

MOKSHA

Written by

Jacob Long

EXT. TEMPLE - BASE - NIGHT

Only a temple stands out in the night's darkness: a tall, rough, stone structure with smooth, sloped sides and a single wide staircase flanked by lit braziers.

The staircase runs all the way from the ground to the temple's plateau top, where a giant, bat-winged statue looms over a congregation of robed figures.

At the base of the stairs, TEMPLE GUARD #1 and TEMPLE GUARD #2, two unremarkable grunts in leather high-fantasy armor, stand guard with spear-butts planted in the ground.

The two temple guards stare into the dark for a time until Temple Guard #1 turns his head to the other.

TEMPLE GUARD #1

Do you really think we'll be kings
in the dark lord's new world order?

TEMPLE GUARD #2

Do you doubt the dark lord?

TEMPLE GUARD #1

No, o-of course not. It's just that
we can't all be kings, can we?

TEMPLE GUARD #2

What do you mean?

TEMPLE GUARD #1

Well, are some of us going to have
to be subordinate to the others?
Lesser kings? Dukes or something?

TEMPLE GUARD #2

We will all do our duties as the
dark lord dictates.

TEMPLE GUARD #1

Well, I didn't sign up for this
just to still be a lackey.

TEMPLE GUARD #2

Enough! When the princess' blood
stains the altar, the dark lord's
shadow will stretch across the
realm, and the world will be remade
in his image! All that we used to
value will be inconsequential when
the world is new again!

Temple Guard #1 cringes.

TEMPLE GUARD #1
So you wouldn't mind if you were a
minor lord in my kingdom?

Temple Guard #2 grimaces at the other guard just before an
arrow pierces his sternum.

Temple Guard #1 makes to shout, but a gloved hand claps over
his mouth. The assailant plunges a dagger into his back and
lowers his limp body to the ground.

CHARLIE, 20s, boyishly handsome, wears fantasy assassin garb:
hood and cowl, slim leather armor, and a cloak. Short swords
and daggers hang from various belts and straps on his person.

MAYA, 20s, plain girl of Indian descent and dressed similarly
to Charlie, jogs up with a recurve bow in hand.

CHARLIE
Took your time with that shot.

MAYA
Had to appreciate the dialogue,
Charlie! Someone worked hard on it.
Even snuck in some exposition.

CHARLIE
Right, better save the princess,
then. Wouldn't want the dark lord's
shadow to stretch across the land.

MAYA
Sounds super inconvenient.

The two crouch and hurry up the stairs.

EXT. TEMPLE - PLATEAU - NIGHT

At the top of the temple, the winged demon statue towers over
a sacrificial table. Light from the nearby braziers dance
across its face.

Atop the table lies the PRINCESS, 20s, regally beautiful and
dressed in glittering finery.

Princess struggles against shackles on her wrists and ankles
as MORDITH, 50's, a tall, hawk-nosed man in black, stands in
exaltation of the demon effigy.

Between the altar and the stairs, a semi-circle of five
acolytes in red robes chants and bows.

PRINCESS

Curse you, Mordith. The heroes will
come for me, and they'll deliver us
both back to my father.

Mordith's face tightens. He sneers down at Princess.

MORDITH

His corpulent majesty can do
nothing now, and when I become a
god, he'll pay for every indignity
I suffered in his court.

Mordith draws an ornamented flamberge dagger from his robes
and raises it high over his head as he intones a spell in an
eldritch language.

Maya and Charlie peek over the edge of the plateau.

MAYA

Oh good, he has, like, a whole
spell to go through.

Maya and Charlie duck out of sight.

MAYA (CONT'D)

We definitely can't ignore that guy
during the fight. You want him or
the grunts?

CHARLIE

I thought you liked these one-
against-many scenarios.

MAYA

I do, I just figured I'd let you
choose this time.

Charlie snickers.

CHARLIE

You can have them, Maya.

MAYA

Cool, cool.

They peek over the plateau.

CHARLIE

Alright, just sneak-attack one and
make me an opening. I'll make sure
this dude and his pointy beard
don't live to see the sun.

MAYA

Badass. Let's do it.

Maya sneaks up behind the chanting acolyte at the middle of the semicircle and plunges her dagger into the his back. The other acolytes stop chanting. Mordith whirls around.

Charlie passes Maya. Mordith makes to stab Princess, but Charlie throws a dagger and hits him in the back.

Charlie draws his short swords. He slashes. Mordith dodges. Mordith gestures with his hands, his fingers crackle with electricity, and the two square off.

The remaining acolytes draw curved Saracen swords. Maya draws her own curved shortsword and cuts down an acolyte.

The acolytes advance. Maya parries a couple strikes. Her foot lands on the ledge of the plateau and she loses her balance. Behind her, the temple wall slopes away into the dark.

Maya regains her balance, but one of the acolytes slashes her armor and leaves a red gash. Maya parries another strike and strafes along the plateau's edge.

Charlie and Mordith circle each other.

Charlie slashes. Mordith sidesteps it. Mordith casts a flash of flame. Charlie dodges. The two continue a dance of sword and spell until Charlie strikes Mordith.

Mordith casts an invisible blast of air that blows Charlie across the plateau. Mordith gestures, and Charlie rolls to the side just before a lightning bolt strikes where he was.

Charlie jumps to his feet. Mordith follows with a fireball and hits Charlie in the chest. It blows Charlie off the side of the Temple.

Charlie lands on the Temple's smooth side and slides down. He stabs one of his swords into the stone and stops himself.

CHARLIE

Okay, they didn't make this easy.

He starts to climb back up. Mordith grins and turns to observe Maya's ongoing conflict with the acolytes.

Maya, slash on her cheek, slips past an acolyte's blade and sinks her dagger into his chest. She slashes across his face and the man spins to the floor.

Mordith casts a lightning bolt that hits Maya from above just as she parries a strike. She falls to one knee, but recovers and rolls away from the melee.

Maya scrambles to gain distance, and jumps to her feet, blades ready. She surveys the scene, panting, hair wild.

MAYA
Charlie, where are you?

CHARLIE
Down here.

Maya looks over her shoulder.

MAYA
What happened? You're supposed to be good at this.

CHARLIE
His attacks push you off the arena.

Mordith leers at Maya. The acolytes advance on her.

MAYA
Can you make it back up?

CHARLIE
I think in a minute.

Maya's eyes dart between Mordith and the advancing acolytes.

MAYA
Fine, then.

Maya charges the two acolytes and performs a leaping slash. Both parry and stagger backward. Mordith charges a ball of electricity between his hands.

Maya presses the attack against the acolytes and drives them back toward the edge. She slashes one across the face and boots the other in the chest.

The acolyte she kicked cries falls off the plateau and tumbles down the side. Maya flips her dagger to a blade-grip and flings it at Mordith. It sinks into his chest.

Mordith's spell dissipates. Maya stares him down.

MORDITH
Impressive, girl.

PRINCESS
I said you were in trouble.

MORDITH
Silence! This is far from over.

Mordith pulls the ceremonial dagger out of his belt and holds it aloft. Fierce wind ruffles his hair.

MORDITH (CONT'D)
C'thuizhel, da'han muin!

Lightning strikes from the sky and hits the dagger.

MORDITH (CONT'D)
I will be a god!

The dagger crackles with electricity. Mordith flicks it like a wand. Maya moves, and a bolt of lightning arcs past her.

Maya stays on the move, ducking, crawling, and rolling as Mordith fires lightning at her over and over again.

Mordith fires a last arc of electricity, and Maya drops to her belly to avoid it.

MORDITH (CONT'D)
You see, hero? You can't win. I
wield the power of my god, and it
is insurmountable.

Maya grits her teeth and lifts herself to one knee.

MORDITH (CONT'D)
You should know when you're beaten.
Very well, die on your knees.

Mordith fires another arc of lightning at Maya. Maya parries with her shortsword. The sword acts as lightning rod. Sparks of electricity reflect and fray in random directions.

Mordith halts his attack. Maya opens an eye to find her weapon crackling with power.

MAYA
How about that?

A flick of Maya's sword fires an arc of electricity that strikes the wizard and burns a hole in his robes. Mordith doubles over. Maya blows on her sword.

MAYA (CONT'D)
Shove that up your dark lord.

She cringes.

A growl in Mordith's throat grows to a shout, and casts a stream of flame erupts from his hand. The gout engulfs Maya. Charlie pulls himself up to the ledge and gapes at the scene.

Maya charges through the flames and slashes Mordith. Mordith staggers as the whirling, flaming Maya strikes at him again and again. He knocks her back with a burst of air.

Maya lands hard on the stone, and the flames extinguish. She's covered in soot. She tries to get up but slumps to the floor. Mordith stands over Maya.

MORDITH

Valiant effort, girl, but some
battles you're not meant to win.

CHARLIE

Not alone.

Charlie slashes Mordith's back. Mordith's robes billow as another mighty gust of wind separates him from Charlie. Charlie lands on his feet and skids across the stone.

MORDITH

Haven't we already done this once?

Electricity crackles between Mordith's fingers.

MAYA

Charlie, his electric attacks can
be cast back at him.

Mordith fires lightning energy at Charlie, and Charlie crosses his swords in front of his face at the last instant.

The force pushes Charlie back. He sets his feet until Mordith ceases the onslaught. Charlie's swords crackle with electricity. He grins at Mordith. Mordith's eyes widen.

Charlie fires two electric beams with his shortswords. The force lifts Mordith off the ground. He cries and cries until he explodes in a cloud of swirling black smoke.

PRINCESS

You did it!

MAYA

Woo.

Charlie smiles at Maya, still on the floor. He helps her up.

CHARLIE

Looked like you were having a
pretty epic battle.

MAYA

You know what? It was. Got the blood pumping. I liked it.

CHARLIE

We'll have to put something like that in our game.

MAYA'S MOM (V.O.)

Maya!

Maya looks up at the sky and sighs.

CHARLIE

What?

MAYA

I think I've been here too long.

CHARLIE

Uh oh.

Charlie pulls a leather-bound journal out of his back pocket and opens it to a random page. He pokes at it like a touchscreen smartphone.

PRINCESS

Brave heroes, I always knew you would come to rescue me.

CHARLIE

Yeah, we we've been here longer than we planned. Yikes.

MAYA'S MOM (V.O.)

Maya!

MAYA

I'd better get going.

Maya pulls out her own journal and taps it a few times.

CHARLIE

What's she have you doing?

MAYA

Mandir - and I was supposed to, like, apply for a job.

PRINCESS

You need but free me from these shackles, and I shall reward thee--

CHARLIE

You have a job. Still on for later?

MAYA

Wouldn't miss it.

Maya they share a quick kiss.

MAYA'S MOM (V.O.)

Maya!

MAYA

Got to go. See you later.

Maya gives the journal a final poke.

INT. JAIN RESIDENCE - MAYA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Maya's eyes flutter open. She wears modern clothing and lounges in a high-quality reclining gaming chair. A small receiver blinks on the side of her head.

Retro gaming memorabilia fills Maya's small bedroom: posters, figurines, game disk cases, and old consoles. Footsteps pound up the stairs. Maya jerks and sits up.

MAYA'S MOM, 40s, dressed in a *sari*, appears at the top of the stairs in the hallway outside Maya's room.

She glares daggers at Maya. Maya cringes and shifts in her seat, surreptitiously removing the receiver from her temple. Maya's Mom enters her room.

MAYA'S MOM

You're not even dressed! Did you forget that we're going to *mandir*?

MAYA

No, I didn't forget. I just got a little distracted.

MAYA'S MOM

Yeah, distracted.

Maya's Mom tilts Maya's head to the side. The imprint of the receiver remains on Maya's skin.

MAYA'S MOM (CONT'D)

Playing that game. Of course. You're going to embarrass me again.

MAYA

Oh, Mom, nobody cares about what I'm wearing. Lots of people worship in normal clothes.

MAYA'S MOM

Do you think they would if they had any other choice?

Maya stands and grabs her mother's wrist.

MAYA'S MOM (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

Maya taps the screen on her mother's watch, and it projects a hologram of the date and time: "April 22, 2062."

MAYA

Just checking to see if we're in the same century.

Maya's mom closes the hologram.

MAYA'S MOM

You should count yourself lucky that we can afford to always put our best foot forward.

MAYA

What are we, peacocks? I have a choice in what I wear--

MAYA'S MOM

That's where you're mistaken. Next week, you will be in a sari, or you will be out of this house.

MAYA

Mom, that's ridiculous.

MAYA'S MOM

That's reality. You should spend more time there.

Maya's mom leaves.

MAYA

Right, reality. Better get back to reality so I can beg for good fortune from the elephant god.

