

Westcrest

Episode #17: Quality Control

Jeremy doesn't attempt to climb *down* the wall, but instead pulls himself upwards. Thick, rope-like lengths of ivy hang overhead, growing amongst the stones.

It is on this dark tangle of creepers that Jeremy focuses as he climbs. His hands carefully seek out protruding bricks that he uses to haul himself higher. He pauses for breath between each movement, but it is not long before he is exhausted.

For Jeremy, everything has vanished from his thoughts except the wall—and the fall. His wrists burn and his back aches. He drives his right arm upwards, desperately seeking something to grip. The vines loom tantalisingly close now; but still not close enough.

The wind stings Jeremy's eyes and he blinks back tears. He can feel his muscles growing weaker every minute, but he tries not to think about it. Blood trickles down the back of his hands as jagged edges of stone cut into his fingers.

A loose brick falls away from the wall, tumbling soundlessly into the red void. For an instant Jeremy almost lets himself go. Clinging tight, he reaches again for the lowest vine.

Thorns bite into Jeremy's palm and he screams, but he doesn't let go. With a tearing sound the creeper comes away from the stone, sending Jeremy swinging through the air. Above his head he can hear a chorus of branches as they gasp and sigh at the shock of his weight. The vine deposits him part of the way around the tower, so that he can no longer see the window that he climbed out of.

Jeremy reaches for another vine, but this too gives way and air rushes past him as he falls. He strikes the wall and it knocks all the breath from him. A moment later, when he slumps against a roof of sloping tiles, he is gasping for breath and struggling to stay conscious.

It is not until he begins to slide down the slanted rooftop that Jeremy realises that he needs to move. He digs in his heels and cradles his bloody hands against his chest. Slowly he clambers up the rooftop and rolls down the other side.

At last, Jeremy comes to rest against a stone wall where it meets the edge of the roof. He stays here for some time, staring up at the scarlet sky and not quite daring to be pleased with himself.

As he rests, a rook lands nearby, looking down at him with jet-black eyes. A moment later another bird joins the first. The birds make Jeremy uncomfortable so he sits up and begins shuffling across the roof.

From Jeremy's high vantage point it appears as though he can see the entire castle spread out below him. A handful of tall spires stand inside the walls, connected by bridges of stone and supported by flying buttresses. Between the towers Jeremy sees several paved courtyards and at the very centre of

the castle is a large circular building with a glass dome on the roof. Almost everything that Jeremy can see appears to have been built out of the same blood-red bricks.

Jeremy continues across the roovescape, noticing many large black rooks are now eyeing him greedily from their perches . He quickly realises why there are so many of the birds: what he first thinks is the shape of a guard, is actually a corpse that has been strung up against a thick wooden beam. Rooks crowd around the body, their talons mincing rotten flesh.

This unpleasant sight is enough to make Jeremy realise just how desperately he needs to get home; and also brings with it the realisation that he now considers his home to be Westcrest.

And back in that other world, somebody is finally about to realise that Jeremy is missing.