Tape 1: Day 1

Pass: THERE IS SERENITY IN CLOCKWORK

...hey, is this thing on?

I am Jeffery Lowe, an archivist of the Zampan Census Bureau. I am [REDACTED] years old, and as of right now, I am charged with digitizing an old archive.

I don’t like people. They are noisy and nosy. Data isn’t noisy, and neither is it nosy. It doesn’t pry at you with questions. It doesn’t demand time, it only takes it. At least my coworkers understand that I don’t want to be bothered by them, and I don’t bother them in return.

My coworker left for a vacation a week ago. Sometimes they leave emails I have to respond to. I don’t mind that much. At least it’s not in-person.

Tape 2: Day 2

Pass: LISTEN TO THE TICK OF SECONDS

I’m twenty or so entries into this mess. It seems like it was a more-or-less ordinary census, dated...roughly two hundred years ago. Full name, age, race and ethnicity, address, income, education, faith, whatever. There are some weird questions on the reverse, though? One of them asks about the respondent’s favourite toothpaste flavour. Did they even have toothpaste back then?

We can’t automate this, unfortunately. The handwriting is atrocious and unscannable, so I have to copy it into the database by hand. I could use some help, but everyone’s really busy with their own urgent stuff.

Some of the sheets have coffee stains on them. I swear, whoever stored them was a slob.

Tape 3: Day 16

Pass: IT WILL GUIDE YOU WHERE YOU BELONG

It’s been more than two weeks! I am roughly halfway through — nevermind, it’s only the first drawer. I hate these drawers.

When I clock out at five, I have to make notes about my progress. I think it looks steady enough, for now? I just need to keep copying data and I’ll make it through, eventually.

Clarence showed up in my room and offered me donuts. I took one. He didn’t do that before. I don’t like to be disturbed but a caramel donut is a caramel donut, and at least he isn’t too talkative.

I stayed overtime today because I spent too much time on my break and I’m falling behind my quota. The boss won’t be salty but it matters to me. The quota is, after all, self-imposed.

Tape 4: Day 21

Pass: SECRETS ARE MORE SUSTAINABLE

I found Clarence’s response. His name and age, accurate to this day, although it says he’s married when he isn’t and has never been. Some other details are accurate, but a lot of answers are wrong. One of the reverse questions lists his eyes as blue when they are green. Sure, it’s not the Clarence I know, but I should probably talk to him, just in case he’s playing a trick on me. It’s his day off, though, so I’ll do it tomorrow.

Otherwise, I’m doing well. Met my quota at four in the afternoon. Guess I can copy some more of these.

Tape 5: Day 22

Pass: THE LONGEST TEXT EVER

Clarence laughed it off and pointed at the data. The census is indeed dated two hundred years ago. Then he offered me another caramel donut, and suggested that I leave my area more often.

It isn’t funny, I did not forge the response. It’s authentic. He said that it might be a coincidence. Maybe it is a coincidence, but maybe it is not. I should just put it aside for now and focus on my work.

I’m running out of coffee capsules. I need to get more for the machine. I need coffee to function, sadly. I don’t even work much…

Tape 6: Day 24

Pass: MERMAID CITY

I found a copy! Janice Rose, listed as Janice Wallace several entries ago. They have the same first name, eye colour, date of questioning, reverse questions and answers, but wholly different ID and zip codes. Weird. They even have matching coffee stains and paper damage.

I’ve asked the boss what to do about these, and he told me to write it off and keep both of them. They may as well be different people, given everything. I need a break.

I mean, it’s not as if it’s the weirdest thing I have seen while working. These Janices may just be similar people whose responses were stored together.

Tape 7: Day 25

Pass: SCANLATIONS

Found a Jeffery Lowe. I initially thought it’s a namesake, but all obverse responses are accurate to who I am.

It’s me. What the fuck?

There is a coffee stain, with a light pencil scratch in the center. It better be a practical joke, and whoever is responsible better own up to it.

There are no questions on the reverse. I don’t know what I could have expected.

I asked Clarence, who is the only person who goes to my room anymore, and he called it a very accurate replica. I swear to fucking god if it’s Clarence I am throwing him out of the window.

Tape 8: Day 30

Pass: THE SUSAN ISN’T THERE

I found another Janice, a mistyped copy of the two previous Janices, with the surname of a coworker of mine. Janice Lowell.

She does recognize herself, and says that my obsession with making period-accurate, coffee-stained replicas is worrying. Wait, marked?

The coffee stain harbours three letters and two numbers. I don’t know where I have seen these before, but I probably did because I remember them.

Janice also brought me a cup of soda. I’m very glad that my coworkers aren’t too distracting, and I should probably buy them all something.

An order of pizza should do.

Tape 9: Day 32

Pass: RIP GRUMPY CAT

I bought everyone pizza. People are very glad that I’m reciprocating their kindness. Neat.

I have never noticed, but apparently Janice is married, and her maiden name is Rose. I asked her if she’s been married to someone whose last name was Wallace, and she froze.

I explained that I found a duo of census responses, but she wasn’t too inclined to believe that it isn’t just a coincidence. At least she doesn’t think I’m a stalker.

Weird.

