

The Adventure Zone: Ethersea – Episode 31

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Griffin: Previously on The Adventure Zone Ethersea:

[“The Adventure Zone: Ethersea Theme” music plays]

Devo: Cambria? We don’t have to do this.

Cambria: I’ve overstayed my welcome, haven’t I?

Travis: “Begin at one end of the bubble, and work towards the temple.”

Griffin: Kodeira says,

Kodeira: Are you... are you clear of the blast radius?

Cambria: Your city. I pray for its survival.

Griffin: The phytoplankton saves, the glass sphere does not. And it shatters, and like the flash dance music video, a bunch of water falls down, onto Zoox.

You see the last missile hit the temple of Cambria.

Outside of the Cradle, up in the Ballast, hundreds of people have gathered... And attached to that airlock at the end of a long tunnel, is the flagship of the Arc Fleet. When the airlock doors open, the people behind them, they see... the citizens of the Founders’ Wake, and see their new dramatic transformations. And it does not break their stride, as the two communities, these distant relations, rush into an embrace.

[Ethersea Theme music plays out]

Travis: [silly fantasy voice] A new day has dawned! Under the sea!

Griffin: Uh, it’s more like a new—

Travis: King Triton smiles upon us!

Justin: That's not part of it. Certainly not part of it.

Griffin: Well, Justin, actually, I've been... I bounced some of my notes off Travis, so he does know that it is gonna be sort of a Little Mermaid... OC...

Travis: Fuck yeah.

Justin: Okay.

Griffin: With my own sort of characters... King Triton—

Travis: Aw man, we're gonna get, like... OC characters in here? Got Ryan...

Griffin: Yeah. It's gonna— Ryan and Seth, but they're merfolk, and, um...

Travis: Hell yeah!

Griffin: Fuck, actually, hold on, let me write all this down.

Justin: Yeah... [mumbles approvingly]

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: Rachel, cut all this out, 'cause this is— this is our next magnum opus. Um. It's actually, it's a new—

Travis: Under the OC.

Griffin: ...Yeah, I mean, they did that... I mean, that was the name of several of their formal dances, at the high school that they went to.

Justin: [chuckles]

Travis: Ohhh, that's fair, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Griffin: Uh. It's actually a new month. It's been, it's been about a month, since the events, the encounter with Cambria. And the city is... back up and running. For certain. After the fallow.

Travis: How's it smell around? Is there like a new smell now; we got better, newer phytoplankton?

Griffin: Oh, it's like, way fresher. It's way fresher. Yeah. Now you're not sort of smelling the smell of— I think it was five big phytoplankton? Now it's a bunch of little ones. And there's just more sort of like... you know... there's a more— a variety, to the smells, that are coming through.

Travis: Oh, yeah...

Justin: Nice.

Griffin: I would say—

Travis: Deeper notes.

Griffin: Yeah. And it's— it's more effective. I think e— where it hits the most is in Joshy's Knuckle. You definitely still get that, like, um... like, spicy food stall smell, but it's not stagnant. Things are— people are more energized than you have seen them, in years. And just kind of the vibe of the city has changed, as folks have also become sort of accustomed to their new... uh... you know, fish features.

[“Neptune's Diner” by Griffin McElroy begins playing]

You three are... in the Gills, making your way toward the Bluespan Brokerage, for yet another gig.

Travis: Griffin, I have a question.

Griffin: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Travis: Have we experienced any kind of, like, notoriety? As the people who, like, restored the phytoplankton, and kinda saved everybody's butts?

Griffin: I mean, certainly among the people in the know, in the city—

Clint: The hoi polloi?

Griffin: The hoi polloi, right, like the Ballasters know, know who you are. The people who are like... connected enough with the... political workings of the city, definitely know what you did. And so, like, you have gotten recognition there. I don't know that every other person in Founders' Wake kind of recognizes...

Travis: Yeah.

Griffin: What you did? Yeah— I mean, y'all tell me, have you been tooting your own horns, around town? Have you been sort of talking yourselves up, at your various haunts, here in the city?

Travis: I don't know that Devo has haunts!

Justin: Uh, I definitely bragged about the blink shark I exploded.

Griffin: Yeah. Yeah. Uh, yeah, Uncle Joshy was... was impressed with that, but when he found out you just sorta blowed it up with a big bomb, he was less... he was less impressed with it. The word "dishonorable" was thrown around. Mostly in jest, but there was a... a sense that he did, he did find it somewhat... somewhat dishonorable to blow one up.

[Music fades out]

Clint: Little truth spoken in jest.

Griffin: Little truth, right.

Clint: Yeah.

Griffin: Um...

Clint: I don't think Zoox has been bragging about it, because ultimately I

think Zoox realizes that... he was the cause of the big problem that he solved for everybody—

Travis: No, he wasn't! That's not how it works, Dad!

Griffin: Mac— Clint McElroy was the cause.

Travis: Dad, you rolling a one...

Griffin: Yeah.

Travis: Is not Zoox's fault! [laughing]

Clint: [laughs] Well, I think he felt bad. For... me. So.

Griffin: Mmmm.

Travis: He felt— So you're saying, Dad, to get this straight: Zoox felt bad for you, Clint McElroy, in real life.

Clint: Well, we were the causes of it! I mean, the stuff came on, from off of our ship—

Travis: But you say he felt bad, for you!

Clint: Well—

Griffin: This is a weird— this is a weird, like, Purple Rose of Cairo, except, like...

Clint: [laughs] Zoox stepped through my computer screen!

Griffin: Right, it's like three layers deep. Um—

Travis: Griffin, can you say—

Clint: [deep voice] I'm sorry, buddy.

Travis: Can you say "Last Action Hero?" 'Cause that's a reference I would get way more.

Griffin: Yeah, Last Action Hero. It's a lot like that.

Travis: Thank you.

Griffin: Uh, I'll tell you who you have not achieved not achieved notoriety with. As you all approach the Brokerage, you see three familiar, albeit unpleasant, faces, leave the building. It is the crew of the Gutpunch. Your rival contractors. There's a stocky Delmer engineer, who is flanked by sort of a squat Brinarr warrior, and a tall pant-suit-wearing cleric. And as they walk out, and see you all, the Brinarr walks forward and says,

Brinarr: Aw, look, it's the— it's the Glory-hole-is crew!

Devo: Well—

Brinarr: Y'all back from, uh, picking up some new contagions to try to wipe out the whole city with? You bunch of ding-a-lings?

Devo: Oh no, we're—

Zoox: Uh.

Devo: We were busy, saving the city, and what were you doing, crew of the Butt Munch?

Zoox: [cackles triumphantly] Yeah!

Devo: High five!

[smacking of hands]

Brinarr: We're, uh— we're on some next level hero shit.

Devo: Ohhh, you were saving a bigger city? That you know about that we don't know about? Was this it?

Zoox: More expansive civilization?

Amber: Did you save your Canadian girlfriend's city? [giggling]

Devo: Mmmm! High five!

[smacking of hands]

Zoox: [giggles]

Griffin: The three of them actually look at each other, and kind of like... kinda giggle. And the Brinarr says,

Brinarr: Uh, yeah, something like that. [chuckles] It's— you all wouldn't— y'all aren't ready for this.

Justin: I wanna do an insight check.

Griffin: Okay!

Travis: Yeah, me too.

Griffin: Yeah, go ahead, roll your insight—

Justin: Well, too bad, I did— I had the idea for it first.

