

Biological research is tricky business. Hearing someone say that they work with biological research makes one think either plants and fungus, or mutants grown out of beakers feasting on flesh. Funnily enough, one research facility seemed to have both. It also had a researcher recently woken up from cryo-stasis. And all she had to comfort her lack of friendly company was an audio recording sounding like someone who had been put on enough drugs to turn his fellow man into a fluffy pink elephant, or by the sound of his panicked screams, something resembling a flesh eating gargoyle.

Sierra wasn't really sure if she was just getting as paranoid as him or if she was just staying safe, but she had no intention of having a meet and greet with whatever walked its way through the abandoned halls. Even if it was a human being, if he or she was as psychotic as the creepy poet, (or worse, actually was him,) his natural reaction to meeting a human being would probably lie somewhere between screaming and jumping like a madman as far away as one can, and screaming and jumping like a madman at you with whatever sharp object he can find. So taking the elevator and following in the spook's footsteps seemed like a first class ticket to an unwanted stab fest.

*...Maybe staying here a little while and finding some info would be a good idea.*

Sierra didn't linger. She left the trashed room and the audio log and moved out of the room. She looked to the right where the elevator was in the distance, no sign of anything besides her. The halls were still as dimly lit as before, and the halls were so quiet that you could probably hear a butterfly flap its wings from the other side of the room.

The offices seemed to lack anything more of interest, so Sierra needed somewhere else to find anything that could let her know what was causing the fuzz. She didn't really know the layout, the only times she were in this department was when she was going from elevator to elevator. Even though most of the research was made with each department for themselves, communication was required, so the eventual quick stroll came around every now and then. But Sierra was never involved in any of the biological research projects; they rarely needed any tech they didn't already have, so they pretty much became outcasts in the building.

Luckily for anyone not acquainted with the twists and turns of the floor, there was a computerized map on the wall which didn't go unnoticed by the scientist with the pony-tail.

It looked kind of cheap, it was mostly just a piece of glass with touch-screen technology and various lights hanging on the wall, but it served its purpose right. Sierra zoomed in and out of the various locales. The department in itself was kind of big, bigger than the one she used to work in. The design of the floor was kind of rubbish, everything just seemed to be more labs and offices the farther away from the central hall you got. The central hall didn't really serve a purpose, but it gave a feeling of connection between all the halls and rooms, probably to make anyone trying to find...well, anything, a little less prominent to getting lost. The floor was divided into alphabetical sectors, and each sector had rooms with a number to separate them from one another.

Sierra looked up to down and left to right, trying to find what she was looking for. By the bottom of the floor map, she saw that there was a security room by the east wing of the department, in the D sector.

*Security cameras and an emergency locker with guns... Sweet.*

Due to the risk of mutants (which proved to be quite a true risk), the security guards had a locker in the room where they monitor the department. So not only could Sierra look at the tapes and see what was lurking the halls five minutes ago, she had a locker filled with tranquilizers and shotguns waiting to be pillaged.

She didn't waste any time. She memorized the way there. The room was D15, and she memorized the turns. Walk down, then left, right, right, left, right. Trying to look through the halls simply by numbers was an arduous task as it was with how the halls fork, so it seemed much simpler just to remember the exact way there.

Walking past various empty offices, she started noticing something (besides the gut-wrenching smell that seemed to come from year-old shrooms growing in the corners). Small things were moving. Small black moving dots. Turns out some of the fungus had become nesting place for various unidentified insects. They didn't seem intent on crawling into her skin and eat her eyeballs from the inside, but she kept her distance. Thick bodies and crooked legs reminded her too much of spiders for her to be comfortable (one time when she was passing through this department, some idiot accidentally let one of their experiments loose, a spider with genetically enhanced bone structure and blood vessels, which made for a very heavy, yet fast arachnoid crawling on her skin. She still to this day seeks vengeance against the bumbling fool.), so she walked through the premises trying to avoid stepping on anything moving, so her pacing through the hall started looking like a game of Frogger.

