALACHI

I hope I answered all your questions.

HOST

You did. Thank you.

MALACHI

Have a nice night.

<the call audio ends abruptly>

HOST

This call left me feeling extremely unnerved. I have no clue whether to believe him or not. On the one hand, his stories add up, but he got so aggressive at the end, it felt very defensive. I think it all depends on who calls in next, and what leads we get. I can't reasonably draw any conclusions without more information.

<static grows to a deafening crescendo and then abruptly cuts off>

<outro music begins>

HOST (CONT'D)

As always, we encourage our listeners to remain vigilant, question everything, and dig deeper into the stories that shape our world. **Stay critical, stay curious, and stay tuned.**