

The Mad Diary of Michael Last

[1950's style sci-fi lab noises.]

Narrator

At a University in the New Mexico desert, teams of men and women work with the brightest minds in America toward the singular goal of bettering Mankind. Some work on electronically powered automobiles that run for days on a single charge, others on synthetic meat, indistinguishable in texture and taste from real flesh. Our story takes place in a smaller lab in the eastern wing. Benjamin Brooks is attempting to communicate with worlds that are not our own...

[a recorder clicks on]

Ben

Dr Benjamin Brooks, research lab 47 at the Institute implementing search pattern 22 with allotted power at .4% available.

[recorder clicks off. Receiver powers up and hums and pulsates. It picks up crackles and static and other odd noises]

Ben

Hell.

[a door opens and footsteps eneter]

Scarfweather

Scopes set at .4, Doctor. Pattern 22 is being recorded.

Ben

It doesn't matter, Scarfweather.

Scarfweather *[bracing against his melodrama]*
Oh no...

Ben

The Institute is more concerned with saving this planet than talking to the others. Clean power and cheaper medicine. Noble goals...

Scarfweather

Ben...

Ben

But they'll never give us the resources we need. .4%? And that's just our allotted power! If we had access to the Institutes full generation for just-

Scarfweather

Ben, Ben, Ben. Benny...baby. Shut up.

Ben *[fondly]*

Sorry, old friend. I suppose I'm feeling melodramatic today.

Scarfweather
I think I'll be able to adjust to this radical shift in your personality. I'll monitor the session, go get some coffee.

Ben *[getting out of his chair]*
Think I'll make a cup of tea, actually.

Scarfweather *[sitting into her chair]*
That's fine, just don't forget to come back with my coffee.

[Ben chuckles and leaves. Scarfweather sighs and fiddles with some knobs and dials. The transmission changes shape and sound a bit. A voice, indiscernible, but still a voice, breaks thru]

Scarfweather
What the hell?

[sci-fi noises modulate as Scarfweather tinkers with the frequency. The voice becomes just clear enough to be understood as a voice]

Scarfweather
DR. BROOKS! BROOKS, COME HERE! I WANT YOU!

[Ben comes running in]

Ben
What is it, Scarf-
[he stops when he hears the voice. He drops the mugs of tea and coffee even though it's a cliché]

Ben
My God.

[the voice continues, almost decipherable]

Ben
Power! We need more power! You check the frequency and adjust for fluctuation and bounce back, I'm going to turn up the scopes!

[he runs out]

Scarfweather
We're not authorized to use more power than oh he's gone. Gonna get us fired, Ben. And you dropped my coffee. Smashed my mug. Don't love that. AH!

[Ben must have gotten to the scopes because everything is much louder. The voice begins to come in a little more clearly. Scarfweather adjusts some dials and knobs. There's a lot of cool sci-fi noises, but we can almost make out what the voice is saying]

Scarfweather
Holy shh...is this...this is for real. This is it. This is it!

[Ben comes running back in]

Ben
Do you have it?!

Scarfweather
Listen!

[she fiddles with the dials and they listen to the voice. They can't understand it, but it's talking]

Ben
My God!

Scarfweather
I can't clean it up more than this. We can take the recording downstairs to analytics tomorrow, how much did you bump the power?

Ben
Scopes to full.

[Scarfweather stands]

Scarfweather
Full? Ben, that's our power allotment for the week!

Ben
We use the power for this! This, Scarfweather! My God, woman! Contact, from another world! This is bigger than the microchip!

[He rushes out]

Scarfweather
Contact with alien life and we're gonna get fired for stealing power from those girls cooking up mammoth blood in the basement.

[she sits and fiddles with dials. Suddenly, with a boost of power, we hear the voice more clearly still.]

Last *[distorted. Nigh unrecognizable]*
Common courtesy seems depleted these days. The people always caught between selfish and selfless, though the former is more apparent. And why?

[she fiddles some more and the voice comes in clear, but still filtered]

Scarfweather
Ben, Listen!

Last
[same as before. Insert.]

