

Previously on Quest Friends...

[Opening theme, "Friends" by Miracle of Sound, begins.]

Kyle (as Mauve)

Mako, the Apocrita isn't just hunting anyone. It's hunting us.

Kyle (as Mako)

So long as we are here, we are a liability to the people of Fasten.

Tom (as Xoc)

[Quietly, full of melancholy.] I don't want you to go, though.

Kyle (as Jesse)

[Strained, forced enthusiasm.] No, you can go, and the three of us will, uh, will help with that!

Kyle (as Mauve)

Jesse, Jesse, no, uh. [A pause.] You're not coming on this one either.

Kyle (as Mako)

Uh, Jesse. [Haltingly.] How about, uh, how about you try our new boat that you and I have been working on for us.

Kyle

And meanwhile, Mauve, uh, turns over to Everett, and she picks up a conspicuously rapier-sized case and hands it out to him.

Kyle (as Mauve)

Elee Badge, just watch over my kids for me, will ya?

[Opening theme intensifies.]

Kyle

[The sound of birds chirping over a rustling breeze.]

A single blade of grass gently blows in the wind. Nearby, its siblings join in the lazy dancing. A broken hound walks onto the scene, sniffing the ground for clues as to where to find its next meal. It's quiet and harmonious.

[Upbeat rock music begins to play.]

And then with an uncertain *bang* of an engine, the scene breaks. The hound yelps and runs, tearing up the grass and dirt which fly into a speeding windshield. We see a figure emerge and start wiping off this dirt-covered windshield. They turn around and shout out,

Kyle (as Jesse)

[Yelling.] Uh, sorry everyone! I forgot to put on the wipers!

Kyle

And with this line, we can all see Jesse's magnificently horrendous vehicle that they built with Mako, with every loved imperfection. So you are now no longer on Mauve and Mako's boat, uh, which was theirs, you are now on your own vehicle. And I have, uh, decided that even though Jesse built it, each of you as players gets to decide one defining feature of this vehicle.

[A pause.]

What the fuck are we looking at?

Ari

I still want, potentially...but it can be a different thing. But it would be fun for it to have a giant propeller beanie hat on top of it that Jesse made, so that Everett would like it.

Kyle

Alright, this car has a giant propeller beanie hat on top of it and uh, this hat, we'll, we'll decide in the moment what these mechanically do, but it can help it with limited flight, this propeller beanie hat.

Hallie

[Laughs.]

Emily

Amazing.

Kyle

All right. What else are we looking at with this vehicle?

Tom

Can, instead of wheels, can it have, like, lots of little legs?

[Crosstalking amongst the party.]

Ari

[Laughing.] Oh my God.

Hallie

[Firmly.] No, no!

Emily

[Delighted squealing in background.]

Ari

Yes! Ohhhh, you did it!

Hallie

Nooo!

Tom

Like a little millipede.

Emily

Like a millipede!

Hallie

No.

Tom

Yeahhh!

Ari

You did it!

Emily

Yes.

Hallie

No!

Tom

[Sing-singing.] Wheels on the bus go step step step.

Ari

[Through laughter.] Step, step, step! I thought you hated it!

[Crosstalk ends.]

Kyle

You want them to be flesh-colored and human-looking, or just millipede legs?

Emily

Please!

Hallie

No!

Tom

Uh, what are people feeling? I don't want to actually, like, gross anyone out and ruin this vehicle for them.

Emily

I feel like to avoid, like, explicit body horror, we should go for bug legs.

Kyle

All right, so they're little, they're little—

Tom

[Crosstalking.] That might be worse. I, that's why I'm asking.

Kyle

No, I think they can be like little—

Emily

[Crosstalking.] Mechanical—

Kyle

Little mechanical sticks.

Hallie

Oh, yeah mechanical sticks, that's...

Kyle

Yeah, Ari's gonna send something which I will link down below if you want to see what the body horror looks like.

Hallie

Okay.

Kyle

Alright, so it has a little millipede legs. You are going to fight your spiders with a millipede! Ooh, interesting. All right, we've got two more features. Hallie and Emily, save this thing or damn it. You decide.

Emily

[Wryly.] Have you met us?

Hallie

That's true.

Emily

Hallie, would you like to go first?

Hallie

Yeah, I'll go. Well, mine isn't visible though, because I wanted ejector seats. *[Laughing.]* A useful thing.

Emily

[Through laughter.] Can they actually be a little bit visible though?

Kyle

Yes, they're—

Emily

[Crosstalking.] Like little springs?

Kyle

They have little springs, they're like, painted with fire. They have, uh, they have little, like, jet packs on the side. You don't know whether or not they help, or they're just extraneous, because if they helped, you will be very hot when you eject.

Hallie

[Laughs.]

Kyle

Alright, and then Emily.

Emily

Well, I know that it goes on...if it's millipede legs, it's kind of long, right? You would think, maybe? Because I think I want it to be kind of evoking the feel of a toy train.

Hallie

[Laughs.]

Kyle

So you—

Emily

[Crosstalking.] Like, weird boxy parts and clashing colors, and like, just absolutely atrocious.

Kyle

Okay, so we have—

Emily

Like a kid drew a car.

Kyle

So we have a weird boxy train with ejector seats, a giant propeller beanie hat, and, uh, lots of little legs that are mechanical. The last thing I will add on the color, it is red with black spots on it, and it is called the Ladybug.

Hallie

[Intensely.] Yes. Yes.

Emily

[Delighted squeal.]

Tom

[Gleefully.] Oh my God. Yes!

Kyle

[Laughter.]

All right. So, um, you are going through the Ladybug. One of you can drive if you want, if not Everett

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and Jesse will probably share the wheel.

A couple of housekeeping things. You can all full rest, and as you describe what you do, feel free to let us know of any new ability...actually no, the new abilities will just come up. I'll say like—

Emily

[Crosstalking, amused.] I think most of them came up.

Hallie

[Through laughter.] Yeah.

Kyle

Yeah. Yeah. So most of the new abilities came up last session, so instead of having us describe it I'll just say if you want to know what the specifically new abilities are, and the new skills, check QuestFriendsPodcast.com, go into the bonus links, and I will have links to the actual character sheets.

Hallie

I do have a question. Um, I don't have my flex skill yet, because that was going to be based on the books that Hop got from Soe, and he was going to ask which one was her favorite so he could start with that one. So it was going to be specifically related to that book.

Kyle

Okay!

[A jaunty, almost sea shanty-ish cello tune begins to play.]

She is going to give you a young adult novel about an intrepid airship adventurer, and it's like marginally historical? But marginally not, like.

Hallie

Historical like a young adult historical fiction. Okay.

Kyle

Yeah. It's a young adult historical fiction. You've been, you've been reading that. It's the follow-up to The Tales of Captain Flyhook. It is now, like, from the point of view of one of the, uh, boys who worked on Captain Flyhook's ship.

Hallie

Okay.

Kyle

You know, one of those ones.

Hallie

Yeah, one of them Flyhook ships.

Emily and Tom

[Laughter.]

Kyle

Yeah. Once this...'cause you get a new skill every morning. So what is your skill for the day going to be?

Hallie

Uh, related to Captain Flyhook...did Captain Flyhook do anything involving flying or hooks? Does he have a grappling hook?

