

THE SEEKER

written by

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Based off the novel *HIDE AND SEEKER* by Daka Hermon

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FADE IN

EXT. FOREST - THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE, GEORGIA - DUSK

A small southern town, lit only by the moon and stars above.

White moss covered oak trees blow in the strong wind. *FROG CROAKS* battle unforgiving *CRICKETS* as the night approaches.

Suddenly, there's a smokey *BOOM* that only we hear...

EXT. FOREST - CLEARING - SAME

A boy in a **Pierce County Resource Center 2021** shirt, ZEE, (11), SPRINGS awake, panting. His curly hairs fall over his WIDE eyes (think "Doc" from *Back to the Future*, but a small black kid.) He's touching his face, making sure he's alive.

He stumbles to his feet, looking for a clue of which direction to go. The loud CROAK of a nearby Whitish/Grey TREE FROG freaks him out, triggering something in him.

Once he realizes where he is... he starts walking.

EXT. PIERCE COUNTY RESOURCE CENTER - MOMENTS LATER

A CAMP COUNSELOR, (19), is ending a street football game as the sun disappears. The kids, noticeably wearing updated **Pierce County Resource Center 2022** shirts, GROAN.

CAMP COUNSELOR
Uh uh, y'all know the rules. Inside by the time the street light's turn on. Y'all know better.

Camp Counselor sees one kid walking from the forest. Alone.

CAMP COUNSELOR (CONT'D)
Aye! What in the world are you doing walking without a campmate?!

She sees it's Zee, and stops breathing. She immediately calls-

OPERATOR (V.O.)
9-1-1. What's your emergency?

MONICAP COUNSELOR
Oh my God, I-- Umm... I think I see a kid that went missing last year??

As we watch a confused Zee stumble closer to camp--

TITLE**INT. JUSTIN'S HOUSE, JUSTIN'S ROOM - EARLY AFTERNOON**

JUSTIN, (11), a shirtless young leader who carries the weight of the world on his shoulders, is playing with a 3D maze puzzle ball and KILLING it. The tiny ball inside moves from one level to another as Justin masterfully TWISTS & FLIPS.

He reaches level 99 of 100! But before he can win--

KIARA
RAHH!!!!

JUSTIN
(dropping the ball)
AHHH!!!! KIARA!!!! COME ON!!

His older sister KIARA, (23), JUMPS in and scares him. Kiara has a certain swag to her that says she handles a lot but keeps her cool - and she's CACKLING at her brother.

KIARA
Sorry, sorry! I've been calling you
to come down and you weren't
answering! Your friends are here.
Oh, and they said to say
"Operation: Who Let the Dogs Out?"

JUSTIN
Again?! UGH.

He reluctantly moves to grab a shirt and Kiara eyes a PUZZLE PIECE on his nightstand. She picks it up... Justin instinctively goes to grab it and sees that it's in her hand.

KIARA
You wanna talk about it?

Justin takes the piece and puts it in his back pocket.

JUSTIN
I just like having it. What...

KIARA
I miss her too, J. I literally
think about her every day. I... I
don't know, I just feel like it's a
lot harder to, like, heal when you
don't... let go?

LYRIC (O.S.)
Justin! We gotta go, man!

NIA (O.S.)
Time is of the essence!

LYRIC (O.S.)
Yea! Whatever that means!

JUSTIN
(saved by the bell)
I should probably--

KIARA
Yea, yea do your thing.

He heads out as Kiara *SIGHS*, disappointed in herself.

SMASH TO:

EXT. THE NEIGHBORHOOD - OLD LADY JOHNSON'S HOUSE - SOON AFTER

Ah, the neighborhood. Laughing kids play street sports in front yards, parents drink sweet tea on porch rocking chairs, sweaty teens push lawn mowers to cut grass (some non-electric, which is basically torture), andddd:

2 LARGE DOGS and 1 SMALL DOG are SPRINTING through nearby yards, having just escaped their shared home. OLD LADY JOHNSON, (70s), let her dogs get away, AGAIN.

Justin and 2 of his best friends, NIA (the brains & mama bear), and LYRIC (the blunt muscle & only white kid, wearing a tape recorder around his neck) hop off their bikes. CHAOS.

MISS JOHNSON
(handing out leashes)
Ahh!! There they go gettin' away!!

LYRIC
Whadda we do, Justin?! Ganging up on em one by one last time took forever!

