Boss Battle

J. Patrick Moss

Big Dog Publishing

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P.O. Box 1401
Rapid City, SD 57709

In memory of
Matthew McEnnerney

Boss Battle was first performed by the Chase High Theater Troupe at Chase High School, Forest City, NC, on May 5-6, 2022: J. Patrick Moss, director.

Boss Battle

COMEDY. Four strangers meet in an online fantasy videogame on a quest to defeat the immortal, computer-generated evil dark lord, Belnod "The Destroyer." The motley group includes a player with a mic that cuts out when she gets angry or excited; a student who has to get his English grade up or he'll be banned from gaming for months; a hyper new player who tends to get other characters killed; and the group's no-nonsense leader, who doesn't like new players. After two disastrous attempts to defeat Belnod, the group reluctantly agrees to meet in person for the first time to plan their final raid. After hatching an ingenious scheme to obtain an uber-powerful weapon, the players reunite a final time in an attempt to defeat Belnod. Audiences will love this hilarious, joke-filled send-up of online gaming! Easy to stage.

Performance Time: Approximately 60-75 minutes.

Characters

(3 M, 6 F, opt. extras)
(With doubling: 2 M, 3 F)

Videogame Characters

KORI: A "healer" character in the videogame "Realm"; female.

BASH: A cocky, swaggering warrior character in the videogame "Realm"; as a "tank," his job is to deal and receive the most damage in the game; wears armor; male.

NED: An eccentric multi-class character in the videogame "Realm" who has serious mic problems; female.

MRYX: An overly enthusiastic, high-damage dealing "evoker" character who casts powerful spells in the videogame "Realm"; female.

BELNOD "THE DESTROYER": The immortal computer-generated Dark Lord who repeats scripted lines in the videogame "Realm"; male.

Gamers

ERIN BANKS (aka "Kori"): A student who plays the character of Kori in the videogame "Realm"; doesn't like new gamers; female.

DAKOTA FERRIER (aka "Bash"): A shy student into cosplay and math who plays the character of Bash in the videogame "Realm"; must get his English grade up or he'll be banned from gaming for months; doesn't like multi-class gamers; wears armor; male.

WINTER PROCTOR (aka "Ned"): A homeless student without many friends who plays the multi-class character of Ned in the videogame "Realm"; her mic cuts out if she speaks too loudly; female.

SHELBY THOMPSON (aka "Mryx"): A hyper middle school student who plays the character of Mryx in the videogame "Realm"; female.

Options for Doubling

NOTE: Videogame characters may be played by the same actor, if desired.

KORI/ERIN BANKS (female)
BASH/DAKOTA FERRIER (male)
NED/WINTER PROCTOR (female)
MRYX/SHELBY THOMPSON (female)

Settings

Inside the fantasy online videogame "Realm" and The Supreme Bean coffee shop.

Sets

Inside the videogame "Realm." Fantasy cutouts adorn the mid-stage traveler. For Belnod's lair, there is a large, intimidating throne.

The Supreme Bean coffee shop. There are comfy chairs, a couch, and a small table.

Synopsis of Scenes

ACT I
Scene 1: Inside the videogame "Realm."
Scene 2: Inside the videogame "Realm," days later.

ACT II: The Supreme Bean coffee shop.

ACT III: Inside the videogame "Realm."

Props

Sheets of paper
Quill
Pair of bunny ears, for Ned
Golden kazoo
Brightly colored book entitled, "Gaming Jargon for Morons"
Armor, for Bash
Serving tray
Coffee cups
Giant hammer or sledgehammer
Staff, for Mryx
Gold coins
Sword, for Belnod

Special Effects

Sound of an explosion
Sound of angelic voices, for Healing Wave
Dramatic music, for Belnod's lair
Evil sound effects/lighting, for Plague Cloud descending
Evil laugh (opt.), for Belnod
Roaring sound (opt.), for Belnod
Blue filter
Special effect/lighting, for Strength of the Martyr
Special effect/lighting, for Ebon Vortex
Special effect/lighting, for Cure Crucial
Special effect/lighting, for Gift of the Vulcan
Special effect/lighting, for Lava Blast
Lightning effect, for Tempest Bolt
Special effect/lighting, for Paralyzing Stare
Special effect/lighting, for Restore
Sound of camera shutter

"So you really
took it seriously
when i said
to let that geek flag fly,
or do you normally
wear armor
in public?"

—Kori

ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: Inside the fantasy online videogame "Realm." Fantasy cutouts adorn the mid-stage traveler. Ned, a multi-class videogame player, is milling about DSR. Mryx, an "evoker," is DSL. Kori, a "healer," enters SR. Bash, a "tank," enters SL.)

KORI: *(Meandering back and forth, calls.)* Looking for party! Belnod "The Destroyer" raid!

(Bash approaches Kori without seeing her.)

BASH: *(Calls.)* Tank looking for Belnod group! Tank looking for Belnod group!
KORI: *(Calls.)* Healer putting a party together for Belnod!

(Bash approaches Kori.)

BASH: *(Calls.)* Level-fiddy tank! Looking to hit up some Belnod action! Level fiddy! Swingy-swing, smashy-smash!
KORI: *(Practically walks into Bash, shouts.)* Bona fide beautiful, light-stacking healer getting group for Belnod raid! Level fifty, nifty [buffs]! Group for Belnod! *[Change that makes a character or weapon more powerful.]*

(Note: For the following, Bash and Kori are face to face but do not see each other. They talk over each other.)

BASH: *(Calls.)* Tanking for some Belnod!
KORI: *(Looking around, calls.)* Need healing for Belnod?
BASH: *(Calls.)* Belnod!
KORI: *(Calls.)* Belnod!
BASH: *(Shouts.)* Belnod?! Anyone for Belnod?!
KORI: *(Shouts.)* Just looking for a Belnod group!

(Bash and Kori turn and are now back to back.)

BASH: *(Calls.)* Belnod! Get yer Belnod here! Level fiddy for
  Belnod!
KORI: *(Calls.)* Nobody doing Belnod?
BASH: *(Calls.)* Anyone?

*(Kori and Bash turn and are face to face. They notice each other for
the first time.)*

KORI: *(To Bash, startled.)* Oh, hi! Didn't see you there. Are
  you looking for a Belnod group?
BASH: Dear, sweet—! Yes! I've literally been raid-requesting
  for the last 30 minutes!
KORI: You? I've had it on auto for the last hour.
BASH: Really? Didn't see it.
KORI: How is that possible? I've literally had the character
  doing nothing but that.
BASH: *(Realizes.)* I bet we have raid notifications turned off.
  That last update disabled them.
KORI: You're probably right. Hold on.
BASH: Yeah, one sec.
KORI/BASH: *(In each other's face. In announcer voices, shout.)*
  Belnod alert! Players in your area are seeking group for
  Belnod!

*(Ned wanders over to Kori and Bash. Ned jumps up and down. Kori
and Bash ignore Ned.)*

KORI: *(Puts her hand to her ear. To Bash.)* Yup, yup, that was
  it.
BASH: Wanting to group?
KORI: Absolutely. *(Introducing.)* I'm Kori. I'm a 50th-level
  healer. You?
BASH: *(Introducing.)* I'm Bash, level-fiddy Tankimus Prime,
  baby! You got buffs?

KORI: Do I got buffs?! Man, I got buffs for days! How does Strength of the Martyr sound?

BASH: Strength of the Martyr? No way!

KORI: Way!

BASH: We're going to steamroll the Destroyer.

KORI: Like my peanut butter—

BASH: Huh?

KORI: Dang, Skippy! Group it!

(Kori and Bash fist-bump.)

KORI: *(Announcer voice.)* Player Bash has joined your group.

