

LAYERS

("LAYER 2")

Written by

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TEASER

MUSIC CUE: "The Four Seasons: Concerto No. 4 in F Minor" by Antonio Vivaldi.

A spotlight clicks on... A beautiful ballerina pirouettes in the thin beam surrounded by utter blackness.

CULLEN is watching...

She spins, and spins, and spins.

The darkness drops, revealing a circle of spectators. They stare, eyes dead in their sockets, at the twirling ballerina.

Cullen is aware of the audience, but his eyes never leave the woman under the spotlight.

She stops. Her eyes meet Cullen's, her brown, desperate eyes.

Slowly, the ballerina reaches out...

Cullen's hand rises to meet hers.

Then, her fingers fall off. Followed by her hand, her arm, her knees, her head.

The dancer collapses into twenty-three pieces.

Cullen stands, watching her dismembered body slide across the floor.

Slowly, a RUMBLE rises up from the ground...

The audience floods over the stands, grappling to break free from the monsoon of bodies.

Cullen takes off in a run, but he's too late.

Frantic hands claw for pieces of the woman. Fingers, legs, shoulders. Whatever they can get.

Cullen pushes forward through the slew of bodies. He spots the head, untouched. Cullen reaches out, but he's too short. A man dives, tucking the ballerina's head in his arms.

Cullen tackles him, and the head rolls free, disappearing in the turbulent mass of forms. The man swipes at his throat, but Cullen has the upper hand. He cracks his elbow against the man's face.

Staggering to his feet, Cullen vanishes, engulfed.

CUT TO:

A pillar of mangled bodies reaches for the spotlight,
towering higher and higher, assembling body by body.

Cullen forces his way up through the pile. Streaks of light
scatter across his face, glimpses from beyond.

He reaches...

... and emerges at the top of the heap.

Cullen rises, kicking off his competition. Woven in his
fingers, the head of the ballerina in the light.

CUT TO BLACK:

TITLE: LAYERS

ACT ONE

INT. CULLEN'S FLAT - LEVEL THREE

Cullen stares blankly at the ruttled concrete ceiling eight feet above his head. He's the embodiment of "average". Brown hair, pale white skin, acceptable height. Common.

Cullen's flat is a square, windowless box. Twin lofts and a shallow washbasin are the only features.

CUT TO:

BLINK. BLINK. BUZZZZZ.

Cullen flips the lights on. His FLATMATE groans.

FLATMATE

Can't you give me five more minutes?

(pulling a pillow over his head)

This is ungodly of you.

Cullen wrestles into his nylon pants.

CULLEN

I told you, I have places to be today.

FLATMATE

Well, at least turn the light off when you leave.

CULLEN

Don't you have work?

His flatmate flips him off and returns to bed.

Cullen chuckles. He snatches his backpack from the bed and heads for the door.

EXT. FLAT BLOCK - LEVEL THREE - MOMENTS LATER

Outside, the streets of York are quiet.

Cullen locks the door and pats his pockets. Reassured that he isn't leaving anything, Cullen adjusts his backpack and starts off.

Overhead, fluorescent lights flicker on one by one.
Artificial dawn is breaking...

EXT. YORK - LEVEL THREE

Cullen makes his way through a deluge of jostling bodies.
Main Street is crowded with ramshackle civilians starting
their day.

Moving along the street, Cullen exits into a large concourse.
Several thoroughfares converge into a bustling street market.

Vendors bark across the crowds. Chefs toss steaming food. The
swirling colors of produce contrast nicely with the concrete
surround.

Cullen moves swiftly through the market, swimming through the
rows of people. He pauses only for a moment to pay for two
prepackaged meals.

EXT. BLOCK 23C - LEVEL THREE

Cullen escapes the crowd and glides along a desolate street.
The dormitory district is cramped and overcrowded.

Cullen trails the street for only a moment before finding the
correct door. He steps inside.

INT. DORMITORY - LEVEL THREE - MOMENTS LATER

Inside, dormant figures lie heaped along the floor. Several
are just beginning to stir in the morning "light".

