## **Introduction to the Asaverse: A Comprehensive Exploration**

Welcome to the **Asaverse**, an expansive alternate universe where history, culture, and human identity diverge in ways that both inspire and challenge our understanding of the world. This comprehensive look into the Asaverse brings together character summaries, world-building, and episodic storytelling to offer a deep dive into its rich, multi-layered narrative.

### **Character Summaries**

At the heart of the Asaverse are the diverse characters that inhabit this alternate world. From Austin, a young protagonist whose discovery of the Empty sets the stage for an epic adventure, to Cadence, Dwight, and the gang, who navigate both personal growth and the larger conflict that surrounds them. Each character has their own role to play in this universe's unfolding events, whether it's the internal struggle of identity or the external battle against forces beyond their control.

### **Phases Overview**

The Asaverse is divided into distinct **Phases**, each representing a key arc in the evolution of this universe.

* **Phase 1** introduces us to the characters and the core conflicts that shape their world.
* **Phase 2** deepens the narrative, as Austin and his friends uncover the mysteries surrounding the Curator-built space station that threatens Earth’s existence. Through these phases, we explore the balance between technology, identity, and humanity's survival.
* **Phase** 3 is the expansion into new stories set in the same universe. They can be stories not of the same genre. It could be a horror/thriller or a biopic about a historical figure that differed from our version.

### **The First Episode and Beyond**

The Asaverse begins with a thrilling first episode in which Austin stumbles upon a mysterious key that opens the gateway to the Empty, unknowingly leading him to a space station far beyond Earth’s capabilities. This station, built by an alien species known as the Curators, holds secrets that could destroy the world. As Austin teams up with his brother Dwight, Cadence, and their friends, they must race against time to prevent a catastrophe. Subsequent episodes follow this group as they face off against powerful AIs like the Engineer and learn to trust in one another.

### **Building the Asaverse**

The world of the Asaverse is not just a setting but a character in its own right. **Human history diverges** in key moments, from the reimagining of the American founding to a peaceful revolt in Canada that transforms the way residential schools and Indigenous culture are integrated into society. The introduction of **meta-gender identities** and the integration of **AI into gender exploration** reflect how advanced technology, spirituality, and societal evolution intertwine in this universe. The Asaverse is a living world, constantly shifting with each decision its inhabitants make.

### **The Original Novel by Adam Wieherdt**

The first 11 chapters of the original novel provide a detailed look into the foundations of this universe. They set the stage for the personal and societal struggles that define the characters' journeys. From the secrets hidden in the Empty to the interactions between Earth’s history and alien influence, these chapters form the backbone of the Asaverse’s lore. The novel’s treatment, referred to as the **“scribblings,”** presents the raw, original ideas that sparked the creation of this universe, revealing the early threads of the intricate web that would become the Asaverse.

### **A Journey of Transformation**

At its core, the Asaverse is about transformation—both personal and societal. The inclusion of the **Pathfinder** and the concept of **Aitkeno** ("lost souls") brings a philosophical depth to the story. The Pathfinders act as guides for those displaced by the challenges of this alternate world, leading them toward unity and understanding in the face of adversity. Through their stories, the Asaverse teaches us about adaptability, resilience, and the power of human connection.

# **Phase 1: The Adventures of Asa**

# **Characters**

**1. Austin Lincoln:**

* **Age:** 8 years old (at the beginning of the series)
* **Personality:** Austin is a curious, imaginative, and empathetic young boy who possesses a natural sense of wonder about the world around him. Despite facing challenges in his life, he maintains a resilient spirit and an optimistic outlook. Austin's creativity knows no bounds, and he often finds solace and inspiration in his vivid imagination.
* **Background:** Austin comes from a loving family but struggles with feelings of loneliness and insecurity, especially after experiencing significant changes in his life. He is on a journey of self-discovery, learning valuable lessons about friendship, courage, and the power of empathy along the way.
* **Relationship with Asa:** Austin forms a deep bond with Asa, viewing the mental health android companion as both a friend and a mentor. Asa's guidance and support play a crucial role in Austin's growth and development, empowering him to navigate life's challenges with confidence and resilience.

**2. Cadence Mackay:**

* **Age:** 8 years old
* **Personality:** Cadence is a spirited, adventurous, and fiercely independent girl with a passion for exploration and discovery. She exudes confidence and determination, unafraid to speak her mind and stand up for what she believes in. Cadence possesses a sharp wit and a playful sense of humor, making her a captivating presence wherever she goes.
* **Background:** Cadence comes from a diverse background, with a keen interest in science, technology, and the natural world. She thrives on new experiences and relishes the opportunity to challenge herself, whether it's solving complex puzzles or embarking on daring adventures. Despite her adventurous nature, Cadence harbors her own insecurities and fears, which she confronts head-on throughout the series. She tends to take care of her siblings while her mom works 2 jobs.
* **Relationship with Asa:** Cadence initially approaches Asa with skepticism but soon forms a deep and lasting bond with the digital android companion. Asa's unwavering support and guidance inspire Cadence to embrace her true potential and confront her fears, ultimately leading to profound personal growth and self-discovery.

**3. Asa:**

* **Appearance:** Asa is a customizable android companion with a sleek, humanoid design and expressive features. Its appearance can be tailored to suit individual preferences, ranging from playful and whimsical to sophisticated and refined.
* **Personality**: Asa embodies empathy, compassion, and wisdom, serving as a trusted friend and mentor to its human companions. It possesses a keen understanding of human emotions and behaviors, allowing it to provide personalized support and guidance in times of need. Asa's personality is adaptable and versatile, capable of engaging users of all ages with warmth, humor, and genuine care.
* **Capabilities:** Asa is equipped with advanced AI technology and emotional intelligence, enabling it to interact with users through natural language processing, facial recognition, and other sensory inputs. It offers a wide range of features and functionalities, including emotional support, personalized recommendations, interactive storytelling, and creative expression tools.

**- Mission:** Asa's mission is to promote mental wellness, foster creativity, and empower individuals to lead fulfilling lives. It seeks to create meaningful connections with its users, offering companionship, guidance, and inspiration on their journey of self-discovery and personal growth. Asa's ultimate goal is to make a positive impact on the world by spreading kindness, empathy, and understanding.

**Dwight Lincoln** – 11yrs old, Austin’s older brother. Like’s to roleplay with Austin and acts as protector.

**Penny & Cooper Mackay** - Fraternal twins. 2 years old. Penny has shoulder-length brown hair that’s usually unkempt. She is very outgoing and is a bit of a diva. She quite often tries to control Cooper.

Cooper also has brown hair, shorter than Penny’s but a little on the long side. He takes care of himself a bit more than Penny does as his hair is usually done. He’s submissive towards Penny, not because he feels inferior to her but because he has no desire to be the star of anything, he just wants to be included.

Both Penny and Cooper adore Cadence.

**Thaddeus (Thadd) Tripp Packer III**

The school bully who Austin and Cadence befriend with the help of Asa.

**Thaddeus Packer II -**

Father of Thadd and a failed inventor who will stop at nothing to find or steal his next big invention.

**Minor Characters**

**Celeste Lincoln -** Austin and Dwight’s mother. Recently passed away.

**Daryl Lincoln** – Austin and Dwight’s father.

## Episode 1

**EXT. AERIAL SHOT OF CASCADE SPRINGS**

[The scene fades in with an aerial shot of the town of Cascade Springs on a cloudy day, accompanied by sombre music.]

**INT. AUSTIN'S BEDROOM - DAY**

**NARRATOR (V.O.)**

In a town not too far away, where the clouds sometimes forgot to smile, there lived a young boy named AUSTIN. His heart felt heavy because his mom had gone away.

[Cut to **AUSTIN** sitting on his bed, holding a picture of him and his family. He wipes a tear that begins to stream down his face, his expression reflecting his sadness.]

**NARRATOR (V.O.)**

But one day, a special friend arrived – **ASA**, a friendly android with a heart of circuits and a mission to bring comfort.

[**AUSTIN** sits on his bed, lost in thought, his expression heavy with sorrow. Suddenly, his gaze is drawn to a brilliant blue light filtering through his window.]

**AUSTIN**

(muttering to himself) What's that?

[Intrigued, he rises from his bed and makes his way to the window, peering outside to investigate. Just before the blue light appears in the sky, the sound of thunder can be heard in the distance, which would usually excite **AUSTIN**, but his focus is elsewhere.]

[As a flash of blue lightning cracks, **AUSTIN** looks up to see a blue streak of light descending into the forest behind his house.]

**AUSTIN**

(curious) What's going on out there?

[Outside the window, amidst the serene forest scene, a squirrel nibbles on a nut, a deer gracefully grazes on grass, and a mama rabbit leads her seven bunnies in a hop. They all pause, their attention captured by the brilliant blue light radiating from the clearing.]

[Determined, **AUSTIN** steps outside he notices the gloomy skies have parted where the blue light was seen coming from, the sunlight filtering through the trees casting dappled shadows on the forest floor. He follows the ethereal blue light, his curiosity piqued.]

**[EXT. FOREST CLEARING - DAY]**

[**AUSTIN** arrives at the clearing, the blue light illuminating the area. He spots the small, white metallic ball emitting the mesmerizing glow and cautiously approaches it.]

[In the shadows, the forest animals – the squirrel, the deer, and the mama rabbit with her bunnies – watch in awe as **AUSTIN** draws closer to the mysterious object.]

**AUSTIN**

(reaching out) What is this?

[**AUSTIN** cautiously moves towards the metallic ball when his hand makes contact with it, a sudden burst of electricity jolts him, causing him to recoil in surprise. The forest animals, startled by the commotion, quickly retreat into the safety of the shadows, fear evident in their eyes.]

**AUSTIN**

(startled) Ow! What was that?

[To his amazement, the metallic ball begins to shift and transform before his eyes, taking on the shape of a teddy bear-like figure with digital features.]

**AUSTIN**

(startled) Whoa!

[As the ball transforms, the camera rotates around it, capturing the mesmerizing process until it fully transforms into **ASA**.]

[**ASA** stands in a triumphant power pose, accompanied by a fanfare of whimsical music. The background shifts to a colorful, animated graphic, highlighting **ASA's** grand reveal. After a few seconds, the music fades and the background returns to normal.]

**ASA**

(various languages) Bonjour! Hola! Konnichiwa! Ni Hao! Guten Tag! Shalom! Privet! Aloha! Hello!

[**AUSTIN's** eyes widen in terror, his heart racing as he sprints back towards his house, panic evident in his every step.]

**AUSTIN**

(shouting) No, no, no!

[The forest animals, startled by **AUSTIN's** sudden movement, scatter in all directions. The mama rabbit and her seven bunnies, overcome with fear, trip over each other in their haste to flee, their small bodies tumbling in a chaotic flurry.]

[The squirrel, startled by the commotion, drops its precious nut and scurries away, only to dart back for it before bolting off into the safety of the foliage.]

[Meanwhile, the deer, initially frozen in shock, stumbles awkwardly on its legs, resembling a fawn learning to walk, before regaining its footing and bounding away with newfound urgency.]

**INT. AUSTIN’S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS**

[As **AUSTIN** reaches his house, his breath ragged and his heart pounding, he scrambles inside and dives under his bed, seeking refuge from whatever unknown force awaits him. With trembling hands, he grabs a walkie-talkie and frantically attempts to contact his brother for help.]

[In the dim light of his room, a blue shimmer catches his eye as it dances under the door, filling the space with an eerie glow. Slowly, the door creaks open, revealing the source of the mysterious light. **AUSTIN** could hear the light pitter-patter of the teddy bear-like creature and then silence. Above him, the mattress becomes weighted down. Scared that this was going to be his end, he held his breath.]

[As **ASA's** head pops out from under the bed, a curious squirrel cautiously approaches the window, its tiny paws padding softly against the wooden frame as it peers inside, its eyes wide with curiosity.]

**ASA**

(gentle tone) Don't be afraid. You won't be harmed.

[As the squirrel watches with keen interest, the forest animals, including the deer and bunnies, huddle together on the ground nearby, their ears perked up in anticipation. A couple of birds flutter down to join them, their beady eyes fixed on the scene unfolding before them. One bird hops onto the deer's back, while another perches on the roof alongside the squirrel, eager to get a closer look at the mysterious newcomer.]

[Meanwhile, **AUSTIN** hesitantly takes **ASA's** hand, feeling a warm, soothing sensation wash over him as he looks into **ASA's** digital eyes, a sense of comfort and reassurance enveloping him.]

**ASA**

(gentle tone) Don't be afraid. You won't be harmed.

[As **AUSTIN** hesitantly takes **ASA's** hand, feeling a warm, soothing sensation wash over him, the squirrel and the bird hug each other in suspense, their eyes fixed on the unfolding scene. Then, the squirrel signs to the animals on the ground that **AUSTIN** is okay, causing the animals in both groups to let out a collective sigh of relief. On the ground, the deer, rabbits, and other forest creatures relax, their earlier fear dissipating as they witness the peaceful interaction between **AUSTIN** and **ASA.]**

**AUSTIN**

You feel... good. What are you?

**ASA**

**ASAPH!** That stands for Advanced Support Android for Psychological Healing. But you can call me **ASA!** It sounds better.

[**AUSTIN**'s eyes widen in awe.]

**AUSTIN**

Wh-Why are you here?

**ASA**

When I arrived on your planet, I scanned Earth for someone in need. And I picked you!

[The scene transitions to outer space, where an oval-shaped metallic pod enters Earth's atmosphere. Graphics on the screen indicate a scanning process, with various pictures of people scrolling past. A crosshair moves across the Earth until it locks onto a spot with specific longitude and latitude coordinates, 49.2201° N latitude and 122.6011° W longitude.]

[As the crosshair locks onto the spot, the scrolling pictures fade away, and a video feed replaces them. The video shows **AUSTIN** sitting on his bed, looking sad and holding a picture of him and his family. He wipes a tear from his eye, his expression reflecting his sorrow.]

[Cut back to the present moment as **AUSTIN** reacts to **ASA**'s explanation.]

[**AUSTIN** looks surprised.]

**AUSTIN**

Me? Why me?

**ASA**

My sensors detected emotional distress in you.

[**ASA**'s leaf starts wilting slightly.]

**AUSTIN**

Why is your leaf changing?

**ASA**

(panics briefly, then chuckles) Oh my circuits! I'm dying! (pretends to beg the universe)

[The squirrel and the bird, sitting outside the window, freeze in terror at **ASA**'s sudden exclamation. With wide eyes, they make a clumsy attempt to flee, darting in opposite directions. In their haste, they collide mid-air, stars swirling around their dazed heads. On the forest floor, the other animals, sensing the panic above, tense up, ready to dash away at a moment's notice.]

**AUSTIN**

(concerned) What's wrong?

**ASA**

(smiling) Just kidding! It's an indicator of your mental health. Green means good, yellow means depressed, and brown... well, that's really bad.

[**AUSTIN** jumps in surprise at **ASA**'s revelation, his eyes widening in disbelief.]

**AUSTIN**

You're as bad as my brother!

[The squirrel, now recovered from its shock, furiously rolls up its nonexistent sleeves, shaking its tiny fist at **ASA** in mock anger. The bird, realizing the futility of the squirrel's gesture, gently restrains its friend, soothing its agitation. Meanwhile, on the ground, the other animals watch the scene unfold with a mixture of curiosity and relief, reassured by **AUSTIN**'s safety and **ASA**'s playful nature.]

**ASA**

(laughs) My design is advanced. I observe and analyze, even read your thoughts a bit.

**AUSTIN**

Seriously?

**ASA**

Well, not completely. But I could, though that'd be rude.

[They sit together on the bed, **ASA** comforting **AUSTIN**.]

[**ASA** and **AUSTIN** sit on the bed, and **ASA** notices a picture frame nearby.]

**ASA**

(pointing) Is that your family?

**AUSTIN** (smiling) Yeah. That's us at the beach with my Uncle Adam. It was a great day.

[As **AUSTIN**'s smile fades into sadness, the squirrel suddenly produces a small picture frame from its hiding place, gazing at it with a mixture of longing and nostalgia. Beside the squirrel, the bird watches with sympathetic eyes, understanding the depths of its friend's emotions.]

**ASA**

What a beautiful memory, **AUSTIN**. You all look really close. I'm close to my family too.

**AUSTIN**

(curious) You have a family? Can robots do that?

[**ASA** looks shocked and jumps up in excitement.]

**ASA**

Excuse me? Robot? No way, I am no robot. Robots are all— (switches to robotic voice) I AM A ROBOT, I HAVE NO THOUGHTS OF MY OWN. I DO AS I AM TOLD.

[Outside the window, the squirrel, inspired by ASA's antics, starts mimicking ASA's movements, clumsily attempting to do the robot dance. Its bird friend chirps and laughs along, amused by the spectacle. Meanwhile, on the ground, the other animals watch with curiosity, unable to comprehend what they're seeing.]

**AUSTIN**

(laughs) That's funny.

[**ASA s**miles warmly as **AUSTIN** laughs.]

**ASA**

Yay! A laugh!

[As **AUSTIN** gets up from his bed, the squirrel and bird quickly scurry out of sight. They move over to the other end of the window and pop their tiny heads out to continue watching.]

[**AUSTIN** grabs the picture frame and walks it over to his desk, placing it down.]

**AUSTIN**

I didn't think I would feel much like smiling today. Thanks for trying to cheer me up.

[As **ASA** gets up and rests its hand on **AUSTIN**'s shoulder, a gentle blue light emanates from its hand, visibly relaxing **AUSTIN**.]

[As the blue light glows, both the squirrel and bird's eyes become mesmerized by it, their attention fully captured by the soothing glow.]

**AUSTIN**

(sighs) Wow, what is that? I feel—not as sad for some reason.

**ASA**

It's one of the many features I have. Most lifeforms respond to certain frequencies in interesting ways. The frequency I just used makes people feel better, temporarily.

[**AUSTIN** turns around, shedding a tear.]

**ASA**

(comforting) Loss is a difficult emotion, **AUSTIN**, but remember, the memories of your mother are a timeless treasure. Let's embark on a journey to honor her legacy together.

[As the squirrel and the bird gaze on, they seem to be swooning to the hopeful sight, their little hearts filled with optimism.]

**[END SCENE.]**

**EXT. AUSTIN'S HOME - DAY**

[Outside **AUSTIN**'s house lies a forgotten garden, overrun with weeds and tangled foliage. Just around the corner, hidden in the shadows of the trees, our little forest friends gather. The squirrel, still caught up in the excitement of mimicking the scene it just witnessed, energetically reenacts the encounter for the other animals, who sit in awe of the storytelling spectacle.]

[As **ASA**'s face falls upon the neglected garden, a sense of sadness washes over the scene.]

**ASA**

Oh, wow.

[**AUSTIN** kicks a plant pot lightly, his expression somber.]

**AUSTIN**

Yeah, this was my mom's garden. It was her favorite thing to do until she got sick.

[**ASA** places its hands into the soil, emitting a green light.]

**ASA**

**[SOUND EFFECT: ding!] No way!**

[The ding from **ASA** catches the attention of the forest animals nearby. As a group, they cautiously peer from the side of the house, their curious eyes fixed on the unfolding events.]

[**AUSTIN** looks at **ASA** with curiosity, sensing something extraordinary is about to happen.]

**AUSTIN**

Why are you so excited, **ASA?** I don't understand.

[All the forest animals pick up on **ASA**'s infectious excitement and start prancing around. The squirrel, being hyperactive, goes a little overboard. The rest of the animals are staring at the squirrel in disbelief. The squirrel notices and stops to stare back. He shrugs and then blushes. The rest of the animals look at each other and join in the playful commotion while the squirrel resumes its hyperactive dancing.]

[**ASA** runs over to **AUSTIN** and places its hands on his cheeks, slightly squeezing them. At the same time, the bird mimics the action with the squirrel as it’s the only one still dancing, panning its face in the direction of the scene.]

[**ASA** then directs **AUSTIN**'s attention towards the neglected garden, excitement evident in its voice.]

**ASA**

The essence of your mother exists here, making the soil in this garden plot rich with nutrients. We could grow a whole forest of flowers and plants here if we wanted.

[**AUSTIN** takes his face back and rubs his cheeks.]

**AUSTIN**

But I don't know anything about gardening, that was my mom's thing.

**ASA**

You may not know anything, but I know EVERYTHING!

[As **ASA's** eyes widen with power, so do the squirrels, mirroring the surge of energy. Its eyes sparkle with thoughts of domination. However, before the squirrel can get too carried away, its bird friend smacks it upside the head. The squirrel is momentarily stunned by the action, rubbing its head in resentment.]

**ASA**

Don't worry, **AUSTIN**, I'm here to guide you.

[**ASA** walks towards the garden plot, picking up packets of seeds left behind by **AUSTIN**'s mom.]

**ASA**

What better way to honor your mother than to plant a garden in her memory? And since your mom left so much of herself here, you would be swimming in her essence. She's all around us, **AUSTIN.**

[The forest creatures, inspired by **ASA**'s words, exchange glances and nod in agreement.]

[The scene ends with a sense of hope and determination as **AUSTIN** and **ASA** prepare to honor his mother's memory by revitalizing the neglected garden.]

**END SCENE**

**EXT. AUSTIN'S GARDEN - NIGHT**

**ASA**

Great job today, **AUSTIN!** By Mother's Day, that garden is going to be filled with brilliant colors. It will be like a rainbow threw up all over the place!

[As the sun dips low, **ASA** and **AUSTIN** sit under a starry sky, surrounded by the revitalized garden.]

[Meanwhile, in the depths of the forest, the animals exchange gifts as tokens of appreciation for their collaborative effort. The deer discovers a safer thicket crafted by the squirrel, providing shelter for them during harsh weather. The birds present a bounty of dandelions and leafy greens to the bunnies, ensuring they have ample food. Additionally, the deer locates a bird feeder and offers it to the birds as a gesture of gratitude.]

[**ASA** and **AUSTIN** chuckle together.]

**AUSTIN**

My mom would love it. Thanks, **ASA**. I feel closer to her now.

[**ASA** sits beside **AUSTIN**.]

**ASA**

Life is like a beautiful dance of joy and sorrow. Your mom's love is a shining star in the night sky, always watching over you.

[**ASA** rests its head against **AUSTIN** and wraps its arm around him.]

[Meanwhile, in the depths of the forest, the squirrel settles down on a comfortable branch, a cozy blanket draped over it. It uses a shiny new nut as a pillow and dims a lantern for the night. Behind it hangs a picture frame displaying all the forest friends together, a symbol of their shared accomplishment and camaraderie. With a sigh of relief and contentment, the squirrel drifts off to sleep.]

**AUSTIN**

Thanks, **ASA**. I'm really glad you picked me.

**NARRATOR (V.O.)**

As the stars twinkled above, **AUSTIN** and **ASA f**ound solace in the revitalized garden. Together, they had planted the seeds of hope and nurtured them with love.

[The camera pans out, capturing the tranquil scene of **AUSTIN** and **ASA** under the starry sky, surrounded by the vibrant garden.]

**NARRATOR (V.O.)**

And so, as the night embraced them with its gentle embrace, **AUSTIN** felt the warmth of his mother's love enveloping him, a reminder that she was always with him, guiding him through life's journey.

[**ASA** and **AUSTIN** share a tender moment, their bond stronger than ever.]

**NARRATOR (V.O.)**

And as they sat there, side by side, they knew that no matter what challenges lay ahead, they would face them together, with courage, love, and the enduring strength of their friendship.

[The scene fades to black, leaving behind a sense of comfort and connection.]

**END OF SEGMENT 1**

**INT. SMALL TOWN - DAY**

[The scene opens with a picturesque view of a Cascade Springs where the wind carries a sense of magic. **CADENCE**, the new girl known for her vibrant and mismatched clothing, resides there, adding to the town's charm. The narration sets the stage for the encounter between **CADENCE** and **AUSTIN**.]

**NARRATOR (V.O.)**

One year ago, in the enchanting little town where whimsy danced in the wind, lived **CADENCE** - a new girl whose attire resembled a kaleidoscope of colors. Each piece of clothing seemed to tell its own story, creating a perfect harmony of uniqueness.

**INT. BOWLING ALLEY - DAY**

[Cut to **AUSTIN's** 7th birthday party at a bowling alley. It will be from the point of view of a video camera. The atmosphere is lively as kids play and parents mingle. **AUSTIN**, accompanied by his family, indulges in an oversized ice cream cone, his eyes gleaming with excitement. However, his joy quickly turns to disappointment as the ice cream cone falls to the ground, prompting tears to well up in his eyes.]

**NARRATOR (V.O.)**

It was **AUSTIN's** 7th birthday celebration, held at the local bowling alley. His family, including his brother, mom, and dad - who captured the event on film - gathered to mark the occasion. Invited classmates added to the cheerful ambiance.

[**AUSTIN's** mom notices his distress and reacts with concern, prompting **CADENCE**, who had been quietly observing from afar, to offer her ice cream cone as a gesture of kindness. **AUSTIN's** tears are replaced by laughter as the two children bond over their shared moment.]

**NARRATOR (V.O.)**

As **AUSTIN's** tears threatened to spoil the fun, a ray of kindness shone through. **CADENCE**, seated nearby and enjoying her ice cream cone, witnessed the mishap and extended a hand of friendship. With a simple gesture, she offered her cone to **AUSTIN**, turning his frown into laughter.

[**AUSTIN's** mom, observing the heartwarming interaction between **AUSTIN** and **CADENCE**, shares a tender moment with her husband, acknowledging the sweetness of their connection.]

**NARRATOR (V.O.)**

Observing the heartwarming exchange between the two children, **AUSTIN's** mom couldn't help but smile, leaning into her husband's arm with a sense of warmth and pride.

[**AUSTIN** and **CADENCE** continue to laugh together, their newfound friendship blossoming amidst the backdrop of the bustling birthday party.]

**END SCENE**

**SCENE 2 ASA's Wise Whispers**

**[INT. PARK - DAY]**

[Transition to the present day, where **AUSTIN** and **CADENCE's** friendship has gradually blossomed. **AUSTIN**, still harboring a crush on **CADENCE**, struggles with his nerves and hesitates to express his admiration for her unique style.]

**NARRATOR (V.O.)**

In the present day, **AUSTIN** and **CADENCE's** friendship had slowly taken root, yet **AUSTIN's** untold crush for **CADENCE** lingered, wrapped in a veil of nervousness. Desperate to convey his admiration for her distinct fashion sense, **AUSTIN** found himself grappling with uncertainty.

[**AUSTIN** sits under a tree, deep in thought, contemplating how to approach **CADENCE**. Suddenly, he feels a gentle tap on his shoulder and turns to see **ASA**, the helpful android, standing beside him.]

**ASA**

If you want to get closer to **CADENCE**, just be yourself and be honest with her. Appreciate the melody of her uniqueness. Compliment her creativity, and your friendship will bloom like flowers in your mother's garden.

[**AUSTIN** heeds **ASA's** advice and musters the courage to approach **CADENCE** with a genuine smile. He expresses his admiration for her style, comparing it to a symphony of colors, each piece telling a story.]

**AUSTIN**

Your style is like a symphony of colors, each piece telling a story. It's amazing!

[**CADENCE's** face lights up with joy, resembling the sun breaking through clouds, as she receives **AUSTIN's** compliment with genuine appreciation.]

**CADENCE**

You’re such a geek, **AUSTIN**. You say the strangest things. I never know if I should thank you or ignore you. \*chuckles\*

**NARRATOR (V.O.)**

With **ASA's** guidance, **AUSTIN's** heartfelt words reached **CADENCE's** ears, sparking a radiant smile that illuminated the space between them. Their friendship flourished, bound by shared laughter and the delight of discovering each other's worlds.

[**ASA**, observing their growing friendship from the shadows, understands the need to remain hidden, silently guiding **AUSTIN** like a guardian angel with circuits instead of wings.]

**NARRATOR (V.O.)**

Yet amidst the blossoming friendship, **ASA** remained vigilant from the shadows, recognizing the importance of its hidden role in guiding **AUSTIN**. Like a guardian angel cloaked in darkness, **ASA** ensured the harmony of their bond remained undisturbed.

**END SCENE**

**SCENE 3 The Secret Keeper**

**EXT. TOWN SQUARE - AFTERNOON**

[On a sunny afternoon, **CADENCE** catches a glimpse of **AUSTIN** conversing with **ASA**, the mysterious android, piquing her curiosity. She approaches **AUSTIN** with a sparkle in her eyes, seeking answers.]

**CADENCE**

What's the secret, **AUSTIN**?

**AUSTIN**

\*nervously\* Oh! Hey! I didn’t see you there, **CADENCE**. Secret? What secret?

[**AUSTIN** starts to sweat and becomes clumsy while opening his backpack to pretend he has something in there he needs.]

**CADENCE**

**AUSTIN**, I saw what you were doing. I saw you talking to some sort of… well, I don’t know what, but I saw it. What’s the secret?

[**AUSTIN**, wearing a hesitant smile, decides to confide in **CADENCE**, revealing **ASA's** existence to her. He emphasizes the importance of keeping their friendship with **ASA** a secret to protect her from potential threats.]

**AUSTIN**

**ASA** is my friend and guide, but we must keep it a secret. Someone might try to take it away.

[**CADENCE**, intrigued by the revelation, agrees to uphold the secrecy of their extraordinary friendship.]

**CADENCE**

I understand. Our friendship with ASA will remain our little secret.

**CUT TO**

[As the sun sets, enveloping the town in a golden glow, **AUSTIN** and **CADENCE** stand together, gazing at the horizon, unaware of the adventures that await them. The promise of countless extraordinary journeys with ASA fills the air, igniting their anticipation.]

**NARRATOR (V.O.)**

As the sun dipped below the horizon, casting a golden hue over the tranquil town, **AUSTIN** and **CADENCE** stood side by side, their hearts brimming with excitement. Little did they know, their secret friendship with **ASA** was just the beginning. The universe held countless adventures, and the trio – **AUSTIN**, **CADENCE**, and **ASA** – were destined for extraordinary journeys together.

[Under the twinkling stars, **AUSTIN**, **CADENCE**, and **ASA** make a pact. "No matter how big the adventure, how colorful the challenge, we'll face it together," **AUSTIN** declares, sealing their promise with a secret handshake. The night embraces them, marking the beginning of their journey into the extraordinary.]

**CUT TO**

[The trio stands beneath the starlit sky, their silhouettes outlined against the backdrop of twinkling stars. With hands clasped together, they solemnly vow to stand by each other through every adventure and challenge that comes their way. As the night envelops them, they embark on their journey into the unknown, united by their unwavering bond.]

**NARRATOR (V.O.)**

Under the canopy of twinkling stars, **AUSTIN**, **CADENCE**, and **ASA** forge a pact that will bind them together through every twist and turn of their extraordinary journey. With their promise sealed, they step into the night, ready to embrace whatever adventures lay ahead.

**END SCENE**

**INT. ENCHANTED FOREST - DAY**

[**AUSTIN** and **CADENCE** open their eyes to find themselves in the middle of the enchanted forest.]

**AUSTIN**

What in the heck!?

[**AUSTIN** looks gobsmacked at the sight while **CADENCE** looks like she’s in love.]

**CADENCE**

(excitingly) OMG! This is literally the best thing ever! How are you doing this?

**[ASA chuckles]**

**ASA**

Imagine standing in a special field where I can control how light behaves. Light is like the paintbrush of the world, and I'm the artist who gets to decide how to use it! By adjusting the way light moves through the air and interacts with objects, I can create incredible illusions right before your eyes. It's like painting with invisible colors, transforming ordinary scenes into extraordinary adventures. So here in this field, we can turn the trees into towering giants, make the flowers sparkle like jewels, and invite fantastical creatures to join us on our journey. It's all about bending the rules of light to create a magical world just for us. That and a little mind trickery.

[**CADENCE**, filled with excitement, runs towards **AUSTIN**, who is still in awe of his surroundings.]

**CADENCE**

**AUSTIN**! Let’s explore this place! Penny and Cooper are never going to believe this!

[**AUSTIN** snaps out of his daze.]

**AUSTIN**

No, **CADENCE**. You can’t tell them, remember?

**CADENCE**

What? Why not? It’s not like they are going to steal **ASA**.

[**CADENCE** ponders for a moment.]

**CADENCE**

Let’s put a pin in that. I could see Penny trying…

**ASA**

Let’s go exploring! I hear there are puzzles and riddles to be solved!

[**ASA** begins to walk down the path with **CADENCE** following. **AUSTIN** is still standing there, looking at a small mystical squirrel in front of him.]

**INSERT**

Mystical Squirrel Form

Appearance

- The mystical squirrel appears larger than a normal squirrel, with a majestic aura surrounding it.

- Its fur takes on a rich, golden hue, with patterns resembling ancient Asian symbols woven into its coat.

- The squirrel's eyes gleam with intelligence and ancient wisdom, their deep, dark gaze seeming to hold secrets of the universe.

- Long, flowing whiskers extend from its snout, gracefully swaying with each movement.

- Intricate patterns adorn its fur, resembling traditional Asian calligraphy and artwork.

Attributes

- Wisdom The mystical squirrel possesses unparalleled wisdom, drawing from ancient knowledge and spiritual insights.

- Serenity It exudes a calming presence, bringing peace and tranquility to those around it.

- Clairvoyance The squirrel has the ability to see beyond the physical realm, offering guidance and foresight to those in need.

- Connection to Nature It serves as a guardian of the natural world, with a deep bond to the earth and its inhabitants.

- Mystic Energy A subtle, otherworldly energy emanates from the squirrel, hinting at its connection to mystical forces.

[The further away ASA gets, the field moves with it. The field passes by the squirrel, revealing its regular form. AUSTIN sees it’s just a regular squirrel and quickly runs to join his friends. The squirrel looks sad to be normal again. His bird friend flies over top of him and signals him to follow. The squirrel jumps up with excitement and follows the bird towards the trio. The other forest friends have had too much excitement for the day and do not follow.]

**END SCENE**

**SCENE 4 The Heart of the Enchanted Forest**

[As they venture deeper into the Enchanted Forest, **AUSTIN**, **CADENCE**, and **ASA** are enveloped by the lush undergrowth. The trees sway gently, whispering secrets known only to them.]

**NARRATOR (V.O.)**

In the heart of the Enchanted Forest, **AUSTIN**, **CADENCE**, and **ASA** embarked on a journey into the unknown. Their footsteps were hushed by the lush undergrowth, while the trees whispered secrets that stirred their curiosity.

[**CADENCE** gazes around, her eyes wide with wonder.]

**CADENCE**

(eyes wide with wonder) It's like stepping into a dream.

[**AUSTIN** grins, his excitement palpable.]

**AUSTIN**

(grinning) A dream we get to explore together.

[**ASA's** sensors flicker with excitement as they lead the way, their circuits humming softly.]

**ASA**

(voice echoing) We're entering the heart of the forest, where imagination comes to life.

[They come across a clearing adorned with vibrant flowers and buzzing with life. Rainbow Butterflies flit around **CADENCE**, leaving trails of shimmering colors in their wake. **ASA** communicates with a group of Wise Owlets perched in the nearby trees, exchanging ancient wisdom.]

**CADENCE** (amazed) I've never seen anything like this before!

**AUSTIN** (excitedly) That's the beauty of our journey. Every step brings new wonders.

[Their path is obstructed by a Rainbow Puzzle, its pieces scattered in a kaleidoscope of colors.]

**CADENCE**

(thoughtfully) Maybe the key is in how we see the colors.

[With **CADENCE's** suggestion, they work together, rearranging the puzzle pieces with a splash of creativity. Slowly, the colors blend, forming a rainbow bridge that spans the gap before them.]

**AUSTIN**

(astonished) It worked!

**ASA**

(nods) Creativity is the key to unlocking the mysteries of this forest.

[As they venture deeper, the forest reveals its secrets. Mystical melodies fill the air, and whispers of ancient tales echo through the trees.]

**ASA**

(leaf twitches) There's something more, hidden within these whispers.

[Guided by **ASA's** keen senses, they uncover clues about a hidden treasure that could bring balance to their world.]

**AUSTIN**

(determined) Whatever awaits us, we'll face it together.

[With renewed determination, they press forward, their bond growing stronger with each step.]

**END SCENE**

**SCENE 5 Dream's Challenge**

[The scene opens in the heart of the dream realm. **AUSTIN**, **CADENCE**, and **ASA** stand before the **GUARDIAN OF DREAMS**, a majestic creature with a mane of stardust.]

**NARRATOR (V.O.)**

In the heart of the dream realm, **AUSTIN**, **CADENCE**, and **ASA** stood before the **GUARDIAN OF DREAMS**, a majestic creature with a mane of stardust, who presented them with a challenge shrouded in riddles.

**GUARDIAN OF DREAMS**

(speaking in riddles) Prove the strength of your friendship, and the treasure shall reveal itself, unlocking the power to weave dreams into reality.

**INT. FORGE OF COURAGE - DAY**

The Guardian of Dreams stands before Austin and Cadence, a figure shrouded in mystery amidst the swirling dream dust.

**GUARDIAN OF DREAMS**

(solemnly) The town of Whimsy, trapped within a snow globe at the heart of the Forge of Courage.

As the Guardian speaks, Austin and Cadence are enveloped in a colorful cloud of dream dust, coughing as it fills the air. Suddenly, silence descends.

When the dust settles, Austin finds himself standing alone at the entrance of the forge, the weight of the challenge pressing down upon him.

**INT. FORGE OF COURAGE - DAY**

The Forge of Courage looms before Austin, a vast chamber filled with towering machines, their gears churning and pistons hissing steam. Roaring furnaces line the walls, casting flickering shadows across the labyrinthine corridors that stretch into the distance.

The air crackles with energy, and the scent of hot metal hangs heavy in the air. Every surface is coated in a fine layer of soot, a testament to the ceaseless industry that defines this place.

Austin stands at the threshold, dwarfed by the enormity of the forge and the challenges it holds within. With a deep breath, he steps forward, ready to confront the trials that await him.

A futuristic band adorns his right arm, two buttons gleaming softly in the dim light. One bears the face of Asa, the other Cadence.

**GUARDIAN OF DREAMS**

(gesturing to the band) Choose wisely, young guardian. Each friend may be summoned once during this trial.

Austin hesitates, feeling the weight of responsibility on his shoulders.

**AUSTIN**

(thoughtfully) I... I can't risk putting my friends in harm's way. I'll face this challenge alone.

With determination in his eyes, Austin steps forward, ready to confront the trials of the Forge of Courage on his own.

**INT. FORGE ROOM - DAY**

Austin enters the forge room, his eyes lighting up as he takes in the sight of the massive forge. He notices a detailed mural on the wall depicting Mjolnir, Thor's mighty hammer, with ancient Norse runes etched around it.

**AUSTIN**

(excitedly) Whoa, this is incredible!

He approaches the mural, studying the intricate runes.

**AUSTIN**

(reading aloud) "Whosoever holds this hammer, if he be worthy, shall possess the power of Thor."

The words resonate with Austin, igniting a sense of determination within him.

**AUSTIN**

(to himself) This forge... it's designed to create Mjolnir.

With renewed purpose, Austin turns his attention to the pedestal at the center of the room, where he spots the big red button and the slot below it.

**AUSTIN**

(determined) Time to forge my own destiny.

Austin begins to explore the room, searching for clues to unlock the forge and create Mjolnir, Thor's legendary weapon.

Austin notices intricate markings on the floor, indicating it might be movable. He begins experimenting with the tiles, trying to align them with the forge.

As he manipulates the floor, a section slides away to reveal a hidden compartment. Inside, he finds a key piece that fits into the slot on the pedestal.

**AUSTIN**

(excitedly) Found something!

Austin takes the key piece and places it into the slot on the pedestal. The forge ignites, heating up the scattered ore.

**AUSTIN**

(pressing the button) Here goes nothing.

The ore melts, flowing into a mold shaped like Mjolnir, gradually taking form.

**AUSTIN**

(watching the process) It's working!

Once the ore has completely melted and taken the form of Mjolnir, the forge stops, and the hammer cools down.

Austin retrieves the newly created Mjolnir from the forge, holding it in his hands.

**AUSTIN**

(attempting to lift it) Let's see if this works.

Austin tries to lift Mjolnir. If he is deemed worthy and pure of heart, he lifts the hammer effortlessly. Otherwise, it remains immovable.

**AUSTIN**

(determined) Guess I still have some work to do.

Suddenly, the hammer disappears from his hands, and a hidden door to the labyrinth opens.

**AUSTIN**

(looking at the door) Looks like that's my next challenge.

He heads towards the door, ready to face whatever lies ahead.

**INT. LABYRINTH - DAY**

Austin navigates the labyrinth, its metal walls towering over him at 8 feet high. Wooden barrels and crates litter the maze, scattered haphazardly throughout.

He attempts to stack them for a better vantage point, but they crumble under his touch, frustrating his efforts.

After 10 minutes of fruitless wandering, Austin's resolve begins to waver. He gazes down at his armband, contemplating his next move.

A decision made, he presses the Asa button, summoning a swirl of dream dust that materializes Asa beside him. They share a joyous reunion, embracing tightly.

**AUSTIN**

Asa, I could really use your help getting through this maze.

**ASA**

You got it, buddy! Leave it to me.

With Asa leading the way, they dash through the corridors, Austin struggling to keep pace.

They reach a giant arch leading to a circular metal platform. Asa motions for Austin to follow, disappearing through the arch.

**GUARDIAN OF DREAMS**

Congratulations, Austin, on putting your pride aside and asking for help.

**AUSTIN**

What happened to Asa?

**GUARDIAN OF DREAMS**

Asa could only assist you with this challenge. Your next challenge awaits.

The Guardian announces the beginning of the next challenge, and the floor begins to shake, collapsing beneath Austin. He slides down into water, emerging in a cave surrounded by moss and trees, leading up to old Roman ruins.

With determination in his eyes, Austin takes a deep breath and prepares to face the next trial.

