

We call him a variety of names. We associate his existence with a variety of objects. One of them is a dead rat.

When he speaks, his words turn into incomprehensible onslaughts of cacophony. He gazes into your eyes, narrowing your field of vision.

A hollow stare. Barren of emotion, it evokes murderous intent.

It might be you yourself, wanting to release this horribly deformed creature from its misery. Or it might just be him angered beyond words for ever seeing his true appearance.

“You truly are horrible, right? You wanted this, right? You wanted to see this horribly mangled failed existence, right?”

It demands an answer. We spit in its face and run. We write in white ink on white paper.

We render our words invisible, we alienate all that surrounds us. We assign him the simple lore of the Beast that the great heroes will kill.

We make it our enemy. We make it our prey. We make it less than human.

And yet...

Its form cannot be properly perceived. We look at it through cracked lens, pointing at it and laughing. How incredible we are, how beautiful we are. So, let's rejoice in our lack of integrity.

Our lack of tact. Our lack of meaning.

Let's tear down all the great works of art, let us deprive this world of beauty. Let's paint this world white. Let's make it beautiful.

We are satisfied with our shining glory, with our knights saving this world from evil. Right? Right. It can't be any other way.

The horror we create is the beauty we feed on.

How beautiful this world we created is, how ugly our forms are. How utterly sickeningly sugary this place is.

So?

Yet we cannot allow beasts like it to exist. Because it does not have a role in our tale of grace and glimmer.

We feed on the remains of meaning. We feed on the remains of that which we created.

That is our only hope.

But that's a lie, isn't it?

Those were the words that I had written for myself to read later. No, rather, it was before I died. Every time I die, my body becomes an artifact of skinless flesh, left to walk alone.

That's what everyone sees it as.

It is as human as them. It is simply trapped within its own mind, unable to reach any conclusions, unable to think, unable to communicate, unable to blend in.

That's one of the many beasts that I left behind.

Frankly, I killed myself enough times for there to be a whole colony of "those things".

Every time she dies, a fake world is created. It envelops everything around it. Its inhabitants are cardboard cutouts of people, made to torture the alienated and seemingly undesirable.

I've found an exit multiple times. Yet it never felt like reaching anything. It never felt like being anyone.

So I just sat and waited. One of the many me's reached out a hand, drooling and screaming. I did not understand it.

Its words did not reach me. Because I could not understand myself. I never wanted to associate with the human being called me.

Her wish was to create a perfect world, and my wish was to create a world where all of humanity lives in terror. Those two wishes intertwined, creating a saccharine massacre of a location.

It stretches for thousands of kilometers, with the same suburb repeating over and over, slowly losing form. From seemingly normal houses to half-finished masses of material.

Roofs cut in half, walls made of pure white, fleshy material with no visible windows, doors made of a material that almost feels like it's gasping for air.

I did not understand how I came to those descriptions, but that is the image that had been burnt into my eyes by the sight.

Shadows standing like statues, dogs barking in the distance, vague whispered conversations. A world that does not have a grasp of what it's supposed to be.

If it was meant to be anything at all in the first place.

Walking through the towns with no gaps between them but some deserted stretches of road felt nauseating.

Frankly, I don't think there was any real oxygen in the atmosphere. The air itself felt strained and unnatural.

Sometimes I saw things that resembled humans. All of them had my face.

I came upon a garden, one that felt like it was cut out of a nature magazine. The grass felt like old paper. The wind carried dust with it.

The nights that passed were fully lit, giving them the same feeling sterile feeling of a hospital hallway.

The streetlights did not flicker even once.

It was like watching someone talk for an hour without blinking even once.

*Even once.*

For the love of god, can this world be imperfect just once?

I continued walking, eventually coming up a dead end.

A wall of stacked traffic cones.

I knew I'd be stuck here for a while.

*(Part 1 - End)*

What was her name? I frankly didn't remember it. Not like I wanted to.

No, what was my own name in the first place? Did I have a name before?

"You're overthinking it."

An unfamiliar voice. Was I rambling out loud? No, wait, was that another human? If so, I don't think I've ever been happier in my time alive. It was the same sort of happiness you'd have seeing a dead relative alive.

"I know what you're thinking. Rest assured, I'm not one of *those things* or just a decoration."

It was another human. An honest-to-god being with a form.

"I don't really know what I'm doing here myself. But hey, not like you do either. So, we're in the same boat, huh?"

Same boat indeed.

She spoke in a cheerful tone. I wasn't sure if I was to feel relieved or scared. But I'll go with the former.

