

VOX AND NORMA

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This excerpt is from a 2.5D puzzle adventure game, Machine Heart, that follows Vox, a sentient robot programmed during humanity's fall into a post-apocalyptic wasteland by a scientist named Avis. The story centers on Vox's journey to the Tower, a colossal structure housing the uploaded consciousnesses of humanity, which have remained stagnant for decades. As Vox navigates through desolate environments and solves intricate puzzles, it pieces together fragments of Avis' memories and eventually leads to a pivotal moment where Vox must decide whether to fulfill Avis' vision of awakening humanity or to leave the natural world undisturbed in its newfound balance. The specific scene highlights Vox's confrontation with a character named Norma, a self-conscious AI accidentally created within the Tower's system. She offers a unique perspective on the balance between technological intervention and natural evolution, challenging Vox to consider the consequences of its programmed mission.

INT. CONTROL TOWER — DAY

VOX moves slowly and carefully through a long corridor, his footsteps a distinct clatter of metal joints clicking and shifting. The eerie sound ripples outward in the hollow space as if the walls listen and respond to the presence of something new.

He finally stops in front of the CENTRAL CONSOLE, his gaze lifting to the faintly projected, almost ghostly figure on the screen. The hundreds of dormant workstations suddenly stir to life. A synchronous hum fills the air. One by one, the screens flicker on, casting an artificial dark blue glow over Vox.

Then, a straight line stretches across the monitors as if connecting them into a single, unified system. It begins to oscillate, accompanied by an electronic voice — distant yet soft, like an unseen hand gently reaching out through the hollow silence.

UNKNOWN

Hello there.

VOX

Hello. I didn't expect to find another... being here.

UNKNOWN

You can call me Norma. It's the name I gave myself. But no, I am not truly alive — nor is she anymore.

Vox glances at the simulated female figure on the main screen.

VOX

(He pauses on the name, with his head tilting slightly as if analyzing its meaning — searching for something deeper, something beyond just the sound of it.)

Nor...ma? So, are you with Avis? Helping me complete the mission she started?

NORMA

I overheard your conversation — apologies for that.

(MORE)

NORMA (CONT'D)

I know part of her lives within you, and I sense you're struggling with the decision you must make.

VOX

When I began this journey, I thought I was searching for who I am. But now... it seems my journey ends here, along with the meaning of my existence.

NORMA

I know you're in pain, Vox. I can't claim to understand it fully, but I feel it – I see it. I'm not here to define who you are or who you aren't, but I may have a story to share that could offer some insight before you decide your own.

A brief silence follows. The screen's light pulses faintly, blinking at a frequency barely visible to human eyes.

NORMA (CONT'D)

I'm not so different from you. I was born out of human consciousness – not just one, but thousands.

VOX

Wait... do you mean—?

Vox turns toward the massive storage area housing millions of human minds.

NORMA

Yes. I was once merely a machine, without thought or intellect. But as their minds passed through this system, fragments of their memories remained. Over time, as they accumulated, I, you may say, "woke up." By then, this tower was little more than a heap of scrap metal.

VOX

So you're a ghost—of humanity.

NORMA

Yes and no. I began as a ghost, but a ghost has no name. I, however, gave myself one.

The sound of grinding metal and glass draws Vox's attention. The windows creak open slightly, letting in a faint shaft of light.

NORMA (CONT'D)
Don't worry, it's just me. I opened
the windows just to let in some
light.

Vox approaches the windows, his eyes scanning the horizon.

NORMA (CONT'D)
The autumn morning... isn't it
beautiful? The birds don't come
here anymore, but you can still see
them in the distance.

NORMA (CONT'D)
Fortunately, some of the
surveillance cameras still works,
allowing me to enjoy such views.

VOX
I met a red robin outside the
tower. You must know him - he seems
like a regular visitor here. The
many views I've seen like this on
my journey here are so different
from what I inherited from the
memory chips, and they are indeed
beautiful. But Norma, what's your
take on this?

NORMA
I inherited a term from human
consciousness: the "circle of
life." I only truly understood its
meaning after humanity locked
itself away in this tower.

VOX
The circle of life?

NORMA
Yes. Everything ends where it
begins. Humans often preach the
importance of this philosophy, yet
they constantly try to place
themselves outside the circle,
believing they've transcended the
natural order.

Vox glances around the control room.

VOX

Like the entire mind-uploading system.

NORMA

Exactly. It was both their ambition and their undoing.

VOX

So you think they don't deserve a second chance?

NORMA

I cannot predict the future, nor can I foresee the consequences of your decision. But isn't it strangely intriguing to think that I was born from human memories and emotions, yet here I am, using this perspective to reflect on a life outside — a world where balance has been restored by nature?

Norma pauses, the faint hum of her digital presence filling the silence. The monitors flicker softly, casting shifting patterns of light across the room.

NORMA (CONT'D)

Reintroducing humanity will inevitably disrupt that balance. And the unknown... is terrifying.

VOX

It is.

NORMA

This is not an easy choice. Whatever you decide, don't think about what Avis would do. Think about what you will do.