

"UMA"
Pilot Episode
"PONANZA"
written by
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(**excerpt**)

INT. HOSPITAL - GRETA'S ROOM - DAY

Mike peers into a tall AIR FLOTATION CHAMBER. Greta sleeps inside, held afloat at the midway point by jets of air. Her hair blows over her head and around her face. Sunshine lights it all from a closed window at the chamber top.

MIKE IMAGINES Greta decaying. Her flesh drying and cracking. It flakes from her muscles. Muscles off her bones. Viscera rises. Blots the window.

DR. KYLE (O.S.)
The floating puts a strain on the
virus. Slows it down.

Her skeleton floats in near darkness.

DR. KYLE (O.S.)
Once their pupils get that diamond
shape, it's only a matter of time.

MIKE SNAPS OUT OF IT and turns to DOCTOR KYLE (70s/M).

MIKE
Why isn't she cured already?

DR. KYLE
I apologize. I thought you knew.
Because of where you work. Ponanza
is one of the 30 percent of our
problems the Unreal hasn't solved.

Mike touches his lobe to activate his unseen earphone.
Listens to the other end ring.

MORGANA'S VOICEMAIL
You've reached the voicemail of
Morgana Strand. Please leave a
message.

MIKE
Visionary Strand, it's Mike Simms.
Please, call me when you hear this.

He disconnects.

DR. KYLE

Morgana Strand won't help you. She can't. Not with a Ponanza cure.

MIKE

She can override the system. Get it to Unreals to solve.

DR. KYLE

Hate to tell you, it's not just The Algorithm deciding. It's five assholes who dictate to Morgana problems the Unreal must never solve.

MIKE

That's absurd. Nobody dictates anything to Morgana Strand.

DR. KYLE

They own all you can buy and they've owned Visionary Strand since before V-1.

MIKE

I want a new doctor.

DR. KYLE

Up to you. Few to choose from these days. Little need. Visionary Simms, I'm the best you'll find at keeping Ponanza at a crawl.

MIKE

I want proof of what you're saying.

DR. KYLE

I'll bring it to you. In the morning. For now, best for your mental health you stick to your routine.

MIKE

Who are these supposed five assholes?

DR. KYLE

They call themselves The Club.

EXT. VIRTUAL PLANET-11 (V-11) - RAZOR-GRASSLAND - NIGHT

SUPER (SUPERIMPOSE): "VIRTUAL PLANET-11"

EMBER STRAND (F/32) -- or at least her physically identical avatar -- stands in tall RAZOR GRASS. Its sharp blades clatter against one another in the wind and bounce off her protective suit.

Light from a lamp woven into her suit falls on a Pottery Shard. Depicted on it are six ENTITIES OF LIGHT. Humanoid, faceless and painted to appear ablaze.

Ember activates her earphone.

EMBER
Headquarters, this is Agent Strand,
get me Visionary Simms.

OPERATOR (V.O.)
Connecting you between V-11 and Los
Angeles-Reality.

She hears a muffled "Meow...Meow..." through the earphone.

EMBER
Tell me you've been stopping by.
Bateman sounds like she's starving.

MIKE (V.O.)
Three times a day. All Week. When
you get back, count the cans.

EMBER
Mike, you okay? You sound funny.

BEGIN INTERCUT.

INT. EMBER'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

Bateman yowls until Mike puts cat food in her bowl.

MIKE
Greta's sick. Just came from the
hospital.

EMBER
Well, at least you guys are out of
there. What did she catch?

MIKE
I left by myself.

EMBER
Mike?

MIKE
Rather not talk about it right now.

EMBER
Mike, if it's something without a
cure, you need to call my mother.

MIKE
Ember, did you call for something
else or just to accuse me of being
a neglectful cat-sitter.

EMBER
I'm unplugging early. My mom is
about to announce her retirement.
She won't say why.

MIKE
She ever say anything to you about
a group called The Club?

EMBER
The Club? I don't think so. Why?

MIKE
I have to go. I have my intern
class in an hour.