[Faint laughter from the party.]

Like, yeah, he obviously flew a ship, but like...

Kyle

Captain Flyhook did not use a grappling hook. He was a very boring man.

Hallie

Oh, that's right. It's a very *dry* his...I forgot that.

Kyle

However, one day, uh, the boy got into some of the cargo and actually found a grappling hook and he has a little mini adventure with it. It's one of those side ones. It's just like, here's a little fun story that's not actually part of the plot.

Hallie

Right.

Kyle

So yeah, we can say that there's a grappling hook adventure.

Hallie

[The music stops abruptly.]

The problem is that I don't have a grappling hook. So I don't know why I want to be good at grappling hooks.

Emily

[Laughter.]

Kyle

Too late. You're good at it now!

Hallie

[Through laughter.] I'm good at grappling hooks!

Tom

Amazing.

Hallie

Okay, under flex skill, I put grappling hooks.

Kyle

Just for the day. And for the first time, this is a multi-day arc. So we'll see if it comes in handy. And as you're reading, Hop, you feel a pair of eyes on your neck, and you turn over to see Jesse just looking at you with big eyes expectantly, and they just say...

Kyle (as Jesse)

[Clearly digging for information.] Soooooo...

[A mischievous little jingle begins to play.]

Hallie (as Hopper)

Uh, yeah, how were things here while we were gone in Roulettia?

Kyle (as Jesse)

No, no tell me everything, you know, they're fine. We built, we built this thing. It's really cool. No! What happened in Roulettia! Tell me everything! Everett said you saw...

[In a thrilled, hushed whisper.] Miss Lorraine?

Hallie (as Hopper)

[Faintly.] She was there. Um.

Kyle (as Jesse)

[Much more enthusiastic about this than Hop.] That's so great! How did it go? It's been so long.

Hallie (as Hopper)

[Trying to humor Jesse.] Yeah. It had been a few years. Um, uh, we got, we got Q-BO back, and we got the information, so it went about as well as could be expected, I guess. Yeah, it went. Um, you know, um, fine.

Kyle (as Jesse)

Okay, and is Miss Lorraine, is she gonna follow us to Qi? Because that would be a little tough, but it would be a lot of fun too.

Hallie (as Hopper)

No, I don't think...I don't think Lorraine's going to be...as *involved* anymore.

Kyle (as Jesse)

[A little disappointed.] Oh.

[A beat, and then with their usual enthusiasm.] Well, that's okay, that will happen soon, eventually. She'll probably come over around the same time Mauve and Mako will. That would be real funny, get in the way. Ah, anyways, I realize no one is driving the Ladybug. So I should go do that.

[The music stops.]

Hallie

[Laughs.]

Ari

Oh my God.

Kyle

And they run back up to the front seat of the, uh, vehicle.

Tom

[Flatly.] Fuck you Kyle!

[A mischievous little jingle begins to play again.]

Kyle

And they keep driving over the three-day drive to Qi, so, you've got a couple of days. Anything remarkable happen during this time? Probably the only exciting thing is as soon as Jesse leaves, Hop feels another pair of eyes on his neck, and it's Soe with just terrible bed head. So it mostly he actually sees Soe's eyes emerging from like, this bush of blue hair, just like being like,

Kyle (as Soe)

W-what did you think of it?

[The music stops again.]

Kyle

And we don't need to play that out. But that absolutely is what he's dealing with for a while.

Hallie

That feels legitimate.

Ari

Is, for clarification. So are we, are those three days, three days of us driving?

Kyle

Yeah. It's three days of travel. So like, you might stop at a certain point, you know, if Jesse—you're on an important mission, but if Jesse sees the world's biggest ball of yarn, they're gonna demand you stop and take pictures and lift up the beanie from the Ladybug, and put it on top, and take a picture of that, so you can be like, oh something happened along the way. It's kind of like when you walked to Charmonde. You're walking the whole time. But you also can stop and rest.

Ari

Well, in that case...so Misha is going to request if they could drive at points, because they kind of feel like...they don't know exactly why they know it, and they don't know why they liked it when they did, but they kind of really liked driving, and so they are requesting if they could do it. And also, it's kind of an excuse for them to be like, in their own thoughts.

Kyle

Yeah. Jesse is a little bit hesitant to give it up, actually, but ends up leaving and just distracts themselves with a million other things. You know, like a box of those games you take on trips?

Ari

Yep.

Kyle

They have just torn into it. They've played every bit of like, "I spy with my little eye,"

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except most of it is just plains. So it's just drit, and half the time they just forget what they're guessing. That they usually play when they're in the seat right next to you, but you get behind this vehicle.

And it--a normal person who drives vehicles would not be comfortable with something as weird as the Ladybug. Someone with a specialization would still have difficulty. You do not.

Ari

[Slightly nervously.] Okay. All right, that's fine.

[More confident.] Also, since I don't know if they would necessarily know the direction, I want, uh, I basically want Misha to become knowledgeable on, on where this place is, since I can tap once a session into the datasphere to become an expert on something.

Kyle

Okay, cool. I won't go through the whole showy thing we normally do.

Ari

No.

Kyle

It's kind of like how, you know, sometimes you skip the magical girl transformation sequence?

Ari

Yeah, I want Misha to be a GPS this session. So that's what Misha is.

[Laughter from the party.]

Kyle

[Cheery, upbeat, almost magical girl style music begins to play.]

So Ari and Misha get an ability where essentially, there's this datasphere. So the datasphere, imagine it like the internet, but it's the atmosphere all around you, and there are actually living things in it. There are three kinds of life. There's mechanical--robots, organic--people and then stratic, which is something that lives in the datasphere. And Misha can have limited communication with, uh, the datasphere, and pull in things to make them temporarily skilled. So Misha is now real good at GPSin'.

[The music stops.]

Ari

And in this case, they just opened Google Maps, but good.

Kyle

And they do it three days in a row! So they get very used to GPSin'.

Ari

Yeah.

Emily

So...so Elee's been thinking about what Mauve said to her. And so probably more than once, I feel like Jesse's probably been trading out driving with Misha more than Everett has?

Kyle

Honestly once Misha asks, Misha, Are you ever going to give up that driver's seat? Because you do not sleep.

Ari

Yeah. Uh. No.

[Laughter from the party.]

Kyle

Yeah. So, no, Jesse is in the back after, probably, I would guess the first half an hour.

Emily

So are Jesse and Everett together, or are there times where they're not?

Kyle

They sometimes are, and Everett doesn't seem to respond. Like, he perks up a little bit if Jesse does like,

Kyle (as Jesse)

I spy with my little eye...oh, Mauve and Mako! Oh, no, that's, that was a cloud.

[Distressed noises from the party.]

Kyle

And he kind of like, puts his head down a little bit more. But, so there are moments when they are separated.

Emily

So she's not ready to deal with the boundless energy of Jesse, but I'm gonna say probably two times so far, she's gonna look really determined and start to walk over to Everett. *[Laughing slightly.]* Like she's gonna ask him how he's doing, and then she's just gonna turn around and like, lose her nerve.

Kyle

And—

Emily

[Crosstalking.] She's been trying real hard to be a good protector for Mauve.

