

MIRAGE

Written by

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EXT. BLACK VOID - NIGHT

Glowing violet eyes open to blackness. FAE (17), creative and quirky, clutches her head in confusion.

She walks around aimlessly in complete darkness and calls out for help, wearing a shapeless gray dress and no shoes.

FAE
(whispers)
Where am I?

Fae walks, twirling around and growing increasingly concerned.

FAE (CONT'D)
Hello?! Anyone? Please, help!

Fae starts running in the vast darkness, desperately looking for anything to run toward. She comes to a halt, hearing two voices echo loudly:

MAN (V.O.)
Why is this taking so long?

WOMAN (V.O.)
The mainframe is stalled, give me a moment.

FAE
Who's there? Help! I'm here, I'm right here!

Fae waves her hands in the air, staring up at nothing.

INT. SMALL WINDOWLESS ROOM - DAY

Fae sits up in bed gasping for breath, shaken and disoriented. The room is like a prison cell, with metallic walls, bare furniture. Standing over her is STELLA (30s), intelligent and nurturing.

STELLA
Sorry about the delay, hun. We had some trouble getting you online.

FAE
Who are you? What was that place?

Fae jumps out of bed, but quickly stumbles into EZRA (20s), stuffy and reserved, who tries to steady her. She pushes past him and backs up against an intimidating door.

STELLA

Calm down, you'll need a moment to adjust.

FAE

Just tell me where the hell I am.

EZRA

Daniel warned us she might be difficult.

Stella shoots a warning glance at Ezra, and cautiously beckons Fae.

STELLA

Come with me, I'll explain best as I can.

INT. MIRAGE OFFICE "BUILDING" - NIGHT

Door sliding open reveals a large base of operations. Empty office cubicles stretch as far as the eye can see. Fae, shaken, stares in awe as Stella leads her down the hall.

STELLA

This is headquarters. It's where you'll be working from now on.

FAE

Working? What do you mean working?

STELLA

That's your purpose now, Fae. To work with us, and to create something brilliant.

Fae clenches her jaw and observes the abandoned space.

FAE

That doesn't- Where is everyone else? It's empty.

STELLA

There are more employees to come.

FAE

None of this makes any sense.

Fae grabs her head, eyes glazing over in confusion. Stella sighs.

STELLA

I'm getting ahead of myself. My purpose here is to be a confidant, and ease your transition.

Beat. Fae steps toward Stella, unwavering.

FAE

Then help me out here. Stop talking in riddles and just tell me what the hell is going on.

STELLA

You're here to be an architect. Your purpose is to build virtual worlds for humans to discover. It's what you were *made for*.

FAE

That place, that darkness. I mean, that wasn't normal. I'm not normal. Am- am I real?

EZRA (O.S.)

I'm afraid not. Same as us.

Ezra appears behind Fae, stone faced. Fae starts briskly walking in the opposite direction and throwing open doors in anger.

STELLA

Oh, honey. It really isn't as bad as it sounds. You're very special-

FAE

Great, I'm a special snowflake. Now point me to the exit and I'll be on my way.

STELLA

Hey-

FAE

I don't want this. I want to leave, I want to go home.

STELLA

This is your home.

FAE

No, no, no. It isn't. It can't be.

EZRA

Hey, hey! Stop!

Fae halts and crosses her arms. Ezra breaks his composure and approaches her.

EZRA (CONT'D)

I know this is confusing for you.
But take it from me, this is the
only life you can or will ever
know. From one prisoner to another,
I suggest you make the best of it.

Ezra brushes past her, and Fae begins to silently cry. She brushes them away with her hands, reacting in shock to her own tears.

FAE

What is this?

Stella's eyes widen and she grabs Fae's hands, comforting her. Fae looks into her eyes, scared of her vulnerability.

STELLA

This makes you special. It makes
you *real*. Don't forget that.

Fae clenches her fists and takes a shaky breath. She looks at Stella with a newfound determination.

FAE

Show me.

STELLA

Show you what?

FAE

Everything that I am. Everything I
was made to be.