JUSTIN
Why the heck are you asking me?!

NIA
Come on, come on, we're gonna be late!

JUSTIN
Okay!! Uh, this might not make any sense but, Lyric! Jasper's the fastest.
(MORE)

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

You're the only one that won't let
anything slow you down, he's yours
 this time! Just on's hurt anyone.

LYRIC

Can't promise you that.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

Nia!

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

Rudolph's the super smart one.
 You'll have to outsmart her! Only
 you can... I'll get Taxi.

NIA

Aye, aye!

LYRIC

Yes, sir!

And they take off, chasing three dogs in three directions.

THE CHASE:

-Lyric's dog JASPER is the most rowdy of the bunch... just like Lyric. He's chasing Jasper AGGRESSIVELY - I mean jumping through SPRINKLERS, running on ALL FOURS, whatever it takes.

A MAILMAN carefully grabs 3 FRAGILE BOXES out of his truck. As he steps onto the driveway, Jasper runs right under his legs! Mailman SPINS & TRIPS a little, stretching his arms out to balance himself and...nice! He didn't drop any-- WHAM!!

Lyric runs THROUGH the boxes and they come CRASHING down.

-Justin's dog, TAXI, is the trickiest. This pup jumps through tiny holes and around corners, forcing Justin to impressively map out the perfect route to keep up, moments before.

Taxi dives through a hole in a fence so Justin tries to jump OVER it but isn't tall enough-- SLAM... a GATE DOOR swings open... of course there's a door. He GRUNTS and runs through.

-Nia's dog: RUDOLPH, Golden Retriever, in an OLD RED VEST. Nia's trying to get Rudolph to stop with... random facts.

NIA (CONT'D)

Rudolph, can we slow down?! While cardio's very good for you, too much of it can cause long term damage to muscle tissues or joints and we may be young but it's never too early to worry!

-Lyric chases Jasper to the end of a culdesac into the backyard of a corner house. Jasper, trapped, BARKS at him... but Lyric calls the dog's bluff, barking even LOUDER, acting a complete fool. Jasper WHIMPERS.

LYRIC
That's what I thought.

He clicks on the leash and notices the CONCERNED FAMILY (jaws dropped) that just watched him bark at a dog... Lyric waves.

-Nia's running out of breath chasing Rudolph. She pulls out her flip phone and checks the time.

NIA
Stop! We don't have time for this!!

She gets a closer look at its vest that reads **Emotional Support**. AHA! She DIVES into a nearby yard and "CRIES".

NIA (CONT'D)
(overdramatic)
My leg! AH I'm in so much pain! Ow!

Rudolph STOPS as a nearby neighbor, MR. TROY, (40), hurries over to a "hurt" Nia. Rudolph does her duty and runs over too, to console her-- then Nia drops the act and leashes her.

NIA (CONT'D)
Gotcha.

MISTER TROY
Oh you're a lil evil genius.

NIA
Nope. Just a genius.

-Justin has to plan every move moments before to keep up.

JUSTIN
Stop! Taxi! Taxi!!

RANDOM OLD NEIGHBOR (O.S.)
(laughing)
Boy there ain't no taxis in the south!

The neighbor's comment steals his attention, making him miss the small HOLE in the ground that TRIPS him. He hits the ground HARD, just missing a SPIKY HORSE CHESTNUT - phew.

He jumps up as the neighbor's hilariously STILL laughing over the "Taxi" thing, and runs around the corner to meet a trash-filled dead end... with no sign of Taxi. Awesome.

As he turns to go find Taxi, slightly panicking, he stops. Maybe he missed something. He grabs the PUZZLE PIECE from his pocket, rubs it to calm himself, and scans the area.

He looks over his shoulder to see if anyone is watching, gets down on hands & knees like a dog and walks around sniffing, looking ridiculous, trying to get in the mind of this animal.

He sees a small dirt HOLE under a fence, clearly dug, so he gets even LOWER to the ground where he can now see TAXI chewing on a stick, his tail to Justin. *Found him.*

He breaks a much bigger branch off a nearby tree, sticks it through the hole and simply WHISTLES. As if fishing with bait, as soon as the stick gets a slight TUG he gently pulls the stick back and Taxi comes through the hole close behind.

Chewing away, Justin leashes him. A job well done.

EXT. THE NEIGHBORHOOD - OLD LADY JOHNSON'S HOUSE - MIDDAY

Our three heroes are walking the dogs back into the house for Old Lady Johnson, who's digging in her purse.