BASH: *(Announcer voice.)* You have joined Kori's group. *(Ned is still trying to get their attention. To Kori.)* I can't believe I haven't grouped with you before. Why is nobody else trying to party up?

KORI: Ever since that new game "Winds of the Cyberman" dropped, nobody plays "Realm" online anymore.

(Ned is still trying to get their attention.)

BASH: But "Realm" is classic.

KORI: It is, but it also hasn't seen any new content drop in a year and a half.

BASH: But there's so much content in the original. Vanilla "Realm" is awesome! Like I haven't even attempted Belnod before. You?

KORI: Nope, first time. We still need more people, though. Belnod is a minimum four-man raid. Any idea where we can find some more peeps?

(Trying to get Kori and Bash's attention, Ned frantically jumps up and down.)

BASH: We could try going back to Valley Village and see if anybody doing socials down there wants to join.

KORI: *(Whining.)* Yeah, maybe, but the people doing role-playing stuff are just weird. Even if we find some, we have to trudge all the way back through the Swamps of Shadow Vale.

BASH: Oh, right, right. That's a pain. Wish there was somebody right here we could—

(Ned bursts in between Kori and Bash, and they finally notice her.)

KORI: *(To Bash, indicating Ned.)* Oh, hey, here's somebody.

BASH: *(Sees Ned.)* You think she might want to join?

(Ned gives Bash a "Ya think?" look.)

KORI: I don't know, ask her.

BASH: *(To Ned.)* You want to group for Belnod?

(Ned nods enthusiastically.)

KORI: *(To Ned.)* He said, "Do you want—" *(Realizes.)* Oh, wait. Did you toggle notifications? That last patch—

(Ned holds up a finger to indicate "just a second.")

NED: *(To Kori and Bash, in an announcer voice, shouts.)* Belnod alert! Player seeking group for Belnod!

KORI: I take that as a yes. *(Holds out her fist to Ned.)* Group up.

(Kori and Ned bump fists.)

KORI/BASH: *(Announcer voices.)* Player Ned has joined your group.

NED: *(Announcer voice.)* You have joined Kori's group.

KORI: Great. What's your class and specs?

(Ned looks at Kori and Bash expectantly.)

BASH: *(To Ned.)* And gear? What kind of gear do you have? You rocking any gold-tier legendaries? Please say yes.

(Ned nods and holds up her fingers, counting.)

KORI: *(To Ned.)* Stats? Specs? I'm really hoping you're some form of [DPS]. *(To Ned, gesturing.)* Can you hear us? Bash asked about your gear. *[Character meant to deal damage.]*

(Ned nods and begins frantically gesturing.)

BASH: *(Realizes.)* Wait, wait, wait. *(To Ned.)* Please tell me that all of these charades don't mean you *don't* have a mic. *(Ned points at Bash and then pulls out a piece of paper and a quill.)* Great, she's typing. She's typing! *(Ned hands the paper to Bash. Reads.)* "Yes, I can hear you. I'm Ned. My mic's broken—" *(Shouts.)* I knew it! Dang it! *(Reads.)* "I'm Ned. Mic's broken. I'm currently saving for—" *(To Ned.)* Ned? Ned? I've never heard of that character.
KORI: *(Realizes.)* Wait. Isn't Ned that really weird character? You know, the multi-class that *nobody* picks…ever.
BASH: *(Upset.)* Multi-class? NOOOOooooOooooo! *(Ned writes something on a piece of paper and hands it to Bash.)* *(Reads.)* "I'm an 18th-level bard, 17th rogue, 16th-level monk with the abilities of—" *(To Ned.)* You're not even level 50? You have to be level 50 to even do the raid. Sorry, but— *(Ned hands Bash another sheet of paper. Reads.)* "The levels of multi-class combined will let the character into a greater raid. All of mine equal 51."
KORI: That's true. I once did the Caverns of—
BASH: Yeah, yeah, yeah, but all of their gear is going to be spec'd in the *teens*, not level 40 or 50, where it *needs* to be. Gaaaaah! I *hate* [MCs]! *[Multi-class players]*
KORI: "MCs"?

BASH: "Multi-classers."
KORI: Oh, right, right.
BASH: And you know what's worse than a straight up MC?
KORI: No, what?
BASH: *(In Ned's face.)* An MC with no *mic*! *(Ned begins writing. To Ned, as she's writing.)* Look, raids are intense! I can't stop to check the chat, like, every 15 seconds to see if you've pulled any [aggro]! Geez! *[Aggressive behavior.]*
KORI: Ned might still be helpful. Besides, is there anybody else? *(Ned hands her a piece of paper. Reads it. To Bash.)* Ned says there's a player over there… *(Indicating Mryx.)* …but she's [AFK]. *["Away from keyboard"]*
BASH: *(Looks over at Mryx.)* Oh, wow. I didn't even see her standing over there.
KORI: See, Ned's already done something useful.

(Ned nods enthusiastically.)

BASH: Bah! Healers are always defending the MCs. I see where this is going… *(Approaches Mryx.)* Maybe this one will actually be useful. *(Looks back at Ned and glares. To Mryx, in her face, waving.)* Wassup? Wanna Belnod? *(Mryx doesn't respond. Snaps fingers. Shouts.)* Hey! Yo! *(To Ned and Kori.)* Are we sure she's actually away from her computer and not, like, lagged or glitched or something?

(Mryx does some AFK moves.)

KORI: Yup, definitely AFK. I hope she'll be up for the raid.
BASH: *(Watching Mryx's AFK moves.)* That's really creepy…the way they just soullessly do that.
KORI: *(To Ned, indicating Mryx.)* How long has she been like that? *(Ned writes something on a piece of paper and hands it to Kori. To Bash.)* Ned says that… *(Reads.)* …"The character's been here since before I showed up. AFK the whole time."

BASH: *(Annoyed.)* Well, that's just great. I say we hoof it back to Valley Village and take our chances. We don't even know if this cat will show up, much less if she'll be up for—

(Mryx comes to life.)

MRYX: *(In an announcer voice, shouts in Bash's ear.)* Belnod alert! Player seeking group for Belnod!

KORI: *(To Bash, indicating Mryx.)* I think she might be up for it.

MRYX: *(In a rapid-fire, high-pitched voice.)* Hey, you guys wanna group? I wanna join a group! Isn't there, like, a raid [instance] close? I think there's, like, a boss fight, like, super close. I totally own boss fights. You guys wanna group? *[A private/small group gaming experience.]*

BASH: Yeah, we're going to four-man Belnod "The Destroyer." Group it!

(Bash holds out his fist. Mryx fist-bumps Bash.)

KORI/NED/BASH: Only the group leader may accept new players to the group.

BASH: *(To Kori.)* What the heck was that? I can't group them? Why? Wait, are you like one of *those* party leaders?

KORI: I created the group. I always have it set to a "closed group" by default. *(Ned hands Kori a piece of paper. Reads it. To Ned.)* No, that does not make me a control freak.

BASH: So change the settings and let's group 'em.

KORI: Wait, hold up. Let's do this right.

BASH: What? Oh, now you're worried about who we add? You weren't so discerning about… *(Indicating Ned.)* …Miss Multi-Class over there.

KORI: *(Ignores Bash. To Mryx.)* What's your class and specs? Gear? All that good stuff. You are level 50, right?

MRYX: *(Spastically.)* Oh, I'm totally high-level. I'm, like, the best…ever. *(Mimes blowing up monsters.)*

BASH: *(To Kori, indicating Mryx.)* See? She's fine. Group it!
  (Holds out fist.)
KORI/NED/BASH: Only the group leader may accept new
  players to the group.
BASH: *(Annoyed.)* Oh, come on!
MRYX: *(To Kori, annoyed.)* Yeah, come on! Group me!