Fae takes a step toward Stella, who falters.

STELLA

Okay. Follow me.

The two walk down the hall together, and Fae wipes a stray tear.

FADE TO BLACK.

DANIEL (V.O.)

Why does the eye see a thing more
clearly in dreams than the
imagination when awake?

CUT TO:

INT. CONFERENCE STAGE - NIGHT

At a conference, DANIEL SCOTT (35), an intelligent and charismatic CEO, speaks calmly while pacing the stage thoughtfully.

DANIEL

A question posed by Leonardo Da Vinci, and one I've often pondered myself. Let's be honest, dreams are weird. Nonlinear, jumbled messes of subconscious thought.

Daniel pauses.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

And yet, as Da Vinci would agree, our dreams are infinitely more vivid than our imagination is capable of. Like how, when you're dreaming, you can watch your second grade teacher turn into a lobster before your eyes and it feels logically justified. Apologies to Miss Turner, of course.

The audience laughs and Daniel pulls out a remote to the projector screen.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

I started thinking. What if I could somehow harness the vivid realism of dreams and turn it into something bigger. So I did. And then I made it small.

Daniel clicks the projector to a slide picturing a thin, circular device. He then takes one out of his pocket, about the size of his thumb.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

This is an artificial neurotransmitter, but for our purposes, I call it a Key. Now I could get into a lot of scientific jargon and confuse the hell out of you, but that stuff's not what's important...

Daniel clicks to the next slide, which includes a video.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

The only thing that matters is what this can do.

A commercial begins to play, voiced by an unseen ACTOR.

ON SCREEN:

EXT. SATURN

A spaceship flies over the rings of Saturn.

INT. SPACESHIP

A smiling crew of five friends laugh together and take in the view.

ACTOR (V.O.)
Imagine entering a world of
limitless possibilities.

EXT. CASTLE - NIGHT

A giant castle resembling that of Cinderella's lights up the night. A WIZARD impresses a LITTLE GIRL (6) with magic, weaving glowing thread between his fingers to make her a beautiful gown.

ACTOR (V.O.)
A world filled with wonder.

EXT. MOUNT OLYMPUS - DAY

A man and woman (20s) hike up a mountain of fog. At the top and above the clouds is a floating city of gold.

ACTOR (V.O.)
Where your wildest dreams can be
realized...

EXT. WHITE SANDY BEACH - DAY

A MOTHER (30s) relaxes on the sand with a book. The little girl grabs her hand and runs toward the blue ocean, where her FATHER (30s) and BROTHER (8) play in the waves.

ACTOR (V.O.)
...In the most authentic virtual
reality experience ever created.

MIRAGE LOGO

A professional logo of Mirage appears.

ACTOR (V.O.)
Mirage. The choice is yours.

FADE TO BLACK:

5 YEARS LATER...

EXT. SPACESHIP - NIGHT

A spaceship hurtles towards a black hole, spinning chaotically as it accelerates.

INT. SPACESHIP - CONTROL ROOM

NICK (18), loyal and quick-witted, frantically runs around the room pulling levers and pressing buttons. The ship shakes, throwing him across the room. He crawls to a wall and sits against it, hitting a button on his WALKIE TALKIE.

NICK
Junior! What's the status down there?

The ship jerks again and lights flicker.

NICK (CONT'D)
Junior!

INT. SPACESHIP, VENT - NIGHT

JUNIOR (17), sarcastic computer genius, crawls through a tight vent. He awkwardly reaches for his WALKIE TALKIE, struggling to obtain it from his pocket. He hits a button:

JUNIOR
The radioisotope thermoelectric generators are failing.

NICK
What does that mean?

JUNIOR
The nuclear power reactors are gonna blow us to pieces!

INT. SPACESHIP, CONTROL ROOM - NIGHT

Nick stares through the glass at the vacuum of space. The black hole sucks away the last light of a gas planet.

NICK
How long have we got?

INT. SPACESHIP, GENERATOR ROOM - NIGHT

Junior clumsily drops from the vent in the ceiling, hitting the ground hard. Smoke fills the room and ALARMS blare as he stumbles to a gauge on the generator, which points to the danger zone.