MISS JOHNSON

Even with lil ZZ up and vanishing,
bless his heart, y'all still got
it. A blessing he found his way--

JUSTIN

Oh we gotta go y'all. We're gonna
be late.

MISS JOHNSON

Wait, wait naa! Let me give y'all a
lil somethin' first. Hmm. Bye bye!

She pulls out three \$2 BILLS, one for each of them, and heads inside. Justin puts his away, Nia jumps, and Lyric frowns.

LYRIC

Two dollars? What am I, six?

NIA

A two dollar bill, Lyric!! The
rarest currently-produced money in
the country!! I wonder how many
there are. I have to look that up.

She pulls out her LITTLE BLUE NOTEBOOK and writes it down.

JUSTIN

She doesn't have to give us
anything. Let's go.

LYRIC

(into his tape recorder)

Future Lyric, past Lyric here to
remind you that next time Miss J
needs your help: ask for a raise.

They hop on their bikes and ride down the street toward a house with mounted balloons on the porch.

An overlapping *DING-DONG*:

EXT. ZEE'S HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - SOON AFTER

Justin, Nia and Lyric wait at the door - anxiously.

Zee's mom MRS. MURPHY, (41), answers looking like she's only awake cuz she has to be. The sight of these three make her smile so big it looks like she's holding back tears.

JUSTIN

Hi Mrs. Murphy? Sorry we--

MRS. MURPHY

You came! Ugh, I'm so happy to see you three. Wow, Justin look at you, young man. I haven't seen you since your mom's... I'm...

Justin looks away, they get awkward. Nia with the save:

NIA

Would you happen to have some of your delicious Kool-Aid, Mrs. M?

MRS. MURPHY

Aw! You're so sweet. Of course girl, y'all come in!

As Mrs. Murphy steps inside--

LYRIC

(quickly whispering)

Her Kool-Aid is the worst?!

JUSTIN

(quickly whispering)

She calls them by flavor, why would you do that?

NIA

(quickly whispering)

I panicked!

They all fake smile at the same time and walk inside.

INT. ZEE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A two-story southern black home with all the fixins: a tomato-shaped pin cushion, black art on the walls, a blue metal cookie can, and a box of honey buns on the table.

MRS. MURPHY

Cherry flavor okay? If y'all want something sweeter the ice cream boy randomly sold me a box for cheap--

JUSTIN/NIA/LYRIC

Ice cream!!

MRS. MURPHY

Oh! Okay! Let me grab those!

The kids *SIGH* in relief and walk around the living room, noticing that it all looks the same, except...

JUSTIN

Whoa...

Up the stairs they find huge SCRATCH MARKS on the wall. It's hard to tell what could have caused them.

LYRIC

(unfazed)

I guess they got a cat.

Mrs. M steps between them and the stairs, blocking the marks, and hands Justin the entire box of ice creams.

MRS. MURPHY (O.S.)

(covering)

Come on let's go to the back.

She leads them to the backdoor. Justin & Nia share a look.

EXT. ZEE'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

The Murphy family backyard is huge, gate-less, and covered in **WELCOME BACK** Balloons, streamers and presents. It's the dream setup for a kids party, if only under better circumstances.

MRS. MURPHY

You're a lil early so I don't have the snacks out yet. Let me go get everything together. Be right back.

JUSTIN
Thanks Mrs. Murphy.

She appreciates his sympathetic smile, and heads inside.

LYRIC
Nia you said we were late!

NIA
Lik Hock Yap Ivan once said "If
you're early you're on time, and if
you're on time you're late."

LYRIC
Lips Hooky who? You made that up.

NIA
Nuh uh!

Justin walks a couple steps away, reminiscing.

JUSTIN
So weird... we were playing with
Zee right here before he went to
camp. Can't believe he just...

LYRIC
Disappeared?

Nia SLAPS Lyric on the back of the neck.

LYRIC (CONT'D)
Ow! What? That's what happened?

JUSTIN
(switching)
I just can't wait to see him.

They start eating their ice creams cups, and realize --

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
Oh cool. My ice cream fact is about
Hide and Seek.

NIA
Mine is too! Aww Zee's favorite.

LYRIC
(to Nia)
What's yours say?

CARLA (O.C.)
That Justin has a peasy head and
needs to get a haircut ASAP?