Travis: Mmm.

Griffin: For the amazing insight check. By the way, y'all can heal up.

Travis: Oh, yeah.

[sound of several dice rolling]

Justin: I did.

Griffin: Okay—

Travis: I got a nat 20!

Clint: I leveled up too, is that okay?

Justin: Sixteen— no, it doesn't matter, Travis! I'm going first! I got a 16 plus three. Now you wasted that 20, Travis. Your next roll was gonna be a 20 and you wasted it.

Griffin: You did waste it. Yeah, I mean a 19 would have done it, Trav. So.

Travis: Aw, dammit. But mine's a nat 20.

Griffin: You— but— but you both are gonna get the same level of information. Uh... she's telling the truth. When she talked about— when you all joked about saving an even bigger city, uh... like... their smiles feel completely genuine.

Amber: Well come on, don't keep us in suspense, what'd you do?

Brinarr: Uhhh... it's, uh... let's just say that we might have... some, some new neighbors, if everything goes well. Just doing a little diplomatic work, just a little bit of brave hero stuff, a little bit of sal— salvation... and we're—

Amber: That's wonderful.

Brinarr: Yeah.

Devo: Cool!

Amber: That's really great. Thank you— that's wonderful. Hey, we appreciate your assistance.

Brinarr: Oh, it's—

Zoox: [snorts, and cracks up]

Amber: Thank you for your, uh, meager contribution. Appreciate you.

Brinarr: Alright. Well. Um.

Devo: Wait, uh— before you go, I want, just to put it aside—

Travis: It's the cleric, right, who had the cool sunglasses?

Griffin: Yeah.

Travis: Just to the cleric—

Devo: Just real quick, um, listen. All cool jibes and beefing aside. Just influencer to influencer. You gotta check out Nermal's Pile. They have such good stuff there, at such good prices. It's— this is fashion you're not gonna find, anywhere else. I am telling you. Look at— look what I can do with this, with this vest!

Travis: And... Devo's just gonna like, switch the vest over to be... just a cool picture, like an animated gif, of like a cat lowering its sunglasses and winking.

Griffin: [sighs] It's— you're taking... you're exploiting this great magic item I gave you, I feel like.

Travis: I'm not gonna use it all the time that way, Griffin—

Griffin: Right.

Travis: I'm not gonna make it do that— just for this— like, he's gonna burn two uses of it—

Griffin: Yeah.

Travis: To do this cool cat winking.

Griffin: Uh, she lowers her sunglasses, and then pulls out one of those cigarettes on a long long long long long stick, "Devil Wears Prada" style.

Travis: Uh huh.

Griffin: And looks down at you, and she says,

Pantsuit Cleric: Consignment? Ugh! Euuughh! Barf, forever.

Devo: I don't remember saying this word. Why would you assume this?

Griffin: Uh... she looks—

Devo: So maybe you have been to Nermal's Pile, hm?

Griffin: Oh dang, you catch her off— she drops her cigarette stick, and picks it up, and,

Pantsuit Cleric: [whispering] Uh, shit. [chuckles nervously] Hmmm.

Devo: Now, where did you get the sunglasses? I must know.

Pantsuit Cleric: A kiosk at the mall.

Devo: Of course! [pause] Zut alors! [laughs]

Justin: [laughs]

Clint: [cracks up]

Griffin: Uh, the... engineer tugs on the Brinarr's armor, and whispers something in her ear. She says,

Brinarr: Alright, we gotta go. It's... we got, just, treaties, and all kinds of stuff—

Devo: Of course.

Brinarr: That we gotta get prepped. But, um... y'all keep it real. And, um... you suck, you stink, you suck shit, and...

Devo: Of course, yes.

Brinarr: We're the best— we're the best, you're the worst, and—

Devo: Ah— you're the worst, and we're the best, and you—

Brinarr: Oh, reverse, okay—

Devo: Huff my farts— okay, bye, Butt Munch!

Griffin: They all walk off, nodding at you—

Clint: And as they're walking off, Zoon yells at the Brinarr,

Zoon: [calling out] I achieved total consciousness last month, and I'm not curious about you, or how you think! [laughs]

Devo: That— that's true.

Amber: Drag `em.

Griffin: Wow.

Zoon: Yeah. Yeah. Mess with us, will they!?

Griffin: She actually walks back to you when you say that, Zoon. And she says,

Brinarr: Wait. Are you... are you for real?

Zoon: Y— yeah?

Brinarr: Okay...

Zoon: Wh... yeah! I have... I am... I am me, and I am no longer trying to figure out who I am. And I only hope that you can achieve this level of total consciousness. Which is nice.

Brinarr: Wow. Okay. That's, um... Why don't you hit me up sometime?
My—

Griffin: She pulls out like a little piece of paper and starts writing on it.
She's like,

Brinarr: I'm... joking aside, like we like to make fun of each other and stuff.
I'm Bo. Um. And I'll write down my last name here. Just hit me up
sometime, okay? It's, uh— that last name is pronounced, uh, F'deez.

Travis: [snorts]

Zoox: Bo Fuh-deez?

Brinarr: Yeah, Bo F'deez nuts.

Griffin: And she walks away—

Everyone: [bursts into loud raucous laughter]

Travis: [shouting] Dammit!

Justin: [still laughing] You walked right into it!

Devo: They got us again!!

Zoox: Yeah, I— boy! I... [whispering] I don't know what that is.

Devo: This is about testicles. I shall explain it to you later.

Zoox: Ohhh!

Devo: Yes.

Zoox: Ohh. Okay. Bo fuh deez nuts— ohhhh, right...

Devo: Yes. Remember how I was telling you about testicle jokes the other
day?

Zoox: Yeah...

Devo: This is one of those testicle jokes.

Zoox: Boy... there is egg on my face-holes. Oh...

Devo: After being slammed by a testicle joke, you should not talk about egg on your face-holes.

Zoox: That's true, yeah.

Devo: Yes.

Griffin: Uh. Okay. You all make your way into the Brokerage, and Ravi Montrelle welcomes you into his office.

[Bluespan Brokerage theme music begins to play]

He looks... he has calmed down. After finding out that one of his contractors nearly doomed the city, he was probably put on administrative leave. But he is, uh, he is looking cock-sure now, as he walks in. You are definitely... like... you have moved up in his rolodex. Significantly. You're like in the, um... like the platinum tab.

Clint: Ooh!

Griffin: The little platinum separator that he has in there. And he says,

Ravi: Look at you! Look at you, and look at you! Where's your— you should have keys to the city— where's your city keys? What have you been opening up with your city keys!?

Devo: I'm getting mine personalized. It is going to look like, uh... a little cool face on the end? My face.

Ravi: Cool. I was— uh— I don't... Did they really give you keys to the city?

Devo: No.

Ravi: [chuckling] Okay.

Zoox: It's more of a fob.

Ravi: Um. Well, I got you all these stickers!

Devo: Ooh!

Ravi: And they're big thumbs up stickers! Those are called— those are called Ravi Marks! And you get five of those... you get a prize.

Devo: Ooh!

Ravi: But these are only for acts of great heroism.

Griffin: He says.

Amber: Hey, have people started to ask about us yet? Like... anybody requesting us, specifically?

