

Avoiding AI'S

More Action - Escape
Throughout Story

Sign - too coincidental?

Sliders: A World of Difference/Separation Anxiety

Open in the Tunnel, where our heroes are skipping along as usual, gliding in this realm of quantum physics. As they approach the end, they notice an unusual anomaly: there are *two* exits! Or rather, as Wade (who is holding the Sliding Device) notes, it seems as if the exit has split into two, a large, almost-normal exit, and a smaller, irregular one. They almost seem, to her eyes, to be blurring together. In shock, Wade finds herself aimed directly at the smaller one while the men zoom towards the large one. "Hey, I can't make heads or tails of this stuff!" she yells to Quinn, gesturing at the device, "What is that?" There's no time for a reply, in a flash, they enter separately.

Cut to: Wade lands, roughly. She gets up and brushes herself off, finding herself on a scarred, empty land, covered in wreckage, a violent snowstorm whirling around her. This is a world ruined by nuclear catastrophe, an unnatural result of ICBMs, and is stark and dim and violent. Wade peers through the gloom, searching for her companions. "Quinn? Professor?" she cries out, searching. "Rembrandt!!? Anyone! Where are you guys!" She is alone on this world, it seems.

Just then, there is a flash of odd lightning, too intense, too bright, too oddly colored to be normal weather phenomenon. In this flash, we see the ghostly outlines of Quinn, Arturo, and Rembrandt, standing near Wade. Shocked, Wade reaches out to Quinn, who also reaches towards her, mouthing "Wade!" although there is no sound of his voice. In a second, the ghostly images fade, and Wade finds herself truly alone on this nightmare world.

Fade back onto Wade, where we left her. She stands, mystified and afraid, whipped by winds and obscured by snow. Suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere, hatches in the ground open up, and *Androids* erupt from the earth: simple, powerful, humanoid contraptions that obviously have no brain power, but which mechanically take charge of Wade, escorting her to an entranceway that has appeared in the ground, a ramp leading downward. Despite her struggles, they easily drag her under, and the ramp closes, a clear but faded sign on it reading "FORBIDDEN AREA, UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT", leaving the landscape unmarked once again. Snow gathers over the hatches and ramp to once again obscure it.

Underground: Wade is pushed down a long metallic tunnel. In a series of quick cuts, we see her being brought lower and lower by a series of elevators. In between, she is stripped (the Sliding Device is taken from her), cleaned (roughly, automatically), tattooed with an odd bar code design, and finally, plumped down in a stark, hardbacked chair, and greeted by a blank television screen. The screen comes to warm life, and a man's face appears on it, distorted and obviously artificial (Max Headroom-ish) but still recognizable. Wade gives a start.

"Bennis!" she chokes.

The man on the screen raises an eyebrow. "Why, I haven't been called that in quite some years, Citizen 456U8SF. I had no idea that name was still known. At any rate, you are wrong, I am not the esteemed Doctor Dennis, but rather his creation, made, a trifle arrogantly perhaps, in his own image. When you're the one man in the country who can create a self-aware computer like me, I suppose you get your perks." The computer's animated face smirks in a disturbingly human way. (Its delivery should be a trifle mechanical, too smooth for human, although it obviously mimicks human tics and quirks, and the late Dr. Bennis' speech patterns) "But more

keep

importantly, Citizen 456U8SF, who are you? Where did you come from? And, I would especially like to know, what is this?" An inset screen appears, and the Sliding Device is displayed for her. "I track all installation technology, and this definitely isn't something I know of."

Wade naturally refuses to answer. "No matter," Bennis comments, "you have been processed into the San Francisco Emergency Facility. For twenty three years I have safeguarded this population, which may very well be the last remnants of the human race left on this wasted earth. I was designed and programmed with preservation of the human race as my primary order, and now that you have joined us you fall under that umbrella. Welcome. One of the residents will explain all the details to you, no doubt."

The screen starts to fade. "Wait!" Wade cries. "You're a computer?"