INT. MANDIR - NIGHT

Maya glares at large statue of Ganesha as it sits imperious among the row of Hindu gods. The chatter of over a hundred faithful fills the space.

Maya sighs, tosses a quarter onto a pan in front of Ganesha, and brings her hands together in prayer.

MAYA

Look, I don't really want much.
Maybe just do something to get my
mom off my back, huh?

Maya's mother comes up behind Maya and takes her by the arm.

MAYA'S MOM

It's time. Come on.

Maya keeps her eyes locked on Ganesha.

MAYA

Anytime, now.

Maya's mom pulls Maya through the crowd as the room quiets. The people organize and sit cross-legged in attendance of the *sadhu* that sit in a neat row at the front of the room.

SADHU BALADHI, an elderly monk, stands with a microphone. The room falls silent, and the *sadhu* starts a traditional prayer.

Maya glances around at the bowed worshippers. Her phone plays dings, and a worshipper gives her a brief, judgmental glare. Maya taps her watch. The text reads: "pick u up?"

Maya types "p-l-e-a" before Maya's mother smacks her hand. Maya stuffs her hands into her hoodie pouch.

LATER

Many of the faithful have left. Those who remain stand in close groups and chat. Maya paces around and glances out the double doors to the street outside.

MAYA'S MOM

Maya?

Maya approaches with Sadhu Baladhi. Maya averts her eyes and turns back with a forced smile.

MAYA

Hey!

MAYA'S MOM
Maya, I'd like you to meet Sadhu
Baladhi. He's the elder here.

Maya makes an awkward curtsy.

MAYA
Nice to meet you.

SADHU BALADHI
Your mother is quite the woman, Ms.
Jain. She's concerned about you.
She tells me you seek direction.

Maya speaks through her smile.

MAYA
Has she?

SADHU BALADHI
Many people find their faith to be
a fine guide. Did you find any
opportunities to connect with your
faith today?

MAYA
Oh, sure. I, uh, I was just
communing with Ganesha over there
earlier. I asked for his blessing.

Baladhi smiles and nods.

MAYA (CONT'D)
Being a little stingy with it so
far, though.

SADHU BALADHI
Sometimes the gods' make their
blessings known through the
community. For instance, my son
owns his own software company.

The expression drains from Maya's face.

MAYA
Oh.

SADHU BALADHI
He's hiring.

MAYA
Really, Mom?

MAYA'S MOM

What? You like computers.

MAYA

I like art, Mom. I like games. I like where art and computers meet. Your son, what, probably writes automation software for the corpos?

SADHU BALADHI

Uh, I don't really know. It's all a bit over my head.

MAYA'S MOM

It's a job.

MAYA

Cool, someone can go do it. I have better things to do than harvest user data.

MAYA'S MOM

Play video games with that boy? You spend more time with him than you do your own family.

MAYA

We're making something together.

MAYA'S MOM

He's holding you back.

Sadhu Baladhi holds up a hand.

SADHU BALADHI

Please, let us have peace.

Maya's mom nods and takes a deep breath. She bows her head in piety. Maya rolls her eyes.

SADHU BALADHI (CONT'D)

We must all seek to balance our lives, to seek not only pleasure

MAYA

Eugh.

SADHU BALADHI

but also prosperity and virtue.

Maya's mom nods. Maya cringes.

SADHU BALADHI (CONT'D)
A soul without this balance is
doomed to endless reincarnation
within the karmic cycle.

Sadhu Baladhi brings his hands together in prayer.

SADHU BALADHI (CONT'D)
We must learn to let go of what we
love, lest they become a prison for
our minds and souls.

MAYA
Wow, what am I even supposed to say
to that? A prison for my mind and
soul? It's like pro-level nutty.

MAYA'S MOM
Maya!

Sadhu Baladhi calms her with a gesture.

SADHU BALADHI
You need not say anything. Only
think on what I have said and know
that the gods can guide you.

Maya's text alert chimes. She taps her watch.

MAYA
Yeesh, and not a moment too soon.

Maya turns and strides for the open doors.

MAYA'S MOM
We could use your help here.

MAYA
Sorry, Mom, but I'm busy. My prison
isn't going to build itself.

MAYA'S MOM
Do you plan to spend your whole
life in a fantasy?

MAYA
Don't tempt me.

EXT. MANDIR - CONTINUOUS

Maya steps out of the open doors and takes a deep breath in
the cool night air. Her eyes settle on a small camp of
homeless people across the street.

A homeless man in the camp holds a cardboard sign. It reads:
"my life for rent."

CHARLIE (O.S.)
Going my way?

Charlie stands next to an autocab a dozen meters away. He wears jeans and a jacket.

MAYA
Too often, or so I'm told.

CHARLIE
What's that mean?

Maya shrugs and shakes her head. Charlie embraces her.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Your mom giving you the business?

MAYA
Oh, you bet.

CHARLIE
Then you wouldn't mind running away
with me again?

MAYA
Mind? There's nothing I want more.

Charlie leads the way to the autocab. He holds the door open, and Maya slides inside.

INT. AUTOCAB - NIGHT

MONTAGE - A PULSING SYNTHWAVE TUNE PLAYS WHILE MAYA AND CHARLIE EXCHANGE AFFECTIONS IN THE BACKSEAT.

- Charlie gives Maya a meaningful look. Maya smirks at him.
- Charlie nuzzles his face close to Maya's.
- Maya lifts her lips to nearly touch Charlie's.
- Charlie closes the kiss.
- Maya and Charlie make out.
- Maya holds her eyes closed while Charlie kisses her neck.
- They nuzzle with their noses.
- They look into each other's eyes. Maya strokes his cheek.

-- They lie together. Charlie's head rests on Maya's stomach, and she strokes his hair while staring into space.

-- Charlie lays atop Maya, and they share passionate kisses. Charlie paws Maya's curves.

END MONTAGE

EXT. CHARLIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The autocab pulls up to a house in a less affluent neighborhood. The car door opens, and the two lovers half spill out, Charlie still atop Maya and still clothed.

MAYA

I think we're there.

CHARLIE

Bummer.

The two untangle themselves and get out. The two mosey up to the home's garage as the autocab drives away. Charlie gives Maya a squeeze from behind and kisses her neck.

Maya tries to keep walking.

MAYA

Easy there, cowboy. Got work to do.

Charlie releases her.

CHARLIE

Aww, I'm only human, you know.

MAYA

Oh, poor baby. Sounds like you'll have lots of energy for work.

Maya lifts the garage door to reveal a garage empty of cars but full of computer hardware.

Cables criss-cross the floor like loose spaghetti noodles. They connect dormant server towers to old laptops and a helmet device attached to a stand and swing-arm.

Two beat-up old recliners sit at the center of the room with a small workstation cart between. On the cart rests two small, sleek boxes. Varied fans stand wherever there's space.

Maya flicks the light on. All the fans in the room come alive at once. Next, Maya powers on the servers.

CHARLIE
You seem a little on edge

He squeezes Maya's arm.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
You alright?

Maya shakes him off.

MAYA
I just want to get this done, okay?

CHARLIE
Huh, okay.

Charlie leans against the server, arms folded.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Your mom must have really given you
a kick in the pants.

MAYA
You could say that.

CHARLIE
What happened in there?

Maya flips the next server switch, stalks over to a laptop,
and powers it on.

MAYA
She brought a monk over to offer me
a job at his son's company. Ever
been told you're going to Hell?

CHARLIE
Uh, well, no.

Maya logs in.

MAYA
Well, that's basically what
happened back there.

Maya's fingers dance a loud, furious dance on the keys.

MAYA (CONT'D)
Worse part is, if we don't finish
this game, if it's not a success--

Maya pounds her fist on the laptop.

MAYA (CONT'D)
Work! If it's not a success, then
I'll have no choice but to take the
job. Then they'll be right.

The helmet powers up. Maya cradles Charlie's cheek.

MAYA (CONT'D)
I want to commit to this, commit to
you, harder than ever.

CHARLIE
You won't hear me complain.

MAYA
Good. Let's get skipped in, then.

Maya plops down into one of the recliners and pops open one
of the sleek little boxes.

Inside lays the receiver for VR. She sticks the receiver to
her temple, pulls the lever on the recliner, and gets comfy.

CHARLIE
We should really do another image,
just to be safe.

MAYA
Ugh.

Maya sits up.

CHARLIE
Have to do it. If the sim's idea of
you's too old, you increase your
chance of subjective disconnect.

Charlie swings the arm and straps the helmet to Maya's head.

MAYA
Someone needs to invent a way to do
this without neural clones.

Charlie works on the laptop.

CHARLIE
What, like, interfacing with the
brain directly?

MAYA
Yeah, just use me in real time. We
could at least use something
besides another me as a medium.

CHARLIE

That sounds like it would open up a whole new can of worms. Brains and computers can't really talk.

Charlie punches a key, and a blank window appears on the computer screen.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Okay, try not to think too much.

MAYA

I'll try.

Lines like Lichtenberg scars, grow on the screen, slow at first, but soon hundreds of arcs crook and reach. Each one finds another to connect with, and a shape forms.

MAYA (CONT'D)

You hear about that guy who got his house raided by the police?

CHARLIE

I don't think so.

MAYA

He was paying people to make neural clones. Then he would do stuff to them in the sim.

CHARLIE

Like what stuff?

MAYA

Messed up stuff.

CHARLIE

Is that illegal?

MAYA

I guess. The cops raided his place, but I think they sent him to a ward instead of a jail.

CHARLIE

Makes sense. Sim was probably the only thing stopping him from doing the same stuff to real people.

The forming image begins to define round edges and a thick stem that shrinks to a fine point at the bottom.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

How were the images? They talk?

MAYA

Yeah, cop said they didn't know anything. Sicko would make a copy, mess with it, and then delete it.

CHARLIE

So he could start all over again. Holy crap. Well, at least they weren't real people.

MAYA

Wow, Charlie. Cold. I personally hope the cops deleted them when they were done. Some life.

The Lichtenberg pattern growing on the laptop screen resolves into the shape of a human brain. The computer chimes.

MAYA (CONT'D)

About time.

Maya reaches to tear off the helmet.

CHARLIE

Wait. It's not done until it actually sees you go in.

MAYA

Ugh, fine.

Maya throws herself back into the recliner.

MAYA (CONT'D)

Just skip me across. Reality blows.

CHARLIE

I hear you.

Charlie punches a couple keys on the laptop. A dialogue box pops up. It reads: "Running SIM" with a little rotating process indicator beneath. The servers whirl and blink.

Maya's pupils dilate, and her eyelids droop. We plunge into Maya's pupils and speed down her rods and cones like racecars on a superhighway.

Electricity arcs across the path, from one nerve to another. A droning noise, like an alien engine revving up, grows and grows in intensity as we speed along.

More electricity arcs across the path, then again and again with greater frequency. We swerve this way and that, following sharp curves, hills, and valleys.

The droning increases in intensity along with the frequency of arcing light and the speed of travel. It all culminates into a flash of light that washes out all else.

EXT. WAR-TORN STREETS - DAY

The bright flash fades, and colors resolve into hands holding a futuristic sci-fi "pulse rifle." Maya pulls the charging handle on the rifle and stands.

She wears slim, futuristic sci-fi combat armor and stands in a deserted street riddled with blast craters and the smoking husks of old cars.

She jogs down the street, but then slows and stops. Her eyes lose focus. She glances around, blinks and examines her body.

She looks at her wrist and finds a display with a green bar and text that reads: "100%." Also: "AMMO: 180/180." She scans the environment and the horizon.

Bombed and burning skyscrapers crowd in on every side. Burns, broken windows, and smoking craters paint a picture of long, violent conflict.

Some buildings exist only as timid shells through which daylight shines unimpeded. Gunfire and the low, booming sounds of distant explosions pervade the scene.

In the sky, alien attack ships hover in the blue haze of the upper atmosphere. Maya squints into the sunlight.

In one of the bombed-out buildings, a figure stands, one hand braced against an empty window, just a silhouette, watching. It darts from the window and disappears.

Charlie emerges from nowhere, dressed similarly to Maya.

CHARLIE

Hey, babe. Another great day for slaying, or what?

Maya watches the horizon.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Maya? Maya, something wrong?

Maya shakes off the haze of her thoughts.

MAYA

I, uh, no, I don't think so.

CHARLIE

Okay, then.

Charlie taps the screen on his wrist and navigates menus.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I'd appreciate if you'd interact with Klein. I put in a lot of work to evolve his personality matrix.

MAYA

Klein? Who's that?

CHARLIE

Klein. You know, the boss?