Once she made it through that corridor and turned right, she walked past several research rooms, some with the doors open, giving her a peak into the madness that was genetic research. The rooms looked like medical bays, and hanging on the wall were X-ray photos showing bones growing out of flesh, and camera photos of growths resembling tumors, only with either an extra limb or something similar to an extra organ. It was quite freaky to look at, but Sierra was content with the fact that she didn't have to see these abnormalities eye to eye (or eye to socket for some).

She reached the security room. There was a window giving anyone passing by a look into the room. The door by the side was a normal lock and handle door. To Sierra's fortune, it wasn't locked when she pressed the handle. But upon opening, a number of little insects quickly crawled out through the gap, relishing in the dimmed light that the inside of the room didn't seem to offer.

She walked into a somewhat dark room lit up by nothing but the light coming through the window, and an assortment of screens against a wall, showing various locations of the floor. It seemed like most of the cameras were still functional, or to an extent at least. Some seemed to have stopped functioning, so the screens for them were just black and white blur, while others were so blurry that one could mistake a pillar for a xenomorph with a wide enough imagination.

Letting her fascination drive her first, Sierra made it her first task to sit down by the computer managing

all those screens. Looking at each of the screens, she saw that nothing seemed to move around, so a little sense of safety was given. From above everything looked kind of peaceful. It was that feeling of walking into a room you've seen thousands of times, except with all furniture gone, and only doors and walls with worn out tapestry left. It made everything seem grander. But she didn't sit there just to look at how pretty the halls were when devoid of coats and bald patches. She looked for the one camera overlooking the elevator hall. She found it in the middle slightly to the left that had its camera overlooking the elevator in which the little outcast had gone. Using the terminal was as advanced as using a home theatre with a book by the side saying "Home Theatre For Dummies", Sierra thought to herself, chuckling at her unspoken wit. So rewinding the video wasn't going to be a problem.

The recording went backwards with a very silent sound. Not like when you rewind a tape where you can hear the thing scratching on the inside, more like a little friendly hum. She backed up around ten minutes before she saw something move on the screen. She played it and tried to look closely at what was walking forward.

With the dimmed lighting, making out what was appearing on screen in detail was unfortunately a bit harder than one would think. She saw a man like figure, somewhere over six feet tall, but by the angle it was a bit hard to tell for sure. It held a somewhat crouched posture and sort of sauntered with heavy steps, as if carrying cinderblocks under its feet.

*Well, this gave me...nothing.*

Even though she could see something moving, the picture gave her nothing that told her what she had been hiding from like a little girl in a cupboard, which admittedly hurt her pride a little.

*Well, that was completely rubbish. Or...hm...maybe...*

Sierra started searching the terminal. If she was lucky, she could find just what she was hoping for. And she did. August 26th 2047. Although it wasn't as simple as she had hoped. In a number of the camera recordings, there were blackouts here and there.

*Huh, I guess the hard drive got corrupted or something. Well, there ought to be something useful. Let's see if that old geezer was right or not.*

She looked around at the amount of scenery she could observe from the camera angles. There were people walking around like normal. Lots of labcoats, glasses, and either bald heads or skinny fellows with their shoulders lazily hanging. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary. Everything was brightly lit with the sound of scuffling feet and incessant chattering on whatever monitor she'd care to turn on the sound. Seemed like any kind of regular weekday (how regular putting ears on the backs of rats for fun now could be). Except on one of the cameras in the upper right corner. A corridor leading up to a set of labs had been sealed off. A thick layer of plastic was blocking the path, probably air tight. And in front of it was a yellow and black biohazard tape.

*Guess somebody did something more than just let a spider out of the jar. I hope I get to see something this time...*

Wanting to look more into it, she tried finding cameras that showed that particular area, but to no avail. If there were any cameras in that location, they were among the ones that had blacked out. And she couldn't just sit around watching through months of recordings. Partly because it's a huge waste of time, but also because Sierra thought it had to be the most mind-numbingly boring thing she could do.