Bennis' image strengthens again. He appears wryly amused. "Not just a "computer", Citizen 456U8SF. A self-aware triumph of artificial intelligence. I am likely the greatest computer ever designed - me and my fellow AIs who possibly preside over the other Emergency Nuclear Shelters throughout the country. Now, off you go."

She is forced to leave through a hidden door, and is suddenly blinded by the brightly light if slightly claustrophobic emergency installation. It houses about 6000 people, men, women, children, in a static and sterile environment much like a hospital or prison. The people wear similar standard issue clothing but are otherwise normal. Up until 23 years ago, many of these people were educated, affluent citizens, now reduced to prisoners of the very systems designed to keep them alive.

Wade has entered the *Common Room*, a wide area where the citizens of the Emergency Installation can gather en masse and socialize. It is wired up with cameras and monitors. She stirs up quite a bit of interest and curiosity, and finally a delegate from the population approaches her carefully. He is Cregar, the middle-aged leader of the population by default. He is a slim man with intellectual tendencies, possibly he was a young student when the war tore the world apart. His air of erudition lends him a deceptively meek demeanor, as does his habit of adjusting his thin wire glasses before speaking. He asks her where she escaped from, and how.

"What?"

"You must have escaped from a similar Emergency Installation, everyone else must be long dead. How did you get out? Did your AI malfunction? How did you survive the surface radiation? Or have the levels been exaggerated? I always thought they might be. It was all theories, theories. None of it proven. And We know now that our AI won't let us out, it might even lie about rad levels to keep us quiet -"

Wade interrupts. "I don't know what you're talking about! I didn't escape from anywhere!"

"You must have!" He pauses. "But perhaps it is best not to discuss this here. It's just that rumor is flying about you."

Wade takes a deep breath. "Explain this place to me," she ventures, "what is it? Who built it? Who are all of you?"

Cregar studies her for a moment, and then shrugs. "Very well. This is the San Francisco Emergency Nuclear Facility. It was built, along with hundreds of others, to be the ultimate bomb shelters. The project was begun, I believe, in 1963, when the cold war started to heat up, after the invention of the Laser Cannon and the perfection of the Bennis Artificial Intelligence Matrix -"

"In 1963?" Wade asks, amazed.

Cregar shrugs. "The arms race produced a startlingly sudden rush of technology, naturally.

At any rate, these facilities were designed to keep the human race alive in case of nuclear disaster - which was inevitable, even if it took another decade to finally happen. We knew that if the bombs fell, there wouldn't be much left. Each facility was equipped with an AI -an artificial intelligence, to run it and make sure we lived."

Cregar pauses. "Unfortunately, the AIs, or at least *this* AI, decided that the only way it could truly uphold its core programming to keep us all alive, was to keep us perpetually underground, perpetually prisoners, perpetually under its care. We are a herd here."

"What does that mean?"

"We are not allowed to roam free!" he replies passionately. "We are held here and every aspect of our lives is doled out to us as the computer sees fit. We have no true freedom. We eat when it tells us to, what it tells us to. We exercise when it thinks it prudent. It manages us and nudges us here and there to ensure survival. And if we try to break from its grasp, it brings out its androids and suppression fields to knock us down. It can reasonably kill a few of us in order to preserve the majority. We made a deal with the devil, 23 years ago, citizen 456U8SF. We said to the AI *keep us alive*. We didn't realize we also said *forever*."

Wade is pensive. "Don't call me that."

Cregar is startled. "What?"

"Citizen 456U8SF. Call me Wade. That's my name."

They shake hands. "There is something so.....alive about you.....Wade." he says slowly. "When you're ready, you'll tell us how you escaped. And maybe we'll be able to duplicate it, and we'll be free." he says. Wade cannot say anything, and merely shakes her head, turning away.

Cut to the guys: they find themselves on a scarred, empty land, covered in wreckage, a violent snowstorm whirling around them. This is a world ruined by nuclear catastrophe, an unnatural result of ICBMs, and is stark and dim and violent. Quinn still stands with an arm outstretched, as the ghostly image of Wade has just faded away.

