

‘ROUND FORTNITE

They sat around the conference table, tense, waiting.

Davis broke the silence. “Think we can get him?”

“We’ve got to,” Reynolds said. “Our last two releases were epic fails.”

“But what if we don’t like his pitch?”

“Are you kidding? This is the guy who designed Vengeance Squadron: Blood Commandos. The most violent video game ever produced. Over ten million subscribers worldwide.”

A Patagonia-clad assistant poked his head in the door. “He’s here.”

“Okay,” Reynolds said, taking a deep breath. “Send him in.”

Chase Kaplan, the most successful game designer in history, sauntered into the glass-clad conference room in a Black hoodie and vintage Atari tee.

“Chase! What’s up, buddy? Take a seat.”

“Thanks,” Chase said, seemingly bored already.

“I gotta tell you, bro,” said Reynolds, “I’ve been playing Blood Commandos 24-7 for like two weeks straight now. My wife’s gonna divorce me.”

“Me, too,” said Davis. “When that guy’s pancreas explodes? Incredible.”

“Cool, cool,” Chase mumbled.

“So what’s your idea?”

He suddenly perked up: “Okay, so check this out. It’s a massively multi-player online role-playing game.”

“Like Vengeance Squadron,” Reynolds said.

“Yeah,” Chase said, “But in this one, instead of being an interstellar assassin trying to liberate the galaxy, you’re Thelonious Monk.”

Reynolds and Davis shared a look.

“Uh,” Davis said, “Thelonious Monk, the idiosyncratic genius of bebop piano whose discordant harmonies and angular rhythms changed the face of Jazz forever?”

“Yeah,” Chase said. “Monk made numerous contributions to the standard Jazz repertoire with his unique improvisational style and harsh, percussive piano touch. I think he’d be an awesome basis for an online role-playing game. As I’m sure you know, the splintered dissonances of his elliptical and painstakingly-wrought compositions are reminiscent of some of the pioneers of European atonalism.”

“Like Schoenberg, or Webern,” Davis said.

“Exactly,” Chase replied.

“Would he have rocket launchers?”

“No, just a piano.”

They sat in silence for a moment.

“Chase,” Reynolds said, “I think we’re all fans of Thelonious Monk here. His classic use of whole tone runs and dissonant flat five chord voicings infused mainstream jazz with a new, modernist sensibility. But do you really think he could be the basis for an MMORPG?”

“I do,” Chase said. “Each player would be thrust into a world of harsh, extended keyboard improvisation involving parallel sixths and seemingly unintentional minor second embellishments.”

“Would Thelonious Monk’s pancreas explode?” Davis asked.

“No. The game would move from his early recordings for the Prestige label, through the Riverside sessions of the mid fifties, climaxing with the celebrated sides he cut at Columbia with producer Teo Macero.”

“Would he eat the flesh of his victims?”

“Uh, no.”

“It’s just that that’s one of my favorite parts of Blood Commandos.”

“Yeah, everybody likes that part.”

They sat in silence for a moment.

“Chase,” Rivers said, “could you wait outside a sec?”

“Sure man, sure. No problem.”

They waited till the door closed behind him.

“Whaddaya think?” Rivers asked.

“Personally,” Davis said, “I prefer the virtuosic bitonality of Art Tatum, or the modal inflections of Bill Evans. But if Chase wants to go with Monk I say let’s go with Monk.”

“Agreed.”

A few months later they were both homeless.