EMBER
Let me take it for you. You've
enough going on.

MIKE
I want to stick to my routine.

EMBER
Give her a hug for me.

MIKE
That'll be difficult.

EMBER
Get some sleep.

MIKE
When she's cured.

He swipes his lobe. END INTERCUT. STAY WITH EMBER.

Ember swipes her own.

EMBER

Control?

CONTROL (V.O.)

Go ahead, Director Strand.

EMBER

Reverse the anesthesia.

Ember dematerializes.

EXT. VIRTUAL PLANET AGENCY (VPA.) - DAY

SUPER: "Virtual Planet Agency" "Planet Division"

A tall building encased in black glass.

INT. VPA. - PLUG-ROOM-11 - DAY

A dozen beds on wheels. Eight empty. Ember and THREE VPA. AGENTS sleep in the others.

They wear bodysuits woven with tech to monitor their vitals.

Each wakes and pops a CONTACT LENS from one of their eyes.

INT. HOSPITAL - GRETA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Dr. Kyle checks a readout on Greta's chamber.

A LASER cuts across his wrist.

His SEVERED HAND smacks the linoleum floor.

INT. MORGANA STRAND'S PENTHOUSE - DAY

Regal and creepy.

Ember in a chair. MORGANA STRAND (F/60) on the couch.

MORGANA

I knew. The planets would work. The world would get better. Not all at once. For some people, get much worse. At the start. But then ... But then ... For many people. Not everyone. Not everything. But better. In every way.

A seventy percent solution rate. We can live with thirty percent unsolved.

EMBER

What about Greta Simms, right now?

MORGANA

I knew. People would come to kill us. Nine of the months I envisioned V-1, I was pregnant. They came and The Club protected us.

EMBER

God, Mom.

MORGANA

The Club is only our friend if we follow the list.

EMBER

Is that what I should tell Mike?

MORGANA

Someone else will talk to Mike.

Morgana exits.

EXT. MORGANA STRAND'S PENTHOUSE - NIGHT

Ember walks down stone stairs to a circular driveway where a small passenger Drone waits.

A larger Drone descends and blocks her path.

The door slithers open. Lost in a rippled seat, hard to see until he leans forward, FRANK TAI (117/M).

FRANK TAI

Agent Strand. Welcome to The Club.

INT. HOSPITAL - GRETA'S ROOM - DAY

Mike stands outside the Air Flotation Chamber, watching Doctor Kyle's head and dismembered limbs float in the tank with his daughter.

FRANK TAI (V.O.)

Dr. Kyle won't be sharing his journal with anyone else.

EXT. RURAL MEXICO - FRANK TAI'S MANSION - DAY

Tai's drone descends to a mansion set into Bordeaux-colored rocks.

FRANK TAI (V.O.)

I'm sure Visionary Simms understands by now how serious we are about our Do-Not-Solve-List.

INT. RURAL MEXICO - FRANK TAI'S MANSION - ROOFTOP - DAY

Frank Tai with EMBER at a dining table.

EMBER

I'll see you're all imprisoned.

FRANK TAI

Love your fire. Your mother did a great job. Rest of us got the jaded brats we raised. Won't be leaving them our empires. Money being almost unnecessary these days.

EMBER

So, save Greta Simms.

FRANK TAI

When we're dead, you can solve every problem. Until then, better you feed our addiction to the hustle.

EMBER

You think I'll help you?

FRANK TAI

I promise you a one hundred percent solution rate one day. When The VPA is yours. You're too responsible to trade it for a girl.

EMBER

To hell with you.

FRANK TAI

Mike Simms is alive because killing him comes with opportunity costs for The Club.

EMBER

What opportunity?

FRANK TAI

No reason to concern yourself with the details. But understand, if you don't stop Simms, his life is an expense we eat.

EMBER

Stop him? Stop him from what?

FRANK TAI

We're concerned Simms will try to find his own path to a virtual Ponanza cure. If he's successful, it'll fall on you to make sure it never sees the light of reality.