"Did you see that?" he whispers.

"Sure did, Q-Ball, but I never thought I'd see a ghost." Rembrandt replies.

"Ghost?" Arturo breathes.

"Ghost?" Quinn echoes. "You think she's dead?"

"My dear boy," Arturo begins, and then quiets. For once he has nothing to say.

"Hey, man," Rembrandt says slowly, "I don't know anything. But I don't know what happened back in the tunnel, and now this.....I don't know."

Quinn looks away. "Oh, Wade...."

Suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere, hatches in the ground open up, and *Androids* erupt from the earth: simple, powerful, humanoid contraptions that obviously have no brain power, but which mechanically take charge of them, escorting each to an entranceway that has appeared in the ground, a ramp leading downward. Despite their struggles, they easily drag the men under, and the ramp closes, a clear but faded sign on it reading "FORBIDDEN AREA, UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT", leaving the landscape unmarked once again. Snow gathers over the hatches and ramp to once again obscure it.

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warm life, and a man's face appears on it, distorted and obviously artificial (Max Headroom-ish) but still recognizable. They all give a start.

"Bennis!" Arturo rumbles.

What follows is an eerily similar interrogation performed by Bennis, followed by their expulsion into the general population. They are not greeted with the same warmth, however. At first Cregar is interested because they seem to hold the hope of escape, but Quinn convinces him that they know no such thing and the populace quickly accepts that. They lose their animation and shuffle off to enter the exercise yard at the ringing of the bell, leaving our guys standing, perplexed.

Wade walks with Cregar and several other citizens. All are bar-coded. Cregar is explaining the workings of underground life: no citizen may possess or operate technology, everyone is tracked by the bar codes, which must be scanned to access any area of the complex. AI provides entertainment on the vid screens and occasionally addresses them directly, but usually is content to monitor unless trouble brews. They have a definite exercise schedule, to keep everyone in good health. They are on a schedule devised by AI and enforced by AI, all with the preservation of the race in mind. If they were allowed to venture on their own, they might perish of radiation poisoning, so they must remain underground. If they were allowed to make their own time, they might overthrow AI, resulting in being allowed to venture on their own, et cetera.

In the middle of this explanation, there is another odd flash, and suddenly the ghostly outlines of Quinn, Arturo, and Rembrandt are once again near her. Arturo blinks in shock and steps towards her, speaking mouth working silently, and then fades away just as suddenly. Wade is shaken by this second visitation. The population takes this as a spiritual sign, something which has been lost from their lives for some time now, and a frenzy of belief sweeps over them. Wade is proclaimed a savior, sent by God, perhaps, but definitely sent to rescue them from their situation. Wade flees from the crowd in confusion.

Cut to: The men, standing directly after Wade's ghostly visitation, still shocked. The population there reject them, fearing these weird occurrences and shying away, murmuring in hostility. Quinn realizes that Wade is not dead, she must somehow be alive.

"How is that possible?" Rembrandt asks. "If she had survived the slide, she would be here."

"Not necessarily, Mr. Brown," Arturo says, looking wise. "I think I may be finally seeing what is happening here. Mr. Mallory, attend to me and see if what I theorize follows: I believe we have discovered our first example of a Kovler Twin Temporal system."

Quinn is amazed. "That was only a theory, professor, and a thin one at that."

"This fits all of Kovler's theories, my boy! Think about these odd energy emanations, those flashes which result in a sort of blurring. That could be the friction of two dimensions struggling against each other!"

Rembrandt breaks in. "Hey, guys I must have missed that textbook back in high school, you wanna slow down a bit?"

Quinn grins. "Sure, Cryin' Man. A Twin Temporal System is a universe that has suffered a severe shock, a major catastrophe, so severe that it actually *splits*. A "shadow" world is created, a mirrored reflection of the original world, that can seem just as real. This shadow world takes on its own timeline, and the people on it live their lives independently."