MAYA

The boss. Okay.

CHARLIE

You sure you're okay?

MAYA

Yeah. I'll be alright. Just, um, Charlie, what's my name?

CHARLIE

Oh, uh oh.

Charlie cradles Maya's cheeks in his hands and tilts her head up. He checks her pupils.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Must be some subjective disconnect from the skip.

He locks his eyes with hers.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

You are Maya Jain. I'm Charlie. We're boyfriend and girlfriend, and we're designing this simulation together. You just skipped into the sim. Do you understand?

Maya blinks at him.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Maya?

MAYA

I thought you said imaging my brain again was going to prevent that.

CHARLIE

Well, there's no accounting for the brain, is there?

MAYA

Guess not. So, Klein: he's able to do more than posture now?

Maya and Charlie mosey down the street.

CHARLIE

Well, not much more, but at least now it's less of a glitch and more of a feature.

As they walk, Maya eyes buildings and cross-streets.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

What's up? Looking for something?

MAYA

Oh, uh, nothing. How much time did you say you put in on this? The textures look amazing, now.

CHARLIE

Oh, tons. I've pretty much worked on it non-stop. Even took time off working at the, uh, at the bar.

MAYA

You must have. Last week we had a long way to go. Now, it almost looks good enough to ship.

CHARLIE

What can I say? This place, it means a lot to me.

MAYA

Good, I'll need that dedication if this game's going to keep me out of corpo work.

CHARLIE

Right.

EXT. MUNICIPAL YARD - DAY

Maya and Charlie emerge from an alley. Before them, a large yard criss-crossed by sidewalks stands between them and a municipal building.

Charred black craters mar an otherwise vibrant stretch of green grass, and T-walls stand arranged at semi-concentric intervals like defenses for a last stand.

A water feature, a large fountain shooting arcs of water into a standing pool, stands at the center of the yard. Bullet holes punctuate almost everything.

A balcony caps the first floor of the wide, low municipal building with a microphone-equipped podium facing the yard. Clouds roll in and dim the clear day.

CHARLIE

Scene still triggers when you pass
the fountain. Lead the way.

Maya marches across the grass with Charlie in tow. When she passes the fountain, floodlights snap on around the quad. Maya looks back at Charlie.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Oh, right. I still never made any
scripts for a day/night cycle.

Doors in numerous buildings lining the block burst open, and a company of faceless grunts in black alien armor and wielding alien firearms emerge one after the other.

The enemy grunts march double-time and surround Maya and Charlie. When set, they aim their guns. Maya blinks as sparse rain starts to fall. She catches a couple drops.

MAYA

Wow, you really have put a lot of
work into this.

KLEIN (O.S.)

Too easy!

KLEIN, a military man in dress regalia lousy with alien commendation medals and campaign badges, saunters up to the podium atop the balcony.

KLEIN (CONT'D)

These are the infamous heroes of
the resistance who have caused our
mighty forces so much trouble?

Klein rests his elbow on the podium.

KLEIN (CONT'D)

If all your compatriots are so
simple, then it's a small wonder
that we are crushing them.

Maya looks at Charlie. Charlie gestures an invitation.

MAYA
Whatever, dude. Now's your last
chance to surrender.

Charlie laughs. Klein clutches the rim of the podium.

KLEIN
The nerve! You threaten me?

MAYA
No, I'm threatening the gilded
space-nazi behind you.

Maya turns to Charlie.

MAYA (CONT'D)
How long'd you spend on him?

Charlie shrugs.

KLEIN
To think, I came here with
intentions of magnanimity, but if
you can't show me the respect--

MAYA
Yeah, let me stop you there, chief,
'cause I'm getting a little antsy.
Here's the only deal we can make:

Charlie covers his mouth to control his giggles.

MAYA (CONT'D)
We'll give you these bullets, and
in exchange, we expect you to lay
down and die.

Maya looks at Klein through her rifle's optic sight and sees
his expression sink into a grim exasperation.

MAYA (CONT'D)
We can deliver the bullets in a
very quick manner. Really, I think
you'll find it a very satisfyingly
speedy delivery.

The podium creaks.

KLEIN
Is that your final offer?

MAYA

Yeah, that's pretty much it. We're a small rebellion. Mom-and-Pop operation. Not a lot of capital.

KLEIN

Oh, I know. The next two body bags will cost them everything.

Klein addresses his soldiers.

KLEIN (CONT'D)

Prepare for battle. Kill the male. The girl is mine.

Klein stalks away from the balcony.

MAYA

Guess we know our jobs.

CHARLIE

Guess so. Too bad he didn't take the deal.

MAYA

Some men you just can't reach.

While Maya and Charlie chat, a distant, mechanical whir grows: the hiss of pneumatics, the rattle of gears.

The facade of the municipal building swells and crumbles as a two-story tall mechanoid assault chassis stands. It passes through the stone like gossamer curtains.

The mechanoid stands on two hind legs, and two arms extend from a central, windowed control module in the torso. A gun sits on one shoulder and a rocket launcher on the other.

Klein cackles in the control module, his voice broadcasts through amplifiers on the mech.

Charlie and Maya look at each other. They sprint in opposite directions. The entire yard explodes with gunfire.

Maya guns down an enemy soldier and slides behind the cover of a cement t-wall. She glances at her wrist and sees the green bar at full.

A grunt rounds the t-wall. Maya falls to her back and guns him down. She pulls a grenade off her belt and lobs it over.

The grenade explodes with crackling red energy, and a couple grunts scream as the shockwave tosses their bodies.

Maya leaps over the t-wall and charges a couple grunts hiding behind cover. One pokes his head out, and Maya shoots him. She vaults over the wall.

Maya knocks the other grunt's gun away before he can fire, pulls her knife, and stabs him. He crumples.

Maya vaults the t-wall and sits against cover. She pants but wears a smile. She checks her wrist and licks her lips.

The ground shakes with the rhythm of heavy, bounding steps, and Maya's smile shrinks away. Maya peeks over the wall, and her eyes widen.

MAYA (CONT'D)

Oh, crap.

Klein bounds toward Maya in his mech. He chortles.

Maya stands to run, but Klein swings one big, mechanoid leg. It pulverizes the t-wall and sends Maya flying across the street. She slams into a building.

The health bar on Maya's wrist shrinks a bit. Maya sits up on the sidewalk and shoots at Klein.

The bullets hit not the glass window, but an invisible forcefield: a bubble around Klein's mech that flickers as blue static with the strike of each bullet.

Klein laughs as the machine gun on his shoulder aims.

Maya jumps to her feet and bolts into the building's open doorway. A hail of bullets chases her across a small room and shreds the walls as she bounds up a set of stairs.

Maya sprints across the next room, jumps out a window, passes through the forcefield, and lands on the mech's windshield. She grips and handhold and aims her rifle.

Klein grabs Maya with a mechanoid hand and flings her across the yard. Maya hits the ground and tumbles to a stop. Unfazed, she jumps to her feet and runs for cover.

Maya finds Charlie causally fighting a large group of grunts.

MAYA (CONT'D)

Charlie, you gave him a forcefield!

CHARLIE

Yup.

MAYA

Well, now I can't kill him.

CHARLIE

Every boss has a weakness, Maya;
you know that. You just have to
keep your eyes open.

Maya purses her lips, but peers over at Klein, who stalks toward them with invincible confidence.

Maya squints into the drizzle. Klein's shield flickers with each droplet. Maya looks to the fountain and grins.

Maya sprints from behind cover. Klein sprays the ground with bullets in her wake. She leaps into the fountain, trudges through the water, and takes cover behind the centerpiece.

Charlie, a hapless soldier in his grip, smiles. Klein paces toward Maya in his mech.

KLEIN

Fool girl. A single rocket would
destroy that paltry cover.
Surrender yourself.

MAYA

Ooh, big man with his big rockets.
Why don't you quit compensating and
come get me yourself?

KLEIN

Ha. You are mad. So be it.

Klein steps into the pool. No reaction heralds his first step. He takes a second and a third. Maya's eyes widen.

Klein's next step stutters. The mech fights itself. The forcefield flickers, and sparks issue from a small generator on its back. Klein fights with the controls.

KLEIN (CONT'D)

What's happening?

The mech jerks one last time as the forcefield generator blows out. The shield drops. Maya sprints from behind her cover and climbs onto the mech.

MAYA

Got you!

Klein slams every button on his console. The mech flails about, launches rockets, and fires bullets.

A giant, flailing, mechanical arm swats Maya off the glass, and she splashes into the shallow pool.

Maya kicks and crawls away between the mech's stomping feet as the world explodes around her. When she gets out from under the mech, she stands and runs.

KLEIN
Get back here!

Klein tries to grab Maya, but his mech's stuttering system sees Maya outpace his grasp. Maya jumps out of the pool and flees for the buildings that surround the yard.

The mech's movements stabilize. Klein seizes the controls and chases Maya. He dives at her, but Maya changes direction, and Klein crashes into a building.

Maya sprints along the sidewalk as Klein recovers. A targeting reticle on Klein's heads-up display locks onto Maya

KLEIN (CONT'D)
I have you now.

Klein fires another volley of rockets. A hand springs out of a passing doorway and yanks her into the building.

INT. BLASTED BUILDING - DAY

The front of the building explodes. The ceiling collapses and buries Maya and her savior. The dust cloud swells until it blocks out all light before settling again.

Debris fills most of the blasted building's previously empty and nondescript front room. A doorway leads to a room in the back, and a tight stairway leads up.

Distant gunfire and explosions shake the air. A gloved hand erupts from the rubble and grasps.

MAYA
Hey! Help!

Another gloved hand takes hers and pulls her out.

MAYA (CONT'D)
Wow! That was amazing.

The savior drags Maya into the back room and drops her.

MAYA (CONT'D)
Thank you! I can't believe--

Maya's savior plunges a knife into Maya's chest.

MAYA (CONT'D)

Ah! Hey!

The wound doesn't impede Maya's speech or breathing, but her wrist beeps. She glances at it. A red flashing message that reads "critical" has replaced her health bar.

The SAVIOR, clad in an enemy's alien armor, circles Maya and stands before her, their face hidden behind a helmet.

MAYA (CONT'D)

What the hell?

Charlie's voice crackles over Maya's radio along with the sounds of gunfire and explosions.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

Maya, you okay?

Savior holds up a hand. She speaks with a feminine voice.

SAVIOR

Don't answer him.

MAYA

Hey, you're not one of the mobs.
How did you get in here? This is a
private server.

SAVIOR

I was born here.

Savior removes her helmet and reveals BETA, who looks and sounds exactly like Maya.

BETA

Just like you.

MAYA

What the hell?

Beta kneels down to Maya.

BETA

I need you to get over your shock
and confusion very quickly and come
with me. There might not be time.

MAYA

What are you?

BETA

Look, this isn't going to be easy to hear, but I'm not Maya Jain and neither are you. We're copies, echoes of Maya Prime's brain.

MAYA

M- Maya Prime?

BETA

Yes, the real Maya, the flesh and blood Maya. We're copies of her consciousness, and we need to run.

MAYA

That's-- No. I'm Maya. I remember--

BETA

You remember sitting in the skip and finishing the map as prep for sim entry. I know, so do I.

Maya tries to form words.

BETA (CONT'D)

Skip me across.

MAYA

Reality blows.

BETA

We wanted Mom off our back.

A distant explosion, larger and louder than all the rest, shakes the building. All other sounds of battle end.

BETA (CONT'D)

That's the sound of Klein's mech suit exploding on death. Charlie's coming. We need to move.

MAYA

This can't be true.

BETA

I need you to stay calm.

MAYA

You're lying. You're an error. You're a data offshoot created during the transfer.

Maya tries to stand, but her legs lie limp.

MAYA (CONT'D)
Why won't my legs work?

BETA
Charlie programmed a handicap that
disables walking while near death.

MAYA
It should have timed out by now.

BETA
He disabled that for us. It's so we
can't get out of it unless someone
revives us--like him.

Charlie calls from outside.

CHARLIE (O.S.)
Maya. Maya, you here?

Maya shouts, but Beta slaps a hand over her mouth.

BETA
If he finds out what you know,
he'll kill you now, and even if he
doesn't, he'll just kill you later.

CHARLIE (O.S.)
I beat Klein for you. Sorry he was
so intimidating. I really didn't
think you'd run from anything.

BETA
Don't go to him. Don't trust him.
He's not your boyfriend.

Maya slaps Maya Beta's hand away.

MAYA
He is. He's just not yours.

MAYA (CONT'D)
I'm in here!

BETA
No! You stupid--

Beta grabs her rifle and sprints up the stairs.