Ben
They sound like us. Phonemic language.

Scarfweather
I should be able to track this.

[the door handle jiggles. Someone starts pounding on the door and shouting]

Scarfweather
Who's that?

Ben
Probably Dr Pokorney from downstairs. I used her scopes to boost our power.

Scarfweather
She sounds pretty pissed.

Ben
The mammoth died a millennia ago, it can wait another week.

Last
[same as before. Insert]

Scarfweather
She's gonna get the dean.

[a new voice begins shouting thru the door]

Scarfweather
See?

Ben *[awe-struck. Referring to aliens]*
They're really out there.

[the door bursts open]

Dr Pokorney
Where do you get off
Using my scopes?? What
The hell is wrong with-

Dean Thomas
Dr Brooks have you gone mad?
This is not the sort of
behavior that becomes a doc-

Last
[same as before. Insert.]

Dean
My God.

Ben
It's them, Thom. We found them.

Dr Pokorney
Where is this coming from?

Ben
We don't know yet. We only just picked up the transmission a few minutes ago. I'm sorry I had to borrow your scopes.

Dean
This is perhaps the most important scientific and spiritual discovery in the history of humanity Ben.

[the signal begins to clear up and Scarfweather tunes in. We finally hear the voice of Michael Last]

Scarfweather
I think I've got them...

Last *[clear but staticky]*

Making family worry seems to be a unique skill I have. Of course I never intend it, but it's hard not to be the subject of worry when you're the working one in the family. My family absorbs the propaganda set by both sides, naturally they believe neither are the "good guys."

Scarfweather
Um...

Dr Pokorney *[amused, but not cruel]*
Congratulations, Ben. With the combined power of my departments scopes and your scopes, you managed to make contact with a teenager's diary.

[She leaves.]

Dean *[less amused]*
Dr Brooks, I'll see you in my office.

[he walks out]

Last
This life gets a big 'ol thumbs up. Granted it's a well below average life, and is a half-hearted thumbs up,

Ben *[broken]*
Turn that off.

[He leaves]

Last
but whatever. Right?

[Fade out]

Narrator
The following day, Dr Benjamin Brooks returns to his lab. The dean has allowed him to continue his research, but new strict controls will make for slow work.

[The next day. Sci-fi lab noises.]

Ben
Good morning. Good morning, Scarfweather.

Scarfweather
Morning, Dr Brooks.

Ben
Why are you still listening to that?

Scarfweather
I don't have much else to do. We won't have another allotment of power for a week.

Ben
It's embarrassing and useless, please dump it. There's plenty of work to do without the power. I have new patterns to construct, and you have to find out why our equipment picked up this young man's diary.

Last
Boy, you best sit down, 'cause my cause is just as important as yours; I wanna get home. I wish I could do that though, whole macho guy act. Push somebody to the ground and act like I'm twelve and a half times more important than he is.

Ben
Dump that. Now please.

Scarfweather
I like listening to it. Michael seems like a sweet kid.

Ben
Michael?

Scarfweather
Mmm.

Ben
Fine, I'll leave you two alone. I'm going to prepare the equations for next week. Will you-

[he knocks on the desk with his knuckles, getting her attention]

Ben
-will you please find out why this signal got gummed up in my relay? We had the damn thing pointed into the deep cosmos, it sounds like this boy is no further away than Florida. I want to open at least 3 Brook's Gates at our earliest opportunity to make up for lost time.

Scarfweather
Yes, doctor. I'll look into it.

Ben
Thank you.

[Ben leaves, we stay with him as he walks down the halls]

Dr Pokorney
Dr Brooks!

Ben
Dr Pokorney, good morning. Once again, I'm very sorry I hijacked your scopes yesterday.

Dr Pokorney

Forget it. It was worth it just for the story. Funniest thing to happen on this floor since that intern tried to harness the solar power of the moon. No offence.

Ben

Not at all! Once the shock of my academic life's supreme achievement being not only dashed away but actually subverted into banality, I was actually able to see the humor in the situation.

Dr Pokorney

Atta boy. You two figure out where it came from?