Ravi: Um... no. But—

Amber: Alright, no—

Ravi: If I'm being totally—

Amber: I shouldn't have asked, it's stupid—

Ravi: No, listen, it's, it's— I mean, there's hubbub! There's buzz. But I think it's, you know... it's all about supply and demand, innit? Right? So I'm still waiting for those jobs to come across my table, and when I do, I will earmark them for you guys. 'Cause I think that you... have what it takes to bring in the big baloney. Which... I don't know why I said that, I meant money. Um.

Amber: No one's ever said that... [laughs]

Ravi: Yeah, it's pretty cool, the way my brain works. But, um... anyway—

Devo: You're a real disruptor!

Ravi: Y'all feel like taking a job? You have been kinda kicking it for a month, and that's fine with me, 'cause you did have a, y'know, pretty big win—

Amber: Living off the spoils, you know! We almost beefed it, you gotta live it up a little bit.

Ravi: Sure, sure.

Travis: Now, ju— Griffin, just to clarify. We didn't get any money—

Griffin: You were not paid for the last job, no.

Travis: For saving the whole city...

Griffin: That was sort of a cleanup—

Justin: The glory spoils.

Griffin: Yeah.

Travis: Okay. Well, probably there were a lot of free drinks.

Griffin: Yeah, sure.

Justin: Sure.

Clint: Oh, we spoke at a lot of luncheons.

Travis: Eh.

Clint: Probably.

Justin: [laughs wheezily] Yeah!

Ravi: So, uh—

Justin: [laughing] A lot of—

Clint: Thank you for having me, Chamber of Commerce!

Travis: Yeah.

Justin: [laughing] Ribbon cuttings! [wheezes]

Travis: Yeah, yeah, definitely. [chuckling] We opened some supermarkets.

Clint: [laughs and claps]

Griffin: So he sl—

Clint: I bet we got some gold for that!

Griffin: [chuckles]

Clint: Some Lux.

Travis: Nope.

Griffin: Uh, probably not. He slides two folders across the table towards you. And he says,

[Music fades out]

Ravi: Y'know, I... the heartbeat of the city is pounding, we're all getting back to work, we're loving it, ba da ba. Ba ba. Uh. Things are a little bit slow in the contract work department though, so just got these two jobs. One of them you've seen before—

Griffin: One of them is covered in cobwebs, and it says "Investigation: The Bio-mass Swarm" on it. As he picks it up out of his desk actually, the manilla

folder crumbles a little bit, with age, as he sets it down next to another folder, called "Investigation: The Menagerie Theft."

These are the two jobs available to you guys. They are both two-star, in risk. The bio-mass swarm, again... the client is Ballaster Kodeira. Uh... and... she is seeking a team of contractors to investigate a growing stationary swarm of sea life, several dozen nautical miles from the city. Your primary objective is to discover what's causing the swarm, but a sizable bonus will be made available to any team that is able to dispel the swarm without requiring the Chaperones' intervention.

[chuckling] The other job... is the Menagerie Theft. The client is the Curator, who is seeking a team to investigate a recent theft from the Menagerie, a facility in the Conservatory tasked with preserving wildlife from the surface world. A handful of animals have been stolen away from Founders' Wake lately. The most recent of which being two aurochs, a male and female, the last of their species.

Clint: [distantly] Oooh... good grab.

Justin: I, um... the Menagerie sounds fun to me.

Travis: Yeah, this is fun, because Devo has to weigh— because he's pissed off both of these people. But. He pissed off Kodeira much more recently. So the Curator has had more time to... to maybe cool down a little bit? [laughs] Um. And... I don't know I like animals...

Clint: Are we the only people that... that Devo has not pissed off?

Travis: I dunno, I piss you guys off sometimes.

Clint: Oh true.

Griffin: Yeah, you did— he definitely pissed off Amber.

Clint: Okay— yeah, I like the— I love aurochs. I'm a big aurochs fan.

Travis: Oh you do? What's your favorite thing about them?

Clint: Uh, their horns.

Griffin: There you go.

Clint: 'Cause their horns do not stick out from the sides of their head, they almost thrust forward.

Travis: Did you just Google aurochs, Dad?

Clint: No I did not.

Griffin: Uh—

Clint: I Googled it, before!

Griffin: [laughs] Aurochs are... sort of oxen, with big— they're like longhorn oxen.

Travis: Okay.

Griffin: Basically. They are also extinct. Sadly. I mean, they are, in our world. And mostly extinct—

Clint: Probably.

Griffin: In this world, it sounds like, yeah.

Travis: Okay. Oh, yeah. Okay. Menagerie!

Griffin: Okay.

Clint: Let's do it!

[Bluespan Brokerage theme music plays again]

Griffin: Uh, he pulls out his little rubber stamp, stamps the Menagerie folder, slides it over to you guys. He says,

Ravi: It's a bit— this might seem like a real snoozer-ino, after, y'know, the high stakes adventure that you all went on last time. But, um... you know, you gotta... you gotta stay on the grind, as they say. And rescue these sweet beasts.

Devo: Okay. We already picked it. We said yes.

Amber: Yeah, you don't... stop selling it.

Ravi: Ehh, you guys are— you guys are up to som— I don't want you to be afraid of this one. You guys are definitely up for it, so—

Devo: No, we're not...

Amber: We weren't afraid.

Devo: We're not worried about— also, Ravi, you seem like a fashionable young man. Have you checked out Nermal's Pile?

Amber: Here he goes.

Ravi: Nermal's Pile? Now what's that?

Devo: Well, it is a shop for only the finest...

Ravi: Now wait a minute! 'Cause I am on a budget.

Devo: Ohhhh, my friend!

Justin: [laughs]

Devo: Oh, then Nermal's Pile is made for you! It's the finest clothes at the lowest prices!

Ravi: [laughs dismissively]

[Music fades out]

Devo: It's right next to the pipe— you go down, you find the steamy pipe, it's right there.

Ravi: Oh, by the steamy pipe?

Devo: Yes—

Ravi: Up in the Knuckle?

Devo: Yes, of course! You know—?

Ravi: The big steamy alleyway pipe! In Joshy's Knuckle?

Devo: Of course! Yes. Yes!

Ravi: Everyone knows where that— yeah! Oh, man, thanks for the hot tip.

Devo: You tell them— you tell them Devo sent you. And you will pay... sticker price.

Griffin: As all this happens, there's just an hourglass somewhere in a shadowy chamber, and a glowing grain of sand falls through it, as Nermal looks over it, just smiling.

Nermal: Yes...

Griffin: She says.

Nermal: It's happeni—

Griffin: No, none of that's real.

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: It might be. Uh, okay! He hands you all the folder. He says,

Ravi: Okay! Y'all know the deal. Or maybe you don't. It's been a while since you had a real job. But, uh, you need to go hit up the Curator, find out more details, and... get him to sign off when you're finished, and then we'll do a money dance.

Devo: Oh, of course, yes. Standard.

Ravi: Cool. [pause] And if you guys want to hang out later...

Devo: Oh, look at the time.

Amber: Ooooh, time to get rollin, yeah.

Ravi: I got some new records.

Amber: Wait... records? [laughs]

Devo: Oooh, wait, tell me more!

Ravi: Yeah! They're, they're, um... they're the— you pop 'em down on the tonewheel. I got... Dewy Louis.

Travis: [wheezes]

Justin: Sorry. No, you don't—

Clint: [appreciatively] Ohhhh!

Justin: It's certainly not Dewey Louis.

Travis: No, I love that!

Clint: So close!

