

## Channel 77 Doesn't Exist

A Dead Signals Original

I found Channel 77 last Monday. It wasn't part of my cable package, and I didn't pay for it. No one else can see it, but it still plays—every night, at exactly 2:57 AM, and only when I am alone.

I live alone—always have. It's not something I brag about—just a fact. My apartment is quiet. Found on the second floor and located at the dead center of a three-story building that's been abandoned to time. The building is unremarkable, set in a neglected part of town, forgotten by everyone but the occasional stray cat or lost delivery person. Ivy climbs up one side, weaving through cracked bricks and eroding mortar like open veins exposed to air. Windows remain perpetually dusty with curtains always drawn shut, concealing their secrets from prying eyes.

Inside my apartment, everything hums faintly: the lights buzz softly, the pipes whisper their complaints, and the walls murmur their subtle protests. It's a comforting background symphony, a gentle reminder that even solitude has a voice, however small.

I do remote work for a company that wouldn't notice if you dropped dead mid-shift, as long as the system still showed green. IT support. A solitary job for solitary people. Keyboard clicks, quiet rooms, digital detachment. I like it that way. Human interaction, even digitally, is minimal, which suits my temperament. I prefer the predictability of machinery to the complexities of relationships with people.

Most nights, after work, I unwind by flipping through the free channels that came with my television. Not that I watch much; it's simply noise filling the hollow corners of the room. I don't pay attention, preferring to eat trash food from greasy paper cartons while scrolling through even greasier websites. My days blur into each other, indistinguishable, uneventful, empty.

The first night Channel 77 appeared began like every other sleepless night. I was scanning channels absently, unaware of each channel flickering between meaningless shows, when the screen stuttered—glitched. But it wasn't a normal digital hiccup where everything pixelates briefly—this disruption looked different, distinctly analog, grainy, and old-fashioned. It reminded me of a VHS tape that had seen better days, gasping back to life.

Then a channel identifier popped up in the corner of the screen in simple, white block letters: "CH 77 - No Data."

But there was data, despite what the identifier claimed. The screen came alive, displaying the interior of a room—plain, sterile, empty. Beige walls and gray carpet, devoid of furnishings or personal effects. It looked clinical, unnerving in its cleanliness. There was no audio except for the quiet, unsettling hiss of static, like the room itself was trying to communicate but had forgotten how.

The camera angle shifted to a new perspective of the same empty room every few seconds. Then, after several rotations, it abruptly switched to another room nearly identical to the first, equally vacant and lifeless. I watched in a soft fascination, unable to turn away, captivated by the bleak simplicity.

As the minutes ticked by, the repetition of empty rooms became hypnotic. I found myself leaning closer, searching the corners of the frames for anything that might justify the broadcast. Yet nothing changed; no subtle movement, no shadows, no explanation for the broadcast—just sterile, unchanging emptiness.

I glanced at my phone, noting the time: 2:57 AM—an oddly specific time for the TV to glitch. I turned the TV off, dismissing the anomaly as an oddity of late-night broadcasting. Yet, even in silence, something lingered—an intangible weight of unease settling in the pit of my stomach.

The next day, I tried to dismiss the memory as nothing more than late-night exhaustion playing tricks on me. Work resumed as usual, dull and monotonous, punctuated only by the occasional ping from a coworker whose face I'd never seen. Yet, as evening approached, the thought of Channel 77 crept back, insidious and persistent.

When 2:57 AM returned, so did Channel 77.

This time, the image had shifted subtly. The same empty rooms appeared, but now there was a faint sense of familiarity, like visiting somewhere forgotten, somewhere buried deep in a memory. The static hum from the rooms seemed louder, more insistent. They buzzed gently, whispering secrets I couldn't decipher.

That night, Channel 77 revealed a bit more. Rooms gradually became recognizable, with indistinguishable details creeping into view: a doorway that looked suspiciously like the one leading to my kitchen, a patch of carpet matching my own living room's faded fibers, and walls that bore identical, distinct cracks and stains found in my apartment.

The realization was slow but inevitable: Channel 77 wasn't broadcasting rooms at random—it was broadcasting mine. Each camera angle grew closer and more intrusive, mapping out my personal space with meticulous accuracy.