(Ned hands a piece of paper to Bash. Bash reads it.)

BASH: *(To Ned.)* Really? That's what she sounds like to you?
  Well, I don't think she sounds like a squeaker noob at all.
KORI: *(To Mryx, slowly.)* What is your class? How are you
  spec'd?
MRYX: *(Confused.)* Class? Specs?
KORI: *(Sarcastically.)* Woooooow! Are you a sorcerer? A
  [mage]? Wizard? Warlock? Conjuror? Enchanter?
  ["magician"]
BASH: Aren't those all the same thing?
KORI: You're not helping! *(To Mryx.)* Are you spec'd as a
  healer? A tank? Do you do damage over time? How much
  [DPS] can you throw down? *["damage per second"]*
MRYX: *(Confused.)* Ummmm…uh…it's a…yeah…that thing
  you just said.
KORI: Which thing?
MRYX: All of it. I do all of it. Damage over DPS spec class.
  (Ned writes something down and hands it to Mryx.) What's
  this?
KORI: Do you not even know how to chat?
MRYX: I have a mic. I'm talking, right?
KORI: It's not the same thing. Geez, you are a noob.
MRYX: *(Angrily.)* I'm not a noob!
KORI: So what did Ned's message say?
MRYX: It says… *(Reads.)* …"Noob!" *(To Ned, insulted.)* Hey!
  I'm *not* a noob!

(Ned shrugs.)

KORI: *(To Mryx.)* Look, I'm sorry, but we just need a player who has a high enough level to do this raid.

(Kori and Ned start to exit SR.)

BASH: Dang it! I was looking forward to this! All right, looks like we're hoofing it to Valley Village, after all. *(Starts to exit SR.)*

BASH/KORI/NED: *(Announcer voices.)* Area [PVP] has been engaged by player Mryx. *["player versus player"]*

KORI: Wait, what?

BASH: Who turned on "Player Versus Player"?

MRYX: Noob this! *(Shouts.)* Lava blast! *(Sound of an explosion is heard. Bash, Kori, and Ned are knocked off their feet. (Strutting, triumphantly.)* Who's the noob now?

BASH: *(On the floor, pained.)* Holy crap! I'm at 40 percent!

KORI: *(On the floor, pained.)* I'm at 20 percent!

(Ned rolls over and hands Kori a piece of paper.)

MRYX: What did Ned say?

KORI: Ned says… *(Shouts.)* …"Ow!" *(Ned hands Kori another piece of paper. Reads it. To Mryx.)* And she's at five percent.

BASH: What do you think? Want to add Mryx now?

KORI: *(Holds out fist.)* Group it.

(Mryx and Kori fist-bump.)

BASH/KORI/NED: *(Announcer voices.)* Player Mryx has joined your group.

MRYX: *(Announcer voice.)* You have joined Kori's group.

BASH/KORI/NED/MRYX: *(Announcer voices.)* Area PVP has been disengaged.

(Mryx helps Bash, Kori, and Ned to their feet.)

KORI: *(Waving her hands, shouts.)* Healing wave! *(Lights flicker and angelic voices sound.)*

BASH: *(Stretching.)* That's better…back up to full.

(Ned hands a piece of paper to Kori. Kori reads it.)

KORI: *(To Ned.)* You're welcome, but I only get two of those per day, remember that. *(To Mryx.)* Mryx, huh? I recognize the name now.

BASH: You do?

KORI: Mryx is an evoker class.

BASH: Evoker?

KORI: Strong elemental magic. You know…fire, lightning, tempests, all that good stuff. They bring extremely heavy DPS to the table.

BASH: I like what I'm hearing.

KORI: But—

(Ned gestures.)

BASH: Yeah, but what?

KORI: *(Sighs.)* They're glass cannons. They may have insane damage output, but a stiff wind will blow them over. That's why nobody ever plays them. I doubt Mryx has half your health bar, Ned. *(Ned makes the "uh-oh" face and hands Kori a piece of paper. To Ned, disappointed.)* Really?! *That's* your health? *(Ned nods apologetically.)* We are so scre—

BASH: It'll be fine. I'm a pretty solid tank. I'll keep up with most of the damage.

KORI: No, Bash, you don't understand. You have to keep up with *all* of it! You've got to soak up every last drop of damage because one solid hit and our DPS is toast and we can kiss Ned goodbye.

MRYX: There's kissing in this game? Ewwwwww!

BASH: Only if you hang out with the freaks in Valley Village.

KORI: Nobody is kissing anybody! It was a figure of speech! It wasn't supposed to be taken literally.

MRYX: So when are we taking on the boss? We gonna fight? I'm ready to fight! Let's go, let's go, let's go!

KORI: Hold up. We have to have a solid plan because as a party we are exceedingly weak when it comes to health. Bash has to be very thorough when it comes to soaking up damage, or we're all dead.

BASH: Why are you putting this all on me? You're the healer! You do your thing, and I'll do mine.

KORI: It's not that simple, Bash. I only have two healing waves per day. *(Holds up two fingers.)* Per day! And I've already used up one of those today, so if we're going to have even a long shot of being successful, we have to be very meticulous in our planning and—

MRYX: Booooooooring! Less talk, more blast!

(Dramatic music is heard and the mid-stage traveler opens to reveal Belnod's lair. Belnod "The Destroyer" is sitting on a large, intimidating throne.)

KORI: Wait, wait, wait! Who started the instance?

BELNOD: *(Gestures grandly. Loudly, threateningly.)* "Never before have adventurers so willingly invited death by entering the lair of Belnod, 'The Destroyer,' Dark Lord of Gehana."

BASH: *(To Kori.)* Can we not back out?

KORI: *(Panicked.)* No! We're locked in!

BELNOD: "Give to me all of your treasures and a swift death shall be offered unto you! Up above, you may walk in hope; here, it is known nevermore."

MRYX: *(To Bash, annoyed.)* Talk, talk, talk. Can we skip this?

BASH: *(Excited.)* This is my first time hearing this dialogue. We're not skipping it.

BELNOD: "Gehana will envelop you in darkness. Let it surround, embrace, and consume you. Down here, you

shall never know the taste of freedom as those rays shine not in Gehana."

(Ned hands Bash a piece of paper. Bash reads it.)

BASH: *(To Ned.)* No, I don't think it's intended to be inspirational.

BELNOD: "Run if you wish. A roundabout way to death is all that path shall offer. And, know this, adventurers…as your last gasp escapes your lips, so, too, shall your souls desert you."

KORI: *(To Bash.)* Okay, okay, okay, don't panic. We can do this.

BASH: I'm not panicking. You're panicking.

KORI: What was your plan?

BASH: My plan? My plan?! You're the planner!

KORI: Right, right. Let me take a deep breath. *(Ned hands Kori a note. Reads it. To Ned.)* He's getting up? *(Looks over at Belnod.)* Oh, geez! Oh, geez! He's getting up!

BASH: Plan?

KORI: Okay…um…we should—

MRYX: *(Shouts.)* Mmmmmryyx spell stormmmm!

(Mryx charges at Belnod.)

KORI: *(To Ned and Bash, indicating Mryx.)* Oh, crap! No, she just didn't!

MRYX: *(Attacking Belnod, shouts.)* Tempest bolt! *(Lightning effect. To Belnod.)* Ha! Take that, you big meanie!

BASH: Wait, doofus! *I've* got to be the one to pull aggro!

(Unfazed, Belnod roars.)

MRYX: Uh-oh!

KORI: *(To Bash and Ned, shouts.)* Get in there! Go! Go! Go!

(Bash, Kori, and Ned run into attack range.)

BELNOD: Now, you die!
KORI: *(Shouts.)* Watch out for an [AoE]! *["Area of Effect"]*
MRYX: What's "AoE"?
BELNOD: *(Gestures with weapon, shouts.)* Plague cloud descending! *(Evil sound effects.)*

(Mryx and Ned fall over.)