Griffin: It's— it's D-E-W-Y. It describes...

Justin: It's not Dewy Louis, no—

Griffin: His moisture, yeah, he is.

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: He's like a wet—

Travis: He's so moist.

Griffin: He's like a wet Louis.

Justin: [whispering] It's like, certainly not Dewy Louis.

Ravi: It's pretty good stuff. Here, actually, I'll put some on right now!

Zoox: Gotta run!

Griffin: Yeah, quick, before the—

Devo: No, I want to hear this.

Griffin: No, before the copyright strike hits. Get the fuck out of that office.

Clint: [chuckles]

[Bluespan Brokerage theme plays again]

[Advertisement break]

[Gentle percussive music plays]

Griffin: Okay, you all make your way up to the... Conservatory. And as you approach, the Docent, who is sort of the big, big, bodyguard for the Curator, greets you outside of the lift and ushers you toward the... Menagerie. Again, just to paint a picture, the Conservatory is sort of— stands apart from the rest of the city, in that it just kind of looks like a big, well-tended park.

Travis: Mmhmm.

Griffin: Like a lot of the financial resources are... of the city, are funneled into keeping this layer, this district, looking so crisp. And there's several buildings up here, including sort of many museums that the Curator manages... the Church, the Parish, the Benevolent Parish, is also up here. But the Menagerie is... it's somehow even more kind of... um... decadent than the rest of the buildings here.

Travis: Ahh, yes.

Griffin: It's almost like, faux-ancient looking.

Travis: Hmmm.

Griffin: Like it's sort of a white marble tower. And as you enter, and the Docent sort of leads you past the security check-in desk. The inside, like, matches, pretty much, exactly. It is almost like a big cylindrical library. There's a lot of sprites, just like glowing cubes, coming and going, checking on... like, different sort of... cupboards, or— not cupboards. Little alcoves, all throughout. It almost looks like a big library. With a spiral staircase running up the length of the whole thing. Um. And in each of those alcoves, there are... a pair of... glass spheres. About the size of a bowling ball. And inside of that bowling ball, are—

Travis: Is another bowling ball!

Griffin: Another bowling ball, all the way down. Uh. Inside of each of these bowling balls, are like, little... almost like, dioramas, of different kind of biomes. From the surface world. You see some that are sort of like, y'know, sandy deserts, and some that are swampy marshes, and some that are... prairies, and just, of all sorts. And then inside each one, you can see a tiny little animal. Just a'scamperin' around.

Travis: Aww. That's adora-bubble.

Griffin: The Docent walks you inside, and he looks sort of, uh... kind of... timid? For his size? As he walks you in. And the Curator greets you, as you enter. And the Curator says,

Curator: Oh! My friends. Welcome. It's good to see two of you.

Devo: Mmm. Yes, this is... this is fair, yes.

Curator: You're taking on the job, then? This is great, I hear you're in high demand these days.

[Music fades out]

Amber: Yeah, I guess our reputation precedes us.

Curator: Yes. Um.

Devo: Curator, if I may, right off the bat, I know that the last time that we met, I... behaved very poorly—

Curator: "Extorted," is a word that I like to use—

Devo: Yes.

Curator: When I tell the story to my friends, I use the word "extorted."

Devo: Yes, I... I... I was new to the job, and new to the world. I had been very sheltered up 'til then, and I behaved so poorly, and...

Curator: Yes.

Devo: And I want you to know I feel terrible, about the way that I behaved—

Curator: Cool.

Devo: And I hope that you are able to look past that, and put your trust in—

Curator: Oh, bygones.

Devo: In this, uh...

Curator: Absolutely. Absolutely. Bygones. I do mostly want to talk to the other two, about the job details. If that is okay, I still— it's— your voice makes me sad to hear it. 'Cause I think about how— the way that you extorted me, when I was in a very vulnerable place.

Amber: [sympathetically] Oh.

Devo: I—

Amber: I hate to hear that.

Devo: This is, uh, completely understandable. If you'd like, I actually have... a... errand, I would like to run before we go, so—

Curator: Yes, please.

Devo: I can step out?

Curator: Yes, that would— this is the best of both worlds.

Devo: Excellent.

Travis: And Devo leaves.

Zoox: [sadly] Aww.

Curator: Excellent, okay—

Travis: And Devo's gonna head towards the Parish.

Griffin: Okay. Uh. We're gonna finish up here, first. Uh. The Curator says,

Curator: So, um, yes, it's like I said in the contract. We've had some thefts, from our Menagerie here. Each theft representing the extinction, of one of our precious, precious beasts. And... we need to put a— obviously— a stop to this, because it's... once we return to the surface world, once things... you know, [blows a small raspberry] chill out a little bit. Um. We want to have our animals back! They're great animals, don't you think? Yes. This is

the job. Um. Not many witnesses, aside from of course, my friend here, the Docent. Who... you'll have to... [chuckles] You'll have to ask him what he saw, because when he told me, I said, "You been hitting the... you've been hitting the, uh, the hooch a little too hard," I said. And then, uh, and then I left, but he was still so scared. And it seemed like I made him kind of uncomfortable. And we haven't spoken since.

Amber: Alright. Well, we'll hit him up. Thank you.

Curator: Um. Do you need anything from me? Or can I...

Amber: Stick around, we may think of some other questions.

Curator: Okay. Okay.

Amber: That's what they say, right?

Griffin: Yeah, sure. That's what they— detectives say.

Zoox: Don't leave town.

Griffin: Right.

Justin: Yeah, that's good.

Griffin: Okay! You all are in... you know. L.A. Noir investigation mode, at this point.

Clint: Okay...

[Gentle percussive music begins playing again]

Griffin: What do you do?

Justin: [heaves a long sigh] Dad, what do you think?

Clint: Uh... well. I think Zoox would like some general information first.

Griffin: Okay.

Zoos: So... how does this all work, Docent? How, how... I mean... are they gonna make the animals bigger? I mean... does the bowling ball weigh as much as a full grown... y'know... couple of animals? What's... what's the technology here?

Griffin: He... walks over to one of the alcoves, and picks up one of the bowling balls, and then grabs a... just one of the folks doing busy work, running around here. And hands them the bowling ball, and he says,

Docent: You know about magic?

Zoos: Um. Um, some of it, yes. Yes.

Docent: This magic makes things very small. And you can put them in things, and contain them. And, we do it.

Griffin: And the... the assistant there, holds onto the orb, and it glows, and then... just a horse comes out. Like a fully, a fully sized horse, just like appears—

Justin: Whoa!

Griffin: Out of a beam of light. Uh. And is... just pops out of it, poke-ball style. And...

[Music fades out]

Travis: Of course it does.

Griffin: The Do— [laughs] The Docent, like, pets its mane. He says,

Docent: This one is my favorite.

Amber: So which one did they steal?

Docent: Uhhh. Well, I'll show you.

Griffin: And he hops up on the horse's back, and just starts to very slowly trot over. And the assistant looks very nervous as this happens. And he says,

Docent: In, uh, let's see... We have had... Before the aurochs disappeared, we'd had four different thefts. Here, you can see... the long-clawed serval. We got the tufted rhino. Uh, the silver striders. And the polar bears—

Travis: And the shrine of the silver monkey!

Griffin: I fuckin' knew someone was gonna...

Clint: [chuckles]

Griffin: He says,

Docent: So this would be the fifth theft. But this is just the first one that we caught. Because you see...