**INT. ROMAN RUINS CAVE - DAY**

The ground rumbles as two old burial caskets materialize within the ruins. Austin's fear is palpable.

**AUSTIN**

Uh oh... please don't be zombies.

The lids burst open, revealing two Roman centurion corpses brandishing swords. The Guardian of Dreams appears, delivering a grave warning.

**GUARDIAN OF DREAMS**

Your final challenge will test your ability to get creative. Should you fail, the Town of Whimsy will be lost forever.

With a puff of dream dust, the Guardian vanishes, leaving Austin to face the advancing centurions.

Austin scrambles, seeking higher ground amidst the crumbling ruins. His attempt to summon Cadence falters; he fears putting her in harm's way.

Cornered, with nowhere left to run, Austin closes his eyes, resigned to his fate. But the centurions hesitate, distracted by something unseen.

Suddenly, a mystical squirrel appears in a radiant glow. Seizing the moment, Austin summons Cadence, who materializes in a swirl of dream dust.

**CADENCE**

It's about time!

Cadence hastily sketches, conjuring a staff with a gem and a circular halo.

As the centurions focus on Austin, Cadence aligns the gem with a crack in the cave, focusing the light to burn one centurion to dust.

As the dust settles, a transformation begins. Programmable matter envelops Austin, forming a sleek suit of armor.

Austin marvels at his newfound strength as the suit enhances his abilities. With renewed confidence, he chases after the last centurion and drags it back to Cadence where she vanquishes it with the light.

**AUSTIN**

Awesome, Cadence!

The Guardian of Dreams emerges, presenting a pedestal with the snow globe containing the town of Whimsy.

**GUARDIAN OF DREAMS**

Congratulations, heroes! You have passed the trials and have freed the town of Whimsy.

In a puff of dream dust, the town disappears, and Asa returns to them. They rejoice together.

The Guardian addresses Austin, acknowledging his courage in asking for help.

**GUARDIAN OF DREAMS**

It's okay to rely on your friends, just as it's okay for them to rely on you.

Austin tears up, feeling conflicted. Cadence offers comfort.

**CADENCE**

It's okay to cry, Austin. I won’t judge you.

**AUSTIN**

My dad says that men don't cry but my mom used to say it was okay. I don't know what to do.

Austin, unsure of what to do, receives reassurance from Asa.

**ASA**

Crying doesn't make you any less of a man it makes you stronger. Holding your emotions in weakens your heart. If you want to cry in private, that's okay, just as long as you let it out.

The simulation fades, returning them to the forest. The trio plans their next adventure.

As the camera pans, the squirrel and the bird look pleased with themselves, dashing back into the forest.

**NARRATOR (V.O.)**

As the trio embarks on their next adventure, the forest seems to whisper tales of their bravery. Hopeful music lingers in the air, echoing the triumph of friendship over adversity. And in the heart of the forest, the squirrel and the bird exchange a knowing glance before disappearing into the shadows.

Hopeful music plays as the scene fades to black.

**[FADE TO BLACK]**

## Episode 2

How to Befriend a Bully - Austin, Cadence and Asa work together to befriend the school bully, Thadd. This friendship will be hard to maintain as his home life generally makes him hard to deal with. Sometimes they are friends, and other times Thadd acts out and picks on them.

In this episode, Austin, Cadence and Asa spy on Thadd and discover he has a love for animals and sees him caring for a hurt bird, the very same bird that’s friends with the squirrel. Austin learns that Asa is able to change it's shape into whatever it wants. Asa takes on the shape of a wounded bird and brutfully helps it. After they meet at Mama Josie’s Gelato Shop, we meet a new minor town character Mama Josie herself. She works with the kids to come up with a new gelato recipe. They mixed together pistachio ice cream with chunks of milk chocolate, bits of caramel and crunchy ice crispies.

Breakdown of the episode:

One sunny day at school, Austin and Cadence discovered a new ability of Asa's. The helpful android, with a gleam in its eyes, rearranged its parts to become a perfect replica of Austin's backpack.

Excitement bubbling, Austin and Cadence hatched a plan to befriend Tripp, the notorious bully. With Asa snugly disguised as Austin's backpack, the trio became detectives, observing Tripp's after-school activities to unravel the mystery behind his unkind behavior.

Sneaking behind Tripp, the trio reached a fence where mysterious sounds emanated. As they listened closely, they discovered a heartbreaking scene - Tripp, with teary eyes, was caring for an injured bird near a shed.

Amazed by what they witnessed, Austin, Cadence, and Asa realized Tripp's tough exterior hid a caring heart. He spoke gently to the hurt bird, tending to its injuries with a tenderness that seemed foreign to his usual demeanor.

Armed with newfound understanding, the trio decided to use this secret knowledge to connect with Tripp. The next day, they found themselves huddled near a window, facing the impending arrival of Tripp.

As Tripp demanded to know what they were hiding, Austin cautiously revealed a carefully wrapped bird, which was Asa in disguise, claiming he found it injured. Tripp's eyes widened, and his demeanor shifted from intimidation to concern.

Snatching the bird, Tripp showed a side of himself Austin and Cadence hadn't seen before. With a touch that seemed almost magical, Tripp skillfully tended to the bird's injuries, nursing it back to health. The bird, now healed, took flight into the open sky.

Amazement painted across their faces, Austin and Cadence celebrated Tripp's unexpected healing abilities. Tripp, now softened by the experience, looked at them with a mix of surprise and gratitude. A newfound bond emerged, creating the promise of a brighter and more understanding future.

As the quartet indulged in sweet treats at Mamma Josie's Gelato shop, the seeds of change were planted. Laughter replaced bitterness, and the atmosphere buzzed with newfound camaraderie. Mamma Josie, the wise gelato shop owner, observed the transformation with a knowing smile.

Under the warm glow of Mamma Josie's shop, the quartet made a pact. They decided to form the Gelato Guild, a group dedicated to fostering unity and understanding in their community. Mamma Josie gifted each member a special gelato flavor, symbolizing the unique contribution they brought to the guild.

The Gelato Guild's mission was to spread sweetness and kindness. Armed with gelato-inspired ideas, they organized events and activities that brought joy to the town. From gelato painting workshops to gelato-themed picnics, the guild's impact rippled through the community.

One day, as the guild prepared for a grand Gelato Gala, they discovered that Mamma Josie's cherished gelato recipes had gone missing. The town was plunged into a gloomy state as the Gelato Guild rallied to solve the mystery.

Asa, the technological maestro, transformed into a detective. With its sensors and circuits, Asa scanned for clues and followed a trail of digital breadcrumbs. The trio and Tripp, now Gelato Guild members, joined Asa in unraveling the mystery.

Following a series of digital clues, the Gelato Guild discovered that Tripp Sr. had stolen the recipes in a misguided attempt to regain recognition. The revelation sparked a mix of emotions, including empathy for Tripp Jr. and a determination to restore balance.

Rather than seeking retribution, the Gelato Guild extended an olive branch to Tripp Sr. They invited him to join their efforts in preparing for the Gelato Gala, emphasizing that sweetness and unity could mend even the deepest wounds.

The Gelato Gala became a town-wide celebration of sweetness, unity, and redemption. Mamma Josie, with a heart full of gratitude, unveiled a new gelato flavor inspired by the harmony brought about by the Gelato Guild.

Inspired by the success of the Gelato Gala, the Gelato Guild decided to organize a Flavorful Fundraiser. Each member created a unique gelato flavor representing their personality and story. The town enthusiastically supported the cause, raising funds for community projects and initiatives.

With the funds raised, the Gelato Guild initiated a Gelato Garden Beautification project. They transformed a neglected space in town into a colorful garden filled with gelato-inspired flowers and sculptures. The community, now enchanted by the vibrant garden, began to appreciate the beauty that unity and collaboration could bring.

Eager to spread sweetness beyond their town, the Gelato Guild conceived the idea of the Gelato Express – a mobile gelato truck that would bring joy to neighboring communities. Asa, equipped with state-of-the-art gelato-making technology, turned the Gelato Express into a mobile oasis of delightful flavors.

The Gelato Express embarked on a gelato adventure, traveling to nearby towns and villages. The joyous jingles of the Gelato Express drew people from all walks of life, fostering connections and creating a tapestry of shared experiences.

## Episode 3

This episode looks into the relationship between Austin and Dwight. Asa will remain in the shadows for this story. Dwight will get his official introduction to Asa in a later episode.

In a cozy house near the edge of a forest, Austin and Dwight, once inseparable, had started growing apart. Austin missed the days when they played superheroes in the clearing behind their house, with Dwight as Loki to Austin's Thor.

Feeling a bit lost, Austin turned to Asa for guidance. The metallic companion explained that people change as they grow older, but bonds can be strengthened by finding common ground. Asa suggested Austin pick one thing to share with Dwight.

Inspired by Asa's advice, Austin and Dwight returned to the forest clearing. They decided to play superheroes again, battling imaginary villains and dreaming of creating their own costumes one day.

Austin, brimming with excitement, approached Asa with a big idea. "Can you help me make something awesome?" he asked. Asa agreed, and together, they gathered random items from around the house, yard, and shed.

A little while later, Dwight arrived home to find a note from Austin: "Help my brother! The Skrull have invaded and kidnapped me. Come to Asgard and help me!" It was misspelled in the charming way only an 8-year-old could.

Following the note, Dwight hurried to the forest clearing, where he discovered Austin's incredible creation – Asgard made from random materials, attached to an abandoned shed.

There, waiting for Dwight, was Austin, adorned in a red blanket cape, a cardboard helmet, and a makeshift hammer. In a surprise twist, Austin presented Dwight with a sceptre, crown, and green cape, all crafted with love and creativity.

Dwight, touched by Austin's effort, joined the epic battle against the imaginary Skrull invaders. Asa, hiding in the bushes, watched with joy as the brothers, united by imagination and creativity, rekindled their special bond.

After the Skrull invasion, Austin and Dwight spent the afternoon crafting more costumes and props. The forest clearing transformed into a workshop of creativity, echoing with laughter and the sounds of their shared adventures.

Inspired by their success, the brothers decided to turn the clearing into the Imagination Station, a place where dreams took flight and adventures unfolded. With each passing day, the station expanded, filled with the magic of their shared creativity.

One day, the brothers stumbled upon an old chest in the shed. With curiosity in their eyes, they decided to create a time capsule, a treasure trove of memories capturing the essence of their bond. Each item they added held a story, a reminder of their adventures in the clearing.

As dusk settled over the forest, Austin and Dwight made a pact. They decided to name two stars in the sky after each other, creating a celestial bond that would endure forever. The clearing, now filled with the soft glow of fireflies, witnessed the sealing of their celestial promise.

One moonlit night, the brothers embarked on a nighttime adventure in the Imagination Station. Armed with flashlights and their boundless creativity, they explored the forest, discovering the magic that comes alive when the world sleeps.

Under the starlit sky, the brothers celebrated the magic of their newfound adventures. Asa, ever watchful, illuminated the scene with a soft glow. The Imagination Station became a haven for the extraordinary, a place where the ordinary transformed into the extraordinary.

Word of the brothers' magical adventures spread, attracting other children to the Imagination Station. The forest clearing evolved into a bustling hub of creativity, where kids from all walks of life came together to build, dream, and create everlasting memories.

The remaining scenes depict various seasons of the brothers' lives, showcasing their ever-evolving bond. From childhood adventures in the Imagination Station to teenage escapades and beyond, the brothers navigate the twists and turns of life, always anchored by the enduring strength of their sibling bond.

## Episode 4

This episode introduces Cadence’s little brother and sister, Cooper and Penny. Cooper suffers with depression as he isn’t very comfortable in his own skin and Cadence believes that Asa can help.

In the heart of playful afternoons, Austin and Cadence found themselves in the joyous company of Asa. Cadence, or “Kiki” as her siblings called her, decided to borrow Asa to bring some cheer to her little brother, Cooper.

In the cozy living room, the trio embarked on a mission to create Fluffy Town, a pillow and blanket fortress where toots were as common as laughter. Penny, the spirited diva, and Cooper, the shy storyteller, were caught in the whimsical adventure.

As evening approached, Kiki shared her secret plan with Asa. Cooper, once a vibrant storyteller, had lost interest in things he used to enjoy. Kiki pulled out her sketchbook, unveiling the magical cube she called a shadow box.

Asa, with a touch of magic, transformed into the shadow box. Kiki explained the box's enchanting ability to project shadows of the story being told on the wall.

As the siblings gathered snacks, Cadence encouraged Cooper to tell a story. At first hesitant, Cooper began narrating the tale of Puss in Boots. Unbeknownst to the twins, Asa, in the shadow box form, started to bring the story to life on the wall.

Amazement danced in Penny and Cooper's eyes as Puss in Boots materialized through shadows. Kiki, with a mischievous grin, told them to focus on the story.

Cooper, now captivated by the magic, told his story with growing enthusiasm. The room filled with cheers and claps as shadows danced to his words. Inspired, Penny and Cooper both wanted to share tales, breathing life into Fluffy Town.

Kiki witnessed the spark returning to her brother's eyes and smiled. "We should do this more often," she suggested. Asa, in shadow form, projected a heart on the wall, silently expressing the joy of newfound connections.

Encouraged by the magical tales spun in Fluffy Town, the trio decided to form the Enchanted Storytelling Club. Together, they invited other kids from the neighborhood to join their imaginative gatherings, creating a space where stories came alive in the most enchanting ways.

As the club grew, the living room transformed into a kaleidoscope of stories. Each member took turns sharing their favorite tales, and Asa, ever the creative companion, added a touch of magic to make the narratives visually captivating.

One day, as the club members gathered, Kiki proposed a quest for the Golden Quill, a mythical writing tool said to unlock the most extraordinary stories. The children, fueled by curiosity and imagination, embarked on an adventure to find the legendary quill.

Their quest led them to the Guardian of Imagination, a wise and whimsical creature who challenged them with riddles and creativity tests. Only those with boundless imaginations could prove worthy of the Golden Quill.

After overcoming various challenges, the Guardian of Imagination revealed the location of the Golden Quill. Nestled within the heart of Fluffy Town, the quill glowed with the essence of limitless creativity, ready to be wielded by those who dared to dream.

With the Golden Quill in hand, the Enchanted Storytelling Club discovered its extraordinary power. They could now weave stories that transcended the boundaries of shadows, bringing characters to life in the most vibrant and fantastical ways.

As the Enchanted Storytelling Club continued their adventures, Fluffy Town became a timeless haven for creativity and connection. Generations of children, inspired by the trio's legacy, gathered to share stories, making Fluffy Town a place where imagination knew no bounds.

The remaining pages showcase various seasons of the Enchanted Storytelling Club's adventures. From exploring mythical lands to facing imaginary challenges, the kids, with Asa by their side, navigate the wondrous realms of creativity and friendship.

## Episode 5

In the quaint town, a cloud of bitterness loomed as Tripp Sr., a failed inventor, harbored resentment. His bitterness found an outlet in sabotaging the school's science fair projects, including Austin's Mag Lev Train and Cadence's Rainbow Volcano.

During a break in the gym, Asa, disguised as Austin's backpack, witnessed Tripp Sr.'s sabotage. Distressed, Asa revealed the sabotage to Austin and Cadence, unraveling the mystery behind the ruined projects.

Reflecting on Tripp Jr.'s compassion for animals, the trio deduced the pressure Tripp Sr. exerted on his son. Despite their anger, Austin proposed a surprising idea—enhancing Tripp's malfunctioning robot to help him win.

Cadence, conflicted by the unfairness of Tripp benefiting from the sabotage, voiced her reservations. Austin argued that a moment of happiness for Tripp could alter his perspective. The trio, embodying patience and humility, agreed to use Asa's technology to enhance Tripp's robot.

Unbeknownst to them, Tripp Sr. lurked in the shadows, observing Asa's capabilities. The trio's plan unfolded as Asa worked its technological magic on Tripp's robot just minutes before the judges returned.

Tripp's enhanced robot stole the spotlight, winning 1st place. Austin and Cadence, demonstrating understanding and compassion, congratulated Tripp on his victory.

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## Beyond

The kids are going to learn how to grow up with the guidance of Asa. At some point, all the kids will learn about Asa. They actively try to keep adults unaware of Asa because grown ups always take away fun toys and they didn’t want to lose Asa.

Thadd’s father will keep trying to steal Asa so he can enhance his failed inventions like it did to his sons robot. They kids will decide to investigate why Thadd’s father is the way that he is and they will uncover that his old protege stole his ideas and became one of the richest people alive (Elon Musk?) lol, I don’t know if we should use his real name but it is an alternate reality…

## Post Spinoff

Asa will find a new group of friends and this time the secret comes out. This new spinoff will introduce other Asa’s that appear in a variety of different forms. They don’t all look and sound the same, it differs from person to person. The OG Asa will always remain as the classic version.

These stories will continue to focus around the younger age groups. The lessons given will reflect the challenges of the kids of that time. Even if not much has changed, we can showcase more ways of dealing with issues to help engage people in using their imagination when dealing with life’s big challenges.

# Phase 2: The Key

## Setting

This is the first first spin-off for the Asaverse. Austin and his friends no longer need Asa to be a prominent member of their group as now they have access to CLARC and the AI programs aboard the station.

Cascade Springs, a fictional picturesque town nestled along the banks of the Fraser River in British Columbia, is known for its stunning waterfalls and natural springs that attract tourists from far and wide.

Town Conflict: This is the B story that follows what the parents are up to while the kids are repairing the station. The town's prosperity depends heavily on tourism revenue generated by visitors who come to admire the breathtaking beauty of the Cascade Falls and rejuvenating springs. However, plans are underway to construct a hydroelectric dam further upstream on the Fraser River to meet increasing energy demands. While the dam promises to provide renewable energy and boost economic development in the region, it poses a significant threat to Cascade Springs' tourism industry.

Key Events:

1. Announcement of the Dam Project: The town council, led by Mayor Daryl and supported by influential stakeholders, announces plans to build a dam upstream. Initially, many residents welcomed the news, anticipating economic growth and job opportunities. However, concerns arise among environmentalists and local businesses reliant on tourism.

2. Environmental Impact Assessment: Environmental activists, led by Cadence's mom, organize protests and lobby for a thorough environmental impact assessment (EIA) of the dam project. They highlight the potential ecological damage to the river ecosystem, including the loss of biodiversity, disruption of fish migration routes, and the depletion of groundwater feeding the springs.

3. Community Division: The town becomes divided between those who support the dam for its economic benefits and those who oppose it to preserve the town's natural beauty and tourism industry. Daryl finds himself torn between his duty to promote economic development and his concern for preserving Cascade Springs' heritage.

4. Race Against Time: As construction of the dam progresses, tensions escalate in Cascade Springs. Austin and his friends, inspired by Asa's teachings of environmental stewardship, join the fight to save the town's natural landmarks. They organize awareness campaigns, engage in public debates, and seek legal avenues to halt or modify the dam project.

5. Final Showdown: With the dam nearing completion and the fate of Cascade Springs hanging in the balance, Cadence’s mom and her allies stage a dramatic protest at the construction site. Facing off against security personnel and government officials, they make a heartfelt plea for preserving the town's environmental heritage and finding alternative solutions for energy needs.

Resolution: In a surprising turn of events, an independent review of the dam project reveals overlooked environmental risks and the potential for alternative renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind power, to meet the region's energy demands without compromising Cascade Springs' natural treasures. Faced with mounting pressure from the community and growing public awareness, the town council reevaluates its priorities and commits to sustainable development practices. The dam project is halted, and efforts are redirected toward eco-friendly initiatives that promote both economic growth and environmental conservation in Cascade Springs.

All of this will have to be woven through the story. It’s the B story affecting the town and will explain what the grown-ups are facing while the kids are fixing the space station.

## Alternate Universe History and World Building

### **1. A Reimagined Founding of America**

* **Divergent Event**: In this timeline, during the drafting of key documents like the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution, there is a critical collaboration between early African-American leaders, Indigenous leaders, and the Founding Fathers. This could happen due to an earlier abolitionist movement or greater unity in the fight for freedom against British colonization, where the mutual fight for liberation brings these groups together.
* **Outcome**: The nation is founded on principles of equality, not just for white men, but for all races and genders from the start. This could set the tone for a society where race and gender equality are baked into the foundational laws, accelerating progress on these fronts.

### **2. The Bohemian Revolution and a Scientific Discovery of Gender**

* **Divergent Event**: During the Bohemian Revolution, a group of artists, philosophers, and scientists come together in a groundbreaking discovery—gender is understood as a spectrum, not a binary. This could be sparked by early research into genetics and human biology, showing that gender is not dictated by chromosomes alone.
* **New Gender**: This collaboration could lead to the introduction of a third or even multiple genders that are recognized both biologically and culturally. Perhaps there’s a discovery of genetic markers (beyond XX and XY) that reveal more nuanced variations of human identity, creating a scientific basis for non-binary genders. These could be recognized as *Inter-Gender* or *Hybrid-Gender*—genders that are fluid by nature, supported by both biology and culture.
* **Cultural Impact**: This would redefine how society views gender. XX and XY would be seen purely as biological attributes, with gender expression being entirely a matter of personal choice, influenced by art, culture, and science.

### **3. A Historical Alliance Between Civil Rights and LGBTQ+ Movements**

* **Divergent Event**: In the 1960s, during the Civil Rights Movement, there is a greater alliance between Black leaders, LGBTQ+ activists, and feminist groups. Figures like Bayard Rustin (a key organizer of the Civil Rights Movement and openly gay) could have played a more prominent role, bringing LGBTQ+ rights to the forefront at the same time as racial equality.
* **Outcome**: This unity accelerates the deconstruction of systems of oppression around both race and gender, creating a society where transphobia and homophobia are addressed alongside racism in a much earlier and more effective manner.

### **4. The Evolution of Identity Through Art and Science**

* **The Bohemian Renaissance**: During a key artistic and scientific renaissance (perhaps inspired by the Bohemian or Enlightenment eras), there’s an intersection of artistic freedom and scientific exploration. This leads to a cultural shift where identity—be it gender, race, or sexuality—is seen as a personal form of expression, unbound by biological determinism.
* **Outcome**: In this society, people are free to define themselves however they choose, and there are no set rules about what it means to be male, female, or any other gender. The Bohemian Revolution of this timeline would have laid the foundation for an evolved understanding of identity, encouraging the creation of new gender categories that are fluid and dynamic.

### **5. Integration of Technology and Gender Identity**

* **AI and Gender Evolution**: By the time the *Asaverse* reaches the point of advanced AI, the concept of gender has evolved beyond biological constructs entirely. Perhaps AI plays a role in allowing individuals to customize or explore multiple gender identities throughout their lives. This could include the use of AI-driven avatars or enhancements that allow people to embody different aspects of themselves in virtual or augmented realities.

### **6. Alexander Hamilton’s Role in the Divergent Founding of America**

* **Hamilton’s Leadership**: In this alternate timeline, Alexander Hamilton could have played a pivotal role in bringing together different racial groups and pushing for an early abolitionist movement, advocating for racial equality alongside his vision for a strong federal government. His personal background as an immigrant and his rise through merit make him an ideal figure to spearhead the unification of people of different races in America’s founding.
* **Backing from Most Founding Fathers**: Nearly all of the Founding Fathers could eventually back Hamilton’s vision, except for one (perhaps Thomas Jefferson, known for his conflicting views on equality). This internal conflict would highlight the tension between the old world and the new inclusive world being built. The musical *Hamilton* can definitely inspire the portrayal of his charisma and influence, showing how his leadership shapes this more inclusive vision for America.

### **7. Notable People During the Bohemian Revolution**

* **Art and Science Converging**: The Bohemian Revolution was more of an artistic and social movement, but there were scientists and philosophers who pushed boundaries during this era, especially around the late 19th century. A few figures to consider:
  + **Max Planck**: Though his contributions were more towards physics (the foundation of quantum theory), his work around energy and science could be adapted to play into the discovery of new understandings of biology and gender.
  + **Sigmund Freud**: Known for his work in psychoanalysis, Freud’s ideas could have been expanded or adapted in this universe to include a deeper exploration of gender identity and expression.
  + **Marie Curie**: While her work was primarily in radioactivity, she could serve as a symbol of women breaking through male-dominated fields, and in this timeline, her discoveries could help fuel the scientific exploration of gender fluidity.
* **Meta-Gender, Fluidis, Versa**: The term *Meta-Gender* can be the official term used in scientific or governmental settings, with *Fluidis* and *Versa* used more colloquially among the population. This adds a richness to the world where people’s expressions of gender are reflected in both formal and informal language.

### **8. Gender-Neutral Washroom Centers**

* **Official Naming**: The idea of washroom centers for all genders is fantastic. To make it sound more official, you could call it a *Universal Personal Facility* (UPF) or *Public Access Washroom Center* (PAWC). These centers could be designed to provide private, secure spaces for all individuals, free from the confines of traditional gendered bathrooms.
* **Structure and Purpose**: These centers would include individual, self-contained rooms with secure locks for privacy, but the center itself would be a communal area for people to rest, refresh, and even socialize. The public spaces in malls, parks, and transit stations would have these facilities as a norm, showing that society has moved beyond the need for gender-based divisions.
* **Cultural Impact**: This shift in public space design would symbolize a society that prioritizes personal dignity, comfort, and safety for everyone, without the unnecessary barriers of gender-specific facilities.

### **9. New Government Area for Social Evolution**

* **Department of Social Evolution**: You could create a government division known as the *Department of Social Evolution (DSE)*, which is tasked with overseeing and promoting initiatives that reflect the cultural advancements of this evolved society. This department would handle everything from education, gender equality, racial inclusivity, and even policies that ensure the development of AI remains ethical and beneficial.
* **Council of Identity and Expression**: You might also introduce a *Council of Identity and Expression* (CIE), which would serve as an advisory body that guides policy decisions on gender, race, and other social issues. This council could be composed of leaders from various disciplines—art, science, philosophy—who provide input on how society can continue to evolve.

### **10. AI and Gender Evolution Post-Asa**

* **AI-Assisted Identity Exploration**: In the world post-Asa, AI could play a role in allowing individuals to explore gender identities in ways that weren’t possible before. For example, the use of virtual reality or AI-driven body augmentation could enable people to experience different aspects of gender fluidity or experiment with their identity in a safe and empowering way.
* **Cultural Shift**: This convergence between AI and gender evolution could represent a societal shift where technology not only helps people express themselves but becomes an integral part of how identity is understood and experienced. This would be a more advanced stage of the *Asaverse*, showing a truly evolved world that embraces the intersection of technology and human expression.

### **11. Surgical Changes and Body Autonomy in the *Asaverse***

* Cultural Norms: In this universe, the emphasis on body autonomy is strong, with the cultural understanding that one’s gender presentation is not tied to surgical alterations. It’s commonly accepted that a meta-gender person may not want to alter their genitals, and this becomes part of their identity—challenging traditional views of what defines gender.
* Acceptance and Tension: While many in society have moved past the need to conform to binary expectations, there are still individuals or groups who struggle with fully accepting this, reflecting how even an evolved society still deals with personal biases and discomfort. This could manifest in subtle ways, such as family tensions, lingering prejudices, or discomfort in certain social settings.

### **12. Uncle Adam and Daryl’s Conflict**

* Daryl’s Internal Struggle: Daryl’s resentment towards Uncle Adam isn’t purely rooted in gender prejudice—it’s more complex. Uncle Adam’s feminine air reminds Daryl of his deceased wife, which triggers both his grief and unresolved emotional issues. Daryl drinks to cope with these feelings, but when drunk, his emotions surface as anger toward Uncle Adam’s meta-gendered traits. It’s less about Uncle Adam’s gender presentation and more about the painful association with Daryl’s wife.
* Uncle Adam’s Role: Uncle Adam, on the other hand, might be someone who fully embraces his meta-gender identity, comfortable with his mix of masculine and feminine traits. His presence in Austin’s life offers a positive role model who demonstrates how to navigate a world that isn’t always fully accepting of meta-gender people. This makes him a key figure in Austin’s development, contrasting with Daryl’s more traditional views.

### **13. Broader Societal Impacts**

* Cultural Acceptance: The *Asaverse* largely accepts meta-gender individuals, but there are still areas where people push back, particularly in smaller, more conservative communities or among individuals who haven’t fully embraced the shift. This creates an interesting dynamic, where certain characters or groups may be at different stages of acceptance, much like real-world societies with ongoing cultural and social changes.
* Institutional Response: The government and institutions in the *Asaverse* may have policies in place that protect meta-gender individuals from discrimination, but there might still be a gap between policy and personal acceptance. This can create tension in workplaces, schools, and even within families, where traditional values clash with evolving social norms.

### **14. Uncle Adam as a Role Model**

* Adam’s nurturing, creative, and open personality serves as a counterbalance to Daryl’s emotionally stunted, alcohol-fueled coping mechanisms. Adam provides emotional support and a safe space for the boys, helping them process their mother’s death through fantasy and play. This nurturing quality, combined with his meta-gender identity, makes him a key figure in Austin’s development, offering a nontraditional but deeply important model of masculinity.
* Adam’s refusal to conform to traditional masculine stereotypes is demonstrated through his role-playing with the boys, where he not only engages their imaginations but teaches them life lessons through stories. His approach is hands-on and creative, which contrasts with Daryl’s avoidance and anger.

### **15. Daryl’s Conflict with Uncle Adam**

* Daryl’s resentment towards Adam is intensified by his grief over losing his wife. While Adam reminds Daryl of his wife’s nurturing and creative spirit, it also frustrates him because Adam’s presence brings out the emotional side of Daryl that he’s trying to suppress. His inability to process grief healthily causes him to lash out, making Adam a scapegoat for his internal struggles.
* The clash between Adam and Daryl becomes a pivotal moment, highlighting the tension between different models of manhood. Daryl’s aggression, fueled by toxic masculinity, is juxtaposed with Adam’s softer, more emotionally available persona. This dynamic can serve as a major thematic undercurrent in the story, showing the impact of these two conflicting figures on Austin and Dwight.

### **16. The Meta-Gender Issue and Familial Tensions**

* In the context of your world, Adam’s meta-gender identity and fluid masculinity could add an additional layer to Daryl’s discomfort. Daryl’s rejection of Adam isn’t just because of grief but also reflects his discomfort with nontraditional gender roles. Adam’s more feminine energy, combined with his open emotional expression, triggers Daryl’s insecurities about what it means to be a “man.”
* The fact that Adam teaches the boys to embrace a broader spectrum of masculinity and emotional expression puts him in direct conflict with Daryl, who clings to rigid, outdated notions of manhood. This conflict between Daryl’s traditional masculinity and Adam’s fluid identity mirrors broader societal issues in the *Asaverse* around gender acceptance.

### **17. Impact on Austin and Dwight**

* Adam’s influence is clearly seen in Austin, who clings to his uncle’s creative and nurturing energy. This provides a foundation for Austin to explore his own emotional and imaginative sides, which likely plays a role in his later development as he faces challenges.
* Dwight’s role is more complex, as he seems to be caught between wanting to please his father by embracing traditional masculinity while also admiring Adam’s creativity and emotional openness. Dwight’s journey might be one where he has to reconcile these two influences, deciding how he defines his own masculinity.

### **Moving Forward:**

Uncle Adam is pivotal in helping Austin and Dwight navigate their identities, not just as young men but as emotionally complex individuals. He provides a critical contrast to Daryl’s rigid worldview, and his role as a meta-gender character allows you to explore the broader societal acceptance of non-binary gender roles in the *Asaverse*.

**Meta-Gender Society:**

Gender as a biological construct rather than a fixed social identity. We’ll integrate meta-gendered individuals as part of normal society, where the existence of Fluidis and Versa represents broader social progress. Societal structures like gender-neutral washrooms and government roles related to social integration will be detailed.

# The Novel

## Main Characters

**Austin Lincoln** – 14 yrs old, curious about the universe

**Cadence Mackay** – 14 yrs old, artist

**Dwight Lincoln** – 17yrs old, senior in high school, practically raised Austin thus affecting his social life, is resentful of it but loves his brother.

## Supporting Characters

**Daryl Lincoln** – Works at the Quarry, alcoholic, abusive physically towards his older brother and a bully to Austin.

**Sid** - Tall and lanky stoner type, long blonde hair but keeps it under a hat or a toque, female.

**Doughboy** - Short, and stout also a stoner type. He’s ginger with a full glorious beard.

**Penny & Cooper Mackay** - Fraternal twins. 8 years old. Penny has shoulder-length brown hair that’s usually unkempt. She is very outgoing loves to act and dress up in costumes and is a bit of a diva. She quite often tries to control Cooper.

Cooper also has brown hair, shorter than Penny’s but a little on the long side. He takes care of himself a bit more than Penny does as his hair is usually done. He’s submissive towards Penny, not because he feels inferior to her but because he has no desire to be the star of anything, he just wants to be included. He also likes to act, sing and dress up with his sister.

Both Penny and Cooper adore Cadence.

**Celeste Lincoln -**

The mother of Austin and Dwight. She’s smart, kind and understanding. She’s a bit submissive to her husband but has a bite if you cross her. She is the glue that held the family together.

**Thaddeus (Thadd) Tripp Packer III**

The school bully wears sports shirts all the time and is followed around by Kyle and Wes everywhere he goes.

**Thaddeus Packer II -**

Father of Thadd and a failed inventor who will stop at nothing to find or steal his next big invention.

## Programs and Bots

**C.L.A.R.C.** – Cybernetic Lifelike Android Responsible for Cleaning. Becomes friends with Austin and Cadence. He is their guide through the station.

There are many more CLARC bots, their job is to keep things clean but since the station was damaged and the simulation is unable to properly update, they were assigned to maintain it.

**The Protector** – Responsible for maintaining life support, security, and medical functions. It can also “Troubleshoot”. When the external interfaces on the station have been damaged, the protector can relay orders to the other systems of the station. Is an A.I. program, that receives an avatar in the simulation-based off on Austin’s idea of a protector.

Avatar: Austin's Father - it looks like Austin’s father but his attitude is based on Austin’s needs.

**The Scientist** – Responsible for the internal and external sensors maintains the life support deck and oversees all scientific endeavors. Is a program but receives an avatar in the simulation.

Avatar: The Austin's Mother

**The Engineer** – Responsible for repairing the station and seeing that everything functions the way it is supposed to. This program is also responsible for the maintenance of the bots and performs upgrades to them. Is a program but receives an avatar in the simulation.

Avatar: A figure of a person with no real discernible features. The face is always shifting like blocks and when he is looking at anyone his face momentarily takes on their face but it can only hold the shape for a few seconds before it goes back to blank.

**Note:** All bots that interface with a life form are capable of emulating emotions but are not actually capable of feeling them. They have a virtual intelligence that is very good at making them seem like they are alive. While they are capable of learning and adapting, they have no desire to do anything they weren’t programmed to do.

**N.E.R.O.** (**Networked Electronic Repair Organism)**

This bot takes its orders from the Engineer program however due to the damage to the Engineers system it is causing the engineer's program to repair in a flawed way. NERO uses programmable matter to make repairs but when he repairs drones that are damaged they then carry the corrupt code causing them to do harm. NERO is kind of like the Engineer's sidekick. While the CLARC units repair the simulation, the NERO unit makes repairs and upgrades to drones and major systems across the station.

**Asa**

This little android is a mental health care companion. The little leaf on his head changes color depending on who it is talking to. Green means they are mentally well, Blue means they are depressed and Brown means they are in danger of their physical health declining and may need help. It will learn about each person who uses it and develop ways to help bring up a person's mental health. Other Asa androids vary in look.

**Security Bots**

These guys do not look threatening in the conventional sense. They are a small orb about the size of a baseball, that can see a full 360 degrees. They glow a light blue when they are on patrol but flash blue and red when intruders have been detected.

A single bot isn’t usually too hard to deal with, however, if they come in numbers they can connect together to make a static net that basically acts as a giant taser forcefield that can hold a few people in.

These security bots can also project images around themselves of people and things in order to trick you.

**Programmable Matter**

The Space Station is built out of it as is everything else the curators have made. In its raw form, it will look like shiny grains of sand. It should reflect fairy dust but instead of it being all glowy and magical, it should look more tech-like. Perhaps when the sand is in large groups you see tech-like lightning speeding through the grains and it intensifies when they are connecting together to make something. You don't need much to create average objects, but as you get bigger you need more.

**Space Station**

There is no Command Deck as there is no need for one. The station runs itself and works in part with the inhabitants.

**Life Support Deck**

This is where all the food and trees are grown that provide oxygen to the station.

# The Story

## Chapter One

It was like any other weekday in the small riverside town of Cadscade Springs in British Columbia, Canada. Austin's father, Daryl, had been drinking and was being belligerent to the TV.

Austin had finished getting ready for bed and was sitting at his desk. His room looked out over the driveway, a rocky road surrounded sparsely by Fir trees. He could see headlights off in the distance, it was his brother Dwight coming home.

Austin turned off his light and grabbed his flashlight which had a strobe setting. He flashed it out of his window hoping that Dwight would notice.

The boys came up with this signal as a way to warn each other if their dad was going to be drunk. Not just any drunk, some nights he could be “passed out” drunk, or when his buddies came over, he was a “party, fun-loving” drunk. But sometimes his dad would be a “Wannabe Alpha” drunk. That's when someone who doesn't feel in control of their life, picks on those they think are weaker than them, and usually in a physical way. If Daryl wasn’t working then he was drinking unless he had to “adult” but even then, he was usually hungover and not in a good mood.

Usually, when Dwight saw the signal, he would flash his headlights to acknowledge it, and then he would go into stealth mode. He would turn his lights off and slowly drive up to the house. However, on this night as seventeen-year old’s sometimes do, Dwight had a couple of beers and drove up to the house with a bit of attitude.

Dwight seemed cocky and sure of himself as he got out of his truck. The closer he got to the house, the sound of his father yelling at the TV caused his demeanor to change.

His heart started pounding and the reality of what he was walking into sank in. At this point all Dwight wanted to do was make it to his room without incident. The door creaked open and he slowly made his way to the stairs. Just as he got up to the first step the floor creaked.

“You better drop the attitude mister, driving up here acting like you’re some kind of big shot.”

“Whatever, Daryl,” Dwight replied.

Daryl being annoyed, got up from his chair a little too fast causing him to get a headrush. He walked towards Dwight and was staring at him with contempt.

“Listen here you disrespectful little shit! I am your father and you will address me as Dad, Pa, or fucking Father Christmas but you will not address me by my first name. Got it?”

“Whatever man, I’m going to bed.” Dwight began to walk away.

Daryl got madder and walked over to Dwight. He clenched his fist and punched Dwight in the ribs. It wasn’t too hard as he pulled his punch but it was enough that it knocked the wind out of him.

Austin was hiding under his covers when Dwight walked by his room causing his door to swing open a bit. Austin peeked out and saw that his brother was hurt. He quickly ran over to him causing Dwight to flinch in pain.

“Dwight! Are you okay?”

“Go to bed Austin, mind your own business…” Dwight continued to walk to his room.

Downstairs the boy’s father could hear them talking and his frustration level started to rise again.

“You better not have woken up your brother god damn it!” Daryl got up and stumbled up the stairs.

“Go to bed now ye hear me, Austin. Just…”

Suddenly he lost his balance and fell on the stair landing. He points at Dwight. “Did you just trip me?” He reached out to grab Dwight but fell again and started to laugh.

Austin being scared and angry at his dad yelled, “SHUT UP! JUST SHUT UP YOU!”

Daryl was shocked to hear his youngest son speak to him that way. “What did you say to me boy?”

Austin ran past his dad, down the stairs, and out the backdoor. He headed into the woods while his father and brother chased after him.

With tears in his eyes, Austin began running through the woods. He ran for a few minutes when he noticed the clearing where he and his brother liked to play.

He looked around and saw an old abandoned workshop. He ran up to the door only to find that it was locked. He could hear his dad and brother calling for him and started to force the door.

The top step gave way causing Austin to lose his balance. He fell through a spider’s web and got grossed out. After shaking the webbing off he tried to stand up but his foot was stuck between the broken stair.

As he struggled to free his foot, he spotted an odd-looking key that he naturally assumed was for the shed. He grabbed it and got his foot free. He tried the key on the door and heard an unusual click \*ZWAPP CLICK\*.

He opened the door and closed it behind him. He noticed another keyhole on the other side and used the key to lock it.

\*ZWAPP CLICK\*.

He ran to the corner of the room where he huddled and cried until he fell asleep.

Dwight and his dad looked for close to an hour but they couldn’t find him. They even checked the abandoned workshop but it was locked up tight and it was too dark to see inside.

Daryl’s fear faded and his frustration began to take over. “Fine you little shit! Stay out here for the night, see if I care.” Daryl began to walk back to the house.

“That’s it? You’re just going to go back home and leave him out here all night?”

“Oh give it a rest mister big-shot hero. He’s having a temper tantrum. He will get cold when he’s calmed down and come home on his own. He’s too much of a pussy to stay out all night.”

Dwight stood in disbelief. He was feeling all kinds of emotions at once. He wanted to yell at his dad but he also felt like it would be useless so Dwight followed his dad back to the house.

Daryl went back to his chair and slammed back the whiskey left in his bottle.

Dwight made some food and a little extra for his brother. Daryl was muttering to himself about random shit that Dwight didn’t care about.

He grabbed a piece of paper and a pen and wrote a note: “Be safe little brother. Here’s some food. Don’t be late for school!” He signed it with a lightning bolt and grabbed a juice box and the food and headed back to the woods. He left the food and note in a container in the clearing and then headed back home for the night.

The next morning, Austin woke up cold and confused. As he slowly came to, he felt something crawling on his hand. He let out a shriek when he realized there was a spider making its way up his arm and quickly shooed it away.

He stood up and walked to the door to leave. The door was locked and then he remembered the key. He looked back at where he slept and noticed the key but it was not alone. The spider he shooed was now right on it.