BASH: Players down! Healing wave!
KORI: I only have one!
BASH: They're down, and I'm at 30 percent. It's now or never. Do it!
BELNOD: Now, you die!
KORI: *(Gesturing.)* Healing wa—
BASH: No, wait! Hit me with Strength of the Martyr! Maybe I can take him if I [crit]. *["critical hit"]*

(Kori stops.)

KORI: *(Confused.)* Wait, am I casting healing wave or—
BELNOD: *(Attacking Kori, shouts.)* Shadow thrust!

(Kori falls over. Bash attacks Belnod.)

BASH: *(Attacking Belnod, shouts.)* Forward slash, back slash, forward slash, back…uh… *(Notices that Belnod appears unfazed.)* …ummmmm…yeah…that's probably not doing much more than tickling you right now is it, big guy?
BELNOD: Now, you die!
BASH: You know, I have a feeling that you're probably right about that.
BELNOD: *(Bellowing.)* Dooooom strike! *(Attacks Bash. Bash falls over. Evil laugh.)* The Destroyer reigns! *(Laughs.)* The Darkness of Gehana has you now!

(Mid-stage traveler closes. Blue filter on front stage as Bash, Kori, Mryx, and Ned walk through the curtain.)

KORI: *(Sarcastically.)* Awesome, just awesome. I really wanted to have to go all the way back to the Guild of Blue and Gold to resurrect.

BASH: I still have most of my taunts and strikes. After we [rez], we could try again. *["resurrect"]*

(Indistinct shouting from Mother is heard offstage.)

MRYX: *(To Mother offstage, annoyed, shouts.)* What?! *(Indistinct shouting from Mother. Whines.)* Mom, I'm in the middle of playing Seth's game! *(Indistinct shouting from Mother.)* What? Now?! *(Indistinct shouting from Mother.)* Awwwww, come on! *(To Bash, Ned, and Kori.)* Sorry, guys, I gotta go eat dinner.

KORI: Oh, you're going to go eat? *(Shouts.)* You just got us all killed!

MRYX: No, I didn't.

BASH: Actually, you kinda did when you—

(Indistinct shouting from Mother offstage.)

MRYX: *(To Mother offstage, shouts.)* Geez! I'm coming! I'm coming! *(To Bash, Ned, and Kori.)* At least I got chicken. *(High-pitched laugh.)* All right, guys, just friended all of you! Deuces! *(Quickly exits SR.)*

BASH/KORI/NED: *(Announcer voices.)* Player Mryx has left your group.

KORI: Well, that's just— *(Shouts toward SR.)* I'm not accepting that!

BASH: Don't hate me, but I should probably bolt, too. If I don't get my English grade up by the end of term, I won't be raiding for months. Friend request me, though. I want another shot at that guy.

KORI: Okay, done.

(Ned hands a piece of paper to Bash. Bash reads it.)

BASH: *(To Ned.)* Why would I friend a mic-less MC? *(Ned looks sad and dejected.)* All right, all right. *(Sighs.)* Fine! Just quit doing that sad emoji thing. There, done. Happy? *(Ned jumps up and down, clapping. Annoyed.)* Stupid MCs! All right! I'm out! Peace! *(Quickly exits SR.)*
KORI/NED: *(Announcer voices.)* Player Bash has left your group.

(Ned looks at Kori expectantly and hands her a note. Kori reads it.)

KORI: *(To Ned.)* Yeah, I'm going to be on for a bit. Okay, let's go "rez." We can do some two-man raids in the Mines of the Endless Abyss. They're a pain, but we could see if we can get some sweet gear to drop. *(Ned hands Kori another note. Kori reads it.)* I guess Bash might like you better if you had some epic gear. Don't worry about him. You just do you. Come on, let's go "rez."

(Kori and Ned exit DSR. Blackout.)

Scene 2

(AT RISE: Mid-stage traveler is closed. Inside the videogame "Realm," days later. Fantasy cutouts adorn the mid-stage traveler. Kori and Ned enter DSR. Bash enters DSL.)

BASH: *(Announcer voice.)* Belnod alert! Player seeking group for Belnod!
KORI/NED: *(Announcer voices.)* You have friends nearby.

(Kori and Ned wander over to Bash.)

KORI: Bash? Is that you? We haven't seen you in a hot minute.
BASH: Kori? Wassup? Yeah, to say that I've been uber-busy is the understatement of the year. Group it!

(Bash and Kori fist-bump.)

KORI/NED: *(Announcer voices.)* Player Bash has joined your group.
BASH: *(Announcer voice.)* You have joined Kori's group. *(Normal voice. To Kori, indicating Ned.)* Still traveling with the mic-less wonder MC, huh? How's that going?
NED: Really well, actually. Kori and I have been making Abyss Mine runs the last few days. I've picked up some top-tier gear and all my classes are level 20 now.
BASH: *(Realizes.)* Wait. Did you just talk?
NED: *(Shrugs, casually.)* Yeah.
BASH: You mean you actually have a mic now?
NED: *(Irritated, speaking loudly.)* Yes, as a matter of fact, I spent all my… *(Mic begins to cut out.)* …and…a…tortoise…I…fine…you…much!
BASH: *(Sarcastically.)* Woooooow, that is soooo much better!

KORI: Sometimes Ned's mic cuts out if she speaks really loudly into it. It happens when she gets angry or excited. *(Ned glares at Kori. To Ned.)* Well, it does!

NED: Doesn't mean that…   *(Mic cuts out.)* …fun…money…sensitive about it. *(Frustrated, sighs.)* Hold on. Let me see if I can fix it.

(Bash stares at Ned.)

BASH: *(Sarcastically.)* Riiiiiiight. I can see that raiding with you is just going to be an absolute joy.

KORI: It takes some getting used to, but, really, it's fine.

BASH: I bet…

NED: *(Frustrated.)* Guys, I'm literally standing right here!

BASH: You were saying something about "truly epic gear"?

KORI: Right, right. *(To Ned.)* Show him!

NED: *(To Bash, excited.)* These are so cool! *(Pulls out a pair of bunny ears and holds up a kazoo.)* Taaaa-daaaaaa!

BASH: *(Mocking.)*   Taaaaaaa-what-the-heck   are   those? Where's the epic EQ?

NED: You're looking at it. *(Announcer voice.)* Equip! *(Puts on bunny ears. Regular voice, excited.)* These are the Adamantine Ears of the Vorpal Bunny… *(Indicating kazoo.)* …and this is Saint Gerschwin's Golden Kazoo.

BASH: Please tell me you don't actually raid in public looking like that.

KORI: Of course.

NED: *(To Bash.)* Why wouldn't I?

BASH: *(Indicating bunny ears and kazoo.)* Because you look ridiculous!

NED: *(Flustered.)*   I   might…   *(Mic   cuts   out.)* …but…all…tanks…chips! *(Writes a note and hands it Bash. To Bash.)* Check out these stats.

KORI: *(To Bash.)* Trust me, you won't care what the gear looks like.

BASH: I seriously doubt— *(Reads Ned's note. To Ned, impressed.)* Okay, not bad.

NED: *(Flustered.)* Not bad? Not bad?! These are *unique* items! They're the only ones on this entire server!

BASH: They only made one set because nobody else would wear them.

NED: Say what you want, but I show up and monsters die.

BASH: Yeah, from laughing at you.

NED: *(Flustered.)* You know… *(Mic cuts.)* …you can…to Florida!

BASH: Didn't catch much of that.

KORI: That's probably a good thing.

BASH: *(Indicating Ned.)* You know, I think I liked it better when she could only chat.