Our heroes look to see 2 more neighborhood kids, QUINCY, (11), aDORKable with slight ADHD, and his big sister CARLA, (12), the neighborhood bully, joining them in the backyard.

JUSTIN

Ugh. Who invited Carla?

CARLA

Zee did, thank you very much.
Aren't you like the leader of the Detective Dummies now? You couldn't solve that mystery yourself?

Mrs. Murphy steps out, handing Carla and Quincy Koolaid.

CARLA (CONT'D)

(switching up real quick)

Thank you so very much, Mrs. Cam!

MRS. MURPHY

Aw you're so welcome, sweet girl!

Justin, Nia, and Lyric roll their eyes.

MRS. MURPHY (CONT'D)

Ok! Y'all stay here and I'll try to get Ezekiel down here when he's ready. He's gonna love this... As soon as he got home the first thing he said was "I wanna play a game with my friends." Ever since then he hasn't really been... well, him. But... this will be so good.

She leaves-- Carla dumps her Kool-Aid in the grass.

QUINCY

Aww... I would've drank that...

(to Justin, Nia, Lyric)

We had lots of Koolaid and stuff at my choir's last performance. Y'all should come to the next if-- oh NO--

A LOVEBUG lands on Quincy's shirt... just a lovebug. They don't even bite. But Quincy does this oddly hilarious thing where he starts "SCREAMING" but makes no noise whatsoever.

Justin, Lyric, and Nia are failing at trying not to laugh.

LYRIC

(trying not to laugh)

I think he's broken?

CARLA

Shutup! When Quincy gets scared he screams but no sound comes out. He just afraid of bugs like y'all afraid of wettin' the bed.

JUSTIN

(moving on)

Anyway, here's my fact.

(reading)

"A legend began in 2002 that a monster named 'The Seeker' steals kids that lose at Hide and Seek." Everybody knows that story. Dumb.

NIA

Well... no one has proven that there isn't a monster.

LYRIC

(whisper, to Nia)

Do you want her to make fun of us?

CARLA

What a bunch of babies. You believe in The Hide and Seek monster now? Bet you're afraid to say *Bloody Mary* in the mirror five times too.

LYRIC

Nuh uh!

QUINCY

Absolutely I am.

NIA

No one knows!

JUSTIN

I don't think "Bloody Mary" is right...

CARLA

Prove it. Let's play Hide and Seek. Loser has to ask Zee where's he's been the past year.

The kids don't like these odds, but they nod. *Fine, game on.*

QUINCY

Didn't the other campkids say Zee went missing while playing? Kinda feels like back luck playing here..
(unfazed by his own point)
So who wants to be the Seeker?!

Everybody looks at Justin. He *SIGHS*, looking around Zee's backyard. AS HE LISTS THE RULES THEY POP UP ON SCREEN.

JUSTIN

Fine. But I'm setting the rules
early this time. **No telling where**
someone is hiding! Carla.

CARLA

Not my fault it wasn't a rule.

JUSTIN

No hiding under cars or buildings.
No blocking base unless you are
Seeker. No being rough-- that's how
 Quincy got hurt last time--

QUINCY

Agreed.

LYRIC

I said I was sorry.

JUSTIN

No leaving base and interrupting.
 Last, **the game has to finish.** We
 have to promise to finish the game--

CARLA

Ughhh okay we get it!

They stack their hands atop each other. Before they break, A WHITISH/GRAY TREE FROG *CROAKS* from beneath them, they JUMP.

JUSTIN

That...wasn't there a second ago?

CARLA

(teasing)

Maybe it's the monster. Let's play!

The kids run to hide as Justin stares at the mysterious frog for a bit longer... then heads to the tree, closing his eyes.

Instead of traditionally counting, he *CALLS OUT*:

JUSTIN

*I went up the hill, the hill was
 muddy, stomped my toe and made it
 bloody, should I wash it?*

Looking for hiding spots, the other kids yell back:

NIA/CARLA/LYRIC/QUINCY (O.S.)

Yes!

CUT TO:

Carla's looking for a hiding spot, takes a moment to consider... then hides UNDER the back porch, breaking one of the rules. We hear a familiar smoky *BOOM*, but the kids don't.

Lyric hides behind a bush.

BACK TO:

JUSTIN

*I went up the hill, the hill was
muddy, stomped my toe and made it
bloody, should I wash it?*

QUINCY/NIA (O.S.)

Yes!