Cautiously, Cullen tiptoes around the sleeping forms. It only
takes him a moment to locate the one he wants...

A young woman is curled on a mattress in the corner. Her face
is glossy and soft. Her hair lies tangled around her slender
neck. This is JUNIA.

Gently, Cullen places his hand over her mouth. Junia's eyes
dart open. She lets out a muffled scream.

Cullen places a finger to his lips...

JUNIA (PRE-LAP)
What are you doing here so early?

CULLEN (PRE-LAP)
I wanted to see you before I left.

INT. BATHROOM - DORMITORY - LEVEL THREE

Cullen and Junia are silhouetted behind a sheer folding door. Junia is sprawled beneath a corroded sink while Cullen lounges with his arm across the toilet.

They chew unappetizing white mush from their shiny meal packets.

JUNIA
You're leaving? Where?

CULLEN
I'm going to Two.

Junia swallows carefully, hand on her spoon.

JUNIA
For how long?

CULLEN
Just a day or so. I'll be back tomorrow night.

Junia appears somewhat relieved. She returns to her breakfast.

JUNIA
Just don't be stupid, okay? Things have gotten crazy down there.

CULLEN
I'm staying with my mother. Poet's meeting me at the lift.

JUNIA
How long's it been?

Cullen inhales deeply... far too long.

CULLEN
Four years. I'll be glad to see everyone.

JUNIA
(grinning)
Even Poet?

CULLEN
Weirdly, yes. God, I hate him.

Junia chuckles and pulls out another spoonful of mush.

JUNIA

I guess you have no plan on bringing him up, then, huh?

CULLEN

Poet? No. He would kill himself before stepping one foot on a lift.
(pause)

Besides, I wanna bring Ruma.

JUNIA

Do you think she would go?

Cullen crumples his meal packet.

CULLEN

I don't know. I haven't mentioned it.

JUNIA

You should tell her. She would love to hear that, especially from you.

CULLEN

Well, I have to make it there first.

JUNIA

(scoffs)

I don't think you'll have a problem with that.

CULLEN

I don't know... It's been four long years. I haven't heard a thing.

JUNIA

They're watching. I promise. Nothing goes unnoticed.

Cullen readjusts, inching closer to Junia.

CULLEN

I wish they would hurry up. I don't know how much time she has left.

JUNIA

You have time...

There's a moment of quiet as Junia scrapes out the remainder of her breakfast.

Cullen memorizes her lowered gaze. He wants to tell her something --

CULLEN
(pause)
I'll come back for you.

Junia meets his gaze, surprised.

JUNIA
Really?

CULLEN
Yeah, why not?

JUNIA
I don't know. I --
(pause)
Don't you think that would be a
waste?

CULLEN
You don't wanna get up there?

Junia chucks her packet and wipes her hands.

JUNIA
It's not that. I -- I'm just okay
here.

CULLEN
On Three?

JUNIA
Yeah. I have a job. Some friends.

CULLEN
And that makes you happy?

Junia sets her jaw.

JUNIA
Is Level Four gonna make you happy?

CULLEN
Yes.

JUNIA
Level Five? Six? Seven? Seven-
thousand?

CULLEN
Yes! I belong up there, and so do
you.

The conversation is getting heated. Junia sighs, eager to defuse the tension.

JUNIA
I'm not so sure...

CULLEN
You do. And I'll get you up there.

JUNIA
And what if I won't go?
Cullen's frustration shines through.

CULLEN
When did you become such a
revolutionary?

JUNIA
I didn't. I just think maybe
there's nothing up there that we
don't already have on Three.

CULLEN
Like what?

JUNIA
Like this! Us. Right now.

CULLEN
But the stories?

JUNIA
The rumors --

CULLEN
Passed down from people who have
actually been there. Lived there,
Junia. It's a paradise!

JUNIA
Not to me.

An awkward pause. Cullen's face softens. They shouldn't be
arguing.

JUNIA (CONT'D)
I'm not trying to stop you.

CULLEN
(quietly)
I know, I know.