NED: Really? Okay…

(Ned writes furiously on a note and hands it to Bash. Bash reads the note.)

BASH: *(Horrified.)* Hey! Language! My mother reads my chat logs!

KORI: Well, if you'd take Ned seriously…

BASH: Seriously? *(Points to the Ned's rabbit ears.)* How am I supposed to take anybody seriously wearing those things?! *(Stares at Ned's bunny ears.)*

NED: Quit staring at them! *(Snaps fingers.)* Hey! Hey! *(Points from bunny ears to face.)* My face is down here.

BASH: I'm sorry, they're just so— *(Bursts out laughing.)*

KORI: You'll quit laughing when you see them in action.

BASH: If you say so.

NED: So, are we going to try Belnod?

BASH: There're just three of us.

KORI: I heard they were going to lower the requirements on some of the raids since there were fewer players in the servers.

NED: Try it. Open the instance.

KORI/BASH/NED: *(Announcer voices.)* You do not have the required number of party members to enter this raid.

KORI: I guess Belnod didn't get that memo.

BASH: Well, Belnod *is* the final boss of the Dark Plains. Honestly, I'm surprised he isn't a six-man minimum.

KORI: And the servers are drying up.

NED: *(Shakes fist skyward.)* Darn you, "Winds of the Cyberman," with your next-gen graphics and your slick play style. Darn you!

KORI: *(To Bash.)* Ned and I haven't seen too many people raiding the lower levels. Bash, you're like the first high-level player we've seen in what…days?

NED: *(Agreeing.)* Several days.

KORI: Where the heck are we going to find a fourth for Belnod?

(Mryx enters SR.)

BASH/MRYX/NED: *(Announcer voices.)* You have friends nearby!

(Mryx wanders over to Bash, Ned, and Kori.)

MRYX: Hey, guys, what's up? Wanna group?

KORI: No! No! No, no, no, no, no, NOOOOooOOOoooOooo!

MRYX: Rude!

BASH: *(To Kori.)* Yeah, what's up with that? You were just saying that we needed a fourth.

KORI: Not *that* fourth! Don't you remember the [party wipe]? We all died! *[The player's character and their entire group are defeated in battle.]*

MRYX: That wasn't my fault!

KORI: *(Incredulously.)* Wasn't your fault? Wasn't your f—?! *(Frustrated.)* It was completely your fault! One hundred percent! You totally [Leeroy Jenkins'd] us. *[A person or thing*

that causes everything to go wrong for everyone else, usually in some extraordinary fashion.]

MRYX: *(Confused.)* Leeroy what? Who?

BASH: *(Explaining.)* A "Leeroy Jenkins" is when a player does something brash, like charge the boss, and gets their entire party killed.

MRYX: I didn't do that.

KORI: No? *(Imitates Mryx, mockingly.)* Mmmmmryyyyyyx spell stormmmmmmmm! *(Makes explosion noises and melodramatically acts out dying.)* Sound familiar? We all lost life-force because of that. You know what happens when you lose all of your life-force, noob?

MRYX: Don't call me that.

KORI: Your character perma dies and you have to start completely over again with a level one unless you pay a butt ton of money to completely revive. You got that kind of money?

NED: I don't.

KORI: *(To Mryx.)* So thanks, but no thanks. We'll find somebody else.

MRYX: I'm sorry.

KORI: What was that?

MRYX: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to get you all killed. I was just trying to show you guys that I wasn't a noob, and then you started yelling about AOC.

KORI: *(Correcting.)* AoEs.

MRYX: See? I don't know what that means. "AoEs," "DPS," "aggro," "E-I-E-I-O." I don't know what any of that means, and I'm sure if you asked just any random person, they wouldn't know, either. *(Looks out into the audience.)*

KORI: Well, we don't have time to teach you *and* take on a massive end-of-the-world boss.

MRYX: *(Begging.)* Please? I'll be good. I'll do everything you say. I won't attack anybody unless you to tell me to. *(Gets on knees, begging.)* Please?

BASH: Wow. *(To Kori, indicating Mryx.)* How can you say no to that?

KORI: Like this. *(To Mryx.)* No! *(Turns away. Mryx, who is still on her knees, scrambles around in front of Kori and continues begging.)* Geez! Why do you want this so badly?

MRYX: *(Fast-paced.)* Because this game is super cool and I get to… *(Makes explosion noises.)* …and you guys let me join your group the other day, and it was super awesome because I don't have any friends. I'm sorry I got you Jenkinsedy. It won't happen again. I promise. *(Holds up her fist.)* Group it?

(Indecisive, Kori just stands there.)

NED: *(To Kori, indicating Mryx.)* You really gonna ignore that?

KORI: Oh, come on! You think she's a noob, too!

NED: I do.

KORI: So how come you accepted her friend request?

NED: Because I don't have many friends, either.

BASH: *(Stage whisper in Kori's ear.)* Group her, group her.

NED: *(Stage whisper in Kori's other ear.)* Group her.

MRYX: *(To Kori, begging.)* Pleeeeeease?

KORI: Oh, all right! Enough already! Here!

(Kori bumps Mryx's fist.)

BASH/KORI/NED: *(Announcer voices.)* Player Mryx has joined your group.

MRYX: *(Announcer voice.)* You have joined Kori's group.

BASH: *(Like an evil villain.)* Good…good!

KORI: I hate all of you right now.

MRYX: *(Happily jumping up and down.)* Yes! Awesome! Okay! Let's do this… *(Kori glares at Mryx.)* …all the while sticking to a well concocted plan that doesn't get us Jenkinseded by AOCs.

KORI: *(Correcting, frustrated.)* "AoE"! Gaaahhhh! *(To Bash.)* This is hopeless. We're all going to die.

BASH: No, no. It's okay. I got this. *(To Mryx.)* Here, this helped me when I was a noo— *(Realizes.)* I mean, when I first started. *(Announcer voice.)* File transfer.

(Bash hands Mryx a brightly colored book with a cover that reads, "Gaming Jargon for Morons.")

MRYX: *(Announcer voice.)* Transfer accepted. *(Indicating book, regular voice.)* What is this? *(Reads a little bit of the book.)* Ewwwww! I'm trying to… *(Makes explosion noises.)* …not study for a vocab quiz!

BASH: *(Disappointed, indicating Mryx.)* Okay, Kori, I guess she's not as good as her word. Let's look for somebody else.

KORI: Okay, ungrouping now.

MRYX: No! No! I'm doing it, see? *(Leafs through the book, reads.)* "AoE or Area of Effect: Any spell or ability whose damage or effects apply to all targets in the area that the spell covers." Ohhhhhhh, I see now.

BASH: Yeah, we got wiped because we were all bunched up.

KORI: No, we got wiped because we charged in there with no plan.

BASH: Well, you're the planner.

KORI: I know that.

NED: So what's the plan?

MRYX: *(To Kori.)* Yeah, what's the plan?

KORI: Hold on…I'm thinking, I'm thinking. *(Thinks.)* Okay, so we know that he leads off with plague cloud. That's his big hit, and it covers most of the throne room.

NED: Yeah it took us down quick. *(Indicates Mryx.)*

KORI: Right, so we've got to buff the party before we start the instance.

MRYX: *(Reads.)* "Buffs: Beneficial increases to a party's stats and abilities." *(Leafs through the book, reads.)* "Instance: A self-contained experience that is closed to the rest of the

server population. Instances contain the most difficult and rewarding content." *(Holds up the book, triumphantly.)* This is making me so smart!

KORI: *(Dismissively.)* Yeah, yeah, you're a genius, kid. Okay, so what I figure is that I'll hit Bash with Strength of the Martyr before we start—

BASH: Yes!

KORI: *(Continuing.)* Bash will rush in, pull the aggro—

MRYX: *(Reads.)* "Aggro: Aggressive behavior, also attacks from enemies."