Kyle

And one time you do that, you just see yourself get covered in, in hair and then a pair of eyes poke out and it's like,

Kyle (as Soe)

[Slightly mysterious music with a maraca beat begins to play, a lively version of Soe's theme.]

Oh, what are you up to, Mom?

Emily

[Huffs out a laugh.]

Emily (as Elee)

Just pacing?

Kyle (as Soe)

Oh, okay. Well, there's not a whole lot of room for pacing here. But if you want, you could fly-pace!

Kyle

And she just holds up her hoverboard.

Kyle (as Soe)

I would have to teach you how to fly it. So really, I would be the one doing the fly-pacing, but you would be there too!

Emily (as Elee)

[Slightly awkward.] I'm good!

Kyle (as Soe)

Okay, maybe I should ask Everett to go fly-pacing. He didn't seem interested in when I first talked, but I've learned that when he doesn't seem interested in something, it means he's really interested in it.

Emily (as Elee)

[Trying to be encouraging.] Yeah, maybe you should.

[The music stops.]

Emily

She's just gonna walk away. But I do want to at some point actually approach Everett.

Kyle

Okay. A while later you approach Everett, and you can see that his hair is puffed up a little bit.

Emily

[Faint "aw!" noise.]

Kyle

As if wind has blown through it. And he's just kind of pouting down, and he has his foot on the rapier case that Mauve gave them.

Tom

[Pained noise.]

Emily

I'm gonna sit down next to him, just like flop, so that it's a loud noise and kind of startles him.

Emily (as Elee)

What's that?

Kyle

No response.

Emily

I'm going to reach over slowly and then...mess with his hair really quick and move my hand away.

Ari

[Sympathetically.] Hmm.

Emily (as Elee)

Your hair looks terrible.

Kyle (as Everett)

[Dismissive noise.]

Emily (as Elee)

It does. Don't scoff at me.

Kyle (as Everett)

Whatever. You're not my...

[Drawn out, like he knows what he's saying will get a rise out of Elee.] Mau...om.

[Shocked/startled noises from the party — a definite "oh no, he said that" vibe.]

Emily (as Elee)

[Clearly hurt.] Yeah, Everett. I'm not.

Tom

[Muffled, like he's covered his mouth with his hands.] Oh.

Emily (as Elee)

But you gotta talk to somebody.

Kyle (as Everett)

[Interrupting.] No I don't!

Emily (as Elee)

[Melancholic piano music begins to play.]

[Firmly.] Yes you do. Doesn't have to be me, but you can't shut down. We're stuck in this. We're on a chase, and an adventure, and bad things are happening. You can't shut down.

Kyle (as Everett)

[Annoyed, interrupting Elee again.] Yeah, I get it.

Kyle

[The music stops.]

And he stands up and he picks up the case, and he, uh, he walks over to the other side. You can't hear what happens, but you see Soe pick up her hoverboard and start clapping in excitement.

Emily

I want to yell loudly so that probably everyone can hear.

Emily (as Elee)

You can't fly away from your problems forever, Everett!

Kyle (as Jesse)

Actually, uh, Soe showed me a really cool book that was all about that! It was about an old man and he had a house full of balloons. And...well, I guess he didn't fly away from his problems after all.

Emily

[Aghast.] How dare you,

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Kyle Decker. How dare you!

Hallie

[Laughter.]

Tom

I am at a loss.

Kyle

All right. So we've talked about Hop and Elee and, uh, and Misha. Xoc, are you up to anything on this trip?

Tom

Yeah. Xoc...Xoc has been up to a bit. I think I can safely assume that Loell has not appeared since that day?

Kyle

Loell has not appeared.

Tom

[Sad, wistful piano music begins to play.]

That's what I thought. Xoc is hurting. He wishes that he said, or did something different, but he's doesn't shut down. He spends some of his time up near the front with Misha. He spends some time talking to Q-BO, like just, just chatting up Q-BO in the in the back. We took Q-BO, right? We didn't leave Q-BO alone in Fasten?

Emily

[Surprised laughter.] No!

Kyle

Yeah. Q-BO is with you. Q-BO was fine.

Tom

Okay. Alright.

Kyle

He's been playing like, you know 20 Questions? He's been playing that a lot with Jesse, and he does not seem to get tired of it, even though Jesse losses after three questions.

Everyone

[Upset noises.] Oh no!

Tom

Anyway the thing I wanna, I want to draw attention to is that, at some point during the journey, Xoc comes up to Hopper and asks,

Tom (as Xoc)

Hopper Scotch I...I've been meaning to ask you for a while now. Ever since we escaped from Charmonde, Misha has been calling you variations of the name Simon?

Ari

[Whispering, a little surprised and amused.] What are you doing!

Tom (as Xoc)

Do you know why?

Hallie (as Hopper)

[Startled.] Oh, um—

Hallie

[Strained but amused.] I'm furious.

Hallie (as Hopper)

Oh, well, um, I'm not exactly sure what happened. But I guess, um, I think when they rebooted in Charmonde after their temporary amnesia, they somehow found information in a database? Simon is my...is my birth name.

Tom (as Xoc)

[With understanding.] Oh! What do you like to be called then?

Hallie (as Hopper)

[A beat.]

Simon's fine.

Tom (as Xoc)

Only if you're sure, because you know, if...

[A simple, melancholy piano version of Hop's theme of begins to play.]

If you want to be Hopper Scotch then...then that can be a real name, if you want.

Hallie

At "Hopper Scotch can be your name if you want," Hopper will do a little, like, scoff to himself, and then he says,

Hallie (as Hopper)

Thanks Xoc, but it's okay. You know, I went by that name for a while, but it's not really mine to take.

Tom

[The music fades.]

And Xoc looks a little worried but he says,

Tom (as Xoc)

O-okay.

Tom

And he, and he leaves it at that.

Hallie

After Xoc leaves, Hopper slumps down and buries himself further in The Adventures of Captain Flyhook.

Tom

Our second cereal brand is, "Oops! Just Angst."

[Laughter from the party.]

I, I didn't mean for that to be as angsty as it was. But also I've been planning this for an entire arc.

Hallie

God.

Tom

And the context has changed so drastically with last session!

Ari

Would it be called, "Oops, I Angsted Again"?

[Laughter from the party.]

"Oops, I Did An Angst Again?"

I do have another thing that I think I want Misha to do at some point during the trip. If we, if we are having stops. At one point when we're having stops, if it's like, late at night and Misha is sure that people are sleeping, I want Misha to take out the clippy item that they have and ask them,

Ari (as Misha)

Uh, so, you said you could help me for any situation that we need. Correct?

Kyle (as Clippy)

[A springing noise.] How can I help you?

Ari (as Misha)

Well, this might be hard for your abilities, but could you help bring our friends who left the boat back safe?

[Pained gasps from the party.]

Kyle (as Clippy)

[Sad trombone noise.]

Sorry, I cannot do that. I am a paper clip! I can tell you about paper clips!

Ari

Misha is going to sigh and say,

Ari (as Misha)

Yeah, I thought as much.

[Driving, intense music begins to play, with kind of a western vibe.]

But I think there's a, there's something that might also be helpful.

Ari

And they are going to look at Hop sleeping.