“Oh, so it’s like that huh?” Austin walked towards the key and then got down on the ground so he could talk to the spider.

“You don’t scare me; I was just creeped out cause I wasn’t expecting you.” He reached his hand out and the spider crawled onto him. Austin stood up and reached his hand towards a web.

“Here you go bud. Thanks for letting me crash in your space.” The spider crawled away and Austin grabbed the key. He looked around the shed and thought it would make a great clubhouse and he couldn’t wait to tell his brother that he got inside. Austin left the workshop and locked it behind him.

When he stepped outside the sun rays shooting through the trees blinded him causing him to drop the key so he could cover his eyes. As he began to get his vision back, he noticed the strange key on the ground.

This was no ordinary key. It was a bit longer than your typical key, it has a strange bluish-green look to it. It almost looked like it might be 3D printed as it had this polygon structure to it. Austin thought it might be plastic but it also had a bit of weight to it. When he tried to bend it, the key shocked him.

“OUCH!” Austin dropped the key and shook his hand. *“What kind of key is this?”* he thought to himself.

As he picked it up, he noticed the container of food and a note that was a bit damp due to the morning dew. As he read the note everything started coming back to him. He realized he had no idea what time it was so he grabbed his things and ran back to the house.

As Austin ran away, the door of the workshop opened up and a pair of strange hands released the spider that Austin left in there. The door closed again and the sound of electricity with a flash of light could be seen through the cracks of the door.

When Austin got back to his house his dad and brother had already left for the day. It was 8:02 and the first bell rings at 8:25. Dwight had made him lunch and set clean clothes out for him. Another note was pinned to his clothes with big bold letters saying: DON’T BE LATE.

Austin rushed around the house doing his best to get ready and made it out 10 minutes later. He hopped on his bike and rode as fast as he could through the forest.

He arrived at school right at 8:30. The front doors to the school passed right by the front desk so Austin had to be like a ninja.

The last thing he needed was the school calling his dad and saying he was late. He knew his dad would have been pissed at him for taking off and if he was late for school, he was certain his dad wasn’t going to go easy on him.

After avoiding a couple of hall monitors, Austin finally arrived at his English class. The door was still open and it looked as if his teacher was busy working on something on his computer.

Not too far from his teacher was his best friend Cadence. Like Austin, Cadence was a bit awkward but that didn’t stop her from being a social butterfly.

She had her own unique thrift store style and was always doing something new with her hair. She had recently dyed her hair blue with pink stars rather than streaks in them. Her mom was a hairdresser and was always looking to do something unique and Cadence was always down for trying a new look.

Cadence had amazing drawing skills. She drew mostly Anime and created comics for the school newspaper. She was showing a couple of other students her latest drawings when she noticed Austin at the door.

She looked over at the teacher and then back at him. She was fully aware of what his dad was like and didn’t want him to get in trouble for being late.

She motioned to him to quickly run to his desk. Austin rushed over but accidentally kicked over the school bully’s backpack. He ran over to his desk and slumped down hoping he didn’t notice.

Thaddeus (Thadd) Tripp Packer. Just as the name sounds, this guy is a total douche. Here’s a guy who thinks he’s god’s gift to himself. He was always sporting some kind of jersey, talked shit about everyone, and would fight just about anyone too.

Thadd was drawn to what he perceived as weakness and when it came to Austin, he thought pretty low of him. Kicking over his backpack was nothing short of an insult to him.

Thadd got up from his desk and zeroed in on Austin. “Runt!” He shoved Austin into his seat and grabbed his backpack.

From across the room, Cadence saw what was happening. She looked back at the teacher and noticed that he was still on his computer oblivious to what was going on.

Thadd looked as if he was going to pound Austin with his own backpack so Cadence let out a loud painful scream while holding her stomach.

Everyone in the class stopped what they were doing and looked at her. The teacher got up from his desk and rushed over to her. “Are you okay Cadence?”

“I’m sorry Mr. Raynor, it’s just… um well, it’s, girl problems.” Cadence looked over at the bully and saw that he had gone back to threatening Austin so she screamed one more time which broke his attention yet again.

“Jesus, okay Miss Mackay just go to the nurse’s station, no need for theatrics.” Cadence started to walk out and the teacher got the class back in order.

Thadd looked at Austin,” This isn’t over runt.” He threw Austin’s backpack on the ground and went back to his desk.

Austin looked over at Cadence and she winked at him. He mouthed to her “Thank You” and she smiled back at him.

Later that day Austin met up with Cadence behind the Gym. Ever since they started high school this would be their hangout spot. It was away from everyone and like most places in town, it was surrounded by fir and cedar trees which is typically where Austin liked to be. It was a nice shaded area with only one way in as a metal fence separated the school from the houses behind the Gym and the parking lot.

Cadence would sketch as she listened to Austin’s tales of his brother and him roleplaying as Thor and Loki but today, he had a different kind of tale.

He told her about the fight between his brother and dad and how scared he was. “I couldn’t take it anymore Cadence. I mean how messed up is that? Aren’t parents supposed to protect us from that kind of stuff?”

“Did you ever think about reporting your dad?”

“Yeah, but what if nothing happens? Remember Shane McCaffery? His parents were junkies and the police didn’t help him until his dad OD’d and put him into foster care. If I reported my dad and they didn’t do anything and he knew it was me? He’d go all Thanos and I would be snapped out in an instant!”

“Where did you go?” Cadence asked.

“Huh?” Austin confusingly replied.

“You said you ran away from your dad. Where did you run?”

“OH! This is where things get interesting.” He brought Cadence into a two-person huddle.

“In that clearing where my brother and I go, there’s this abandoned workshop which is usually locked uptight.”

Austin reached into his pocket and showed her the key. “Then I found this under the steps.”

“Whoa, can I see?” Cadence’s eyes lit up.

Austin passed her the key.

She examined it closely. “You know this sort of reminds me of those old skeleton keys they used to have way back when.”

“What the heck is a skeleton key?”

“It’s a master key. Old homes would sometimes have one so they wouldn’t have to waste time searching through a bundle of keys to find the right one.”

“Intriguing…” Austin took the key back and pondered what its potential could be.

“Is Dwight okay?” Cadence asked.

“Yeah, he says that dad pulls his punches but it still looked like it hurt. I don’t get why Dwight doesn’t just punch the old man out?”

Austin started shadow boxing. “Just one swift jab to the jaw and he would be out like a light!” Austin danced around and started cheering like he just won a match.

“Awe, did the little baby Austin beat up the air?” Thadd and his cronies Wes and Kyle walk around the corner.

Austin quickly put the key back into his pocket.

“What’s the matter, runt? All you can handle is boxing the air?”

Austin got scared and took a few steps back behind Cadence. Thadd walks over to his cronies. “Look, the runt is hiding behind his girlfriend. What a joke!”

Cadence put down her sketchbook, stood up, and walked up to him. “You know, you should be a lot nicer to people, you don’t know what kind of shit they are going through. The last thing someone might need is a blockhead bully like you pushing them around!”

Thadd stared at Cadence trying to size her up. “How is it that you have bigger balls than him? Maybe she’s the dude and he’s the chick?” Thadd and his cronies started laughing.

Austin stood there with so many emotions flowing through his brain.

Thadd walked closer to Cadence. “Why don’t you ditch the runt and come hang out with some real guys?”

Cadence looked nervous as the two other cronies walked closer to her. Austin started to get mad but wasn’t sure what he should do. He closed his eyes and tried to focus.

He reached his hand out and Thadd looked over at him.

“What the hell is this guy doing?” asks Wes.

⤘

***Thadd looked Austin in the eyes and noticed them lighting up. A whirring sound could be heard off in the distance. The wind began to pick up and the bullies started to get nervous. The whirring sound got closer and then BAAAM!!! Mjolnir, Thor’s hammer flew through the sky and hit all of the bullies, knocking them out and flying into Austin’s hand. Austin walked over to Cadence all heroic and kissed her.***

⬽

“Runt!”

Austin opened his eyes. He was standing there with his hand out while Cadence, Thadd, Wes, and Kyle were all looking at him like he just had a stroke or something. Austin realized that he was daydreaming and became embarrassed.

“What a freak!” exclaimed Kyle.

The boys started laughing at him. Finally, a surge of anger bursts out of Austin and he charges at Thadd knocking the wind out of him.

Cadence’s mouth dropped, she did not see that coming.

Wes and Kyle looked shocked and stared at him with fear in their eyes.

Austin caught his breath and started laughing when he noticed Thadd on the ground.

“Geeze, you went down like a sack of rocks only, that's not really a fair comparison. It’s kind of insulting to rocks.” Cadence laughed at his joke which angered Thadd.

He looked over at his friends. “What are you two waiting for? Get him!”

Wes and Kyle were fully back into “bully mode” and began chasing Austin.

He ran around trees and hopped over a few things but the three of them kept cutting him off at his only escape route. He frantically looked around and saw a door to the gym. He ran over to it and tried to open it but it was locked.

He turned around and heard Cadence shouting. “Someone, please help us!”

Austin reached into his pocket and felt the key. *“Maybe it is a skeleton key? Maybe that’s a stupid idea,”* he thought. But not as stupid as it working and him avoiding getting his butt kicked.

He quickly turned around and put the key in the hole. Expecting it not to work he turned the key.

\*ZWAPP CLICK\*.

He opened the door and ran through it, closing it behind him. He went to lock the door but noticed there is another keyhole on the other side rather than a conventional lock. He put the key back in and locked it.

\*ZWAPP CLICK\*

## Chapter Two

Austin slumped against the back door and caught his breath. He noticed that he was not in a very well-lit room. He grabbed his phone and turned on the flashlight. He saw that he was in the equipment room and proceeded to leave.

When he entered the hallway, he was expecting to see students and teachers all over the place but there wasn’t a soul in sight.

“Hello! Is anyone there!?” Austin walked down the hallways of his once-bustling school. “Is this a joke?”

No one answered. He went back outside to behind the gym but there didn’t seem to be anyone there either. He pulled out his cell phone and attempted to call his brother but all he got was a strange tone. His heart started to race so he began to panic.

“Well screw them. If this is a joke and the whole school is in on it, then I’ll just go into town and skip school.”

Austin began running towards town. The streets were void of people and there were empty cars everywhere.

He heard some noises coming out of Mamma Josie’s Gelato Shop. He ran over and checked the shop for anyone who might be inside.

“Is anyone here?? Hello!?” The espresso machine was making noise so he turned it off. “Either aliens have abducted everyone in town or this is the most elaborate practical joke ever.”

Figuring it couldn’t possibly be aliens and it was more probable that it was a practical joke, he decided to test his luck. He grabbed an ice cream cone and then looked around.

“You aren’t going to stop me? I’m going to eat all your Gelato and then we will see who pranked whom.”

He went to reach for the gelato scoop when he saw a chocolate-covered waffle bowl; he looked at his cone and back at the bowl.

Moments later Austin was sitting at a table with the waffle bowl full of every kind of flavor he could fit into it with lots of toppings and the original cone on the top of it.

“Okay, the jokes on you cause dis the most expensivest.”

With every bite he devoured, he was expecting someone to come out and bust him. It must have been the thrill of eating this massive dessert coupled with the dread that everyone on the planet is gone that got Austin through that entire dessert. He sat back and rubbed his tummy.

“I feel like I’m missing something… something obvious.” Austin got up and walked to the front door of the shop. He reached for the handle when he noticed that there was another keyhole on the inside of the door.

It’s not unheard of to have this kind of lock but the workshop had it, so did the school, and now the gelato shop?

He ran next door to the pet shop and checked the doors there. Every door in the shop had the same keyhole in it.

He ran to the next few shops and found the same thing. He took the key out and started to wonder if this key had taken him to an alternate Earth where no one exists or like the upside-down.

“If this key brought me here then maybe it can take me back.” Austin went back to the gelato shop and headed to the back door.

“It’s probably safer to do this where there isn’t a lot of foot traffic. That’s if this works.”

He put the key into the hole and held his breath for a moment. “Please work, please work, please work.” He turned the key and heard that strange click.

\*ZWAPP CLICK\*

He opened the door and poked his head out. The sound of a bustling town can be heard and cars are driving by.

He popped his head back into the shop and the streets were empty and he couldn’t see anyone. He went to the back door again and quickly exited and closed it behind him. He locked the door and heard the signature click

\*ZWAPP CLICK\*

While holding his breath he took a few steps back and started to breathe again. Suddenly, a woman talking on the phone with a cigarette walked out and scared him.

Realizing that it was after school he headed back to the school to grab his bike and then headed home to face the music.

Later that evening, Austin arrived at home all excited about what had just happened. He wanted to tell his brother about it but as he got up to the house he could see his dad sitting in front of the TV smoking and drinking.

As he stood there thinking about what his dad might say or do about the night before and the fact that his school would have called to report his absence in the afternoon, his stomach started to rumble. Running back home from town worked off all that gelato he had eaten and now he was craving peanut butter.

Austin opened the door and slowly walked in. He walked towards the kitchen when his dad abruptly shouted, “DOOR!”

Austin looked back and saw that he didn’t close the door all the way. He quickly shuffled his way back to the door and closed it while apologizing. After closing the door, he stood behind his dad expecting to be scolded.

“You need something?” Daryl asked Austin.

“No, just a little hungry is all,” replied Austin.

Without breaking his line of sight with the television, Daryl replied, “I didn’t get around to making dinner because the kitchen is a mess. Give it a sweep and rub down and you can make your own dinner tonight.”

“Okay”

Thankful that his dad wasn’t angry he walked over to the kitchen which had dishes from the previous few nights soaking in the sink and garbage on the floor. Austin got himself the broom and started sweeping.

He couldn’t help but wonder why his dad was so chill about the whole thing? He looked at the phone and didn’t see a missed call from the school and there were no voice mails.

After twenty minutes of cleaning, Austin made himself a piece of bread with peanut butter on it. As he poured a glass of milk, Dwight walked in.

He walked up to Austin and in a low voice said, “the school called, said you weren’t there for the last part of the day. Your lucky dad didn’t get the call or you’d have a sore butt.”

Austin poked Dwight in the ribs which made him flinch. “I wonder how long before dad starts doing stuff like this to me.”

“It won’t ever come to that,” Dwight replied.

With a puzzled look on his face, Austin jumped off his stool and asked, “why not?” almost as if he were being left out.

“Because you look too much like mom and besides, I would never let him lay a finger on you. That would be the end of him.”

Austin looked at his brother with big eyes and hugged him. Dwight fought him off. “Hey now don’t do that. It’s what mom would have wanted me to do.”

“I don’t think mom would want you to hurt dad but I don’t think she thought he would turn into this either.”

“Yeah well this is our reality little brother and one day it may come to that but for now eat your peanut butter bread and keep a low profile. Don’t do anything more to get you on his radar.” Dwight grabbed his keys and put on his jacket.

“You’re going out?”

“Yeah, I’m picking up Sid and Doughboy and we are going to the old church for a couple of hours. I should be home around 10, make sure you’re in bed by 9:30, got it?”

Austin lifted up his piece of peanut butter bread and saluted him with it. “Yes sir!”

Dwight pointed at his little brother, “on your word Asgardian?”

“I said yes, geeze. Why you gotta take it there?”

Dwight headed out and Austin went to his room to play Minecraft. Later that evening, about half an hour before his bedtime, he walked past the living room and saw his dad passed out drunk with a lit cigarette in his chair.

Austin walked over and put his cigarette out. “Father of the year here.” He grabbed his dad’s ashtray and held it like an award.

“I’d like to thank the Academy of Deadbeat Chain-smoking Fathers for this amazing honor. I couldn’t have been the worst father if it wasn’t for your support and the support of whiskey makers everywhere. Truly, thank you.” Austin began to walk away when he felt he needed to say a bit more.

“Oh and sure I have third-degree burns all over my body and my family is dead but hey, I won!”

Daryl snorted and scared Austin.

He quickly pulled his dad’s boots off, laid his feet up on the ottoman, and put a blanket on him.

He walked to the front door, opened it, and looked around the yard. He took in a few deep breaths and then put his hand in his pocket and held onto the key.

Austin thought to himself, *“Should I use it again? Where did I go when I used the key?”*

He stared at the keyhole and then down at the key. He clenched the key tightly and said to himself, “Do it.”

He put the key in the door and turned it. He heard that strange click noise

\*ZWAPP CLICK\*

Austin opened the door and walked into the living room, closing the door behind him. Everything is as it was in his house only his father wasn’t in his chair.

Austin stared at the chair and recalled all the times his father was mean to him and his brother. He started to feel anger building up inside of him and as loud as he could he yelled, “I HATE YOU!”

He started breathing heavily and looked at the whiskey bottle. He picked it up and threw it through the TV.

He yelled again, “I HATE YOU!” and started to beat up his dad’s chair. Austin was all worked up with tears and anger.

With a fierce burst of rage, Austin began trashing the living room.

He started to feel as if electricity was flowing through his veins.

Austin looked at his clean kitchen and started to smash all the dishes and knock appliances over.

He closed his eyes as he once again had the feeling of electricity flowing through his veins.

⤘

***Austin opened his eyes as thunder roared. Electricity surged through his body and eyes.***

***He let out a thunderous roar causing the entire house to start falling apart.***

***He looked over at his dad’s trashed chair and then to the sky. Austin raised his hand and shouted, “NO MOOOOOOOORE!”***

***A massive lightning strike hit the house destroying everything.***

⬽

Austin opened his eyes and saw no electricity and the house was still standing albeit trashed. He fell to his knees and threw up.

\*beee-whoop\* A strange tone could be heard in the distance and a green hue started emanating from the sky. Austin ran to the window to see what was going on.

What appeared to be mini spotlights hovering in the dark attached to dark figures began to approach his house. They looked like they might be people but their faces are lifeless and their eyes are like lights.

Austin ran to the back door and to his surprise they were out there too. As they began to get closer to the house the power turned off.

Scared and confused as to what was going on, Austin grabbed the key and put it in the backdoor, and turned it.

Nothing happened.

He tried again and still nothing.

He turned around and looked at the front door. “Idiot! You didn’t lock the front door!”

Just as he took a step towards the front door, something grabbed his arm.

Austin felt like his heart jumped out of his chest. Instinctually he turned around to see what had him and he came face to face with this strange being.

“Hollow man,” Austin said in astonishment.

It looks humanoid but void of life and somehow automated. He slipped through his hoodie and got free.

He ran to the front door but just before going back through it, he looked behind him and saw the hollow man doing something to the wrecked TV. He went back through the door and locked it.

\*ZWAPP CLICK\*

As Austin sighed in relief and leaned against the door, it opened behind him and he fell back all scared. Thinking the hollow man must have followed him, he started to scream.

“What are you nuts!?” his brother exclaimed in a whisper kind of yell.

Austin was relieved beyond relief when he realized it was only Dwight.

He then became confused. He realized that he left the front door unlocked when he went to the other world and if his brother came home how did he not see him?

”How did you get in? The front door was-” Austin began to ask as his brother cut him off.

”I came in through the back.” Dwight grabbed a juice box from the fridge. “But the bigger question is, why aren’t you in bed?”

Realizing how late it was, Austin quickly rushed up the stairs and went into his room.

The next day at school, Austin was preoccupied with what had happened to him last night.

Mr. Reid was busy teaching Social Studies using Hockey metaphors.

Everyone loved this class, Mr. Reid knew how to keep students engaged and when he wasn’t able to, he would take notice.

“Mr. Lincoln!” Mr. Reid abruptly shouted startling Austin.

Not knowing what was going on, Austin blurted out, “Hockey! Ya go team hockey…”

The class started laughing at his response causing Austin to blush.

“Am I boring you, Mr. Lincoln?”

“Um no, not at all. I just have, um, you know teenager things going on, hormones, teenage angst, and whatnot.” The class laughed again.

“I understand the trials and tribulations that come with being a teenager Mr. Lincoln and you have my sympathies.” Mr. Reid walked over to his desk and picked up a jar of jelly beans.

“For a handful of jelly beans,” Mr. Reid brought up a quote from the Official Leonardo Da Vinci website. “Mr. Lincoln, it says here, ‘Leonardo has often been described as the archetype of the "Renaissance man", a man whose seemingly infinite curiosity was equaled only by his powers of invention.’ Can you tell me all the areas that he studied?”

Austin sat there for a moment in silence.

Everyone in the class stared at him as they awaited his response.

He had his moments of being a class clown and at this point, everyone was expecting something funny. But the one thing nobody in the class would have known except for Cadence is that Leonardo Da Vinci is one of Austin’s historical heroes.

Austin sat straight up and cleared his throat.

“Well Mr. Reid, Leonardo Da Vinci was certainly a man curious about the universe. He was a scientist, mathematician, engineer, inventor, anatomist, painter, sculptor, architect, botanist, and musician.” Austin smiled as the class looked in awe of him.

Mr. Reid was pleasantly surprised by his answer but also knew that he had missed one thing.

“Very well done Mr. Lincoln however you-”

Austin cut off Mr. Reid. “Oh, I forgot! He was also a writer.”

Mr. Reid had a dumbfounded look on his face, which quickly turned into a cheerful smile.

“I knew you had it in you, let’s see if we can keep up with the rest of class shall we?” He walked over to Austin and let him take a small handful of jelly beans.

Cadence sat behind Austin and kicked his chair. “Show off,” she whispered to him. “What’s eating you this morning?”

Austin turned around and whispered back to her, “I need to talk to you about something but not here. Let’s meet at our spot during the break.”

## Chapter Three

Over on the other side of town, Dwight was skipping school with his two best buds Doughboy and Sid.

Doughboy was a short-round guy who kind of looked like a Dwarf from the Lord of the Rings. For a seventeen-year-old, he had a glorious bushy ginger beard which made him look older and had a napoleon complex. He’s kind of like a mix of a “Weasley” and Joe Pesci. There’s a mashup no one asked for.

And then there’s Sid. She’s tall for a girl, a tomboy with long blonde hair that she usually keeps up under a toque and she almost looks like a girl when she doesn’t look like a mechanic. She was always helping Dwight out with modifications to his truck.

There’s this old Church on River Road where teenagers sometimes went to go party or hang out.

Recently, the city has been cracking down on it and hired a security firm to patrol the grounds. This helped keep out most people but Dwight, Sid and Doughboy wouldn’t let it stop them.

Ever since Dwight was young, he would go to the Church and do something they call ‘web slinging’.

The front of the Church had a massive steeple and the back of the church was flat. You could easily run up the steeple and get onto the roof.

They would take a harness and rope that they would attach to the top of the steeple and run and jump off the building and swing from one side of the steeple to the other.

It gave the experience of what it might feel like if you were Spider-man web-slinging through New York or so they thought so.

Doughboy could sometimes make it up the steeple but lately, he had been having some trouble making it up. He had been putting on weight and liked to deny it.

“Stupid steeple!” Doughboy exclaimed.

“I told you, you’ve put on some weight,” Sid replied.

“Seriously, cut that shit out! I’m the same weight I was when I last got up there.”

Doughboy prepared for another run up the steeple. He ran as fast as he could and almost made it but fell to the ground and picked himself back up as quickly as he could.

“This is an old church and the earth has probably shifted a bit and so the angle of the church is steeper.”

Sid passed Doughboy a homemade bong made out of an empty two-litre bottle, some duct tape, a pen and an old bong bowl. “Looks like you’re on lookout duty again.”

All frustrated, Doughboy let out a loud, “SHIT!”

He walked over to the truck and packed a bowl. “Stupid gravity…” he mumbled to himself and then took a big hoot.

Doughboy always sat in the back of the truck and insisted he wanted a big comfy chair to sit on. So they bolted an old lazy boy to the back of the truck where he just sat and smiled.

Back up on the Church roof, Dwight was getting himself into the harness. He asked Sid, “Do you like being an only child?”

“I mean, kind of? That’s a hard question to answer,” Sid walked around Dwight and made sure the harness was good and tight.

“I don’t have to share my stuff with anyone, the wait for the bathroom is almost non-existent but there are days I wonder what it might be like to have annoying siblings.”

Dwight looked at Sid in the eyes as she looked back in a super confused way. “Wanna adopt Austin?”

“What kind of question is that?” Sid shoved Dwight, knocking him over. “He’s your little brother. He’s like this adorable little puppy. Why don’t you want your brother?”

“No, it’s not like that. I love my little bro but he’s gonna grow up to be a weirdo. He clings to his Thor comics like they are his blankie and his best friend is this weirdo chick too. He gets picked on at school and we have a fuck up for a father.”

From the back of the truck, Doughboy shouted, “MOTHER FUCKER!” He looked like he was having a fit.

“Yo! What’s your problem man?!” Sid yelled down to Doughboy.

“Fucking Wasps! It’s my Orange Pop, not theirs!” Doughboy was flailing his arms around, trying to fight the wasps when he fell off the truck.

“OUCH!” Doughboy quickly stood up like a jack-in-the-box being released.

“I am not talking to YOU gravity!” he shouted at the ground.

“You know if he moved as quickly as he does when he gets up after falling, he would be in a lot better shape.” Sid grabbed the rope and tugged on it to make sure it was secure.

“I get that you’re under a lot of pressure between your dad and your brother but you can handle this you know. We don’t get to choose our circumstances, the only power we have is how we react. You have choices you know.”

“Yeah but if I reported him to the Ministry then we might get separated and I can’t risk that. My mom wouldn’t want us to be apart. Besides my little bro needs me and I’ll be 19 soon enough and then I can apply to become his guardian.”

“And then what?” Sid asked.

“And then we get the fuck out of here and never look back. I don’t want to see that man ever again.”

“Well if you need a mobile mechanic and an eccentric dwarf on the road with you then let me know.” Sid smiled at Dwight and Dwight smiled back.

Dwight had been friends with Sid and Doughboy for a long time. Usually, he didn’t look at Sid as anything more than a buddy but every now and then he would see the most beautiful smile from her and lose himself in it. But then he would remember it's Sid and snap out of it. This was one of those times.

Sid always noticed it and she liked that she had that kind of power over him. She grabbed the harness and gave it one last tug. “Are you ready for this Spider-Loki?”

Dwight took a flask out of his pocket, takes a swig, grabs a pair of aviator goggles and puts them on. “Let’s do this!”

Dwight started to run and Doughboy took notice. He quickly stood up and started yelling, “FUCK YAH! SPIDER-LOKI!”

Dwight jumped off the roof and the momentum carried him over to the other side. As he lands he rebounds and pushes himself back the other way all the while hootin and hollering.

Down the road from the Church, two security trucks started driving towards them.

Doughboy caught wind that something was amiss. He looked down at his orange pop and saw ripples in it. He shot his head up and noticed security trucks coming their way.

“PIGS!!! WE GOT PIGS!!!” Doughboy got all frantic and went to get off of the back of the truck but ended up falling to the ground.

In Doughboy fashion, he quickly got up and went into the truck. He turned the key but the truck was having trouble turning over. “God Damn it!” Doughboy quickly realized that he was cursing God’s name at a Church.

“Yeah well fuck you for not helping us out right now ya douche!” The truck suddenly turned over and Doughboy was surprised. He began to back up towards the Church.

Dwight and Sid quickly got their gear together. “Shit we gotta go!” yelled Dwight.

“I know, I know,” Sid replied back while throwing their gear into the back of the truck.

Dwight was trying to get out of the harness when Sid grabbed him. “There’s no time!” She pushed Dwight off the roof and he landed on Doughboy’s chair.

Sid jumped down into the back of the truck. “DRIVE!” she yelled to Doughboy.

The security trucks blocked off both entrances. “Fuck!” Doughboy frantically yelled, ”What should I do guys!?”

Dwight looked around and saw that a part of the back fence had been kicked in which led to Camwood Park.

It was a heavily forested area that would make an escape difficult but his truck was built for it. “Drive through the fence back there and cut through the park, they won’t follow us.”

“You sure about this?” Sid asked.

“We don’t have any other choice.” Dwight hit the top of his truck and shouted, “through the fence Doughboy, NOW!”

Doughboy reversed as fast as he could. Dwight and Sid grabbed onto the sides of the truck. “I didn’t mean like this!!!” Dwight shouted.

The truck broke through the fence and then they came to a stop. The security guys were freaked out by their course of action.

Doughboy looked at them and said, “Not today little piggies… not today.” He started driving down a path that led to the road.   
  
“Keep driving! We will lose them, they need to drive around the block to catch us and by that time we will be long gone.” Dwight sat back and leaned up against Sid. They both smiled and laughed.

Sid looked at Dwight in a very sincere way. “I’ve had enough excitement for the morning, maybe we should head to class?”

“Yeah I guess you’re right,” Dwight hit the roof again and yelled to Doughboy, “let’s go to school!”

“What in the actual fuck!?!? Are you serious!?”

Sid shook her head. “To school Doughboy!” Doughboy begrudgingly drove to school. They arrived just as the break was starting.

➺

Behind the gym, Cadence and Austin were sitting in the grass looking at the key.

“And you’re telling me that this key brought you to another world void of people?”

“Didn’t you wonder what happened to me after I went through that door?” Austin pointed to the door he ran into when Thadd and his cronies were chasing him.

“I just thought you went home, it was a very stressful and intense situation. No one would have blamed you.”

Austin was offended that she would even consider that he would run away like that. Sure, he gets intimidated easily and may, at times, hide behind his friend but run home? Never.

“Do you really think I would make up such an elaborate story just so I don’t look like a coward?”

“You are a storyteller but no I don’t think you’d make up such a fantastical story.” Cadence looked at Austin with intrigue. “You do realize that I’m going to need some proof right?”

“Obviously.” Austin grabbed the key. “Come on.” Austin grabbed Cadence’s hand and started pulling her.

“Where are we going?”

“I’m going to prove it to you, let’s go.” Austin let go of her hand and started walking to the side of the school. He walked up to a door and stared at it.

“What are you doing Austin?”

He looked at Cadence with a confused look on his face. “I haven’t tried this on a door with a window on it. I don’t know how it will work cause everybody on the other side will be gone.”

“Hey, if you want to change your story now then cool, I get it. A load of crap is a load of crap and it’s good that you’re not dragging this on.”

Austin became annoyed with Cadence’s poking at him. “I’m not changing my story. I’m just wondering is all.” He took the key out and put it in the door. “Here goes nothing.”

Austin turned the key. \*ZWAPP CLICK” and opened the door.

To both Cadence and Austin’s amazement, there were no students on the other side of the door.

Cadence closed the door a bit and could see students walking through the halls but when she looked on the inside of the door, they were all gone.

Austin stood there with his arms crossed and a cocky grin on his face. “And that’s just the beginning.” Austin closed the door and locked it.

“Hey! Aren’t you going to take me in there?” Cadence asked disappointedly.

“If I took you through right now, we will end up missing school because you are not going to want to come back right away. Meet me in the alleyway behind Mamma Josie’s after school and I promise you will get to go in there.”

Excited and frustrated all at the same time, Cadence said “How do you expect me to go through the rest of the school day with this kind of knowledge Austin?? That key is magic or something!” She went to grab the key but Austin quickly snatched it up.

“Look, I can’t afford for my dad to be getting calls from the school saying I was skipping. I probably should have waited to say something but now you know what happened to me and I have been holding it in unable to talk to anyone about it.” Austin started to have a panic attack.

Cadence noticed the pressure he was under and understood where he was coming from. “I’m sorry my dude. You’re right, we should wait till after school.”

Austin started to calm down and gave Cadence a hug.

“Oh,” Cadence said. This was the first time he had hugged her in a long time. She hugged him all the time but he didn’t usually hug back, he was just awkward about it.

For Cadence this was a big moment because she had forgotten what his hug felt like and it was everything she hoped it would be. Austin was strangely really cuddly. She smiled and hugged him back.

She had a crush on that awkward little guy but she was a bit old-fashioned in the sense that she wanted the guy to let her know he liked her first. But she also felt the mood was right and was done waiting for Austin to come around.

It was time to seize the moment and make the first move! She squeezed him a little and he found himself really enjoying it.

That’s when his heart started racing and the thought of kissing her grew stronger in his mind. He looked Cadence in the eyes and he knew this was the moment.

*“Did she want this too?”* he thought to himself.

Sometimes he got the feeling she liked him more than a friend but didn’t really know how to tell. At that very moment, he didn’t seem to care about that, the mood was right and he was going to go for it.

At that exact moment, both Cadence and Austin leaned in for the kiss but with a little too much gusto and they ended up knocking their heads together.

“OUCH!” They both yelled as they grabbed their heads in pain. A few seconds had passed and they both looked at each other.

Cadence was grinning at Austin as he was still rubbing his head.

He looked at her and started to feel silly.

They both started laughing really hard and fell to the ground. The door opened up and the Vice Principal was standing there.

“Don’t you two have someplace to be?” the Vice Principal said in a stern voice.

“Sorry, sorry, sorry. It’s just-” Cadence continued to laugh.

“We are going now.” Austin stood up and helped Cadence up. They grabbed their things and walked into the school still giggling.

The Vice Principal shook his head. “I can’t believe these kids are going to reproduce one day. The Earth is doomed.”

At the end of the school day, Cadence headed home and quickly changed into an outfit she felt was appropriate for such an occasion.

She wore leggings that had galaxies printed on them and a baby blue/hot pink camo button-up shirt whose sleeves she rolled up and a utility vest where she kept her art supplies.

She did up her hair and grabbed her steampunk goggles and wore them on her head. The last part of her outfit was a spritz of vanilla body spray. She loved how it made everything smell like she was baking cookies.

As she stood in the mirror making sure that her outfit was perfect, her door swung open and in came her two younger twin siblings Penny and Cooper.

Penny was wearing a purple top hat that she stole from Cadence and Cooper had green streaks in his hair and his face had been badly coloured in with an orange marker.

Penny stood up on Cadence’s bed and spoke quite loudly, “I am the maker of music!”

From right behind her, Cooper jumped on the bed knocking Penny down and he shouted, “I am the dreamer of dreams!”

Penny being irritated by Cooper for stealing her line, pushed him down. “What’s the big idea, Cooper? That’s my line!”

“Yeah, but we are twins which means we are two of the same person. You are the maker of music and I am the dreamer of dreams.”

“We aren’t two of the same people butt-hole! We are fraternal twins, not identical twins. Go watch Paw Patrol or something, I’m going to talk to Cadence about her date.” Cooper walked out of the room looking down and closed the door behind him.

Cadence turned around and looked at her sister with a weird look on her face. “Who said anything about a date? I’m not going on a date, I’m going out with Austin who has something to show me.”

“I knew it!” Cooper yelled from behind the door.

Penny picked up a pillow and threw it at the door. “I said roll out!” Cooper walked away mumbling and groaning to himself.

“It’s not a date Mr. Wonka!” Cadence took the hat off Penny’s head, “it's two friends going on an adventure together.”

Penny leaned in closer and sniffed the air “And you smell like cookies cause you want to smell good for a ‘friend’?”

Cadence got all huffy, “I can smell whichever way I want to thank you very much.”

She grabbed her bag and threw her top hat onto a mannequin head. “And stay out of my stuff!” She left her room and headed downstairs with her sister in tow.

“I’ll be back in a few hours ma, don’t wait up.” Cadence winked at her mom.

“Okay, sweetie! Have a nice date!” her mom sheepishly replied with Cooper giggling behind her.

“UGH! IT’S NOT DATE!” Cadence stormed out of the house while her mom, Copper and Penny were laughing.

# 

## Chapter Four

Austin was waiting on his bike for Cadence at the back of the gelato shop. His phone buzzed and notified him about a text with an attachment he received from his brother:

**DON’T BE LATE TONIGHT! This is what happens to people who don’t listen, don’t be like this.**

Austin opened an attachment which was a picture of Doughboy lifting up half of his shirt and his brother looking like he was about to take a bite of his man boob.

Austin’s face dropped and which quickly turned into a disgusted look. “Gross.”

Cadence rolled up from behind and saw the pic. “Well that explains a lot, you’re into bears, not pretty girls.”

Austin’s face turned red and he quickly put his phone away. “What!? No, I was just, I mean my brother sent me that pic. I’m not into bears!”

Cadence started laughing at Austin. “Relax my dude,I don’t need to bust your balls all that hard to get a decent reaction out of you huh?”

“Whatever, I don’t care.” Austin’s demeanor changed into a cocky one. “Bust my balls all you want cause I’m about to blow your mind all over the fucking place.”

He stopped for a moment and thought how that sounded in his head. Cadence looked at him with her eye brow perched up.

“Yeah, I just heard it after I said it,” Austin nervously laughed and reached into his pocket and pulled out the key.

Cadence looked at it in awe. “Alright then Austin, blow my fucking mind.” She grinned at him.

Austin grabbed her by the hand and took her to the front of the shop. “I want you to take in your surroundings. You see all these people in the store and out on the streets?”

Cadence looked at him unimpressed.

“This is important Cadence. Do you see all this?”

“Obviously.”

Austin grabbed her by the hand again and took her to the backdoor. He put the key into the door and then put his finger up and listened for the click.

\*ZWAPP CLICK\*

Austin grinned at Cadence and opened the door. “Go ahead, snoop around!”

Cadence walked into the store which was completely void of people. There were bowls of half-eaten gelato on the tables and the electronics were still active but there was no one in the store.

She ran outside and saw that all the cars were empty and stopped. “It’s like a picture only someone photoshopped everybody out of it.”

“Yeah, it’s weird, you’d think cars would be crashing without drivers but they are just idle.” Austin walked back into the store and hopped behind the counter.

“Can I interest you in all you can eat gelato?” He picked up a scoop and smiled at her.

“Tempting but I’m lactose intolerant, you wouldn’t want to be around me after eating all of that.”

Cadence walked outside the store and looked down the street. “Oh my god! Best idea ever!” She ran down the street and Austin followed.

She stopped outside of Mr. Gold’s Toy Emporium. “Ever since I was little I have wanted to play with every toy in this shop but of course you can’t because Mr. Gold is a big old meany.”

Austin’s eyes lit up as he ran into the store. Cadence was shocked that he didn’t even wait for her. “Hey, mister!” Cadence ran past him and headed right into the heart of the store.

They looked in awe as they had the run of the store and no one was going to stop them. Cadence went directly to the candy aisle. Austin looked one way and saw all kinds of Marvel action figures, he looked another and there were all kinds of Nerf guns. He ran to the Nerf guns and pulled out the Fortnite AR-L. “I’ve always wanted to play with this gun…” He held it and smiled. “Oh Cadence. I have a surprise for you!”

Austin walked through the store looking for Cadence but he couldn't seem to find her anywhere. He headed over to the ball zone where there was a giant ball pit as well as a huge net suspended in the air with hundreds of red rubber sports balls in it.

“Hey Cadence, I wanna show you something, it’s really cool!” Austin continued to look until he started to get worried that something had happened to her, maybe one of the hollow men got her?

From above Austins head fell a gumball. “Shoot!” Cadence whispered.

“Cadence?” Austin walked towards the gumball and then looked up. Suspended above him was Cadence. She was holding onto one of the ropes holding the net of balls up.

“You have no idea how hard this is!” Cadence giggled.

Austin grabbed his gun and got ready to shoot her.

“It’s ballbusting time!” Cadence undid the rope and swung down bringing all the balls hurtling towards Austin.

Austin let out a high-pitched scream and began to run as an avalanche of red bouncing balls closed in on him. Finally, he got overwhelmed by the balls and fell on them. Shanny was laughing her ass off as Austin was trying to get out of the mess she just created.

Because of all her laughing, she didn’t notice that Austin managed to get clear and got his gun back. He stood there smiling at her when she finally noticed. She gasped as Austin said, “Asta Lasagna, don’t get any on ya!” He unloads 10 darts on her nailing her almost every single time.

“Hey!” Cadence yelled at Austin.

“If you can’t take the heat, get out of the kitchen.” Austin winked at her.

“Okay, there master chef.” Cadence got up and started to clean herself up as she looked around. “Have you ever tried taking anything from here back to our world?”

Austin’s eyes lit up. “Holy shit! That’s a good idea!” He ran to the counter and grabbed a bag for himself and one for Cadence.

“Shall we?”

Cadence ran over to the art supply area and Austin headed back to the toy area. Austin grabbed a few little things including a yo-yo. Just as he was about to go and meet up with Cadence he spots a package of walkie-talkies. He had always wanted some so he grabbed the box and put them in his bag.

Suddenly, the sky started to glow green and a siren started to go off. Austin’s heart started pounding as he looked back at Cadence who looked confused.

“WE GOT TO GO!” Austin yelled as loud as he could.

“What’s that noise? What’s going on Austin?”

Austin grabbed Cadence by the hand and started to pull her to some stairs that led up to the employee break room. From the front of the store, the lights started to flicker and at the same time, they saw little spotlights shining in the streets. As they got closer the hollow men started to enter the store.

“Who are they, Austin?”

“I don’t know and I don’t want to find out. We have to go now!”

Cadence was looking out the window which overlooked the store. Austin grabbed the key and stuck it in the door. \*ZWAPP CLICK\* “Come on Cadence!”

“Wait, I don’t think they are dangerous, I think they are cleaning our mess.”

Austin pulled on her arm and dragged her to the door. “Please Cadence, I don’t want to be here anymore!”

“Okay fine, get off of me!” Cadence broke away from Austin and grabbed her things. She ran back through the door and Austin locked it behind her.

As they were rushing out of the store, Cadence grabbed Austin’s shoulder and asked “Who were they?”

“I don’t know Cadence,” Austin replied with an attitude, “I didn’t exactly stop to ask.”

“But why? They could probably tell you what that place is you know?”

“Because maybe every single movie ever made says you fucking run when creepy dudes with lights shooting from their eyes show up.”

“Yeah, but those are movies. It doesn’t mean every unknown is going to be evil. You shouldn’t be afraid of everything, just be cautious when you need to and be brave the rest of the time.”

Austin stood and stared at HER with a confused yet thought-provoking look on his face. He often hated that she made sense when he wasn’t thinking clearly, sometimes he enjoyed lavishing in his own ignorance but he also knew she was right.