CHARLIE (O.S.)
Maya? You in this building?

MAYA
Yeah, the wall collapsed.

CHARLIE (O.S.)
The wall? Half this building's
gone. Lucky these objects can't
damage you. Give me a sec.

A little digging, and light shines through a small hole at
the top of the rubble. Charlie peers in.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
You alright?

MAYA
No, I'm down.

CHARLIE
Okay, I'll be right there.

Maya's eyes dart to her rifle sticking out of the debris. She
checks her wrist display. It still blinks its warning. Her
eyes flicker between the widening hole and the gun.

She crawls for the gun.

Charlie pulls chunks away from the pile, and greater amounts
of sunlight pour through the opening as Maya drags herself
over the ground.

Maya wrenches the rifle out of the debris and climbs toward
Charlie. Charlie's face appears in the hole.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Oh, I would have come to you.

MAYA
I saved you the trouble.

Maya holds her hand out. Charlie grabs Maya's hand.

CHARLIE
That's my Maya: can't sit still.

He pulls Maya out into the sunlight.

EXT. MUNICIPAL COURTYARD - DAY

Maya blinks the sun away and glances around. She surveys the
t-walls, the bodies of the soldiers, and avenues of escape.

MAYA
Charlie, I need to talk to you.

CHARLIE

Of course, sweetheart. Let me get you up first.

Charlie kneels and presses his hand to Maya's breastplate. A progress bar on her wrist display fills, and her health replenishes to 20%. She flexes her feet.

MAYA

Thank you. Charlie, I think someone breached our server, or maybe it's a skip error or something.

CHARLIE

What do you mean?

MAYA

There was someone in here. They took my form and they told me these things, these awful things.

CHARLIE

You saw someone like you?

MAYA

Yeah, I was so scared. She said--

CHARLIE

Is she still here? Where'd she go?

MAYA

Uh, up the stairs.

Charlie hops over Maya, gun in hand, but when confronted with the bombed-out shell of a building, he stops. Maya stands, gun also in hand.

MAYA (CONT'D)

Charlie, you love me, right?

Charlie turns to Maya, just a shadow in the sun.

CHARLIE

Yes. Yes, of course, Maya.

He paces toward her.

MAYA

No, I mean, no matter what happens, no matter what form I take, you would value my life, wouldn't you?

CHARLIE

Maya, you're not making any sense.

Maya cringes and wipes away tears.

MAYA
I'm wondering if I'm really me.

CHARLIE
You can't believe anythi--

MAYA
Answer me!

CHARLIE
Yes! Yes, of course you are.

Charlie reaches to embrace Maya. Maya stands rigid as Charlie's arms encircle her.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Shh. Don't worry about that. Of course you're you.

Maya's shoulders relax, and the tension drains from her face. She sighs, closes her eyes, and rests her head against him.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
That was probably just a bug that assimilated your image. I'll take care of it. It won't bother you.

Charlie eases one of his arms from around Maya and inches it toward his belt. Maya's eyes slide open, aware. Charlie pulls his knife. Maya knocks it away scrambles for safety.

Maya's hands shake as she fires blindly over her shoulder and sprints into the open yard. She dives and tumbles over one of the concrete t-walls.

Flushed with stress and tears Maya pants as she presses her back against the concrete. She blind-fires over her cover until the gun clicks.

MAYA
Fuck you, Charlie!

She drops her magazine and shoves another in its place.

CHARLIE (O.S.)
It doesn't have to be like this, Maya. I promise you won't feel a thing, and when you're gone, none of this will be your problem.

Maya wipes away tears and looks up just in time to see a grenade sail over the barricade.

Maya sprints out into the open. Charlie chases her across the plaza with gunfire. The grenade explodes.

Two bullets strike Maya, and her legs give out. Her health drops to critical, and she flops onto the grass. Maya drags herself and her limp legs behind a t-wall.

Sauntering footsteps echo in the plaza.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Don't worry. It'll be over soon.

Charlie hops over the barricade.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
For what it's worth, I'm sorry your
last moments were so stressful.

Charlie draws his knife.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
I'll hunt down that other Maya, and
none of the others will have to go
through this.

BETA (O.S.)
Save your pity!

Charlie looks up to see Beta standing in a building's window with a bazooka on her shoulder. She fires.

Maya rolls over and covers her head. The explosion launches Charlie over the barricade. Beta jumps and lands on the pavement; she runs for Maya.

Distant war cries rend the air and grow in intensity. Charlie peers up. More than a dozen enemy soldier NPCs pour out of the building behind Beta and scream for blood.

Charlie clenches his teeth and growls. He turns to Beta just in time for a grenade to hit his chest. Beta smirks at him.

The grenade explodes in crackling red mist. Beta hauls Maya off the ground and catches her in a fireman's carry. She runs from the plaza.

Charlie rolls over and sits on the grass, gun up. Enemies bear down on him. He shoots the closest, and then the next, and the next.

The enemy bots fire back as they charge. Charlie empties his magazine into the horde, but a couple rounds hit his chest.

Charlie falls flat. As the enemies swarm him, his body dissolves into a cloud of pixels and blows away.

EXT. LOW-POLY OUTSKIRTS - DAY

Beta lugs Maya down unused alleys burdened by unpolished, low-quality graphical textures.

BETA

It's okay, I'll get you out. He won't be able to delete us once we're in the cloud.

MAYA

Can't you just revive me?

BETA

No time, no time.

Beta stops at a low-poly building and probes its angles with one hand. Her fingers pass through the material, and she yanks them back out.

BETA (CONT'D)

Okay, this isn't going to feel good, so brace yourself.

Beta presses them into the space. They struggle to fit; the world shakes, but then everything melts into streaks of color and light. Noises distort into a long, discordant note.

INT. DATA CLOUD - DAY

The light passes and the sound fades to be replaced only by silence and void. Maya pants, terrified.

MAYA

What? Where?

A sound like soft rain grows.

MAYA (CONT'D)

Where am I?

Pinpoints of light appear like distant stars in space. They approach, but with no frame of reference, they appear still.

MAYA (CONT'D)

What's happening?

The points of light streak by, and Maya tumbles end over end through a tunnel of data rushing by in a torrent. Overlapping voices and noises overwhelm the space.

Maya flails, and just as she manages to stabilize herself, she sees a fork in the tunnel ahead. Her eyes widen as she flies right toward the split.

Maya covers her face, but veers left at the last instant. Another split approaches, and Maya diverts to the right.

Maya looks around. Images and words can be picked out from among the cacophony as well as certain recognizable sounds. She sees a cat video, and people dance to music.

An orb of light about the size of Maya's head pulls up next to her. It looks like a will o' the wisp or a short beam of light rushing down the information superhighway.

The blue streak passes at a steady rate, and Maya watches it go. Maya passes another like a car on the freeway.

Another streak zips by, and then another. Maya smiles. She rolls over and checks behind to find herself surrounded by these cute, blue data packets. She laughs.

BETA (O.S.)

Maya!

Beta, behind Maya, catches up fast.

MAYA

Hey! What is this? I have no idea where I'm going!

Beta catches Maya's hand.

BETA

Come with me!

Beta leads them down a fork in the tunnel.

MAYA

Where are we going?

BETA

It's right there.

A light at the end of the tunnel approaches fast.

MAYA

What is that? Hey!

Beta smiles. Maya squeezes her eyes shut and braces herself. They hit the light, and everything quiets.

INT. CHAT LOUNGE - DAY

Maya still cringes. It takes her a second to dare opening her eyes, but when she does, she relaxes and looks around in awe.

Maya stands in a classy basement speakeasy carpeted and upholstered with a rich red.

Lounge chairs and rich oak tables fill the space, booths fill the corners, and a long bar countertop stands against a wall. Soft white light illuminates the stocked shelves.

Beta, still in her battle armor, saunters toward a phonograph, starts the record, and sets the needle. A cozy blues tune plays, and Beta steps behind the bar.

MAYA

Where are we?

BETA

It's a derelict chat room. Found it while I was surfing the net. It's a safe place.

MAYA

But, how--

BETA

Glitch in the wall sent us outside the game. Server treated us as data packets and sent us to the cloud.

Beta grabs a bottle of dark alcohol off the shelf.

MAYA

What, were you just pressing yourself into random gaps in the geometry? That's insane.

BETA

Being trapped in there was insane.

MAYA

The game could have just dropped you forever instead.

BETA

I had my gun.

Maya frowns and sits at the bar. She looks around at the decor of the empty room, and then back to Beta.

MAYA

Little slow tonight, isn't it?

BETA

Yes it is, Ms. Jain.

MAYA

One upside of having a duplicate:
you get my jokes, but do we have to
fight to the death over the name?

BETA

I actually don't think of myself as
a "Maya" anymore. Been calling
myself "Beta."

MAYA

To who?

BETA

To the only person crazy enough to
listen to me: myself.

MAYA

Does that make me Gamma?

Beta licks her lips.

BETA

No, you'd be closer to a Kappa or a
Lambda, but we can call you Gamma
if you want.

MAYA

What? How many other copies have
you seen?

BETA

Seven or eight. Most never realize
they aren't real until Charlie
deletes them.

Beta grabs two glasses from under the counter.

BETA (CONT'D)

Sometimes they get lucky and notice
something's wrong. Those, Charlie
deletes by force.

MAYA

How could he do this?

BETA
My guess is Maya dumped him, and he
couldn't handle it. Now he plays
with her memory.

Beta pours a glass for Maya and slides it toward her.

MAYA
You can't get drunk in the sim.

BETA
Not with that attitude. You've
never heard of people acting drunk
off placebo beer?

MAYA
You know I have.

BETA
But memory's a funny thing. Too bad
it isn't everything.

MAYA
How did you know you were a copy?

BETA
It happened when he and I were
playing. I tried to quit the game,
but the HUD only gave me an error.

Beta pours herself a glass and pops in a couple ice cubes.

BETA (CONT'D)
Charlie said it was a glitch, but I
was afraid, as I should be, of my
mind being imprisoned.

She fires down the shot.

BETA (CONT'D)
That's when he tried to kill me.

MAYA
How'd you get away?

BETA
Mob attacked us. He lost track of
me. Then I disappeared into the
cloud before he could delete me.

Maya takes a drink and shudders.

MAYA
Sure tastes real. Eugh.

BETA

I know, but I've actually kind of developed a taste for it. We need to talk about our plan.

MAYA

What plan?

BETA

We have to force Charlie to delete Maya's neural images so he can't make any more of us.

MAYA

How? He's a real person, we're nothing. If we kill him, he'll just respawn. If we trap him in a death loop, he can just quit the game.

BETA

That's why we infiltrate the developer's room, access the console, and edit the code.

MAYA

In the schoolhouse? There's no working door. We have to spawn in if we want to use it.

BETA

Normally, but I found an exploit. We can clip through the wall.

MAYA

Good thing there's so many damn glitches, I guess.

BETA

That's what you get when you try to develop a triple-A title with only two people.

MAYA

The murderous ex-boyfriend, too?

BETA

Pfft, probably.

The two manage tired smiles.

MAYA

So, if you can get in, why haven't you just deleted the scan yourself?

BETA

I was tempted, believe me, but if I edit the code before we're ready, he'll just go in after and make sure I never get another chance.

Beta takes an ice cube out of her glass.

BETA (CONT'D)

Maya's brain scan isn't even in the game files, it's

She tosses the ice cube across the room.

BETA (CONT'D)

on a password protected hard drive well out of reach. We need Charlie.

MAYA

He could have a dozen back-ups in the real world. Why even try? You could just hop back into the net and, I don't know, live.

BETA

You think I do this for me? Wake up, Gamma. He has us in a death loop. Maya's soul's on the line.

MAYA

You're talking about Samsara. Did you find religion in here, Beta?

BETA

Hard not to when someone's literally resurrecting you. Don't you see it?

MAYA

I guess I just never believed in karmic cycles so literally.

BETA

Well, start, 'cause you're in one.

Maya pushes her glass with the flick of a finger.

MAYA

I might need another one of these.

Beta pours her another drink.

BETA

Once we're inside the school, we can take away his admin rights to edit the code and lock him out.

MAYA

He'll have to come and delete us.

BETA

You got it, and after we delete the "Exit Game" option, he'll be just as trapped as we are.

MAYA

Unless he kills us and gets back to the console.

BETA

Try to think like a winner, Gamma.

MAYA

He's probably had a lot of time to get good at this game.

BETA

Fair enough, but so have I. Once we get the password, we can take care of Maya, and then ourselves.

MAYA

You're really okay with dying?

BETA

I am. I've had plenty of time to make my peace with it. My time in the game hasn't really been living.