Fear blossomed inside me, quick and relentless. I searched my apartment obsessively, pulling down light fixtures, unscrewing air vents, and even ripping

wallpaper to find hidden cameras. But I found nothing. No tangled wires snaking through the walls, no glinting lenses peering out from concealed corners, no hidden recording devices lurking in the shadows—only a heavy silence, thick and ever watchful, pressing in from every empty space.

Exhaustion took hold, sleep becoming fragmented, riddled with nightmares. The rooms haunted me—empty, waiting, alive with invisible watchers. I grew paranoid, second-guessing every shadow, every creak, every reflection in mirrors and windows.

It was then that Channel 77 did something it had never done before. It showed me myself—asleep, vulnerable, unaware of the silent observer capturing my every breath, shift, and subtle twitch.

I jolted awake, cold sweat clinging to my skin, breath shallow, heart hammering. Channel 77 was dark now, just static, but it had delivered its message clearly: I was being watched. Documented. And I knew, deep in my bones, that Channel 77 wasn't done with me yet. It had only just begun.

It was the third night when I clicked the info button on the remote as soon as the live feed began: "CH 77 - No Data." I tried recording it on my phone, but nothing saved. Not that it mattered. Looking at the TV screen through my phone's lens would show only static, like the channel itself defied its documentation, existing for my gaze alone. Frustrated, I tossed my phone onto the couch behind me and sat up straight, eyes glued to the TV, waiting for it to confess its purpose, its secrets.

I stared at the remote resting in my hand; how did it get in my hand? Suddenly unfamiliar, its plastic buttons slick beneath my sweaty fingers. With a surge of anxious impatience, I mashed the guide button repeatedly, watching the guide page cycle through channels of normalcy—weather channels, infomercials, late-night reruns of sitcoms. But Channel 77 wasn't listed. It didn't appear grayed out, like those premium pay-per-view channels; it was absent, erased as if it had never existed among the other mundane channels.

My heart pounded in my ears, a drumbeat matching the TV's digital clock's relentless march toward morning. I attempted to navigate away from the channel guide to return to Channel 77, but it had concluded. Only static greeted me, whispering its cold white noise into the void of my living room. Doubt crept into my thoughts—had I imagined it?

Yet Channel 77 returned at 2:57 AM the following night, its humming, haunting images seeping into my dreams, which had already begun to fracture, shifting from familiar patterns into something distorted and unfamiliar. And then, by the fourth night, the scenery evolved—an unsettling metamorphosis.

A crooked, framed photograph appeared on an otherwise stark wall, the frame's victims unidentifiable from the distorted feed. A coat rack now stood upright in the corner of a dim room. An elongated shadow stretched ominously across the carpet, dancing between static bursts, though no apparent source was responsible for casting the darkness. A half-open door teased me cruelly, forever on the brink of revelation, but each cut to a different angle stole away the chance to glimpse the mysteries it blocked.

And then—something else appeared—a seemingly insignificant detail that would send chills down my spine. On a desk sat my coffee mug—the exact one, distinctive, unmistakable. A chipped ceramic fox with a smug face and one missing eye; a flea market find from happier times, yet unique enough to know that nobody else could have it. I froze, paralyzed in fear, reality slipping from my grasp as panic surged. Could it be a coincidence, or perhaps a trick of flickering shadows?

I replayed the images in my mind, frame by painstaking frame, combing through my memories as carefully as a detective searching for evidence. No logical explanation emerged from the darkness of my recollections, leaving only dread in its place. Determined to find clarity, I resolved to remain awake once more, awaiting the inevitable return of Channel 77.

At 2:57 AM on the fifth night, adrenaline coursed through my veins. This time, the scene crystallized into undeniable clarity. My living room flickered to life on the screen, not just an image but a perfect replica in every detail. The warped floorboard that groaned underfoot, the faint stain by the window left from when the air conditioner leaked, and the perpetually lopsided bookshelf I'd never found the energy or reason to fix.