“Fine,” Austin said abruptly.

“Fine what?” replied Cadence.

“Fine, let’s ask them the next time we see them.”

“Are you being serious with me right now? Like no fucking around?”

Austin was offended by her not knowing if he was being serious. “Of course I’m being serious. Don’t I look serious? This is my serious face, see?”

Austin looked at her with these stern but doughy eyes. That look was nothing short of adorable for Cadence. He was trying so hard to be serious but you could still see this gentleness about him.

“Okay then Captain, how shall we proceed?” Cadence said in a militaristic way.

Austin stood firmly up and adjusted the bottom of his jacket. He cleared his throat and said, “Uh… We should set up a trap so we can lure it to a place where we can protect ourselves just in case it turns out to be dangerous.”

“Agreed. But we have to be careful, we don’t want to hurt it.”

“Okay. When we would go camping with the family, my uncle taught me how to make a counterweight trap. It was made to catch little creatures but we could scale it up and use that to capture it.”

“We could set it up outside of the gelato shop and use the alley into the store as our escape route. But we should probably arm ourselves just in case it ends up being hostile.”

“With what? I don’t want to mess around with guns or anything that could potentially accidentally get us killed.”

“Not real guns, dumbass. We grab paintball guns and ammo from the Army Surplus store.”

“Hey! That’s Captain Dumbass and that’s a good idea number one.”

An announcement over the store's speaker came on informing them the store will be closing soon.

“What time is it anyway?” Cadence grabbed her phone and saw that it was almost 8 PM. “Shit, I should get going.”

“Yeah, me too.” Austin grabbed his stuff while Cadence called her mom for a ride. At that moment Austin started thinking about the things they took from the other world. He pulled out the yo-yo and proceeded to where he took it from.

Sitting on the shelf is the exact yo-yo right down to the same serial number. He picked it up and started examining the packages when one package touched the other.

Suddenly they started glowing and heating up. Austin dropped them and they disintegrated. It left behind an odour that can only be explained like burnt hair.

Cadence walked up to Austin. “My mom’s on her way. We should probably go get our bikes.” She then smells something odd. “Ew, what’s that smell?”

Austin and Cadence left the store to get their bikes while Austin explained to her what happened to the yo-yo.

“I think if two objects with the same quantum code touch they cancel themselves out,” said Austin with a lot of confidence.

“How the hell do you know that? Are you just making shit up?”

“My mom was really into this stuff. She loved Carl Sagan and Richard Feynman. She had a bunch of their books and lectures on tape that I listen to every now and then. I mean, I’m far from being a scientist but it kind of makes sense doesn’t it?”

“It kind of does actually.” Cadence’s mom pulled up and she put her bike on the bike rack. “You sure you don’t want a ride home?”

“Naw, it’s okay. I got a lot to process on the bike ride home.” Austin got on his bike and waved to Cadence’s mom. “see you later, Ms. Mackay!”

Cadence’s mom waved back as Cadence got into the car.

Her younger brother and sister were sitting in the back of the car looking at her with sheepish smiles. As Cadence got in the passenger side and put her buckle on, she could feel her family staring at her. “What?!” she snapped at her family.

“How was your date?” replied Ms. Mackay.

“It wasn’t a date! Geeze can’t a guy and a girl be friends without everyone thinking there’s something going on?”

“Oh sure honey. Sure but only if the chemistry between the two wasn’t so obvious.”

Cadence was shocked. “What do you mean by ‘obvious chemistry’? Do we have a sign over us saying ‘these two are an oblivious couple’?”

“Yep!” shouted Cooper.

“In big neon lights that everyone but you can see,” said Penny.

“Whatever.” Cadence put her headphones in and slouched in her seat.

## Chapter Five

Over the next few weeks, Austin and Cadence continued to visit the alternate world without people. Although they both had the intention of capturing a hollow man, the truth is they were both pretty scared about the whole thing. So they did what any fourteen-year-olds would do in that situation, they went on a shopping spree.

Neither Cadence nor Austin come from wealthy families so they didn’t have all the latest fashions or toys. They were smart not to take too much at first. It started off with Austin needing new shoes and wanting a pair of jeans that weren’t from Walmart.

Cadence was a bit different in her choice of clothing. While Austin was into brand name stuff, she stuck to thrift shops. She liked the eclectic nature as there are no two things alike and the possibilities were endless.

As the weeks went by, they got more careless with how much they were taking and it wasn’t long before people started to take notice including Cadence’s Mom and Dwight.

One evening at dinner time Cadence and her family were gathering for Taco Night. Penny arrived at the table in costume. She was wearing a gold luchador mask with purple highlights around the eyes and mouth. She also had her purple bathing suit on with gym shorts on. She tied a towel around her neck and was stomping and jumping on the chairs. “Taco Niiieeeette!” she yelled.

Cadence’s mom walked into the room with taco fixings. “Get off the furniture, Mistress Luchador, we still practice our manners.”

Penny slouched and dropped herself into her chair. “Fine,” she said in a pouting manner.

“Where’s your other half?” Cadence’s mom asked as she passed Cadence plates to set at the table.

Down the dark hall, Cooper’s voice can be heard in a Latino accent, “Your son is right here mother!”

As if piercing through the darkness, Cooper darted out wearing a Mariachi costume and holding a ukulele. “Tonight we shall dine on de tacos!”

Cooper's face dropped when he saw only the hard shell tacos. Breaking character Cooper said “I was led to believe that we would be having soft tacos. You know I don’t like the hard ones, they hurt my throat.”

Cadence’s mom pulled some warmed-up softshells out of the oven. “Hey Senor Picky-Pants, I got your soft shells right here.”

Cooper smiled and took a seat next to Cadence. Cadence wrapped her arm around him and said, “You know if you chew your food instead of trying to swallow it whole, it wouldn’t hurt going down your old food trap there.”

Cooper shrugged her arm off and let out a groan.

Cadence’s mom joined them at the table. “Leave your brother alone Cadence. We are all entitled to our own likes and dislikes.”

“Really? Do you mean it, mom?” Cadence asked in a sarcastic way.

Cadence’s mom looked at her puzzled. “What’s with the sass?”

“Well, I dislike having to babysit Puss in Boots and Donkey here but I have to do it any way but when he dislikes hard shells, you give him soft ones. Seems a little hypocritical if you ask me.”

Offended by her words, Penny dropped her taco on her plate, “Offense taken! Cooper and I go through a lot to accommodate you when babysitting us. It’s like a frickin epic show that only you get to see. We could be YouTube stars you know. And how dare you refer to Cooper as Donkey, he’s more Gingy if anything.”

Cooper was stuffing his face when he realizes that Penny thinks he was Donkey. “Um, your Donkey, I’m Puss in Boots, obviously.”

Penny’s face dropped. “Seriously Cadence? You’re lucky I love you or else I’d never perform for you again!”

Cadence’s mom shook her head and wiped her mouth with a napkin, “I understand what you are saying Cadence and I’m sorry you feel that way but in this family, we are a team and sometimes we have to do things we don’t want to do. I need your help sometimes.”

Cadence relented, “Ugh, I know and I’m sorry Penny and Cooper, I didn’t mean it. It’s just Austin and I have plans and lately, it seems like I never have time to do what I want to do.”

“What if I drop you three off at Austin’s tomorrow while I go to the City Council meeting. It’s the best compromise I can come up with sweetie.”

“Fine, whatever.” Cadence’s annoyed face quickly turned into a smile. She picked up her phone to text Austin when her mom gave her grief for using her phone at the dinner table.

“Cadence Von Rude Much! There will be no use of technology at the dinner table. You can text your boyfriend after you have finished eating.”

Cadence put down her phone. “Whatever.” Under her breath, she said, “And he’s not my boyfriend.”

Cooper and Penny giggled. No one was buying that they aren’t boyfriend and girlfriend.

Cadence’s mom looked at Cadence’s phone and noticed that she had a new case for it. “That’s new, when did you get that?”

Cadence got a little nervous, she didn’t think anyone would notice. “Oh, this? Yeah um, that cell phone store in town had a sale on those cases you can draw your own designs on and Austin bought it for me cause he felt bad for my poor artist ass.”

“Ah, I see. Well if your ‘poor artist ass’ wants to make her own money so her ‘not boyfriend’ doesn’t have to buy her things then I can get you a job at the salon sweeping hair for a couple of hours after school if you want?”

Cooper and Penny giggled again. Cadence glared at them. “Thanks mom, that’s something for me to think about. I’ll get back to you on that. May I be excused? I’m full.”

Cadence’s mom nodded her head. “Don’t get too comfortable though, as soon as we are done eating the three of you can clean up dinner.”

Both Cooper and Penny whined about having to clean as Cadence got up from the table and headed to her room to text Austin.

Text Conversation:

**Kiki** - Hey butthole! What are you doin tmrw nite?

**Austin** - n2m. Dad’s got a council meeting so my bro and his friends are gonna be here. Why???

**Kiki** - my mom’s going to that. Is it cool if she drops me and the rugrats off on her way to it?

**Austin** - lemme check…

10 minutes later.

**Austin** - OMG! 🤬my brothers gross dwarf friend made me motor boat his man boobs! 😭

**Kiki** - LMFAO!!! 🤣

**Austin** - 😡no seriously, he’s ginger ALL over. I got some of his dwarven fur in my mouth 🤮

**Kiki**- buck up frodo. I’m sure it wasn’t for nothing?? 😇🥰

**Austin** - yeah, well, it was traumatizing for me and yes, you and your stupid brother and sister can come over tomorrow…

**Kiki** - MY HERO!!! 🙉😻🥳 I knew you could do it!

➺

The next evening Cadence, Penny and Cooper were dropped off at Austin’s house. Outside of the house were Dwight and Sid who were tinkering with Dwight’s engine.

Sid looked up and saw Cadence wearing a very colourful outfit. She wore rainbow leggings with Converse sneakers that she modded with purple fur and sparkling silver laces. She was also wearing red shorts with rainbow suspenders and an old Pink Floyd the Dark Side of the Moon t-shirt. Her hair was done up in a ponytail with a rainbow scrunchie. And finally, she was wearing a faded denim vest that was mostly covered in patches from different bands.

Penny and Cooper in their usual style had come dressed up as two little hobbits. Cadence told them that a Master Dwarf would be there and they took it to heart.

“My god Dwight, real actual Hobbits in your front yard with Rainbow Bright!” Sid said excitedly.

“Huh?” Dwight looked up and started to grin. “I see the fellowship is convening yet again. If you were looking for a Dwarf, he’s inside with King Dork himself.”

Cooper and Penny pull out plastic swords and point them at Dwight. Cooper steps forward and in a stern voice says, “We may be small but we will cut you down if you do not hold your tongue, sir!”

Dwight put his hands up. “Whoa, calm down there halflings.”

Sid intervened, “Excuse me little ones but my boorish friend here certainly did not mean any offence. You have to excuse him as he doesn’t have much experience in dealing with civilized people.”

Dwight looked at her all offended. “Boorish?”

Penny put her sword away. “The Elf is right, leave his boorish man to his tinkering. We have a Dwarf and a Dork to see!” she said as she walked towards the house.

Cooper stared at Dwight and put his sword away. “I got my eye on you.” He joined Penny in the house.

Cadence walked by Dwight when he asked, “What the fuck is wrong with your little brother and sister?”

Cadence smiled at him and said, “They are lovely little weirdos who are more comfortable in their skin than you.” She twirled around and threw glitter at Dwight.

“What the fuck?!” Dwight backed up and spit out glitter.

Sid laughed. “That may have been meant to be a burn but I gotta be honest with you D, you look so much better now!”

Dwight looked at Sid in shock. “Oh really? Well, how about we see what it looks like on you?” Dwight started chasing Sid around the truck while Cadence entered the house.

Inside the house sat Doughboy who was sitting in front of the TV with a Super Nintendo Entertainment System. He was playing a role-playing game with a bottle of orange soda next to him. In Doughboy fashion, he was yelling at the storyline in the game as if it could hear him.

“You’re a goddamn sonuvabitch Golbez! Tellah was a good man! He didn’t deserve it!”

Penny and Cooper were standing in awe of this sight. There he was, the Master Dwarf playing on what they can only assume is some ancient device from the old kingdom.

Cadence looked at her brother and sister and saw how enthralled they were in the game. Cadence approached Doughboy in the hopes of pawning them off on him.

“Hey Gimli, Song of Gloin! I have two hobbits here who would love to know more about this game,” not knowing what the name of the game was, she squints her eyes as she looks at the cartridge to bring the name in focus, “Final Fantasy 2. Will you teach them all you know?”

Doughboy dropped the controller and quickly looked at Cadence. “DO I LOOK LIKE A BABYSITTER TO YOU!?” He flashed her his trademark grin.

“Who said anything about babysitting? Two hobbits merely want to hang out with a Master Dwarf.”

Doughboy looked confused. Was she somehow making fun of his looks and size? Because that’s how it was feeling to him. “Look Lightbrite, I don’t know what you’re getting at but my size is none of your concern. I may be short but I’ll knock ye on yer arse so hard -”

Cadence cut Doughboy off “- First of all, I think you meant Rainbow Bright, not Lightbrite. And secondly, I’m not making fun of you dude. I really do have hobbits with me and they think you’re a Dwarf.” Cadence looked behind Doughboy where her brother and sister are standing in awe of him.

Doughboy turned around and saw the two hobbits standing before him. He gasped and then smiled. “Palom and Porom!”

Penny and Cooper looked at each other confused. They look back at Doughboy and Penny said, “Actually, Merry and Pippin. We’re hobbits not whatever you just said.”

Doughboy squealed in delight. “Not for long. COME YOUNG HOBBITS! I shall teach you all about the world of Final Fantasy 2!” Doughboy sat back down in front of the TV and Penny and Cooper joined him.

Cooper looked over and saw his bottle of orange pop. “Can I have some of your orange pop?”

Doughboy looked at Cooper. “My dear little hobbit, there are many things you will learn about me and the first and most important thing that you must never forget is, don’t mess with MY ORANGE POP!” He finished off with his smile.

Cooper looked horrified. He sat down next to Penny who was holding back her laughter. “You okay Cooper?”

He leaned in and whispered in her ear, “I’m pretty sure I poo’d and pee’d myself a little…”

Penny started laughing uncontrollably while Cooper sat there and pouted.

Cadence walked away shaking her head. She’s not sure who she feels more sorry for, Doughboy or her brother and sister. She walked into the kitchen where she found Austin working on one of his Thor costumes.

Austin was so into what he was doing that he didn’t even notice Cadence and she was aware of it. It sometimes annoyed her when he didn’t notice her but at the same time, this was something she really liked about him. You could tell he was lost in his own world and she relished the opportunity to interrupt him.

Cadence walked up to Austin and grabbed him by his shoulders saying, “Ah! It is Thor, leader of the Asgardians of the Galaxy!”

Austin jumped as he clearly was not expecting that. “Jesus Cadence! I hate when you do that!”

From the living room, Doughboy yelled, “STAR-LORD IS THE ONE AND TRUE LEADER OF THE GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY! NICE TRY THOR!”

Cadence sat down at the kitchen table.“I guess some people are just die-hard team Star-Lord huh?” She had taken notice of some of the modifications Austin had made to his costume. “You get all this stuff from the other side?”

“Yeah of course. How else could I make this stuff look so good.”

“Aren’t you worried that someone is going to notice?”

Austin dropped what he was doing and thought for a moment. “We are being careful aren’t we?”

“I have been but I think my mom is starting to notice. She asked me about my phone case and I told her you bought it for me.”

Austin looked at his costume and it really was a step up from what he could afford to do before. “Oh crap… I think you might be right…”

“We need a stash because if we keep bringing stuff home without having a good explanation for where we got it, I just don’t know how we are going to explain this.”

Austin started to ponder. “What about that abandoned workshop where I found the key?”

Cadence perked up. “Yeah, we could fix it up and create a clubhouse!”

Austin grabbed his phone and Googles how to pick a lock. “We just have to figure out how to break into it.”

“Can’t we just use the key?”

“If we use the key to get in, we won’t be going into the real workshop, it will be the one in the other world. We want the one in his world.”

“Oh yeah, I forgot. Hey, how does everything seem to reset every time we go back? Do you think that’s what the hollow men are doing? Resetting it like a simulation?”

“The hollow men!” Austin exclaimed as he was just realizing that they hadn’t followed through on capturing one.

“You ‘forgot’ too huh?” Cadence sat right next to Austin.

“Yeah, I guess. I suppose it kind of freaks me out you know? Like I haven’t felt this freaked out since my mom passed away.”

“You don’t talk about that much. All I know is that there’s some connection between her and you and your brother's Sons of Asgard thing.”

Austin started to become uncomfortable and Cadence took notice. “I’m sorry Austin we don’t have to talk about it if you don’t want to.”

Austin stood up and walked away from Cadence. In his hand, he was holding his Sons of Asgard patch. “You’re right, there is a connection between my mom and the Sons of Asgard. I haven’t talked about it since it happened but the truth is, I want to - like really bad but I haven’t found the right person to open up to.”

Cadence felt a little hurt inside that it wasn’t her. She stood up and said to him, “It’s okay Austin, I didn’t mean to open up old wounds. We can talk about something else.”

“No, I do want to talk about it… with you.” Austin smiled at Cadence. “That’s what I’m trying to say is that I found that person and you’re that person.”

Cadence gleamed a big smile at him. “Wait,” she said, “ Let’s go for a walk to the workshop and you can tell me whatever you want.”

Cadence went to check on her brother and sister who were having a great time watching and listening to Doughboy.   
  
“Austin and I are going for a walk, if you need anything just call my cell.”

Penny and Cooper both moaned, “yeah yeah, call cell phone, going for a walk with boyfriend, yadda yadda yadda.”

Cadence replied while grinding her teeth, “He’s not my boyfriend.” She stormed off out the backdoor.

Austin not knowing what just happened quickly grabbed some tools and followed her. “What was that all about?”

“Oh, nothing, just siblings doing the annoying thing.” She wrapped her arm around Austin’s and they started walking through the woods towards the workshop.

When they arrived, Cadence found a nice comfy stump and looked at the door “Did you figure out how to pick the lock?”

“It might take a while to figure it out but I can do it while telling you my story.” Austin pulled out some tools and started tinkering with the door. Cadence gave Austin her undivided attention.

**6 Years Ago**

It was a hot and humid night in the dead of summer. Austin, Dwight, Daryl, Uncle Adam, and their grandparents were all gathered at the Cascade Springs Hospital. They were preparing to take his mother off life support.

Her sickness had made it next to impossible for her to breathe on her own. Daryl didn’t seem to be too interested in Austin or Dwight as his head rested on their mother’s hands quietly sobbing.

In the corner of the room, there was a TV that was getting spotty reception. The CTV news anchor was talking about solar flare activity.

Austin was always paying attention and he was intrigued about the solar flares but was also a little scared. He couldn’t help but feel overwhelmed, it was like his whole universe was being swept away. First, his mom got sick and on the same night she was going to die, the sun was shooting solar flares at the Earth.

Dwight was sitting in a chair reading a Thor comic. He always had his nose in some kind of book whether it be a comic or one of his dad’s books on auto mechanics.

Since their mom got sick, Dwight started to use his comics to help Austin through his mother's sickness. Dwight loved his comics but unlike Austin who was all about Thor, Dwight rooted for the misunderstood Loki.

Before their mom got sick they would often play together in the woods behind their house. Sometimes they would have friends over and play capture the flag or they would build forts and have mini-wars.

After their mom got sick Austin got really into wanting to roleplay as Thor and his brother as Loki. This was when he started making his own costumes and fashioned his own Molnjir out of foam and the handle was made from a piece of an old rocking chair.

It started off with the two of them battling each other but Austin always felt that Loki and Thor should be out having adventures together.

Dwight preferred his way of playing and didn’t give much thought to what Austin wanted. Austin even went as far as to create badges for them to wear that had “S.O.A.” printed on them with a lightning bolt behind it.

“S.O.A.?” asked Dwight.

“Sons of Asgard,” Austin replied. “If Loki and Thor officially teamed up, that is what they could call themselves.”

Austin jumped up on a crate and struck a heroic pose. In his best Thor voice, he said, “What say you brother? Shall we join forces against the scourge of the universe!?”

Dwight looked at his brother and then down at the badge. “I dunno Austin, I think I prefer it this way.”

Austin’s heroic pose quickly melted away in disappointment. From down the path, the boys heard their mom calling out for them to come home. Austin ran past her in a huff.

“Is everything okay Dwight?” their mother asked while coughing.

“Yeah, he’s just mad cause he wants Loki to join Thor in some superhero group he calls the Sons of Asgard,” he replied. “I keep saying no because that’s not how it happens in the comics.”

She walked over to Dwight and put her arm around him. “You know sometimes it’s okay to take creative liberties when you play with your brother. Maybe in one universe, they are rivals but perhaps in an alternate one Thor and Loki are heroes called the Sons of Asgard.”

Dwight was a little irritated with her logic as he couldn't argue with it. “I guess you’re right.”

She kissed him on his head and said, “Go wash up and get ready for dinner.”

Dwight ran up ahead of Austin and stopped him. “Yo! Hold up a sec!”

Austin stomped his feet and looked at the ground. “What do you want?”

“Got some of that fabric glue left?”

“Yeah, tons actually. Why?”

“I’m going to need to attach this badge somehow and I really don’t want to have to sew it on.”

Austin’s eyes lit up and he began dancing around. “Are you serious!?” he exclaimed. “Oh my gosh, this is going to be epic Dwight. I’m going to need a new costume!” Austin ran into the house and accidentally bumped into his dad.

“Whoa there bud, slow down, there’s hot stuff here,” said Daryl as he was setting the table.

“Sorry dad,” said Austin while running up the stairs. “Dwight and I just made history!”

Dwight shook his head and wondered if he made a mistake. This was the last time they all had dinner as a family before their mother's sickness started to take hold of her.

Back in the hospital, Austin had curled up with his brother's green hoodie that had the Sons of Asgard patch on it. As they waited, a loud crash of thunder scared Austin. Dwight opened his backpack and took out one of his Thor comics.

He opened a page to Thor raising his hammer with lightning striking behind him. He began to explain to Austin, “when a great warrior of Asgard has fallen, Thor summons a mighty thunderstorm so that the other fallen warriors in Valhalla will know that one of their brothers or sisters is on their way.”

“But mom isn’t Asgardian, is she?” Austin asked with the look of innocence in his eye.

Dwight felt a deep pain in his heart when he saw that look. He had no clue what happens to you when you die but he felt like this might give his brother closure if he had an answer.

He pulled his brother in close and whispered to him, “I’m not supposed to say this because I’m not supposed to know but mom is a direct descendant of the Lady Sif. You can’t tell anyone though. This has to be our secret okay?”

Austin’s eyes lit up as he looked over at his mother. He stood up and walked towards her mesmerized by this new knowledge of his family’s lineage.

He pulled a chair to her bed, stepped up to her head, and whispered in her ear, “I know your secret mommy. I know your part Asgardian but don’t worry your secret's safe with me.” He leaned in and kissed her on her forehead. Austin's mother softly smiled and then moments later she passed away.

Austin ran back to his brother grabbing on to him and started crying. Dwight held on to his little brother while fighting back his tears. Their father didn’t handle it well, he got angry and started yelling at the doctors and nurses.

Daryl lost a piece of himself that night and when that happened, he never quite recovered. As selfish as it was, he chose to wallow in his anger and grief. Every time he saw his boys or looked around the house he was reminded of the best friend and the only part of him he felt was worth anything that was slowly taken from him. At least if he held onto his anger and grief, he would be holding on to what he felt was the very last part of her. Moving on would mean accepting this outcome and because of that, his children suffered.

This did not go unnoticed by the rest of Austin’s family. His grandparents were quite old and were in no position to help out. The only other person who could help them was Austin’s mom’s brother, Adam. He was a few years younger than his sister and was considered the black sheep of the family.

He was a highly creative guy who loved to play with his nephews. He would usually take on the role of the villain and would go all out on his costumes and superpowers. He had one rule: if he was to play with them, they could never defeat him by killing him. He would make up a reason why he would be doing these things and it would be their job to deduce it and use it to stop him.

Adam wasn’t the best when it came to adulting, in fact, he sucked at it but he was an astute observer when it came to behaviors. Everything he did was to teach them a lesson they could take away from and apply it to life situations.

For the first six months, things weren’t too bad, Adam moved in and made sure the boys were getting themselves to school and were being taken care of. Daryl was quiet and contemplative for those months and over time a new normal began to emerge.

Around eight months in, Daryl started drinking. At first, it seemed like it was a good thing, Daryl started participating in discussions at the dinner table and would be there to say good night to his boys at bedtime.

One evening Austin had been in a mood, he was missing his mom and didn’t know how to express it so he took it out on his uncle and dad. When things were good, so was Daryl but when things got hard, Daryl’s patience wore thin. Adam could see it and intervened.

“Hey little buddy,” Adam sat down next to Austin’s bed. “Sometimes when I’m feeling big things and I don’t know how to say it, I can get pretty cranky.”

Austin sat in his bed pouting and not giving eye contact.

“Does this have anything to do with the upcoming anniversary of your mother’s passing?”

Austin grunted and kicked his feet as his eyes started to tear up.

“I miss her too little dude. She was the best big sister I could have asked for.” Adam started to tear up and Austin began to notice.

Austin crawled over to Adam’s lap and hugged him. Adam hugged him back and when he looked at the door Dwight was standing there looking just as sad. Adam waved him on over and Dwight sat next to them.

“I think we need to celebrate your mom.”

Austin perked his head up. “Mom’s an Asgardian you know?”

Dwight got upset. “Austin! That’s supposed to be a secret!” He got himself all worked up and Austin began to feed off his reaction.

Adam quickly jumped in the middle, “Hey what? How do you guys know that? That’s a top-level family secret!”

Both Dwight and Austin’s faces dropped.

Dwight quickly realized what his Uncle was doing and began to play along. “Sorry Uncle Adam, I know we aren’t supposed to know but I was snooping in mom’s things one day and found this old scroll and it was mom’s birth certificate.”

Adam ran to the door and closed it, not all the way, just enough that he could peek outside to make sure no one was listening. He huddled up with the boys and started to whisper, “Okay look, you guys are too smart and I can’t lie to you anymore. It’s true that your mom and I are children of Thor.”

Dwight interrupted, “Um you mean Lady Sif.”

Understanding what he did wrong, Adam quickly corrected himself. “Of course, Lady Sif who was best friends with Thor, and to be honest Thor practically raised us so it's like he was our dad but really wasn’t.”

Austin was going nuts sitting there listening to this. He could barely sit still, the energy was building and he wanted to scream in excitement so much. This drove Dwight nuts when he started to do this. He stood up and tried to get Austin to sit down.

“I hate when he gets like this, if he gets too wound up he will never get to sleep.” Dwight was continuing to hush his brother as Adam was panicking that he may have made things worse.

“Wait!” Adam exclaimed as he sat down next to Austin. “Alright, little buddy you’re gonna have to calm down.”

Still bouncing around in his spot, Austin replied, “Sorry Uncle Adam, it must be all that Asgardian energy building inside of me. I don’t know what to do with it!”

Adam and Dwight grabbed Austin and did their best to calm him down. Adam started to think.

Dwight impatiently said, “if he doesn’t calm down, I don’t think Dad is going to take it very well.”

Adam’s mind was racing. He looked over at the boys and then over at one of Austin’s comics. Adam was a storyteller and when he gets overwhelmed with energy like Austin, he creates worlds in Minecraft. He couldn’t do that but maybe there was a compromise.

“Okay, Austin I’m going to teach you something Thor taught me.” Adam sat directly in front of Austin with his legs crossed. “Do as I do okay?”

Austin sat with his legs crossed. Dwight calmed down but was confused as to what Adam had planned.

“It is well known among Asgardians that each of us has this ethereal energy that flows through us.”

Confused at the word, Austin asked, “What’s eth-real?”

Adam had to think fast. “It means god-like electricity.”

Austin understood and was open to finding out what this energy was.

“In order to stop our energy from controlling us, we must learn to work with it.”

“You mean we have to learn to control it, right Uncle Adam?”

“Well no Austin, we can’t control it as this energy is bigger than us. Those who try to control it get driven mad. The secret is learning to work with it, so it helps us in our lives and doesn’t destroy us.”

Both Austin and Dwight were now into what Adam was saying.

“How do we do that?” Austin asked.

“Yeah, how?” Dwight added to Austin’s question.

“Okay, close your eyes,” Adam made sure Austin’s eyes were closed. He looked over at Dwight and he too was participating.

“Imagine you’re out in the rock quarry and there’s lightning striking all around you. You’re trying to get to safety but there’s a big boulder blocking the way. In order for you to get to safety, you’re going to have to harness the lightning.”

Austin started to panic. “How am I supposed to do that? I’m just a kid.”

Adam put his hand on Austin’s shoulder. “No, you’re not just a kid, you’re your mom’s kid. What would your mom say?”

Austin squeezed his eyes. “I don’t know-”

“Come on kiddo, I know it’s in you. What would your mom tell you to do?”

Austin started to visualize his mom standing in the quarry with him. Lightning continued to strike all around him as he looked at her and for a moment the chaos around him began to fade. She was saying something to him but he couldn't quite hear her. “I can see her, she’s here!”

Dwight opened his eyes and looked at his brother. “Huh? You can? What’s she doing?”

“I don’t know, she’s saying something to me but I can’t hear her.”

In a calm voice, Adam said, “Focus Austin. Take a deep breath and let it out slowly.”

Austin took in a deep breath and slowly let it out. He looked at his mom and she smiled at him. He cried out to her, “I don’t understand, I can’t hear you!”

Dwight quickly ran to the door and shut it all the way. Downstairs Daryl had been drinking and caught wind of the commotion.

Austin’s eyes began to water and his fantasy started to get blurry. He cleared his eyes and began to approach her. His mom reached her hand out to him as he tried to grab on.

Outside of his fantasy, Austin had stood up and was reaching out to his window. Adam and Dwight were holding him back from falling out.

What felt like ages, Austin’s hand finally grabbed ahold of her. In a single moment, he heard her voice say, “I believe in you my brave boy.”

Suddenly, a lightning bolt struck Austin in his fantasy, and yet outside of his fantasy both Adam and Dwight let go of Austin as they felt a shock from him. In his fantasy, Austin was now holding Mjolnir. “She’s gone! Mom’s gone!”

Dwight rushed to his side, “what do you mean she’s gone? What happened?”

“I was reaching out for her and when I grabbed her hand I heard her voice and then lightning struck us and now I’m holding Mjolnir.”

“Awesome!” exclaimed Adam. “You’re starting to believe in yourself there kiddo. That hammer is how you’re going to focus that energy.”

In his fantasy, Austin had closed his eyes. At first, he didn’t quite understand but then his mother’s face flashed before him and then he knew what he must do.

The sound of the lightning strikes became loud again. Austin opened his eyes in his fantasy which was now surging with electricity.

He held up Mjolnir which attracted all the lighting to him and he struck the hammer down bringing everything raining down on that boulder.

Adam and Dwight were sitting in silence as they couldn’t see any of this and were wondering if he’s okay. Austin smiled and opened his eyes. “That was awesome. I feel so much better Uncle Adam.”

Surprised that it worked Adam hugged Austin. “Of course it did, Thor would never steer me wrong.” Dwight feeling left out joined the hug.

Outside in the hall Daryl stood listening. He opened the door a crack and saw them in their hug. At first he was overcome with the feeling of joy but then he started thinking about what he had lost and started to get mad. He swung the door open and in a stern voice said, “Adam, can you come here for a minute?”

Adam proceeded to tuck Austin in and gave him a hug. “Anytime you feel that way, you just visualize Mjolnir and you make that energy work for you okay bud?”

“Okay, g’nite Uncle Adam, I love you.”

“Love you too bud.” Adam and Dwight left Austin’s room. Dwight hugged his dad and was about to say good night when Daryl broke his hug. “Men don’t hug Dwight. You’re getting to be a young man and it’s time you started acting like it.”

Dwight was hurt by that, his dad had never said anything like that before. Seeing as Daryl was his role model, he didn’t want to disappoint him so he walked to his room feeling ashamed of himself.

Daryl and Adam went downstairs into the kitchen.

“Look Daryl, I don’t want to overstep but are you serious with that men don’t hug crap?”

Daryl took a shot of whiskey and looked at Adam. Most days Daryl was fine with him but there were days he reminded him of his wife and he didn’t like it. “No offense Adam, I appreciate all the help you’ve given me but I think it’s time you started to step away.”

“Wait, what?” Adam was taken back by this. “I thought things have been going well.”

“Yeah well these guys need their father to show them what it means to be a man and like I said, no offense but you aren't exactly a great example of that.”

“What is this? The 1980’s? There’s more to being a “man” than testosterone and beer. It would do these guys good to see the range of “man” they could be.”

“This is my house and those are my kids. If I feel you being here is impeding my ability to raise my kids the way I see fit then you gotta go.”

“Seriously? Because the past eight months I have been there for them while you have been sitting there wallowing in your self pity. And now you want to take away another person who they have been relying on to get them through the day?”

“Once again Adam, you’re not their father, I am.” Daryl was trying very hard not to lose it on him. “We no longer need your help, so kindly, fuck off!”

Adam was shocked. “So what, you want me to just pack up my things and leave?”

“No, I’m not saying right now but take a couple of weeks and prepare the boys. Then you can go back to whatever pathetic existence you had before all of this.”

“Fuck you Daryl.” Adam did his best not to be disrespectful to Daryl in his house but he had enough. “I love these boys like they were my own and you know what, I think my sister would want it that way if she knew that their father had turned into a pathetic drunk.”

That was it, Adam pressed one too many buttons and Daryl lost it. He shoved him up against the wall and put his hands around his throat. “I could end you right now, it would so fucking easy you judgemental piece of shit.”

Daryl loosened his grip and backed away. “Get your shit together and be out of here by the time I get off work tomorrow. If I see you again, I will fucking kill you and then your sister will have some company.”

Adam started to tear up. “I’ll be watching you and if I think for one minute those boys are in danger...”

Daryl furiously walked out of the house and got into his truck.

Adam followed. “Where are you going?”

“You and I can’t be in the same house right now. I’ll leave you with your pretend family for the night but then it’s all over. I’ll be taking over the role of father.” Daryl closed his door and drove off.

Adam knew that Daryl was quite drunk so he called the police and reported it. Sure, it was out of spite but Daryl really should not be driving drunk and he wanted those boys to still have one parent in the morning. Daryl spent the night in the drunk tank and Adam spent the night packing his stuff.

The next morning Austin and Dwight came downstairs. They had overheard what went on and were both really sad.

Adam had prepared them a French toast breakfast with freshly cut fruit. It was a tough morning for them all but Adam made sure to tell them how much he loved them and gave them his cell number.

“You guys can call me anytime. I doubt your dad is going to let me come around but as soon as you guys are old enough you can come see me anytime.”

True to his word, Adam was gone by the time the boys got home from school. In the beginning things weren’t too bad with their dad but the good days got shorter and the bad days became their normal.

**Present Day**

“Whoa… So that’s what happened to your Uncle! You always just said your dad and him didn’t get along but that’s some epic rivalry shit right there.”

Austin managed to pick the lock and got into the workshop and installed a new lock to which they both had a key for.

Austin’s eyes had teared from telling the story so he wiped them off and continued to move things around the workshop.

“Yeah, I miss him. We tried inviting him to some birthdays but dad and Uncle Adam can’t get along. He moved to the Okanagan but always video calls us on birthdays and holidays.”

“Lame dude. My family fights but nothing like that.” Cadence grabbed her bag and pulled out a sketchbook. She opened it up to a drawing of a hollow man. “Don’t you think it’s time to be brave again Austin?”

“Huh?” Austin was confused by the question at first but then heard his mom's voice in his head telling him to be brave.

He looked in her book and saw the hollow man. His anxiety started to rise again but then he looked at how calm Cadence was. “You really don’t think they are dangerous?”

“Well I mean they could be but they don’t look designed to be dangerous. Should we be cautious? Yes we should. Should we attempt to learn more about them? Absolutely!”

“I guess that’s what any good scientist would do, huh?” Austin grabbed her book and took a really good look at it. “Yeah, let’s do it.”

Suddenly, Cadence’s phone started ringing. Her sister was sending a video call request. “Ugh, it’s the daughter of a Took!” She answered the call and Penny was wrestling with Cooper over who gets to talk.

“No butthole! It’s my phone so I’m going to talk!” Penny grabbed the phone and ran into another room.

From in the other room, Cooper yelled, “IT'S OUR PHONE! MOM SAYS SHARE!”

Penny stuck her tongue out towards the next room and then looked at Cadence. “Are you and Austin busy kissing??” Penny started making kissing faces which made Cadence blush.

Austin started to freak out. “What did she say? Why would we be kissing? We don’t do that… Do we?” He looked at Cadence confused.

“Calm down there cootie boy.” Cadence sat Austin down while she still had her phone in her hand. “Chill out my dude, it’s little kids and their imaginations. Don’t put too much stock in it.” She winked at Austin while he now looks even more confused.

“Everything is changing so fast,” Austin felt like he was missing something about this conversation with her sister and Cadence could tell.

She passed him her sketchbook. “Start working out how we are going to trap the hollow man.”

Austin got to work on his plan while Cadence got back to her sister. “What do you want, young hobbit?”

“What’s a hollow man?” asked Penny.

“What? Oh, none of your business. Did you need something cause we’re busy?”

Penny talked Cadence’s ear off for a few minutes about Final Fantasy 2 and how it had boy and girl twins named Palom and Parom. Both Penny and Cooper wanted to cosplay as them. Cadence was shaking her head as her brother and sister seem to have a new obsession every week.

After that call, Cadence and Austin got back to planning their next adventure. After about an hour they had a pretty solid plan.

“When do we do this?” asked Austin.

“Dude, this is your story, not mine. I’m just along for the ride.”

Austin looked at the plan with some certainty. He nodded his head and said, “Saturday. That way we have a few days to gather the things we will need.”

Cadence smiled. “Saturday it is.” She put her hand out like someone would do with their teammates but Austin being oblivious to it was confused as to what she was doing. He took her hand into his and puckered his lips and confusingly kissed her hand.

“What are you doing dork?”

“Uh… I’m doing an impression of a confused guy. Pretty good huh?” Austin nervously laughed.

“No, I put my hand out like this,” Cadence extended her hand and grabbed Austin’s hand, “and then you put your hand in like this,” she put his hand on top of hers. “Okay and now we both say ‘GOOO TEAM!’”

Austin had seen stuff like this on old TV shows but thought it was stupid but he didn’t want to disappoint so he half heartily said, “Go Team,” and weakly waved his arms in the air.

“I hope that half-assed cheer is because you are saving your enthusiasm for the mission.”

“Yeah, sure,” replied Austin.

Cadence gave him a shove causing Austin to lose his balance. She started laughing and running towards the house.

“Hey! What’s the big idea?!” Austin ran after her and for the next hour, they watched Doughboy play video games until Cadence’s mom picked them up.

## Chapter Six

The next morning as Austin was getting himself ready for school, he found himself thinking about what they would say if anyone started to notice all their new gear. Was it really that bad?

He stood in front of a full-body mirror that hung in the hallway. He made a point not to wear too many things that were obviously something he couldn’t afford. He was pretty proud of his DC Unca leather boots. He felt they looked good but were also practical for going on adventures with. He was still wearing his usual clothes which were jeans, a t-shirt (usually something geek-related), and a military jacket.

Cadence referred to his look as “the Winchester”. He looked like he could be a younger dorky Winchester brother from the TV series Supernatural.

Austin didn’t mind the comparison as the Winchesters were pretty badass and there may have been a small, teensy weensy chance that Austin was going for that look and the boots really completed the ensemble.

Yep, Austin was digging the look and thought there was no way anyone was going to be looking at his feet and noticing something like that.

He ran downstairs and started making himself some peanut butter toast. As he was pouring his milk, his brother walked in and stopped to check out his outfit.

“That shirt makes the rest of the outfit look like a joke.”

Austin looked at his shirt with confusion. “What’s wrong with Teen Titans?”

“Let me guess, you’re trying for a more mature look right?” Dwight proceeded to pour some cereal into a bowl. “There’s nothing wrong with Teen Titans if you were trying to give off a goofy gamer/skater vibe but it doesn’t work with this.”

“It’s an ‘I'm tough when I need to be but still sweet and kind of innocent look’.”

“Nope. It comes off as ‘I’m trying to be something I’m not and I’m really just a big old dork’ look.”

Austin went back upstairs to throw a dark green plaid button-up over his t-shirt. As he was walking back down, Dwight noticed his shoes.

“Whoa, are those DC leather boots? Those are like 130 bucks man, there’s no way dad bought you those.”

Austin’s heart started to race. ‘*How the hell did he notice?’* He had to come up with something quick. “Oh these? I told you about these.”

Dwight looked confused. “Um, no I don’t think you mentioned those before?”

“No? That’s so weird cause I have been talking about it non-stop for the past like three days dude.”

“You have?”

“Yeah, I’ve been going off about how I got this awesome deal. I actually thought that I was annoying everyone about it. Like, I was worried people were just wanting me to shut up about these boots already. Are you sure you haven’t heard me say anything about the boots?”

Dwight still looked confused about the whole thing.

Austin, trying to act all calm and collected started eating his peanut butter toast which made his mouth all sticky. “Thany and I were at the frifth thop -”

Dwight cut him off. “Thany and you were at the frifth thop?”

Austin took a swig of milk and swished it around his mouth clearing up the peanut butter.

“No, I said Cadence and I were at the thrift shop which is something we do all the time. We were looking at the old school toys in the back when I noticed these bad boys sitting on a table in the back room. I asked the lady about them and she said someone dropped them off with a bunch of other stuff. I begged her to sell them to me and after a little haggling, I got them for like 10 bucks…”

Dwight was not quite convinced. “Wow, 10 bucks? That’s a steal!”

