

TUTORIAL LEVEL

EXT. UNDERGROUND MODULE 78C

VISSEL

Assignment recap. Axton, that's on you.

[Scene fades in to the team standing beneath an arched ceiling marking a shopping arcade. The overhead lighting flickers as if on the brink of dying. There's little public activity, making the dirty streets feel desolate and eerie. VISSEL addresses the group with a serious expression. Save from JAVEN, who allows himself a moment of distraction by a passing tabby cat, the others regard their teacher with undivided attention.]

AXTON

(speaking loudly on behalf of the team) Air quality control bots have deviated from their programming. First instance three days ago. Total of twelve fatalities so far, all restricted to Module 78C. For now. It's our job to disable them.

VISSEL

(nods, re-directs gaze to CORDELIA) Bot specs?

CORDELIA

(has a tablet before her but doesn't read from it; she's memorized the data) Bots on record were recommissioned security droids, model ID No. 257XY12, manufactured by Cortell Inc. 15 years ago. Initial reports suggest old protocols somehow being reinstated, or at least reuse of parts that hadn't been removed during repurposing. This module is reported to be under the jurisdiction of 6 of these bots. One's marked as taken for maintenance, so that leaves us with 5 to account for.

KEN

Let's hope they remained faithful to their jurisdiction.

JAVEN

(laughs) Yeah, unlike to their jobs.

VISSEL

Everyone ready? I won't tolerate less than stellar results.

AXTON

We won't disappoint you. (turns towards others) We're getting our silver stripes today, aren't we?

KEN

Without question.

JAVEN

(grinning) If any of you screw this up...

CORDELIA

Just waiting for the green light.

VISSEL

(smiles and gestures to AXTON) Then get this show on the road, Axton. Remember, I'm only here to observe.

JAVEN

Got any bets on one of us not making it back?

VISSEL

I'd be reckless if it wasn't on you.

JAVEN

(feigning hurt) Ouch. (looks towards CORDELIA and shakes his head like, "what gives?")

CORDELIA

(smiles back at JAVEN) Statistical analysis does support his decision.

JAVEN

You know that's not true.

AXTON

(punches JAVEN in the shoulder as he walks past him and takes the first true step into the shopping arcade) We can review Cordelia's data later. Let's go.

[Team moves out with AXTON (the player) taking the lead. After exploring the shopping arcade and trying to speak to the few people around, AXTON finds a lead off to the west. Anyone in the area has already fled or are locked in their apartments. It's quiet but for a steady hum of motor parts. They follow the sound until CORDELIA's tracking equipment is able to pick up a local signature. AXTON determines strategy/attack formation. When the bot is rendered incapacitated, the team investigates its components.]

CORDELIA

Well then. (pulls back from the bot's computer as if to get a better look at it; her tablet is connected to read data)

AXTON

What is it?

CORDELIA

I can only read intraday reports. Machines like these aren't usually programmed to wipe come midnight.

KEN

Reprogrammed, then.

CORDELIA

(frowns) Hard to say. I don't have much to assess here. No evidence of reprogramming logs either. Could just be an error.

JAVEN

Like whatever sent the other one to maintenance.

CORDELIA

(raises an eyebrow at him) Oh, so you were listening.

JAVEN

I can't ignore the sweetly perfumed voice of an angel.

CORDELIA

(groans)

AXTON

(sighs)

VISSEL

(rolls eyes)

KEN

(quietly) In scripture they are harbingers of death. So no, best not to ignore them.

JAVEN

(pats KEN on the shoulder, grinning) Don't worry about me. I revel in heartbreak.

AXTON

Focus, guys. We have to find those other bots. One might still have its logs.

CORDELIA

(rubs the side of her neck and hisses between her teeth) Best we can hope for.

AXTON

Then let's move out. Cordelia, can you locate the other bots using the data from that heap of scrap?

CORDELIA

(smiles) Already have a signal. We go northwest.

[Introduction to using CORDELIA's tracking system. Team locates a second bot, disable it, but find its logs to be in similar shape as the first.]

JAVEN

(in a drumroll/singsong voice) Next destination is... (looks to CORDELIA expectantly)

CORDELIA

(frowns, looking at her tablet)

AXTON

Nothing?

CORDELIA

Out of range, perhaps? (touches multiple places on the tablet; windows open and data streams) Let me just adjust—ah! There we go. Straight up through... (taps/swipes tablet to zoom in) Ah yes, lovely. Quarter Twenty-Nine.

JAVEN

(disbelief/anger) Through the Shambles?

KEN

(frowns) I don't like that place.

AXTON

Few do. But we don't have much of a choice.

JAVEN

We're really going to risk our hide for those people? (clenches fist at his side, expression serious) I say let the bots cull.

AXTON

(shakes head) Our duty is to protect all civilians. Many in the Shambles are innocents caught in the tides.

JAVEN

What, one percent?

AXTON

It's not open to discussion. Besides, it's not our call.

CORDELIA

(sighs) Axton's right. We have our mission and we must fulfill it.