Ari (as Misha)

Can you help me with it?

Ari

And then, only if you want, can we like cut at that and then like, later on I give Hopper the thing?

Hallie

Oh no.

Tom

What the fuck is happening?

Hallie

[Through laughter.] Oh, no.

[The music intensifies, revealing itself as a jazzy, MIDI-esque version of Britney Spears' iconic pop classic, Oops, I Did It Again.]

Kyle

[The music fades.]

Hello, and welcome to the announcement break for Quest Friends Episode 37, Crime and Courtship Part 2. I am Kyle, your GM, and our intro and outro song are "Friends" and "Hitoshio,"

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both by Miracle of Sound. I've got a very, very big announcement for you today. As of today, as of right now, Quest Friends has an official Quest Friends Patreon!

For those of you who aren't as familiar with what a Patreon is, it's a kind of subscription-based crowdfunding service where essentially you can pay a monthly fee in order to get more content from us. At the more affordable level, these benefits include things such as gameplay clips, monthly digital wallpapers of our official artwork, and access to my session notes after the session episodes have been released.

At the middle tier level, we have things such as monthly short stories starring side characters and main characters, and a monthly, small kind of digital e-magazine that includes things like the short story, annotated chat logs, and just other fun stuff. So like this month's you'll see has a crossword puzzle!

And if you've got a lot of money that you want to put towards the show or you want to combine your subscription with some of your friends, up at our highest level, our \$50 level, we have the option to get a once-a-year one-shot GM'd by one of us. In addition to the backer benefits available now, backing us on Patreon will also in the short-term just have the benefit of making the show a little bit more affordable for me to do, and then in the long term, hopefully free me up so I can focus on adding really substantial chunks of content.

As such, we've got some really fun goals that we want to do when we hit certain amounts of patrons. One of the ones I'm really excited about is that at our 50 patron level, so once we hit 50 subscribers on Patreon, we'll start doing a biweekly talk show where we just like, you know, shoot the shit, talk about our daily stuff, but then also provide our own thoughts and behind-the-scenes information on the episode, on the core episode that was just released the week before.

So if you're interested in supporting us on Patreon, you can check out us on patreon.com/QuestFriends. You can find the link below in this episode. And then also if you go onto our website QuestFriendsPodcast.com, there'll be a big Patreon button on the header. So again, that's patreon.com/QuestFriends.

We're going to be releasing the first month's worth of content for free! So not, uh, not everything, like obviously we can't release that \$50 one-shot for free, but some of the things that are going to appear on a more monthly basis. So those wallpapers, those gameplay clips, that e-magazine. We're going to be releasing those all for free over the course of this upcoming

week so that you have the opportunity to explore what benefits you'd be getting at each level, and you can choose the one that would really fit you best.

Alright, thank you so much for listening to that! A reminder that if you're interested in being part of the show, you can tweet or Tumblr out about us using the hashtag #QuestFriends, and you'll be added to a name pool that I use for items, locations, and characters. Our named pool participant for today is Meeghan who is named for Megan, or thegeekynarhwal on Tumblr.

[The music slowly fades in again.]

Alright, that's all I've got for you today. I hope you enjoy the rest of the episode, and I will be back in two weeks on Monday, May 27th with our next episode, Crime and Courtship Part 3.

I will see you then.

[The music intensifies.]

Kyle

So you drive for three days to Qi, and the closer you get the more vehicles you start to see clumped together. Over time, this disorganized mass of travelers turns into intentional rows, and eventually you're just a single line of cars and traveling feet that lead towards an exquisite skyline perfectly lit against the morning sun. You have made it to Qi, and you are *[Sing-song.]* already in line.

[Trumpet fanfare.]

But this line does move quickly, unlike most lines do.

[Whimsical ragtime piano music begins to play — the kind of fast-paced tune you might expect from a silent comedy film.]

And soon enough, you just find yourself moving through a passageway cut through the city. Above you, rows of identical species walk along dozens of overlapping walkways with such an *efficiency*. It almost seems like a slightly vibrating image, you know, like if a tire moves fast enough, it just looks like it's still in place? Dirigibles and balloon-armed citizens fly in a choreographed dance, scuttling all around the walkways.

And to your left and right, marsupials armed with lace scuttle across plastic plants, tying them back into the mathematically perfect position. And before you can even take these in, you're parked in front of the tallest tower in Qi, a spire with hundreds of rotating arms reaching across the entire city, and before you can register that, the ground is gone and you're in the one of the arms, dozens of feet in the air and rising until—

[The music stops abruptly.]

Ya stop.

[A buzzing electrical noise.]

A sign in front of you flashes with the words "Visitor Inspection" and you are

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granted a second to breathe.

[Another upbeat rangtime piano tune begins.]

And then, after you take that second, Xoc, you notice, perched on your right, with a blinking ear tag and a notepad in their arms, a scrat looking straight at you.

Tom

[Startled laughter.]

Kyle (as Steve the scrat)

[In an unnaturally high and fast voice.]

Hi, welcome to Qi, I'm Steve, I'm your inspector today. I'm gonna ask you just a few questions to go through, just to quickly do the inspection, and make sure you're a good person to come into our city. Okay?

Kyle

And it just starts almost blinking around, as if by magic, around your boat.

Kyle (as Steve)

Is your hair always like that? What is this staff made of? Is it glass, or is it tree? Hmm, your car is in different colors. Is that intentional? Is that a-a flavor thing? Because we don't like a whole lot of unique colors here. Oh, that's interesting. Your hair is blue. That's another point against colorfulness, we kinda got a color scheme going on here. Okay, and then over here, this right here. What is—

[The piano music abruptly stops with a loud thud.]

Kyle

And Everett just slams his foot down on the rapier-sized box, and glares down at the scrat.

Ari

[Quietly, with anticipation.] Oh my god.

Kyle

Which just stares up at him, and without looking away, just slowly check marks a box on their thing. And the scrat named Steve turns around and he's like,

Kyle (as Steve)

Alright, well. I guess I just have one last question for you. What is your business in Qi?

Tom (as Xoc)

[Slowly, uncertain.] Ah, w-well, we are coming to see a friend.

Kyle (as Steve)

Oh, that friend?

Kyle

And they pull out a binder of all the citizens of Qi.

[Groans from the party.]

Hallie

God.

Kyle (as Steve)

Alright, so what is that friend's name? Does it start with an A, a B, a D, an E?

Emily (as Elee)

P. For...Professor.

[Barely restrained laughter from the party.]

Kyle

He'll be like,

Kyle (as Steve)

Professor, professor, professor, professor, professor. Are you looking for Professor Goldstone? Professor Frankmanning? Professor—

Hallie

Do we actually know the professor's name? And did I just forget it?

Kyle

No, you just know "The Professor."

[Laughter from the party.]

Hallie

Okay.

Ari

Yeah, so Misha, Misha was going to say,

Ari (as Misha)

Uh, I believe the first part of their nomenclature is "the."

[Laughter from the party.]

The Professor.

Kyle (as Steve)

Okay, that would be in the T's because we as a city understand that you always wanna start with the first letter. That just seems logical and more efficient.

Kyle

And they flip over to the Ts.