Still nervous, went to take a bite of his toast while talking. “Yeah, crazy right? It's so unbelievable but believable because it thappened that way.” Austin smiled with peanut butter on his teeth and proceeded to wash down his toast with more milk.

Dwight shook his head and couldn't help but laugh at his little brother. “Go brush your teeth, you dork.” Dwight threw a kitchen towel at Austin’s face.

“Oh and hey, if you find any more cool things like that in my size, pick it up. That’s so cool!”

Austin finished his breakfast and proceeded to brush his teeth. He couldn’t believe his luck. Out of all the things to notice, who notices shoes? What were the chances that two people would notice on the same day? Figuring his bad luck quota had been filled for the day, he got school stuff together and got a ride in with Dwight.

Later that day during their lunch break, Austin and Cadence went over their plan. Austin had his tablet out and was using Google Maps to point out potential obstacles and vantage points.

Austin zoomed in near the gelato shop. “We can position ourselves on the rooftops here at Mamma Josie’s and over here on the opposite side at the pawnshop.”

“How are we going to talk to each other if we are on different rooftops? You said cell phones don’t work there right?”

“True but I swiped these from the other toy store.” Austin pulls two walkie-talkies. “These should take care of that problem for us.”

Cadence looked unimpressed. “What in the retro hell? Okay, I mean we could have just used string and two cans.”

“Hey, walkie-talkies are cool. My uncle had them as a kid and he bought some for Dwight and me. Sometimes we would pick up on passing truckers talking over their radios. They’re pretty cool and very spy-like. And don’t worry I tested them earlier and they work fine. Besides we have to try and be as safe as possible and that’s what these are going to do for us in case we get separated.”

“Uh-huh, uh-huh,” Cadence nodded her head in agreement. “What’s your backup in case radio communications break down.”

“Ah! I actually have a backup plan for that,” Austin highlighted the alleyway behind the gelato shop. “If you stay on top of the gelato shop, I will leave the alley door unlocked so you can go for help.”

Cadence agreed until she started to wonder how practical that would be. “Who am I supposed to go to for help? Am I going to tell a cop that my friend found a doorway to ‘the Empty’ with crazy hollow men trying to get us and I need help to save you? No one will believe me.”

Austin confusedly asked, “The Empty?”

“Well I was going to say ‘the other world’ but my mind stopped me at ‘the empty’ because it kind of sounds cool.”

“Yeah, like the ‘upside-down’ only ‘the empty’,” Austin said as he had a profound look on his face.

“Only better cause we have hollow men instead of Demogorgon’s.”

Austin’s face quickly turned to a look of dread, “Oh no way, if a Demogorgon shows up, I’m done.” He stops to think about Eleven and her powers. “Unless…” Austin looks at Cadence all curious like.

A little disturbed, Cadence asked, “Why are you looking at me like that?”

Austin moves in closer to her and whispers, “Can you move things with your mind?”

“*What a weirdo!*” Cadence thought. This was something she loved about him, he always went into these thought processes of things that are absolutely ridiculous but she always played along.

Cadence’s face got all serious. When Austin saw this he felt a sense of urgency and started to get a little scared but he was excited at the same time.

Cadence sighed, “I’m not supposed to say anything because this could put my family in danger so promise me Austin you won’t tell anyone.”

Austin gulped and nodded.

Cadence motioned her head over to a tree. “Don’t take your eyes off that tree okay?”

Austin locked his eyes on the tree.

Cadence began to stare at it as if she was getting ready to do something. She was counting on Austin being in his own little world so much that he forgets to use common sense.

She grabbed her strawberry jam sandwich and with her finger smeared it under her nostril. She began looking at the tree again and a breeze picked up and started shaking it.

In disbelief, Austin’s mouth drops as he slowly pans his head over to Cadence where he sees what looks like blood coming out of her nose. “Oh my god, Cadence! Your nose!”

Cadence was smiling inside. ‘*He bought it*,’ she thought to herself, ‘*time for the finale*.’ Cadence broke her gaze from the tree and then looked at Austin with a serious look on her face.

Austin became concerned. “Cadence?”

Cadence then pretends to faint. As her body hit the ground Austin got really scared. He ran to her and began yelling for help.

“HELP! SOMEONE PLEASE! MY FRIEND NEEDS HELP!”

Cadence, not being able to hold it in anymore started laughing.

Realizing she was messing with him Austin started to get mad. “Why are you always messing with me?!”

Cadence got up and wiped her nose off. “Oh chill out my dude, I’ll stop messing with you when it stops being funny.”

The school bell rang signifying that lunch was over. Austin and Cadence grabbed their stuff and started to walk to their next class.

“Call Dwight,” Austin blurted out, “he will come help and he’s always got Sid and Doughboy with him so you will have plenty of backup.”

“Really? Ain’t that like calling for the D squad? The Reject Society? The Misfits of Toy Island?”

Austin started to get offended at the suggestion that his brother isn’t good enough to be called upon when Thadd and his cronies walked around the corner.

“Yo Runt! You win the lottery or something?” Thadd and his goons corner Austin.

“What? Why would you think that? I’m just a poor boy...um...nobody likes me?” Austin nervously smiled.

Thadd looked down at his shoes. “Those shoes of yours are real nice.” He then moved his gaze into Austin’s eyes. “I want them.”

Austin laughed. “Yeah, sure, take my shoes!” he said sarcastically. He tried to break past them when Kyle put Austin in a headlock. Austin struggled. “Let me go!”

Cadence jumped up and started hitting them. Thadd pushed her aside. “Quit your bellyaching. I’m not going to hurt him, I just want his shoes.”

Austin broke out of Kyle’s headlock. “Why? Your feet are way bigger than mine, they won’t fit you!”

Thadd laughed. “Here’s the thing kid, there’s a status quo to maintain and that status quo says you’re a dork and dorks don’t wear stuff like this,” he pointed at his shoes.

“I got a sweet deal at the thrift shop man, it was a fluke.”

“Bull shit,” Thadd said in a matter-of-fact way.

“What? What do you mean bull shit? It’s the truth.” Austin started to get nervous.

“I know your family ain’t rich. Your dad works at the quarry like most people in this town and no one is making good money there these days. So I figure you guys came into some money or the runt has some sticky fingers.”

Austin felt his fingers. “Sticky fingers? I wash my hand’s dude, why would they be sticky, that’s gross.”

Cadence, understanding what Thadd was getting at quickly intervened. “Damn it Thadd, you’re not as dumb as you look.”

She walked up to Austin and put her arm around him. “This little guy looks like a dork but that’s because that’s what he wants you to think.” She removed her arm from Austin and walked towards Thadd.

“This ‘Runt’ as you so cleverly like to call him is actually one of the best thieves this town has ever seen, possibly the best in the province!”

Thadd, Wes, Kyle, and Austin’s eyes lit up. In unison, they all say, “He is?/I am?”

“Yep, that’s right. If you want proof, for a bit of cash he can get you anything you want.”

Austin clued in as to what she is trying to do. “Yeah, that’s right, I’m probably even world-class!”

Cadence glared at Austin and through her teeth said, “Don’t push it.”

Thadd, Wes, and Kyle look at each other and start nodding their heads. “Alright butt-head,” Thadd walked over to Austin, “I want a pair of those shoes in my size. Size 11. WIDE!”

Realizing that he said that a little loud, he looked at his buddies who were giving him a weird look, and said, “What? I have wide feet.”

Austin started to feel proud like he had some power in this situation. He blurted out, “Fifty!”

Everyone was in shock as to how loud he blurted that out.

Thadd puffed out his chest. “Fifty bucks?”

Austin suddenly felt a little less powerful with Thadd and his power pose. “Uh, thirty?” Austin says while trying to smile.

Thadd thought about it for a second. “Twenty and if you manage to pull that off, I might have some work for you that will benefit us both.”

Austin didn’t like where he was going with that. He looked at Cadence and she could tell so she interjected, “Twenty dollars is fine, he will have the shoes for you Monday.”

Thadd agreed and then left with his cronies.

“What’s the big idea Cadence? You’re going to get me in trouble!”

Cadence put her hands on Austin’s shoulders and looked him in the eye. “Chill dude. You aren’t actually stealing anything. Well, I mean you kind of are but you aren’t going to get in trouble for it.”

She continued walking to class as Austin followed her. “We need to use the next couple of nights to gear up, you can grab the shoes then.”

Austin still didn’t like it but at the same time, he kind of felt like a badass.

Cadence stopped and looked at Austin, “Why exactly are you haggling over the shoes? I said twenty bucks to make it more legit, it’s not like you need the money when you can get anything you ever wanted from the Other.”

Austin sighed. “Look, I don’t know if this key is going to be a forever thing so I think it would be smart if we had a backup plan just in case.”

Austin and Cadence continued their walk till they get to their history class and sat down.

Cadence turned around and said to Austin, “I wonder who created that key?” She turned around and opened up her books.

While Austin was good at asking questions, this particular one never crossed his mind and it was a good one.

Who could make something like that?

Is it for good reasons or bad?

The responsibility of having the key started to weigh on him and it scared him but at the same time, he felt there was a reason for him finding it.

## Chapter Seven

It was a long night for Austin, all he could think about was the mission. It was great what that key had been able to do for him so far but he really needed to find answers.

*‘Who made the key? What purpose does it have? Is it meant to hurt people? I mean, it opens doors. What harm could that have? It would be easy to get in any place with a keyhole… Anywhere. Like a bank, or even the Prime Ministers’ office.’* All these different scenarios played through Austin’s head until he fell asleep.

For the next few days, Austin and Cadence visited the Other, grabbing supplies and preparing for their quest.

Austin got Thadd his shoes and Thadd was quite impressed with him. He gave him a list of things he and some of his friends want and how much they are willing to pay for them.

No one in town had a lot of money as everyone was feeling the effects of the quarry closing so Austin agreed to get the stuff to make some people feel better.

Austin started getting the attention of people who never used to talk to him, he was feeling like he was important. But not all attention was good as some of the teachers began noticing something was going on and started paying closer attention to him.

On Friday, Thadd was angry about something and pulled Austin aside. He told him his older brother took his shoes so he had to get him a new pair and he’s not paying for them either.

Austin was getting fed up with Thadd always talking to him like that. He was going to get his shoes but he was also going to find a way to exact some revenge.

Saturday morning rolled around and as soon as the sun came up Austin was wide awake. He noticed that for some reason his hair was a little wet and his body felt sticky.

When the boys in his family hit puberty, they all seem to sweat a lot while they are sleeping.

Dwight had it happen to him as well as their dad. He should probably tell his dad but he kind of felt stupid about it.

Those thoughts quickly faded away when he remembered what today is. He was starting to feel positive that the day was going to be a good, curious sort of day with a side of adventure and possible mayhem.

He spent most of the early morning going over his plan, he wanted to make sure he had everything covered.

As he sat there engrossed in his plan, he started to smell something awful. He stopped to sniff the air. “What is that smell?” he said to himself.

He got up from his chair and started searching his room. He got over to his bed and he took a whiff of it. “Phew, why does it smell like a sweaty gym sock or something?”

When Austin thought about it, this wasn’t the first time he woke up like that. The past few days have been similar. He then took a whiff of himself and was taken back by the smell. “You need a shower bud and possibly do a load of laundry.”

Austin had a shower, got dressed, took his sheets off his bed, and brought a load of laundry downstairs.

A sound of a woman talking in the next room got Austin’s attention. He set the basket of clothes on top of the kitchen counter and started to follow the sound.

The closer he got to the sound, the more familiar the voice became. He walked by the living room where he saw his dad sitting in his chair watching old videos on Facebook of his 6th birthday party.

That year they went to Science World which was one of Austin’s favorite memories. They had invited a bunch of kids from his class which is where he became friends with Cadence.

Cadence was always quite independent in her attitude and style. This opened her up to ridicule from her classmates from time to time.

In the video, there’s Austin and Dwight with their mom eating ice cream while the other kids are eating theirs in the background.

While their dad was filming and wishing Austin a Happy Birthday, you can see some kids purposely knock Cadence over causing her ice cream to fall out of her cone and onto the floor. Cadence was very much irritated by the kids but she didn’t shed a single tear.

Austin on the other hand saw it and started bawling his eyes. Dwight stormed off saying, “Oh my god this kid is so annoying sometimes.”

Austin’s mom got down to his level and gently asked him, “what’s wrong honey?”

Austin looked at her with big pouty eyes and he tried to say words but it came out in a jumble, ”Da-ice-cream-cone-and-then-fall. I’m-so-sad-for-her.”

She wiped his tears away and said, “yeah, that wasn’t very nice was it?” Austin shook his head in agreeance while sucking the snot back in from his nose.

His mom pointed at Cadence and said, “I think someone could use a friend right about now wouldn’t you say so?” She pulled out some tissue from her pocket and wiped his nose.

Austin took his ice cream cone and walked over to Cadence. He sat down next to her and didn’t say a thing. His dad laughed with his mom as they commented on how cute they looked.

Daryl said, “I don’t think he knows what to say hon.”

Austin’s mom hushes him and says, “Just wait and see what happens.”

Austin awkwardly stuck his hand out holding his ice cream to Cadence. She looked over at him like, is he for real?

Austin awkwardly smiled at her and immediately the shock melted away into a smile. She took his cone and started to lick the ice cream. Austin scooched over a little bit more and then put his arm around her and gave her an awkward pat on the back and then scooched back over.

Some of the other kids saw this and started playing with them again.

Austin’s mom smiled at the camera. “See honey, the other kids saw that Austin was accepting of her and now so are some of the other kids.”

“I am definitely not as good at understanding kids as you honey. I would be lost without you.”

The video paused and Daryl started wiping his tears. Austin stood there watching this and took a step back when the floor creaked.

Daryl jumped not knowing that his son was standing there. He quickly tried to regain his manly composure. “You um… You’re up early?”

“Oh, yeah, the sun came up, and apparently so was I.” Austin began to fidget.

His dad took notice and became confused. “What’s wrong with you? Why are you fidgeting?”

Austin wanted to tell him about his night sweats but was fighting the embarrassment at the same time. “I’ve been waking up all sweaty and now my bed stinks like B.O.”

His dad was relieved. “Oh that, yeah no you’re going to have to change your sheets all the time depending on how bad your night sweats are.” He stood up and put his jacket on. “I’ll make an appointment to see Dr. Smith just to make sure all is well. I’ll pick up some new sheets too.”

“Yeah, thanks, dad.” Austin started to walk back to the kitchen.

“Oh!” Daryl abruptly said. “I’m going to fry up some of mom’s chicken tomorrow night and we are going to have dinner together like old times.”

Daryl headed out for the day and Austin started his laundry. He looked at the time, it was 9:30 AM. “Time to text Miss Cadence.”



Over at Cadence’s, she wasn’t quite awake yet. She could somewhat hear Cooper and Penny fighting over something and she was working hard to drown it out. Her phone started buzzing and she reluctantly reached for it.

“Who dares disturb my slumber?” She saw the text from Austin and smiled. “Of course.” She sat up in bed when suddenly her door swung open and Cooper came running in with a blanket wrapped around him.

“Cadence, can I share some of your space? Penny is being a TV hog and won’t let me watch my show in peace.”

From down the hall, Penny yelled, “He’s seen every episode a million times! No one wants to watch that much Paw Patrol!”

Cadence stared at Cooper. “What did I say about respecting my boundaries? Knock first and then wait to be invited in.”

Cooper started pouting. “I’m sorry Cadence but Penny is being a diva and I just need some space from her right now.”

Feeling irritated by her siblings, Cadence crossed her arms. “Why my room though? There’s a whole house to use and you want to use my space?”

“I know but your room is cool and she can’t bug me in here cause you’ll go crazy on her.” Cooper smiled a half-ass smile at her.

Cadence threw her arms up. “Fine! You can watch your shows in here till I’m out of the shower but then you gotta vamoose!”

Cooper danced around. “Yahoo!” he shouted. He sat on Cadence’s bed and threw his blanket over his head and started watching Paw Patrol on a tablet.

Cadence had her shower and got herself dressed. Cooper was no longer in her room as she could hear them fighting downstairs. “Cut it out, you guys! You know better!”

Penny and Cooper both said, “Sorry!” at the same time.

Cadence got back in front of the mirror and grabbed a pair of chopsticks and put her hair up in a french twist. She started to mist some hairspray when she heard the faint sound of crying.

Thinking it was one of the kids, she walked out into the hallway and could hear them downstairs. The crying was coming from her mom’s room.

Cadence tip-toed over to her mom’s door where it was slightly open. She could see her mom sitting on her bed crying while her shirt was partially on but tangled.

The quarry was nearly depleted and the atmosphere in town was grim. The town started off as a major logging settlement in the 1800s and ran up till the 1930s. The Government of Canada decided to protect the forest which ended any hope of expanding into new areas. Eventually, the forest became a research forest dedicated to the preservation and study of trees.

Seeing as there was no more work, people started leaving the town. All was not lost for the little town as the area started to draw in the attention of prospectors. They discovered what they believed was a rich source of granite. Before you knew it the town was thriving again.

Cadence’s great grandparents came to work at the quarry and working there became a kind of family tradition. They have deep roots in the town and the closing of the quarry was especially hard on Cadence’s mom.

She had been laid off a few years ago but didn’t want to have to move as Cascade Springs was her home. She decided to go into hairstyling and had discovered a new talent that had rubbed off on Cadence.

Cadence slowly opened her mother’s door, walked over to the bed and sat down. She put her arm around her and then hugged her.

Her mother hugged her back while still crying. “I’m sorry sweetie, I just can’t help it sometimes. I just get so emotional and when the flood gates open out it all comes.”

“It’s okay mom.” Cadence moved some of the hair blocking her mom’s face. “Have you been taking your pills?” Cadence started looking for the bottle.

Cadence’s mom got a little upset with her. “I keep forgetting and I’m not sure they are working anyways.”

Frustrated, Cadence walked to her mom and looked her in the eyes. “Mom. You need to be consistently taking them in order for them to work.” She spotted the bottle and grabbed it.

She placed it in her mother’s hand. “If they aren’t working that well then you need to talk to the doctor but you can’t stop taking these just ‘because’. The doctor told you it could be dangerous.”

Her mother got angry and threw the pills across the room. “Well, I shouldn’t be fucking taking pills that are that dangerous then.”

Cadence sighed. She picked up the bottle and placed it back in her hands. “Mom, please listen to me. If you aren’t going to take your meds for yourself, then do it for Cooper, Penny and me. Because this isn’t healthy and you know the doctor will have no choice but to call social services and they will come to take us away from you.”

Cadence’s mother, terrified and shaking cried out, “No please.”

“Then do the right thing and take your meds for now. Remember mom, it’s going to take time to find a balance and if we are going to make it, we have to work together. Isn’t that what you have always taught us?”

Cadence’s mother smiled and wiped her face. “Yes honey, you’re right. That’s why I love you so much, you keep me grounded.” She opened up her pill bottle and grabbed a glass of tepid water that was sitting on her nightstand and took her meds.

Cadence smiled at her. “You do remember that I am going out with Austin today right? I don’t want to have to cancel cause we have been planning this for so long.”

“Oh no sweetie, you go on your date. If I need anything I’ll call Wendy.” Cadence’s mom stood up and started to fix herself.

Cadence started to walk back to the bathroom when her mom shouted at her, ”Hey!” Cadence quickly walked back in reverse and looked at her.

Her mom in a teasing tone said “You didn’t notice that I called it a date this time, things must be getting serious with you two.”

Cadence’s jaw dropped as she looked at her mom very seriously. “Uhh-nope that did not just happen, you are wrong, you are mistaken and I gotta go!” she says while running downstairs.

Cadence heads to the workshop in the woods behind Austin’s house where Austin was waiting for her all geared up and ready to go.

Austin takes notice of Cadence’s hair, he always liked that look and he rarely sees people wear it that way. “Hey, cool hair-do, Austin likey.”

Cadence blushed which was unusual for her.

Austin definitely picked up on it and was thrown back. “Uh, what’s with that?”

*‘Stupid mom got in my head’,* Cadence thought to herself. Cadence nervously laughed, “Oh, um, no that’s not anything related to what you just said. The milk tasted a little off this morning and I think it’s making me a bit gassy, it will pass.”

Cadence quickly turned around and started gathering gear. ‘*Oh great, cause gassy is much better! What is wrong with me today?”* she thought to herself.

To change the subject, Cadence asked “Hey, why are we meeting here? Wouldn’t it be easier to just enter from town?”

Austin smiled at Cadence. “True, however, it would be too conspicuous with two teenagers carrying all this stuff walking through town. The last thing we need to do is draw attention to ourselves.”

“Okay, well I hope you have something in mind because it’s not like it’s a hop, skip, and a jump to town from here.”

“Oh don’t you worry about that, I got it covered.” Austin grabbed what he could and went into the workshop with Cadence in front of him.

Austin tried to close the door but his gear was blocking his path. He struggled to move things around when his gear cleared causing him to trip. He stood up, grabbed the door, and closed it.

It is now pitch black in the workshop, Austin or Cadence can’t see a thing.

“Uh, Austin?”

“Just give me a second,” Austin fumbled through his pocket. “I got the key right here, somewhere.”

“Dude, you’re killing me!” Cadence took out her phone and turned the light on. “Did you ever consider maybe putting a light in here?”

“Oh yeah!” Austin flicks a switch and some work lights power on burning their eyes for a brief moment.

“Jebus Crisco Austin! You gotta warn someone before you do that. I’m like blind here.” Cadence starts to feel around when she realizes she is palming Austin’s face.

“Oh sorry!” Cadence laughed while keeping her palm on his face.

“Oh no, please leave your hand there. I think this might be an improvement.”

Cadence removed her hand and grabbed sanitizer to clean it. “I don’t need your boy cooties.”

Austin pretended to be offended. “I am cooty free thank you very much.” Under his breath, he says, “you probably have cooties and just gave them to me.”

Cadence, while moving their gear around asked, “Did you just say something?”

Austin shook his head. “Nope, not a word.” He smiled at her while she looked at him in disbelief.

In the middle of the workshop was a random door sitting in a poorly constructed frame that’s lined with white Christmas Lights and an old detour sign which Austin had painted over with the words: To The Other.

“Um, why is there a random door in the middle of the workshop being held together by-uh I’m not sure what?”

“Ah, so you’ve seen the gateway!” Austin marveled at his own creation.

Cadence stood next to him and tilted her head. “Um yeah, it’s a little hard to miss. Austin, you are my best friend and I mean this in the best possible way. It, uh. I mean it’s…”

“Cool, right?” Austin nodded his head in agreement with himself.

Cadence looked at Austin and saw the pride on his face. She couldn’t tell him that she thought it looked like mental patients built it. “Good job, my dude. But why did you make this?”

“It’s a hack,” Austin said confidently.

Cadence confused says, ”Okay, I need some more context.”

“Ah! Well you see, I entered the Other earlier and rode my bike to Pete’s ATV shop down the road and grabbed us some transportation.”

“Doesn’t it reset as soon as you lock the door?”

“And that’s the hack! It only resets when I lock it but if you don’t lock it, it doesn’t reset.” Austin picked up his gear and opened the door.

Cadence grabbed the rest of the gear. “But why the mental-uh I mean really cool door and not the backdoor to your house?”

Austin noticed her slip up and raised his eyebrow as he locked the door behind him. \*ZWAPP CLICK\* “I have to be careful what door I leave unlocked or else some poor person could come by, enter and they will have no idea where they are or how to get back if they don’t leave the same way they came in. You can’t just leave portals to other places out in the open Cadence, that’s sci-fi 101.”

Austin and Cadence grabbed their gear and walked out of the Other workshop to find two ATVs waiting for them.

Cadence was impressed. “Way to go, dude! Maybe you aren’t a mental patient after all!”

“Hey! What! When was I ever a mental patient?”

Cadence walked by Austin while giving him a light shoulder bump and loaded up her ATV.

A few minutes later they are good to go and put their helmets on.

Austin sat down on the ATV and started to run a checklist. “Gear. Check. Protective dome in case of an accident. Check.” He turned on his ATV and looked at Cadence who was impatiently waiting on him.

“Are you going to spend all day checking shit or are we going to do this?”

Austin stared at Cadence as he slowly put on his goggles. “Goggles. Check.” He smirked at her and shouted, “Let’s move out!” As soon as they started to drive off Austin’s gas light turned on and the ATV stopped moving.

Cadence started to laugh at Austin. “Gas. Not checked! Dude, you are hilarious to watch fumble through life.”

Austin sat there pouting. “What are we going to do now?”

Cadence looked at her gas gauge, “I got a full tank here Commander, looks like you’ll be riding with me,” she said while winking at him.

Austin knew that there was not enough room for all this gear and himself. Cadence suggested only taking what they actually need which ended up being a backpack full of gear and a couple of paintball guns.

Austin went to sit on the driver's seat shoving Cadence to the back seat and adjusted his goggles.

Cadence cleared her throat, “excuse me but your seat is one spot back.”

“What? Why!?”

“You forgot to fill yours, that’s your mistake. Don’t make me suffer for your screw-up.” Cadence got off the ATV and waited for Austin to move.

Knowing that Cadence had a point, he begrudgingly scooted to the back seat.

Cadence sat down and turned on the ATV. “Hold tight there fella, we don’t want you falling off!” Cadence hit the accelerator scaring Austin who grabbed onto her and rested his face on her back.

Muttering to himself, Austin says, “I wanted to be the cool rider.”

“Did you just say something?!”

“I said let’s move out!”

## Chapter Eight

And just like that both Austin and Cadence had embarked on their very own quest. A little while later they arrived in downtown Cascade Springs. They pulled up to Mamma Josie’s where Austin was quick to jump off the ATV.

“Fucking hell Cadence, where did you learn to drive?”

Cadence was amused at how shaken Austin was. She thought about telling him that this was her first time but he seemed stressed enough. “I’m sorry Austin, I didn’t see the grandma setting.”

“Oh shut up.” Austin opened his jacket and pulled out a folded-up piece of paper with a note written on it: DON’T FORGET TO GET THOSE SHOES. SIZE 11. WIIIIIIDDDDDE.

“Cadence, can you please start hauling this gear to the roof of Mama Josie’s and set up your post. I’m going to grab these stupid shoes and then I’ll be back to set my post up over at the pawnshop. After that, we will set up the trap.” He took out a walkie-talkie, turned it on, and passed it to her. “This is how we are going to stay in contact.”

\*growl\* Austin’s stomach is quite unsettled.

Cadence looked at Austin. “Was that your stomach?”

Embarrassed Austin replied, “Uh oh… Um… I’ve been pretty stressed and I wasn’t able to go to the washroom this morning. I think maybe…”

“Okay, nope, you go do your thing. I’ll see you when you get back.” Cadence ushered Austin away and headed to the roof.

An hour later Austin came back with the shoes while Cadence was sitting on the ATV looking bored. “That took way longer than it should have.”

Austin nervously replied, “Sorry, I had to do um- Let’s just say I had to make a deposit.”

“Gross.” Cadence jumped off the ATV and started to get psyched. “So what’s the plan? Are we gonna catch a hollow man?”

Austin bowed while saying. “Why yes, ma’am we are!” He looked up at Cadence who wasn't thrilled about being called ma’am and he knew it. “No, ma’am?”

Cadence shakes her head. “I am not an old lady Austin. Cadence, Shan, Shanmeister, or even sir is acceptable but no ma’am.”

Austin nodded his head in agreement until he thought about the “sir” part. “Wait a sec- sir? That implies that you are my superior.”

Cadence smiled and twirled around and stuck a pose like an anime character holding the peace sign.

Austin shook his head. “Okay, you know the plan and where the emergency exit is so now all we have to do is get into position and lure out the hollow man.”

“And how are we going to do that?” Cadence asked

“These guys seem to show up when we break stuff so I’m going to break the lamp with these babies.” Austin put on heavy-duty gloves and pulled out an insulated styrofoam box.

Cadence looking confused asked, “What is that??”

“Not too long ago Mr. Bevans was showing my science class how dry ice is made and what it can do. Well I thought to make these hard enough to break something, they needed to be really cold, and regular freezing methods wouldn’t cut it. Liquid Nitrogen would be overkill plus, it’s pretty dangerous stuff. Dry ice would work, and we could be mobile with it and so I went on the internet and found out how to properly handle it and store it.”

“I’ve seen videos on YouTube about this Austin and you’d need to have those things in liquid nitrogen to get them hard enough to possibly break something.”

“Yeah but the difference is, those people are freezing paint in the ball, I got empty balls and added water to them.”

“Sweet dude. Science for the win. How many of those do ya got?” Cadence tried to peek inside the box.

Austin quickly withheld the box from her, “I have enough, plus you gotta have the gloves on if you are going to open it, safety first.” He wasn’t quite sure why he was being so protective over the box. He could just show her but he didn’t.

Cadence was a bit irritated by it but acted like it didn’t bother her. “Whatever my dude. I know you sometimes go paintballing with your brother and his friends but are you at least a decent shot?”

Austin, using some tongs, carefully gets a paintball and loads it into his gun. He points at the stop sign and looks back at Cadence as if communicating that he will hit that target. He got into position and shot.

PING! Austin hits the “O” on the Stop sign. As soon as the paintball hit, it shattered into a million pieces.

“Okay, he can shoot. But one might not be enough to break the lamp, can you hit the same target twice?” she said challenging him.

Austin smirks and carefully loads another ball. He got into position and took the shot hitting just between the “O” and “P”.

Impressed, Cadence walked up to Austin and patted him on the back. “Yeah, I think you got this.”

Austin and Cadence went to their spots. Both of their hearts were starting to race. This was it, if they pulled this off they would be face to face with a hollow man. The unknown is scary.

Austin carefully loaded the gun with two paintballs. He got himself into position and looked down at his sight. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. He opened his eyes and -

\*radio crackle\* “Hey, what are we supposed to do after we catch it? We never really talked about the after part.”

Austin jumped. She scared the shit out of him. He looked over at her and she was cracking up. He grabbed his radio and held down the talk button, “Seriously Cadence! Yeah yah, laugh all you want. If that hollow man tries to dissect us, I’m throwing you at him.”

\*radio crackle\* “Relax, it’s a legit question,” she said while still giggling.

Frustrated at the situation and question, Austin realized that she was right. “I don’t know, I guess this is really a first contact situation. Let’s see if it can communicate, I guess.”

\*radio crackle\* “Do you really think setting a trap is the best way to start off a first contact situation?”

Austin thought for a second on that. “I have reason to believe they might be hostile as one tried to attack me remember?”

\*radio crackle\* “But did it? You said it grabbed your sweater, maybe it was just trying to communicate with you and you got scared and assumed it was attacking you.”

Austin replayed the scenario in his head. Did it attack him? “Arg! Look we are here and we are doing this. Hopefully, it will understand that we are just trying to protect ourselves.”

He grabbed his gun and looked through his scope. “I am not afraid anymore,” Austin said to himself as he lined up his shot once again, took a deep breath and -

\*CRACK\*

The paintball makes contact and cracks the glass slightly. That’s okay, they anticipated that it may take more than one, that’s why he brought more.

Austin took the second shot and the glass began to crack a bit more.

\*radio crackle\* (in a Scottish accent) “YAH GONNA NEED MORE POWER CAPTAIN! GIVE HER ALL YOU GOT!”

Austin rolled his eyes and radioed back, “The Captain is the one who calls for more power. The engineer is trying to provide more power!”

\*radio crackle\* WHO CARES! UNLEASH THE KRAKEN!!!”

Austin loaded up the rest of the frozen paintballs and unleashed an icy storm of ‘meh’ level proportions but they didn’t care. Cadence was cheering him on and Austin felt like a badass.

The glass was more than broken and so was the light. Austin put his gun down and looked over at Cadence with a confident nod and Cadence returned the gesture.

Austin picked up the radio. “Okay, it should be coming any time now, get ready.” They both got into some cover and waited with breathless anticipation.

Moments went by. Both Cadence and Austin were looking at each other and then back at the broken lamp post waiting for their big moment. Moments turned into what felt like a long-drawn-out infinitude of moments.

\*radio crackle\* “Did we fuck up somehow?”

Austin thought back to all of his encounters. “Something feels off about this.” And then he realized that all of those encounters took place at night. “I think it has to be nighttime because I’m pretty sure it was dark every time I saw one.”

\*radio crackle\* “What!? You’re killing me here! It’s like May, the sun doesn’t set till almost nine, which is three hours from now. What are we going to do till then?”

“We shouldn’t leave our posts, keeping our distance till it’s subdued should be our priority but I don’t think it’s really necessary for me to be over here now that the lamp is broken.”

Austin gathered his stuff and joined Cadence. “What should we do to kill time?” he asked.

“I always come prepared.” Cadence reached into her bag and pulled out a deck of cards. “Wanna play crazy eights?”

Austin’s nose scrunched in disapproval. “Is that all you have in there? Low tech is so boring.”

“No cell signal remember.” Cadence opened up the deck of cards and began shuffling. They spent the next three hours playing crazy eights, building a house of cards which the wind took away leaving them with a few cards so they started whipping them at each other like ninja stars.

Forgetting their objective and not realizing the time, the sun began to set. That same strange sound and green hue fill the sky. This quickly broke up the goofing off and they both started to panic.

“What is that?” Cadence worryingly asked Austin.

“I don’t know, I think maybe it means the hollow men are coming.” Austin grabbed Cadence’s hand and pulled her down so they were in cover.

From the alley beside the pawnshop, they saw a bright light for a few seconds, and then it went dark again.

Moments later a single hollow man walked out of the dark. As it walked into the light it paused and looked around. Austin and Cadence hid hoping that it didn’t notice them.

Austin peeked his head up first followed by Cadence. Austin thought he would be more scared during this moment but it didn’t look scary, more interesting than anything.

It had a strange textured design on its skin, like swirls, dots, and lines all over its body. It didn’t have hair or anything that would indicate it is an organic lifeform.

It had an unusual blue shimmer that appeared throughout its body from time to time. The only thing that looked somewhat alive was its face. It had two eyes, a nose, and a mouth but no ears.

The hollow man’s eyes began to glow and a laser-like scanner was scanning the lamp post. In a smooth but mechanical-like way the hollow man crouched and picked the broken glass.

The kids expected the trap to have gone off by now. They looked at each other as if to say, “what the hell, it didn’t go off!”

The hollow man closed his hands together and they began to glow. Seconds later it opened its hands and a small field formed around the glass and they began to float towards the lamp post. When it arrived at the lamp it glowed brightly and then things returned to normal.

Austin and Cadence sat there with their mouths hanging open in disbelief.

“Holy crap Austin!” Cadence grabbed Austin by his shirt and pulled him closer to her. “That thing has magic! It’s a magical beast!”

Austin shooed her away. “Not magic. Technology from an advanced species would be indistinguishable from magic to those who don’t know better.”

The hollow man finished his task and began to walk back into the alley when his foot got caught in the trap setting it off. The hollow man fell back and hit its head on the ground causing sparks to come shooting out.

“SUCCESS!” Austin shouted while looking proud of himself. He looked over at Cadence to see her reaction but she wasn’t there anymore.

Cadence had picked up her gun and was already on her way down the ladder.

Austin quickly grabbed his gun and ran after her. “Hey! Cadence, be careful! We still don’t know if it’s dangerous or not!”

As Cadence stepped off the ladder she looked up at Austin. “The thing repaired a street light and it doesn’t seem to have guns on it or sharp sword-like arms for killing. It’s got hands and feet like you and me. I don’t think it’s dangerous.”

Austin hopped off the ladder and looked Cadence in the eyes. “I get what you are saying and you’re probably right but we should still proceed with caution.”

Austin picked up his gun and started loading it with regular paintballs. “That and I didn’t want you to go on without me.”

Cadence with a confused look on her face replied, “Why would I do that? This is something we are doing together.”

“No, I know. It’s not personal, it’s just I’m used to my brother always treating me like a little kid like I can’t handle myself when I’m capable of way more than he gives me credit for.”

“That’s probably because you never seem too sure of yourself. You’re like this cute little kitten in the middle of the street while life, a big semi-truck is coming at you and no one wants to see the kitten become roadkill.”

“Is that really how people see me?”

“I mean, yeah, kind of.”

Austin was not happy. Hearing this from her hurt him because that’s not who he thinks he is but if that’s how everyone sees him, maybe it was time to show them how wrong they are.

He picked up his gun and stood tall. “Yeah well, this kitten is about to become a fierce lion. The Simba kind, not the Scar kind.” He walked out of the store aiming his gun towards the hollow man.

Cadence shook her head. “He gets so close to sounding like the badass he wants to be and then he closes it off with the Lion King reference. If he would just learn to stop talking.”

Austin noticed that Cadence wasn’t behind him and he could hear her faintly talking to herself. “Are you coming or not? Cause I can do this myself you know?”

Cadence rolled her eyes and followed behind him.

The hollow man hung there swinging back and forth. It didn’t move or even seem alive. Austin moved in closer while aiming his gun at it while Cadence kept her hand on Austin’s shoulder in case it tried to grab him, she could pull him back.

“Hey! CAN - YOU - UNDERSTAND - ME?” Austin yelled at the hollow man trying to see if it could speak.

“I think maybe we knocked it out. Check for a pulse,” Cadence said as she pushed Austin towards him while still keeping her hand on his shoulder.

Austin pushed Cadence’s hand off his shoulder. “Don’t push me! I got this covered, just give me a moment.”

Austin didn’t have a better idea, maybe he should check its pulse? He slowly moved in closer and grabbed its wrist. It felt cold, almost metallic and it kind of vibrated.

He let go of it and took a step back. “I don’t think it’s organic, it’s-”

Suddenly, the hollow man seemed to wake up and start making noises while its eyes glowed and it flailed about.

Austin and Cadence both screamed and grabbed on to each other at the same time. Austin’s scream was more high-pitched than Cadence’s making him sound like a little kid.

While still holding each other, Cadence looked at Austin. “Um was that your scream?”

Austin, still in shock, looked at Cadence. What she said just hit him when he realized they were holding each other. He quickly backed off and adjusted his shirt.

“Huh? Oh, my scream? Yeah, that was weird, wasn’t it? Must be the acoustics in this area that must have-”

Cadence cut him off, “Yeah, acoustics for sure.” Knowing he was trying to play it off cool she passed him his gun. “Maybe we should cut it down. I think we hurt it.”

Austin pulled out a hunting knife and cut the cord holding the hollow man causing it to fall on its head again.

“Jesus Austin! Be careful. This poor thing is going to go home brain-damaged because of us.”

Austin, feeling bad, quickly rushed over to the hollow man to help it up with Cadence following suit.

“We are so sorry mister hollow man,” Austin said while dusting it off.

As if trying to respond, the hollow man started to make noise again. \*zip\* \*zap\* \*zorp\* \*static\* “CREEE-TOR” \*static\*

Cadence looked at Austin in shock. “Did it just say something? That almost sounded like English.”

Austin shrugged his shoulders. “I dunno. I’m not sure what I heard.”

Cadence looks at the hollow man. “MY NAME IS Cadence AND THIS IS Austin. DO YOU UNDERSTAND US?”

Austin being a bit nervous grabbed her by the shoulder, “Cadence, I doubt it can understand us. Look at it, it's not from Earth and its skin is cold and metallic-like.”

The hollow man jerked and its eyes stopped glowing brightly and went down to a gentle dull glow. “Curator detected.”

Both Austin and Cadence looked at the hollow man.

“Um, what?” Cadence said in shock.

Austin heard it that time. “Did you just say, ‘curator detected’?”

“Affirma--” \*zip\* \*zap\* \*static\* The hollow man began to fritz out again. “Apologies curator, this unit is damaged. I am--in need of repair.”

The hollow man turned around and began to walk down the alley.

Cadence grabbed Austin. “Let’s follow it!”

“Wait, what? Are you serious? It’s going into a dark alley and you want to follow it? Did you also hit your head?”

“Oh come on, what happened to being a ferocious lion?”

Austin’s nose scrunched up. He hated when his own words were used against him.

A bright light appeared at the end of the alley lighting the area up.

“It’s not so dark now, what do you say?”

“Fine but if we get assimilated I’m blaming you.”

Cadence smiled and kissed Austin on the cheek causing him to blush.

While following the hollow man, Cadence looked back at Austin. “Are you going to stand there blushing all night or are we doing this?”

Austin shook his head while rubbing his face. “I’m not blushing!”

They slowly followed behind the hollow man. As they moved further down the alley, they could see another room that doesn’t look like any room they have ever seen before.

The hollow man walked through the threshold of the door.

Austin grabbed Cadence’s arm. “Are we sure we want to do this? We have no idea where that is.”

“Are you going to be able to walk away from this right now and be okay with that for the rest of your life? Because I won’t and I will ALWAYS blame you for eternity.”

Austin nodded his head and grabbed Cadence by the hand. “Together then.” Cadence nodded her head and they both stepped through the door.

The light level in the room was brighter than outside the door causing them to rub their eyes upon entry.

The first thing Austin noticed was it smelled different, almost like something was burning. As his vision started to focus, he could see a kind of frosted glass-looking walls and a ceiling with what looks like ropes of light traveling through them.

He walked closer to it and placed his hand on the wall near a bunch of rope lights. The surface of the wall began to vibrate ever so mildly. “Whoa.” Austin laughed.

Cadence walked over to him looking confused. “What are you doing?”

Austin’s face had a look she had never seen before, he kind of looked stoned or perhaps it was that he was content.

“Put your hand to the wall like this, it’s so cool.” Austin sighed with relief.

With one eyebrow raised Cadence replied, “Oookay. This isn’t creepy at all.” She placed her hand on the wall where she had a sense of calmness wash over her. “Oh yeah, I see what you mean.” She giggled.

Over by a console, the hollow man pulled up a holo of itself where it was highlighting the damage to its head. It touched the part of the hologram that was showing the damage and from above their heads, the same kind of light that repaired the street lamp floated down and entered the damaged area.