Griffin: And he walks over to the tufted rhino exhibit, and it looks like there are... like, those bowling balls, sitting in the places where they're supposed to be, but as he reaches for them, his hand passes right through them, and the illusory spheres disappear.

Amber: Hmm.

Docent: I went through and I touched the rest of the orbs. And so, the rest are okay.

Amber: I... let me...

Docent: Yes.

Amber: Let me... before we work too hard. Let me try to reframe this. Are people allowed to touch the spheres in the Menagerie, typically?

Docent: Typically no one is allowed access into the Menagerie. It is not... it is not like the rest of our exhibits, where you can come and have an interactive sort of soul-enriching experience, with all the great art. Because—

Amber: Um, so people can't touch them, right?

Docent: No. No—

Amber: No, okay—

Docent: Unless you have very special privileges.

Griffin: And he pets the neck of his horse. Says,

Docent: They cannot take—

Amber: That's fine—

Docent: They can't take this from me.

Amber: Now... okay. So you can't touch `em. But... there's illusory magic that makes it look like they're still there, right?

Docent: Yes.

Amber: Alright, well, let me... let me ask you this. Is there even a problem?
[stifling laughter]

Griffin: [wheezes, then laughs loudly away from his mic]

Docent: I don't understand what you mean.

Amber: Well, nobody can touch `em.

Docent: Right.

Amber: And it looks like they're there, right?

Docent: Right...

Amber: So I think we just pack it in for the day, [wheezes] right?

Docent: I don't—

Amber: If people are like, "Hey, I touched this and my hand passed through it." You should be like, "You shouldn't have touched it! That was your mistake!" [stifling laughter]

Docent: So you're saying that, like... some of us will know, like, no more polar bears...

Amber: [breaks into giggles]

Docent: But everyone will be like, "Can't wait 'til we get back to the surface and kick it with these great white bears."

Amber: Exac— [laughs] exactly! Well listen, we're gonna be so thrilled...

Docent: Right...

Amber: [through laughter] To be back up on the surface... who's gonna miss polar bears?

Docent: Right... you're... so, the meetings of the tufted rhino fan club, that happens in the city—

Amber: [laughs]

Docent: I can show up, and be like, "Don't worry guys, everything's great."

Clint: [laughs]

Docent: Uh, yes, I suppose it's a victimless crime. Except for, of course, the polar bears. And rhinos. And silver striders, and long-clawed servals, and aurochs.

Travis: I'm... I'm just really glad that Devo's not here for this, because—

Griffin: Yeah, you left.

Travis: I— I, Travis McElroy, am screaming, "He was a witness."

Griffin: Okay. [pause] If you wanted to be in the investigation scene— maybe you shouldn't have—

Travis: And listen, I didn't know we were gonna be interviewing—

Griffin: Maybe you shouldn't have left.

Justin: Thank you.

Travis: I didn't—

Justin: We were just making conversation.

Griffin: Yeah...

Travis: [blows raspberry, laughs]

Zoox: [aggressively] Alright, why don't you come clean, perp!? We know you're the one that had something to do with it!

Travis: Wow! A hard swing!

Amber: Whoa, whoa, whoa, Zoox! I'm— I'm sorry about my partner—

Zoox: [quietly] I was being bad cop!

Amber: He—

Zoox: [sad] I was being a bad cop.

Justin: I'm trying to play along! Shut up!

Zoox: Okay.

Amber: I'm sorry about my partner. He flies off the handle, he's got a—

Docent: Real loose cannon. You should...

Amber: Yeah. I mean, he is. And I would tell you, he's an itchy trigger finger. It's actually very... that's not, like, a... fun... [giggles] threat, kind of deal. I'm warning you, that like... he has shot people with his crossbow, that— I— with very little premeditation. So, um. I am sorry. And you haven't done anything to deserve this, so I am sorry about that too. Um. Can you just tell us what you saw?

Docent: Huh... It's pretty... pretty spooky.

[Ominous ambient music fades in]

Amber: Dang— dang, hold on. Let me, let me buckle in for a chiller, then.
[chuckles]

Docent: It were a ghost. I did— I saw one of the bowling ball shaped— wait I should come up with a better name for them. I saw one of the containment orbs...

Amber: Good.

Docent: And it was... it was...

Justin: [giggles]

Docent: It was floating in the air. And it was like a... there was like a white specter, that was holding it. And I shouted. And it vanished. And then I got— I got— I'll be honest, I was so shit-my-pants terrified, at that point, that I did just run out of the building.

Amber: Okay, slow down, I'm still writing—

Docent: Do you believe in ghosts?

Amber: I'm writing the fifth "g" here.

Docent: 'Cause they believe in us.

Amber: "Guh-guh-guh-guh-ghosts?" There, I wrote that down. So, gho—are you telling me a ghost stole the sphere?

Docent: I mean, um...

Amber: Did you see the sphere— he vanished; did he take the sphere with him?

Docent: No, he tried to steal the— a different animal. It was a... one of our... wonderful beautiful lions. He tried to get our lions, but in my bravery, I said "Hey, you ghost, stop it!" And he— and then, um, and then I ran away, but it's okay, 'cause I saved the lions.

Amber: You stood up to a ghost.

Docent: Yeah, man.

Justin: Um. Griffin, I'd like to take... I'd like to do... [clicks tongue thoughtfully] I think it would be a... I don't know if it would be nature or history. I mean, this is a weird world.

Griffin: Yeah.

Justin: We're in. Like... I'm trying to see if there's anything... that immediately jumps out to me, where I think, like... ref— like, what it could have been. You know what I mean? Like if there's any magical things that I know about in the world, where this could be... like, similar, to what he's describing. So I don't know if it's like arcana, or nature, or... history?

Griffin: Uh... you are trying to, basically, deduce, "are ghosts real."

Justin: Not "are ghosts real." More like, "could it have been... X." Like...

Griffin: Um...

Justin: What is sitting— unlike a ghost, that I could— that maybe it could have been.

Travis: Because just as a refresher, I mean like, ghosts ARE real. In this world. Right?

Justin: Yeah.

Griffin: Yeah—

Travis: Because the spirits of the Homi... Homininians... was that it? No—

Griffin: Yeah, I would say you know that, right? Like... that is the only... uh...

Travis: The Einarr! That's it, yeah.

Griffin: The Einarr, right? The spirits of the Einarr are like, the only sort of... experience— Because when they first came out, uh, they would— they were like moving shit around the camp, that you all, y'know, lived in on the shoreside. So like... there is a history of that. They weren't like visible tangible things, like he's describing. Like... he's described a visible white specter that he saw. This was more like poltergeist style, like things moving around.

So, like, I will give you that without a roll. Uh. If you want more than that... I don't know, you could just give me a... if you're just trying to do some deduction here... um... you could give me just a straight up intelligence check, maybe?

Justin: Yeah! Intelligence. [sound of dice rolling] Oh my God, a natural 20, boom.

Griffin: Wow!

Clint: Ohhh!

Travis: Boom. Boom. Boom. Boom.

Justin: I'll be dipped in shit and rolled in breadcrumbs.

Clint: Whoaaaaa, Nelly!

Justin: Amazing.

Griffin: Uh. You know exactly what this is.

Justin: I just had a galaxy-brain!

Travis: Yeah!

Griffin: Yeah, sure!

Justin: For a moment! Just like— the light dims, all around her, and for a moment, she is smart!