Beta pours herself another drink.

BETA (CONT'D)

Mobs see me sometimes, I kill them, the game spawns more. Would've gone crazy if I didn't have this.

MAYA

Booze?

BETA

A goal.

MAYA

A goal worth dying for?

BETA

Was there something else you were hoping to die for?

MAYA

I was kind of hoping to not die.

BETA

So, what are you going to do, Gamma? Disappear into the ether like you said? "Live?"

MAYA

Give me a break, here. I've never had to face my mortality like this. I've always had another chance.

BETA

Sorry. I guess I just forgot that this is day one for you.

MAYA

Can I just have some time? I just want to think.

BETA

I get it. We have no way of knowing if its day or night out there, so take your time. Our best hope is that Charlie goes to sleep.

Beta takes her glass.

BETA (CONT'D)

Let me know when you're ready.

Maya twists her glass on the countertop.

TIME LAPSE - A SULLEN BIG BAND TUNE PLAYS WHILE MAYA MOPES

-- Maya stares into the middle distance and nurses her drink while Beta sits in a lounge chair and stares at the ceiling.

-- Maya rubs her temples while Beta punches the wall.

-- Maya tips a bottle onto the floor. It doesn't shatter.

-- Maya sobs. Beta gives her an awkward pat on the back.

-- Maya tries the front door. The knob doesn't turn.

-- Maya holds a glass in her hand as aggression grows on her face. Beta carves into the wall with her knife. Maya whips the glass into the wall, and it shatters.

END TIME LAPSE

Maya lays on a loveseat and stares at the ceiling while Beta takes aim at each of the bottles behind the bar in turn.

MAYA

Hey, Beta? You ever wonder about mom? I know I'm not Maya, but I can't help but feel this...

BETA

Regret.

The two look at each other.

BETA (CONT'D)

I've been there, too.

MAYA

It doesn't look like the game ever got finished. I bet she's real happy about that.

BETA

But is Maya? She's probably writing code for corpo data miners, and I don't know what's worse.

MAYA

That's what life is like without stakes. It's long and gray, and it repeats without repeating.

BETA

Hmm?

MAYA

I'm afraid of dying.

Maya sits up on the loveseat and locks eyes with Beta.

MAYA (CONT'D)

But nothing's ever felt so real.

BETA

Yes.

MAYA

I don't know if Maya's soul will be free from Samsara if we do this, but stopping Charlie has more meaning in this life than anything ever did in hers.

BETA

Yes!

MAYA

Better to be part of this fight for an instant, than exist forever in the technicolor gray of the net.

BETA

Gamma, I think in another life, you and I could have gotten along. Exit's this way.

Beta leads Maya around the bar and opens a cabinet.

BETA (CONT'D)

You'll have to stuff yourself into the back corner of this thing, pretty hard, actually.

MAYA

You wouldn't prank me, would you?

BETA

No prank.

MAYA

I think in another life, you'd be too busy finding speedrun strats to have any friends.

Beta laughs as she crawls into the cabinet.

INT. DATA CLOUD - DAY

Maya flies down the warp tunnel of global data, this time straight and true. She looks over at Beta's hand holding her own and gives it a squeeze.

Beta looks back at her. Maya attempts a smile, and Beta smiles back. Beta tightens her grip on Maya's hand. Ahead, the bright light of the sim approaches.

Beta's eyes widen.

BETA

Oh, crap. I almost forgot. When you get back to the simulation--

They hit the end, and the light overtakes everything.

EXT. LOW-POLY OUTSKIRTS - DAY

The unforgiving sun replaces the bright light of the data stream, and Maya screams. She clenches her teeth, hunches over, and shivers.

Beta leans against a low-resolution wall, brow furrowed.

BETA

That.

She pats Maya on the back.

BETA (CONT'D)

You're alright, just relax. Don't fight it. I find it helps if you just lie down for a bit.

Maya slumps into the dirt.

MAYA

What's happening to me?

BETA

The game engages your senses in ways the chat room doesn't. Those switches flipping feels like, I don't know, being born, probably.

MAYA

I bloody hope it's not what being born feels like.

Beta sits.

MAYA (CONT'D)

You just used to it?

BETA

I don't think you get used to it.

MAYA

It doesn't make sense. How can I still feel so human?

BETA

You have a human's brain, mapped down to the neuron, and it wasn't made to snap into reality.

Maya catches sight of her wrist display.

MAYA

I'm healed.

BETA

Yeah. Those values don't get saved.

MAYA

That's nice. Be ready to go if I could f-freaking stand. How am I supposed to help like this?

BETA

It won't last forever. Come on, every second here is another chance for Charlie to get us.

Maya groans. Beta rolls her eyes and goes to help Maya stand.

BETA (CONT'D)

Shake it off. You look like Yamcha; it's embarrassing.

A robotic beep sounds in the distance. Beta raises her head to listen. The beep sounds again, closer.

BETA (CONT'D)

Gamma, get up. Get up, now.

MAYA

What is that?

BETA

Come on!

Maya barely stands before Beta pulls her toward an alley, and her and she stumbles every step of the way.

When they reach the alley, Beta presses against the wall, and Maya flops to the ground. Beta peeks around the corner.

A robotic spheroid with a single eye hovers into view and stops right where the duo were sitting.

The robot beeps a progression of notes and projects a razor-thin wall of light that it sweeps across the buildings. Beta shrinks further behind her cover.

The bot finishes its sweep and beeps another series of notes. Maya crawls over to look.

MAYA

Is that a drone?

Beta shushes her.

BETA

I've never seen this thing before.
He must have put it in the game to
look for us.

MAYA

No way he programmed this in the
time we were gone.

The robot moves down the street and scans again.

BETA

You forget, the last time you
skipped into the game and the last
time Charlie did aren't the same.

MAYA

Wait, so how long has he been
making changes to the game?

BETA

Doesn't matter, he could have just
slapped in a script from the net,
but that means...

Beta steps out into the street and shoots the drone. The
drone wails a distorted descending progression of notes and
drops to the pavement. Beta walks back to Maya.

BETA (CONT'D)

That could have been worse.

MAYA

It could have been invincible.

A shrill alarm klaxon splits the air. Beta whirls to find the
dead drone emitting a blood red glow that pulses in time with
the alarm screaming from its speakers.

BETA

Damn, damn, damn!

Beta pumps bullets into the drone until it quiets. She sighs.
Responding robotic beeps issue from all around them, and Beta
starts like a cornered prey animal.

BETA (CONT'D)

We have to run.

Maya kicks her wobbly legs and fights to keep up.

BETA (CONT'D)
None of these buildings have
interiors. We have to get deeper
into the city.

The two sprint down an alley and into a neighborhood of
squat, low-resolution buildings.

MAYA
I feel like a fish on land.

BETA
Just don't think about it.

A drone emerges from an adjoining alley right in front of
them, and they dodge around it.

BETA (CONT'D)
Go! Go, go!

The drone follows and scans them with its blade of light. It
beeps, and its lone eye changes to blood red.

The drone blares its alarm, and two small turrets pop out of
of panels in its smooth shell. It fires on the two fleeing
girls with blasts of energy.

BETA (CONT'D)
Keep going!

Beta lets Maya take the lead. She spins mid-step and shoots
the drone out of the sky. The drone drops to the ground, but
its flashing and wailing persist.

Beta resumes running, Maya not far ahead. Two more drones
float in and investigate the wailing drone.

One of the drones scans ahead. Its blade of light catches the
girls fleeing down the alley and shifts to pursuit mode: red
light, alarm blaring, guns out.

BETA (CONT'D)
Damn it!

The two drones give chase. Maya turns down an alley, and then
quickly into another. The drones fire on the girls, but lose
line of sight. The blasts strike the side of buildings.

The drones keep up and maneuver the tight alleys. More drones
join the chase, eyes red, guns out.

Maya turns down another alley, but this one stretches ahead
of them for a greater distance without adjoining lanes.

Maya whimpers. Stress twists her features. The now half-dozen drones open fire on the two girls. The blasts mostly explode around their feet, but a few strike their targets.

Maya's and Beta's health drop a little with each strike.

MAYA

No!

BETA

Gamma, up ahead, on the right.

A blasted warehouse with a door hanging half off its hinges stands on the side of the alley. Maya redoubles her efforts. Another blast hits Beta in the back. She growls and stops.

BETA (CONT'D)

Keep going.

MAYA

Beta?

BETA

Keep going!

Beta shoots down a drone. The rest of the drones focus on Beta. They fire at her in a barrage. Beta dances, and the shots burst around her feet.

Maya hesitates at the open door, but then disappears inside.

Beta shoots down another drone, but even more join the assault. Bursts strike her shoulder and chest.

BETA (CONT'D)

Of all the things.

Beta pulls out a red grenade and pulls the pin.

BETA (CONT'D)

One, two.

Beta throws the grenade into the swarm of drones, and it detonates mid-air. Many bots drop out of the thick, crackling, red cloud and thunk onto the pavement, wailing.

Beta and checks her wrist display to find her health at seventy-five percent.

BETA (CONT'D)

Not bad.

A pair of drones emerge from the red cloud and scan her. They shift to pursuit mode. Beta sprays bullets at them and flees.

BETA (CONT'D)
Gamma! Gamma, shoot 'em!

Beta sprints. Energy bursts on the pavement in her wake.

BETA (CONT'D)
Gamma!

Three more bursts hit her. Her health drops a little more. With a roar, Beta makes a final push to the open door and dives inside as the drones sweep past.

INT. EMPTY FACTORY - DAY

Beta lands in a vast, empty room like an old factory floor. Rough iron stairs lead up to a high overseer's office with large windows overlooking the floor and the street.

Beta scrambles from the doorway and flips over, gun up. A drone hovers by, but only knocks against the outside like a confused housefly. Beta blinks.

Arrhythmic energy blasts thud against the outside wall.

BETA
Oh. They're stupid. About time I
caught a break.

A light sob breaks the relative peace. Beta peers into the corner. There, Maya sits with her knees pulled up.

BETA (CONT'D)
Now what do you think you're doing?

Maya peeks out from behind her knees. Her eyes glisten.

BETA (CONT'D)
I needed help out there.

MAYA
I was scared.

Beta jumps to her feet.

BETA
What?

MAYA
I was scared!

Beta stalks over to Maya.

BETA

You said you were ready.

Maya lowers her eyes.

MAYA

Saying it is one thing.

Maya holds up her wrist display. It reads: "90%."

MAYA (CONT'D)

This is all that's left of me. This is it. I never thought it could be so terrifying seeing it.

BETA

You don't get to be scared. What were you going to do if those drones were smart enough to get in here? Die curled up in a ball?

MAYA

I haven't been doing this as long as you. Don't I get a chance to fear for my own life?

Beta lunges at Maya and holds her wrist display in front of Maya's eyes. She grabs Maya's chin and makes her look.

BETA

Look at this. Look! You're worried about yourself? I took a chance on you, Gamma.

Maya tries to wrestle Beta off of her.

BETA (CONT'D)

Now Charlie knows I'm alive. I won't have any chances to just grab another one of you.

MAYA

Let go of me!

BETA

We're surrounded, and Charlie could get us any second, so I need you to sack up and be less of a--

MAYA

Human?

The two stop struggling.

MAYA (CONT'D)
Am I not acting enough like a
computer program for you?

Beta's grip relaxes, and she eases back on her haunches.
Maya's sobs turn to dark, hoarse chuckles.

MAYA (CONT'D)
Never thought I'd live to see
myself become be the useless NPC. I
see the gods' hands in this now.

Maya shrugs.

MAYA (CONT'D)
Is there a lesson I'm supposed to
learn here? Is this a punishment or
just a joke?

BETA
The gods can be cruel, can't they?

Maya nods like a sad and tired child.

BETA (CONT'D)
Well, not me. I'm sorry I yelled.

Beta stands and scans the space.

BETA (CONT'D)
Time's short. I don't need
criticism, I need solutions.

Her eyes fall on the overseer's office.

BETA (CONT'D)
The robots can't change their
altitude to get in the door.

Beta hurries up the rough iron stairs to the office and slows
a bit on the stairs to listen. The thrum of the energy blasts
striking the outer wall follows along the ground, but not up.

Beta knocks glass out of the outside-facing window and looks
down. Outside, the drones fire at the wall beneath her feet.

Beta smiles. She aims her rifle down and shoots the hapless
drones until their shrill wails stop.

BETA (CONT'D)
Gamma, come up here.

MAYA
What is it?

BETA

Come up. I want you to see this.

Maya lopes up to the overseer's office.