JUNIA

I just don't want you to break something you can never get back, wishing for something you'll never have.

CULLEN

I know... I just think you should consider it.

JUNIA

What? A free ride?

CULLEN

A ride. It wouldn't be free.

Junia laughs playfully. He's joking.

JUNIA

You want me to pay you?

CULLEN

No. Just stay with me.

Junia smiles with her eyes. His sentiment is sweet but unrealistic.

JUNIA

(pause)
Okay, fine.

CULLEN

Deal?

JUNIA

Deal. You get up there, and I'll consider it.

CULLEN

Wait for me.

JUNIA

Okay.

Cullen reaches forward and cups her hands.

CULLEN

No, I mean it. I'll be back for you. I promise.

Junia stares into Cullen's deep, brown eyes. *How could she say no?*

JUNIA

Okay...

The tension has returned. Nothing aggressive. Just something unsaid.

Cullen removes himself from Junia's grasp.

CULLEN

(pause)

I should go.

JUNIA

(nodding)

Be safe, okay? It's dangerous down there.

Cullen rises to his feet, dusting off his pants.

CULLEN

Don't worry. I'll be with Poet.

JUNIA

That's why I'm worried. Don't start a war.

CULLEN

I won't.

Cullen smiles wryly.

JUNIA

Thanks for breakfast.

CULLEN

You're buying next time.

Junia nods. Cullen turns to the divider and cracks it. He slides through and closes it lightly behind him.

JUNIA

Stay out of trouble.

Cullen doesn't hear her.

EXT. YORK LIFT STATION - LEVEL THREE

AUTOMATED ANNOUNCEMENT (V.O.)

-- Please stay in your designated lane. The boarding process will begin momentarily --

An animatronic voice spouts precautions over a loudspeaker.

Cullen shuffles along a line of disheveled citizens. The lift station is packed. Hordes of people palpitate through the narrow gates.

Beyond the gaggle of passengers, Cullen can just make out a smaller line. These travelers are going up -- Sevens and Tens returning to the upper layers.

Cullen is flooded with jealousy. *That'll be me one day.*

AUTOMATED ANNOUNCEMENT (V.O.)

-- Please move to the next
available scanner. Have your
identification ready --

After a moment, Cullen is corralled to a scanner. Throwing his forearm under the thin, red beam, his chip is scanned.

The machine twirls for a second before responding:

SCANNER (V.O.)

Cullen ORe98876. Please proceed to
line nine.

The metal gate swings wide, allowing Cullen access to the lifts.

Cullen runs his fingers along the eight-foot ceiling. He takes in every bump and groove. This has become his ritual, committing the ceiling of each level to memory.

After waiting, Cullen arrives at the lift doors.

INT. LIFT - MOMENTS LATER

The lift is packed. Elbows, shoulders, and knees touch. Cullen wedges himself into the mix. Hot breath mixes with the smell of tightly compacted bodies.

After the last few passengers squeeze in, the gates close, and the lift rattles to life.

AUTOMATED ANNOUNCEMENT (V.O.)

-- Please keep loose items close to
your person at all times. Do not
stick your hands or feet through
the metal grates. This is for your
safety --

A red light flickers.

BLINK. BLINK.

With a moaning crunch, the lift begins its descent. Cullen watches carefully as Layer Three disappears.

The lift plunges into darkness. Nothing but the pulsating red light provides illumination. Cullen's pupils dilate.

The lift clatters and lurches. Bodies sway, bumping together in the dark. It's disorienting, claustrophobic. Cullen's breath sticks to the back of his throat.

Then... Light.

Starting at his boots, the beam of light works its way up Cullen's thigh. He squints as the shaft reflects in his eyes.

The hoots and roars of Level Two come into focus...

EXT. LIFT STATION - LEVEL TWO

Through the gaps in the chain link fence, Cullen can see hordes of people pushing against the outer gate.

With a gut-wrenching crack, the lift grinds to a halt. The instant the lift sets down, the urge to escape sets in.