CUT TO:

Quincy hides under a car parked on the side of the house - knowing he's breaking the rules. We hear that smoky *BOOM* again. What in the world is that?

Nia hides underneath the snack table, knowing it places her dangerously close to Justin. But also close to base.

BACK TO:

We only hear *WIND* blowing through the moss of this oak tree.

JUSTIN

*I went up the hill, the hill was
muddy, stomped my toe and made it
bloody, should I wash it?*

No response... The game's begun. Justin turns around to a silent backyard, on the hunt. He tip-toes, searching, and hears a *CREEK* under the back porch as Carla's SHOE quickly disappears inside the small crawl space. *Wow, of course.*

While creeping toward his first victim he steps on a *STICK* - the distant sound giving Nia the confidence to roll from under the snacks table and *SPRINT* to base. Made it.

NIA

Safe! Whoop whoop!

Justin creeps toward Carla again, but she's crawling toward the other side of the porch where he can't reach her.

CARLA

Your tip-toeing sucks! You ain't sneaky!

JUSTIN
And you're cheating!

Quincy rolls from under the car - J immediately spots him.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
Really Quincy?! You too?

He hangs his head in shame. Justin rushes toward him so Quincy runs for the tree. J MISSES when going to tag him cuz Quincy attempts to spin out of the way.. but trips them both.

Quincy is trying his best not to cry.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
Ow...

Carla pops out of her spot and sees them on the ground.

CARLA
You said no being rough! Why don't you go get your little friend from behind that bush over there and get off my brother!

JUSTIN
Carla! Stop cheating!!

Lyric GRUNTS angrily and pops up from behind his hiding spot.

Justin sees Quincy's down for a bit so goes after Carla. Nia looks like she doesn't want to leave base... but breaks the rules and does anyway - BOOM - to make sure Quincy is okay.

SOMEONE'S POV at Zee's watches them play from a window.

Carla runs circles around Justin, running toward base, but Lyric's blocking base - he doesn't want Carla to win. BOOM.

CARLA
Look who's cheating now! Move!

LYRIC
You cheated first you crazy person!

Carla stops running, not wanting to play anymore --

CARLA
What did you just call me?

IN SLOW-MO: Carla pulls her fist back, ready to punch Lyric, and no one notices a small whitish/gray SYMBOL appearing on her fist - a type of WARNING. Justin jumps in front Lyric:

JUSTIN

Stop! What is the matter with--

ZEE (O.S.)

Justin, is...?

The kids turn to the porch... it's Zee. He looks... confused.

He's scratching his arm a bit too much, causing ashy marks. While it is awkward, Justin still can't help but smile.

JUSTIN

Welcome back, Zee? It's... really good to see you again, man.

LYRIC

You look a lil wild, honestly.

(Nia smacks his neck)

Dang! You hit hard!

CARLA

You need to hit Zee's arm hard wit some lotion. Boy you are ASHY.

ZEE's POV: he zeroes in on the small symbol on Carla's hand??

ZEE

*On this day you sealed your fate...
Once you're tagged then you will know--*

NIA

What is he saying?

Out of freaking nowhere Zee TACKLES Justin to the ground like a Linebacker!! Lyric and Nia jump back! Carla CACKLES.

QUINCY

(genuinely unsure)

Is this part of the game?

CARLA

I don't know but I like it!

In a strange, private moment - Zee talks directly to Justin as if trying to give him a message.

JUSTIN

Zee what are you doing?!

ZEE

Down below there's no more dreams--

Mrs. Murphy appears and DROPS the snacks in her hands.

MRS. MURPHY
Ezekial!!

ZEE
Justin, find--

No one notices Zee slip SOMETHING GREEN into Justin's pocket right as Lyric, Nia and Mrs. Murphy YANK him off of Justin and he reacts almost as if his skin could hurt THEM.

ZEE (CONT'D)
No touching! NO TOUCHING!

Justin SCURRIES back, breathing heavily, and sprints away.

EXT. ZEE'S HOUSE - FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

ON Justin/Justin'S POV: he's having a slight panic attack. All SOUNDS warp together. As if under water, he hears--

| | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| NIA (warped) Justin! Wait! | LYRIC (warped) Slow down! |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|

--mixed with a warped *JINGLE*. He doesn't hear it. He jogs forward, disoriented, not wanting his friends to see him.

Without stopping he grabs the PUZZLE PIECE, rubbing it between his fingers. As if made of magic, he hears:

WOMAN (V.O.)
It's okay. You're okay.