Griffin: Yeah!

Travis: Every— every single experience you've had for the last two weeks—

Justin: Right.

Travis: Just came into play, and was like, "Wait! I know this!"

Justin: [laughs]

Griffin: You know exactly what this is, then! You, you— you piece this— you literally connect a, like, a dozen dots, in your head, all at once. You have seen this happen before. You have seen a white spectral shape... that... had in— you had interacted with, and then vanished in the blink of the eye.

And it was... when you were at the Auction house. And the... there were, y'know, a lot of sort of hard light apparatuses there? But the one that sort of sticks out in particular, is the auctioneer himself.

Because after you sort of— after things went to shit, in the auction, and people started to kind of abandon ship, the auctioneer forced you all to, y'know, settle up before you could leave. And was essentially like a free-floating hard light... thing. That a sprite was projecting out. So it wasn't like a person wearing a suit, it was like a... a standalone sort of hologram. That, you remember that. And as he describes what he saw, like... you put together, like, "I have seen this before, pretty recently."

Justin: Okay.

Griffin: So! You know, what he is describing is some sort of sprite, that can... like... make a body for itself with hard light. Because you saw the auctioneer essentially do that.

Justin: Okay.

Griffin: Back in the auction house.

Justin: And by "sprite," you mean...

Griffin: One of these floating cubes—

Travis: Like a drone.

Griffin: One of these— like a drone, yeah.

Justin: Okay. ...Was that controlled— I mean, what I saw before, was that being controlled by somebody? Or was it like...

Griffin: You assume it was being controlled by a real person... remotely. Right?

Justin: Okay.

Travis: Like a drone.

Griffin: Like a drone.

Justin: Got it. Okay. Hmm. This is a long shot, but I'm gonna do an investigation check, around the area where he saw the... the... I'm gonna keep calling it a ghost, I guess, for simplicity's sake.

Griffin: Uh, okay.

Justin: I don't really have good brain skills... I wish Devo was here.

Travis: Yeah. I didn't realize we were gonna start the investigation. I thought we would just be getting the... briefing...

Justin: You could come back! You could come back!

Griffin: Why don't you just come back?

Travis: Yeah. My errand is complete. We'll check in on that errand later, folks.

Clint: [laughs]

[sound of dice rolling]

Griffin: Or maybe we won't.

Justin: I got... I got 15.

Griffin: Okay.

Travis: It's a pretty important errand, Griffin.

Griffin: Okay. Uh. With a 15... there are... dozens, of these like floating cube sprites, that are going all around the room. Occasionally you see one kind of like... slot into like a little square indentation on the pedestals

holding the biome spheres, and you'll see something change inside, as they tend to the... habitats, for these compressed creatures. Um.

One of them, you notice... is... not plugging into these indents. One of them seems to be, for lack of a better word, pretending to work. And... you clock it as it continues to kind of fly around. It's high up, it's like near where the... third story is, of this... y'know... towering library of animals. And it is just kind of floating around, and it'll come close to one of the alcoves, and then just move into another one. That is what you notice.

Amber: Hey, Devo, what do you make of that?

Travis: Hmm. Uh, Griffin?

Griffin: Yeah?

Travis: What we know of these sprites, like, common knowledge. Are they intelligent things? Do they have any kind of AI?

Griffin: Very very limited. Like, crazy limited. They are basically specialized tools, that do one thing. They are—

Travis: Would you say that they have an intelligence of three or lower?

Griffin: Yeah.

Clint: [laughs]

Travis: Ah, shit. Okay.

Devo: So, this seems, um, to be the sprite that you caught that now is trying to avoid detection? Yes? So what if we all... and this is a long shot. Looked away from it. Let it escape. And then followed it.

Amber: Alright. Well. Yeah, let's try it.

Zoos: Man, I'm glad you came back!

Amber: No kidding.

Devo: But it— yes, 'cause it seems stupid. It does not have an intelligence of four, or more. And so I think that, in my f— if we do like, a, oh, look at, oh look at this horse, everybody, look at this horse! Does everybody see this horse over here!? What's this horse's name?

Griffin: The docent says,

Docent: I mean, he doesn't have a name, but I like to call him... Buddy.

Devo: This is a fine name. Buddy.

Clint: Okay, Zoox casts Speak with Animals.

Griffin: Okay.

Devo: To talk to the horse?

Clint: To talk to the horse.

Devo: Okay.

Griffin: Excellent.

Devo: [loudly] And let's make sure everybody's really paying attention to this horse. [whispering] Don't really pay attention to the horse, right? We're gonna... we don't want to miss the sprite leaving. [laughs] Okay.

Zoox: Okay. So, um... friend Horse...

Horse: [loudly] Get this guy off my back! Holy shit!

Justin: [laughs]

Zoox: Yeah, I was gonna ask you, do you like having him up there?

Horse: He's so! Big! You got— listen, man, you gotta get me out of this fuckin' ball, dude!

Travis: [bursts into laughter]

Justin: [cackles]

Horse: Every day he puts me back in this ball— like, here's what I remember! Kicking it on the surface, great, great, great, great, great! Lots of people doing magic war! I dunno, guys, seems like a bad idea to me! There's a big storm over there, is anybody else worried about that? And then fuckin' Ash Ketchum comes, puts me in this li'l spherical prison! It's— it's not fun! Do you know how many carrots are in there? Hey! Hey, you— weird, fucked up plant man! Or whatever you are! Do you know how many carrots they got in there? Do you know how many oats there are? 'Cause as far as I can tell from my li'l, my li'l prison, uh, it's no oats! Oats are extinct! Cool, but I'm not! I pray—

Zoox: Ah! What about Hall?

Horse: I pray for death! Do you understand??

Travis: [cackles]

Zoox: My friend, I understand completely. So—

Justin: We are not! Actually! Concerned about the horse!

Zoox: When you were— when you were inside that ball, could you see out?

Travis: Has Dad forgotten... okay, no, wait, hold on— this is good—

Justin: No, no, that's good though, he's investigating a horse!

Horse: Could I see out? Of course I see you, big, giant, weirdos, just looking at me ambivalently as scream at you, "oats..."

Zoos: Okay, so, is what the Docent on your back, that bastard on your back!

Horse: Yeah, it sucks!

Zoos: Did— is what he's saying true? Is that what really happened?

Horse: Yeah. I mean, yeah, there's like a ghost— there's like a ghost, by which I mean of course a hologram projected by one of the sprites, like anybody could figure that out. And it shows up, and it'll grab an orb, and then it'll just sort of like, uh... hide it, and then just float right out of here, and... ya know? So, um...

Travis: Okay, so, has the— has the sprite moved, Griffin?

Griffin: I mean, it's continuing to pretend to work. But like... it is... it's not, like, this sprite knows its cover is blown, and that it needs to get out of here. If one of the— you get the impression that if one of these sprites just left the building...

Travis: Mmhmm.

Griffin: In the middle of the day? Apropos of nothing? Like... it would, of course, raise suspicion. And so it is not— it is not— it has no cause to do that, right now.

Travis: Mm.

Justin: And there's really no way we could get up to... closer to it, correct?

Griffin: Yeah, I mean, you could go up the stairs, and try— but it's like... to catch it, would be... tricky. But not impossible.

Zoos: One last question. I know your name's not really Buddy.

Horse: No!

