

A total of 26 floors ran through these ruins, each labelled after a letter of the English alphabet. It was the biggest surprise to them, since this entire time they had been speaking the universal, 56-character language, as a result of being Blessed. The auto translation power they wielded was amplified here, and it caused all languages to appear as English to Frost at least, whereas the Archivist saw them for what they were.

This indeed followed the English alphabet, confirmed by the Archivist, meaning this place must have had a significant Earthly influence. It could not have been the same world given how vast its horizons were, but perhaps just like in Elysia, people may have been able to slip into this world unexpectedly.

Every elevator shaft located throughout the ruined facility was plugged with cement, as if to imprison whatever they left behind. Exploring the first floor also revealed slight oddities. The first were the bones. Frost had enough knowledge to tell a human bone apart from an animal.

Here, bundled in a heap behind the receptionist counter were indeed the skeletons of humans, and humans only, burned down to withering remains. The reason was unclear.

Frost wondered what the purpose of this memory served. It didn't follow the theme of civilization. Rather, it felt like a personal memory more than anything else. A core memory in a way. Traversing through these halls stirred unwanted dread into his heart.

This place invoked terror. A hospital best described its layout. Those unfamiliar with such places were bound to get lost following its pearlescent halls, and the perpetual buzz of flickering fluorescent lights.

Navigating these halls was second nature to Frost. Whether it was because he was once a nurse, or because he had once roamed these halls was impossible to tell. What he did know however, was that his last and only true recollection of Earth was that he roamed a hospital ward.

"I finished working with an old lady who just arrived post op." Frost quietly monologued. "She gave me a biscuit. No idea how she snuck that in. Later, I left the room and headed straight for the staff room. Next thing I knew I was in the Nexus."

"Does this place remind you of it?" The Archivist peered into each room and forks along the path as Frost navigated through with little effort. His body seemed to instinctively know where to turn.

"Too much." Frost quietly said. "Turn back the clock, and you can imagine this place being all white, with blue rimmed doors, and name plates along some of the doors. But at the same time, these corridors are too big. You have exposed cabling running through as well, and ventilation shafts but that's probably because of how deep underground this place is."

"The rooms here look like private hospital rooms." The Archivist added, knocking on the inner walls of one of the rooms. It made a dull thud, indicating that it was made of thick metal. "O-Ouch..."

“An isolation room. Or a quarantine room.” Frost said, also peering into the same room. “Just no showers. No beds either.”

“Like a prison...”

“Yeah. Exactly that.”

* * *

The place that Frost was supposed to feel most at home was twisted in a manner that caused terror to ensnare his heart. His face did not show this, but deep down a part of him hesitated whenever he approached a room or was about to turn a corner.

A central staircase connected each floor. It wasn't as wide as they thought. Rather, it was smaller than a fire exit staircase. The claustrophobic nature, combined with the ominous atmosphere caused his breathing to become ragged.

It felt like something had clung onto his back, choking him as he struggled to take deep breaths. Something about this place was inherently terrifying to him. The deeper they went, the thicker the cables became, and the larger the halls seemed, as if to facilitate the movement of giant creatures just like in F-H5.

Every few floors the specialization seemed to change. 'A' was the lobby. The next several were a hospital. Further beneath were living quarters. Then prisons, from what they could tell, which only grew larger with each subsequent floor. Beneath that were rooms filled with sparking electrical equipment, and cables so thick that they appeared like the veins of a great tree. Following it were empty tubes, likely filled with some form of liquid.

“... A-Are you ok?” The Archivist worriedly asked as Frost realized that his hands had been trembling.

“I-I'm fine. Really. I'm ok. I don't know the significance of this place... but I'd be lying if I said that it meant nothing to me. I wonder if this was the place I was thinking of and not Earth. But that wouldn't make any sense because I clearly remember Earth's history.” Frost sparingly spoke, with words that struggled to leave his lips.

He was overwhelmed with emotions that he knew did not belong to him. He rejected them, because there was no way that he could have mistaken Earth for this place. Just what *was* his past to react so strongly to a place like this?

The Archivist timidly held onto Frost's sleeves in an act of kindness. She didn't have much to say. Frost couldn't blame her, but her showing worry was enough to kindle courage in Frost's heart.

It was unlike him to buckle like this.

And it only fed his ravenous curiosity.

* * *

Afterwards, upon arriving on Floor 'Z', they found themselves in a nursery. Childrens toys were scattered everywhere, and ruined cribs told the fates of the children that must have lived here. Skeletons big and small could be seen cuddled, as if hiding from something.