KORI: *(Annoyed.)* Are you going to do that every time?

MRYX: What? I can finally understand what the heck you guys are saying.

KORI: *(To Bash, sarcastically.)* I am sooooo glad you gave her that book.

BASH: You didn't want to have to teach her. She's learning. I'm not seeing the downside to this.

KORI: You're also not trying to plan a raid with… *(Indicating Mryx.)* …Dr. Dictionary over there. *(Bash shrugs.)* Annnnnnyway, what was I saying?

NED: Bash pulling aggro.

KORI: Right. Bash rushes in—

NED: I'm a bard! I could play my inspirational charge! *(Plays kazoo.)*

BASH: *(Sarcastic.)* That's, wow, yeah, that's just so…inspiring.

NED: It gives you plus 15 to your attack and damage.

BASH: Well, you just golden kazoo away, then.

KORI: Okay, so Bash charges in, soaks up the plague cloud, pulls the rest of the aggro. Mryx hangs back, throwing lava blast, tempest bolts, and whatever else she's got up those sleeves of hers.

MRYX: Yeah, yeah. I got the "pew pew"!

KORI: I'm also hanging back, throwing out some light or heavy cure…a Wind of the Divine or a healing wave as needed.

MRYX: You have cure?

KORI: Uh, yeah.

MRYX: *(Begging.)* Show me, show me, show me!

KORI: Not now! Only when you need it! I only have so many per day.

MRYX: *(Disappointed.)* Oh.

BASH: Okay, so whilst I'm up bashing some Nod… *(Points to Mryx.)* …you're in the back flame-throwing. *(Points to Kori.)* You're in the back showing some cure love. *(To Ned.)* And you are—

NED: Meditating.

BASH: Meditating?

NED: *(Nods.)* Meditating.

BASH: You're part monk. Shouldn't you be doing, like, monk things? *(Strikes a kung fu pose.)*

NED: Meditating *is* a monk thing.

BASH: How? Meditating on what?

NED: Deep thoughts.

BASH: Like what?

NED: I don't know. Like if a tree fell in the forest and nobody was there to hear it, would it still make a sound? How do Pop Tarts work? What is the sound of one hand clapping? Deep thoughts!

(Ned, Kori, and Mryx try to clap one handedly.)

BASH: Would you guys stop that?! *(To Ned.)* So I'm slashing, Mryx is blasting, Kori's healing, and you're…thinking.

NED: *(Correcting.)* Meditating.

BASH: I don't see how that helps us.

NED: *(Frustrated.)* Contemplative musings communally channel the skills… *(Mic cuts out.)* …players…allows you…operate…two levels…are! *(Sighs.)* Dang mic!

MRYX: You're saying that if you do that, we'll be, like, what…two levels higher?

(Ned nods and continues to look like she's adjusting her mic.)
KORI: *(To Bash.)* I'd say that's pretty helpful.
BASH: Fine. You guys just stay behind me and do your thing. Bash is about to go toe to toe with big ugly. *(To Kori.)* Hit me with it!
KORI: *(Gesturing magically.)* Strength of the Martyr! *(Special effects/lighting.)*
BASH: *(Pumped up.)* Yeeeees! *(Hits himself.)* Let's do this! Start the instance! Whoooooooooooo!

(Dramatic music is heard. The mid-stage traveler opens, revealing Belnod's lair. Belnod "The Destroyer" is sitting on a large, intimidating throne.)

KORI: *(To Mryx, Bash, and Ned.)* All right, guys, get ready!
MRYX: *(To Bash.)* Can we skip the dialogue this time?
BASH: Yeah, yeah, yeah! Whatever! I just want to hit something!

(Belnod gestures grandly.)

BELNOD: *(Loudly, threateningly.)* "Never before have—"
KORI: Next!
BELNOD: "—Gehana. Give to me all of your—"
KORI: Next!
BELNOD: "You! Up above you may walk in—"
KORI: Next!
BELNOD: "—never more. Gehana will envelop—"
KORI: Next!
BELNOD: :Let it surround, embrace, and invade you—"
KORI: Next!
MRYX: *(Indicating Belnod.)* Dang, he's long-winded.
BELNOD: "Down here, you shall never know—"
KORI: Next!
BELNOD: "—Gehana. Run if you wish—"
KORI: Next!

BELNOD: "A roundabout way to death is—"
KORI: Next!
BELNOD: "And know this—"
KORI: Next!
BELNOD: "—your souls desert you."
NED: *(To Kori.)* Wait. Restart the dialogue.
MRYX: Restart it? Nooooo!
BASH: *(To Ned.)* Come on! I need swingy-swing, smashy-smash!
NED: *(To Kori.)* Trust me and skip as quick as you can.
KORI: Ohhhhh-kay. *(Announcer voice.)* Restart dialogue, maximum skip.

(Belnod appears to reverse for a moment and then begins his grand speech again.)

BELNOD: *(À la the Rick Astley song, "Never Gonna Give You Up.")* "Never…Gehanna…Give…you…Up…
  Never…Gehanna…Let…you…Down…
  Never…Gehana…Run…Around…And…Desert you."
NED: I knew it!
MRYX: What just happened?
KORI: I can't believe the game developers just [Rickrolled] us.
  [The unexpected appearance of Rick Astley's song "Never Gonna Give You Up."]
NED: Right? That's too funny.
MRYX: I don't understand.
BASH: I understand that we're going to get rolled if we don't start throwing down! *(Rushes toward Belnod.)* Massive attack!

(Bash "strikes" Belnod repeatedly. Belnod roars in pain. Bash and Belnod begin fighting in earnest. Ned appears motionless, stuck in place.)

KORI: Take it to him, Bash! *(To Ned and Mryx.)* Okay, stay back and let the tank work.

BELNOD: Now, you die!   *(Gestures.)*   Plague cloud descending!

BASH: That it? That all you got? *(Shouts.)* Super cuts!

(Bash and Belnod resume fighting.)

KORI: *(To Ned, annoyed.)* Aren't you supposed to be kazooing or something?

NED: *(Mic cutting out.)* I'm…lag…I…really badly!

KORI: Not now!   Okay, just work on channeling that contemplative stuff. Mryx, hit him with something big.

MRYX: Heck, yeah! *(Gestures, shouts.)* Lava blast!

(Bash and Belnod roar in pain.)

BASH: Watch the AoEs! That hit me, too!

MRYX: Sorry.

BASH: *(To Kori.)* Hit me with some healin'!

BELNOD: *(Gestures, shouts.)* Shadow thrust!

(Belnod "hits" Bash.)

BASH: *(To Kori.)* Like now! *(Gestures, shouts.)* Snake pit slash!

(Belnod and Bash fight.)

KORI: Will do! *(To Ned.)* Could use those extra levels to buff the heal!

NED: *(Mic cutting out.)* I…on it! *(Adjusts mic.)* There! I'm lagging, like, super bad, but for some reason, it's not letting me meditate. *(Points to bunny ears.)* I think my headpiece is interfering with the ability. My channel bar isn't moving. It's static.

BASH: *(Fighting.)* Kori, l'il help?!

KORI: Mryx! Hit Belnod, no AOC's.

MRYX: *(Correcting.)* AoEs.

KORI: Just do it!

MRYX: *(Gestures, shouts.)* Tempest bolt, tempest bolt, tempest bolt!

(Belnod roars in pain.)

KORI: *(To Ned, indicating bunny ears.)* So take them off.

NED: I can't. I'm lagging. See if you can take them.

(Kori fidgets with Ned's bunny ears.)

BELNOD: *(Gestures, shouts.)* Doooooooooom strike!

(Belnod "hits" Bash.)