Zoos: What is—

Justin: Can we— okay, wait, wait, wait, time out. Can we assume... can we just for the sake of, like... [giggles] linear storytelling. For me and Devo to like... do something else while he's doing that. So can we just say that like... what we'll do next is what we're doing while he's talking to the horse?

Griffin: Sure.

Justin: Okay. 'Cause the horse was supposed to be a distraction. Which I'm into.

Griffin: Right.

Travis: Yeah.

Justin: I think it's great. But, like... Okay. Go ahead, Dad.

Zoox: You're— okay, so I know your name's probably not really Buddy. What is your name... really?

Horse: My name is... Alqualinine. The last—

Justin: [snorts loudly]

Alqualinine: The last of the—

Zoox: Al?

Alqualinine: Alqualinine.

Zoox: Alqual... Al...

Alqualinine: The last of the great equine empire... the Cloud Stomper... the, the Mane... Runner. The...

Justin: [wheezes]

Zoox: Yeah, I'm not gonna remember all that—

Justin: [through laughter] The what?

Zoox: I'll just call you Al.

Alqualinine: Okay.

Zoox: Can I just call you Al?

Alqualinine: Yeah, typical... can I call you... Puh? Can I call you... J-guh!?

Zoox: Zuh. Zuh!

Alqualinine: Okay, Zuh.

Zoox: It would be Zuh.

Alqualinine: Yeah. Call me—

Zoox: Zuh.

Alqualinine: Call me— you can call me late for dinner, if you just get this guy off my fucking back!!

Zoox: Yep. Hey, Docent? Do me a favor—

Docent: Yes.

Zoox: Um— can you—

Docent: Oh, I— your language is so beautiful when you speak to him like that! Tell— what's he— what's he saying, is it— tell me all about the sort of, like...

Justin: [bursts into giggles]

Docent: Great, uh, sort of, spiritual friendship that we share—

Zoox: No, no, no, no! No, he was... he was saying that, um, back when he was in the biome?

Docent: Yes.

Zoox: Uh, one of the other horses... um... shit all over his back. And you might want to get off.

Travis: How did that happen?

Zoox: You might want to just... um...

Travis: Hey Dad, this is me, Travis, asking—

Clint: Jumped over him and shit.

Travis: Oh! A mid...

Clint: Jumped over him and shit.

Justin: [wheezes] Wait— wait, stop, we can't do our show anymore. So wait. [laughing] The— Are you saying that another horse...

Travis: [laughs]

Justin: Leapt over this horse, and shit on him? In midair?

Travis: 'Cause that would have to be pre-meditated!

Justin: [laughing] It would have to be— you can't accidentally do that, you can't canter over somebody—

Clint: Well that's if somebody—

Travis: You wouldn't start running when you felt a shit coming, on accident.

Justin: [laughs]

Clint: That was my second choice, but I thought the first choice would have grossed everybody out.

Griffin: Okay.

Justin: Ewww, `kay...

Travis: Ohh, I can't, yeah...

Griffin: He says,

Docent: We keep the animals separated, in their own biome containment units? I do not know how it would do... But I am, um, if it is a yucky back, I do not care, because Buddy is my best friend.

Zoox: Yeah. Um. Listen. Um, I'm the bad cop, remember—?

Docent: Only friend, if you really, if you think about it, the only friend.

Justin: [snickers]

Zoox: Get off the— please get off the horse. He does not like it. He does not like... you, sitting up— maybe if it were a child? Maybe if it were, like, hayrides—

Travis: Maybe if you were sitting on a child?

Zoox: Maybe if a child was sitting on him, he'd be okay. Um. But you need to get off. Please. Get off Al. Right now. Okay?

Griffin: Uh—

Zoox: His name's not Buddy.

Griffin: He looks down at Buddy's face, and says,

Docent: Is this... is this true, Buddy?

Griffin: And Buddy says,

Alqualinine: I can't— I— really, I can't with this fuckin' dude anymore. I'm gonna buck him, in like five seconds, if he doesn't get off. And...

Zoox: Ohh! [giggles nervously] Oh really?

Alqualinine: Yeah, I've been saving up some really good kick strength, 'cause I got nothing to kick in there, either, so...

Zoox: Yeah, buck him off... and... I'll jump up! I wanna see what it's like.

Alqualinine: Don't fucking dare, you look pointy as shit, my friend!

Zoox: I am kinda pointy...

Griffin: The... Docent slides off. And he looks kinda bummed out. And he says,

Docent: Okay. Um. Well, put him back in.

Griffin: And the assistant sucks the horse back into the biome sphere. And you hear Alqualinine go,

Alqualinine: [growing distant] Whaaaaa!

Griffin: And he is shrunk and little again, and they put him back on the pedestal. Uh.

Zoox: I don't guess we could have him... could we?

Docent: Could you have... the... the last...?

Zoox: The horse... Al...

Docent: The last one of two horses that exist in the world? You gonna take—

Zoox: Well, I'll take both.

Docent: You gonna take real good care of him?

Travis: [cracks up]

Zoox: Yeah!

Travis: [laughing] You promise to feed him, and walk him?

Zoox: I will feed him—

Docent: Yeah, sure...

Zoox: And walk him every day!

Docent: Got it, got it.

Griffin: Uh. Devo and Amber. What are you doing?

Travis: So during this time, like the... he's continued doing the thing, so... Devo's gonna whisper to Amber, like...

Devo: I will sneak up on him, you get your extra hands out, you get ready to catch? Eh? Yeah?

Griffin: Catch the sprite? ...Okay. You all probably make your way up the stairs, to the level that this sprite is pretending to work on.

[Mechanical sprite sound effects play in the background]

As you all approach it, it's like trying to move away and give you all distance, as if this is like a protocol it is following, to... [chuckles] not specifically, get caught. So, uh...

Justin: Okay.

Griffin: You all will need a tactic, to achieve this.

Travis: Is the sprite distracted by all this horse nonsense going on, on the ground? I would find it very distracting, myself.

Griffin: I would say— I would say yes. Whatever technique you all try to pull, I will give you... y'know... a boost to it, because of the distraction that you all have created here. But you have to have some sort of technique, 'cause this thing is not gonna let you just walk up to it and fuckin' grab it. 'Cause it is... uh... it is being a little bit more intentional than that.

Travis: Hmm... what color is the sprite? Like, what... what's it look like?

Griffin: Uh, it's just plain glowing white sprite. It looks like the rest of them, in this room.

Travis: Okay. Devo's gonna change his... his Glamor Weave.

Griffin: Okay.

Travis: To be the same glowing white.

Griffin: Okay.

Travis: As another sprite.

Griffin: Okay.

Travis: And he's going to move in 90 degree corners— he's going to move however the sprites are moving.

Griffin: You're gonna make yourself cube-shaped— what are you doing??

Travis: No, no, no! But like, however the sprites are moving, which I assume is like short staccato movements?

Griffin: Uh...

Travis: I'm matching those, baby, I'm matching their pace. I'm matching their rhythm. We're doing a dance now. 'Til I can get close to it.

Griffin: So is this a stealth, stealth check? Or...

Travis: A— I mean, I guess that's better than...

Clint: Performance?

Travis: Blend— yeah, we're gonna go with performance! Griffin!

Griffin: Okay.

Clint: Yeah! If you're dancing like 'em!

Griffin: Uh, okay. Yeah. Go ahead and make a performance check... this is pretty... this is pretty out there shit, man.

Travis: And I have advantage though, right? You said 'cause the distraction...

