

Loop

Ghosts? What ghosts? I couldn't quite understand what Sym was trying to tell me, but for some reason it made sense. He seemed so sure of himself, I had to know more.

"What the fuck are you talking about? We haven't seen any ghosts... I'd say they weren't real but after what we've seen here, I'm a bit more open-minded." Porter demanded, looking Sym over in frustration. He held the same condescending smirk as always, and simply turned to her. "If Blondie does what she needs to and removes herself from this loop, she'll understand. There's no need to explain it to you." He answered, before turning away from her dismissively.

I can't deny that I was curious of what would happen if I actually went through with his statement of removing myself from the loop, whatever that meant.

"What loop are you talking about?" I was intent on finding out what this was all about, and finding the way out of this nightmare.

Sym looked at me with surprise, it definitely felt like the room got a lot more awkward before he took a step towards me and brushed my face.

Reflex had me smacking his hand away, with a disgusted cry. I'm not into men-more than I have to be for work, and definitely not into whatever the hell Sym is.

"You forgotten." He stated definitively, and looked at his wrist, pulling back his sleeve. A sequence of five numbers ran quickly like a timer on his arm.

"What are you?" I thought I was hardcore in my cyberware upgrades, but if he turned himself into a clock then I think he had me beat.

"I'm a guarantee of sorts... to make sure you don't get stuck in this kind of situation." Sym explained, obviously hiding something from us.

"So, what? You came with this fucked up world then?" Porter asked, looking him over, the distrust rolling off of her now.

All this was only becoming more and more intriguing to me. This was clearly a situation made to design...a fucked up design...but a design nonetheless.

"Since you're a guarantee against loops, named Sym, I'm assuming you're some sort of simulation program or application?" James asked, surprising us all that he and Lisa had been listening in.

Sym looked at him and nodded, "You're closer than either of these geniuses. She could have used someone like you on the outside to help her."

"So, who made you? Why?" Lisa asked, eliciting a smirk from Sym who stayed silent but turned to face me.

Everyone was now staring at me, and I was feeling more uncomfortable than any previous assignment had ever made me.

"Twelve lives." Sym said before adding, "That's all I'm allowed to say concerning that question unless the right person asks.

The right person? Who the hell would that be? Here this asshole is looking at me like I made him but he refuses to answer any of my questions.

What does he mean by all he's allowed to say? Does that mean I'm not the only one who made him then, assuming that it's true I made him in the first place?

"So, who's that?"

"They're not here, so it doesn't matter. They can't be asked until Dr. **** is retrieved, meaning they can't be stuck here." Sym, answered.

Solution

Watching from behind James, Lisa took in the situation and listened carefully. She knew of these types of beings, they'd been used before in missions that she and her team ran. The room they stood in, had been used by them for a while now, at least. So, why weren't any of them hungry? Or weak for that matter? Sure they slept occasionally, but Lisa got the feeling that they did that for reasons other than the need for it.

We're not real, not really here. So, where are we then?

This whole mess and cryptic shit had to be explained...and it felt like I already knew the answer to it. I actually knew what had thrown me off about Blondie.

"What is Blondie supposed to be fixing?" I asked, sure I was on the right track with my question. "Fix?" Blondie and Porter asked, looking at me in confusion.

"This sort of simulacrum is designed to keep tasks... specifically those that are of mission-level importance. This one I assume is charged with keeping Blondie on task, am I wrong?" I explained, drawing on my own experience.

Sym nodded, and answered, "So you understand the situation, and probably know the solution."

Nodding, I looked at Porter and James. "I do."

"Share with the class then, because I don't have a clue," Porter grumbled. Interesting last words.

Sym made eye contact with me at the same time I noticed a new weight on my person. The weight of a firearm, one with bullets designed to burn it's target from inside out. Somehow, my gun from when I was on the battlefield found its way back to me.

"If you would, please."

Clearly discretion wasn't part of his programming.

Porter and James looked at me, and saw the gun under my hand. Both lunged at the same time, except James lunged and Porter while she lunged at me. He tackled her to the ground, and held her for the few seconds he could.

Drawing on Blondie as Sym looked on with approval, I took aim and emptied the clip into her.

Protocol

Thoughts raced through her mind at light speeds, as she struggled to break the complexity of the problem before her. It was a monster of an equation that made Calculus IV look appealing, how to break the hold that they'd gained on everyone. When the dark figures came, they came knowing how to take the entire planet hostage almost at once. There was never a chance to fight back.

Most of the planet was ensnared with their technology, and razed into a hellscape to look more like home as they put it, and only a few hundred remained free now.

All of them had been delivered the same ransom note...a strange equation that needed near impossible math to solve. The point, being to solve their riddle. Those who had the equation imprinted into their minds, were also plagued with a dark need to solve it, and had been transported to a space with technology and tools to solve it.

"Wake up!" A voice urged, followed by a violent slap across the face that sounded like a gunshot, and tossed me nearly off the table.

"I'm up! What is it?" I shouted, rolling off the table to my feet. Opening my eyes I saw Sym standing there, sighed and stepped back. "You stayed in too long again, Dr. You would have been trapped inside there if not for the safety measure I integrated into the application you've been using."

Looking at him for a moment, I took in the room and the company I had left. "What was that hellscape? It was a nightmare."

"The result of the last answer we came up with to the equation. As far as we've been able to discern, you've gone through nine different life sequences. These equations they've been holding us hostage with, despite how complex they are, don't seem to have a lot of variable answers."

Sym answered, looking at three chambers housing people that they'd managed to save...barely.

They remained in comatose states, after their interactions with the dark figures. Their bodies altered.

I could barely remember what happened in all the confusion, when we'd acquired them. Two women and a young man, who unlike many of the others that were infected by the dark figures and turned to monsters.