BASH: *(Frantic, shouts.)* Kori! I'm almost dead! Strength of the Martyr is wearing off. Healing wave already! Healing wave! *(Looks over.)* Kori, I'm at two percent. For the love of— *(Gets "hit." Shouts.)* GAAaaaaah! What are you doing?

KORI: *(Messing with Ned's bunny ears, frantically.)* I'm adjusting the rabbit ears to clear up the static on the channel! *(Ned bows her head and shuffles offstage.)* What the—?

BASH/KORI/MRYX: *(Announcer voices.)* Player Ned has lost connectivity. Player Ned has left your group.

MRYX: Uh-oh.

BELNOD: *(Gestures, shouts.)* Devastating blow! *(Belnod "hits" Bash. Bash falls over. Belnod laughs. To Mryx.)* Now you die!

MRYX: *(Shouts.)* Uh-oh! Kori, he's coming for me! Help!

KORI: *(Shouts.)* Mryx! You and Bash dealt a lot of damage! Maybe we can take him.

BELNOD: *(Gestures, shouts.)* Ebon vortex! *(Special effects/lighting effects.)*

MRYX: *(Pained.)* He's stealing my health!

KORI: *(Pained.)* Mine, too! Try to get out of range!

MRYX: Can't…make it… *(Falls over.)*

BELNOD: *(Laughs. To Kori.)* Now you die!

KORI: Yeah? Well, your dialogue is weak and stilted!

BELNOD: *(Gestures, shouts.)* Deathstroke! *("Hits" Kori. Kori falls over. Evil laugh.)* The Destroyer reigns! *(Evil laugh.)* The Darkness of Gehana has you now!

(Mid-stage traveler closes. Blue filter on the front of the stage. Bash, Kori, and Mryx walk through the curtain.)

KORI: *(To Mryx and Bash.)* Well, that just…sucked!

MRYX: Yeah, like the life right out of us.

BASH: Kori, what the heck? Where was my healing?

KORI: I'm sorry, Bash, I was trying to help Ned because I wanted those two extra levels because all of my healing would bump by ten percent and—

(Ned enters DSR.)

NED: Hey, guys! I'm sorry about that. The connection was really janky and…and… *(Looks around, realizes.)* Wait, we all died, didn't we?

BASH: *(Indicating surroundings.)* Gee, you think?

NED: Look, I'm sorry. I can't help it that the Internet connection was— *(Indistinct shouting offstage from Jim, a Supreme Bean employee. To Jim, calls.)* No, I didn't order the half-caf-decaf-skinny-caramel latte with a cinnamon shot. My order was the Mega Mocha Lottachino with extra whip cream! Get it right, Jim! *(To Kori, Bash, and Mryx.)* Sorry. What were we talking about?

BASH: Are you at a coffee shop?

NED: Yeah, the Supreme Bean. Is that a problem?

BASH: No wonder your Internet is crap! You're having to deal with the company's firewall, narrow bandwidth, and high latency. What's the protocol?

NED: I don't know.

BASH: Ask the guy.

NED: *(To offstage, calls.)* Jim! Hey, Jim! *(Indistinct reply from Jim offstage.)* What's the Internet protocol? *(Pause. Indistinct reply from Jim offstage.)* Because the guy I'm gaming with wants to know! *(Indistinct reply from Jim offstage. To Bash.)* Jim says, 802.11 B.

BASH: That's archaic! What else they got there…a horse and carriage? How are you even playing right now?

NED: Look, it's free, okay? *(To offstage, shouts.)* He said your Internet sucks, Jim! *(Indistinct reply from Jim offstage. To Bash.)* Jim says you're a nerd, Bash.

BASH: Did you actually do anything that last fight? Where was the inspiring kazoo…the thoughtful buffing? Where was any of it?

KORI: Look, don't take it out on Ned. I was late on the "heals." It's just as much my fault.

BASH: Oh, I'm just as ticked at you, Kori, but you know who I'm not mad at? Mryx! Evoker throwing down the mad damage! *(Holding up his hand for a high-five. To Mryx.)* Put it there, playa! *(Mryx high-fives Bash.)* That's what I'm talking about! I think we almost had him.

MRYX: Yeahhhhhh! Bash and Mryx throwing down the… *(Makes slashing and explosion gestures and noises.)* Yeaaaahhhhhhh!

KORI: You guys definitely made quite a dent in his health bar.

BASH: Would have taken him the rest of the way if the two of you… *(Indicates Ned and Kori.)* …would have actually done something worthwhile.

NED: *(Mic cutting out.)* Look, I've said…sorry…what… supposed…clue!

KORI: Hey, ease up! Even if I'd kept hitting us with cures, Belnod ebon vortex'd! That sucks the health of everybody on-screen and gives it to him. All four of us would have just put him up to full health.

BASH: Really?

KORI: Really, really.

BASH: So, I guess we just keep at him with the damage train.

MRYX: *(Making train noises.)* Chooooo-chooooo!

(Bash and Mryx high-five.)

KORI: Yeah, but if he has more vortexes, it won't matter. We have to find a way to stop that ability.

BASH: Well, maybe if we had more time to plan the assault. This putting something together right before we enter the instance isn't working.

KORI: Well, I'm about to have to go to work right now. Maybe we could all meet up sometime?

BASH: What? Like in real life?

NED: I know where there's a good coffee shop.

KORI: The Bean is on the corner of Third and Main, right?

NED: Yuppers. Thursday at 4:00 good for everybody?

KORI: What about squeaker… *(Indicates Mryx.)* … over there?

MRYX: *(Insulted.)* Don't call me that.

NED: Are you even allowed to go meet up with people?

MRYX: What? With a group of three random strangers I just met on an Internet game? What could possibly go wrong?

KORI: Ummmmm…

MRYX: No, I'm kidding. It's cool. My mom's a cop. She goes there all the time to hang out in the old book section. She'll be with me, so if any of you guys look "sus," then… *(Pantomimes putting on handcuffs.)*

KORI: Why do I suddenly feel even less reassured?

MRYX: I'll just tell her that you guys are tutoring me on my coding language. "I've got to brush up on my next quiz for buffering the DPS tank instance." She'll have no clue what I'm talking about, so she'll be cool with it. How do you guys feel about background checks?

NED: Why do I suddenly feel even less reassured?

MRYX: Okay, then deuces, guys! Was a super fun run! Put it there, Bashimus Prime! *(Mryx and Bash high-five.)* Thursday

at four! *(To offstage, shouts.)* Hey, Mom! We're gonna have ta run some plates! *(Exits DSL.)*

BASH/NED/KORI: *(Announcer voices.)* Player Mryx has left your group.

KORI: Should I be scared right now?

NED: Hold me.

(Kori embraces/hugs Ned.)

KORI: Bring it in, Bash.

BASH: Nah, I'm good. *(Looks around uncomfortably.)*

KORI: What is it?

BASH: Do we have to meet up in real life? Can't we just, like, v-meet or something?

NED: What's wrong with meeting up in person?

BASH: *(Muttering incoherently.)* It's just…I…uh…

NED: What was that? Did your mic suddenly go out, Bash?

BASH: I'm…I…I'm just not good with people in real life, okay?

NED: *(Mockingly.)* So Super Bash—Mr. Tankimus Prime— isn't as swag as he would lead us to believe.

BASH: You all just plan without me, okay.

KORI: Dude, no.

NED: I can't believe—

KORI: Ned, chill! *(To Bash.)* What's the problem? Don't you want to meet up with us?

BASH: I…I do. I'm just…I'm afraid you'll think I'm a dork. I'm not cool in real life, all right?

KORI: *(Comfortingly.)* Bash… *(Indicating herself, Ned, and Bash.)* …we play a fantasy online game! Do you know how many people would make fun of us for that?