JUNIOR
Six minutes, if we're lucky.

Junior is thrown into a coughing fit.

INT. SPACESHIP, CONTROL ROOM - NIGHT

Nick sets his a countdown on his DIGITAL WATCH for six minutes.

JUNIOR
I'll try to fix the cooling systems, but it doesn't look good.

NICK
We've got bigger problems right now.

ALLY (O.S.)
You're telling me!

INT. SPACESHIP, WEAPONS BAY - NIGHT

ALLY (17), impulsive and adventurous, fights off half a dozen aliens with long tentacles and multiple rows of teeth. She sports a laser weapon in one hand and a WALKIE in the other.

ALLY
Now will you morons use a different channel?

She shoots an alien, disintegrating it.

ALLY (CONT'D)
I'm trying to concentrate!

NICK

Ally, what's going on?

ALLY

Remember that ugly alien octopus we thought we killed last week? It had kids, and they're pissed.

JUNIOR

Ally, why didn't you say something?!

ALLY

(incredulous)

Because I've been a little busy!

Without even looking, Ally shoots another snarling alien attacking from behind.

INT. SPACESHIP, CONTROL ROOM - NIGHT

Nick wears a spacesuit and prepares the airlock exit, attaching himself to a tether. He talks into the WALKIE:

NICK

We have four minutes, guys!
Probably less. I'm going to try to repair the hyperdrive and get us out of here, but the damage is external. Junior, work on the cooling systems. Ally... just keep up the good work.

ALLY (O.C.)

Thanks for the vote of confidence, Nick.

Nick puts on his helmet and enters the airlock. The alarm sounds as the airlock opens and he's pulled into space.

INT. SPACESHIP, GENERATOR ROOM - NIGHT

The gauge breaks from the pressure. Junior wraps his shirt around his head as protection from the smoke and starts to unscrew a panel to the cooling system. Junior hears an alien coming through the vent. Diving underneath the generator, he grabs his walkie just in time.

JUNIOR

(whispers)

Ally, are you busy right now?

The ALIEN slithers across the room searching for prey.

INT. SPACESHIP, WEAPONS BAY - NIGHT

Ally continues to fight hoards of aliens, which surround her in every direction. She responds to the walkie talkie:

ALLY
(sarcastic)
Little bit.

INT. SPACESHIP, GENERATOR ROOM - NIGHT

Junior crawls carefully across the room.

JUNIOR
One of the aliens is here and I
don't have any weapons.

ALLY
Can't you handle it?

JUNIOR
Easy for you to say!

INT. SPACESHIP, WEAPONS BAY - NIGHT

Ally shoots what appear to be the last three aliens.

ALLY
Yeah, sure. Easy.

An unseen ALIEN sneaks up behind Ally and opens its large mouth. Her walkie drops to the ground as the Alien swallows her whole. A long pause before:

JUNIOR
Ally, please!

The Alien explodes. Ally emerges covered in green guts with a smoking laser gun, grabbing the walkie.

ALLY
On my way.

To herself:

ALLY (CONT'D)
Why do I have to do everything?

Ally briskly walks away, stomping through gooey alien guts.

EXT. SPACESHIP - NIGHT

Nick works diligently on a damaged panel outside the ship. They're closing in on the black hole now, space growing darker by the second. He speaks into the walkie:

NICK

Junior, how are those generators doing? I reengaged the hyperdrive, but we've gotta move quickly.

Pause.

NICK (CONT'D)

Junior? Status update!

INT. SPACESHIP, GENERATOR ROOM - NIGHT

Junior's walkie talkie lies alone on the floor next to alien remains. Ally picks it up.

ALLY

Junior's dead. It's a wonder we even put up with him.

NICK

Can't say I'm surprised.

ALLY

I'll pick him up at Retrievals.

Ally smirks.

EXT. SPACESHIP - NIGHT

Nick shakes his head and grins. He pushes aside the broken wires to see a RED GEMSTONE disguised as a button, but glowing.