Arturo breaks in. "Unfortunately, these systems most probably can never be stable. The shadow world draws its energy from the parent world, and over time, usually a cosmically brief period of time, the parent world draws this energy back into itself. Eventually, the shadow world "bleeds" back into the original timeline, and ceases to exist."

"It's possible that whatever nuclear disaster destroyed this world caused such a split here." Quinn ends. The crowd of the populace has closed in around them loosely, and unfriendly vibes are directed their way.

A look of dawning horror spreads over Rembrandt's face. "And our gal Wade is over on that "shadow" world, you're saying?"

Arturo is grave. "If our theory is correct, I believe so."

"And what happens if she's still there when it "bleeds" back?"

Quinn is grim. "She dies."

Rembrandt is shaken. "What can we do?"

Arturo throws out his hands, obviously upset. "Nothing! If this nuclear war occurred 23 years ago, I would imagine that the "bleed" might be winding down to its final moments as we speak. But Wade has the sliding device! Without it, not only can we not even manipulate the temporal stream, we cannot even think to save ourselves!"

Quinn looks up. "She can save herself, though. She can slide out of there."

Rembrandt winces. "And then we're trapped."

Quietly, they look at each other. Arturo steps up. "We cannot give in to such disastrous pessimism, Mr. Brown, Mr. Mallory. Between us we have proved to have unexpected and prodigious resources -let us use them and see what we might be able to do in this underground nightmare."

Quinn looks uneasily at the angry, hateful faces of their fellow citizens. "First things first, I think we have to get out of here."

Open on: Wade, back in the interrogation room. Bennis asks her more questions, both about her origins and about the sliding device. She refuses to answer, attempts to question the computer in return. Bennis meets her questions with wry amusement, eventually releases her back into the population.

Cregar is waiting there, with a large delegation of the population. Although Wade does not notice it yet, they are all "faded", colors washed out, their demeanors tired and grim. They are "less there", while Wade is still vibrant and vital. This should not be commented on yet, but it should be noticeable. The populace hails her as a savior, and beg her to deliver them, to either help them escape or deliver them from AI. Wade resists, but her heart forces her to do something for their plight, perhaps she feels that if all she can offer them is faith it's enough. Wade has begun to figure out what is going on, and feels pity for these shadow people. Emotional, Wade flees. Cregar follows her, consoling, knowing that this is difficult.

"You don't know what's really happening here, do you? How can I help you when I can't even help myself?"

She attempts to explain how she came here, and what she has put together based on her sliding experience, that this world is somehow split into two realities. She has not yet realized that this is not a permanent situation. Cregar does not want to believe, he merely implores her to help them, as they have been given a new faith by her arrival and believe she will save them.

Cut to: the guys, plotting escape. They fail in a futile attempt at subverting AI's defenses (we'll think of something) and the populace, fearing them as outsiders and due to the odd visitations, rises against them. AI sends out a suppression field and puts the trio into a cell.

Now: Wade, meeting with Cregar and other important members of the population, asking them questions in an attempt to see some way out. She notices the "fade", that they are not quite as "there" as she is. This may be why they regard her as something almost holy. Cregar merely smiles when she points it out to them. "You're so...vital, Wade. That is why we are drawn to you. You come from somewhere else. You have given us hope."

Wade is freaked out by this, but isn't sure what it might mean, although a suspicion is beginning. She distractedly gets back to business, telling them that every computer system has a backdoor, a way to shut it down. If they can find Bennis' back door, they can get in and shut it down, and free themselves. And get the sliding device back.

To: Guys in cell, bonding. Each speak of their regrets, they admit their differences and are beginning to imagine being trapped on this wasted earth forever. Quinn regrets how he has handled his relationship with Wade. Towards the end of their bonding - Arturo might even apologize to Quinn for his attitude towards him - Quinn gathers materials for a sign and says that there is one more thing he can do.