Elsewhere, he saw bodies trying to protect these children. Others were left alone in bathroom stalls, some embracing the skeleton of a child as they sat silently, as if accepting their fate. The stench of despair immediately struck Frost. The powerful surge caused him to nearly trip on the toy blocks, which tumbled to form a single word.

"Remember."

"Remember what...? I don't even know what this is." Frost uttered, glancing around. Each room was fitted with one-way windows, observable from the hallway only.

They revealed many other playschool facilities, but they were designed more like experiments given the layout, the whiteboards at the front labeling the children after a code, number, and a given name written between single quotation marks. The names were bizarre, going from 'human' to 'parrot', to 'nightmare'.

They were crossed out in red, with the reasoning written out as:

'Primary Mimicry Events' | P-Factor Possession

GEN-00-01 'Parakeet' | **Terminated** | Followed simple instructions. Identified within 48 hours of breach.

GEN-00-01 'Monkey' | **Terminated** | Abnormally high results in conducted tests. Identified within 2 hours of breach.

GEN-00-01 'Human' | **Terminated** | Asked to see the stars. Identified within 90 hours of breach.

Reading those words caused Frost's blood to both boil and chill. He did not know anything about this, but something inside of him wanted to scream. In an unexpected fit of rage, Frost

threw the whiteboard across the room, shattering a glass window as the Archivist staggered backwards in terror.

“A-A-Ah...” She trembled, holding the notebook over her head as she tried to make herself as small as possible.

Frost did not know what had come over him. The frenzy lasted for only a split second, but it was enough to shake him to his core. If he could sweat, then he’d be drenched. His eyes were wide like he had stared into the face of death itself, and he slumped forward, clasping at the walls for support as his legs suddenly buckled.

“W-What... the fuck... was that?” Frost panted as the Archivist reluctantly approached him, turning her face away as she reached out a hand to pat his back. “I... I’m ok. I don’t know what came over me.”

“D-Did you remember something?”

“No. Nothing at all. But this body *knows* something I don’t. Shit... At this point I don’t even know if I want to remember anything.” Frost said, as toy blocks slid underneath his feet, writing the words:

“Do you remember?”

A ghost in his memories tried to jog something, but all it did was cause him much misery.

“... what does this have to do with Civilization?” Frost sincerely asked, struggling to keep himself upright. “Do you know anything? Archivist?”

“No... nothing. I’ve never been here before... I’ve never seen electricity run through cabling either. This place... I’m sorry.” She apologized, trying to cheer Frost up as she flickered through pages of the notebook, looking for something to lift his spirits.

“Don’t apologize for what happened here. Agh... ‘Mimicry’. Maybe when we get our hands on that Corrupted we’ll be able to figure something out... Hey. Do you think those things were referring to me?”

“I don’t think so. M-Maybe you were one of the people here trying to help that GEN – Um... E-Entity!”

“... I sincerely hope so.”

* * *

Pulling himself together was not easy. The last notable thing they found though the subsequent floors was a single chalkboard where a decaying corpse of a metal skeleton

resided. Written on the chalkboard was a message surrounded by a giant strawberry cupcake.

"I could not taste it. But I hope that you will be able to taste thousands more. Go fill the night sky, captured star."

Frost took a moment to watch over this figure.

This thing was not just any ordinary heap of scrap.

In all likeliness, this was Nav. A Nav stripped bare of all circuits, made indistinguishable from a broken machine. Strands of artificial, light blue hair could be found around its corpse, as well as a single golden eye.

"... I get the feeling that you... were there... for me. Even in this life, huh? Archivist..." Frost whispered, crouching at eye-level with the mechanical corpse.

"Mhm..."

"Nav can hear me, right? Tell it I said that we'll definitely... *definitely* let it know the taste of mortality."

He could not pry himself away from the figure. It took tremendous willpower to accept what had happened and move on. The events leading up to all of this were still left in the dark and seeing the aftermath only left her to speculate wildly. Imagination tended to be more frightening than reality, but in this kind of world reality superseded nightmares.

"If that's Nav... then how come I vaguely know of Nav's voice?" The Archivist asked after Frost left, wiping his cheeks clean with a gloved thumb.

"I wish I could answer everything. We're only seeing things from my perspective. From this... fucked up hell hole."

Walking through shattered glass and rubble, they moved towards the next section of this desolate world.

And before long, they reached a place reminiscent of a Site Core.

This was Floor Z-0.