I don't understand emotions just yet. I know how to take social cues, but the concept of feelings still seems

alien. This has happened during my last few deaths, so I don't think this is anything to worry about.

"Yeah, we are."

I reply. Maybe with a sense of confidence, maybe with a looming sense of uncertainty. I wouldn't know! ...Not like that's anything to be excited about.

"You're the guy who wrote that stuff on the stone, right? I ain't really sure why you did that, but the words certainly seemed intriguing. I came upon it, and wanted to see what the author was up to. Or if there was an author in the first place. But you seem like the right person."

Right on the money.

"Yeah, that was me. I don't really get it, but I guess I've died multiple times, and had to leave behind messages for my next incarnation. It's nothing too exciting."

"...You sure that's *nothing too exciting*? That's one of the weirder things I've heard today. Nah, hell, you're like... the weirdest thing I've met today in general. Those things don't do much, they just wander around and scream. But a living being is certainly an interesting find. Lemme guess, you're the co-creator of this place, right?"

How'd she know that?

“I guess... I haven't really grasped the details of that part either. I guess past me was looking for a girl, the other creator of this world.”

I vaguely understood what my own wish was, or how it impacts this place. I guess living in terror could be interpreted as creating a bunch of zombies and having the world be a hollow hellscape that you feel completely alienated by.

That makes sense. A lot of sense. Totally. No, that sounds sarcastic. Why was my wish strong enough to affect this world, though?

“I've found a few areas that didn't feel as stilted. Hell, they nearly felt like paradise. Sanctuaries for true beauty.”

Did she, really?

“I know what you're thinking. That definitely sounds like bullshit at first. But it seems your wish didn't really fully paint this world white. Some parts of this 'perfect' world survived.”

She continued.

“Naturally, the whole construction is flawed. There is no such thing as a 'perfect' world. Such a wish can be



interpreted in a multitude of ways, but they're bound to crumble. There's a strong barrier around this place as well. Was a pain in the ass to get through."

Get through?

"I know what you're thinking. Why exactly did I need to get through? Well, simply put, it's my job. I had this guy who didn't leave any contact information behind throw me some good cash to investigate this place. Left the money at my doorstep. Surprised no one stole it."

What field of work is she in?

"Simply put, I work as an investigator. A multiverse investigator. My job is to break through spacetime barriers and get people out of their comfy little pocket dimensions. Usually, they can be detected as interference. Like turning on the radio and tuning it to what was once dead air. Then hearing someone talking bleed through the static."

That seems... like a fairly mundane way of detection.

"In concept, it's a occurrence that seems fairly insignificant. But such disruptions become suspicious when they're caught within a certain region. We call it the '40 kilometer zone'. Of course, its location slightly shifts year by year, but we've only started working on it

recently. We've found remains of its influence in a radius of 500 kilometers, but the most activity comes from that chunk of land at the moment."

Huh, that is interesting.

"Anyway, in that range, gateways to other regions of spacetime open. Most of them close before we manage to get to them, but we got lucky this time and had a funding boost from our client."

"...So, in concept, I'm supposed to be your enemy?"

"You could be, really. But you seem harmless for now. I can't confirm if your influence can have any major effects on the pocket dimension itself, and you don't seem aware of the full situation. So, essentially, you're an ally under one condition."

"One condition?"

"You cooperate."

"Fair enough."

"Honestly, that whole thing about me not knowing what I was doing here was just a ploy to get your trust. Was confirming if you're actually aware of what's going on." I was starved for human interaction, so I probably was willing to trust basically anyone at that point.

“So, now here’s the fun part. The investigative process. I haven’t confirmed if there’s any real humans in here aside from you yet. Did find a deserted car nearby, so let’s use that, I guess.”

Convenient enough. Justified by the fact that my influence did not spread far enough for it to completely drain everything of form.

We get in the car. The keys sit on the driver’s seat. She picks them up. I sit in the back.

This all happens in the present tense. This does not relate to any event in the past. That almost gives me a sense of peace.

We drive through a stretch of farmland with a forest that feels truly green in the distance. The sun feels less like stage lights. I open the car’s sunroof. Warmth bleeds in. This world exists.

Or at least exists more than the other parts of this place. The sun burns. The world feels imperfect. That’s why it’s a perfect recreation of the real world. That’s such an odd contradiction, but in a way, it makes sense.

*(Part 2 - End)*

Thank you for reading! Look out for part III and IV soon.

*Claudia Sheffner*