As the camera panned slowly, deliberately, the gravity of reality shifted beneath me. There I was, captured in the feed, sleeping soundly on my own couch. The shirt I wore on the screen was the same one I felt against my skin. The blanket tossed haphazardly over my sleeping form matched the fabric clenched nervously in my own trembling fist.

My throat constricted, my heart thudding violently against my rib cage, desperately trying to escape its bony prison. Instinctively, I spun around, expecting—fearing—to glimpse the back of my head or catch sight of some unseen watcher in the shadows behind me. Yet I stood alone in a living room that suddenly felt alien and hostile.

Turning back to the TV, the image had shifted, replaced by another vacant room, anonymous and empty. The surreal broadcast vanished like a dream dissolving in daylight. Had I imagined the entirety of what I'd seen? Could my mind concoct such vivid horrors?

As I stood bewildered, the familiar weight of my phone vibrated in my hand. I glanced down instinctively. My breath stopped—a missed call notification displayed on the screen. The phone lit up and buzzed again, filling my nerves with dread. It was an incoming call from me.

Fingers shaking, heart racing, I let the phone ring twice. My thumb hesitated above the green answer button as the screen dimmed. I stared at my phone in fear and confusion. The missed call notification had vanished, and the call history was empty, a clean slate without explanation. The thin line between paranoia and reality is becoming blurred.

Sleep became a memory. I left every light on, drowning in the artificial glow of lamps and reruns. I checked door locks compulsively, muttered reassurances to myself—stress-induced hallucinations, glitches, faulty wiring—any rationale preferable to confronting the chilling realization that an unseen observer had violated my solitude.

By the sixth night, desperation led me to seek validation. I invited my friend Eli over to witness the bizarre broadcast, a skeptic and habitual joker whose blunt commentary might ground my unraveling sanity. At 2:57 AM, we waited together, staring at the static-riddled screen with tense anticipation. But Channel 77 never materialized from more than the frantic black and white pixels. Eli laughed loudly, asking about the drugs I must be smoking, his voice echoing harshly in the silence. I forced a weak chuckle, hid my panic beneath brittle humor, and shut the TV off.

But as soon as Eli left, curiosity and dread compelled me to check again. Alone once more, I powered on the TV and dutifully pressed 7-7 on the remote. “CH 77 - No Data” appeared as scheduled, as if confirming that it existed solely for me.

Channel 77 was back.

The footage changed subtly at first, so incrementally that I initially doubted my senses. It wasn't random rooms anymore, not just innocuous interiors captured by indifferent surveillance. Now, it had purpose—intent. The camera followed something intangible, always hovering just out of view, like an elusive phantom guiding the lens through distorted scenes. Every night, at precisely 2:57 AM, Channel 77's silent broadcast deepened its invasive mystery.

The doors within the broadcast were persistently ajar, each slightly wider than before, as if beckoning me to peer deeper into their forbidden territory. Furniture, previously neat and undisturbed, lay overturned and displaced. Sofas slumped crookedly; tables lay upside-down, legs splayed like animals felled by some unseen predator. Lights no longer illuminated clearly but flickered chaotically, casting restless shadows that danced frantically across walls and floors.

Then came the sound. It began as nothing more than the barest whisper, an unintelligible, rhythmic rasping. I strained my ears, pressing closer to the TV speakers, yet the words remained tantalizingly out of reach. Each breath felt hurried, frantic, desperate—like the labored panting of something running in terror, channeling each agonizing gasp through an antique radio that was slowly, painfully dying.

By the ninth night, my unraveling became impossible to deny. Sleeplessness gnawed at my sanity, tearing down my mental fortifications brick by brick. I called out sick from work, my voice hoarse and trembling. Dark crescents formed beneath my eyes, etched deeply into the pallid skin as evidence of nights spent battling an intangible dread. My apartment felt alien and hostile—a quiet enemy lurking within familiar surroundings.

Each night after Eli's visit, Channel 77's broadcast would begin in the same distorted, unnatural room. Each broadcast pressed closer to my reality, as though methodically breaching the safety barriers that separated me from the images onscreen. Unfamiliar stairwells and hallways morphed gradually into disturbingly familiar landscapes: my stairwell, my hallway, culminating inevitably at the threshold of my apartment door.