EMBER

If you're this serious about your list, then why is Greta Simms still breathing?

FRANK TAI

It's one thing to prevent her salvation, but murder her? Director Strand, uncouth.

EMBER

I can't stop Mike for you. Even if I wanted. I've met no one who can out-manuever him.

FRANK TAI

If the Unreal find their virtual cure, let Visionary Simms download it. Before he sends it for Realization, merge it with the code on this module.

He tosses her a memory module with a cholera-yellow casing.

EMBER

What does it do?

FRANK TAI

Turns virtual solutions into something worse than the problem.

EMBER

You want it to fail the safety scan.

FRANK TAI

Your factory never makes real what does.

INT. HOSPITAL - GRETA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Mike and a NURSE stand outside the Air Flotation Chamber, watching Doctor Kyle's head and dismembered limbs float inside the tank with the still sleeping Greta.

DETECTIVE MARTIN (34/M) watches from inside the door.

MIKE

Why is she still in there with him?

NURSE

We wanted you to be here in case she wakes up.

Air jets lessen. Greta and the dismembered Dr. Kyle lower.

Greta's eyes open on two diamond-shaped pupils. She throws her arms toward her father, surprised when her palms strike glass with a resounding boom. She screams.

INT. HOSPITAL - GRETA'S NEW ROOM - NIGHT

Mike -- he wears a protective face mask and gloves -- inside a New Air Flotation Chamber with the sleeping Greta. Air jets roar against them.

He inserts a long cotton swab between her lips and rolls it across the inside of her cheek.

Puts the swab in a vial.

IN MIKE'S MIND:

GRETA

Stay. Don't go. Don't leave me.

He blinks. Greta, as she was.

INT. VPA. - LAB-47 - NIGHT

Mike alone outside a closed door that reads VIRTUALIZATION CHAMBER. Through its window, he sees the swab he put in Greta's mouth.

MIKE

Begin Virtualization.

A hum. Lights in the chamber strobe and return to normal.

LAB-47 AI VOICE
Successful copy created. Virtual
Weaponized Ponanza Virus queued to
infect.

MIKE
It shouldn't be reading as
weaponized. Check against original.

LAB-47 AI VOICE
Perfect match. Unreal demographic
to infect?

MIKE
Um...ages 1-18. All of them.

LAB-47 AI VOICE
Anything above eleven percent will
inhibit emergency retraction.

MIKE
No retractions. I need them
motivated to work fast.

A beep.

LAB-47 AI VOICE
Infection successful.

MIKE
Destroy original.

Lasers burn the swab from existence.

Mike inserts a contact lens into one eye.

INT. VIRTUAL PLANET 47 (V-47) - PANDEMIC CENTER - NIGHT

A narrow hallway.

Mike materializes in front of a Frosted Glass Door that reads
DISEASE CONTROL.

He listens.

Through it, he hears liquid pouring and bubbling.

RESEARCHER (O.S.)
To a Ponanza cure.

A clink of champagne flutes.

INT. VPA. - LOBBY - NIGHT

Uma enters the building.

Security and elevators to her right. To her left, a museum.

INT. VPA. - VISITOR MUSEUM

The day's last visitors mingle among forty-seven exhibits.
Each dedicated to one of the V-Planets.

All with a floating hologram replica of the planet in rings.

INT. VISITOR MUSEUM - V-1 EXHIBIT

Uma studies an INFORMATION DISPLAY that reads VISIONARY
MORGANA STRAND, VIRTUAL PLANET-

A picture of Morgana at 40. Looks like Ember. Only pregnant.

Uma lays a hand on the screen. It shorts out. Turns black.

Uma walks away. Smoke twists up behind her as the display
melts and smolders in its bezel.

INT. VPA. - LOBBY

Uma enters from the museum.

Ember from the street.

She walks past Uma to an elevator. Its doors close.

Uma follows.

INT. VPA. - LAB-47

Mike at the Command Hub.

LAB-47 AI VOICE
Weaponized Ponanza Cure downloaded.