BASH: That's my point. I was saying—

KORI: No, that's *my* point. *(Indicating herself, Ned, and Bash.)* *None* of us are cool. Not in the traditional sense, anyway. But you know what? I quit worrying about what other people thought was cool years ago. I made the decision that

even if I was the only one who thought I was cool, that was enough. What anybody else thought of me didn't matter. You know what else?

BASH: What?

KORI: Ever since that day, I have had more fun, been freer to just be comfortable being me than all the days that came before. So what if you're a dork, or a nerd, or a geek? *(Indicating herself and Ned.)* So are we. Let that flag fly and quit caring, my dude. You'll be happier, I promise.

NED: That was, like, totally deep and inspirational.

BASH: *(To Kori.)* Yeah, I never thought of it like that.

KORI: Thanks. So, Thursday? Four p.m.?

BASH: Yeah, yeah. I'll be there.

NED: I'll save you a Mega Mocha Lottachino.

BASH: Cool, thanks. All right, I'll see you guys there. Peace!

NED/KORI: Peace! *(Bash lowers his head and exits DSL. Announcer voices.)* Player Bash has left your group!

NED: *(To Kori.)* You know, that was, like, super nice.

KORI: Thanks. I'm usually a pretty nice person…at least half the time.

NED: What about how you act toward Mryx?

KORI: Yeah, noobs, get the other half.

NED: Scary.

KORI: Okay, I'm actually late in getting ready. My boss is going to jump all over my back.

NED: Right, sorry.

KORI: So, you logging out?

NED: Nah. I'm going to go do some research.

KORI: Research?

NED: Yeah, I'm going to see what the socials know in Valley Village.

KORI: The socials? *(Shudders.)* You're braver than I am.

NED: What? Them's my peeps!

KORI: Sometimes I worry about you.

NED: Awww, that's sweet.   Anyway, there's this one dude…goes by "Mr. Wizard."   He hangs out in a tavern called, "The World."

KORI: The World? Like where everybody from the Internet can go? Cute.

NED: I know, right? But this Mr. Wizard cat…I swear, he knows everything.

KORI: If you say so. All right, have fun in Mr. Wizard's world. I've really gotta bolt. *(To offstage, calls.)* Speaking of cats…Chairman Meow, get your fuzzy butt off the counter! I've got to get ready. *(Puts her head down and exits DSR.)*

NED: *(Announcer voice.)*   Your group has been dissolved! *(Skipping toward DSL, sing-song.)*   "I'm off to see the Wizard—" *(Exits DSL. Blackout. Intermission, opt.)*

ACT II

(AT RISE: Mid-stage traveler is closed. The Supreme Bean coffee shop. There is a couch, large comfy chairs, and a small table. Kori enters DSR and takes a seat. Bash enters DSL, still wearing his armor.)

BASH: *(Timidly.)* Kori?

KORI: My name is Erin. You have to be Bash. *(Indicates Bash's armor.)* So you really took it seriously when I said to let that geek flag fly, or do you normally wear armor in public?

BASH: Yeah, I'm working on a cosplay for RealmCon. I figured I'd see how it wore. Plus, how else were you supposed to recognize the Bash.

KORI: So what's your real name, or am I supposed to keep calling you Bash in public?

BASH: My name is Dakota, but it's cool if you call me Bash.

(Ned enters DSR, holding a tray of coffee cups.)

NED: Who wants some Mega Mocha Lottachinos?

BASH: Sweet!

KORI: *(To Ned.)* Thanks! You didn't get all these, did you?

NED: Oh, I didn't pay for them…not yet. I started a group tab with Jim. We just have to settle before we jet.

KORI: All good. I'll get this round.

NED: Oh, wow, thanks! You don't have to do that.

KORI: It's no problem. I know how things are. *(Introducing.)* Oh, Bash, this is… *(Indicates Ned.)* …Winter. *(Introducing.)* Winter, this is Bash. Bash's real name is Dakota.

BASH: *(To Ned, softly.)* Hi.

NED: Bash-*ful* is closer to the truth. *(Sees that Bash is uncomfortable.)* Just messing with you, man. It's okay. Cool armor, though.

BASH: Thanks.

KORI: *(Looking around.)* It's after four. When were we expecting the squeaker to show up?

(Mryx enters DSR and spots Bash, Kori, and Ned.)

MRYX: *(Speaking into an earpiece.)* Mama Bear, this is Angel Cub. Targets have been acquired in the lounge section. Threat level beige. Repeat, threat level is beige, over! *(Listens, nods.)* I'm going in. *(Approaches Bash, Kori, and Ned.)* Hey, guys, what's up? Am I too late? I hope I'm not too late.
NED: Hi. Mryx?

(Ned offers Mryx a coffee. Mryx takes one.)

MRYX: Ned?
NED: *(Introducing herself.)* Winter Proctor.
KORI: *(To Mryx, introducing herself.)* Erin Banks.
BASH: *(To Mryx, introducing himself.)* Dakota Ferrier. It's okay if you still want to call me Bash.
MRYX: I'm Shelby Thompson. Nice to actually meet you all. *(Speaking into earpiece, serious tone.)* Mama Bear, this is Angel Cub. Threat level is translucent. Repeat, threat level is translucent, over. Stand down. *(To Bash, Ned, and Kori, pointing offstage.)* Wave to my mother, Lucy, over there in the books.

(Ned, Kori, Bash, weakly wave to offstage USR and adlib, "Hi Lucy," "Hey, Lucy," etc.)

NED: You're one scary kid, you know that?
MRYX: *(Laughs.)* Don't know why you'd think that.
KORI: *(Realizes.)* Wait. *(To Ned, indicating Mryx.)* Did we just give her coffee?
NED: *(To Mryx.)* Shelby! Wait!

MRYX: *(Takes a big gulp of coffee.)* Oh, this is great! *(Rapid-fire.)* Is that whip cream? I love whip cream! I accidentally put it on mashed potatoes once. It wasn't so good. Whip cream and mashed potatoes don't go together, in case you didn't know. Anyway, what's the plan? Have we planned anything yet? I'm ready to do some planning. Oh, hey, Bash, I really like your armor.

BASH: *(To Ned.)* Too late.

MRYX: *(Rapid-fire.)* Too late for planning? Oh, shoot! Are we just going to go in there to die? Because I don't like that. Dying's not cool. Like, I keep losing life force, or whatever that means. Can we not take a sec to plan? Come on, guys!

NED: No, too late to stop you from hitting the hyper drive.

KORI: *(To Mryx.)* How do you not know how life force works in the game? How did you get your character to a high level without knowing how the game works?

MRYX: Well, this is actually my brother's account. He's the one who leveled the character.

BASH: So how did you get a hold of it?

MRYX: Well, he kinda sorta had some friends over, and he got into Mom's duty belt—

BASH: Ha! Duty.

(Bash and Mryx laugh. Kori and Ned exchange a look.)

KORI/NED: *(To Bash and Mryx.)* Really, guys?

BASH: Sorry. *(To Mryx.)* You were saying…?

MRYX: Well, he got into Mom's belt and got the Taser, and his friends were all like… *(As teen boy.)* "You won't shoot yourself with that." And he was all like… *(As brother.)* "Fifty bucks says I will." *(As teen boy.)* "You won't do it." *(As brother.)* "Get ready to pay up!" *(Pantomimes shooting herself with a Taser and makes electrocution noises.)*

BASH: *(Realizes.)* Wait, wait, wait! Darth Taser is your brother?

NED: You know him?

BASH: Yeah, Seth Thompson, goes to my school. He shot himself with a Taser and everybody starting calling him "Darth Taser." Poetic justice if you ask me. He always made fun of me. He's kind of a jerk.

MRYX: Yup, that's my brother.

[END OF FREEVIEW]