

An Allegory For Death

By

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Cast of Characters

LEA:

JAMES:

WALKER:

AN ALLEGORY FOR DEATH

A laboratory. The low hum of electricity runs through the room. A ticking of a clock is heard faintly, to a point that its hard to tell whether its there at all.

LEA

Audio log eighty-nine, day thirty-seven. Project name: Gabriel. After yesterdays failure, a success today appears more paramount than even before. The signal's strength has remained steady, as it has since its inception.

Morse code is heard: the word "welcome".

JAMES

There it is again.

LEA

Quiet! Audio logs.

JAMES

Sorry.

LEA

Today, we believe we have found the source of the electrical glitch causing the malfunctioning refractors, and expect promising results in today's test.

JAMES

She says... again. And again.

LEA

Your comments are not appreciated.

JAMES

Alright, alright.

LEA

Lead researcher Lea McNally, signing off.

Morse code is heard: the word "to"

JAMES

Almost 7:04. Not to long now.

LEA

You're really going to pretend that did not happen?

JAMES

What didn't happen?

LEA

You making a fool of me on official comms, that's what! One day, in the future, someone will be researching this very moment, and all they'll hear are your snide comments on an otherwise revolutionary event. Is that how you want to be remembered?

JAMES

Okay, okay, I get it.

LEA

Never do that again.

The dinging of a clock is heard, as if it had just struck 12.

JAMES

7:06.

LEA

Start it up, start it up!

JAMES

I am! I am!

The whooshing of a switch being pulled. Quickly, the air fills with the sound of crackling and the heavy whirring of electricity, as it grows louder. JAMES and LEA get louder as they talk over everything happening.

JAMES

It's doing... something!

LEA

It's working, that's what its doing!

Reality rips, as if paper.

JAMES

Oh my God, it's opening!

LEA

Quickly! Before it closes, send the drone through!

JAMES

Working on it!

The whirring of drone blades, combined with all the other sounds, quickly joined with the harsh ripping of paper, before nothing at all. Silence for only a moment, before the word "Heaven" is heard in Morse Code, before transposing itself into the sounds of a city street in the rain. The sound of rain drizzling. The sound of a car driving and splashing water across the sidewalk. LEA'S light, fast footsteps are heard, splashing through the rain.

LEA

Here it is.

An old door creaks open, the sounds of the city outside are replaced by those of a church organ echoing throughout a chamber. LEA'S footsteps continue, only across an old hardwood floor, eventually coming to a sudden stop.

LEA

Father Walker?

WALKER

Yes, and to who do I owe the pleasure?

LEA

Head Researcher Lea McNally of Project Gabriel, we need to talk.

WALKER

Well, I'm afraid I'm quite busy. Surely, whatever charity you represent can schedule an appointment for another time.

LEA

Mortem Corp.

WALKER

Ah. Let us take this to my office. A bit of privacy.

The organ music fades to a much closer patterning of rain against a window.

WALKER

Mortem Corp, huh.

LEA

Correct.

WALKER

Heh, They never are through with me, are they?

LEA

Thomas Walker, aged forty-four, marital status, divorced, left the company at thirty-seven. What they never say is why.

WALKER

I see you read my file.

LEA

It's quite impressive: the Sahara Incident, Exodus of the New Year, the Truth Protocol, the Nightmare Genesis...

WALKER

That was a fun one.

LEA

You're quite the legend at Mortem Corp.

WALKER

Yes, I suppose I would be.

LEA

Then you / understand why I-

WALKER

But I'm not going back.

LEA

I think you may change your mind when you hear just what we want you back for.

WALKER

Which is why you're not getting the chance to tell me. Goodbye.

The sound of a chair scraping against the floor, and WALKER grunting as he gets up.

LEA

Do you believe in God?

WALKER

You have my attention, where is this going?

LEA

Do you believe in God?

WALKER

Ha. I'm a priest, I would hope.

LEA

Yes or no?

WALKER

Yes.

LEA

And do you have proof of God?

WALKER

Well, that's a complicated question-

LEA

Do you have proof of God, Father?

WALKER

I have faith.

LEA

And does faith constitute proof?

WALKER

I will not have my faith questioned by a-

LEA

I am not questioning your faith, just asking if you have proof of your beliefs.

WALKER

There's the Bible-

LEA

Yes or no.

WALKER

It's much more complicated than-

LEA

Yes or / no.