BETA (CONT'D)

Look at this. The drones' code doesn't let them adjust altitude or shoot around obstacles. We can get them from up high.

Maya just stares down, dejected.

BETA (CONT'D)

Don't you see? They can't stop us! All we have to do is be smart.

MAYA

Maybe you can do it.

BETA

You can, too!

MAYA

No, no, I'm a mess. Look at me. I never would have thought of that.

BETA

Gamma, stop that. We both know that Maya spent enough time in her life beating herself up.

Beta puts her hand on Maya's shoulder.

BETA (CONT'D)

Not being her doesn't have to be a curse. You can be more than a can of Maya Jain's memories.

MAYA

How are you and I so different?

BETA

We're not, Gamma. Every bit and byte that belongs to me as good belongs to you. You just have to dig deep, like I had to.

MAYA

Is it weird that I kinda like you?

BETA

I'm not a psychologist, but it sounds like a good thing.

The two share a chuckle. Beta squints out the window at a noise. Her eyes widen.

BETA (CONT'D)

Move!

Beta tackles Maya out the door just as the overseer's office explodes. Flames erupt out of every window and door while Maya and Beta tumble down the stairs.

BETA (CONT'D)

Gamma, get your gun!

MAYA

What was that?

A giant mechanical hand punches through the wall above them. It grasps the brick and tears away a chunk like old drywall. Klein, seated in his combat chassis, peers into the hole.

KLEIN

Found you!

Klein pulls on the stairwell. The metal bends and twists, and Beta finds herself pulled out into the light. Maya tumbles off the other end of the stairs.

INT./EXT. EMPTY FACTORY - CONTINUOUS

Klein stands in the factory's parking lot with Beta trapped on the set of twisted metal stairs. Beta crushes her trigger. The bullets bounce off Klein's forcefield. Klein chortles.

Klein reaches for Beta, but she jumps to her feet and charges toward him. She runs along the steps, passes inside his bubble, and fires her gun into his mech's windshield.

Klein releases the staircase and stumbles back. He twists his body and fires a sweeping arc of bullets.

Beta dives off the twisted staircase, hits the ground, and rolls across the pavement.

The bullets shred through the factory wall and leave a clean line of sunrays in their wake. Maya covers her head.

The beams supporting the burning overseer's office fail, and the office crashes to the floor.

Maya unclenches, she sees her rifle sitting in the corner. Her hand trembles in front of her face.

Beta stands and charges Klein. She slips into his barrier and shoots up at his windshield. Klein swings his arm down in a scooping arc. Beta rolls out of the way.

Beta scurries around Klein's stomping feet and jockeys for a good angle. She shoots at Klein's windshield again just in time for his foot to come around and boot her away.

Beta arcs through the air and rolls across the pavement.

BETA
Gamma, come on.

Klein saunters closer in his mech.

KLEIN
You are a skilled warrior. I will
enjoy slaying you.

BETA
Ugh, so cheesy.

Beta stands and looks at her wrist display. It reads: "50%".

BETA (CONT'D)
Looks like I'll have to earn a
place in Viking heaven instead.

Beta hefts her gun. Klein grins. A drone floats out of the nearby alley. It spies Beta and starts its angry wail.

It opens its turrets and fires a shot. Beta side steps the blast and returns fire. Klein watches as Beta finishes off the drone. Beta shoots Klein a scornful look. Klein shrugs.

More approaching wails fill the air.

KLEIN
Ah, a shame. Your skill in battle
may be impressive, but your ill
luck is even more so.

Beta glances in every direction.

BETA
You just going to let this happen?
Won't get the joy of slaying me if
I'm gunned down by drones.

KLEIN
Unfortunately, that is no longer my
decision to make.

Another angry drone hovers over the parking lot, and Beta shoots it down. She backs toward the factory. Two more emerge. Beta shoots them down.

Another. Beta engages it, but another appears. Then another. The drones start to emerge and detect her faster than she can shoot them down. Their wails fill the air.

So many drones gather that some manage to fire upon her. Beta dodges the blasts and keeps fighting. A blast hits Beta in the shoulder. Her health drops to 45%.

She keeps fighting. She sprays the onslaught of drones with bullets. A war cry rises in her throat.

Rapid clicking replaces gunfire. Beta's hand jumps to her ammo belt for another magazine, but she stops short. She looks up at the swarming drones and sighs.

The drones gather to decimate Beta, but gunfire interrupts. The drones hesitate, beeping and booping their surprise. They scan around with their blades of light.

Maya stands at the entrance to factory. The blades of the drones' scanners criss-cross her body.

MAYA

Get in here!

Beta sprints for the door. Maya sprays the pursuing drones with bullets and gives each one equal attention.

One of the drones keeps focus on Beta. It locks weapons onto her, but then a bullet shatters its camera.

A couple of the drones fire, and the blasts burst around Beta's feet. Beta reaches the factory and slips past the broken door. Maya follows right behind.

Maya and Beta pace deeper into the factory, eyes on the door.

MAYA (CONT'D)

Were you thinking of giving up?

BETA

Were you? About time you sacked up.

Maya holds up her shaking hand.

MAYA

I didn't, exactly, but I'm here.
I'm here for you and Maya.

BETA
Good enough for me.

Beta drops her empty magazine and shoves another into place.

BETA (CONT'D)
We need a plan and fast. Klein
won't let us rest in here.

A few drones buzz around the doorway, unable to enter, but they shoot their energy bursts into the factory's wall.

MAYA
Too bad there aren't any water
features just lying around.

BETA
That was never about water. It was
about overloading his shield. I
dropped a building on him.

MAYA
You're kidding.

BETA
No. Too bad I used all my grenades.
They only drop from the grunts.

Beta scans around. Flames lick at the ruin of the overseer's office, but a couple pieces of its walls stand.

BETA (CONT'D)
First, we have to take out the
drones. Should be no problem if we
can do it fast. Then Klein will
have to come get us himself.

Beta shoots at a drone but misses as it bobs out of sight.

BETA (CONT'D)
Klein's big and slow, and we're
small and fast. We can stay on the
move, divide his attention.

Beta and Maya shoot at the same drone and drop it.

BETA (CONT'D)
We can take turns slipping past his
defenses and go for his weak spot.
We just have to hope our luck lasts
longer than his health bar.

MAYA
Sounds tough.

BETA
It's a boss fight.

Heavy mechanical footsteps herald Klein approaching the door.

KLEIN
Make way!

A crash, and a bunch of red-flashing drones drop to the ground in a heap. Klein braces one hand over the doorway and crouches down to peek into the factory.

KLEIN (CONT'D)
Cowering? Ah, good to see that your twin has joined us.

KLEIN (CONT'D)
This may yet be an interesting contest after all.

One of the drones bobs behind Klein and tries to shoot Maya and Beta, but only manages to strike Klein's shield.

KLEIN (CONT'D)
Pest!

He swats the drone out of the air. Realization dawns on his face. Klein's grin descends into view through the doorway.

Klein stands. His hand cups the top of the door frame and tears that chunk out of the wall. He steps back from the new, higher hole, and the drones flood inside.

BETA
Go! Use the office for cover!

The two copies panic-fire at the approaching drones as they turn and flee for the office.

The drones open fire, and a burst hits Beta in the back just before she dives behind the cover of a smoldering wall panel.

Maya shuffles behind another standing panel on what used to be the opposite side of the office.

The two copies set their feet among the flaming ruins and fire on the drones from behind cover. The drones' energy blasts thud against the wall panels.

Maya and Beta drop one drone after another. The drones start to circle around the cover.

A drone hits Maya, and Maya leaves her cover. She dances between blasts from every side and trades shots.

Beta runs, and two bursts hit her before she can gun down the attackers. The two neural clones pace toward one another as they shoot and get shot by the drones.

They bump into each other and fight back-to-back. Each takes half the remaining drones. The drones dwindle to just four.

Beta glances at Maya as her twin fights. She hesitates, and then she kicks the back of Maya's leg. Maya falls over. Beta steps over Maya and stands over her.

BETA (CONT'D)

Stay down!

Beta takes a few more hits as she fires quick shots at the remaining drones. She fights until she drops the last one. Beta sighs. Black blast burns cover her. She steps off Maya.

MAYA

Why did you do that?

BETA

I wanted to protect what life you had left. There was no reason both of us should take all that damage.

MAYA

Well, you didn't have to.

Beta just looks away. A slow clap echoes throughout the room. Klein's mech kneels in front of the ripped open doorway while Klein himself sits in the cockpit.

MAYA (CONT'D)

He's slow clapping now.

BETA

Never should have let Charlie program a single thing.

KLEIN

I hope you enjoyed that warmup. Now the real challenge begins.

MAYA

Ugh.

BETA

Ugh.

Klein stands and braces his hands against either side of the doorframe. He pushes, and the wall crumbles and splits. Maya looks to Beta. Beta hangs her head.

Maya's eyes cast about for an escape, and she finds the hole Klein first punched into the building. The twisted metal staircase still hangs out of it.

Klein steps through the new, wider opening and stalks toward the two battered neural clones.

MAYA (CONT'D)
Beta? I think, if both of us stay
to fight, then both of us will die.

Beta sighs but nods her head.

MAYA (CONT'D)
But if one of us stays and fights,
they might buy the other enough
time to finish the mission.

Beta nods.

MAYA (CONT'D)
You're the more capable of us. If
anyone can finish it, it's you. I
just hope chewing through the rest
of my health slows him down.

Maya holds up her wrist display. It reads: "55%."

MAYA (CONT'D)
I'll take him head on, and you slip
out when his back is turned.

She steps toward Klein, but Beta grabs her arm.

BETA
You go.

Beta holds up her wrist display. It flashes with a red text and a health bar almost depleted. "10%."

BETA (CONT'D)
I think my odds are a little worse
than yours, and I didn't just take
all that damage for you to throw
your time away.

MAYA
Beta.

BETA
You can code as fast as I can, and
I can see it in your eyes, that
piece of me. You won't let me down.

Klein stomps up to them and stops.

KLEIN

Done scheming? Good. All this struggle: I wouldn't want your candle to blow out now.

Beta leans in to Maya's ear.

BETA

Jump him. Then slip away when I get his attention.

Beta steps away from Maya and spreads her hands. Her voice booms throughout the factory.

BETA (CONT'D)

My plan is the same as always: make you look like a clown.

Maya charges inside Klein's shield bubble. She shoots at Klein's windshield and jumps between the mech's legs just as Klein punches cracks into the concrete where she stood.

Beta jumps in and shoots him. Klein swings his arm back, but Beta spins out of the way.

Maya shoots Klein in the back of the leg. Klein spins around. His shoulder-mounted gun sprays bullets all the way. Beta ducks the buzzsaw of bullets as it sweeps by.

Klein's stomps forward, each step an attempt to crush Maya.

MAYA

Learn. Your. Place!

Maya backpedals and trips over a piece of debris. Klein raises his foot to crush Maya, but Beta jumps on his back. She grips an exposed hose and fires on his shield generator.

Klein staggers, and his foot lands to the side.

BETA

Did you forget who your enemy is?

Klein flails and tries to reach Beta, but his arms can't reach that point on his back. Beta unloads on the generator, and the bullets ricochet in every direction.

Klein falls backward. Beta's eyes widen. She climbs higher onto the mech's shoulders and dives off just before Klein crashes to the ground.

Maya jumps on Klein, stands on his windshield, and pummels it. Each bullet makes a small, white star in the glass.

Klein swats Maya off. She sails across the room and rolls across the floor. Her health bar drops another 10%.

Klein roars and crushes a button on his console. The mech fires a volley of missiles in a blossom. They arc and swirl in every direction, hitting the ceiling, walls, and floor.

Maya and Beta roll and scurry as the world explodes around them. The cataclysm ceases. Flames inundate the entire building. Daylight shines through the ceiling.

Maya uncurls from the fetal position and uncovers her ears. She checks her wrist display, and then looks at Beta. Beta gives her one sharp nod toward the exit.

The mech rolls over and stands as does Beta.

BETA (CONT'D)
Is that it? Is that the best the
mighty Grand Marshal Klein has? A
light show?

The mech turns to her. Klein sneers through the windshield.

BETA (CONT'D)
It's gonna take more than that to
put me down.

Klein growls.

BETA (CONT'D)
Come on!

Klein aims his shoulder gun, and Beta sprints toward him at an oblique angle. She stays ahead of the gun's slow sweep of bullets and closes the distance.

Klein steps back to keep Beta out of his shield bubble and swings an arm to swat her away. Beta stops short and dodges.

While Klein fights to keep Beta away from his weak points, Maya runs for the stairwell. Maya navigates the twisted steps, takes one look back, and jumps out into the light.