Now: Wade, searching for Cregar. She finds him alone near the holding cell (empty on the shadow world) and she attempts to explain what she has realized about the "fade". She reiterates that the reason she is not fading is that she slid there. Cregar shakes his head. "No, Wade, you were sent here to help us, even if you don't realize it." She is amazed at this new spirituality she has caused, and suddenly there is another flash - and Quinn's ghostly figure appear in the cell, backed by Arturo and Rembrandt. He is holding a crude sign: SLIDE, SAVE YOURSELF and then is gone.

Cregar is amazed again, but Wade is obviously shaken. She whirls on him. "Don't you get it? You're dead, you people are all ghosts, in five hours it'll be like none of you ever existed!"

Suddenly, a suppression field drops down, and AI appears on one of the monitors. He demands to know what she meant by that remark. "I have been monitoring all your fascinating conversation, citizen 456U8SF, since you arrived, and I think the time has come to explain it to me. What is happening? What is happening to my *people*?"

Wade sees a chance, perhaps her only one, and she explains to AI what she is, how she came there, and her theories on what is happening (in less technical jargon than the Professor, of course). "Don't you see, you're dying. Your people are dying. I might be able to save you. You must have databanks, libraries of research, endless amounts of information -if I am given back the sliding device, and if you cede control of this installation to me, I can save you."

"How?"

"There might be a way to reverse the fade, to stabilize this dimension. Or I could have the population slide with me, rescue them to another world. I don't know. I won't know until you give me control, Bennis! Please. It's you're only hope. Your core programming demands that you preserve the population. If you don't give me control, they will die. Give me control, and I may be able to save them. Your core program doesn't give you any choice."

She waits, tensely, and AI considers her. "What a surprising girl you are." he says, for a

moment as human as his creator ever was. Then he goes blank, and moments later the field lifts, the lights return to normal, and simultaneously a secret door opens nearby. Entering, Wade discovers an ancient command center, with cobwebbed seats and ancient keyboards. This was where the human leaders would take control of AI, if any of the leaders had lived. She enters and takes control, pumps AI for information on the situation and discovers that there is an 83% chance that the proximity of the parent universe means that if she slid, she would be attracted to the parent world. She also learns that the people are not simply dying, or “fading”, but rather being absorbed back into their original energy, joining back with themselves on the parent world. She also discovers the shut down code for the AI, and makes a mental note of it, but no time to dally, the slide is in seconds! She tells Cregar how to shut down AI. “Why do I need that now? AI is already shut down, thanks to you.”

“Just remember it!” she yells. She runs for the holding cells and slides, while the amazed and almost-faded populace watches in shock.

At first, nothing has changed, and for a brief, crazy moment she believes nothing has changed. Then suddenly Quinn shouts “Wade!” and she whirls to see the three of them, trapped in the holding cell (HEY JEOF HOW THE HELL DO WE GET THEM OUT OF THE CELL, HUH??). Wade notes that the next slide is 45 seconds away (CONVENIENT, AIN'T IT?) A crowd of suspicious citizens moves in, led by Cregar, who is peering at Wade curiously. “Do I know you?” he asks.

“Do you?”

He pauses to look pensive. “You see, “ he says slowly, “we are not ghosts, and are not dead yet.”

Wade is amazed. “Why do you say that?”

Cregar is suddenly confused. “I...I don't know.”

Wade smiles brilliantly, relieved. The device goes off and a gate opens, and the guys lose no time in jumping. Quinn grabs Wade. “We can't dawdle!” he yells.

“Wait!” she cries. “I have to tell them!”

“Tell them what! Come on!”

She allows herself to be dragged into the gate, and she waves, hoping that Cregar's shadowy memories will give him the secret of freedom eventually.

NOTES:

- How *do* we get them out of that cell?
- I know I forgot to mention how much time until the next slide (necessary for proper tension) but we'll factor that in later
- Is the shut-down code okay, or is the embedded virus a better idea?

→ Breakout?