I have also found another copy of Clarence’s census. I don’t care what they say, there’s something weird going on.

Tape 10: Day 41

Pass: ALL THEORIES ARE VALID

I found two weird ones today.

The first one is Quinn’s response, accurate to the last point, with their ID in the coffee stain. I haven’t seen Quinn for two months...wait, why does it list their duration of stay as that?

The second one is mine, with a misshapen triangle in the circle and an unanswered question on the reverse.

“Do you traverse mazes clockwise, or counterclockwise?”

Fine. Whatever. I quit in three weeks either way. Counterclockwise goes into the database. Who cares, it may know that Jeffery Lowe traverses mazes counterclockwise for all I care.

Tape 11: Day 46

Pass: HOW MUCH DO YOU THINK WAFFLES COST

Fuck, I really can’t afford quitting my job. This means I’m staying. The boss doesn’t parse what’s going on and finds it practical jokes. He says he can’t allow me to be let go and we’re going to be short-staffed if this goes on.

I looked over Quinn’s again, and found a floor plan of a room. I copied it into a notebook. It looks like a generic room, with an entry pointing towards the coffee stain.

I also found the seventh instance of my response, with the question and my response being filled in. Okay, this isn’t funny. I’m going to bring this up with the boss tomorrow.

Tape 12: Day 47

Pass: DO YOU TRANSVERSE MAZES CLOCKWISE OR COUNTERCLOCKWISE

Boss fell ill with acute pneumonia. Guess it’s up to me to dig this up.

Clarence got sent abroad for whatever reason. Some problems they can’t fix remotely. Then it’s gonna be the quarantine.

His copy asked him about exposure to the disease, and there’s another ID and another room. I’m arranging these together and they...well, they don’t fit, but there’s some place between them to let them fit.

I had to leave my area to get donuts. Damn, my entire diet is coffee and donuts at this point. This can’t be good. I should start eating more veggies if I don’t want to have heart problems.

Tape 13: Day 51

Pass: DO YOU TRANSVERSE MAZES CLOCKWISE

Found a perfect copy of Janice’s response, and filled in the plans of another room. At this point this reminds me of our floor.

I’ve filled in four questions at this point. The responses are replicating themselves. I need to figure out what is going on. I need to figure out what is going on.

The archive’s entries all have reverse questions about mazes. Paths, algorithms, minotaurs, I don’t know why. I may just be going insane.

I don’t think anyone else showed up at work today.

Tape 14: Day 63

Pass: COCONUT MALL

I figured out that the coffee stains only have IDs inside for those who used to work at Zampan, and these are also the sheets that house their names. Janice’s ID, however, wasn’t inaccurate, she just was employed twice under different IDs for whatever reason. I also don’t have an ID; there are only numbers.

It’s my copy number 112. I find them roughly once each three hours, no matter whether I skim through past ones or look through them carefully. Whatever is going on isn’t mundane.

Magic, however, doesn’t exist and is stupid, so I don’t know what to say. I’ve filled in nine questions already. May as well go all the way through and wait for the tenth.

Tape 15: Day 69

Pass: METEOR SHOWER

The office is a maze. Of course it’s a maze.

It took me forever to notice that the IDs trace a path through the rooms. I just need to draw it and walk it counterclockwise, because I traverse mazes counterclockwise.

I need to wait for everyone to leave. Not just feel like anyone is here. I need to make sure nobody sees me, because I will need to break into the director’s room.

I’m doing it today. I just need to wait for Nate to go home already. Dude has always been pretending he’s being overworked and I fucking hate him for this since he doesn’t do jack shit.

Tape 16: Day 70

Pass: VERIFIED FACT

Yesterday, I walked the path I traced through the archives and picked the boss’ lock. I found a blank census sheet, with a tea stain.

What a stupid joke. It’s him. Of course it’s him. Of course he’s been gaslighting me and everyone else.

I just filled it out. All questions on the obverse, nine on the reverse. I still don’t know what the tenth is.

He came to work today, and I confronted him about this. He said he has no idea what’s going on and that he hates coffee.

Of course he’d lie to my face. I’m going to do it again.

Tape 17: Day 71

Pass: BLATANT LIE

Moonlight shines through the windows. I am walking the same road. I enter Janice’s room, and backtrack immediately. I turn on my heel, and rotate twice. I grab a donut on my path to the boss’ room, and peek into the closet.

I enter the boss’ room.

I fill in the sheet again. I flip it.

There’s the tenth question. I know that I should answer “yes”, because that is the correct response to the tenth question. But I shall not respond to it in the expected manner. I shall stop this.

I pick up my pen, and fill in “no”.

Tape 20: Day ???

Pass: CONTEMPORARY OF PONG

I clock in at nine in the morning. The air is cool. I just need to finish this archive. There’s only one entry remaining undigitized.

I flip it, and find a coffee stain, with a dotted zero written with a pencil in the center. Sigh. Vandalism.

I copy all there is on the obverse, starting with the name and ending with the occupation. I haven’t met other Jeffery Lowes before. Nice to know you by proxy, namesake.

I flip it to reverse, where the coffee stain is. Ten questions, ten answers. I fill them in.

Farewell, paper archive. I am finally done with you.