WALKER

You cannot give such a complex question such a simple answer! You will find I have all the proof I need!

Silence, barring the sound of rain patterning the window.

LEA

Fifty days ago, Mortem Corp picked up a signal stemming from an unknown source beaming into the abyss. A series of dots and dashes-

WALKER

Morse code?

LEA

Yes, forty one days-

WALKER

Saying what?

LEA

I'm getting to that. Forty-One, we started researching this signal, and found that it was coming from a previously undocumented rift in this reality.

WALKER

That's impossible. As a member of the very committee that documented those rifts, our methods were flawless.

LEA

I read your file, and I do agree, which only added to the mystery.

WALKER

The only other explanation being... that its something new...

LEA

Exactly.

WALKER

But that's impossible.

LEA

Interested yet?

WALKER

Well... No, no. I can't.

LEA

And, four days ago, we opened the rift for the first time and sent a drone through-

WALKER

Resulting in...?

LEA
Nothing.

WALKER
Hm?

LEA
The camera's memory had been wiped when it was retrieved.

WALKER
Odd, really odd... But no. I can't help. Goodbye.

LEA
You wanted to know what the message said?

Ruffling through a bag, the sound of a recorder hitting the table.

LEA
Play it.

The sound of the play button being clicked. The ominous clicking of the dots and dashes of the phrase "Welcome to Heaven"

LEA
It is my understanding you already have experience with morse code?

WALKER
Welcome to Heaven.

LEA
I see you need no help deciphering.

WALKER
I wish I did.

LEA
It may not have been in your file, Father Walker, but the reason you became a priest is clear to see.

WALKER
Hm?

LEA
Spending half your life at Mortem Corp, the horrors you've seen, the actions you've taken, it weighs heavy on my own mind, I can only imagine how you felt when you left.

WALKER

The Truth Protocol, Electro-Memory Therapy, The Remembrance Removal Operation, The Nightmare Genesis... You've read the files, you know what I've seen, after everything, after all of that, where else would you turn, except for religion?

LEA

And wouldn't it be nice to know, that out there, there is something listening to your pleas for salvation?

WALKER

I... That's...

LEA

Yes or no?

WALKER

I think you should leave.

The pounding of the rain fades out the faint humming of electricity.

JAMES

Any luck?

LEA

I don't know.

JAMES

Well how are we supposed to continue without him?

LEA

I don't know.

JAMES

I mean, at this point, we don't need a another researcher on the team, we need a priest, and Mortem Corp isn't going to approve of just any old Priest...

LEA

I know, James, I know!

JAMES

Then what do we do?

LEA

I... Here's what we're going to do. We're going to take a break, and approach this closer to 7:06.

JAMES

Fine by me.

Footsteps, the sound of LEA and JAMES sitting down, before a moment of silence.

LEA

Any luck with the drone's camera?

JAMES

Completely shot. I'm not even convinced the wires could hold an electric charge anymore!

LEA

At least we learned something.

JAMES

And what's that?

LEA

That whatever's on the other side of the rift, whether it be someone, something, or the place itself, is either incapable of being observed using technology, or holds enough power to destroy technology within milliseconds of entering its realm.

JAMES

So what do we do with THAT information?

A moments pause.

LEA

We move on to the only possible alternative.

JAMES

You're not suggesting...

LEA

Without any other choice, I fear I am.

Time passes. The click of an audio log starting. The faint hum of electricity continues.

LEA

Audio log 96, day 43. The rift remains stable, continuing its pattern of dormancy for twenty three hours before a surge at exactly 7:06 P.M. Today will, hopefully, mark the second successful passage through the rift, this time, with a live test subject.

Muffled chirping can be heard.

LEA

A caged bird, the purpose of this trial is not to extract information from the bird, but rather to see if the rift is safe for organic travel, if it is, we will proceed to send something more intelligent through.

A door opens, the chirping no longer is muffled.

JAMES

Here ya go, Lea! Cheapest bird at the pet store.

LEA

Audio log out. Brilliant; just in time to. 7:04.

JAMES

Noisy little thing, isn't it?

LEA

With any luck, it'll be just as noisy when it comes back through the portal.

JAMES

And if not...

LEA

We... Mortem Corp has done worse.

JAMES

7:05.

Morse code: the word "Welcome".

LEA

It's starting, get into position!

JAMES

I'm going!