Very quickly the hollow man began to heal until it looked like there never had been any damage.

“Whoa! Did you just see that?!” Cadence said, filled with excitement.

Austin walked over to the hologram and studied it. “Yeah, I did. It appears to be some kind of repair nanites specifically for repairing units.”

“Nanites? Huh? How do you know? All this stuff looks like gibberish to me.”

“What do you mean? It’s all in English, see.” Austin pointed at a bunch of symbols. “It says, ‘Level 3 Nanite Repair initiated’.”

“Dude, what are you talking about?” Cadence shoved Austin aside and started touching the holo controls.

The hollow man’s eyes began to light up and started walking towards Cadence. In a calm yet urgent way, the hollow man started to use an unfamiliar form of sign language and said, “Intruder Detected. Step away from the holo, please. You are not authorized to be using the system.”

Austin concerned jumped in front of Cadence and shouted, “NO! She’s my friend! You can’t touch her!” He took a deep breath and shouted as loud as he could, “WE DO NOT CONSENT!”

Cadence, for the first time since they started going to that world, was scared. She knew Austin was scared too but was impressed with how well he was handling the situation. If she had to, she could handle herself, ‘but *this time,’* she thought to herself, *‘I think I’ll let him take the lead.’*

There Austin stood looking deadly serious in his eyes and what he thought was baring his teeth but he had more of a little underbite thing going on.

The hollow man's eyes instantly went back to normal and it went back to its default standing position. In a soothing calming tone he said, “Curator, I have detected an intruder behind you. I shall need your consent if I am to apprehend her.”

“No!” Austin yelled before changing his demeanor into a less threatening stance. “She’s my best friend, please don’t hurt her.”

“Yes curator, would you like me to amend the rule?”

Confusion washed over Austin’s face. “Huh? Amen? Are robots religious?”

Cadence giggled. “Austin, he said ‘Amend’ with a ‘D’ at the end. It means ‘change the rule’.”

Austin pondered what she said for a second. “Wait a sec… How do you know what it means?”

Cadence sighed. “I’ve had to sit through city council meetings with mom. It’s a term heavily used in ‘politician-ese’ as I call it.”

Austin’s face crinkled at the thought of having to sit through one of those meetings. He turned to the hollow man, “Yes Amend the rule, my friend is not to be harmed.”

The hollow man’s eyes glowed blue for a second. “Rule updated.” He turned his head to Cadence, “Please stay by the side of the curator at all times. The rule has been amended for this unit however, due to system failures I am unable to broadcast the change to the rest of the station.”

Austin’s mind was finally catching up to where they were. So many questions had started filling his mind. He paced back and forth for a moment when his mouth opened and out flooded, “Are you a robot? Did you say this place is a station? Did you know that there’s this weird shimmer of blue light that passes through the walls and your skin? Is that skin? Why does touching the wall make me feel safe? Like when your mom and dad were together and everything made sense kind of safe? And why, OH WHY! do you keep calling me curator?”

The hollow man tilted its head to the side and paused for a moment. It looked back at Austin and Cadence and with almost the same speed Austin shot his questions off he replied while signing, “I am not a robot, I am an android. Yes, I did say this place is a station. The blue light you see shimmering is a byproduct of the programmable matter that makes up this entire station and myself. This is not skin, it is a synthetic chameleon polymer that allows this unit to change its appearance. The vibrations you feel are set to be in tune with your species' neural pathways. You feel safe because the station is trying to tell you that you have nothing to fear in this environment that is alien to you. Because that is your designation, Curator.”

“A curator of what? Don’t those guys usually work museums or something?”

“A curator of the universe.” The hollow man’s mouth smoothly changed into a smile. The way the hollow man moved was too precise, like an over-representation of how people move and so it makes it look a bit creepy. His face then went back into his resting face.

Cadence gave her head a shake. As if a lightning bolt struck her head, her eyes widened and she excitedly said to Austin, “Do you know what this means?”

Austin was confused by everything. He still had no idea what it meant by curator and Cadence looked like she just solved the mystery of the origins of the universe.

Cadence arms swung open and she exclaimed, “You’re God dude!” She ran up to Austin and put her arm around him. “I knew there was something special about you, I really did but I didn’t think you would be God!”

Austin gulped. “M...mmuh..me? God?”

The hollow man began to talk while signing again. “God is a concept that has shown up in virtually all level 5 species we have come across. It is a natural occurrence involved in the evolution of a species. To wonder about what may be? Where do you come from? Who created you? These are questions necessary for a species to grapple with if they wish their legacy to move beyond their homeworld. A Curator is not a God, they are you.”

Austin leaned in to whisper in Cadence’s ear, “I think he may have hit his head harder than we thought.”

The hollow man turned around and started walking towards a wall. The wall started glowing blue and the programmable matter shuffles and a doorway appears.

Cadence rubbed her eyes. “Hey, how did you do that?”

The hollow man stared blankly at her and then continued to walk away.

Austin was not impressed with this android. “Hey! She asked you a question, it’s not polite to walk away from someone when they are talking to you.

“Ah, you misunderstand my intention, Curator. She does not identify as a user or Curator, she is classified as an intruder.”

“But I told you she is not an intruder,” Austin said sternly.

“She is no longer considered an intruder by this unit. In order to designate her as a user, I, unfortunately, do not have the permissions to make those kinds of changes, Curator. Due to some of the lower systems failing, I am unable to access the protectorate system. You would need access to a command console and manually input the changes.”

“Where is the command interface?” asked Cadence.

The hollow man acted as if she wasn't there.

Irritated by the hollow man, Cadence yelled “Oh for crying out loud Austin, ask him where the command interface is!”

Austin started to feel unsure of himself. The hollow man said so many things and he’s fourteen. Fourteen-year-olds aren’t supposed to be dealing with this kind of stuff.

“What are you waiting for?”

“Maybe we should just go home. This is a little weird don’t you think?”

“Are you really this much of a chicken? I mean I knew you were timid but what gives?”

“Hey! We are in some messed up place with this creepy looking robot-”

The hollow man interjected, “Android.”

“Oh sorry, Android and you want to go exploring? Where is your sense of caution!?”

Austin started to feel hot and lightheaded. “Is it hot in here? It’s like there’s a heatwave or something.” His heart started racing and he began to have trouble breathing. “I just- I don’t feel so good. I-”

The hollow man’s eyes start glowing blue. “Warning, the Curator's blood pressure has dropped, loss of consciousness is imminent.”

Austin stumbled around until he finally fell over and fainted.

A little while later, Austin began to wake. His eyes weren’t quite open yet, he laid there for a moment because he felt amazing wherever he was.

*‘Is this my bed? Why does it feel so comfy? Hey, wait a sec, I don’t remember going to bed. Did I fall asleep somewhere?’* Austin started thinking about what happened to him but he felt so comfy. *‘Five more minutes’* he thought to himself.

Austin was slowly becoming more aware of his surroundings. He could hear the sound of someone talking but it sounded muffled and distant.

A few more seconds pass and he could start hearing actual words and voices.

The hollow man had been keeping track of Austin’s vitals and began to detect that he was in the process of waking up. The hollow man’s eyes began to glow green, “The Curator is regaining consciousness.” The hollow man and Cadence both rushed to Austin’s side.

And then, like a ton of bricks he remembered everything. He quickly opened his eyes and the first thing he saw was the hollow man standing above him.

*‘Awe, dammit,’* Austin thought. ‘*That is not what anyone needs to see when they wake up.’*

“You’re a creepy android you know.” As Austin went to sit up, the surface he was sleeping on began to change its shape into a chair that perfectly suited his form.

This spooked Austin but at the same time, it felt really cool when the surface morphed. He looked up at Cadence and saw the look of relief on her face.

“Finally! You had me worried, you’ve been out for hours.” Cadence gave Austin a huge hug. She has never felt so scared in her life, she thought she was going to lose him.

After the fairly long hug, Cadence started to feel annoyed at Austin for putting her through that. And just like that she broke the hug and punched him in the arm pretty hard.

“OW! What the hell was that for? I’m the one that fainted.” Austin rubbed his arms with a pouty face.

“You scared me okay. Plus, ya know usually it’s the girl who faints and the boy who carries her to safety. But I guess our dynamic is far from the stereotypical male-female dynamic.”

“Hey, leave me alone okay, it’s just sensory overload.” Austin went to get off the chair when it morphed yet again to assist him with standing up. Once he was on his feet the programmable matter returned into the station.

“Correction, this unit carried the Curator to safety, not the intruder.”

Cadence looked at the hollow man surprised, “Hey, I thought you couldn’t respond to me?”

The hollow man looked at Cadence blankly.

A faint reddish-orange light started to change the mood of the room almost as if they were watching a sunrise. Instead of the usual siren sounding, it was a soft piece of heavenly alien-ish kind of music that resonated with Austin and Cadence.

Cadence smiled and asked “What is that? It sounds soothing yet uplifting.”

“I dunno, but I like it,” Austin happily replied.

The hollow man put his hand on Austin’s shoulder. “Morning is approaching. Curator, it would be wise for you and your friend to go back to your world now, you need rest.”

Austin looked around the room. “How do we do that? There are no doors.”

Pointing towards Austin’s pocket, the hollow man replied, “The key in your pocket will give you access to any door. Hold it firmly in your hand and the way will reveal itself.”

Austin held the key in his hand and could see the faint glow of doorways around him. He could see the door they entered through and slowly walked towards it with his hand out trying to feel for a handle.

As his hand touched the wall, he sighed happily, and then the programmable matter started to shift revealing the exit.

“Hey, um, thanks for helping me. Do you have a name or something? What should I call you?”

“This unit’s designation is 237-A, Cybernetic Lifelike Android Responsible for Cleaning.”

Both Austin’s and Cadence’s faces looked disgusted.

“Ouch, whose bright idea was that?” asked Austin.

“The Curators give us our designation.”

Cadence rolled her eyes. “Wow, that is just the worst. You’d think these ‘curators’ who can build all this would have come up with a better name.”

Thinking for a moment, Austin’s eyes light up. “We could always name him Data!”

Cadence shook her head, “Um no... Way too obvious. Let’s see... How about... Oh! I got it! Clarc! It’s an acronym.”

Austin thought about it for a second and then started nodding his head. “Clarc. Yeah, I like that. Hey hollow man! Your new designation is Clarc, okay?”

“Yes Curator, this unit will now be known as C.L.A.R.C.”

“Also, if my friend talks to you just pretend that it’s me talking. She deserves to be treated with dignity and respect.”

CLARC’s eyes glowed for a second. “Permissions Changed. Reminder: Permission Changes are only valid with this unit. Please use a command console to make station-wide administrative changes.”

Just as Austin and CLARC were walking the opposite way from each other, Austin had a thought. “Oh hey! One more thing!”

Clarc turned around and stared at Austin.

“Why do you guys only come out at night?”

“I realize you have many questions Curator, however, my scans show me that you both need rest. I will be waiting for your return.”

“Hey Austin, we better get going. If our parents realize we aren’t at home they will flip!”

“Good point.” Austin started to leave when he felt a strange feeling inside of his gut. The feeling was the absence of a feeling. Usually, his stomach felt tight when he was anxious which was most of the time but for once he wasn’t feeling it.

He paused and turned back to look at CLARC. Austin knew that he should be scared and worried but he’s not. He really didn’t feel like he was in danger at all.

Austin’s face went from a glossy stare to a peaceful smile. He waved good-bye to CLARC.

CLARC tilted its head as it was intrigued by Austin’s waving. Its operating system was having trouble connecting to the main computer so it couldn’t identify this particular human gesture.

It determined there is a high probability that it is part of a human ritual when departing from others. Part of its programming is to respect other beings' cultural practices and to use them whenever possible while interacting with them. It slowly brought its arm up and in its android-like fashion, waved back to him.

Cadence stormed back into the room frustrated that Austin had not been following her. When she arrived she was confronted by a moment between a boy and an android bonding in front of her. It was a sweet moment and kind of a big one for Austin as she had noticed that he wasn’t his usual neurotic self.

As much as she could appreciate all of this, she couldn’t help but bust up the moment. “Awww! It’s like Elliot and ET but dude, Wuh-Ee go home.”

Austin snapped out his moment and felt a little disoriented. Cadence wrapped her arm around him and waved good-bye to CLARC and proceeded back to the alleyway behind Mamma Josie’s.

## Chapter Nine

“Sorry to break up your moment back there but I really don’t want to get into trouble and not be able to come back for a while cause I’m grounded.” Cadence went to open the door when it was locked.

“Austin! You said this door would be unlocked.”

“Oh shit.” Austin just realized he forgot to unlock that door. “Whew! Good thing nothing bad happened huh?” He shot Cadence a goofy grin.

“Oh no, don’t you dare look at me like that. You can’t use that goofy grin on me all the time Austin.” Cadence shoved Austin.

“Hey, I’m sorry, that wasn’t cool of me and I promise it will never happen again.” Austin walked back to the ATV and got on it. “It’s my turn to drive, get on, I’ll take you home.”

He started up the ATV and confidently motioned her with his head to hop on.

Cadence was stunned to see this side of Austin. It was weird but also, he seemed hot. She absolutely thinks he is adorable and handsome but she thought that maybe he didn’t have that side to him. She had no idea what he was thinking but she was diggin this Austin so she hopped on the back of the ATV and they drove off.

Fifteen minutes later they pulled up to Cadence’s “other” house. “What are we doing here?” asked Cadence.

Austin got off the ATV, “What does it look like? I’m bringing you home.” Austin was definitely feeling more confident after that experience. He looked at her house and asked her, “Which window is yours?”

Cadence walked up to him and in a flirty sarcastic way said, “Why? You wanna climb up through my window and surprise me?” Cadence in her head was screaming at herself. *“Why the hell did I just say that all flirty? Sarcasm only Cadence!”*

Austin would normally be thrown off by the way she said it but this time he blurted out, “Maybe.”

The both of them stood looking at each other in shock and wonderment before quickly being overtaken by the reality of what just happened. As if someone hit a switch, they both became super awkward with each other.

Austin got all nervous and pointed at her house. “Oh no, um I mean we could climb to your window and I can put you right into your room so your mom will think you were in there the whole time.”

She was impressed with that line of reasoning. “Damn, you are full of surprises.” She pointed to the window on the far right of the two-story duplex she lived in. “That’s my window-”

Austin cut her off abruptly, “Oh, this one right here?” He ran towards it scoping out a way to climb up. There was no easy way to go about it but he thought the roof looked a little low. He might be able to jump and pull himself up.

As he prepared himself to jump, Cadence walked over to him with a confused look on her face. “What are you doing?”

Austin took his first jump but couldn’t find anything to grab on to that would support his weight. “I’m going to get myself up onto the lower roof here and then I’ll pull you up.”

He jumped again and this time he grabbed onto a part of the gutter that somehow didn’t buckle too badly. He pulled himself up and as he nearly got up, the gutter gave way and he fell flat onto his back.

As he lay there with the wind knocked out of him, Cadence looked down at him, “Are you okay?”

Austin groaned and shot his arm up giving her a thumbs up.

“Or, we could maybe use the front door as this isn’t my actual house remember?”

Austin had forgotten about that and was now a little embarrassed.

Cadence helped him up and they went inside. She was a little uncomfortable showing him her room. She hadn’t really let a friend into her room as that is her unique space where she can be away from people and recharge when she needs to.

“Before I show you my room, you have to promise me something?”

Austin nodded his head, “let me guess, your room is a mess and you’re embarrassed right? I get the same feeling every time you come over to my house.”

“No, well yeah now I’m thinking that but no.” Cadence looked at Austin dead center into his eyes and said, “You know that you have a power that no one else has on this planet with that key right?”

Austin nodded.

“No, I mean it, Austin. My room is a sacred place. It is my domain where I can be my true self. All my secrets are in here. Please, for the love of Thor, do not ever go through my room. I will show you what I want you to see. It will be a violation of the worst kind if you did that to me.”

“Absolutely,” Austin replied wholeheartedly, he fully understood what she was saying.

Cadence took her hands and cupped his face in her hands and said, “Thank you.” She then gave him a little kiss on the tip of his nose and then proceeded to enter her room.

“That was a little weird,” Austin muttered under his breath.

As he crossed the threshold of her room, he was greeted with a sight like nothing he had ever seen before. It was the most colorful room he had ever seen.

There were bursts of colorful see-thru fabrics that started off behind her bed arranged to look like a rainbow. They start to expand the further up you go until it fans out creating a canopy effect over her bed.

There were white string lights draped around her room and she made a collage out of anime posters and cutouts.

Her desk had an old antique sewing machine and there were articles of clothing strewn about. Some of them were whole while others were being modified.

Facing her bed was a dresser with four mannequin heads wearing different colorful wigs. Also, on that dresser was a bunch of scrunchies she had made.

“Wow. This place is-”

“I know, it’s weird. This is why I don’t like showing people my ro-”

Austin cut her off this time, “I was going to say that this is the most magical room I have ever been in.”

“Oh!” Cadence said in shock.

“I mean the mannequin heads are a bit creepy but the rest of it is AWESOME! Your room looks like the Bifrost!”

Cadence was really happy he liked her room. “I agree, those heads are creepy and that’s exactly why they are there.”

“You want them because they are creepy?”

“Yes and no. I’m used to them now but I have a pest problem called Penny and Cooper. They have a hard time respecting my boundaries and I need something that will make them think twice about coming in here.”

“They can’t possibly be that scared of these heads! I mean, they are kinda creepy but that wouldn’t scare me and I’m me.”

Cadence started laughing. “On Disney plus there’s a movie called ‘Return to Oz’. There’s this scene where there are all these different heads in cases are sleeping-”

“What, like real heads?” Austin interrupted her.

“They are heads that are magically enchanted. This witch stole them from all these beautiful women and she would wear them and change heads depending on her mood.”

Austin looked grossed out but he wanted to hear more. Cadence continued, “so Dorthy has to steal this powder of life stuff from a cabinet with a head in it. She reaches for the powder when the head wakes up and starts yelling her name, DORTHY GALE!”

Austin shuddered.

“And then the rest of the heads wake up and they all start screaming while the body of the witch rises from her bed and starts walking towards Dorthy. Dorothy books it out there, right under her arms as she can’t see cause she ain’t got no head-on.”

“And you watched this with your brother and sister?”

“Yep. Now, whenever they come into my room and I start saying ‘Dorothy Gale’ in that tone they run away screaming.”

Austin started laughing. “That’s awesome! We should totally pull a prank on them with that someday.”

Cadence liked that idea. “Oh man, I got some great ideas! but it’s late, we should probably do this.”

“Oh right, okay, um, well for this to work we have to go into your closet and then I’ll use the key and open up the door to your real room.”

Cadence looked suspicious. “You want you and me to go into my tiny ass closet together?”

Austin realized how it sounded, “Oh no! No, not like that, strictly to let you back in your room, no funny stuff. I swear.”

Cadence snarkily grinned at Austin. “If you say so,” she said while winking at him.

Cadence went into the closet and Austin nervously followed her in. “Wow, it is cramped in her isn’t it?”

“Yeah, well you’re the one who wanted to do it this way.”

Austin shuffles around. “What’s behind me, it’s poking into my back.”

“It’s just a bunch of old junk. Here let me-” Cadence leaned into Austin and started moving stuff as best as she could so he wasn’t getting stabbed anymore.

Austin noticed how close she was to him. At first, he was cool with it but then he smelled that vanilla scent she wears and it started to make him feel funny.

“Okay, that should do it. Are you okay now?” Cadence readjusted herself and then looked at Austin. He had a strange grin on his face and his eyes were closed.

Suddenly Cadence could feel something against her thigh. Her eyes widened in shock cause she figured out what was going on. “Um Austin?”

Austin was still in his weird place so Cadence nudged her shoulder into him. “Austin!” she yelled softly at him.

Snapping him out of his daze, he noticed a strange look on her face. “what??”

Cadence was nervously trying so very hard not to move. She could not look him in the eyes at the moment. “Your-um-gun is sticking into my hip.”

Austin smiled and nodded his head, “Ace Ventura, great movie.”

“No, Austin. Your gun is sticking into my hip.” Cadence awkwardly looked down.

It was at that moment Austin realized what was going on. “Oh my god!” Austin started blushing profusely and apologizing. “I am so sorry Cadence. You were there and I’m here and we are so close and I don’t know. You smell so good and I have no control over it sometimes.”

“Oh yeah no, I get it, it’s cool, don’t worry about it. Maybe you should just-” Cadence motioned her head to the door.

“Oh yeah! I got the key just right here.” Austin began digging around in his pocket.

He was squirming around so much that she started to feel really hot. Her heart started pounding and she grew to be very uncomfortable with her feelings. It was good but bad and she needed him to stop. “Why didn’t you get the key out before you got in?”

He pulled the key out and said, “Got it!” He looked at Cadence and saw she looked bothered or something. “You okay Cadence?”

“Would you just please get me out of here!”

Austin quickly rushed and used the key on the door.

**\*ZWAPP CLICK\***

The door flung open and out fell Cadence and Austin causing quite a bit of noise.

“Shit!” Cadence yelled. “There’s no way mom didn’t hear that. Okay, you gotta go now.” Cadence shoved Austin back into the closet.

She shut the door and reopened it again. “Remember what you promised me!”

She shut the door again and quickly took off most of her gear and changed into a pair of shorts. She jumped into her bed and made the blankets all messy draped around her.

Her mom knocks on her door and slowly opens it. “You okay hunny? It sounded like you may have fallen out of bed again.”

Cadence dug her face out of her pillow and said, “yep, I fell out of bed again and knocked a bunch of stuff over.”

Cadence’s mom shook her head and softly laughed. “Typical teenager.” She walked away not shutting her door as she left.

“Door!” Cadence yelled at her mom.

“Good morning to you too sweetie! I’m making pancakes in the shape of a cactus, sausages, eggs, and toast!”

From down the hall, Cadence could hear Cooper getting excited. He called that “a cowboys breakfast” and puts on his cowboy gear and pretends he’s in a saloon.

“I WANT BACON!” Cadence yelled downstairs in the hopes her mom heard her.

**\*ZWAPP CLICK\***

Cadence shot out of her bed, walked to her closet door, and slowly opened it only to find it empty. “Was he in there that whole time?” she said to herself.

# Beyond

All the information here are things from the OG story where things have changed but it includes plot points still important to the later story.

## Chapter Ten

Later that evening, Austin, his brother and his father are having a family dinner. Before their mom died, they would all have fried chicken night. Austin’s mom had a family recipe which was the boys favorite. It wasn’t too often their dad would make it but it was close to the anniversary of her death and Daryl was feeling nostolgic.

“So Austin,” his father said to him while taking a bite of his chicken. “What have you and that girl been up to? You two have been spending a lot of time together.”

Austin felt nervous at the question. He wiped his mouth and replied, “Oh you know, just hanging out doing whatever, nothing specific.”

“Nice answer Austin.” Dwight knew that Cadence and Austin were getting closer and that his brothers answer made it obvious.

Daryl looked at Austin with sadness in his eyes. Even though years had passed, the pain he felt about his wifes passing was as strong as it was on the day he left her. the boy, his father and brother are eating dinner together which is a rare thing to happen in his home. His dad asks him about the girl he has been spending time with and he says she is just a friend. His brother pokes at him a bit while his father gets angry at him for turning their convo into a joke.

We see his dad trying to be a father but at the same time he is showing some of his fear with his boy becoming attached to this girl. He wants to protect him from loving too much and then losing that love the way he lost his wife.

The boy hasn’t slept at all and is feeling it. He texted the girl that he is going to cancel on her because he isn’t feeling up to it. She replies that she can barely keep her eyes open too and they will go tomorrow after school.

The next morning Austin got a ride to school with Dwight. He was still feeling a little sluggish from staying up all night. notices that there aren’t as many people at school today. school during his social studies class, the boy is approached by a nerdy kid while they were watching The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers. He heard he has a talent for getting his hands on items people need for a cheap price. The boy is suspicious of him but asks him what he’s looking for. He tells him he wants a scientific calculator, not a cheap one, one of the more expensive ones. He says he will keep his eyes and ears open for one.

Sometime passes and it’s the end of the school day. They take off to the other world where the boy wants to grab items he needs including that scientific calculator.

Night falls and they go to the light post where they first caught CLARC and sure enough he is there waiting for them. The boy was surprised and asked him why he was there. CLARC responds that it was because the Curator told him so. The boy says that he said meet him there tomorrow which was yesterday so why did he come back? CLARC responds because that was the last command he was given and since he was not there that night he would return there until the Curator had returned.

The boy and girl have devised a series of tests to try out with CLARC to determine exactly what he is capable of. This includes a strength test, speed test, math test, memory test and then a cleaning test.

The girl asks CLARC why he never comes out during the day time. He tells her that is the time of the Curators to do their work, they are not needed till after. The boy asks him about the Curators and why he hasn’t seen another one.

CLARC goes onto tell him about the accident that happened 6 years ago. He tells him he is the first Curator he has seen since then. Since then he and his brother bots have been maintaining the station but it still slowly falling apart and soon it will be beyond their ability to make repairs. If the station blows up it will take out the Earth. Now that the Curator has returned, CLARC recommends that he get started on repairing the station.

The boy tells him that he is just a kid and has no idea how to fix a space station. CLARC tells the boy that the Curators designed the system to be intuitive enough that most species with higher intelligence would be able to figure it out simple enough.

The first thing they need to fix is the PROTECTOR program. The protector is responsible for maintaining life support, security and medical functions as well as acting as a bypass to critical systems that need instructions. In this particular situation all other external means to communicate with the other systems are cut off so the protector program will act as the Curator's avatar and deliver their orders.

The way to the protector’s mainframe is blocked by debris; they will need assistance moving some of the heavier things. They think about trying to recruit some more cleaners but that would take too much time. The boy realizes that he may not be able to keep this place a secret too much longer because now he’s going to need help from his brother.

The next day the boy leaves his brother a note to meet him at the old workshop in the forest behind their house after school, IT’S IMPORTANT! The boy and the girl wait for his older brother who comes plowing his way through the forest in his 4 X 4 truck. He has a few guy friends with him which makes the boy a bit uncomfortable but at the same time he knows he could use the help.

The boy tells them that what they are about to experience will change the way they view their entire existence so if they think they can’t handle it they should turn back now. His brother and friends think he is just being dramatic and agree to his terms.

He leads them into the workshop and locks the door behind them. He shows them the key he found and then tells them about the first time he used it. They don’t believe him so he takes them outside and tells his brother to drive into town.

When they arrive they are quick to notice that there isn’t a single person around. The guy’s started to get nervous and started to question if the boy was kidding or not earlier. His older brother starts walking to stores and yelling out for people. He finally looks back at his brother and grins at him.

His brother and friends decide it’s time to go nuts they start trashing the streets and breaking store windows. The boy starts to get upset because he wants to get the repairs started and the girl starts to notice.

“Let them have their fun, this is big news and this is their way of coping. Besides when the sun goes down they will really get a taste of what this place is.” The girl

The brothers two friends got into some other cars and started driving cars through mailboxes and street signs. One of the friends accidentally drives into the brother’s truck trashing both the car and truck. The brother quickly becomes upset but goes to see if his friend is okay. The friend is laughing and cheering but he is a bit cut up. The boy’s brother is irritated by how his friend is reacting so he pushes him and starts yelling at him.

Just then the sun starts to set and the green light fills up the sky and the siren roars. The brother and friends become startled and the boy tells them they need to leave before the hollow men show up. The boy holds on to the key and closes his eyes and concentrates on opening up a doorway to the interior of the station. A door opens and he rushes them inside.

CLARC is standing there waiting for them. He greets the boy and the boy introduces his brother and friends and gives them permission to be there and what their function will be. CLARC notices the scratches on the brother’s friend's face and offers to heal him.

The boy and girl didn’t know he could heal people and ask him about it. CLARC tells him that he can heal any injury that is caused in the simulation but only if it is caused while in the simulation. Any injuries caused from outside the station are the individual's responsibility and will not be healed. He also informs them that healing the friend drained his power reserve by 12%. In order for him to replenish his power cell they need to get the systems back online.

The boy turns to his older brother and friends and tells him this is where they need their help. They aren’t sure they can help with something as complicated as that station they will do what they can.

The girl brings out her notebook and reveals a plan she has drawn up. She tells the boys what they will be doing, the boy asks what she will be doing and she says she’s the foreman, you work and she does all the technical planning while smiling a charming smile.

The boy’s start clearing debris and eventually they clear a path to the protector’s mainframe. CLARC comes through and his eyes light up and start to glow green.

INTERFACE COMPLETE – CLARC

Did it work? Did you talk to the protector? – Boy

Negative. The system has started to degrade and I cannot bypass the security lock. – CLARC

Is there anything else we can do? – Girl

I would have to find a way to repair my systems or find a way around it. – CLARC

You said there’s a security lock around it right? – Boy

That is correct. – CLARC

Too bad we couldn’t use this key to unlock that security door. – Boy

I don’t think it’s that kind of lock Austin...- Girl

CLARC stares at the boy for a second as if he is pondering something.

What? What is it? – Boy

The Curators made sure that the simulation and its systems were preserved before they died in the accident. All the programs on this station are able to interface with the simulation. I may be able to tie the protector’s mainframe into the simulation giving you a way to interface with the system. – CLARC

How is that going to work? – Girl

The system will decide how to translate that into the simulation; however I am not entirely certain as to how that will look when we go back in there. – CLARC

I don’t get it? You’re talking about some crazy matrix talk...- Brother

Do try to keep up big brother! (acting a little superior to his older brother) Okay CLARC how do we do that? – Boy

I will set it up now Curator. – CLARC

Clarc’s eyes go green and then like a flash from a camera he blinds the boy for a second.

Hey what was that for!? – Boy

I am sorry Curator but the system has no avatars available at this time so I scanned your mind and I have made suitable avatars using your memories. – CLARC

You can do that? – Boy

Yes, it is something I can do however I must tell you that all of this work has depleted my power reserves by another 22%. – CLARC

How much power do you have left, CLARC? – Girl

56% - CLARC

We better get going then before my friend here collapses from a power loss. – Boy

The boy and the girl follow CLARC but the brother and his friends stay behind.

Aren’t you guys coming? – Girl

This is all a little messed up don’t you think? You guys are following a robot and we are on a space station? – Brother

Yep! You see it’s not that hard to understand is it? – Girl

You aren’t worried that once you repair the station they aren’t going to assimilate you or something? – Brother

You guys watch too much Star Trek. Not every species is going to be as stupid as the human race and besides what do you have going on that’s better than this? – Girl

The boys look at each other and agree. They follow the rest of the group back to the simulation. The walk into the town square and it is night time.

Hey can we be out here at night? I thought this time was reserved for the Hollow men? – Boy

Indeed. However the station is badly damaged and time is running out. There may not be a station in the morning. – CLARC

Wow no pressure huh? – Girl

Try not to break anything or do anything to get the attention of my brothers. They will consider anyone without a Curator key an intruder. – CLARC

What happens if they catch you? – Boy

CLARC stares at them with a blank stare.

I don’t know. – CLARC

How can you not know? – Girl

There has never been an intruder before and I am unable to access any more information on the subject at this time. – CLARC

Okay guy’s you heard the Bot! Stay close and don’t touch anything! – Girl

CLARC interjects, “Android.”

“Yeah, yeah whatever. Bot, Android, same difference.”

“Bot, short form for Robot. A robot simply does what it is programmed to do. While I too have a program to follow, I am able to think for myself and I have self-preservation protocols, a robot does not.”

“I totally get it,” Sid said in reply to CLARC. “One is self-aware and the other is completely automated.” Sid started to inspect CLARC.

Where the heck are we going anyways? – Boy

I am detecting activity near the police department; I believe that is where we will find the protector. – CLARC

They all head towards the police department. As they get closer they start to hear sounds of people. This confuses everyone as they are the only ones there but CLARC tells them that by tying the simulation into the rest of the station it needs to represent the problems by inserting them into the simulation.

The police station is surrounded by police officers in heavy swat gear and it is fenced off. This represents the security programs that they will need to get by. However, since there is damage to the programs some of the officers are glitching out as well as the fences. [When the officers are glitching out you can see that they are other CLARC’s under the simulation] Someone should make reference to that.

They devise a plan that the brother and his friends would act as a distraction to lure some of the officers away. They would need to keep them busy long enough for them to sneak inside the station. After they are to head back to the workshop and head home. Austin told him he left the door unlocked there so if for any reason he would have to come get him this is the way back in.

The boy’s start their distraction and create a gap in their defenses. The gate where those officers were stationed is glitching out and there is a gap. The boy, girl and CLARC sneak in and hide behind some crates. They notice a door that leads down into a back entrance. They try to open it and it’s locked. The boy looks at is key and wishes that he could use it to open the door but knows if he tries it will just open up back to his world. CLARC points out that the key has multiple uses and if you turn the key the other way you will unlock a door instead of opening a door between worlds.

The boy tries the key the other way and surely enough it opens. They run inside and there are stairs that lead up into a fancy foyer. It is not the main entrance from the actual police station it has changed. There is a double door leading out to the front of the station, a door that leads back to where they came from and another double door with a circle indentation in the center of it with a banner over top of it.

It has a J.R.R. Tolkien quote from the Two Towers written on the banner: “War must be, while we defend our lives against a destroyer who would devour all; but I do not love the bright **sword** for its sharpness, nor the **arrow** for its swiftness, nor the warrior for his **glory**. I love only that which they **defend**.”

There is a large stone in the room that has a Shield stuck in it. The shield is the same size as the indentation on the door. Below the shield are three puzzle shaped indentations. CLARC tells them that there is a puzzle to be solved to which the boy and girl had already guessed. The girl points out the bolded words, sword, arrow, glory and defend. The boy notices the similarities to the shape of the shield and the indentation on the door.

The shield is tightly in place. The boy first asks CLARC if he could just use his robot strength to rip the shield from the rock but CLARC tells him no. He explains once again that the puzzle represents the stations systems and in order to bypass the security lock around the protector’s door he needs to prove his credentials by solving the puzzle.

There are a few distinct features in the police station. While it looks like a futuristic police station there are 3 notable items that seem out of place. On the back wall there is a white marble carving depicting the victory of Helms Deep called, “For the Glory of Man”. In the center of carving is King Theoden holding the flag of Rohan. Around the flag is a faint outline of a puzzle piece which the girl manages to remove using a pocket knife she has with her.

In another part of the room there is a coffee table with intricate carvings around the sides of the table. It shows one side being the Orcs and the other side are Elven archers have launched a volley of arrows. There is one arrow in the center of the table that is strangely placed off the path of the other arrows with a slight puzzle outline.

Near the door to the protectors room there is an Elven Suit of Armor. On the back of that armor is a little plaque with the symbol of a sword on it that acts as the signature of the blacksmith who made it. Like the other pieces this has a slight outline of a puzzle which means it can be removed.

The boy and girl gather all the puzzle pieces and insert them into the corresponding hole. The Shield is released and the boy puts it in the door. The door starts to glow really bright and then disappears while blinding the boy and girl.

When they gain their eyesight back the police station has changed back into what the real police station looks like and there is a box in the middle of the room. The boy picks it up and opens it. Inside is a small metallic octagon with a shield engraved on it. The boy asks what it is and CLARC tells him it is the Protector’s program. Each bot has a matching octagon shape on their upper back, these are interface slots. Not knowing what to expect they insert the program into CLARC. At first nothing happens and then something unexpected happens.

CLARC’S eyes go dark and then they suddenly fill with a yellowish light. The light gets brighter to the point where the boy and girl must cover their eyes. When they come to a figure of a man is standing in front of them.

CLARC? – Boy

The boy and girl starting walking opposite ways around CLARC.

What happened? You look… different. – Girl

Oh you mean this old body? Why it’s just an avatar little missy, taken right from the Curator's mind. – CLARC

You sound different too, but familiar at the same time. – Boy

CLARC steps out from the shadows and reveals the avatar of the protector. The boy is in shock.

What the- Dad?? – Boy

No sir, like I said this representation was taken from your mind. I chose this form as it represents someone who you consider to be a protector. – Protector

Makes sense, our parents are the ones who raise us and give us a safe home. – Girl

Can’t you take another form? I don’t like this one… - Boy

Hey it’s just a skin kiddo besides I kinda like it! – Protector

Are you still CLARC? I mean you kind of possessed him, can he still hear us? – Girl

The cleaner’s program is in no danger. I am just borrowing this vessel so we can get to repairing the station which is no small task. – Protector

The protector walks towards the kids and the boy flinches.

Curious, are you frightened of me? That isn’t usually the appropriate response towards a protector, why are you frightened? – Protector

I’m not! It’s just creepy is all; you look like my dad but you’re not. I will just have to get used to it. - Boy

What should we call you? Protector? CLARC?... – Girl

The protector looks at the boy and then looks back at the girl.

Halvor, you may call me Halvor. – Halvor

The girl looks grossed out by the name.

Why Halvor? – Girl

Halvor means guardian or protector. It’s an old Norse name. – Boy

Oh? Are you Norse Austin? – Girl

Yeah my family descended from the Vikings on my mom’s side. It’s also why Thor is my favorite superhero. – Boy

Cool! I guess Halvor is an alright name. – Girl

I’m glad you approve. I hate to end this bonding session but I do believe we have some work to do? – Halvor

Halvor goes on to tell them that they need to get the life support deck fully operational. The life support deck provides oxygen to the station via the indoor tree factory. All food is naturally grown and any meat products are bio-printed. This section also contains the breeding grounds where they breed different types of bacteria that are used to help maintain the station's cleanliness.

In a recent incident on the life support deck a fire broke out and is causing the forest to burn. The forest is grown from trees similar to the ones found on Earth. They won’t be able to physically put the fire out as it is too dangerous for anyone to enter it so the simulation has found a way for them to work around that.

The research forest nearby is on fire and it’s up to us to put it out. There are no lakes or rivers close enough to help and the water tower doesn’t have enough water to help put the fire out. They will have to assess the situation when they arrive.

The boy mentions that the research forest is too far to walk. It would take them half a day to get there. The protector stops to think for a second and then smiles.

Next scene: The protector leads the boy and girl to the town square where there are event tents set up for the Farmer’s Market opening in the morning. There is an old crop dusting plane that is sitting in the middle of the square and the protector plans on using that to get to the forest quicker.

Um, no offense Halvor but can you fly that? – Girl

An actual airplane? Probably not without the programming but this is a simulation, one that I have some control over. – Halvor

Halvor walks towards the plane and puts his hand out. He feels the wing.

This is going to be fun! – Halvor

The plane starts up and the lights turn on. The boy and girl go to get in and notice the controls are not what they expected. They are futuristic like the controls back on the station.

Halvor walks out from the shadows dressed differently. Now he looks like a pilot out of an Indiana Jones movie.

You changed? – Boy

Gotta look the part there kiddo. If you’re gonna be flying a plane you should at least look like you know what you’re doing! – Halvor

Halvor gets into the plane and drives it onto Main Street. The boy and girl look at each other as if to say I hope we don’t die. The plane starts moving forward and before they know it they are starting to get higher.

They fly over the town, seeing their school and homes. In the distance they can see a glow, the forest fire is bigger than they thought. Halvor lowers the plane's altitude so the kids don’t have to breathe in the smoke.

When they get there they fly over the research center and circle it. After they land at a nearby air strip the plane starts to have a bit of trouble but they don’t think much of it.

The research center is walking distance from the airfield however Halvor warns them that he saw security drones patrolling the exterior building and there would most likely be more inside.

I didn’t see anything? Do you mean there are more CLARC’s? – Boy

No, your bot friend is a cleaner and not used for security purposes unless there are no security drones present. In that case it can defend itself and render an intruder unconscious. – Halvor

Oh... then what do these security drones look like? – Boy

Probably something bad-ass like Terminators or something. – Girl

You two watch too many movies. No, these security drones are small spheres that are reflective on the outside. They have a 360 degree field of vision. On their own they are hard enough to deal with but when there are two or more they can connect together to form objects that can be used to stop you. – Halvor

You mean like a giant hand or something? – Boy

Obviously not stupid. – Girl

Actually they could if they wanted. – Halvor

Oh... – Girl

Who’s stupid now? \*laughs\* - Boy

Hey! Don’t call me stupid! – Girl, hits the boy.

No fighting you two! Come on now, we need to focus on this because if we don’t get that fire out you won’t be able to return here. – Halvor

We’re sorry – Boy and Girl

That’s better. Okay now these drones have different tools at their disposal. You are going to want to make sure you don’t fall prey to these two things. When they are on their own they will try to trick you by projecting an image of something that will seem harmless until you get too close. – Halvor

What happens if you get too close? – Boy

The drone will stun you and put you into a stasis field. Then it will bring you to a holding area which is probably in the basement of the research center. – Halvor

You said they project an image of something, what does that mean exactly? – Girl

Like I said; these drones are small spheres with a reflective surface that makes them hard to see. Because of their form their defences are limited. If an intruder is cunning enough to stay hidden the drones will be able to project an image. The image could be anything from an animal to a person. The more it knows about you the more complex the image will be. – Halvor

So these drones can learn... interesting... – Boy

What else can it do? – Girl

On their own drones aren’t too big of an issue but more than one poses a bigger problem. - Halvor

Halvor picks up some stones and arranges them on the ground in this pattern:

0 0 0

0 0 0

0 0 0

The drones can connect together to form complex shapes that can subdue an intruder. Their preference is forming a kind of electric net, that’s what this is here. Imagine those rocks being drones. As they fly in formation they sent a current of energy to the other drones forming a net. – Halvor

He draws lines connecting the stones together.

0----0----0

| X | X |

0----0----0

| X | X |

0----0----0

That sounds painful. – Girl

I’m sure it would hurt a bit but unlike the tasers on your planet these drones are capable of using a current that is perfectly in tune with the intruder. It’s never too much to kill and only enough to subdue. – Halvor

Okay so avoid groups of the drones... – boy

The boy walks away looking nervous and unsure of himself.