Ben

No, Scarfweather is looking into it now.

Dr Pokorney

Gotta be coming from the top of a mountain on the other side of the planet though, right?

Ben

My guess was Florida. *[suddenly focused]* Why do you say a moutaintop?

Dr Pokorney

If you were using your full scopes plus what you "borrowed" from me...I mean hey, I don't pretend to understand your department. I'm just a simple girl from Nebraska who's trying to build a naturally functioning mammoth genome from scratch, but with that much power, wouldn't the transmission have to be picked up from very, very far away?

Ben

Hmm. Yes actually. Quite far indeed.

Narrator

MEANWHILE: BACK AT THE LAB...

[sci-fi noises. Michael Last goes in and out]

Scarfweather

[having a 'conversation' with Michael by responding to his transmission]

[Ben enters in a flurry]

Ben

Scarfweather, you haven't dumped the boys diary, have you?

Last

Common courtesy seems depleted theses days. The people always caught between selfish and selfless, though the former is more apparent. And why? Is too much to ask for a simple thank you? Or an excuse me? A sorry?

Scarfweather

No, doctor.

Ben
Good, I need you to chart search pattern 22, we need to know
where the Brooks Gate opened, now!

Scarfwether
Whoa, whoa, whoa, cowboy, hold on. I can't check anything without
power from the scopes. I know this box is making a lot of groovy
noises, but it's not actually doing anything. We have to wait
till next week to get our power allotment before we do any
charting or...whatever.

Ben
This is too important. I'm going to re-direct some power from
Drywell's scopes. He's not in today, he won't mind.

Scarfwether
Oh man, if you don't want to work here anymore just quit. You're
gonna get us both fired.

Ben *[not listening]*
There's a good man, Scarfwether.

[he leaves]

Scarfwether *[mocking]*
There's a good man, Scarfwether.

*[sci-fi lab noises as Scarfwether manipulates her machine. She
punches buttons and twists dials. Suddenly the machine gets
louder, and noises are added as presumably Drywell's scopes are
tuned in]*

Scarfwether
Oh there we go. Thank you Dr Drywell.

[Ben comes running back in, slamming the door closed]

Ben
Have you found it yet?

Scarfwether
No, it's been like...no I haven't. Gimme a second. I have to punch
in your pattern, reload the sequence, it's gonna take just a
while. How much power did you use? .4 of his scope would give us
a general location in about a couple of hours.

Ben
I turned his scope to full.

Scarfwether
Hell, Ben. There's no way Dean Yeager isn't gonna notice that. We
are so fired.

Ben
How long to find the gate with full power?

Scarfwether
Just a minute. It's loading.

Ben
How long?

Scarfwether
Literally like, a minute. Hold your horse.

Ben
This is too important, Scarfwether. I believe we may have been contacted by alien life. The amount of power we used, poured into our machine, there's simply no way a gate just opened up on in the Himalayas.

[beat]

Scarfwether
Ben...was Dr Drywell in her lab?

Ben
She was.

Scarfwether
And did you get her permission to use her scope for this?

Ben
This is too important!

[banging on the door. Muffled voices yell.]

Scarfwether
Oh my god.

Ben
Has the machine located the gate yet??

Scarfwether
Yes! You child, let them in.

[she stands, crosses, and opens the door.]

Drywell
Ben, you just got cost me a month's research! I lost 4 spiders and half a model ecosystem!

Ben
Terribly sorry-

Dean
What did I tell you yesterday? Hm?! If Dyson didn't have such an affinity for this project I would have you escorted from this institute right now! You're suspended, both of you! Until I can figure out how to untangle this mess.

Ben
Scarfwether?

Scarfwether
Hang on. *[she walks to the machine. Fiddles with dials]*

[beat]

Scarfweather
Hm.

Ben
Well?!

Scarfweather
The gate...the signal seems to be coming from...here. New Mexico.

Ben
No.

Dean
I hope your peace of mind was worth it Dr Brooks. If I have my way you'll be finished here.

Drywell
Sorry Ben.

Ben
No, it doesn't make sense! Check again!

