

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 work, 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.