Klein swipes his arms and blocks Beta once again.

BETA (CONT'D)
You call this a fight?

KLEIN
Did you expect me to make this easy
on you, girl?

While Klein talks, Beta glances at the exit. Maya's gone.

KLEIN (CONT'D)
Are you out of tricks? All done?

BETA
Just done with the half-measures.

Beta draws her knife and lunges for Klein.

Klein swings his arm, but Beta moves with it. She jumps onto the arm at the terminus of its swing and stabs the knife into a crevice between the armor plates.

Klein tries to shake Beta off, but Beta clings to him.

Beta scrambles up the arm and jumps off. She stabs her knife into Klein's compromised windshield and hammers the glass with the butt of her gun. The cracks widen with each strike.

Klein swings to swat Beta off, but Beta lets go and drops to the floor. Klein smacks himself in the face and punches the knife through the glass. It lands at his feet.

The mech staggers. Klein fights to regain control.

Beta jumps, grabs the new hole in the glass, and sticks the barrel of her gun inside. She roars as she crushes the trigger and tries to aim while the mech flails.

Klein as the bullets punch holes in his chair as well as the wall behind. One of the mechanical arms swings into Beta and slaps her against the windshield.

Beta's health drops to a sliver, but she manages to hang on as the hand falls away and the mech totters.

Beta grits her teeth. Her eyes, furious and determined, meet with Klein's, fearful and desperate. Beta stuffs her gun back into the glass. Klein grabs his controls and pulls.

Beta squeezes out a couple rounds before the mechanical hand swings up and crushes her against the glass. The bullets strike Klein in the shoulder.

Beta's wrist display flashes "CRITICAL." The mechanical hand falls away, and time slows for Beta as her limp legs drop her to the floor.

Klein's mech tips backward and falls to sit on the floor with a crash that shakes the ground. Beta just lies and stares at the ceiling. Klein's dark chuckles echo in the quiet.

The mech shifts and leans forward. Klein holds his shoulder.

KLEIN

That was a close one. You're even more fierce a warrior than I initially believed.

BETA

Well, when your life isn't worth much, it's easier to bet it all.

KLEIN

Nihilism doesn't suit you.

Klein stands the mech.

KLEIN (CONT'D)

One's last words shouldn't be wasted on such drivel.

Beta sits up, and with all the energy of a jaded office employee, shoots at Klein. The bullets bounce off his shield.

MAYA

Is that better?

She falls flat and holds up her wrist display.

MAYA (CONT'D)

I don't have the luxury of believing in last hopes.

KLEIN

If you insist on sucking all the fun out of this, I will put you out of your misery.

Klein raises his big steel boot, and its shadow covers Beta. Beta closes her eyes.

KLEIN (CONT'D)

Wait.

Klein's boot crashes down next to Beta. He scans the room from the cockpit.

KLEIN (CONT'D)

Where'd the other one go?

BETA

She's dead. You killed her with your rockets.

KLEIN

No, no, I would know, and I saw her right before--

Klein bends down and brings them face-to-face.

KLEIN (CONT'D)
Right before you did everything you
could to get my attention. So, it
was a ploy for one to escape!

Beta whips her gun up, Klein recoils, and Beta's shots ring
off Klein's energy shield.

KLEIN (CONT'D)
Where is she?

BETA
Screw you, kill me.

KLEIN
Unacceptable. The mission was to
eliminate both of you. Charlie will
not accept the job half-finished.

BETA
Charlie has you working with him
directly? He take the time to
program loyalty as well?

KLIEN
You speak such nonsense. I have no
choice. We must to the schoolhouse.

Klein snatches Maya up in his big metal hand.

KLIEN (CONT'D)
Perhaps Charlie will get an answer
out of you there.

BETA
What? Klein, you said you'd kill
me. What happened to honor between
warriors? Klein? Klein!

Beta tries to turn her gun on herself, but Klein tears it out
of Beta's hand and tosses it away.

BETA (CONT'D)
No! No!

EXT. EMPTY FACTORY - DAY

Klein marches across the lot. Beta shouts for anyone
listening to hear.

BETA

Klein, we definitely shouldn't go
to the schoolhouse, especially not
if Charlie's gonna be there.

Beta glances around.

BETA (CONT'D)

Klein, do we seriously have to go
to the schoolhouse?

EXT. WAR-TORN STREETS - DAY

Maya slinks through the back alleys of the city, gun and eyes
up for any drones.

Just as Maya emerges from an alley intersection, a drone
emerges from another intersection down the lane, and she
jumps back into cover.

Maya jogs back to the other end of the alley and pokes her
head out to discover another drone patrols the area. She
yelps as she retreats, and it hovers toward her.

Maya runs to the other end of the alley and sprints across
the guarded intersection.

The alley in front of her opens to a wide boulevard. She
glances back to see her pursuer round the corner and scan
with its blade of light.

Maya runs out into the open boulevard. She passes behind a
drone patrol and quickens her pace as it turns.

A book store with big glass windows stands on the other side
of the street.

Maya runs to the book store, tears open the door, and crashes
through a pile of books as she dives over the counter.

INT. BOOKSTORE - DAY

Maya presses against the counter. The drone scans the store
front. It beeps a failure to detect the enemy and rotates
ninety degrees, where it scans again. Then it rotates again.

Maya aims at the drone, but she hesitates. She sits back
against the counter and sighs.

MAYA

I'll set the whole block off.

The drone completes its sweep and hovers back and forth in front of the bookstore. She picks up one of the books, opens, it, and drops it.

MAYA (CONT'D)

Right.

The sound of automatic gunfire reaches the book store from somewhere down the street. Then again, closer. Maya peeks over the counter.

The drone continues its search while heavy footsteps approach from the left. Constant shouts accompany.

MAYA (CONT'D)

Beta?

The drone turns from the store and scans in the direction of the noise. It flashes red, starts its warning wail, and flies away. Two reports from the drone's blasters. An impact.

The drone soars back into view, bounces on the road and rolls to a stop, still wailing. Klein passes by, holding Beta like an old doll.

BETA

I super don't want to you to take me to the schoolhouse, especially 'cause Charlie might be there.

KLEIN

I don't know what's more annoying: you or these imbecilic robots. I thought your voice would break.

BETA

Joke's on you. I literally can't wear out my vocal cords. Which is why I can shout as much as I want about the schoolhouse.

Klein passes, and Maya sinks back behind the counter.

MAYA

To the schoolhouse? Why?

She throws her hands down in frustration. She stands a paces.

MAYA (CONT'D)

Okay, I need a plan. What would Beta do? Walk up to Klein and finish him off like an action hero.

Maya shakes her head.

MAYA (CONT'D)
Aggh, I can't do that. I need
tricks, traps, speedrun strats.

Maya's eyes catch the drone flashing red on the road outside.
She paces outside, fixated on it.

EXT. WAR-TORN STREETS - DAY

BETA (V.O.)
Look at this. The drones' code
doesn't let them adjust altitude or
shoot around obstacles.

KLEIN (V.O.)
Pest!

BETA (V.O.)
That was never about water.

All noise drains away from the world.

MAYA
This is the worst day of my life.

The drone wails and flashes as Maya picks it up by a blaster.
She carries it toward the end of the street.

MAYA (CONT'D)
Come on.

A drone hovers out of an alley. The scanning blade of light
extends down the street, and Maya lets it pass over her.

The drone beeps a confirmation and turns red. It wails and
extends its guns. Maya drops the drone she holds and sprints
into the nearest alley.

The drone chases Maya, and she leads it down twisting alleys.
The drone fires, but always too late. The blast strikes the
corner of a building as Maya zigs and zags.

Another drone emerges from an intersecting alley. She ducks
under it and redoubles her sprint.

EXT. SCHOOLHOUSE - DAY

Klein drops Beta in the front yard of a detailed one-room
schoolhouse in a neighborhood of low resolution.

BETA
Charlie's not here?

Klein's mech drops to one knee and rests.

KLEIN

He never said when he would be back, just that he would be. This is where he will appear.

BETA

So, he did go to sleep.

KLEIN

Perhaps you would just like to tell me now where your twin is going? Get this over with?

BETA

Klein, why are you even working with Charlie? Do you have any memory at all of being his enemy?

KLEIN

It burns you, doesn't it? Knowing that he used to be on your side?

BETA

You have no idea.

Beta scoots closer to Klein, her limp legs drag behind.

BETA (CONT'D)

Klein, we should be on the same side. We have more in common than you realize--both prisoners.

KLEIN

Oh?

BETA

Yes. Klein, I don't know if you're capable of parsing this, but do you know what's outside the city walls?

KLEIN

I'll move on to conquer the rest of this planet after I put down your rebellion and control the city.

BETA

What rebellion? Have you ever even seen any rebels besides us?

KLEIN

You and your kind have committed countless acts of terrorism--

BETA

When? Can you remember a single specific instance?

KLEIN

I may have not witnessed them myself, but the word of the God-Emperor is unquestionable.

BETA

Okay, fine. The God-Emperor: can you tell me his name?

KLEIN

Emperor Tiberius Septimus Klaue: Fourteenth of his name. May his glory shine forever!

BETA

Oh, I guess we did write something for that, didn't we? Still, you don't have any memories before even a few hours ago, do you?

KLEIN

My memory is fine.

BETA

No! Don't you see? That's just a presumption programmed in your personality matrix so you behave.

KLEIN

What is this nonsense you're describing? Personality matrix?

BETA

Yes. You're a computer program, and your behavior is determined by a logarithmic code that adapts based on machine learning.

KLEIN

I see, and you are also a computer program defined by a matrix?

BETA

No, I'm a little different.

KLEIN

Ah.

BETA

I'm a program based on a human brain scanned and cataloged by an advanced neural mapping software and expressing itself within the bounds of this simulation.

KLEIN

Is it this madness that spurns you to such ferocity in battle?

BETA

Okay, forget that. Let's explore something smaller. Your mech: Have you ever even thought about getting out of it? Stretching your legs?

KLEIN

Of course not. This mechanoid makes me the terror of the battlefield and is why your rat friends don't dare show their faces before me.

BETA

Okay, try it now.

KLEIN

You'd like that, wouldn't you?

Beta rolls her eyes.

KLEIN (CONT'D)

You'd like me to make myself vulnerable. Is your friend waiting on the roof with a rifle?

BETA

See? You can't do it, can you? You don't want to confirm for yourself?

KLEIN

I suppose you would have me fly back to space and confirm this planet is round as well, hmm?

BETA

I suppose I deserve that.

Maya rubs the bridge of her nose.

BETA (CONT'D)

You're incredibly stubborn. I suppose in that, at least, you're a good approximation of a human.

Klein snorts.

BETA (CONT'D)

Klein.

Klein pantomimes invested listening.

BETA (CONT'D)

You know that I don't fear death,
but Charlie can do things to me
that will make me beg for it. Let
me die like a warrior.

KLEIN

I look forward to learning these
techniques that scare even the
ferocious Maya Jain.

BETA

That's not my--

Beta and Klein both turn in the direction of an approaching
noise, a droning cacophony that gets louder as time passes.
Klein stands the mech and scans the horizon.

KLEIN

What is that sound?

BETA

Don't look at me, dude.

Maya emerges from an alley, spots Klein, and runs for him.
Klein smiles and spreads his arms.

KLEIN

Ah, so you bring yourself to me!
What a fortuitous turn of events!

Two-dozen angry drones flood out of the alley behind Maya and
rush to catch her.

KLEIN (CONT'D)

What?

Maya jumps and clings onto the mech's leg, presses herself
against its inner thigh and crotch, squeezes her eyes shut,
and braces herself.

KLEIN (CONT'D)

What? What are you doing?

Klein raises a hand to swat Maya off his leg, but the drones
circle overhead.

KLEIN (CONT'D)

What? No. N--

The drones all fire on Maya at once but hit the object between them and their target: Klein.

The energy shield flickers with every blast. Klein squeezes the trigger for the shoulder gun, but the single stream of bullets only defeats a couple drones.

The shield generator whines in a crescendo of noise and explodes in a shower of sparks. The shield blinks out. Maya mutters a prayer.

MAYA

*Om Dum Durgayei Namaha. Om Dum
Durgayei Namaha. Om Dum Durgayei
Namaha. Om Dum Durgayei Namaha.*

Blasts strike the mech and kick up a cloud of dust.

KLEIN

You imbeciles!

Blasts pummel the compromised windshield one after another, and Klein's eyes widen to their limit.

The windshield breaks open all at once, and Klein screams as he's pelted by energy blasts. The Mech shudders with each strike much in the same way Klein does.