Kyle (as Steve)

The, the, the, the, the. The Professor. Nope. No results of people. However, there's a very interesting brick, if you would like to read it.

Hallie (as Hopper)

Uh, can we just go on in and...we think, she's at the University of Qi. We're going to go to the University of Qi.

Kyle (as Steve)

[High pitched laughter.]

Just go...just going. No you, no, you need to have a purpose.

Hallie (as Hopper)

Uh—

Kyle (as Steve)

What are you doing here in Qi?

Hallie

To himself, Hopper whispers,

Hallie (as Hopper)

It's gotten so much worse.

[Laughter from the party.]

Ari

So I have a question.

Kyle

Yes.

Ari

So I have an ability, but I don't know if it will work. Probably will, like what is, a scrat is like a, it is actually a creature. Right? It's not like a hologram or anything like that.

Kyle

Yeah. It is a squirrel rat, which we call a scrat—

Kyle

Which we realized back in like, episode five, is why they named Scrat from Ice Age that, and I'm still not over it

Tom

[Laughs.]

Ari

Same. Okay, perfect because I do have an ability called implant suggestion, where I can implant a suggestion in the mind of a creature within immediate range. So if you allow me to use this thing, I might implant the suggestion that it allows us to go to the University of Qi without...you know.

Kyle

Okay. What...give me the specific suggestion you want to implant.

Ari

Um, yeah, so the suggestion is that it allows us to go to the University of Qi to look for the professor.

Kyle

Okay. Um, give me a roll.

Ari

Okay. I am going to use two levels of effort because I am good at intellect stuff. *[Dice roll.]* 16.

Kyle

16?

Ari

Mm-hmm.

Kyle

[A humming, resonating song begins; it has the fluctuation hum of a piece of running machinery and a low steady drumbeat.]

Alright, your mind does the thing it does with the Google search, where you go in and you type words into Google, except this time you can feel the datasphere kind of loop around and into the mind of the scrat.

Ari

Oh my God.

Kyle

And it almost pulls up like a Google Word document filled with this line of text. And it's hard to catch, because this thing is thinking so fast that you can't, like, you can't catch up. But eventually, you're able to just slip in the few words. "But yeah, it's no problem, dude. I'll totally let you in to see your friend, The Professor."

And then it automatically keeps typing and you say, "Here, have this informational brick."

Ari

[Quietly, amused.] Oh my god.

Kyle

And as this happens, it pipes up

Kyle (as Steve)

Yeah, and I just think you need—

[A noise like the sound of a computer rebooting after a power surge.]

Yeah, no, totally. You bros can go see your friend, The Professor. Here, have this informational brick.

Kyle

And it picks up a brick and it just throws it at you, and it conks Everett in the head.

Tom

[Trying not to laugh.] Oh my God.

Ari

Oh no...

Kyle

And just hits the ground with a thud.

Tom

Not our sweet boy!

Kyle

And, uh, the scrat, before you can even register what happened, is just gone

Hallie

Hopper is *very* confused, and says,

Hallie (as Hopper)

It's—what just happened

Tom

Xoc just shrugs.

Kyle

[Slightly slower, more peaceful ragtime piano music begins to play.]

As you say this, the arm—as it's like, what's going on, you start to shake as the platform you're on is picked up by another arm of the spire, which moves you across the city and drops you on a walkway ten stories tall. As your vehicle is carried along the slowly moving walkway, you're able to finally get a good fucking

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look at your surroundings, and you're also able to look at this informational brick that is on the ground, which is just a brick. It is just a brick, but it is just a brick.

Hallie

[Confused.] Is there any information written on it?

Kyle

No! There is not. You're able to glean things looking around though. Things are, as I said, generously slower. You can still feel the relentless efficiency of the city, with dirigibles racing across the skyline at a pace they should not be able to take. But luckily, you're surrounded not by the citizens of Qi, but by other visitors, who are quizzically looking at the odd rules of this relentlessly efficient city, such as how every path is a one-way, and how vehicles can only take right turns.

Tom

[Strained laughter.] Nooo.

Hallie

[Frustrated.] I hate it so much.

Kyle

There are citizens here as well, but as you seem to be planted in kind of the shopping district, they're relaxing as best as someone from Qi can. And even though you've only been here for about thirty seconds, you know that that's not that easy. In the distance, you can see the port, a collection of spires where the Prodigious is set to take off.

Hallie

It's at noon today, so we have to get on the Prodigious. I mean, Hop, he'll just,

Hallie (as Hopper)

Alright. We gotta head toward the Prodigious, I guess. The easiest way's this way.

Hallie

He knows how to get there.

Emily

Elee notices this.

Ari

Yeah, Misha also notices this. Actually, no they don't.

Tom

Xoc also just takes this in stride like yeah, of course Hopper Scotch would know where things are.

Ari

Yeah, Misha doesn't notice. I as a charac—I as a person notice.

Kyle

I assuming Misha's driving and Hopper's directing?

Ari

Yes. Misha is always driving, unless, unless someone explicitly says otherwise now.

Kyle

Elee is helping Soe, who is trying her hardest to understand this brick. She is determined to figure out the secrets inside.

[Laughter from the party.]

And Xoc, you're able to actually kind of get a look at the, at the city. It's weird, it's kind of shopping as people do. Lines of people come in with shins, super excited to pay, and lines of people come out with their perfect pristine product.

Although it is weird, because everyone seems to be coming out with the exact same product, and you see a slightly different colored one getting thrown in the trash as they leave.

Tom

[Shuddering, slightly nervous groan.]

Kyle

Uh, and these people are so focused on what they're doing, they don't seem to pay any attention to the things around them.

[Another upbeat song begins to play, a more whimsical and playful accordion tune.]

In fact, you see a bunch of them just barely walking over, or just accidentally kicking into this small shape of a tiny little backpacked robot lying on the ground. He seems to have fallen, and no one notices or no one cares.

Tom

Xoc is going to—we're still in the, in the Ladybug right now, right?

Kyle

Yeah.

Tom

Xoc'll actually like, in flagrant disregard for all safety, just open up the door to the Ladybug and hop on out to rush over to this, this little machine.

Kyle

Bold of you to assume that the Ladybug has doors.

[Laughter from the party.]

It is a flap you open up, my good sir.

Emily

Nooo! Oh, Jesse. Oh, Jesse, why.

Hallie

[Through laughter.] I love it so much.

Tom

Alright, so Xoc runs over to this poor little machine, and is like, trying to use the telepathic connection.

Tom (as Xoc)

Are you okay? Are you active, are you alright?

Kyle

You just hear like, you know when you try to start your car, and it's just like, *[Faint clicking noises of a car starter failing to turn over.]* You just hear some clicking, that's all you hear.

Tom

That was the most horrifying version of a car starting sound I've ever heard.

[Laughter from the party.]

I just wanted to say that as an aside. And so Xoc is going to like, shoo away the people stepping on this poor child, and scoop them up and just like, carry them back to the Ladybug.

Tom (as Xoc)

[Anxious.] This little machine needs help. I think they've been damaged? We need to get some repairs done. Nobody was helping them.

Hallie (as Hopper)

Do you have the tools for that?

Tom (as Xoc)

[Through laughter.] Do I have the tools for that?

Tom

Xoc just dumps like, a bag of tools and parts, along with like a canister of spray metal and everything.