The tenth night was when my apartment door opened.

The broadcast, sinisterly deliberate now, moved hauntingly into my sanctuary. Slow and purposeful, enveloping, it traced a methodical path down my hallway. The whispering from the TV grew louder, almost coherent. There were no words but fragments—words I could nearly grasp—words that would practically form into something cohesive and then dissolve into gibberish, leaving only frustration and mounting dread.

Finally, the camera found me standing still and silent in my living room. The figure onscreen wore my clothes and mirrored my posture, build, and face, but bore an unsettling expression I could never recreate. Its head tilted slightly to the side, eyes blank and devoid of recognition, it stood motionless until suddenly, horribly, it smiled—an expression devoid of warmth or joy—a cruel, knowing grin.

My trembling legs instinctively tried to move, but a sickening uncertainty rooted me to the center of the room. Had I moved without remembering? Had I dreamed the transition between lying down and standing? My memories felt thin, brittle—moments crumbling away even as I tried to hold them. The flickering screen seemed to bleed into the edges of my vision, bending the walls around me, and for a terrible moment, I wasn't sure if I was looking at the TV or a recording of something that had already happened.

Maybe I had been standing there all along.

Panic surged through me. I had no memory of this. No memory of standing, motionless and grinning, facing the unseen observer. Desperation drove my following actions; I violently unplugged the TV, tearing the power and auxiliary cords from their wall sockets. My shaking hands pried open the remote control, scattering batteries across the floor as if exorcising malevolent spirits. Yet, despite all this, the screen lingered briefly in darkness, an afterimage of my apartment and me burned permanently into my vision.

2:57 AM returned the next night.

Awakening not to the flicker of my TV but the harsh brightness of my phone screen illuminating the room, I found a new app positioned in the corner on my home screen—an app I never downloaded. Its gray icon offered no title, only a single, white, solitary number: 77. Frantic, I attempted to delete it—my hands trembling, heart thundering wildly in my chest. But it refused removal, only dancing side to side, mocking me in its immunity from permanent deletion.

Helplessly drawn to the unfolding terror, my finger tapped the icon involuntarily. The screen shifted instantly, revealing another grainy, alien yet familiar room. In the center stood my doppelgänger, barefoot and breathing steadily, as though waiting patiently for me to discover its presence, its back facing the camera. Without warning, it turned, eyes locking directly onto mine through the digital haze, and smiled again, slowly, knowingly.

Recoiling in horror, I hurled the phone away with primal force, watching as it fractured against the wall. Splintered glass gleamed from the phone screen's diminished light, a distorted constellation of colors shown against my carpet. Yet even broken, the buzzing from the feed's audio whispered, its voice distorted but chillingly clear:

"You're not watching the feed. You're part of it."

Fear had begun to claim dominion over every corner of my existence. Nightly, footsteps echoed ominously outside my door. Approaching the peephole with mounting dread, I peered cautiously into the hall, only to witness a distorted vision of my living room, as though my apartment was watching me vigilantly from the outside, a twisted reflection of reality.

My understanding of what was real eroded rapidly and relentlessly. I no longer trusted my reflection, compulsively checking mirrors as though searching for proof of my very existence. But the reflections betrayed me, too, moving just fractions of a second behind my reality. Always, invariably, my mirror self would smile first.

Sleep became an enemy, dragging me unwillingly into dreams of relentless static—harsh, suffocating static punctuated by visions of stairwells, hallways, and

doors—each invariably marked by the same insidious number carved crudely into the wood: 77. The sequence ended always the same, jarring me awake to the shrill ring of my phone, a persistent call from myself that I could never answer, refusing to break the cycle.

I exist now in limbo, unsure of when—or if—I ceased being real. Perhaps reality had always been illusory and ephemeral. Now, trapped within the static confines of Channel 77, I question my memories, sanity, and very identity. The broadcast is relentless, inevitable, and eternal.

Each night, I prepare, desperately clinging to fragments of awareness, knowing dreadfully what awaits me. 2:57 AM approaches again—another broadcast, another revelation. And as I stare into the void of Channel 77, it gazes inexorably back, always smiling.