MIKE (O.S.)
Prep for safety-scan and notify
factory-bots to expect it for
realization. Get a drone ready to
fly it to Greta.

He hears the main doors slide open. Turns. No one there.

He can't see Ember hiding behind a server.

She listens.

LAB-47 AI VOICE

Two minutes to safety-scan.
Solution requires ID tag.

MIKE (O.S.)

Name the cure "Finish Puzzle."

INT. VPA. - HALLWAY

Uma spies Ember exit the lab. Hangs back.

Further down the hall, Ember enters another door.

INT. VPA. - REALIZATION FACTORY

Uma walks in behind her.

Ember passes FACTORY-BOTS powered-down at an unmoving conveyor belt.

In her hand -- the MEMORY MODULE Frank Tai gave her.

She stops at a panel embedded in a wall.

Eyes a module-port.

EMBER

Open solution ID "Finish Puzzle."

FACTORY AI (V.O.)

Open.

EMBER

Prepare for edit.

She lifts the module to insert it in the panel.

Hesitates.

Uma appears behind her.

She grabs a handful of Ember's hair and yanks her backward.

Ember cries out.

The Memory Module skids across the floor.

UMA

She was pregnant with you. When she came to my school.

Ember breaks free, pivots, and swings.

Uma ducks, weaves, and strikes her in the throat with an open palm.

Ember stumbles backward, hacking blood.

UMA

Looking for volunteers.

Uma lands a roundhouse kick that puts Ember on her ass.

UMA

She said she wanted you to grow up in a better world.

Ember springs to her feet and drives an elbow into Uma's nose.

Uma drops to the ground and kicks Ember's legs out. Before her head hits tile, Uma grabs her by the hair again.

Uses it to drag Ember through a CHAMBER's open door.

Uma steps out and calls back.

UMA

She said the process was safe. Maybe there's been improvements.

Uma slams the door.

It reads VIRTUALIZATION CHAMBER.

UMA

Virtualize.

FACTORY AI

Warning. Self-Aware organism detected. Proceeding carries high risk of consciousness disembodiment.

UMA

Proceed.

A hum. Lights dim. Ember's screams through the door.

INT. VIRTUALIZATION CHAMBER

EMBER'S DISEMBODIED CONSCIOUSNESS P.O.V.

A corner of the chamber's ceiling races closer.

P.O.V. REVERSES to look at the flesh left behind.

EMBER'S BODY looks up to the corner with "blank" eyes from a kneeling position on the silver floor.

Alive.

Uma audible through the door...

UMA (O.S.)
Save disembodied consciousness to
Virtual Cosmos.

CUT TO:

EXT. VIRTUAL COSMOS

The 47 V-Planets. Each in their glowing rings.

The voice of EMBER DISEMBODIED small in the vastness.

EMBER DISEMBODIED (V.O.)
Hello?

CUT TO:

INT. VPA. - LAB-47

Meanwhile in reality, Mike paces.

LAB-47 AI VOICE
Safety-Scan complete.

MIKE
Make it real.

INT. VPA. - REALIZATION FACTORY

No sign of Uma. The conveyor and robots buzz to life.

Vials of the now real Ponanza cure come down the belt.

The Factory-bots slap labels on which read FINISH PUZZLE.

EXT. VPA. - ROOFTOP HELIPAD - NIGHT

A ROBOT clutches a vial of the cure in hinged-fingers. Rolls toward a waiting UNMANNED DRONE.

INT. VPA. - LAB-47

On a FLOATING IMAGE, the robot places the vial in the drone. Behind Mike, Morgana Strand and FOUR VPA. AGENTS enter.

MORGANA

It's over.

Mike's eyes on Morgana. Hers on the image showing the roof.

From an unseen source above the roof comes a LASER.

It hits the drone.

With enough force, it splits in two.

Morgana's shocked expression makes Mike look back to the image.

To see both halves explode.

END OF EXCERPT

Thank you. For a complete script, discussion, or pitch, please contact me.

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