Hallie (as Hopper)

[Flatly.] In retrospect, it was a silly question.

Kyle

And you get to work, except you don't, because I have a GM intrusion for you. Who do you want to give the other point to?

Tom

Oh, Jesus Christ. I don't even know. I want to give the other point to Misha, if only because Misha had some really cool shit during the chase in what would have been last episode I think.

Ari

[Delighted.] Ooh! I get back my XP that I spent today!

Tom

[Ominously.] The hoarding continues.

Kyle

So as you sit down to do that, you feel a very hot light on your back from the open flap.

[Eerie, quiet music begins to play—it's not a theremin but has the same kind of unsettling ambiance.]

I'm just gonna call it a door. From the open door of the Ladybug, and you hear this organic mechanical sound.

[There's noise that sounds like a cross between a beep and something squishing. The music intensifies with a low bass rhythm.]

And you see, with its six tentacle arms grabbed on the open door, a six-foot high squid covered by a patchwork of wires and metal plates with liquid oozing out from the gaps. These plates all converge at its collar, where a ring of eyes rotate around wet, pale, exposed flesh.

Ari

[Unnerved.] Oh my god.

Tom

[Another shuddering, nervous noise.]

Kyle (as the mechanical squid)

[Low, unsettling noises—they definitely sound mechanical, but still weirdly squishy.]

Hallie (as Hopper)

[Uncertain.] Uh, hello. Can we help you?

Hallie

I will if no one else is doing anything.

Ari

Yeah Misha's gonna also do it.

Ari (as Misha)

How can we help?

Kyle

Cool. Everyone

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roll speed defense.

Hallie

[Faintly.] No.

Ari

[Reluctantly.] Well, that's a thing that we do.

Hallie

I'm going to use a different die.

Tom

Wait, wait, wait, hold on a second as of tier four, part of my focus gives me, um, makes me skilled in attack and defense against automatons and intelligent machines.

[Haunting choral music, Xoc's magic theme, begins to play.]

There are two reasons for it, because Xoc on the one hand, is very concerned that someone is out for Misha, ah, and is generally worried that the Jagged Dream can control machines, among other things. And he recognizes that he may have to fight machines in the near future, and he has more knowledge of them than most of the other members of the party.

But also he's, as he's built up his power and modified his own brain box spell book thingy, his, his like normal telepathic abilities have also become stronger, and he has a sort of low level feel now. It's not like anything he could read minds with, but it's more like a Spider-sense almost. But he can like, sense something coming just a split second before it happens. So that, that gives them that little extra edge when fighting machines.

[A pause. The music stops.]

Uh, but this is an automaton, isn't it?

Kyle

Nope.

Tom

It doesn't count?

Kyle

It does not count.

Tom

It doesn't count? That's bullshit. Alright, let me...

Ari

Hear me... *[Dice roll.]* Roll!

Hallie

Maybe if I roll on the other side of my floor.

Tom

I rolled a ten.

Ari

I rolled a one.

Hallie

Oh, no, you never roll ones!

Ari

I know!

Tom

Misha no...Misha Jarviiiis!

Hallie

I rolled a fifteen.

Kyle

Okay, and Elee does not have to roll because Elee did not do anything.

Emily

Oh, okay, cool. Well, I rolled and got a fourteen. It's fine.

Kyle

So, all of you get hit with ten points of might damage.

Hallie

Ow!

Tom

[Shocked.] Excuse me?!

Kyle

As these tentacle arms slam you into the sides of the Ladybug and pin you against the wall, as like, the ooze starts to drip around you. As an arm reaches down and grabs the little robot and pulls it out of the vehicle.

Emily

Can I try to stop it?

Kyle

Uh, yeah, you can try to do something.

Ari

Ooh!

Emily

It's just gonna hurt me, isn't it? You know what? No, I'm going to do it anyway.

Hallie

[Laughs.]

Emily

I would like to...you know, I want to try to like claw it out. *[Dice roll.]* Fifteen.

Kyle

[As Kyle speaks, there's an intense, angry hissing noise—like air pressure being let quickly out of a punctured tire.] You claw through one of its arms and it screams in pain, and the robot is dropped and you hear it say,

Kyle (as the mechanical squid)

[Frustrated, low beep-squish noise.]

Kyle

And you see this like, canister come out and just start—

[There's a hissing noise as gas is released into the Ladybug. A slow, steady, but intense techno beat begins to play.]

Hallie

[Panicked.] Oh, no. Oh no no no.

Tom

Can I activate countermeasures?

Emily

[Incredulous.] On the tear gas?

Tom

Uh, like could I at least keep the can, the tear gas canister from opening?

Kyle

Uh, yeah. It—

[The hissing continues.]

And it lets go of all of you and its arm starts spinning.

Ari

Whoa, whoa.

Kyle

And then suddenly, you hear a voice from outside say,

Kyle (as a voice outside)

My shins were taken! I need your help.

Kyle

And suddenly none of you can see each other. You're all invisible.

Ari

[Startled.] What?

Kyle

And you see, you see its eyes all assemble to its top, and it just stares, and then it turns over and looks at this bipedal fish person.

[A much more cheerful tune with a low horn line begins to play.]

They're a visitant called a varjellen. They have this salmon-colored skin that glistens in the moonlight, and a large fin that goes from the front of their head down the back of their neck. Their mouth is a line drawn from cheek to cheek, and uh, when they talk it opens up and down almost like a puppet. And they're like,

Kyle (as a voice outside/the varjellen)

Yeah. It just was over there. You should go check it out.

Kyle

And the Zhev kind of looks at her, and this fish, this fish woman, you don't know if it's sweat or just her skin, but she is glistening harder and then it eventually disappears. And it flies away, and with that all of you become visible again, and this fish visitant looks through and is like,

Kyle (as the varjellen)

Oh, hey everyone, is everyone okay?

Hallie (as Hopper)

Uh—

Tom (as Xoc)

[Bewildered.] What just happened?

Kyle (as the varjellen/Meeghan)

Oh that was just a Zhev. They're the police force here, but they're not very good at their job.

[Booming laughter.] That was a little bit of a joke. My name's Meeghan!

Kyle

And she extends a scaly hand to you to shake.

Tom

[Slowly, uncertain.] Xoc will hesitantly reach out and shake the hand.

Ari

Misha will do so as well.

Hallie

Hopper will also do so.

Kyle

[Chuckles.]

Kyle (as Meeghan)

Well, it's great to meet all of you.

Kyle

And before you answer, Hop, you get a memory. The second Meeghan says "a Zhev," you recognize, oh, yeah. That was a Zhev. Of course.

Hallie

[An eerie tune begins to play, with the undercurrent of something electric underneath it—the hum of machinery.]

I was gonna ask if I knew what it was, but I didn't wanna like, interrupt the flow.

Kyle

Yeah. So the Zhev are a, uh, a police force in Qi.

Hallie

Okay.

Kyle

The reason I told Tom that it wasn't a machine is because they're actually organic creatures, but they've been covered by a patchwork of, uh, of metal and wires that presumably help them do their job better. They're basically squids with weird armor. No one knows why they were made. We don't know if they were found, if they were created, the story changes every time.

