

The Friendship Enigma

Episode 1: *Pilots*

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The clock tower in the centre of Tidmouth rang 8 times. It was 8 o'clock. The controller of the North Western Railway, Sir Topham Hatt, was sitting in his office reading his mail as he usually did every morning, until the station master walked in.

"Good morning, Sir, I've just got off the telephone. The Crovan's Gate works manager wants to speak to you immediately." he said. Sir Topham paused a moment and looked at the letters on his desk; There was a letter from the works that he had not yet opened. He promptly opened it upon the stationmaster's request and read it;

Sir Topham Hatt,

On the night of June 6th, 3 engines took refuge in the sheds at Vicarstown. They were then delivered here to the works on the 7th by one of your locomotives. We do not yet know where they have come from or indeed why. Until any information can be found, might I suggest storing them elsewhere as we are short on floor space. I feel it is important that we arrange a meeting here so we may discuss the matter further.

Michael Cramley,

Crovan's Gate works manager

"Phone ahead to Crovan's Gate and tell them I'm on my way now." Sir Topham Hatt finally replied, before grabbing his top hat and walking out the door. He had decided to take his car, not out of ill-faith in his own railway, but because it was more convenient not having to wait for the next train or organising a special.

His journey was not at all long, though it was tedious, the only thing relieving his boredom was looking out as he drove along, taking in the beautiful countryside of Sodor in the early morning sun. He arrived at Crovan's Gate and parked in his reserved space. The works manager came out to greet him.

"Ah, hello sir! Nice to see you again!" he exclaimed.

"Hmm quite, Mr. Cramley. So, where are these 3 'mystery engines' of yours?" queried Sir Topham Hatt.

"Right this way sir." Michael replied, pointing toward the door to the main workshop. When they walked inside Sir Topham Hatt was both amazed and confused.

"I wasn't expecting such... strange engines to flee to my railway" he said, looking at the 3 engines that now stood before him, lined up together and in varying states of disrepair. Michael then decided to introduce the engines while trying to show off his railway knowledge.

"As you can see sir, we have a British Railways class 03 shunting diesel, an ex-LNER Y3 sentinel shunter and finally an ex-LMS Fowler 3F tank engine. The tank engine's class is normally referred to as a 'Jinty'." Michael explained, feeling pleased with himself.

"What repairs will be needed to have these 3 in operational condition?" Sir Topham Hatt asked, pondering the benefits of additional shunting engines. If the repairs would be too expensive, he would try to contact their owners and have them send home. The fact that these engines were trying to run away

from their home was a thought that stuck in the back of his mind. There was probably good reason as to why and he hated to hear of engines being mistreated.

"Well the 3F has the most damage, both of his frames are cracked. We can either patch them up and replace them later or replace them now and save ourselves some effort. The boiler hasn't been checked as of yet, though going by everything else we've seen it may also need to be repaired. We think he's probably been left to rot in a siding for the the past decade."

"Hum." murmured Sir Topham Hatt, still thinking things over.

"As for the 03 and the sentinel, they're pretty good and only need minor repairs and a bit of cleaning up. They could be good to go within a few weeks." he finished.

"Hold on a moment, I've just noticed something."

"What would that be, sir?" Michael quizzed.

"There are 3 engines here, all with a 3 in their class names! An 03, a Y3 and a 3F!" Explained Sir Topham Hatt.

"Ah... That is an odd coincidence, isn't it!" Michael replied.

"Anyway," he began, "perhaps we could use these engines to help out with some shunting, although that 'Jinty' as you called it will need some serious repairs before it can be put to any use." He paused as he thought for a moment. "I'll need to speak with the board at the next meeting before I make a final decision. I have to go back to Tidmouth now to deal with a few things, but before I go I should ask your names." The engines looked at him nervously - they wanted to make a good first impression. The class 03 spoke up.

"Well, er..." he paused. "Hello, I'm Richard. The Y3 sentinel is Robert and the 'Jinty' is... well, I suppose he's never really had a name. We just call him Jinty." Richard explained. Sir Topham Hatt smiled.

"It has been a pleasure to meet you 3," he winked "and I look forward to having you work on my railway." The engines were very excited upon hearing this. He then walked calmly out to his car and was about to get in when Michael stopped him.

"Sir, I was just wondering if I could possibly..."

"Stow it Michael!" Sir Topham Hatt interrupted. "I know what you're about to ask and I've said this to you many times before! The answer is still *no* and do not ask me again!" Sir Topham then got in his car, shut the door and drove away.

"darn." Michael sighed.

Michael walked back to his office, hoping to make a start on the endless mountain of paperwork when Mr. John Dobson walked in. Mr. Dobson was not the kind of person you would describe as intelligent, however he was extremely helpful. He was the first man to be called upon to do the dirty work and odd jobs that Michael didn't particularly want to do himself.

"Er, excuse me sir, but have we got the all clear from Fatty for the Psycho box-it's?" Mr. Dobson asked.

"Teledicopathy boxes? No, of course we don't, John! But we do have permission to repair and restore the engines." He replied in a sly manner.

"Ha... I don't get it." John replied. Michael was frustrated.

"Gah! Don't you see, John? If we fit these devices, then we'll be able to take over this railway once and for all!" He menaced, excitedly.

"Why do we even want to take over the railway anyway, Sir?" Mr. Dobson asked while scratching his head, quite clearly confused by the situation.

"I'm going to take over this lucrative railway and suck it dry of any assets, then I'll use the money to finally complete my ultimate plan!" he said in a confident and triumphant voice.

"You?" John managed to ask, surprising Michael.

"That's what I said. Us." came the reply, clearly trying to cover himself.

"Ha, right... so fit the banana then?" John stammered while regaining some brain cells.

“Yes, yes! Go! And do it to the Jinty first! Haha!... Wait! Don’t activate them yet John! Well’ll need to wait for the perfect time to strike!”. “Yes, sir!” John managed to respond as he slammed into the door. He then opened it and wobbled out of the office.

Richard was getting very excited.

“Ah, this is new era for us, guys! Now let's take this opportunity to savour the moment as *this* is our new beginning. A second chance! A-” Robert then butted in.

“Stop right there. Sometimes I don’t know *what* goes on in that grill of yours, but I agree, let's savour this moment for all its worth. Who knows what the future may hold? We will have to make a good impression if we’re going to stay here, though.” He explained. Jinty then chipped in.

“No worries - I got this! Good impressions? Now *that* I can Do!”

“Maybe leave that to us, Jinty. You seem to be - well... almost entirely accident prone.” Robert replied.

“I mean, just *look* at you... what even happened?” Richard asked in confusion. Jinty paused.

“Oh. It's a... long story.” he finally answered. Richard, at that moment, was feeling very philosophical.

“If you think about it, though, isn’t everything a long story?”

“Oh, shut your flaps, Richard” Robert replied, cheekily.

(end credits)

Teledicopathy (tel-e-di-cop-a-thy) n, the ability to speak the thoughts of someone who is asleep whether in a normal state of sleep, unconscious, or comatose. ←this works so well if you think about it! Thank the internet!