It's a few seconds before the station droids pry open the doors --

Then, like a herd of cattle, passengers spill out from the crack. Cullen is one of the last to make it to freedom.

Cullen trails the steady stream of passengers to the outer fence. As they approach, the crowd starts to separate.

Family members jostle to catch a glimpse of their prodigies returning from the upper levels.

The excitement is overpowering. Several passengers break off and grasp their loved ones through the fence.

Cullen bides his time, scanning the mounds of people for his brother. He hasn't spotted him.

Then, through the fence, Cullen makes out the sunken eyes and mousey face of POET. He stands just past the gate, surrounded by Twos.

Cullen can't help but grin as they make eye contact. Poet throws up a limp hand.

Pushing through the breach in the fence, Cullen attempts to make a beeline to Poet. The task is impossible.

Dodging hugs and flailing arms, Cullen embraces his brother:

POET

A Three on Level Two. What the hell
are you doing here?

CULLEN

I go where they send me.

POET

Yeah, that always has been your
biggest problem.

Poet releases his brother and takes a sniff from a soaked
rag.

CULLEN

(motions to the rag)
Still going strong, I see.

POET

Once you start the stuff, you can't
stop. Guess that's kinda the
appeal.

CULLEN

How's Mom?

Poet coughs into his elbow and returns the rag to his pocket.

POET

Excited. She's been preparing all
day for the arrival of the
"prodigal son".

CULLEN

No. How is she?

POET

(sighs)
Older. Starting to slow down.
(pause)
I didn't tell you this, but I'm
glad you're back. It'll be good for
her to see you.

CULLEN

Well, it's only temporary.

POET

Oh, she knows. It's always "on to
the next one" with you.

Suddenly, a SHRIEK rises above the din of the station. It's the type of noise that instantly boils your blood...

Cullen turns to look at the platform. So does everyone else.

CUT TO:

A woman and her daughter have pushed through the crowd. They are making a break for the lifts.

Within seconds, several patrol droids are alerted to the commotion.

Shots RING out. The crowd gasps and wrestles for a clear view. The woman shields her child as they stumble toward the exit.

They don't make it far --

BANG!

Another gunshot. The woman releases her daughter and tumbles to the ground. A pool of crimson blood spreads along the floor.

The child doesn't look back... She scurries across the station, seconds away from freedom. She's small and insignificant, surrounded by a crowd of eager spectators.

BANG!

The child skids to the ground...

CUT TO:

Cullen's face falls. As soon as it started, the moment is over. The refugees lay dead on the ground.

The crowd resumes its chatter. Patrol droids circle the lifeless bodies. They have cleaning to do...

POET (CONT'D)

Sad, isn't it?

Cullen turns to his brother. Poet is solemn.

CULLEN

Why would they do that? It's a death wish.

POET

People are desperate, Cull.

CULLEN

For what?

Poet points in the direction of the lifts.

POET

Freedom. A better life.

CULLEN

They're wasting their time. There are better ways...

Poet cocks his head.

POET

Better ways? Better ways of doing what, huh? Advancing?

CULLEN

If they did their job, they would be rewarded.

POET

If they did their job, they would be dead.

CULLEN

They are dead.

This comment silences Poet. But, as always, he has a comeback.

POET

(pause)

They're the lucky ones. The rest of us are stuck down here.

CULLEN

You're never satisfied...

POET

Not everyone gets a swanky scholarship, Cullen? We can't all be Threes. That's what they don't tell you.

(pause)

Accidents like that are becoming more and more common.

Cullen shakes his head.

CULLEN

We shouldn't fight.

POET

I know.

CULLEN

Mom wouldn't want us to.

POET

I know. You're just so...

(pause)

Fucking allegiant.

Poet smiles. He means it in the nicest way possible. He knocks Cullen on the shoulder.

POET (CONT'D)

Come on. Let's get out of here.

CUT TO:

As the brothers take off into the crowd, cleanup has already begun. Blood mixes with soapy water.

A droid drags the child's lifeless body over to her mother. Their faces are blanched, but peaceful.

END OF ACT ONE