Everyone knows they originated in a location a little bit away from Qi called Zhev Garden, but again, no story is really consistent. Uh, the one thing we do know is that Qi, as a, just a defensive powerhouse, has

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kind of really, really embraced the Zhev, been like, hey, look at this amazing thing that we have. And the Zhev of really become kind of the face of Qi.

[The music fades out.]

Hallie

Okay. Uh, in that case after shaking Meeghan's hand, Hop will say,

Hallie (as Hopper)

[Startled.] Thank you for that. Do the Zhev just do that now? I don't think that—they were never like that before.

Kyle (as Meeghan)

I wouldn't know. I didn't have a whole lot of information on my brick. I just heard that if, uh, you get on the wrong side of them...they can't attack what they can't see, right? *[Laughter.]* So I just turned invisible.

Hallie (as Hopper)

How did you do that?

Tom (as Xoc)

Are you a nano?

Kyle (as Meeghan)

Yeah, I'm a nano! I hear, I hear poems and I use them to make songs, and then sometimes I turn things invisible, but you know.

Kyle

I can't think of words.

Hallie

[Laughter.]

Hallie (as Hopper)

Well, okay, it was very helpful. Thank you.

Kyle (as Meeghan)

No, not a problem at all! I just got here because I'm gonna go on the Prodigious for the University of Qi!

Hallie (as Hopper)

Oh, well, that's great.

[An awkward pause.]

Kyle (as Meeghan)

Have a good day.

Hallie (as Hopper)

Uh, you said you, you were on your way to the to the Prodigious?

Kyle

And she stops and she turns around. She's like,

Kyle (as Meeghan)

Yeah, I'm going on the Prodigious. It's the best education you can find. It'll get you into the exact career you want!

Hallie

Uhh, one of those things is true.

[Laughter from the party.]

Hallie (as Hopper)

I'm Simon. This is Xoc, Misha, Elee, Jesse, Everett and Q-BO, and unidentified small robot.

Tom

And Soe.

Hallie

And Soe! Damn it. I was like, I am forgetting someone. He'll just gesture and then say,

Hallie (as Hopper)

You said you were new in Qi? We are actually also going to the Prodigious, if you want to come along. If you want a ride.

Kyle (as Meeghan)

Yeah, that would be great! Let me just grab my things.

Kyle

And you see her reach down, and she just picks up a large tuba and throws it into the boat and climbs in. You make your way across the spires, across multiple walkways.

[Dramatic, inspiring orchestra music begins to swell—the kind of music you might hear in a travel ad.]

And up to the multiple congealed spires that make the port, where you can find the mile-wide luxury airship the Prodigious. And this airship oozes class. Multiple lines color its side in black-and-white, these colors offset by balconies scattered across the ship's side. But all of these are shaded from the weather by a wide crimson umbrella laying over the airship's top.

On the top of the umbrella, a datasphere relay sends out a mighty purr, and a careful listener might even notice the whirring of dozens of mechanical components dutifully maintaining every single detail. This is not a ship. The Prodigious is a clear sign of Qi's opulence and its military

might. And in front of this, uh, ship, excited students line a walkway up onto the captain's gondola.

Alright. So you drive your car up, the car is put on its own like, pathway, the—well, it's not a car, it's the Ladybug is set on this walkway that will move it up and put it in the vehicle cabin. And you can see all the workers just kind of giving it a weird, a weird look.

Hallie

[Quietly, amused.] As you do.

Kyle

But they let it pass, and you're kind of just waiting in line for the Prodigious with Meeghan. And Meeghan is just really excited.

[Long, random discordant tuba noises play in the background.]

She's got her tuba, she's tuning it. You cannot tune a tuba, but she can.

Hallie

Good for Meeghan.

Kyle

Around her, you see some people kind of get like, a little bit distracted and upset by it. You see a blond-haired bro with a monocle and a polo shirt.

[Snickering from the party.]

To his right, an individual with pressed silver hair and a matching sweater vest just sits there with their arms crossed, but you can see they're tapping their foot along. Behind you, you see an older man with black hair and a frizzy blond mustache just looking very intrigued and writing a little note into his hand. Uh, and then just all around you, you see this pack of aneens with matching ear tags have kind of just given you a wide berth.

[The tuba noises finally end.]

So they're all waiting in line. You see a ship, a few ships go through, and everyone slowly goes through and Meeghan goes through, and she says her name.

Kyle (as Meeghan)

Meeghan Fishwife!

Emily

[Loud, incredulous laughter.]

Kyle

And she uh, pulls out this, uh, ID and scans it in. I did not have a last name for her. And she pulls out an ID card and gets it scanned and walks through, and you are all up.

Hallie

I was just about to ask, but I was too afraid that maybe you just hadn't thought of it. We don't have tickets or anything to get on this boat. Right?

Kyle

Nope.

Hallie

[Pained.] Oh, no.

[More confident.] Okay. It's a scanner? Is there a person manning the scanner, or are you just supposed to scan things?

Kyle

Uh, there are...

[Quietly.] What's a good animal for a scanner.

[Normal voice.] There are a bunch of the equivalent of cats.

Hallie

[Whispering.] Dammit.

Kyle

Just walking across the keypads.

Hallie

[Louder, more annoyed.] Dammit!

Kyle

Working the scanners, and they also all have the ear tags.

Hallie

Okay. I was going to just use machine control implant—

Ari

[Long, shrill, delighted squeal.]

[Laughter from the party.]

Hallie

[Crosstalking.] To let us pass. But there are cats now!

Emily

But there are cats now.

Kyle

And you have not heard these cats speak, but they look very cross.

Ari

But they are not machines. Okay, they're just cats. Okay.

Kyle

No, there they are--they are organic.

Tom

I was thinking of trying to use charm machine to give

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us a 50% chance of the scanner letting us through.

Ari

I was going to use overload.

Kyle

I mean admittedly, you don't know whether or not the cats are actually running anything.

[A pause.]

It's me, so they probably are, but you don't know that for sure.

Emily

[Hesitant.] I have an idea,

Hallie

Please, please.

Emily

It's not going to help us get through but it can start the process of...

Hallie

Okay, I'm open to suggestions.

Emily

I would like to put one hand on, um, Soe's shoulder, and then one hand like, kind of behind the general group and say,

Emily (as Elee)

Elee Badge. I'm here to drop off my children.

Hallie

[Laugh.]

Kyle

And the cat looks at you and it just motions, and it walks across the keypad, and the keypad says,

Kyle (as the scanner)

Please showcase ID.

Emily (as Elee)

We don't have IDs.

Kyle (as the scanner)

Get lost, loser.

Tom

[Hesitantly, testing it out.] We need to pick up our IDs. We were told that we had to come here to pick up that identification?

Kyle

Um, give me a role for persuasion.

Tom

Yes. Certainly.

[Dice roll.]

I think this die might be a cross with me because this is...

Ari

[Crosstalking.] Oh my God.

Tom

Like the second or third three that I've rolled on this die tonight.

Hallie

[Sounding vindicated.] It sucks. Doesn't it?

Kyle

[Crosstalking.] So—

Emily

Can I go jump in?

Kyle

Nope! The die is rolled.

Tom

Also, I have an inability in this, in this as well. So I rolled a zero equivalent.