So rather than sitting around like a lonely teenage computer dweller on a Friday night, she rolled herself with the chair over to the little metallic desk drawers and started looting the drawers for anything that could be of interest. Before she looked more into the mysterious plastic-contained zone, she wanted something to go after, something to give her a heads-up or anything at all really. Then at the third left drawer a black little notebook slid out as she pulled the drawer to her. It didn't have anything written on the front. She opened it up. It didn't have much written in it. The parts that had writing had huge notes with letters overlapping the lines of the yellow pages. Most of the notes were just reminders. But somewhere in the middle of the book there was something that caught her interest.

*"September 13th 2047 23:38."*

There seemed to be lots of fuzz around that particular year, and not in the same way you discuss good years for wine. It seemed apparent that that year was popular in (what Sierra referred to the biology department as) "The Scientific Freakshow".

With the little black book in her hand, she rolled the chair back to the terminal, looking at the date and then switching to the recordings of that period. She set it to start at 23:37. The screens all blinked and then the little numbers in the lower right corners had been changed to that time.

Once again, everything looked normal. There was not much difference in, well, anything. She looked for an entire minute, waiting for the supposed blackout. After a minute of what would be the most minor form of suspense, not much happened. She fast-forwarded a number of seconds, let the minute pass. Then the cameras came back on, and in the camera overlooking the sealed off area, she was greeted by a silhouette standing behind the plastic. The thick protective layer covered up any features, it showed only a black tall silhouette, just standing there on its own. It felt as if it was aware of the camera's presence, and was trying to make anyone watching uncomfortable (and he succeeded in this case).

The creepy thing stood firm for maybe ten seconds, not moving a single muscle, until it turned its entire body in a both clumsy and slender movement, dragging its feet against the floor. It moved in the same fashion as the figure she saw by the elevator.

Sierra was getting a bit impatient; nothing of this was useful to her. All it did was make her ask more questions. She decided that it would be better to just start moving. She only had one concern left though. The oh, so wonderful blasting shotguns and pistols hiding inside the locker.

She stepped out of the chair, and walked towards the metal locker. She put her hand around the handle, and thought what could be in there for her. She may have been a bit of a geek, and maybe it was just a bunch of fantasy, but the thought of holding guns was always exciting to her. She had only held a gun once before, and that was when she was young. It may have only been one of those airsoft BB guns, but for her it was the most fun she could have. (That was, until she accidentally shot her dad in the leg. Unfortunately that was kind of a bad thing to do.)

Even though she doesn't want to encounter anything in the halls, it would feel empowering to know that she could kill it. She didn't want to fight for her life, but she wanted to feel the adrenaline. (She had quite an amount of frustration after being abandoned alone in this place.) She pushed the handle down, pulled the door, and...

*...Are you fucking kidding me?*

Sierra kicked the locker, which in retrospect wasn't the best of ideas when the locker was made of very sturdy metal. She jumped up and down on one foot, her other foot hurting like all hell. After a few seconds of dancing around, she put her foot down, and thought about what she could do. She didn't know why, but having that locker being locked made reality hit her a bit. She hadn't really paid much attention to what she was dealing with.

*Think, think, think... I guess I could walk around unarmed and run the risk of being mauled. But I probably would anyway, if not even a security guard could kill whatever killed everyone else then either this thing isn't that easy to kill, or security's run by chimps. Shit, shit, shit. What do I do then? I can't contact higher grounds, they're probably dead already or have abandoned ship like the suited up chickens they are. But maybe...what if...*

Sierra started stuttering in her mind. Before, the only thing she seemed to think about was that the place was abandoned, she didn't really think much through what was going on in this place until she actually saw for herself what it was, because whatever it was, it wasn't human. And on top of that, no guns.