Frantic running, occasional chirping. Morse Code: "To"

LEA

Bird in place?

JAMES

Yes!

LEA

Switch ready?

JAMES

Yes!

LEA

Hold your breath. Now!

The sound of a switch being pulled. Electricity starts surging, much the same as before, only now accompanied with chirping and flapping that only grows more frantic as it goes on.

LEA

Bit more energy.

JAMES

Come oooon...

The ripping of reality, once again, as if paper.

LEA

Send the bird through!

As the bird cage goes through, we hear it almost sizzle as it passes through, along with scared chirping, before the chirping and sizzling go silent for a brief second.

LEA

And now bring in back!

The sizzling returns, but without the chirping. Soon after, everything returns to the low electronic hum as before.

LEA

The bird returned!

JAMES

Is it alive?

Concerned slow footsteps towards the birdcage.

JAMES

Here, birdy.

The metal cage door opens. The click of an audio log.

LEA

Audio Log 97, day 43. The bird has returned, no apparent wounds are visible. However, the bird is not

moving, still standing, and...

Snapping.

LEA
Unresponsive to stimuli.

JAMES
The birds dead!

LEA
It's not dead.

JAMES
It is!

LEA
We don't know that!

Suddenly, a chirp.

LEA
See? Not dead.

JAMES
Thank god.

More chirps. Sudden fluttering through the air.

JAMES
Okay, birdy, come down.

LEA
Uh, continuation of previous audio log. The birds flying... Almost exclusively around the area of where the portal was... As if it was trying to get back through...

JAMES
Come here birdy...

Angry chirp.

LEA
Attempts to approach it are meant with aggression...

JAMES
Biiiiirdyyyy.

Another angry chirp.

JAMES

Ow!

Click of the audio log turning off.

LEA

Leave the bird alone for now.

JAMES

I just don't get it.

LEA

Likewise.

JAMES

But, the bird, what's it so anxious to return to?

LEA

Welcome to Heaven.

CHURCH ORGAN MUSIC. LEA'S footsteps are heard, approaching.

WALKER

You're back.

LEA

The experiment proceeds...

WALKER

I'm not listening to this.

LEA

The mystery deepens...

WALKER

I said no!

LEA

We sent a bird through.

Beat.

WALKER

And?

LEA

It returned, without harm.

WALKER

I find that hard to believe.

LEA
Physical harm.

WALKER
There we go. And you want me to go through next.

LEA
We simply want help with the project.

WALKER
Why me?

LEA
What?

WALKER
Why me? You're the smart type, yet, here you come, back, in hopes that I might say yes.

LEA
We believe a Theologian would be beneficial to the project, as due to its religious nature, and Mortem Corp would not approve anyone not associated-

WALKER
No.

LEA
Excuse me?

WALKER
A lack of religious understanding never stopped Mortem Corp before, the Godsend Journey, the Ark Expedition, so many more, what makes Project: Gabriel so different?

LEA
Project: Gabriel? I never told you the name-

WALKER
I have my ways. The point is, I don't think that Mortem Corp is worried about religion at all, they would never treat something like that with the delicacy it deserves, rather I think it stems from a much more personal place, the very mind of the project's head scientist.

LEA
What are you implying?

WALKER

You're smart, I knew that much last time we spoke; you managed to turn the conversation on me. Not an easy feat. Curious as well. But, I think, you're scared / too.

LEA

I'm not-

Organ Music slowly fades out as WALKER is talking.

WALKER

My turn. After all, what if Heaven is behind that door? What then? What happens next? If everyone knows that, everyone will be lining up to take the quick trip there and never return. A literal doorway to Heaven, how terrifying is that? But, perhaps even more terrifying, what if its not? What if its something masquerading as Heaven, luring people through the doorway for some unknown intent? Perhaps its not morse code at all, but a cosmic coincidence in a language not at all similar to our own? You want me on board the project not to further understanding, but to conquer that fear of the unknown. I can see it in your eyes, that fear, that fear that you're right, but even greater, the fear you may be wrong. So, if you truly desire my help on this project, I gladly will, all I ask is that you admit it.

LEA

I think...

WALKER

Two words: I'm afraid.

LEA

This is not-

WALKER

Last chance. Say them, or we shall part ways.

LEA

I'm afraid.

Silence; before the faint hum of electricity starts once more, soon accompanied by the chirping of the bird and rattling of its cage.