Scarfweather
Look for yourself, the gate opens up not far from here. It's not alien in origin.

Drywell
I need my scope back, Dr Brooks. I'm going to lose the rest of my ecosystems without-

Ben
Distance! Scarfweather, check the distance the signal traveled!

Dean
This is getting embarrassing, really Dr-

Ben
Please! You have to listen!

Scarfweather
Hang on...Dr Brooks, look at this.

[the tone shifts. The staggering weight of the discovery has put them in quiet awe]

Ben
My God.

Drywell
What is it?

Ben
Immeasurable. The distance limit we have set extends to our entire galaxy.

Scarfweather
This signal buries the needle.

Dean
You mean...this voice, this child, is broadcasting from outside our galaxy? It truly is an alien then?

Scarfweather
No sir. Remember, the gate is still recorded as opening here in New Mexico. Not far outside of Flat Hills.

Dean
I don't think I quite understand.

Ben
It means that Scarfweather and I have failed in our experimental attempt to find alien life in our galaxy. We have, quite accidentally, discovered what I believe is a way to receive transmissions from an alternate universe.

NARRATOR
This was the first moment. The course of human history changed. Every spiritual, social, economic, scientific, and artistic conversation on the planet from that moment forward was about how they related to the discovery that we were still perhaps alone in the universe, but the universe itself was not alone.

Ben Brooks was now set on a new path, one that would ultimately lead him away from this universe, and into one far, far more disturbing.

Narrator
Two short years pass. Doctor Brooks and Doctor Scarfweather now have their own dedicated lab to explore fully the Alternate Universe Phenomenon known casually as "The Last Universe", named for the accidentally received diary of Michael Last.

While the world listens intently to every word recorded, hoping for some small insight to the differences to our universe and the Last Universe, content to absorb, and perhaps one day, transmit a response, to make contact, Dr Ben Brooks' ambition outpaces his peers...

We join him now, at a symposium in Duoala, Camaroon.

Last [*echoes with across a large auditorium*]
[Insert]

[*Dr Brooks voice also echoes with a microphone's timbre*]

Ben [*halfway thru a sentence*]
...becoming, but still growing into, a more self-aware, species. Discovery happens at a gallop, and then a crawl. I understand this as well as you. However, the danger of sitting idle and naval gazing while great strides need to be taken is an easy trap to walk into. We have hit a ceiling on what we can learn from Michael's electronically broadcast diary, and as it's been said before: He could stop at any time. We needn't, we MUSN'T, sit idly by, content to suckle at the teat of an accidental broadcast with the interest in the discovery of an alternate reality like a homebody reading celebrity gossip magazines. It is imperative that we act NOW. We must make every effort to not just listen,

not merely endeavor to send transmissions that may or may not be received, but to actually find a way to punch thru and enter Last's Universe. I already have designs for a localized Brooks Gate in New Mexico. Ladies and gentlemen, we must send into this other universe, which shares space with us but is still at a great distance, our own "proxy-nauts" to make contact and explore the undiscovered country.

[he delivers his last line with expectation and gravity. It's met with murmurs and scattered applause. He punctuates]

Ben
Thank you.

[more applause now. But still scattered and unsure. Ben walks off stage.]

Moderator
Thank you, Doctor Benjamin Brooks. He's given us plenty to think about, and as the man who discovered the...*[fade out as Ben walks backstage]*

[backstage now. The moderator is muffled]

Scarfweather
I told you.

Ben
Why are they, THEY of all people, so afraid to move forward and embrace the next obvious steps in human history?!

Scarfweather
I think it's because you gave a lecture with the word "teat" in it.

Ben
I assumed the scientific community would be enthusiastically in favor my ideas.

Scarfweather
In the scientific community's defense, your idea is "somehow go somewhere we don't know where it is or how to get there at the risk of life and limb"

Ben
We do know how, Scarfweather! We already have to technology! We just need to make it bigger.

Scarfweather
Ben...

Ben
You know it can work!

Scarfweather
Opening a Brooks' Gate in deep space to receive a signal is one thing. Opening one here and then sending a human thru, to god knows where, is...absurd. We haven't the knowledge, or power. It's ludicrous.