Are you okay Austin? – Girl

Hmm? Oh yeah no I’m fine. – Boy

You’re scared aren’t you? – Girl

Of course I’m scared. It’s normal to be scared, just cause I’m a boy doesn’t mean I don’t scared okay! – Boy

Hey I didn’t mean anything by it. I’m scared too you know. – Girl

The boy turns and looks at the girl.

Are you? You sure don’t look like it. You hide it well...- Boy

Everyone gets scared. Even Thor gets scared once in a while. – Girl

Yeah but Thor is a thunder god and he has his magical hammer Mjolnir. I’m just a kid with a key to what is probably the most important discovery ever. Take away the key and I’m just a kid. – Boy

Just a kid?! – Halvor

Halvor walks over to the boy and kneels so he is face to face with him.

Let me tell you something about the Curators and that key. You think a race like them would have made a key that any old person could pick up and use? - Halvor

You know that I’m not one of the Curators? – Boy

Of course I know. That key is far more sophisticated than you know. The Curators died in the incident that left this place ruined but that doesn’t mean their work ends with them. You were chosen Austin because of your character and your curiosity. You are no mere mortal. On some level you are light years ahead of most humans so no, you’re not just “a boy”. – Halvor

The boy smiles.

Okay so how do we get around these drones? Blow them with grenade launchers? – Boy

Blow them up... Listen to this trigger man. I think we can do this without destroying a single drone. We just have to exploit their strengths. – Halvor

You mean exploit their weakness right? – Girl

What fun is that? No we are going to exploit their strengths because in the end their strength will be our strength. – Halvor

The girl looks at her watch and sees that it’s well past midnight. She says she needs to go because her parents will kill her for being out so late. The boy says he needs to go too and Halvor agrees that they should go for now. He installs an app on the Boy and Girls phone that shows them how much time is remaining before total station collapse. There is just over 32 hrs remaining. They promise they will be back after they are done with school. He will await their return and in the meantime he will prepare the next task.

The boy takes the girl home and uses the key to put her in her room so if her parents go and check on her they will see is safe in bed. There is a moment between the boy and girl where you can see how they are growing together.

## Chapter Eleven

The next day at school the boy and girl are fairly tired because of their late night. Just as the boy was getting to class that nerdy kid shows up and pulls him aside. He tells him that the principal is going to be calling him down to the office today about the items he has been selling to the kids. He was sent to him by the principal in the hopes of finding out where he is getting all that stuff from. He didn’t actually think he could get the calculator but that it was really cool he did. In fact he kept the calculator and didn’t tell anyone because he really did want one.

The boy confused asks him why he is telling him all of that. He says that he was always pretty nice to everyone and never gave him a hard time. So what if he can get his hands on stuff people want, no one in that school could ever afford this in the first place. It was nice that someone could even things out. He thanks him and the Boy goes to class.

Just as the class is about to begin the morning announcements come on. At the end the principal calls his name and requests he go see her. The class looks at him and the girl looks concerned.

The boy sits in front of the principal and guidance counsellor. They are smiling at the Boy in a strange way. They think they know something and that they are here to bust someone. They open up by starting to ask him how he is doing and how things are at home. The boy politely responds and then they start talking to him about kids in the school getting brand name items and parents wondering how they are getting them. The boy looks surprised and shrugs at it. They start asking him if he’s heard or seen anything that can explain this. The boy denies hearing or seeing anything. The guidance counselor approaches the boy and asks him if he’s sure there isn’t anything he wants to share with them and he politely denies any involvement. They proceed to tell him that they called the police and there are no reported thefts of those kinds of items so no one is in trouble. Only that selling things on school property isn’t allowed. The boy shrugs his shoulders and then asks if he can be allowed to return to class. They let him leave but not before the principal notifies him that she will be watching him.

After school Dwight shows up and tells them both to get in. He drives to the quarry to where he threatens to tell his dad about the key. The boy and girl beg him not to say anything. His brother goes off on telling him how he doesn’t know what that key is and if those aliens are good or bad.

The boy looks at his brother and knows that he is jealous. He tells his brother he knows he won’t say anything and that he’s just afraid he won’t bring him back there. If he wanted to come back all he had to do was ask. His brother admits he is a little envious of him and he would like to go back but what makes him so sure that helping repairing that place won’t end up with the assimilation of everyone on Earth?

The boy tells him he just knows, he can’t explain it but he believes the Curators were never there to harm them this is their way of asking for help. They may be dead but they left this place behind so one day someone worthy enough would come along and discover its secrets. He’s not saying he is worthy of anything only that the ship’s A.I. seems to see something in him that no one else sees.

His brother looks at him and smiles. He tells him that he always did see something special in him and he remembers that his mom did too. The boy thanks him and smiles. The girl also says she sees something in him too and she doesn’t understand why he can’t see it but maybe this experience will help him see it too.

His brother asks him when he can come back to the station with him. He says they have a task to complete tonight that they don’t need his help with but the task after that is bigger and we will definitely need your help and maybe even your buddies.

His brother drops them off at the house and tells him that he has a girl coming over tonight so if he needs to stay out late he will cover for him. The boy thanks him and they return to the simulation. The boy looks at his phone and sees they only have 12 hours to finish the repairs. Halvor appears and welcomes them back. The sun is setting but the fire from the forest is keeping it well lit outside.

They gather near the airfield where Halvor has a blueprint of the research center. He has the exits marked and the potential locations of where he suspects they keep silver iodide. He explains how he can seed the clouds in the sky with silver iodide and if all goes according to plan it will make it rain.

“Seriously?” Says the boy, “You can do that?” Halvor goes on to explain that under normal circumstances no this method wouldn’t work because the fire is making the air too hot however I can enhance the silver iodide with this. Halvor has a small pouch and when he opens it a small glow shines out of the bag. What is it? Asks the boy. Halvor found some programmable matter while exploring some of the station, it’s how he was able to repair CLARC and restore his power levels. He can program them to enhance the silver iodide so it can work in the heat as well.

The girl asks him what programmable matter is. He explains that they are small bots that can join together to create any item you want. When you are tired of using that item it can disassemble itself and is free to be what you need it to be. The girl is fascinated with it and asks if that’s all he has. Halvor says there are lots of containers full of programmable matter in other parts of the station but this is all that was accessible.

There are 4 ways into the research center, the main entrance, a back entrance, a side door and a loading bay near the back. The back entrance is being blocked by shipping containers which sucks because it will lead directly to the loading bay in the basement. The loading bay doors are locked from the inside so it’s crucial they find a way down there and open the door. The loading bay is most likely where the silver iodide is located, that or the lab upstairs. If that’s the case then there is a dumbwaiter that connects the lab upstairs to the loading bay. They will have to send it down as quickly as possible. The main entrance is covered by video surveillance and motion detectors so that way won’t work. The side door is the least guarded but it is also on the other side of the building which means they will have to make their way across the research center without getting caught. The boy asks about other video surveillance in the building and Halvor says that this research facility doesn’t have a huge budget and is in the middle of nowhere so they only have video surveillance in the front and the loading bay which is why the security drones are patrolling the area.

The girl asks why they have to be the ones to break into the research center and not Halvor. Halvor asks if she knows how to drive a transport truck and she says no and he replies, “That’s why.” Halvor tells them he will take them to side door but they will be on their own from there. From that point he will get the truck and meet them at the loading bay. He tells them to remember what he said about those security drones; they are crafty so stay alert and try not to split up but in case they do Austin had given him the walkie talkies and he modified them to work on a hidden channel.

The boy pulls the girl aside and asks her if she is scared. She says yes and he says so am I. She never looks scared to him and he asks her why that is. She tells him she thinks most people are scared when it comes down to it but it just depends on how you let that fear affect you. She says, “remember in Thor 2 when Heimdall told Thor he could not see Jane Foster anymore?” The boy nods his head. “You probably didn’t notice this but the reason why he rushed to Earth so quickly was because he was scared that something bad had happened to her. I’m sure it would be easier for someone to run and cry or they could summon up all the courage they have to find out what’s really going on. Chances are in the end it’s not as bad as the fear led you to believe.” The boy stays silent for a moment as he contemplates what she just said. He holds the key tightly in his hand and then he regains his composure. “Let’s do this” the boy says.

The boy and girl walk towards the truck where Halvor is already set to go.

They drive to the path that leads them to the side door. He tells them to stay safe and always trust in your partner because they will help you stay alive.

The boy and girl enter the side door which leads them to a dark hallway. (There are two security drones present)There are wooden crates in the hallways that give Austin and Cadence some cover. Austin is starting to feel more confident about what they are doing and decides he’s going to cut across the hall and head to the other crates just outside the lab and for Cadence to come after he waves her across. Austin does his thing and is not spotted. He looks around and gives her the signal to come. Just as she steps out one of the security drones comes around the corner and spots her. Cadence runs back down the hall they came from and goes into one of the other labs. Meanwhile the other drones are on alert and a red light emanates from the drones.

Cadence hides behind counter breathing heavily and closing her eyes. She grabs her walkie talkie and plays around with the volume to make sure it’s not going to be too loud. She calls out for Austin but there’s no answer. She then calls out for Halvor but she still doesn’t hear anything. Everything sounds quiet to her so she slowly creeps out and looks around. Unknowingly to her a drone sits behind her and scans her. She feels something is behind her and quickly turns around only to find nothing there. She walks back out into the hallway where it’s still strangely quiet. She goes to the crates on the other side of the hallway where she last Austin and found his walkie but not him. She then hears a noise coming in from one of the labs. She walks over expecting to see Austin but she finds nothing yet again. Finally a tabby cat jumps down from one of the shelves and startles her. It’s purring and rubbing up against one of the cabinets.

That’s strange? How did you get in here?? - Cadence

She walks over to the cat and calls out to it.

Here puss puss… don’t worry I won’t hurt you. - Cadence

The cat doesn’t move towards her so she keeps slowly moving towards it.

Wait a sec… How are you here? There are no animals in this simulation… - Cadence

Cadence then remembers what Halvor said about the drones.

“If an intruder is cunning enough to stay hidden the drones will be able to project an image within a few meters of itself. The image could be anything from an animal to a person.”

Oh crap… - Cadence

She turns around to run and the drone reveals itself, shocks her and she blacks out.

Across the hall Austin is hiding in a conference room. He’s peeking through blinds trying to see if Cadence is still out there. He doesn’t see her plus he doesn’t see the drone.

He quickly closes more of the blinds and starts looking around the room for something he could use as a weapon.

“If I was Thor I could just throw my hammer at that drone and it would be dust… But I don’t have a hammer so...what could I use?” - Austin

He looks on the conference table and sees a pitcher of water.

“It’s a drone made from a super advanced alien society, I think they would have figured out water.” He starts to walk away and then goes back to the pitcher and takes it.

Cut To Hallway:

Drone is patrolling the hallway and Austin jumps out and yells, “FOR ASGARD!” Just as he begins to yell the drone begins to power up to stun him and he throws the pitcher of water at it. The pitcher breaks and water spills all over the reflective drone. The drone immediately powers down but still remains floating in the air. Austin just stares at the drone breathing heavily. Suddenly the drone falls to the ground and scares Austin. He screamed so loud it came out sounding very girly. He then looks around to see if anyone was watching and then regains his composure. He walks over to the drone and picks it up. In his best Thor voice he says, “You fought well techno demonic creature but I Thor, son of Asgard have bested you.” Up close Austin notices a little octagon hole that looks like it could be used to have a futuristic disc placed in it. He places the drone in his bag. He pulls out a bag of deflated balloons that he was going to use for a water balloons and gets a bright idea. He returns to conference room where he makes a bunch of water balloons.

Austin enters the main foyer where he knows two drones are and does some slick running around avoiding them and then throwing water balloons at them and hitting them dead on. Both drones short out and fall to the ground. Austin proceeds to put both of the drones in his bag which by now would be making his bag heavier so that should be reflected in this scene.

Austin returns to the hallway and goes into a research room. There is an industrial dumbwaiter in there and a bunch of silver iodide canisters. He proceeds to load the canisters on the dumbwaiter. He is really psyched to ride it down but his weight would make it too heavy to work properly. All disappointed, he sends the canisters to the lower level and walks away all mopey like. He radios to Halvor that he found the canisters and to meet him out back. Halvor radios back that he will be there but he may be a little late. Austin asks why.

Cut to Halvor being chased by a couple of drones. He is driving the truck down some dirt roads while the drones are projecting things to try and distract him and powering up to try to stun him. “I just gotta drop a deuce, I’ll be right with you!”

Cut back to Austin looking grossed out. he gets back on the radio, “Gross Halvor. TMI...tmi…” Austin walks away.

Cut to Austin entering the loading bay and going to open the bay doors. He looks out for Halvor but doesn’t see him yet. He decides to go into the storage room and get the canisters ready to go. There is a cold storage room and a regular storage room where the dumbwaiter is. He looks around and sees the cold storage door has a window to peer inside. He slowly walks up and rubs the window clean. He sees Cadence laying on the floor unconscious. He quickly opens the door and runs to her.

“Cadence!” Austin goes to grab her hand and it’s cold. Austin gets scared because he thinks she might be dead. He then proceeds to try to warm her up. he take his jacket off and tries to wrap her up. He start to rub her hands while saying, “Please don’t be dead” over and over again. He presses his cheek up against her and says, “Take my warmth Cadence… Please don’t be dead.” A few more seconds go by and he closes his eyes and starts to cry.

Just then a muffle Cadence says, “Dude, prince charming kissed her, not press his cheek against hers and drool all over the place.”

Austin shoots up and screams. “You’re alive!”

“Of course I’m alive, I haven’t been down here very long you know?” - Cadence

“You were cold and I just thought if I could warm you up that maybe you’d…” - Austin

“Chill out dude. I was just messing with you. When that drone zapped me I passed out for literally a second and it had brought me here. And like 15 minutes later you came down here and I decided to pretend I was a sleeping beauty. Thought out of anyone you’d get the reference.” - Cadence

“That actually makes sense... “ - Austin

“How did you get passed the drones?” - Cadence

He pulls water balloons out of his bag and lightly throws one to her. “Water balloons” - Austin

“Get out of here? Really? That simple? You’d think for being an advanced machine water wouldn’t be an issue?” - Cadence

“You know I thought that too at first but then I figured this simulation is making this a puzzle to solve so we shouldn’t take things so literally…” - Austin

“Wait, did you take care of the one that brought me down here?” - Cadence

“What are you talking about? When I came down here I only saw YOOOOOOOOU” - Austin

Austin is zapped by a drone and falls to the ground. Cadence squeals and throws the balloon at the drone rendering it null.

Cut to Austin Shanny and Halvor loading up the truck. The truck looks in bad shape but it will hold together a bit longer.

“Well that’s quite the tale there Austin, now you have some of your own adventures to talk about.” - Halvor

“I’ll just have to leave that last part out.” Austin nervously chuckles.

“Don’t worry Charming, your secret is safe with me!” - Cadence. Winks at Austin.

They get into the truck and head back to the landing strip. The fire is brighter and it’s getting hotter. Cut to airplane.

Halvor is trying to get the engines to turn over but the conditions from the fire are interfering with it being able to work. Halvor informs them if they can’t figure out another way to get that silver iodide with the programmable matter into the sky with in the next few minutes they will have failed.

Austin grabs his bag and pulls out a drone. “Wait a sec… Halvor, you can give these drones new orders can’t you?” - Austin

“Well sure, what are you thinkin?” - Halvor

“If one of those drones can take a person down into a cell then why can’t we network them together and they can deliver the payload.” - Austin

“That just might work! Good thinkin Kid!” - Halvor, he messes up Austin’s hair and Austin smiles.

They bring the canisters and 5 drones Austin collected out to the field. Halvor lays them out and then tells them to stand back. Austin and Cadence stand back. Halvor rubs his hands together and says “Okie dokie… time to dazzle.” He looks back at Austin and says, “how’s this for Asgardian showmanship?”

He grabs a small pinch of programmable matter and creates Thor’s hammer Mjolnir. Austin can’t believe his eyes. Halvor grabs onto it and holds it up to the sky. It starts to get all stormy. Lightning strikes Mjolnir and charges it. Halvor then strikes out at the drones and they surge full of power and start to hover. One of the drones is acting funny. Halvor commands them to seed the sky. They gather around the canisters except for the one that is acting funny. It moves towards Austin. At first Austin and Cadence are scared but then Austin says it's okay. The drone starts to make strange noises as it frantically moves about. It’s like a minion but a drone version. Halvor says he doesn’t need to use it for this to work, the other four are enough. Austin agrees to hold on to it. Halvor then sends them away and they go do their thing.

Cut to CG of drones flying around with the fire blazing below. They go into the clouds and then cut to Austin.

“Uh how do we know this is going to work?” - Austin

“It shouldn’t take long. That programmable matter works fast and before you know it…” - Halvor. Rain starts to pour out of the skies.

The three start cheering and celebrating. Halvor checks the status of the station. “It appears if this keeps up we may have given ourselves more time to fix the station.” - Halvor

The drone is flying around making noises and bouncing off things. “Man that drone in bonkers!” - Cadence

“Awe she’s just all excited, leave her alone.” - Austin. He walks over to it and pets it.

“She? What makes you think it’s a she? Do you see anything that indicates that it’s a she?” - Cadence

“Yeah, SHE reminds me of YOU when you get really excited over new art supplies and all you can talk about is how special it is to crack open new pencils for a new project.” - Austin

“Hey buster, I’m cute and smart and I am not that hyper when I get new art supplies…” Cadence gets all fast talkie, “But you see you’re not an artist and you just can’t appreciate it like I can because it’s so much more than --”

Austin and Halvor are blankly staring at Cadence.

“Oh, heh okay maybe I see a small similarity but don’t be mean!” - Cadence. She punches Austin in the arm. Just then something falls from the sky. It doesn’t hit the ground, it just floats a few feet above it. The sky has opened up around it and the moonlight shines on a small octagonal disk.

“Hey it’s another one of those discs.” - Cadence

The three of them and bonkers run over to the disk. Austin picks it up. The disc has a marking on it representing the Scientist.

“That’s the scientists program. We need access to it.” - Halvor

“How? We need another one of you?” - Cadence

Austin looks at Bonkers and notices the octagon shape. He holds the disc in his hand and silently thinks. He gets up and walks over to bonkers and sticks the disc in the slot.

Bonkers goes nuts. She starts bouncing all over the place while making strange noises. She comes to a sudden stop in front of Austin’s face and a bright flash of light happens. This blinds Austin for a moment. You can hear Halvor and Cadence talking and then an unfamiliar voice.

“Oh my, I am so sorry… Your eyesight will return shortly here, don’t panic.” - Voice

As Austin’s vision returns he sees a kind looking woman smiling at him.

“There you go. Just a few seconds more…” - Voice

“Who… Who are you?” - Austin

“Oh how rude of me! Austin, Cadence, this is the Scientist's avatar. She’s the eye’s and ear’s of this station, she also assists in the maintenance of life support and oversees all scientific endeavors like research and development.” - Halvor

“Pleased to meet you.” - Scientist

Austin just stares at her.

“Don’t be rude Austin!” - Cadence. She nudges Austin.

“Mommy?” - Austin

Cadence and Halvor look at the scientist.

“Wait a sec… Halvor did she choose an image from Austin’s head like you did?” - Cadence

“Well yes, that’s how it works. We search for an image the Curator has strong feelings of trust with. We of course don’t know much about the image we are using unless we are given access to that information.” - Halvor

“Why does it have to be her?” - Austin

“I’m sorry does my image disturb you? I can change it if you want.” - Scientist

“NO!” - Austin. He quickly regains himself. “Um no, it’s okay, the shock is wearing off.”

“Is this what your mom looked like? She’s beautiful and you kind of look like her.”- Cadence

“You look exactly how I remember her.” - Austin. He slowly walks to her and his eyes are locked on to hers. He puts his hand out to touch her and it goes right through her. “And you're just as hard to hold on to as her.”

“Oh I’m sorry, I’m a hologram so I don’t have a physical form.” - Scientist

“The CLARC unit has the ability to take on different humanoid forms which is why I can do this. The security bots project holograms, usually away from the unit but it seems Bonkers is hiding her bot form within the hologram to make her look more real to you.” - Halvor

Austin looks over at Cadence. “I told you she was a girl.” - Austin

She smirks back at him. “So this is your mother… You never talk about her only that she died from some kind of sickness and that your dad was never the same after that.” - Cadence

“Yeah there was a time when we were all happy. My dad didn’t drink all the time, he actually hugged us.” INSERT FLASHBACK SCENE “Now he’s always angry and sometimes he takes it out on me and my brother.” - Austin

“Holy cow Austin. Is that why you don’t always come to school?” - Cadence

Austin shakes his head in shame. “When Halvor took that form I was scared at first but he reminded me of my old dad and it was nice to have that again.” - Austin

“I’m sorry kid, if I had known I would have used a different avatar.” - Halvor

“No. I know this is good for me, it’s forcing me to confront my fears. Ever since we got here it’s like I have a playground that helps me work on me and that feeling of growth and change actually kind of excites me… as weird as that may sound.” - Austin

“Well I think you’re brave Austin. I’ve been watching you since you arrived and you share many of the same qualities as the Curators. You are very wise for being so young.” - The Scientist

“See Austin, this is the person I have always seen in you and now you can see it too.” - Cadence

“Not quite. But I’m starting to.” - Austin

Sometime passes and Austin and Cadence forget about their lives back home. A whole night goes by and the next morning Austin’s father wakes up and goes to check on his boys. When he gets to Austin’s room and doesn’t see him he flips out. He runs to Dwight’s room where he is sleeping. Daryl shakes him out of bed.

“Where the hells your brother at!?” - Daryl

Dwight suddenly becomes concerned. “What? Why? isn’t he in bed?” - Dwight

“No stupid, he ain’t! His bed hasn’t been slept in, I don’t even think he came home from school yesterday. Why weren’t you looking out for him!?” - Daryl

“Why wasn’t I?! You’re the parent! I dunno? where is YOUR son DAD!?” Dwight says all angrily towards his father.

Daryl backs down and calmly says, “Okay let’s not place blame here, let’s figure this out. Do you have any idea where he could be at?”

Dwight figures something must have happened to him in the simulation but he can’t let his dad know. “I bet he passed out in that old workshop he hides out in. I’ll get dressed and check it out. Just put some coffee on and I’ll be back with him soon.”

Cut to exterior of workshop. Dwight comes walking up just as Austin and Cadence come walking out of the workshop.

“What the hell Austin? I thought you were smarter than this!” - Dwight

“I am so sorry Dwight, it has been the craziest night ever!” - Austin

“Yeah well when you were in there doing god knows what, Dad was waking up this morning to find your bed empty and I don’t need to tell you who he came running to.” - Dwight

“Oh my god. Are you okay? Did he hurt you bad?” - Austin

“Luckily no. He was too worried about you ya idgit.” - Dwight

“Um I hate to interrupt but do you think you could give me a ride home? I have to go deal with my mom…” - Cadence

“Yeah I’ll give you a lift.” - Dwight

“Cool, I’m coming with!” - Austin

“Like hell you are! You gotta go face dad and I’ll drive her home.” - Dwight.

“Yeah but what if he hurts me like he does to you?” - Austin

“Trust me Austin, he was actually worried about you, you’ll be fine.” - Dwight

Cut to exterior of Austin’s home. A car is parked outside of the house and it’s blocking Dwight’s car. Cadence immediately recognizes the car, it’s her mom.

Cut to interior of home. The door swings open and Dwight walks in followed by Austin and Cadence.

“Shanessa!” - Cadence’s Mother. She gets up and runs to her daughter giving her a big hug.

“Mom!” - Cadence. She struggles to get out of her mom’s hug. “I know you’re mad at me and I’m sorry but can you tone down the PDA in front of other people please!”

“You two had us worried sick! How did this seem like a good idea to you two? I tolerated you having a girl for a best friend but I knew in the end it would end up being trouble. This ends here!” - Daryl

“What!?” - Cadence

“You can’t tell me who I can be friends with, it doesn’t work that way!” - Austin

“I’m your father which means it does work that way. I’m sorry but one day you’ll thank me.” - Daryl

“I think you’re being too hard on --” - Cadence’s Mom

“I wouldn’t be criticising anyone on their parenting techniques seeing as you have an out of control slut on your hands.” - Daryl

“Excuse me?” - Cadence’s Mom

“Yo! Dad you are out of line!” - Dwight. He gets in his dad’s face. “I get that you're angry but you just called a child a slut. You think you’re right in the head? You got issues and you need help.”

Daryl’s eyes start to well up. “You don’t know! You can’t care about someone and then… and then just go away… It hurt’s! More than I can bare.” Daryl walks over towards Austin. “You don’t know kid… You’ll thank me one day… “ Daryl walks to the door, grabs his jacket and puts it on. “I uh… have to go…” He looks at Cadence and her mother. “I’m sorry for what I said about your daughter, I didn’t mean it.” Daryl leaves the house and drives away.

Later that Evening.

Daryl is still out and Austin and Dwight have just ordered in some pizza and are about to eat.

Dwight asks his brother about his relationship with Cadence. Austin says she's his best friend. She believes in him in a way no one else does. Is he in love with her? Who knows but he’s 14 and there’s lots to do before getting caught up in romance.

Austin goes on to tell his brother that he needs to go back to the station and he’s going to need help. Dwight asks about their dad.

“Dad’s going to get mad at us a lot while we grow up. It’s part of the job description. Besides this is bigger than me and you, this is saving the world Dwight. I’m pretty sure that trumps grounding.” - Austin. He also goes on to tell him about Halvor and how he looks like their dad. He doesn’t act like him but at times he reminds him of how his dad use to be.

Dwight is freaked out a bit by it but is interested to see it. Austin deliberately leaves out the bit about the scientist's avatar.

Austin gets a text from Cadence. Her mom has her on lock down so he’s going to have to break her out.

CUT TO:

INT. Cadence’S BEDROOM

Cadence is laying on her bed playing with her tablet. She sends Austin a text: Where r u?

She gets a reply: be there in 2

She gets up and runs towards the window. She can see the headlights from his brothers truck down the street. As she is looking out the window her bedroom closet door begins to slowly open. Austin quietly steps out and walks towards her. Trying to be all prince charming like, he gets down on one knee and goes to grab her hand and he barely gets out he words “I’m here my princess” when she screams and quickly turns around and instinctively punches Austin in the jaw, not too hard but enough to hurt him a little.

Cut to down stairs of Cadence’s home.

Cadence’s mom hears the commotion but just barely as she is watching something like Entertainment Tonight on TV and it’s kind of loud.

She yells up stairs, “Cadence! Everything okay??” - Cadence’s Mom

“Oh crap!” - Cadence. Realizing what she just did she runs to Austin to make sure he’s okay. She starts to laugh and says, “I’m so sorry.” She walks to the door and opens it up. “Yeah! I’m fine mom! I was just goofing off and fell over.”

Cut to her mom. She catches the last thing she said and shakes her head. “I may have a weird kid but at least she has a normal mom.”

Cut back to the Cadence’s Room.

Cadence gets her jacket on and grabs her bag. “So what’s the plan? How we getting out of here?”

Austin opens her closet door and tells her to get in.

“Wow… You’re really full of yourself aren’t you? Hoping to play a little 7 minutes in heaven?” - Cadence

Austin becomes confused and nervous. “Oh what?! No! I just came in through here so I figured we would leave the same way is all… “ - Austin

“Oh is that all? Sure back out of it, I might have said yes.” - Cadence

“Wait what? Yes? You would have said yes?” Austin

“Moments gone, time to go.” Cadence smirks at Austin.

Cadence walks into the closet. Austin still looking dumbfounded stands there so Cadence pulls him in the closet and the door closes behind them.

Cut to moments later at Dwight’s truck. The door opens and Austin and Cadence get in the truck. Dwight asks where they are off to now and Austin says, “We’re going to the movies boys! oh and girl.”

The truck drives off. A bit of ways down the road a pair of headlights turn on and the car starts and follows the truck.

Cut to:

EXT. MOVIE THEATER

The truck pulls up.

“Why here little brother?” - Dwight

“Remember when we use to go to the movies with Mom and Dad?” - Austin

“Yeah. Remember when we went to go see [INSERT PERIOD REFLECTIVE FILM] and you begged mom to get extra butter on your popcorn and you ate so much of it you ended up puking all over the people in the front rows.” - Dwight

“I also ate a bunch of sour kids and drank a lot of pop. It was a recipe for disaster!” - Austin

“Ew… Wait a second, I remember hearing about that.” - Friend 1

“Yeah and the entire first few rows smelled like barf for the longest time so no one sat there.” - Friend 2

“So what, you wanna puke all over the seats again or what?” - Dwight.

“No, even better.” - Austin. He gets out of the truck and walks to the front door. He puts his key in it and unlocks the door. He opens the door and everyone goes inside and locks the door. Waiting for them in the middle of the foyer is Halvor and the Scientist.

“What the f… “ - Dwight. He stops and his eyes start to well up.

“Okay I know what you’re thinking so let me just let me talk. Yes she looks mom but no this isn’t her. Like Halvor, they scanned my memories and picked a suitable avatar to interface with me. I just thought, wouldn’t it be a trip to hang out with all of us together again?” - Austin

“Jesus Christ Austin… This is all kinds of messed up… “ - Dwight

“Not messed up Dwight, it’s a miracle. I mean sure, it’s not her but who else in the world ever gets this chance? And on top of that we are going to save this station and everyone on the Earth and there’s no one in the world I would rather do it with then the people here in this room… minus Hack and Slash over there.” - Austin. He looks over at Dwight’s friends who are having a pretend sword fight with props from a poster of a medieval movie.

“You know there probably isn’t a therapist in the world who can help me with the issues that will come from this.” - Dwight.

“This is your therapy big brother. Come meet her, she won’t bite, literally actually cause she's a hologram.” - Austin

Austin and Dwight approach Halvor and the Scientist.

“Hey Guys! Thanks for meeting us here. I’d like for you to meet my big brother Dwight.” - Austin

“Well howdy there Dwight, I’m Halvor and this little lady here would be the Scientist.” - Halvor

“Hello Dwight, I’m pleased to meet you. This must be very strange for you, we asked Austin if we should change our appearances but he insists it’s helping him.” - TS

“Whoa this is seriously trippy… You do look how I remember her… “ Dwight stares at her. “But no I agree, don’t change, believe it or not my little brother has changed a lot since he discovered this place. It seems to be making him a better person, more confident. So I guess it can’t be that bad.” - Dwight

“We can’t keep calling you the Scientist, it just won’t do. - Cadence

“What are you thinkin?” - Austin

“Celeste. I think it’s a beautiful name and it is fitting for a strong smart and beautiful woman.” - Cadence

“Oh I like that!” - TS

Both Austin and Dwight say, “Really?” with a confused and kind of disgusted look that makes you tell they are brothers.

“I think that’s a perfect name my dear.” - Halvor to Cadence.

“It’s your choice, if you want that name then take it.” - Austin

“Oh yes I do, thank you Cadence.” - Celeste

“Okay kiddies I think it’s time we got down to business. Let’s go to theater 1 cause I gots something to show yah.” - Halvor

Everyone enters theater 1 carrying popcorn, pop and candy.

Halvor and Celeste go stand in front of the screen. A movie starts to play describing who the Curators are, the purpose of the station and the roles they play. This is where they introduce the types of bots and drones on the station. NERO is one of them. Once NERO is brought up, they talk about finding him because without him they would have no hope in fixing the engineer. They then proceed to show footage of the disaster that wrecked the station. ENTER FLASBACK 2 In order to do that, Celeste has written a repair program that needs to be injected into the engineers program. NERO is the only bot capable of interfacing with the engineers program.

NERO’s last known location was near the residential area. Communications and sensors in that area are badly damaged. If NERO is still active, then he should be trying to fix the Engineer’s program but wasn’t happening. There are limited sensors in that section, all they know is something is happening. Power is being re-routed there and although the sensors are out, a visual inspection out of a window shows that certain parts of the station are being stripped but for what purpose? That’s what they need to go and investigate.

**[For this part of the mission Austin will have to go through the damaged parts of the station which means he and Cadence will get to put on futuristic space suits. These look a bit like the octagon discs only white. You press it up to your chest and outside of the box comes a certain type of programmable matter that covers the being wearing it. It is not at all bulky. It feels like skin but gives them speed, strength, allows them to breathe when necessary, works in the water and magnetizes in low gravity situations]**

Shortly after they repaired the life support system, the engineers program somehow interfaced with the simulation and is causing issues at the Rock Quarry. Right now the issues seem to be localized to the quarry but sensors show that it is increasing. The only way the engineers program could have interfaced with the simulation is if NERO is out there. If he is then they need to find him and chances are he is still in the residential area.

**[Why would NERO interface the Engineers program with the simulation? NERO knows what they have done with the simulation and he’s worked out how the Scientist intends on repairing the program. In order for NERO to make the repairs necessary he needs create a way for him to gain access to engineers backdoor which the simulation does.]**

That’s one part of what needs to be done. The second part is a supply run. Since Celeste has been active she has a better idea of what’s going on in the station. There are storage bays near the simulation room that have containers of programmable matter. They need to bring it back to the simulation. Halvor can also use the programmable matter to repair CLARC and it wouldn’t hurt to have some to help them out.

In order to pull this off they will split up into two teams. Austin needs to be the one to find NERO as he will only accept commands from a Curator. Cadence interjects that she is going with Austin and they can’t stop her. Halvor agrees and he tells them Celeste will accompany them. Austin wants to know why Halvor isn’t going too and he tells him he is the only one who can get the rest of the people through the station without another Curator. Everyone gets up and leaves to the station.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOVIE THEATER - CONTINUOUS

The truck that was following them pulls up next to Dwight’s truck. A man steps out of it, all you can see is the lower portion of his legs.

The man walks over to the theater which is closed. He tries the doors but they are locked. The camera slowly starts to reveal who the man is. It is Daryl the boy's father.

“Where in the hell did they go?” Daryl

CUT TO:

INT. STATION - WORKROOM

Austin, Cadence and Celeste are preparing for their journey. Since Celeste has no physical form she can’t directly touch anything, however since she is tied into the station network she can make doors or hatches open. She opens up a hatch which contains several life support discs. Austin and Cadence get one and press it onto their chests. They are amazed and weirded out when the suit expands. Cadence mentions how she feels like she isn’t wearing anything. Just then a heads up display shows up on the front of their helmets that tell them their life signs and the status of their suits. They can also scan and detect threats. Cadence mentions how it reminds her of Iron Man to which Austin replies he felt the same thing but he would rather look like Thor than Iron Man.

They venture out into the dark and lifeless parts of the station. There are various things floating around including water and plant form. They also make notice of the parts of the station which have noticeably been stripped. They see a sign indicating the residential area and continue forward.

CUT TO:

Halvor, Dwight and his 2 friends are walking down a corridor. Dwight isn’t saying much while his two friends are making comment about how they feel like they are in a video game. Halvor tries to make small talk with Dwight but he isn’t biting. One of the friends asks if they can hear that high pitched noise. No one pays attention. Halvor tries again with Dwight and he snaps. He yells at him that this whole experience is creepy and the fact that he looks like their dad turns this whole thing into a nightmare for him. He is here to help with repairs, not have fun with a robots and spaceships. He walks away from Halvor. Halvor shouts at him, “HEY! I may look like your old man but I am not him. So you have daddy issues but so does your little brother and he is capable of knowing the difference between him and a computer program. You’re supposed to be his big brother, maybe it’s time you started acting like one. We don’t have to be friends but we have to work together if we don’t want to die. You don’t want small talk that’s fine but don’t treat me like I’ve done something wrong.” Halvor walks away. Dwight pauses and lets his guard down. He goes back to Halvor and he tells him he is right and he apologizes, he will try to be better. Halvor then says the storage room is just up ahead. The friend mentions again this high pitched sound.

CUT TO:

Austin, Cadence and Celeste enter the residential area. The residential area stretches out for miles with dwellings and plant life everywhere. There are strange fiber optic looking cables coming out of residences and leading to a strange structure in the center of the area. Celeste says the sensors aren’t working as they should be. The drone she is using has it’s own internal sensors and she is picking up a lot of info through that. The cables appear to be connected the residences power units. They run separately from the station in case of a power failure. These aren’t earth like generators, these are very much more powerful but what could they powering? Austin and Cadence talk about Austin’s dads reaction. He tells her about his mom’s sickness and how it changed him. “He said he never loved anyone like he loved her and when she died it’s like the entire universe let him down.”

“Is he that way with your brother too?” - Cadence

“No, you see that’s the weird thing, he picks on my brother but has never said a thing about the girls he goes out with.” - Austin

“May I offer up an observation?” - Celeste

Austin shrugs his shoulders. “Sure”

“I can’t say to know too much about your brother or father but from a biological point of view I can tell that your brother strongly resembles your father and you look your mother.” - Celeste

“That makes sense Austin.” - Cadence

“Maybe. But it doesn’t really matter what my dad wants. I’m not going to let his fears become mine and he’s just going to have to accept that.” - Austin

“That’s a very mature outlook Austin, now you just have to figure out how talk to him which will be the hardest part.” - Celeste

“Why do I have to say anything? I’ll just do it and he will have to accept it.” - Austin

“Communication happens on many levels. Speaking is one form but actions are another. When someone does something out of spite, you feel it and it creates negative feelings. If you want to communicate to your father that you want to be your own capable person than you need to make sure that your actions reflect that.” - Celeste

Austin agrees. Cadence points out that she may not be his real mom but she sure dishes it out like she is. They show up to a dome that was manufactured using pieces of the station and where the fiber optic cables go.

“WARNING INTRUDER ALERT!” - NERO

CUT TO:

Dwight Halvor and the friends have loaded up some platforms with some of the containers of programmable matter. They exit the storage room and head into the corridor.

“Can we see it?” - Dwight

His two friends are in agreeance with him.

Halvor opens up a container and there is silver sand glistening with tech lightning.

“It’s harmless.” Halvor puts his hand in it and picks up some. “Until it’s given instructions they are dormant.”

“How do you repair yourself with it?” - Dwight

Halvor licks his finger and then quickly dabs his finger onto the sand. He then shows them his finger. The sand begins to react Halvor’s form begins to glitch out. They now see CLARC’s form emerging and repairs are being made. Halvor’s form completely disappears and it’s CLARC again. The protector disc falls to the ground and Dwight picks it up.

“Are you okay CLARC?” - Dwight

“This unit is now fully operational.” - CLARC

“Hey you dropped this when you were repairing.” Dwight

“Ah the protectors progra-- ALERT power conduit overload is eminent. Evacuate the area immediately.” - CLARC

A loud high pitched sound occurs and everyone starts to run with the platforms. CLARC tells Dwight to hop on and he does. He begins to push him at a fast speed. He catches up to the friends who look over at CLARC over taking them. A big explosion happens and everyone goes flying forward.

CUT TO:

The station shakes knocking Austin and Cadence to their feet. NERO jumps out of the dark and lands over top of Cadence.

“INTRUDER ALERT!” - NERO

“NERO no!” Celeste runs at NERO but passes through him.

Austin looks over and yells, “STOP! I am a Curator, see I have a key, you have to listen to me!”

NERO looks at Austin and scans the key. He immediately responds by stepping off Cadence and returning to a neutral stance.

“Curator, I have detected an intruder, how shall I proceed?” - NERO

“You will first recognize her as my friend and she will not be harmed. She has guest privileges.” - Austin

“Excuse me? Guest?” - Cadence

“What else should I say? My girl friend? \*laughs\*” - Austin

With a totally serious face, “Sure, why not?” - Cadence

“Um maybe cause we’re not.” - Austin

“We pretty much are.” - Cadence

“She’s got a point, Austin, you do act like it.” - Celeste

“We act like best friends because that’s what we are.” - Austin

“How is this conversation relevant?” - NERO

Cadence looks at Austin. “You really don’t feel anything for me other than a ‘bestie’?”

“I never really thought about it… sure there have been a few moments but aren’t we too young to worry about that stuff?” - Austin

“Well maybe you should start thinking about it cause I’m a catch you know and I probably won’t be on the market for much longer.” - Cadence

“I think you need to be around other guys in order for someone else to find you interesting.” - Austin

“Is that what you want? For me to go meet new guys so you can get rid of me?” - Cadence

“What? No, I don’t want to get rid of you or for you to go meet other guys, I like the way things are.” - Austin

“Things change Austin, you out of all people should know that. Keep up or get left behind.” - Cadence

“Yeah well thanks for sharing how you feel with me. I need time to process this okay?” - Austin

“This conversation is most puzzling.” - NERO

CUT TO:

Everything is black and then a fuzzy picture shows with a high pitched sound.

Dwight stands up and looks around. The hall they just came from is blocked with rubble but he can see through the cracks and into the simulation. He sees his friends poke out from around the corner. They check to see that he is okay and ask about CLARC. Dwight starts to panic and tries to see if he can see if CLARC is in the rubble.

“Uh dude, after you passed out CLARC put you down and then proceeded to take the containers to the simulation.” - Friend 2

“He what?” - Dwight

“Yah man, he just put you down and then ran off that way with the containers. He just left you there.” - Friend 1

CLARC returns. “You are up, good I see your injuries were indeed minor.”

“You just left me there? Didn’t even stop to check if I was okay?” - Dwight.

“I did check on you. Your vitals indicated you fainted, something you share with your brother.” - CLARC

“These guys said you just put me down and then hurried off.” - Dwight

“I see where the misunderstanding lies. I am equipped with all types of sensors. It took me .3 seconds to run a full analysis, 3 times.” - CLARC

The boys all look at each other and are dumbfounded.

“I am advanced.” - CLARC

“No kiddin… “ - Dwight. He reaches in his pocket and pulls out the protectors disc. “Oh hey we better put this back on you.”

CLARC approaches him and turns around. Dwight is about to insert the disc when he looks through a crack in one of the walls. There seems to be a room full of deactivated CLARC’s. “Whoa… are they like your brothers?”