NICK

Huh, that's strange.

Nick plucks it out from the ship and examines it in his hand.

ALLY

Are we getting out of here, or what?

Shaking his head, Nick puts the gemstone in his pocket. He checks his digital watch, which counts down 17 seconds from zero as he nears the black hole.

NICK

There wasn't enough time. We have
to cut our losses.

Pause.

INT. SPACESHIP, GENERATOR ROOM - NIGHT

Ally nods, notably nonchalant while in a burning room.

ALLY

See you on the other side, man.
Over and out.

Ally types on her DIGITAL WATCH and suddenly disappears in a
wave of pixels.

EXT. SPACESHIP - NIGHT

Nick detaches from the tether and floats away. His watch
begins to beep and the ship disappears into the black hole.

INT. BLACK HOLE

Just as it explodes, the ship dissolves into pixels that
stretch and light the black hole like a warped tunnel. The
journey accelerates and we quickly pass an old fashioned
"Game Over" from the classic Galaga.

As we speed through the tunnel, the lights begin to change
and brighten. The tunnel shrinks and expands with each second
as it becomes more unstable. Forks in the path emerge and the
journey becomes more frantic, twisting out of control.

Vibrant lights fade to black and the journey slows as the end
of the tunnel is reached. What first seemed like a black void
blinks open to a near glowing violet color.

INT. FAE'S QUARTERS - DAY

Fae opens her violet eyes and jumps up in bed, her hair a
mess. She looks like she's seen a ghost. Her room is like a
prison cell, decorated to the taste of a teenage girl. The
intercom to her right BEEPS and Fae hits the button.

STELLA (O.S.)

Are you up, sunshine? You have a
meeting with Ezra in 10 minutes to
discuss Update 142.

FAE
That's today? Tell him I'm sick.

Fae dramatically falls back into bed.

FAE (CONT'D)
Of seeing his stupid face.

STELLA (O.S.)
Very mature.

FAE
You love me.

STELLA (O.S.)
You've rescheduled three times
already, he won't wait any longer.

FAE
Yeah, yeah. I'm on my way.

Fae leaps out of bed and stumbles for the exit, holding her head.

INT. MIRAGE OFFICE "BUILDING" - DAY

The door slides open and reveals the large base of operations for the virtual world Mirage. Office cubicles stretch as far as the eye can see, giving off an otherworldly impression.

Fae walks confidently through the office, passing dozens of cubicles with uniformed workers. She cheerfully greets people as she passes them, and their response is less than warm:

FAE
What's up buttercup? Hey! What's
shakin', bacon?

A GIRL she passes responds without looking up from her computer screen:

GIRL
You're not cute.

Fae whips around to walk backwards.

FAE
That's what you think! But I think
you're great!

Fae backs into Ezra, making him drop a stack of papers he was carrying. He lets out a sigh and Fae haphazardly tries to pick up the fallen papers, stumbling over her words.

FAE (CONT'D)

I'm so sorry, Ezra. I was just coming to see you! I was just wondering if-

EZRA

You are not rescheduling the update again, Fae.

FAE

No, no, forget that. I have to tell you something! I was in sleep mode last night and you'll never guess-

EZRA

I'm busy right now. Look, I'll be in your office in 10 minutes to review your work. Tell me then.

Ezra takes the rest of his papers from her hands and quickly walks off.

FAE

Looking forward to it, boss man!
(under her breath)
Uptight prick.

Fae slaps on a smile and keeps walking. She finally enters her corner office.

INT. FAE'S OFFICE, SIMULATOR - DAY

It's unexpectedly a large dome theatre. Live feed from all over Mirage displays on the 360 degree screen surrounding her. She watches it all with a smile, then lingers on District 4, the space world from earlier.

Fae walks up to the control panel, swiping her hands across the air to expand the live feed. She lands on a video of a young couple at a bar. She zooms in on their hands, fingers flirting shyly before intertwining.