And he slowly begins to breathe... the sounds around him croscendo to normalcy. He's starting to hear that *JINGLE* louder as if it's approaching him FAST, and--

NIA
WATCH OUT!!

Justin JUMPS BACK from a loud *HONK*, barely missing an incoming ICE CREAM TRUCK nearly crash into him!

Lyric and Nia run up to the truck and Lyric SMACKS it.

LYRIC
(screaming)
You almost hit my friend!!!!

The door slides open and out steps HYDRO MILLER, (24), an oddly mysterious, awkward guy wearing GREEN GLOVES.

HYDRO
(to Justin)
You alright?? I didn't see ya!

NIA
You didn't see a *kid running at you*? You drive an ice cream truck!!

JUSTIN
I'm fine, guys.

HYDRO
Gotta be more careful, bud! I get it, though. I was a, ya know, a *kid* once-- too. Sometimes when you're playing ya just get swept up in it! What are you playing? Lemme guess. A little Hide and Seek? That was my favorite as a kid. I never won though. Why does the coolest kid always end up winning, huh? Funny how that works. Ya gotta win! Whatever it takes, right?! If you did lose, though, hey, no big deal-- you can win next time. Ya got to. What's the point of playing anything if you lose, right?!

He looks past the kids and stares at Zee's house a while...
The kids just look at each other.

HYDRO (CONT'D)
How's he doing?

JUSTIN
Zee? You know Zee?

HYDRO
There were posters all over town and stuff? Everybody does? Welp, gotta get back to work... I'm glad your friend chose to come home.

He smiles, hops back in the Ice Cream Truck and U-turns.

LYRIC
What a weirdo.

They grab their bikes from Zee's front yard.

JUSTIN
I think I'm gonna head home. Wanna ride bikes tomorrow? Or finally shoot our fireworks?

NIA

Sure, but... are you okay? I mean,
Zee was, like, really scary.

LYRIC

It's like he was possessed or
something!

NIA

I haven't seen anything like that
since my aunt caught the holy ghost
in church three times in a row.

JUSTIN

(lying)

Yea, yea. I'm okay. He probably
didn't know what he was doing.

NIA

You can *both* not be okay--

LYRIC

Well even if he didn't--

JUSTIN

I'm okay! I'm fine. Ha, I promise.
I'll see y'all tomorrow, okay?

Justin heads home - Lyric and Nia watch him go.

EXT. JUSTIN'S HOUSE, FRONT YARD - SOON AFTER

Kiara's dragging recycling to the street as Justin rolls up.

KIARA

Y'all already done playing??

JUSTIN

Yep.

Her big-sis radar senses that something's off.

KIARA

...You doin alright, J?

JUSTIN

Yea? Watchu mean?

KIARA

It's just... I went in mom's room.
Saw the puzzle still hasn't moved--

JUSTIN

(avoiding)

I'm okay, Kiara. Geez.

KIARA

I'm just asking. Can't know you're
okay until you say it, right?

They start walking toward the house. He changes the subject.

JUSTIN

I almost had to drink Mrs. Murphy's
Kool-aid again.

KIARA

Oof, dodged a bullet boy. That mess
tastes like sewer water.

JUSTIN

Or poison--

KIARA

Made in the sewer.

This gets a *CHUCKLE* out of him as Kiara hides her worries.

INT. JUSTIN'S HOUSE, JUSTIN'S ROOM - LATER

Justin, shirtless, enters his room, eating a CHICK-O-STICK.

KIARA (O.S.)

I'm heading to work! Be safe and--

JUSTIN

(yelling down, mid chew)

Don't answer the door for
strangers, I know! Bye sis!

He clicks his tv on, puts his PUZZLE PIECE down and goes to grab his ball game, but flips open a BINDER on his desk instead. Inside are local magazine cutouts of him and his friends (including Zee) solving mysteries around town. **FINDER FOUR TRACK DOWN LOCAL MASCOT COSTUME. KID DETECTIVES REVEAL WHAT'S IN SCHOOL'S "MYSTERY MEAT".** Etc.

Justin smiles at the memories, then-- *KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK*. Someone's at the door? He exits...

Not noticing that he left his puzzle piece behind.

INT./EXT. JUSTIN'S HOUSE - FRONT DOOR - MOMENTS LATER

Justin opens the door to see...??