Clint: Mmhmm!

Griffin: Um... yes. Well, at this point it's like, what is more distracting, this horse conversation happening downstairs, or this man pretending to be a cube.

[sound of dice rolling]

Clint: Whoa!

Griffin: Man, that's a nat 20. [sighs] Okay.

Clint: [chuckles]

Justin: You kidding me?

Travis: Yeah, 26 total.

Griffin: Yeah, he rolled a nat 20... You... [sighs] Amber, it's the damndest fucking thing, man. [laughs]

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: You're like, "where's Devo? And where did that big cube come from?"

Justin: [cracks up and cackles] He is— he is Man Cube!

Griffin: Man Cube!

Justin and Griffin in unison: Half man, half cube!

Clint: [laughs heartily]

Justin: He walks in two worlds but is the master of both!

Clint: [guffaws]

Justin: He has legs!

Griffin: Uh— here is what that accomplishes though, Devo. This... this sprite... you have definitely sort of broken its cover, because it is no longer zipping around and pretending to be one of the other sprites. It's like, YOU are now the biggest most distracting thing in this room. So before, it was kinda distracted, by this horse thing happening. Now, it just saw a man turn into a cube.

Travis: Uh huh.

Griffin: And it's like... some—

Travis: I didn't turn into a cube! I wanna make it clear.

Justin: For all intents and purposes...

Griffin: Purposes— okay, it is not— do not fight me on that.

Travis: From its perception, I have turned into a cube. I don't want some weird fan art, [laughing] of Devo the cube, now!

Griffin: Well. You can't...

Justin: Yeah you do—

Travis: Yes I do—

Clint: I do!

Griffin: Yeah.

Travis: Yeah.

Griffin: Um, Amber, what are you doing, because now the— here's what I will give you. It is so... confused. That it is... uh... it is, for a moment, like... it has broken its avoidance—

Justin: I'm just gonna snatch it out of the air.

Griffin: Okay. Uhhhhh...

Justin: With my net.

Griffin: You do have a net, don't you?

Justin: Yes I do.

Griffin: Uh, okay, why don't you... make...

Justin: Fishing tools, I'm— Amber comes with fishing tools.

Griffin: Ohh! Okay.

Justin: She has her fishing tools.

Griffin: Just make an unarmed strike roll, 'cause I will— I mean you definitely have proficiency with fishing tools, I will say...

Justin: Okay.

Griffin: So the modifiers— the numbers will be the same. And make it with advantage, because Travis turned into a cube.

Justin: [sound of dice rolling] 14... [sound of dice rolling] Or 11.

Griffin: Um... okay... on a 14... you... Devo, the cube, see Amber sort of creep up behind this thing, and throw a net over it. And Amber, you manage to grab— gather up the corners of the net, as this sprite immediately jerks away, and is... trying to pull you up, into... no, fuck it! It pulls you up into the air. You are now holding onto this net, and this sprite is now flying all around the room, as you sort of hang on for dear life, underneath of it.

Justin: [chortles]

Griffin: Uh, and now everyone is looking up, at this scene. The sprite doesn't seem to be trying to go in any particular direction; it is like a bucking bronco trying to get you off of it, right now. Zoox, what are you doing? The horse has been put back in the horse shelf. So you're not talking to the horse anymore.

Clint: Um, I think Zoox is gonna join the party.

Griffin: Yeah.

Clint: Zoox is gonna... walk over, and prepare an action.

Griffin: Okay? Are you gonna tell me what the action is, or...?

Clint: Mmm, no.

Griffin: Is it gonna be like a special surprise? Like a special...

Clint: It'll be a special surprise.

Griffin: Okay, cool. Devo, what about you? The cube.

Travis: Devo the cube... um... so, is Amber anywhere near Devo? Is it...

Griffin: Sometimes!

Travis: Okay. I'm gonna also try to—

Griffin: Amber's fly— Amber is sort of flailing behind this thing, as it zips around sort of the open area of this huge tower.

Travis: Okay. Now would you say that this counts, Griffin... as fighting it? Is Amber fighting it?

[pause]

Griffin: Amber, are you fighting it?

Justin: I mean, I'm being pulled through the air, right?

Griffin: Yeah.

Justin: I mean, as much as I can— I mean, no? I don't know what I would be doing!

Travis: Okay, great. Um. I am going to cast Charm Person?

Griffin: On...

Travis: The cube. So it is a creature, yes?

Griffin: Uhh... I will...

Travis: Oh, it does have to be a humanoid. Nevermind. That doesn't work.

Griffin: Yeah. Not a cubinoid.

Travis: I... am going to talk to the cube...?

Griffin: Okay.

Devo: Uh, sprite? Um. I see that you are busy and I understand this, yes. I... I assume...

Clint: [laughs]

Devo: Uh, that you have figured out that you have been, uh, undone. As it were. And perhaps discovered as... the projection. Now, we can offer you amnesty, yes? Some sort of forgiveness, where we will not... um, punish you? You are merely the tool, the vessel being used, to accomplish this theft. If you would please stop swinging my friend around? And, uh... you know... be willing to help us? In this investigation? Then no punishment will be taken against you. And in fact, you could probably work here, or in some other facility, once all this is done? Perhaps even with us! If you've ever had a desire to travel. But we will need your help, and please stop... swinging my friend around.

Griffin: Um. This is gonna be a persuasion check.

Travis: Yeah.

Griffin: Uh... but... because of sort of the nature of this thing... which is to say, y'know, based on what you all have deduced so far, it is being sort of controlled by a third party? Uh. I'm gonna make you take disadvantage on this persuasion check.

Travis: Okay. [sound of dice rolling] Well, that's a... 20 total, 11 plus nine. [sound of dice rolling] And a 17 plus nine, a 26. So a 20 or a 26. So it would be a 20.

Griffin: Okay... with a 20... uh... it is going to do what you say, but not before you make a dexterity saving throw.

Travis: Ohhhkay. [mumbles] [sound of dice rolling] 14 plus four, an 18.

Griffin: Okay! You— [amused] And Amber, make a dexterity saving throw.

[Playful bouncy music plays softly]

Justin: [chortles] Alright. [sound of dice rolling] That's a 20!

Griffin: Yeah. Okay. [laughs] This is amazing! Uh... it stops in the air, leaving Amber dangling like 30 feet above the floor of this, of the Menagerie. And then... after it hears what you say, it dive-bombs you, Devo, bringing Amber sort of flailing behind. You manage to jump out of the way though, right before it smashes into you, and Amber, as it like... sails over the railing of the platform that Devo is standing on, you just manage to slide on your knees, into like— to land on your feet. And the cube... turns... inert. The light that was sort of surrounding it, just shuts off.

[Music stops]

And now it is just this small, gray, runed, metal cube. And it tumbles out of the net, and rolls along the ground, and stops. And as you see it, now, Amber, and Devo...

[Ethersea Theme music begins to play]

It doesn't just remind you— especially Amber, since you put this together before. It's not like it reminds you of what you saw with the auctioneer, back at the auction house. This exact cube, this exact object...

Travis: Mmhmm.

Griffin: Is the... exact, same thing...

Justin: Mm.

Griffin: That the auctioneer left behind, when it vanished. And it is dead now, it is no longer being controlled by the auctioneer. But now, with this item in tow, the perpetrator of this crime is... completely evident.

[Ethersea Theme music plays out]

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