JAMES

Birdy, listen, I love you, I'm not letting you out.

The lab door opens, two sets of footsteps enter.

JAMES

Well, Lea, no noticeable change in the birds condition, still seems to be in almost a state of mania...

WALKER

Let me see.

JAMES

Oh my god.

WALKER

No, we won't see him until 7:06 P.M., isn't that right, Dr. Lea?

LEA

That is correct.

WALKER

Now, may I see the bird?

JAMES

Be my guest.

JAMES is heard getting up from a chair, his footsteps as he walks over to Lea are heard, as well as WALKER'S as he move to examine the bird. JAMES and LEA are whispering.

JAMES

Who's the new guy.

LEA

Thomas Walker.

JAMES

Thomas Walker!

WALKER

Yes?

JAMES

Nothing! How'd you manage to convince him?

LEA

I'm not entirely sure myself.

WALKER

Science furthers itself only when curiosity

overpowers fear. If you want, say I was curious, and, if that is not to your liking, let us instead say that we all have demons in our past, and confirmation that someone hears us when we pray to keep them at bay is an enticing offer.

JAMES

Amen.

WALKER

Don't, don't do that.

Sound of the bird's metal cage rattles.

WALKER

Mania, you said?

JAMES

Yes, ever since...

WALKER

It's not.

JAMES

You can't just look at a bird for five seconds that I've been studying for days and say I'm wrong.

WALKER

I'm afraid that's exactly what I did. You were quite close though.

More frantic chirping.

If I had to put a name to what our little bird friend here is experiencing, I'd say its some form of psychosis.

LEA

We brought back the body, but the mind didn't make the return trip.

WALKER

Possibly. Only one way to find out, though.

JAMES

A bird MRI?

WALKER

Only if you two want answers next year.

JAMES

Then what?

WALKER

We're sending me through.

Chirping, more rattling.

JAMES

What? No!

WALKER

And someone get this bird out of here!

Time Passes; Morse Code: "Heaven."

LEA

Are you sure about this?

WALKER

You want answers, correct?

LEA

Yes, but, we don't know...

WALKER

And we never will if we don't do this, hm?

LEA

Yet even then...

WALKER

At best, you have found nothing at all, and at worst, the unthinkable. Second thoughts should have been left behind long ago.

LEA

Yes...

WALKER

Of course, you are the head of the project, I am but the expert who came to help, if you don't want me to go through with this, say the word.

LEA remains silent.

WALKER

Exactly.

He laughs slightly, the word "Welcome" in Morse Code.

LEA
It's starting! James!

JAMES
Coming!

LEA
Switch the switch!

JAMES
Working on it!

WALKER
Here we go.

Morse Code: "To". The sound of a switch being pulled. Electricity surges. All while:

WALKER
Our Father, Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name;
Thy kingdom come...

Reality rips, as if paper, WALKER continues reciting the prayer.

WALKER
Thy will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven.

LEA
Go on through.

Footsteps, barely heard with everything else going on, eventually ending with an almost static noise as WALKER goes through.

LEA
Now we wait.

They wait.

JAMES
We can't keep this open forever.

LEA
Keep it open!

JAMES
But the energy!

LEA
Come ooon!

JAMES

It's not sustainable!

Suddenly, it snaps shut, the sounds all return to the faint electrical hum. JAMES and LEA are stunned silent for a minute.

JAMES

Even if we could've kept it open, I don't know that he was coming back.

Time passes. The click of a voice recorder.

LEA

Post-Project Mission Log, Addendum One. As mentioned in my previous mission log, Project: Gabriel was labeled too dangerous to continue, and, as such, has been abandoned. But, I lay awake at night, wondering just what was through the rift. Before it is cleared out, I'm visiting the laboratory one last time. It's quiet, I'm not used to it being so quiet in the lab, there's almost always some piece of technology doing something, but now, nothing. It's 7:05, almost 7:06. The longer I wait, the more likely no one will notice and shut the rift down. I need to know what's on the other side.

*A switch is pulled. Electricity is restored.
Morse Code: "Welcome to Heaven".*

LEA

Curiosity before fear, curiosity before fear,
curiosity before fear...

The rift opens. The entire affair is much more somber and less bombastic than previous times the rift was opened. Lea continues repeating "Curiosity before Fear", as her footsteps are heard entering the portal, all of which, slowly fades to static as she enters.