JUSTIN

Quincy?? Uh...what's up?

QUINCY

JUSTIN MY SISTER'S GONE AND I NEED
YOUR HELP! ...also can I use your
bathroom please.

He runs past a stunned Justin and into his house, uninvited.

INT. JUSTIN'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - NOT LONG AFTER

Quincy steps out of the bathroom, sniffing his hands.

QUINCY

Mmm your soap smells like candy!

JUSTIN

What do you mean she's gone??

QUINCY

Right! Focus, Q! You gotta believe
me. It's my sister. She-- you
remember Carla? My sister? She's
this tall, really fun, a super good
actor but no one knows cuz she's
afraid to chase her dreams--

JUSTIN

(impatient)

I was with y'all a few hours ago.

QUINCY

Right, duh. She's gone!! After Zee
tried to eat you we headed home and
she saw this thing on her hand, so
I went to grab the hose in the
backyard, and when I came back
around the house... poof.

JUSTIN

Come on Quincy--

QUINCY

I've looked everywhere! Can you
help me find her? Please?

INT. JUSTIN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - SAME

We're staring at a very intrigued Nia & very unconvinced
Lyric, sitting on the couch on both sides of Justin.

NIA

And there was nothing? No sign that
she was just... hiding from you?

QUINCY

Nothing! Just this, like, purple
smoke in the air-- ooo, cookies!

Quincy runs to a METAL BLUE COOKIE CAN in the kitchen,
opening it. **From now on: Justin, Lyric and Nia talk privately
on the couch as Quincy's in the background, ignored by them.**

LYRIC

(to Justin & Nia)

Guys, come on.

QUINCY

Aww... these aren't cookies.

JUSTIN

(to Quincy w/o looking)
They're never cookies.

NIA

(to Quincy w/o looking)
They're never cookies.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

(to Lyric)

I know, but Zee used to always say
no matter what, if someone asks for
help, The Finder Four have to try.

In the BG, Quincy's grabbed a CHICK-O-STICK off the counter
and started opening it, pacing. Suddenly, right before taking
a bite... **his HANDS straight up DISAPPEAR?!?!** He comedically
freezes, unsure what to make of this... and drops the candy.

NIA

I believe Quincy.

JUSTIN & LYRIC

You do? / Seriously?

NIA

Not sure he's capable of lying this
well. And today's a really weird
day?

Quincy's waving his hands in front of his face. Are they
there? He SLAPS himself. Yep, they're there. Just invisible.

QUINCY

(trying to stay calm)

Umm... guys?

NIA

(to Quincy w/o looking)

Sorry, give us one sec.

LYRIC

Ugh, Nia's not wrong. I hooked up my recorder to my mom's laptop to playback what Zee was saying and he didn't make any sense at all.

JUSTIN

I know... it's like his brain is broken?

In the BG, Quincy's FEET disappear.

QUINCY

What is happening?!

JUSTIN

(to Quincy w/o looking)
For real.
(to Nia & Lyric, hushed)
So you think something really did happen to Carla? Don't think Quincy's just...

LYRIC

Being Quincy?

All at once, both his legs AND arms: GONE. Okay, now Quincy's FULL-BLOWN panicking. Hilariously just a floating head & chest, he goes to SCREAM to warn them but... remember that whole "his screams make no noise" thing? He silently yells and runs out of frame in the bg - they still don't notice.

NIA

Quite possibly.

LYRIC

Well, alright then. Where do we start, Justin?

JUSTIN

Ugh, Zee was so much better at making plans... Where could she have gone--

Quincy, running with his eyes closed, runs into the FRIDGE-- *WHAM!* - the sound of it makes the kids FINALLY turn around!

LYRIC

QUINCY WHAT THE POOP?!

NIA

WAH!! WHERE ARE YOUR LIMBS, MAN?!?!

QUINCY

(in pain)

Ow my headd. I was running like a
million miles an hour.

NIA

It's less than a million miles from
the earth to the moon so I doubt it
was that fast.

QUINCY

So two million?!

JUSTIN

Is now really the time for this?!

Where are his arms and legs?!

BOOP! Now Quincy's torso's gone! It's just his floating head!

JUSTIN/NIA/LYRIC

AHH!!!

QUINCY

(scared by THEIR screams)

AHH!!!

ALL

AHHHHHH!!!!!!

QUINCY

Is it a bug?!?! Get it!! Get it off
get it OFF GET IT OFF!!!!!!