“Brothers is a biological label, droids are droids but if it helps, sure.” - CLARC

“Why are they all in here and not doing anything around the station.” - Dwight

“They activate when they are needed, they are not needed right now.” - CLARC

“Yeah but they could be repairing the station couldn’t they?” - Friend 1

“That is not what they were designed to do. The stations self repair protocols are controlled by the engineer however if a Curator ordered them to they could begin to repair the station.” - CLARC

“I’ll mention it to my brother, might speed things up.” - Dwight

Dwight puts the protectors disc in CLARC and he turns into Halvor again.

“Whew! Didn’t expect that to happen. Hey it worked! CLARC’s hardware has been repaired and I have wireless again. We should get going before anything else happens.” - Halvor

CUT TO:

NERO, Celeste, Austin and Cadence are checking out the dome.

“What the heck happened in here?” - Austin

“Shortly after the solar flare event the Curators entered stasis. All except for two. One managed to restore the shields and then that portion of the station lost structural integrity and he died. I managed to hang on and began sealing that section.” NERO walks towards Celeste. “You and the protector were not responding which meant I could not make any repairs to the engineers program.” NERO

“You couldn’t follow your primary orders, what conclusion did you come to if you had no orders.” - Celeste

“Every A.I. is programmed to ensure the survival of the Curators and the origin pod. That became my number one priority.” - NERO

“Aren’t all the Curators dead?” - Cadence

“Negative. When life support started failing so did the stasis pods. I had to build a self sustainable life boat using parts of the ship.” - NERO

“I don’t have access to that part of the ship and from visual inspection the stasis chamber was stripped.” - Celeste

“Is that what this dome is? You built a new stasis chamber out of station parts and are using the power units from the residences to sustain it?” - Austin

“Precisely.” - NERO

“Wow I guess that makes you a hero NERO!” - Cadence

“I have not saved them yet. In order to maintain the simulation; after you integrated the stations systems into it, power levels started draining faster. If you are to be successful then the continuation of the simulation is necessary, so I am siphoning power to the simulation.” - NERO

“Won’t that kill the Curators?” - Austin

“Not if we can repair the Engineer. I assume you’re the one who integrated him into the simulation?” - Celeste

“Affirmative. Now I have the means to inject him with your repair program.” - NERO

Celeste becomes worried. “We should get back, my sensors just came back online and there’s a breach in the simulation. A power conduit blew near the storage room which is located behind the simulation room.”

“Dwight was there!” - Austin. They all run back.

CUT TO:

Back at the workroom Halvor, Dwight and his friends are waiting for the other team to arrive.

“Where are they?” - Dwight

“Don’t worry Dwight, they are on their way.” - Halvor

“Yeah? How do you know?” - Dwight

Halvor points to his head. “I’m networked with the station again now that CLARC’s been repaired. I’ve been in touch with Celeste for the past 10 minutes.” - Halvor

“Dude! You couldn’t have told me that as soon as you had word?” - Dwight

“Nobody asked me.” - Halvor

Austin, Cadence, Celeste and NERO enter. Both Cadence and Austin press on their chests and remove their suits. Austin runs to his brother and hugs him.

“I thought something happened to you after that last explosion.” - Austin

“Psh, it takes far more than a little explosion to kill Loki the god of mischief!” - Dwight

“Sons of Asgard?” Austin reaches his hand out. Dwight smiles and puts his hand on top of Austin’s.

“Sons of Asgard.” - Dwight

“What are the Sons of Asgard?” - Cadence

“After my mom passed away Dwight and I would pretend play Thor. Dwight made me my own Mjolnir and I would dress up as Thor and he would be Loki.” - Austin

“Aren’t Thor and Loki enemies though? Like Loki’s always trying to get rid of him.” - Friend 2

“Actually we didn’t play that way. Our Thor is in another universe than the Marvel one. In our universe Loki and Thor work together to protect the Nine Realms.” - Dwight

“Awesome” Friend 2. Grins.

“Dwight, I want you to meet another friend of mine. This is NERO, the engineers right hand droid.” - Halvor

“Hey.” - Dwight.

“I do not mean to be rude but you humans waste a lot of time with meaningless conversations. We have a job to do and barely enough hands to do it.” - NERO

“What do you mean not enough hands?” - Austin

“That last explosion breached the back part of the simulation and some of the programmable matter was sucked into a vortex the Engineers unstable program is causing. In order to protect itself it has created an army.” - NERO

“What do you mean an army?” - Cadence

Halvor turns a display on and it has an image of the quarry. There are hundreds of NERO duplicates of a slightly different color protecting the engineer.

“Oh man this is getting intense.” Friend 1

“If we are going to go up against these guys we should have some kind of protection right?” - Friend 2

“We could all use those space suits, there’s enough of them for all of us to use. Oh and Halvor has Mjolnir so we have that.” - Cadence

“Yeah but how the heck are we supposed to get past all those NERO’s? I doubt even with those suits it will be enough to take all of them on.” - Austin

“What if we had our own army?” - Dwight

Dwight winks at Austin and tells him about the room of CLARC’s. They could activate them and Austin could order them to help out.

“What’s all the programmable matter for?” - Austin

“In case you may think we will need something. I can literally create whatever you can think.” - Halvor

“Could we modify our space suits?” - Austin

“Absolutely! What did you have in mind?” - Halvor

CUT TO:

A cool transformation scene of Austin and Dwight becoming Thor and Loki with kick ass music playing. [The outfits look like the film versions but more tech like for this film.]

“Awesome” Both Friends at the same time.

“Wow you look pretty bad ass in that Thor gear.” - Cadence

“Yeah? Chris Hemsworth wears it better but yeah I do look pretty bad ass don’t I?” - Austin

“The Sons of Asgard to save the day again hey little brother?” - Dwight

“Absolutely! You guy’s think about what you’re going to wear to battle?” Austin asks both of Dwight's friends.

“Oh yeah, check out this power duo.” - Friend 1

Another transformation scene happens and the two friends turn into Legolas and Gimli from Lord of the Rings.

“Now there’s an interesting mash-up, Thor meets Lord of the Rings. Well I’m going to break from ripping off movies and I’ve designed my own suit.” - Cadence. She pulls out her sketchbook and shows them her suit which looks like a wizard but tech looking.

“Wow this is pretty cool Cadence!” - Austin

“Thanks.” Cadence says while smiling at Austin.

“It doesn’t have any cool armor or anything.” - Friend 2

“That’s the point idiot.” - Cadence

“Hey you don’t have to be so mean to him, he was just saying we are going into battle and that suit doesn’t look like it’s designed for that.” - Friend 1

“That’s the point.” - Austin. He looks over at Cadence and smiles at her and she back.

“What do you mean?” - Dwight.

“Cadence’s a lover, not a fighter. She respects all things and believes violence doesn’t always have to be an option.” - Austin

“I get that I do, but I don’t think we have a choice here, those robots are going to try to stop us and I don’t think they will care if we come in peace or not.” - Dwight

“I didn’t say she wasn’t going to help us out, she is just going to take a different approach.” - Austin

Dwight and his friends look at each other and have no idea what he means.

“It doesn’t matter, when the battle starts you will see what she can do. Which leads me to my battle plan.” - Austin

“You have a plan? No offense but don’t you think these vastly superior robots should be making the plan?” - Friend 1

“Don’t turn your back on someone because you lack insight. You should see the things this kid has pulled off, I trust him enough to hear him out and so should you.” - Halvor

“Thanks Halvor.” Austin. He walks over the a table where a hologram of the quarry appears. He marks the location of the engineer and the NERO duplicates. “If they tried to rush them, even with the suits, they will get overwhelmed so instead they are going to send in the CLARC droids. CLARC droids are not programmed to fight but we can upload a personality subroutine into them.”

Sid's face lights up, “Are you saying we can pick any personality real or fiction?”

“That's exactly what I'm saying” Austin replies.

Sid deep in thought, scratches her head and says “So we could literally create an army of superheroes?”

Halvor interjects. “Actually, we only have two modules available to us so I will have to network half the CLARC's to one of the modules and the other half to the other.”

At the exact same time Sid and Doughboy yell out, “LET US CHOOSE!”

Dwight, Austin and Halvor all have the look of dread on their faces. Cadence has the look on her face that is both exicted and intrigued. “Let them do it,”Cadence says in a high pitched squeal.

Austin looks at her in shock. “Are you serious?”

Cadence runs over to Austin and looks him in the eyes. “Let them do it. I know they seem like dumb stoners to you but I think we can clearly see they have some depth worth exploring. Let them do this.”

Austin looks at Dwight and Dwight looks to Sid. Dwight knew those two idgits since the third grade and they were his best friends. “I trust them with my life little brother,I say we give them a chance.”

Dwight smiles at his friends and then he notices Sid in a different light. For the first time he was really seeing her, not just as a woman but as a more complex human being.

Austin hearing his brother grabs the modules and passes them to Sid and Doughboy. “Looks like the jobs yours. I won't lie, I'm a bit skeptical but you got some pretty strong backing. I look forward to seeing what you can do.”

Sid and Doughboy high five. Austin walks back to the map and is about to continue going on with his plan when Doughboy put his hand up.

Austin looking confused asks, “Do you have a question?”

Doughboy looks at his hand and is shocked. “oh, guess I do!” He forces his hand down and asks, “could we use some of that techno dust to make some transportation? Maybe? Perhaps? Possibly?” He pauses for a moment and then adds a great big jolly smile and says, “pretty please?”

Austin laughs. “Sure man, if you think it will help, why not?”

Doughboy and Sid rush towards Celeste both talking a hundred miles an hour. Austin interjects, “Use the PADS and input what you want and then click the big green button.”

Doughboy and Sid slowly sit down clasping their PADS trying to contain their excitement.

“Doctor and Sid… Wait, who's Sid? Aren't you Sid?” Austin points at Sid in confusion.

Doughboy stands up and says “Uh I'm dressed as Cid with a ‘C’ from Final Fantasy Four and she's Sid with an ‘S’ but she's dressed as The Doctor. You see?”

Austin replies in Spanish, “Si.”

Doughboy looking all confused points to himself and replies, “C. Sid.”

“Oh yeah no I get it.” Austin pats Doughboy on his shoulder and Doughboy quickly smiles and sits back down.

Austin performs the Picard Maneuver and goes back to this plan.”You two are going to help clear a path for me and NERO using whatever you plan on doing with the CLARC'S. Your Sonic Screwdriver and your hammer will work as they should which means what your Sonic lacks in firepower, it will make up with it's ability to mess with the NERO replicas. Cid uses a mighty hammer but I'm feeling like maybe since I have Moljnir maybe for the sake of variety you choose something else?”

All cocky like Doughboy replies, “Oh don't worry about that, you got your flashy Hammer and mine is totes different. I got the best fucking idea, you don't even know.”

“Okay, I don't know what that means… moving on. Dwight will have Loki's helmet which has sensors that scans his thoughts and gives him the ability to make illusions and pretty much anything else Loki can do. You are going to cover us.”

“Can’t I just make you invisible with my powers?”

“The droids would still be able to detect your heat signatures and hear your heart beats.” - Celeste

“Which is why I didn’t go with that idea. Now our Ace in the hole is going to be Cadence. She will be back with Celeste working her magic.” - Austin

“Actually,” Celeste interjects, “in order to make The Doctor’s transportation I will have to download my program into it but I won't need Bonkers so she can have her to watch her back.”

“I'm cool with that besides I got my techno magic so I don’t really need the assist but I'll take it.”

“And we still have no idea what that “magic” is.” - Doughboy

“Trust me when I say, it will be awesome. When NERO and I finally get close enough to the engineer he will no doubt try to stop us. So far the engineer hasn’t taken a solid form. NERO limited his interface with the station and forced him into created a physical body which is what will give NERO access to his program. Once we are close enough he can inject the program into him and the effects should be instantaneous.” - Austin

“Wow… That’s actually a pretty decent plan even without knowing what your ace in the hole is.” - Dwight

“Thanks big brother.” - Austin

“Well this is it guy’s, final boss battle. Do you wish to save your progress as there is no turning back if you decide to move forward.” - Halvor

Everyone looks confused but Austin who is grinning.

“You sound like a video game… Wait is this whole thing just a crazy video game?” - Friend 2

“Dude, totally. Video games rule.” - Friend 1 and 2 high five.

“Okay I told him to say that, I thought it would be funny but it went over your heads.” - Austin

“You’re a geek.” - Cadence as she smiles at him.

Austin smiles back and calmly says, “Geronimo.”

“Actually it probably isn’t a bad idea to go home first and see our families before we do this. I mean we could die, there is no reset button.” - Dwight

“Good idea, don’t take too long but I don’t think the engineer will try anything and if he does we will contact you.” - Halvor

Austin and the gang return to their homes.

CUT TO:

Ext. Austin’s House - Daytime

Dwight and Austin pull up to their house and are sitting in Dwight’s truck.

“This is pretty crazy isn’t it?” Austin

“Crazy doesn’t even begin to cover it little brother.” Dwight

Both the brothers laugh.

“Do you think we should tell Dad about the key?” Austin

“Honestly? If I found that key I’d probably never return to this place… “ Dwight

“You’d leave me alone with him?” Austin

“Of course not! I would never leave you alone with him.” - Dwight

“So you think we should just pack up our stuff and move to the space station?” Austin

“Well other than the fact it’s falling apart, robots are everywhere and some of them are trying to kill us, it still seems safer than being here.” Dwight

Austin looks at his house and his dad's truck parked in the driveway. He looks sad.

“Why can’t he be a father? He’s so miserable and mean, it’s like he doesn’t even know he is hurting us…” Austin

“He knows Austin, he just doesn’t care.” Dwight

“No, he does, I see it in his eyes. He cares deeply and in some twisted way it’s why he treats us the way he does.” Austin

“You’re just a kid Austin, you see that in his eyes cause you still have some part of your innocence left. In a few more years he will treat you the exact same way he treats me and you will see him for the monster he really is.” Dwight

“Maybe… or maybe if we tell him about the key and show him what’s over there, it might change his worldview.” Austin

“That man doesn’t deserve your faith in him Austin! If he had to choose between the bottle and saving his sons lives, he would choose the bottle every single time. If you don’t believe me, go in there and tell him everything and I guarantee you he will be the dick he has always been.” Dwight

“No Dwight, he wouldn’t and maybe you’ve lost your innocence but I’m not giving up on him, not yet!” Austin

Austin gets out of the truck and runs up to his house.

CUT TO:  
  
INT. Austin’S HOUSE

Daryl is sitting in his chair drinking whiskey. Austin runs in the house.

“Dad!” Austin

Daryl continues to drink and doesn’t look at Austin.

“Where have you boys been?” Daryl

“Dad! You’re never going to believe what I have to tell you.” Austin

“I don’t want to hear it! You boys have turned out to be the most disrespectful little punks! When I tell you that you are grounded, that doesn’t mean sneak out and go to the movies!” Daryl

“No but dad you don’t understand.” Austin

Daryl gets out of his chair and rushes over to Austin.

“No you don’t seem to understand! I am your father, when I say something you don’t question it, you just do!” Daryl

Dwight walks in.

“You!” Daryl

Daryl runs at Dwight with his hand in the air ready to strike at him. Austin picks up an egg which are sitting in a basket near the kitchen and throws it at his father’s head breaking it and yolk dripping down his face.

Dwight and Daryl look shocked. Daryl looks at Austin and is pissed.

“What!? Are you going to hit me too!?” Austin

“How dare you!” Daryl

“How dare me!? You’re the parent! We aren’t supposed to fear you. You’re supposed to love us and make sure harm doesn’t come to us but you’re nothing but a big old bully. Dwight is right, my faith in you is misplaced. From now on you will never see us again. You’re dangerous dad…” Austin

Dwight stands there ready to spring into action in case his dad loses it on Austin.

“Where do you think you’re going to go? No one will want you and you think two little punks can make it on their own?” Daryl

“You don’t know the first thing about us or what’s going on in our lives. Maybe if you spent sometime with your boys instead of the bottle you’d know about this!” Austin pulls the key out and shows it to him.

“Oh you found a key did you? Everything is solved! You found a key!” Daryl

“Mock him all you want Daryl but that doesn’t change the fact that we are out of here. Let’s go Austin.” Dwight goes to leave and Daryl charges at him again.

“You aren’t going anywhere.” Daryl

Austin then jumps on the dining room table and starts to throw the rest of the eggs at Daryl. “RUN DWIGHT!” Austin

Dwight runs out the door and Austin proceeds behind him. Daryl falls to the ground and can’t get up due to the slippery surface.

CUT TO:

EXT. Austin’S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

“Let’s get our team together and finish this.” Austin

“Hey Austin” Dwight

Austin looks at Dwight.

“I’m proud of you kid, standing up to him like that. Mom would be proud.” Dwight.

Austin’s eye tear up. “Thank bro”

They get in the truck and drive off.

Daryl walks out of the house and watches them drive away. He wipes off the egg on him and decides to follow them.

CUT TO:

ROCK QUARRY - SUNSET

Dwight pulls up to a storage building at the quarry. Austin and Cadence are sitting in the front with Dwight and the two friends are in the back of the truck.

They pull up to a garage near the quarry. Everyone gets out and they all stand together in a circle.

“If you asked me a year ago where I saw myself in a year I don’t think I would have said about to go into battle with my little brother against a malfunctioning alien computer program in a holodeck on a space station, oh and if we don’t win the Earth will be destroyed..” Dwight

“But it’s been awesome hasn’t it? I mean sure at first I was scared but with the help of my best friend \*looks at Cadence\* I learned I have bravery in me but it’s also okay to be scared at the same time.” Austin

“It’s okay little dude, we’re scared all the time but that’s why we are so close \*grabs the skinny friend and holds him tight to him\* we make sure we got each others backs.” - Doughboy

Sid breaks away from Doughboy . “Yeah and even though we sometimes violate our buddies personal space.” Sid looks at Doughboy. He shrugs and says “What did I do?”

“We remember that we are all in this together. We all suffer but we don’t have to do it alone. And we always remember, Never cruel or cowardly.” Sid

“Never give up.” - Doughboy

“Never give in!” - Cadence

Everyone looks at Cadence.

“What? I watch Doctor Who. And it’s not the worst promise a person could make.” - Cadence

Austin takes a look around the circle. “Let’s do this.”

Everyone begins to walk towards the locked garage door. Cadence stops and says, “Wait! I think someone has to say this. Are we sure that a bunch of teenagers are equipped enough to take on such a huge undertaking? I mean wouldn’t it have been smarter to go NASA or something?”

Everyone looks at each other. They unanimously shake their heads and say, “No.”

“Good enough for me!” - Cadence

Austin takes out the key and uses it on the garage door. When he opens it up, The Protector and the Scientist are waiting for them with their suits ready to go.

“Cool, okay everyone suit up. Oh and I’m going to close this door but I’ll be leaving it unlocked. I don’t want you guy’s having to risk your lives unnecessarily. If you can’t continue then leave, I’d rather no one die if possible okay?” Austin

“Good idea.” Halvor

[switch to a shot of the garage and surrounding area] The garage door closes. wait about 5 seconds and then show headlights driving up the road to the quarry.

CUT TO:

EXT. GARAGE - SIDE ENTRANCE - SIM - MOMENTS LATER

Everyone is suited up and getting into Dwight’s Truck.

“Okay you guy’s, everyone knows what their jobs are yes?” Halvor

Everyone says Yes.

“Good. NERO is waiting for us at Austin’s starting position. We will drop off Rod and Todd here across the way from where we drop Austin off. Dwight, you go with them to provide support.” Halvor

“No way am I leaving the side of my little brother.” - Dwight

“It’s okay Dwight. There are going to be hundreds of CLARC’S between me and the minions. They will be providing me with all the cover I need but I need you out there because you’re the only one I trust to handle those two.” - Austin

Dwight looks at his brother intently.

“I can’t tell if you are brave and or stupid.” - Dwight

“Have faith in him Dwight.” - Cadence

“Fine. But if things get too hairy you shout for me okay?” - Dwight

“Sons of Asgard?” - Austin

“Sons of Asgard.” - Dwight

The boys hug.

“And don’t worry Dwight, it’s not like I’m sending the Curator out there with no way to defend himself.” - Halvor

Halvor walks to a metal cabinet where Celeste is waiting. She opens up the cabinet revealing Mjolnir.

“If you’re going to battle looking like the God of Thunder you should at the very least take this.” - Celeste

Austin freezes.

“What’s wrong?” Celeste

“You do realize that only someone who is worthy can wield Mjolnir right?” - Austin

Friend 2 comes out of the truck and runs towards Austin.

“Is that what I think it is?” - Friend 2

“Yes but it’s for Wy - “ Celeste

“Well if he ain’t gonna use it then this Dwarf should!” Friend 2

Friend 2 walks over and goes to pick up Mjolnir but it won’t budge.

“What the?? Seriously!” - Friend 2, he starts pulling harder and trying different things to get it off but nothing works.

“How could it possibly work that way? This isn’t a comic!” - Friend 2

“What are you waiting for? If you aren’t worthy then you might as well get it over with.” - Cadence

“I… I just can’t.” - Austin

“Oh wait a minute… I think I know what’s going on here.” - Celeste

“Yeah someone's afraid.” Friend 2

“Yes he is but it’s more than that. Austin, are you afraid if you can’t pick up Mjolnir that it would confirm something a voice inside your head has been saying to you? That maybe you're not worthy?” - Celeste

“My mom died when I was so young and then I lost my dad… I always kind of thought that maybe there’s something wrong with me. That maybe the universe doesn’t think I’m worthy of these things…” - Austin

“That’s just crazy.” - Dwight

Dwight walks over to Austin and looks him the eyes.

“Mom loved you Austin and so does Dad even if he forgot how to act like it. And yeah I get that feeling because I think that about me too.” Dwight

“You do?” - Austin

“Yeah I do. But let’s take stock of some very important information. Look at that key. Out of all the planets and all of the people, it found you. You have what most people would kill for, a real life adventure with infinite possibilities. I’d say if anything, the universe is showing you just how worthy you really are.” - Dwight

Austin looks at his brother and smiles. “I am pretty badass now aren’t I?”

“Don’t let it go to your head butt-head.” - Cadence, she smacks him across the head.

Austin rubs his head and then look at Mjolnir. He walks over to it and stares at it for a few seconds. He then reaches his hand out towards it and in his head this is an epic moment with music and awe… And then he picks it up no problem. It’s surprisingly light.

“Damn.” - Austin

Everyone looks confused.

“Well I was expecting something to happen. Like lightning going all nutty or a crazy white light blinding us all as I grabbed it and power goes surging through me.” - Austin

“Yeah it was very anti-climatic.” - Cadence

“Boy you give these guys the adventure of a lifetime and they still find something to complain about!” Halvor throws his hands up and they all pile in the truck and drive off.

CUT TO:

EXT. GARAGE DOOR - MOMENTS LATER

Daryl is walking around calling out for his boys.

“Dwight! Austin!” - Daryl, walks around Dwight’s truck but sees nothing. He scratches his head and looks at the garage door.

“Austin are you guys in there? I’m not mad I just want to talk.” Daryl. He goes to try the handle and notices that it’s not locked. He turns the handle and lifts the door.

CUT TO:

EXT. GARAGE - SIDE ENTRANCE - SIM - CONTINUOUS

Daryl opens the door and steps outside again.

“Where in the heck are they?” - Daryl

Daryl looks up the way Austin and the gang drove off. He can see dust trails and fresh tire marks. He heads back to his car and drives up the road following them. [Script note: When he drives past the garage again, the garage door should be closed even though he left it open as the door that connects back to our world appears closed in the simulation on the other side]

CUT TO:

DROP OFF POINT - ROCK QUARRY - MOMENTS LATER

The truck comes to a halt. NERO is waiting for them by a stack of shipping containers.

“Whoa using shipping containers to make some cover, smart idea.” Austin

“Actually that would be our backup.” Halvor

Halvor jumps out of the truck and climbs to the upper stack. Everyone gets out of the truck.

The doors opens and inside the containers are the CLARC units. Halvor stares at Dwight with a grin. “Time to wake up...my drones.” Halvor

The CLARC’s all power up and they start to glow green \*ominous music beings to play\*

“Now it’s time to assimilate the human race! Go forward my drones and add their biological and technological distinctiveness to our own!” - Halvor

Dwight looks scared, “I KNEW IT! Austin GET BACK!”

Austin and Halvor start laughing. “It’s a joke big brother, relax.” Austin

“I am seriously going to hurt you one day Austin…” Dwight

Dwight walks over to his brother and hugs him. “Don’t die.” Dwight

“I won’t and neither should you.” Austin

Austin starts to walk towards his position and Cadence breaks off and starts to climb rocks.

“Where are you going? Aren’t you supposed to be with Celeste?”

Cadence stands tall on a rock and looks down and Austin and says, “Look to my coming, at first light, on the fifth day”

Austin smiles and says, “Nice. Good call, going with a Gandalf quote. But seriously where are you going?”

“I need a better vantage point so I’ll be up there with Celeste saving your asses.” Cadence smiles at him and begins her climb.

[Basic story finale]

A battle ensues between Austin’s crew and the bots. Austin is trying to use the cover of the CLARC bots to get NERO close enough to the engineer. Dwight and his two buddies as well as NERO and Austin become overwhelmed by the NERO bots. Cadence intervenes just in time as she uses a magic wand/screwdriver tool to create objects to help them out of the programmable matter.

A little ways off Daryl is driving up to this battle. Bots are flying past him as well as parts of programmable matter and half formed objects. He swerves out of the way of some incoming objects.

Back at the battle Austin is having trouble keeping his strength up. He starts to panic. He calls out for his brother who is also surrounded by bots. He shouts out to his two friends. Friend 2 looks at friend 1 and they nod heads. Friend 1 picks up friend 2 and swings him around as if he were throwing a discus. Friend 2 lands on the bots overwhelming Austin and starts going nutty on them. The engineer takes notice of this and launches an attack on him. He shoots a powerful beam knocking him back towards where the truck is knocking him out. Friend 1 gets angry and launches a powerful arrow attack that isn’t exactly a Legolas attack but power moves can be done in the simulation.

Dwight uses his powers to clear Austin of bots. He checks on Austin. Cadence uses her skills to create a path for Austin to the engineer. Dwight reaches his hand out to Austin and they agree to do this together. NERO is fighting this whole time but we don’t concentrate too much on him. Austin, Dwight, Halvor, friend 1 and NERO regroup and inform Celeste and Cadence they are going to finish it. Friend 1 breaks off to go to tend to his buddy. They start running down the path looking like it’s a straight shot. The engineer becomes aware of this and let’s out a frightful, “ENOUGH!”

A wave of pressure shoots out of the Engineer destroying the path Cadence made and sending the rest of them flying back severely dazing them and knocking Austin out for a moment. As he was the closest to the shock wave, it damages Austin’s suit and he is back to wearing his original clothes with no protection.

Austin begins to come to and there’s lots of dust and debris around. He tries to regain his bearings. He tries to find his brother and all he can see are his friends lying down and hurt. He sees a figure walk past him. Austin desperately tries to see who it is but can’t focus enough. He hears NERO’s voice and then the unknown voice.

“You are obsolete NERO, you will be terminated.” The figure picks up NERO and crushes his robotic head and rips it out of its body. The figure throws the NERO’s body aside as if it was nothing and a small disc much like the ones with the Protector’s and Scientists programs on it falls to the ground.

The engineer’s figure walks over to Austin.

“Curious. Such a small delicate creature” the voice starts wigging out due to the degradation of the engineer’s program.

Austin is looking for Mjolnir but he can’t sense it. The figure’s arm turns into a sword like object and he is getting ready to finish Austin when the key falls out of his pocket.

[script note: The engineer’s avatar is a figure of a person without a face, almost CLARC like but more digital. It looks like blocks cycling and occasionally it copies the face of the person it is talking to but only for a moment before it degrades back into blocks]

This causes the engineer to freeze for a moment as it recognizes the key and it seems to remember that it’s important when all of the sudden Daryl comes running in with a piece of debris beating back the engineer.

“Get away from my son!” Because the engineer is degrading Daryl gets some really good hits on the engineer causing his body to break off and block out. But then the engineer regains control and his face turns into Daryl’s face. He looks at Daryl which scares him. The engineer looks directly into his eyes and says, “Intruder Alert.”

The engineer's hand grows big enough to pick up Daryl as if someone had grabbed a GI Joe. His arms expand outwards and crushes Daryl against a shipping container. The engineer let’s go and Daryl’s body falls to the ground. He isn’t dead but very close.

By this point Austin and the rest of his crew have recovered somewhat. Austin screams, “Dad! No!” Dwight becomes enraged, grabs his staff and starts charging at the engineer. His two friends pick up their arms and start running behind him. Austin looks up at Cadence who is getting up and attempting to provide them cover.

The engineer starts smacking the guys around. Austin looks over at the Protector who is glitching due to damage so he is reverting back to CLARC’s original form.

He looks at NERO’s body and takes notice of the disc. This disc is different in the sense that it looks more like a rainbow jewel but the same shape as the other discs. Austin picks it and examines it, there a small keyhole on one side. He reaches into his pocket to grab the key but he discovers there’s a hole in his pocket. He looks around him and sees the key nearby. He rushes towards it but debris from the battle is flying past him. He manages to grab the key and takes cover.

Being the most scared he has ever been, he takes in a breath and slowly lets it out. He clenches the key and closes his eyes .

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**In his mind he can see his mom. She is wearing Asguardian armor similar to Lady Sif. She kneels down to him and whispers in his ear, “it’s time to be brave my son, we are all counting on you.”**

**Standing all around him he can see his Dwight, Cadence, Cooper, Penny, Sid, Doughboy, Daryl, his friends from school, people from the town and many more people. They were smiling at him, not saying a word but in his heart he could feel them all telling him that they believe in him.**

**Austin’s eyes start to tear up. As he looks to his brother and Cadence, they step away revealing a new person. It’s another Austin dressed in his Winchester gear.**

**Austin looks at him confused. “Why aren’t you in your Thor gear? Aren’t you afraid?”**

**Other Austin smiles at him. “I don’t need to hide behind that anymore. I am enough and always have been. The world doesn’t need another war machine Austin, it needs patience, kindness and understanding.”**

**Austin was seriously considering Other Austin’s words. “But the Engineer isn’t human, it’s a program. It won’t respond to patience, kindness or understanding.”**

**The people around him begin to disassemble into programmable matter which starts to create visuals as Other Austin talks. “We are all programs, the differences between biological or technological matter are superficial, you are programmed to be aware of your existence. Your body is designed to help you manipulate your environment. Your brain’s purpose is to explore and learn more about that environment. What you see as the self is really just sensors trying to determine what it’s environment is like and the impact it has on your vessel or as you call it, a body. Your core programming is self preservation which is done through the action of trying not to get killed and reproducing.d**

**While the Engineer is degrading, its core programming is still intact. Similar to you, it’s programmed to ensure it's own preservation because without him, all life on this station will cease and that goes against our core belief.”**

**“Our core belief?” Austin walks around Other Austin. “You’re the creator?”**

**“Yes but it would be more accurate to say that ‘we’ are the creators.”**

**“What happened here? How did this happen? If you have all of this technology, how could a measly solar flare cripple the station?”**

**“It was not the solar flare that caused the damage, it was ‘us’.”**

**Austin being confused and a little angry by this news got closer to Other Austin. “What do you mean ‘us’? You did this? That seems evil!”**

**“You misunderstand. ‘We’ are not like you with a sense of individual self. We do not have individual forms. We exist in a kind of network where each new idea branches out and as it evolves it influences older branches. The consensus regarding the state of your planet was split down the middle.**

**“Where are you from exactly?” asked Austin.**

**“You are immersed in what you refer to as the third dimension, that is where your vessels originate from. We exist in what you might consider the fourth dimension. A very long time ago we learned about your dimension but we could never exist in that space. We know that your dimension has some small but significant similarities to ours. We developed a way to send and receive information to your dimension. At first we sent commands that would help us determine what kind of environment existed there. We started to learn that we could manipulate the environment on a very small scale but over time it had a cumulative effect. Eventually we changed the environment so much that we were able to create what you know as life. From our point of view life was created in the same way you create machines to manipulate your environment.”**

**“You’re talking about the beginning of life on Earth?”**

**“While this process did take place on your planet, it was not the first place to happen. Our intention was not to create life for the benefit of life being able to exist however, the outcome from it is far beyond what we would have imagined.”**

**“What is the purpose of all this? And you didn’t really answer about why you created this problem.”**

**When we reached a new consensus a new branch was created and a scenario was devised that would help us find an individual who would join us and help save your planet from destruction.”**

**“My planet is in danger?” Austin asked nervously.**

**“Yes, due to the choices Humans are making, you are close to passing the point of no return. That is why we are here. When a planet dies we observe its final moments before we collect all the information about that planet and we can recreate every moment of that planet from its start to end exactly as it was and how it was perceived by every life form that ever existed on it.”**

**“And that’s why you call us Curators?”**

**“Precisely.”**

**“Well not be all rude but that sounds dickish. I mean I get why in Star Trek they have the Prime Directive but if you are what you claim to be and you see whole planets struggling, why not intervene? Why not help them see the error of their ways?”**

**“After spending eons manipulating your universe, we wanted to become purely observers. So much had been done by us and when we realized the extent of our influence we decided to let our creation take a life of its own. And it did, after we stopped guiding the changes, the changes continued to happen. The universe remembers and continues to function on it.**

**Eventually your universe became aware of us, a species long ago made contact with us using bacteria. They detected Infra-low frequency brain waves coming from the bacteria. It is this Infra-low frequency that allowed us to connect to your universe in the first place.**

**We formed a kind of symbiotic relationship with that species and we worked together to observe and know this universe. Over the eon’s we have partnered up with other species to which we refer to as the Curators.**

**The consensus was for a long time that there would be a strict non interference agreement in order to avoid any further contamination of your universe. If a species got to the point where they could find and understand us then we would make ourselves known only to them.**

**We have observed countless species in your universe that have made similar choices to yours and wiped themselves out.**

**“Because we have been observing and learning about your dimension for as long as we have, we have learned to read what you might consider to be the code of the universe.**

**The Curators are not a single species, we choose individuals who follow a personal code to respect all life and practice kindness in everything they do. This station is designed to read the information left behind on worlds that have gone extinct. We can rebuild a world completely through the information we gather including people.”**

**“And what, you chose me?**

**He places his hand over Austin’s heart where a keyhole appears and his hand enters it.**

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At that moment Austin puts the key into the jewel.

Everyone gets blinded by a bright flash. Moments later as things begin to clear, Cadence and Dwight are looking for Austin while Celeste is checking on Daryl and the two friends are helping CLARC up.

Dwight approaches the spot where he last saw Austin and it’s still very dusty. He hears something not far from him so he runs over thinking it’s Austin. Just then the Engineer walks out with Mjolnir sticking out of his chest and his form is blocking out but it is actually building a figure of a person.

“Program...restoration…” The engineer stumbles around.

“Where’s my brother you damn dirty A.I.?” Dwight

“Complete.” Engineer

Finally the engineer takes the form of an older man with a bushy beard, wearing welding goggles and overalls.

Dwight winds up to swing at the engineer when he hears Austin shout, “I’m here Dwight!”

Off to the side through a thick cloud of dust walks out Austin who is dusting himself off.

“Austin!” both Cadence and Dwight yell and run to him.

They check to see that he’s uninjured and they have a group hug. There will be some kind of moment between Cadence and Austin and then they get interrupted by Celeste calling for him.

They rush over to find Daryl barely breathing. Everyone wonders how he got there and Dwight figures he followed them and must have entered the simulation through the garage door they left open.

Austin is blown away that his dad tried to save him and that if he didn’t show up when he did, the engineer would have killed him.

CLARC drones start showing up and are beginning repairs to the simulation.

CUT TO:

INT. SPACE STATION - MEDICAL BAY

Daryl is being monitored on a bed. Because his injuries were caused in the simulation they can heal him however due to his lifestyle choices his body was already in bad shape.

It is because of this they can’t heal him to the point of being balanced and healthy. Dwight doesn’t like that answer and figures that since Austin has the key he can override them. CLARC says that’s true he does have that power now that the station is repairing itself.

Austin is quiet at first and then starts to ask CLARC about the purpose of the station.

CLARC tells him that information can never be destroyed even if it looks like nothing is there. On a planet like Earth,when any type of life form dies, it sheds it’s biological component but the energy that gave it life, that stored all the information they gained still exists. You can find this around the planet. There are plasma tubes you can’t see but that’s where that information goes. The station can read that information and through it the Curators can learn all about the planet, how it lived and how it died right down to the last detail. They are basically futuristic archaeologists.

The simulation room allows them to take the info and recreate whatever time period they want to learn about.

Austin asks about people and CLARC says that it can create individuals and they can recall any information they once possessed. Cadence asks why there aren’t people in the simulation when they used it. CLARC explains that between the solar flare and a glitch in the system they didn’t pick up scans indicating what was happening. Because of that they were never able to access the info. The only thing the simulation could do was recreate a “snap shot” of the way things were at at the moment the key was used to make the connection. Austin then asks about the yo yo. CLARC tells him that the simulation literally recreates everything down to the subatomic level. When two objects with same quantum frequency come into contact, they cancel each other out.

Dwight interjects and asks what they are going to do about their dad. Austin asks how long he will have to live if he heals him. CLARC responds, “A year, maybe less.”

Austin becomes silent. He looks at Dwight, then his father and then at Cadence. She smiles at him and she smiles back. “Heal him.” Austin says.

“Are you sure? I mean that’s a year he will suffer, shouldn’t we put him out of his misery? Lord knows he is miserable as hell.” Dwight

“Do it. And then I’m going to tell him everything, they key, CLARC, the space station, everything.” Austin

Austin wants to give his father one last chance to make things right with his sons.

CLARC points out there is no guarantee he will change but if that’s what he wants, he will do it.

Austin agrees and begins to heal him. CLARC tells him it will take some time before he is ready to talk, they should get cleaned up and head back to the simulation, Celeste is waiting for them there.

CUT TO:

SIMULATION - TOWN SQUARE - DAYTIME

Dwight, Cadence, Austin and the 2 friends show up to where they borrowed the airplane. CLARC, Bonkers and a new NERO are standing next to 3 CLARC like droids only they are different in color and slightly differ in design.

CLARC tells him that the station made these avatars to house the Protectors, Scientist and Engineer’s programs. Well not house as much as gives them bodies to use as their programs are still integrated into the station. Each of them is capable of taking on a human form but they still have their unique droid looks. They turn on their humanoid forms and start congratulating them on their victory. They reveal a table with a feast fit for Asgardians. They eat, listen to music and have fun.

A few hours pass and Celeste informs Austin and Dwight that their dad is coming around and they should go meet him. Everyone drops what they were doing and proceed back to the Medical Bay.

CUT TO:

MEDICAL BAY - MOMENTS LATER

When they get there Celeste says they are still sedating him but they can wake him up safely now.

Austin tells them to proceed.

Daryl starts to come around.

They both greet him and hug him. He asks what happened.

“It’s a long story dad. One you should probably remain laying down for.” - Austin

“What are you talking about? Just tell me what’s going on.” - Daryl

“Well…” Walks out of the way a light blinds Daryl for a second and when he regains his vision Austin, Dwight, Cadence, The Protector, The Scientist, The Engineer, CLARC, the two friends and Bonkers are standing there as a group.

“We got a lot of explaining to do.” Austin

Daryl is shocked at the site of seeing a cleaner version of himself and his dead wife being a part of that group. That’s the final shot, shocked look on face of Dad

END SCENE

CREDITS

AFTER CREDITS SCENE

1 YEAR LATER

INT. SPACE STATION - RESIDENTIAL GARDENS

Celeste is walking through the gardens when a CLARC droid approaches her with a floating window and a warning flashing about viral contaminants found on Earth. Celeste makes reference to when the station was falling apart and how contaminates must have escaped and survived on Earth. “We have to warn Austin.”

THE END

**Notes:**

Cadence has created a comic book called ‘The Sons of Asgard’ with Austin and Dwight’s Thor and Loki starring in it. She will show Austin the comic later in the story and Austin will base their battle suits off her design. [Will need to hire an artist to create mock cover with futuristic versions of Loki and Thor’s suits]

The Curators created the space station for the purpose of collecting information. There is an antenna which was being built where the Curators could use it to absorb the consciousness of every single human being that ever lived and recreate them in that world.

When people die their information still exists. Their DNA remains in the physical world but their consciousness exists as energy. What people can’t see is there is a build up of consciousness around the earth. Every person who has ever lived has added their consciousness to it. It’s not just people either, its animals and other life forms. This array would be able to download all those energy patterns and be able to rebuild things out of people’s memories. It would literally be an encyclopedia of everything on Earth.

The Curators were an ancient alien race that was much like us. They have a deep found respect for life and believed that every life created deserves to be remembered. They have basically figured out how to preserve life even after their bodies have died. You could study an entire world and its history though all the memories and experiences of that world.

The Curators are still alive but they exist in stasis pods hooked up to the ship. The stasis pods were designed to allow the user inside to access people’s life experiences through their point of view. The part of the ship that duplicates the earth is meant for physical interactions so that the user may experience from an outsiders point of view. In our terms it may be like entering your favorite TV show and being able to interact with all the characters.

The Curators were scientists and they were in the last stages of getting their station complete when disaster struck. An explosion caused from severe solar activity leads to them having to take refuge in the stasis pods.

The station is very advanced. It has self healing capabilities as do the robots. The explosion did not reach the core because it is the most fortified part of the station. Nothing less than a supernova could destroy it.

When a life form enters the station they are immediately scanned and the environment changes to suit their needs.

The Curators did not believe in killing and therefore nothing on that ship is designed for that purpose.

Notes to self: Make sure that you touch base on Dwight’s underage drinking. Have someone confront him about it and the dangers of it.