VISSEL

Javen's concerns do have legitimacy. Don't forget Clause 4.

AXTON

We're not waiting a year to retake the assessment.

VISSEL

You pass nothing if you're dead.

AXTON

I won't let that happen. We'll keep a low profile. Stick to the better streets where we can.

VISSEL

(crosses arms and nods, pleased)

AXTON

(turns to CORDELIA) Lead the way.

CORDELIA

(focused on her tech) Wait. There's something... There's 3 of them.

AXTON

(walks closer to her)

CORDELIA

(shows AXTON her screen) Unless something's screwing with me, the final 3 bots are together. Clustered. Thought it was a single signal at first.

KEN

Too convenient?

CORDELIA

Impossible to say at this point. They may have just been assigned the same area and crossed paths.

AXTON

In that case it's only a matter of time before they separate.

JAVEN

(still looking disgruntled) Good. Even more of a reason to make this quick.

KEN

Abandon caution and this goes sideways.

JAVEN

I said “quick,” not “reckless.”

KEN

(slight smile plays in his eyes) I’m unsure the words are always distinguishable to you.

CORDELIA

(stifles a laugh)

[JAVEN starts toward KEN and opens his mouth to retort, but AXTON steps in front of him.]

AXTON

Enough. We have a signal. Let’s move on it.

[JAVEN glares at KEN over AXTON’s shoulder, then shrugs and turns away.]

[Team tracks the 3 bots into and through Quarter Twenty-Nine. A few encounters with the residents of the area do occur if the team does not exercise caution and take the long way around at times. Eventually, the bots are found, and are indeed stuck together, making the battle more difficult than the previous. After the battle, CORDELIA reviews the battered machines and extracts whatever data she can from them.]

CORDELIA

(mulling over the data) Interesting.

AXTON

What’d you find?

CORDELIA

(looks up and smiles) Incomplete code, messy files, and tracks everywhere. These bots were indeed reprogrammed. On this one, it looks like the wipe protocol was only partially installed.

AXTON

Meaning something severed the connection between this bot and whoever was reprogramming it.

CORDELIA

Yes.

JAVEN

Maybe a patrol scared them off? Or a passerby spotted them?

KEN

This is pretty elaborate to abandon mid-way.

AXTON

They could have been injured, or thought they could finish the job later. Which means we could be under—

CORDELIA

(tone lowers) Surveillance. (eyes shift slightly) Green building across the street, fifth floor, second window from the left.

KEN

(twisting his torso and arms in a stretch, looking out the corners of his eyes) And third floor fire escape to our right. They dropped their guard.

AXTON

(curses) They may be armed.

CORDELIA

(attention returned to her tablet) Or they may not be. These logs show that the bots were responding to a beacon.

AXTON

So they were called here so whoever's watching us could finish their job.

VISSEL

(addresses CORDELIA) Any indication in that data who's behind this?

CORDELIA

No, sir. None so obvious. I lack the resources at the moment. That would require time and running through some software back at headquarters.

VISSEL

Then it's even more imperative that this data gets back to Central.

AXTON

Yet this may be our best chance to get to the bottom of this. The code has limitations in what it can tell us.

JAVEN

Yeah, and I don't quite feel like wearing a target on my back from this day forward if this turns into something big.

CORDELIA

Neither do I. Axton, orders?

AXTON

Keeping this data secure remains our top priority. But we can't sit around waiting to be shot in the back. We split up. If they run, pursue if possible. Meet back here.

VISSEL

I'll lead the group of two. We'll take the fire escape.

AXTON

Read my mind, sir.

[Player chooses party members. View from the 2 enemy vantage points of the team seemingly agreeing to meet up later. They act casual. AXTON's team moves around to the back of the green building, where they enter from a back door. An encounter versus a single figure ensues, the chase extends throughout the building and into another, then down a street, but they escape. Team returns to meeting place to find VISSEL and other team member waiting. The other team member is lightly injured, but the biggest damage seems to be discouragement.]

AXTON

I take it they escaped from you, too?

VISSEL

Slippery scum. Got close and personal before he dropped a gas can. Noticed a peculiar tattoo along the collar bone: a chain-link of dragonflies.

AXTON

That's more than we got.

KEN

Never heard of chain-linked dragonflies. (thoughtful) But might be useful for identification.

AXTON

Well, nothing we can do now. Best we get out of here.

CORDELIA

Before they bring their drinking buddies.

JAVEN

Speaking of drinks... (turns to VISSEL; smiles, expecting a response)

VISSEL

I think you've earned more than just drinks.

JAVEN

Yes! Those stripes are going to look mighty stellar on this jacket.

CORDELIA

(beaming) We'll be so fashionable that Central Ridge won't know where to put us.

AXTON

(laughs) Aside from the center of attention for a week?

KEN

The other benefits are longer-lasting.

VISSEL

(smugly) You'll see no benefits unless you make it back to Central.

AXTON & CORDELIA

Yes, sir!

JAVEN

Right. Let's get the hell out of here.

[Camera zooms out as team heads back the way they came. Screen fades to black.]