*Okay, calm down. What do I do? What can I do? There must be some way I can...*  
*...Hang on, what was that?*

Sierra turned her head and stood motionless for a few seconds, listening intently. She could swear she heard the sound of something. She didn't really figure out what the sound was, but something interrupted the silence, if only a little. She walked carefully towards the wall that separated the room and the hall. She didn't breathe; she tried to listen in absolute silence. Pointing her ears towards the hall, she could in the cold dead silence hear something.

A foot.

No, not a foot. Feet make steady heel-toe sounds. This sounded almost...like a paw, or something close to it. The firm noise of something placing itself on the ground, no need of balance redirection, like normal

humans when letting their weight fall forward against the ground with their foot. No, this was far from human pacing. Sierra didn't really pay as much attention to the nature of the steps last time; she just assumed it was something close to human. But she knew that something outside that realm was in this building.

She couldn't hold her breath. She felt the steps coming closer, moving in the halls. Not like it was searching, but like it was waiting for something to happen, in the same slow fashion as hunters waiting for a deer to pop out of a bush. Sierra started getting shivers. She felt cold sweat starting to run against her forehead. She could feel parts of her body twitch. She remembered being told about this. This was what human physiology referred to as "panic". Her heartbeat was going faster; blood was spreading out through her body faster, the sweat glands tried to cool her off. Her body was ready to run. She wanted to run. She wanted to hope that she could run. Hiding seemed pointless.

Sierra then started to feel something. Her breathing started to become heavier, but she didn't feel enough oxygen coming into her lungs. She grabbed hold of the gas mask. It didn't filter out enough air for her. It could only mean one thing. Gas masks don't really generate air. It just filters out the air to make you able to breathe with ease. But they can only go so far. The fact of the matter is, your body can absorb certain types of gas and use it as a substitute for cellular respiration. It's not healthy though. These gas masks make sure you don't breathe that stuff in, but if the oxygen amount is too scarce, the mask ends up just suffocating you.

Sierra felt trapped. She knew she had to get out, and quickly. She wouldn't be able to run with the gas mask on without passing out, but she could probably survive inhaling the gas for a short while. If she ran like hell she could probably make it to the elevator in time. She was guessing the elevator was on this level since the...thing, was here.

Time was running out. She could hear the steps coming closer. She took off the gas mask. Air, though not the preferable kind, started going into her lungs and she could breathe. The gas was close enough to normal air for her body to absorb it. She took a deep breathe, opened the door, and leaped out. Knowing from which direction she heard the steps, she turned to the corridor in the other direction and ran. She pushed herself forward as much as she could, feeling her legs starting to burn from running for the first time in years. She remembered the directions she took, and she frantically repeated them in her head, trying to remember them in reverse to get back.

*Left, right, right, left, right. Fuck, what is that turned around!? It's...fuckfuckfuckfuck, it's...Left, right, left, left, right!*

She chanted that order over and over, her inner voice screaming, trying to make her ignore the fact that the steps behind her became faster. She turned, she turned, and she turned, making her way, until she finally saw the big hall where she came from. Still not taking a second to look back, she sprinted toward the elevator that was in the distance. It looked so far away, it felt pointless to run. She would never make it, she thought. She ran and ran and ran, each step feeling more pointless than the other, her body giving up. Her legs could barely lift her up anymore. She pushed herself more and more. She could hear the steps

closer now. She didn't dare to look behind. Morbid curiosity wasn't her thing; she'd rather die not knowing what was tearing her to pieces.

A glimpse of hope appeared. The elevator was actually there, she could see now. But her legs could barely handle anymore, her upper body felt like lead pushing her down. But she was so close, maybe 20 feet. She pushed herself, the sweat running down on her entire face, her entire body burning by the pressure, and in her panic she could almost hear the thing's breath behind her.

A few final steps, she was almost there. She leaped into the air, trying to gain more velocity. She was inside the elevator, and crashed into the wall of it. She quickly regained her balance and pressed whatever button she could reach, not looking back.

“Ding!”