Kyle

So I'm going to say because I was going to do a GM intrusion here, you can jump in after the fact.

Emily

Okay.

Kyle

Because like, normally I'd be like, oh, yeah, you can do it as an asset, but there's nothing saving this.

Hallie

[Laughter.]

Emily

No.

Kyle

Uh, so as we do that, you see the Ladybug go through the scanner. You hear a beeping, and then the pathway just stops, tilts itself up, and the Ladybug slides back down the platform.

Hallie

No!

Tom

Oh nooooo.

Ari

No.

Kyle

And the robotic voice says,

Kyle (as the scanner)

Contraband! Contraband detected! Contraband! Dozens of books! Young adults books, the worst contraband!

Tom

Noooo.

Hallie

Hopper groans out loud just like,

Hallie (as Hopper)

[Angry, frustrated groan.]

Hallie

Like he's so frustrated.

Kyle

And at that point you see eight bricks launched into the air and almost start to fall on your head.

Do any of you dodge?

Tom

[Confused.] Y-yes? We would like to dodge?

Hallie

I will attempt to.

Ari

Yeah, I'll attempt to do that.

Kyle

Okay, everyone who wants to dodge, roll?

Ari

Well, why wouldn't we attempt to dodge!

[Dice roll.]

Hallie

[Laughing.] Who's like, I want to be nailed in the face by a brick.

Ari

I rolled a twenty! I did that.

Tom

[Forlorn.] I rolled a two.

Ari

Ohhh!

Hallie

[Dice roll.] Twelve.

Emily

I'm just focused on pulling Soe, Everett, and Jesse out of the way as well as I can.

Tom

Oh god.

Emily

Whoa! A nineteen!

Kyle

So Elee pulls everyone out of the way.

Ari

Excuse me. I pulled myself out of the way! I rolled a twenty, don't!

Kyle

Sorry, I was talking about Elee pulls the children out of the way. The children except for Hopper. Well, except for the rest of you. Like the, the NPC children. The NP children.

Ari

Okay. Okay.

Tom

The children specifically for NPCs.

Kyle

Yes, the non-player children.

Ari

Okay.

Kyle

Um, she pulls them out of the way. Misha steps out of the way. And Elee, you get conked on the head by this brick, and suddenly when you do you realize oh, all books are outlawed here, and you will get severely punished, probably—no, you will get definitely expelled if you're caught with books. In place of books, you can purchase your Qi approved Brick by any approved vendor such as...

And it lists a bunch of names, and the only one you recognize is Penny and Pocket. Out of character, Hop has a book. He has the atlas. Xoc has a book. He has the, um.

Tom

Sir Arthur's Guide?

Kyle

Sir Arthur's, and Soe has many, many books.

Hallie

Hopper's like rubbing his forehead. He's like,

Hallie (as Hopper)

Alright. Alright. We gotta, we got to do some restocking here. We got to do some reorganization.

Kyle

And Hallie, just to make sure, this happens even though you do not get hit by a brick.

Hallie

Yeah. This happens, even though Hopper was not hit by a brick, but he is like,

Hallie (as Hopper)

[Whispering.] I forgot about the books. It's all about the books.

Emily

[Laughter.] Elee like, leans in uncomfortably close, in trying to be like a really intimidating way, to Hop.

Hallie (as Hopper)

[Strained.] Okay.

Emily (as Elee)

[Not asking so much as demanding.] What do we do now. You know this place.

Hallie (as Hopper)

Um, okay. Yeah that, you know, that's, that's fair. But first what I suggest that we do is go get book jackets, and then just put the pre-approved book jackets over the books. It works sometimes.

Hallie

Unless Kyle you don't want that. That was just the first thing I thought of.

Kyle

There aren't book jackets, there are brick. There are brick jackets.

Hallie (as Hopper)

Then scratch that, Hopper will say we'll sneak them in in a brick jacket.

Emily (as Elee)

Well, I'm more concerned about what we're doing at this particular moment holding up the line.

Hallie (as Hopper)

Uh, um.

Hallie

Can we leave and come back?

Kyle

Yeah. Okay. In fact everyone give me a perception roll.

[Dice roll.]

Ari

Fourteen.

Tom

A sixteen.

Hallie

I got six.

[00:50:00]

[A pause.]

Again.

Emily

Eight, but I'm good at perceiving.

Kyle

So, who rolled above—

Hallie

Wait! I am also trained in perceiving.

Kyle

Who rolled above ten?

Ari and Tom

Me.

Hallie

I rolled a six but I am trained in perceptions. That would lower the role.

Kyle

Okay, cool. That means shit. You were, it's still not above ten.

Hallie

[Frustrated.] Okay!

Kyle

[Laughs.]

Emily

Well, what about me? What about me?

Kyle

Yeah, Emily's fine.

Emily

Sorry.

Hallie

What?

Kyle

'cause Emily rolled an eight, and that's above ten with her skill.

Hallie

It, no. The way you phrased it upsets me. Eight is over ten! And I was sitting here like no, it's not!

[Laughter from the party.]

Ari

I know, I also for a second I was like, what?

Kyle

Anyways, so everyone except for Hop, who is very distracted somehow.

Hallie

He's distraught.

Kyle

Turns over and you see a line of shops outside, and you recognize one of the places you can get the approved bricks, and potentially the IDs, is Penny and Pocket where you normally do your shopping. And sure enough, kind of on the, the, uh, on the bay line on the edge of these spires, you see the familiar, small, star-studded tenth of the three Penny brothers and their store, Penny in Pocket.

Emily

I want to turn back to the cat and say,

Emily (as Elee)

I will be back, but I want you to know that I will not stand for the way you have been treating my children. I don't know if you've ever heard of a law suit? Or perhaps, a law *tux*--

Kyle (as cat)

[Angry hissing.]

Emily (as Elee)

--but I will be taking this up with my friends in higher places.

Kyle

Cats are very—you don't want to mess with a cat in court, man. You do not mess with a cat in court.

[Laughter from the party.]

Hallie

They have pawsible deniability. You can't touch 'em.

[Everyone laughing harder.]

Emily

[Delighted shriek.]

Ari

Oh my God, Hallie. Why?

Kyle

Alright.

Emily

I love it.

Tom

[Groans.] No. Noo.

Kyle

So do you go to Penny and Pocket?

Tom

[Poutily.] Yes, we do.

Kyle

And as you walk back Elee, uh, you're kind of trailing behind, making sure everyone is safe, staring at the cats. And as you walk, you feel a hand delicately brush against yours. And as you turn over, you see that this long elegant hand is covered by arm-long gloves that rise up--

[The faint introductory strains of the closing theme, "Hitoshio" by Miracle of Sound, begin.]

--to this woman wearing a beautiful professional green suit and very, very high heels, and she walks forward and her right hand lifts up her ID and scans the card in. And you just hear the ID say,

Kyle (as the scanner)

Professor Vera Layeni. Welcome to the Prodigious!

Emily (as Elee)

[Stunned.] Holy shit!

[Ending theme intensifies and fades.]

Kyle

And this is where I put in the weird. organic mechanical sounds like where— *[Kyle makes squishy mechanical noises.]*

[Episode ends - 00:53:02]