CUT TO:

5 YEARS AGO

INT. FAE'S QUARTERS - DAY

Fae lays in her bed, staring up at her hands in wonder and scrutinizing each finger. She locks them together, and her eyes widen at her discovery.

DANIEL (O.C.)
Hands are notoriously difficult to
render.

Fae jumps in surprise and glares at Daniel.

FAE
Who the hell are you?

DANIEL
There are over 30 muscles in the
human hand, all working together in
a highly complex way. I sought to
replicate those movements as
authentically as possible.

Daniel grabs Fae's hand and examines it methodically.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
Yours came out lovely if I do say
so myself.

Fae, stunned, rips away in disgust.

FAE
Screw you! Who the hell do you
think you are?

DANIEL
Remarkable. You are already
learning, assimilating new
information, developing a sense of
self. Truly remarkable.

Daniel holds out his hand with a friendly smile. Fae looks at the gesture with confusion, but he just enthusiastically grabs her right hand and shakes it in his.

INT. FAE'S OFFICE, SIMULATOR - DAY

Fae stares longingly at the live feed. She observes a WOMAN drag a MAN to dance, twirling and laughing with glee.

Fae takes a breath and shakes her head. At the control panel, she enters a complex series of code until the center button lights up green. She hits the button, causing the live feed to disappear and the whole environment to change before her eyes.

INT. UTOPIAN CITY - DAY

First, a blue sky with clouds emerges from the ceiling. All around her, chrome buildings appear and trees grow from the ground. Within seconds, an entire utopian city emerges, seemingly endless in all directions.

EZRA (O.S.)

And you're sure it's ready to go
out in the update next week?

Fae turns around in surprise. Ezra comes through a door from one of the buildings and observes the new environment.

FAE

Yes, it's ready.

He walks around with a critical eye, hunting for mistakes. Fae blurts out:

FAE (CONT'D)

I had a dream last night!

EZRA

What is it then? A new concept you
want to try?

FAE

Look, I know it sounds crazy, but I
think I tapped into a client's
gameplay.

Ezra sighs.

EZRA

Fae, you know that just isn't
possible-

FAE

I thought so too, but it was so
bizarre and I just know there has
to be a reason for it. So I was
wondering if you might help me
investigate? You know you are the
only one with access to player IDs
and locations. I need to know if it
was real.

EZRA

Then I'll save you the trouble. It
wasn't.

FAE

It was! I've learned about all of human history. Every book ever written, every song, every movie. But I've never actually seen a human before and I could just tell. They were *different*.

EZRA

Where are you going with this, Fae?

She takes a deep breath.

FAE

What if I went into Mirage? Just for one day! We could frame it as research for my next assignment!

EZRA

Fae, stop.

Ezra takes one last look around the city, and nods with approval. He wants to end the conversation.

EZRA (CONT'D)

It looks good. I'll pass it on to Daniel.

Ezra hits the big button on the control panel and the world dissolves around them. He moves to walk out the door when Fae interrupts, growing angrier by the second.

FAE

There has to be more than this! Aren't you frustrated with it all, aren't you angry?! I'm pissed as hell you don't even care!

Ezra walks up to close to Fae and speaks quietly.

EZRA

You're getting greedy, Fae. You forget that Daniel runs the show, and we're nothing to him. Your software isn't even compatible with Mirage. And there's nothing you can do about it.

Fae shakes her head.

FAE

If you believe that, you're a coward.

EZRA

As always, your passion makes you a better architect. And a big pain in my ass.

FAE

My pleasure.

Ezra turns around and walks away briskly, determined to get out of there before Fae interrupts again.

EZRA

Get back to work. And double check the code for those trees, I might have seen an optical flicker.

FAE

Maybe you're happy to sit on your ass and waste your life! But I'm not.

EZRA

We're not alive, Fae.

Fae is silenced for a moment, and Ezra sighs.

EZRA (CONT'D)

I don't want to see you get hurt.

FAE

Is that a threat?

EZRA

A warning. Daniel may find your antics amusing right now, but you are just as expendable as any of us.

Ezra walks out the door, leaving Fae alone in a darkened theater.