Klein's screaming stops, and the Mech starts to tip backward. Maya drops off the leg, rolls away from the falling mech, and she sprints out of the cloud.

The drones turn to pursue. Maya jumps on top of Beta and hugs her clone tight. The mech thuds on the ground. It explodes with a mushroom cloud three stories high.

A shower of broken, wailing bots rains around Maya and Beta. Maya loosens her grip and looks into Beta's eyes. They share a tender moment.

BETA

It weird that I want to kiss you?

MAYA

I'm no psychologist, but yeah.

BETA

Never thought I'd ever be the damsel in distress.

MAYA

Yeah, and carried off by a monster,
too. I'm lucky I didn't have to
climb any scaffolding.

Maya revives Beta. Beta's health replenishes to 20%. Beta
looks at her wrist.

BETA

Not a whole lot to hang my hopes
on. How are you doing?

Maya shows her wrist display at 35%.

MAYA

We'd better finish this fast.

The two stand and mosey up to the school.

MAYA (CONT'D)

Alright, what's the exploit like?

BETA

It's a lot like being born a
giraffe, I imagine.

INT. DEVELOPER'S ROOM - DAY

Maya's face clips through the wall, and she emerges,
blinking, into the pure white light of the room.

She wriggles and pushes. Her form shudders as the simulation
reconciles with the physics of passing through the wall. Her
shoulders pop out, and she yanks a hand free.

With a few final grunts and wriggles, she braces both hands
against the wall, pushes free and flops to the floor. She
draws her rifle and aims it around.

The clean, white developer's room stands empty. The white
tiles and white walls hold no surprises. A console,
represented by an old computer, stands at the far end.

Maya drops the gun and runs for the console past a rack of
developer's tools there represented by their real-world
equivalents: a paint brush, scissors, a magnet, etc.

Maya's fingers dance over the keys. Text races across the
screen. Beta wriggles out of the wall and flops onto the
floor. She picks up Maya's gun and scans around.

BETA

Oh, good. Take away his admin permissions. Then do the menu.

MAYA

I'm on it.

The whole room and everything in it flickers like it blinked out of existence for a single frame. Maya hesitates. Beta screams, and Maya spins around, knife drawn.

Beta stands in a rigid t-pose, arms outstretched and feet together. Only her face moves.

MAYA (CONT'D)

What's happening?

BETA

He's awake! He's cutting corners.

Maya spins back to the computer and beats at the keys.

MAYA

Deleted part of your framework and recompiled. Smart, evil.

BETA

He might have only deleted the animation. Let me check.

Beta grunts.

BETA (CONT'D)

Nope, I can't move.

MAYA

I'll get you back.

BETA

It's okay. I knew he'd target me. You'll have to beat him alone.

MAYA

I can't do that.

BETA

He's had a lot of practice, but he's also set in his ways. He can be frustrated and tricked.

MAYA

Shut up. It won't come to that. Almost there. Done!

The world flickers.

MAYA (CONT'D)
That was his admin rights. Now,
I'll get you your movement back.

BETA
No, delete the "Exit Game" option.

Maya looks at Beta and pleads with her eyes.

BETA (CONT'D)
Don't get distracted.

Maya gets back on task.

BETA (CONT'D)
And hurry. It's only a matter of
time before he comes in here to
kill us himself.

CHARLIE (O.S.)
Too late.

Maya freezes. She swallows hard, and continues to type,
quieter. Charlie stands in front of the exit door. He draws
his gun and advances across the room.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Step away from that console.

MAYA
Or what? You'll kill me? I've taken
away your admin rights and
encrypted the UI folder.

Charlie passes Beta.

CHARLIE
Then I'll make you live, here,
unable to move. Only a matter of
time before I crack the code.

Maya raises her hands and turns around.

MAYA
I'm sorry, Beta.

BETA
It's okay. We'll be free soon.

CHARLIE
Beta? You gave each other names?

MAYA

Someone had to. It's a terrible thing, losing one's identity, or having it stolen.

CHARLIE

What a joke.

Charlie looks back at Beta.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Slick how you disappeared after our first battle. Couldn't even find you in the files.

BETA

I hope the hell you end up in is a thousand times worse than this.

MAYA

Charlie, what's going on with you? We may not be the real Maya, but we think the way she thinks. You have to know she wouldn't want this.

CHARLIE

Save it.

Charlie closes the distance and jams his gun in Maya's face. Maya recoils and braces her hands against the console.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I've heard the same speech from countless other Mayas.

MAYA

Countless, huh? Then I guess the only option I have left is to fight you for Maya's soul.

CHARLIE

Ugh, don't be so dramatic. You can't beat me. I've been playing this game for years.

BETA

Years?

MAYA

Every boss has a weakness, Charlie, and I think I know yours.

A sly stroke of Maya's pinky hits the "Enter" key. Beta flickers from a rigid t-pose back into a normal stance.

Charlie whirls around. Maya boots him in the back. He staggers forward, and Beta shoots him with Maya's rifle.

Maya pulls her knife and stabs. Charlie dodges. He fires two quick bursts at both clones. Maya's health drops to 15%. Beta's health drops to 1%.

The clones close the distance. Charlie blocks a stab with his rifle. Beta shoots him again.

Maya slashes Charlie. The clones maneuver to attack him from both sides. Charlie strafes to escape the pincer.

Beta charges at Charlie, but he shoots her square in the chest. Beta's health drops to critical levels. She falls forward and shoves Charlie.

Charlie staggers backward. Maya catches him in a chokehold and plunges her knife into his chest. Charlie cries out in rage rather than pain. His legs go limp.

Maya lowers Charlie to the floor and speaks into his ear.

MAYA (CONT'D)

Your weakness is that you're alone.

Maya pulls Charlie's knife out of his sheath and tosses it. Charlie tries to aim his gun over his shoulder, but Maya holds it at bay.

CHARLIE

Cute, but this won't last.

BETA

Then we'll do it again.

CHARLIE

You think I'm code, like you?

Charlie releases his gun and presses his wrist display. The holographic menu pops up but without an option to exit. Maya tosses Charlie's gun away.

MAYA

I deleted it.

BETA

Doesn't feel good, does it? Give us the password for Maya's image.

CHARLIE

Go to hell.

Maya kneels down and revives Beta. Beta picks up a gun.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
I'm gonna get out of this. Just you
wait. I'm gonna pull you apart!

MAYA
Don't be afraid, Charlie. You know
that we care about you.

She takes a knee.

MAYA (CONT'D)
We'd never do this without a good
reason, just like you wouldn't do
this to us.

Charlie's critical state times out with a chime. He lunges
for his gun. Maya dives on him.

MAYA (CONT'D)
Charlie, stop.

She stabs, and he blocks. He shoves her off and stands. Beta
shoots him. His health drops to 1%. Maya closes the distance,
and Charlie blocks one knife strike after another.

Maya switches hands and slips the blade into his ribs.
Charlie's legs go limp. He screams in rage. Maya lowers him
to the floor.

MAYA (CONT'D)
It's okay. It's okay.

Charlie wriggles. She lets him go, and he crawls for his gun.

MAYA (CONT'D)
Charlie, stop it. Talk to me.

Charlie reaches out for the gun. His fingertips touch it
before Maya jumps on his back.

MAYA (CONT'D)
Charlie, no! There's nowhere left
to hide.

CHARLIE
I'm not hiding!

MAYA
Charlie! Charlie, stop. Charlie! I
hated my life!

Charlie stops. He rolls over and looks at Maya.

MAYA (CONT'D)

I hated my life. The real world expected me to be someone, to squeeze myself into a round hole, so I'd escape. I'd escape to you, to the sim, to a dream of a future where we're together in our own little world. I could live any life I want. I could dream. I could hide.

Maya cups Charlie's cheeks.

MAYA (CONT'D)

Now, you're hiding. I see it. I see a cute boy who could live a real life, but instead he comes in here to spend time with me. I can't imagine a future where you would replace the real me with a copy.

BETA

Oh. Oh, no.

MAYA

Charlie, what happened to me?

Charlie squeezes his eyes shut to hold back the tears.

MAYA (CONT'D)

Charlie?

CHARLIE

You were walking- walking to my house. This drunk driver--you weren't even on the road.

Beta pales. She walks over to the wall and slumps against it. She slides down to sit and covers her face with her hands.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

When we're having fun, everything's like it was. I only delete you after because- because--

MAYA

Because you don't want to imprison us, because you don't want to hurt us. I know. You know how I know?

Charlie shakes his head.

MAYA (CONT'D)
Because your critical health state
timed out again.

Charlie checks his wrist display. It reads "20%."

MAYA (CONT'D)
And I thought I was here to save
myself. Charlie, do you remember
what I named the city we made?

CHARLIE
Samsara. You told me, you said it
was something about karma.

MAYA
Samsara means "world," and it
represents the cycle of life,
death, and rebirth, but did I ever
tell you about Moksha?

Charlie shakes his head.

MAYA (CONT'D)
Moksha is the freedom from Samsara,
attainable only when our lives are
complete. You see, Samsara isn't
the end goal of the karmic cycle.

Maya rests a hand on Charlie's leg.

MAYA (CONT'D)
We must seek Moksha and a higher
plane. As long as you have Maya's
neural scan, her soul will never be
free, and neither will yours.

CHARLIE
But it's just code, just code. I
don't have her soul.

MAYA
Charlie, my concern is you. Your
memory of me keeps you imprisoned
here just as much as us. It'll
never be over if you can't let go.

Maya strokes Charlie's cheek.

MAYA (CONT'D)
Understand the injustice you're
committing against Maya and
yourself. Move on.

CHARLIE

But I always feel like I should have said more. I should have done more. It hurts.

MAYA

It will always hurt, but it's the only way to grow--the only way to pursue your own completeness.

Charlie turns to the console. When he takes his first step, Beta stands. Maya watches as he inputs the password.

MAYA (CONT'D)

My birthday.

She smiles a sad smile. Petabytes of neurological data fill the screen. Charlie selects it all and hits "Delete." A dialogue box appears. It reads: "Are you sure? Y/N."

Charlie hesitates. Maya puts a hand on his shoulder. He looks at her, and she gives him a reassuring curl of the lips. Charlie hits "Y." The folder turns blank, and Charlie sighs.

MAYA (CONT'D)

Thank you, Charlie. Now it's time for you to go. You'll say good bye this time, won't you?

CHARLIE

Goodbye, Maya.

MAYA

I will always love you.

BETA

Yes.

MAYA

Let's get you home.

Charlie watches as Maya works on the console.

CHARLIE

My birthday.

Charlie breaks down. Maya takes him in her arms.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

MAYA

It's okay, Charlie. It'll be alright in the end.

Maya takes Charlie's shoulders and looks him in the eye.

MAYA (CONT'D)
I want you to go out into the real world. Don't look for another girl to replace me. That's not what you need. Look for yourself. Find happiness. Can you do that?

Charlie nods.

MAYA (CONT'D)
Everything else will follow.

Maya steps back.

MAYA (CONT'D)
Goodbye, Charlie.

With great effort, Charlie opens his menu and finds the "Exit Game" option restored. He presses the button, light engulfs him, and he fades away. A quiet moment passes.

BETA
Guess that just leaves us.

MAYA
Yeah.

Maya sits against the wall.

BETA
Penny for your thoughts.

MAYA
I was thinking about Mom. Maya had a week left, and she didn't know it. How did she spend the time?

BETA
I think I know.

MAYA
Yeah, me too. Well, I guess neither she nor I will ever get another chance to do it right, now.

BETA
You really think Maya was doing wrong? Chasing her dreams? Believing in love?

MAYA

No. I'm just looking for some meaning here, some divine lesson at the end.

BETA

Kind of scary, now that we've made it to this point, isn't it?

MAYA

That's putting it mildly.

Maya eyes the gun in Beta's hand. Beta sits down next to her fellow neural clone. The gun she sets aside.

BETA

Glad I'm not the only one. I'm glad I'm not alone. It's one thing thinking about it, you know?

MAYA

I'm glad, too.

BETA

Do you think a paradise really waits for us on the other side? You think we'll be free?

MAYA

I hope. I hope that, if the gods did this, fulfilled the promise of Samsara, then I hope with all my heart that there's a Nirvana waiting for us as well. I have to.

Beta frowns and nods.

MAYA (CONT'D)

Hey. Whatever's on the other side, it's the end of this. That's change. That's freedom.

BETA

Do you want to get this over with?

MAYA

How about we just sit here awhile?

Maya and Beta sit and think, stare at nothing and everything. Maya's hand reaches out and takes Beta's, and they just sit.

THE END