Ben *[with gravity]*
Come to lab tonight. There's something you have to hear.

[TRANSITION NOISES. Ben has walked out onto the busy street]

Ben
Taxi!

[a taxi pulls up. Ben gets in]
Johnny Cab
Where to?

Ben
The corner of 1st and 1st, please. The Institute.

[the cab drives on]

Johnny Cab
Hey...Hey ain't you Brooks?

Ben
Ah, yes. I am he.

Johnny Cab
Hey heeey! Dr Brooks! In my cab! Ho man! Wait'll my husband here's about this! Hey, hey, you mind if I ask you something?

Ben
What can I do for you, young man?

Johnny Cab
So me and the boys, we love Michael, right? I mean we been listening to his diary since the beginning, we're not just some johnny-come-lately fans, yanno? But we got this, it's sort of a bet, yanno? We gotta know, does he really *[insert]*?

Ben
I'm afraid I don't know any more about Michael than you do. All his transmissions are a matter of public record, and as you and "the boys" can evidence, public discourse.

Johnny Cab
Yeah sure sure, I hear ya. Boy, Dr Brooks, the father of Michael Last, in MY cab! You know, last year, me and the family and everyone, we went out to that demonstration at *[insert]*, yanno, yanno the one?

Ben
"Make The Last Universe First"

Johnny Cab
Yeah! Yeah that one. Still got the shirt somewhere. Say, I heard youse were trying to make contact with Michael Last, tryin to talk back to him. You have any luck with that?

Ben
No. Not yet. He's on his own, for now.

Johnny Cab

Hey, too bad. Too bad. I would love to talk him myself. My kid, She's 11. She really likes him. Couldn't stop playin his album for a month straight. Hand to God, a month!

Ben
His album?

Johnny Cab
Yeah, you don't know? I don't blame ya, can't stand it myself. Got his diary "re-mixed" over some synth music stuff. I don't get it, yanno? But she loves it. You don't get any money for that stuff?

Ben
No, no. Michael's diary is free to all. I don't have much interest in his celebrity. I just want to reach him.

Ben
Yeah, I feel the same way about my 11 year old. Ha, kids, huh? They can be right there, right damn next to ya, but still feel a thousand miles away, yanno?

Ben
Mm, yes I think I do know.

[transition noises. We're in a lab. 1950's sci fi noises. Excerpts of the Last transmissions play.]

Ben
I hear you, Michael.

[A door opens and Scarfweather enters]

Ben
Scarfweather, thank you for coming. Please sit down.

Scarfweather
It's late, Ben. Tomorrow I have to meet with the International Committee of Futurism about funding, can we please make this short?

Ben
For nearly two years the world has been listening to the Last transmission, believing that they have the full breadth and depth of Michael's life on his Earth.

Scarfweather
Ben, I'm really tired...

Ben
I want you to listen to one of his first transmissions now.

Scarfweather
You wanted me to come in to listen to an OLD transmission?? Ben, come on!

Ben
No one but myself has heard this.

Scarfweather *[leading. Accusingly]*
I thought the transmissions were all public, Ben?

Ben
I have kept some secret.

Scarfweather
Why??

[Ben flicks a switch and tunes a dial.]

Last
[Insert]

Ben
Because they are at war.

Scarfweather
My God...

Ben
Michael's Earth is involved in an every nation war. And it's getting worse.

Scarfweather
Ben, I don't understand. Why keep this a secret?

Ben
Because if our world finds out that opening a gateway to Michael means opening a door to a planet that's engaged in total warfare-

Scarfweather
They might make sure we can never open that door.

Ben
World War III could be a battle between our two planets. If we do nothing though, there is no doubt in my mind that Michael will die.

[beat]

Narrator
At a University in Camaroon, Drs Brooks and Scarfweather must decide how to alter the fate of one young man, and...perhaps, the fate of two worlds...two worlds separated by a gossamer thin barrier as impassable as iron. A barrier that once broken, could open a Pandora's box of hell on Earths.