And just like that, in a poof of PURPLE SMOKE, Quincy's GONE!
The kids don't know what to do, but they're freaking... out.

LYRIC

HE JUST-- I SAW-- WHERE is-- DUDE?!

JUSTIN

Quincy?!?! What just happened?!

Justin starts touching the empty ground, trying to make sense
of this. Look for any clues. Just then, NIA GASPS!

NIA

Oh my gosh. What if-- oh my GOSH
WHAT IF IT WAS THE SEEKER?! THE
SEEKER!! THE SEEKER GOT QUINCY!!!

LYRIC

The Hide and Seek Monster?! Nia be
serious! That's crazy!

NIA
CRAZIER THAN QUINCY'S FLOATING HEAD
DISAPPEARING ON THE FLOOR?!

LYRIC
Yes! Maybe we should call the cops!
JUSTIN NIA
HECK no!! NO!! What would we even say?!

LYRIC
You're right, bad idea.
NIA
What do we do Justin he's gone!!!

JUSTIN
Let me just-- just, let me think--
guys let me think!

Justin stress-paces and goes to grab the puzzle piece from his pocket, but it's not there. He checks other pockets, panic-attack building, then feels SOMETHING ELSE in one:

The green GAMING PIECE that Zee slipped in there. With a closer look, we see it's a Man with a Melee Weapon. Justin seems to immediately recognize it. Lyric & Nia notice.

LYRIC
What is it??
JUSTIN
...We're going back to Zee's house.

EXT. ZEE'S HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

We see each of the kids' fists KNOCK on the door. No answer. Behind them are the bikes that they rode on, toppled over.

NIA
Sorry why are we here again?

JUSTIN
Zee has this board game "*ZOMBIES!*"
we used to play. I found his
favorite piece from it in my
pocket.

LYRIC
So we came back cuz you found a
toy?? Quincy's head was floating!!

JUSTIN

It's not a toy. It's the only piece he plays with. You know how Zee hates losing. He wanted to beat me so bad before playing it with anyone else cuz it was his game, but I'd always win. There's no way he'd let me take his piece home without knowing. I think he put it there when he... ya know--

LYRIC

(sarcastic)

Tackled you? Cool. Great idea, man.

NIA

Cooperate or give a better idea.

All the kids knock simultaneously again. Lyric complies, on board with this. He strangely starts taking steps back.

NIA (CONT'D)

Why aren't they answering?

JUSTIN

The car isn't in the driveway.
Poop. Maybe they're not here.

KLOW!! Lyric hilariously RAMS the door open!

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

Dude you can't just do that! NIA
That's illegal, Lyric!!

LYRIC

Yea yea-- if we're doing this we're doing it! Operation: Devil's House!

They RUSH in. Justin checks to see if anyone saw, closing--

JUSTIN (O.S.)

And you wanted to call the cops!
Now look atcha!

INT. ZEE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

--the door shut. It's exactly how it looked yesterday, but with the lights off it's justttt a little creepier.

JUSTIN

(calling out)

Zee? Are you home?

LYRIC

It's us--

NIA

Three of The Finder Four.

Silence...then a *RUSTLING* from upstairs.

JUSTIN

Sounded like it came from his room.

INT. ZEE'S HOUSE - STAIRS - CONTINUOUS

The gang creeps up the stairs as the *RUSTLING* continues.

Lyric, seeing a nervous NIA, jumps on the opportunity.

LYRIC

(whisper, teasing)

We're good. Probably just a monster
looking for food that's exactly
your height and smells like you.

NIA

(whisper, deadly serious)

It's very possible.

JUSTIN

(whisper)

Lyric, stop trying to scare Nia!
And Nia, monsters aren't real!

NIA

(whisper)

Quincy just disappeared in front of
our eyes! Nothing's real until it
is! Maybe you're not real!!

They hear something in the room DROP and they freeze...

JUSTIN

Zee?

As they get closer to his bedroom door they notice fresh
CRACKS in it and 2 LOCKS. Like an animal trapped in a cage.

NIA

For the record, I think you are
real... I just can't prove it.

Something else DROPS or is THROWN and Zee YELPS from the
inside. Justin unlocks the door and FLINGS it open.

INT. ZEE'S HOUSE - ZEE'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Thin black paper lines the wall, allowing the sun to barely bleed through. Papers on the walls & floor full of broken sentences & drawings. Zee's mind's a confused & lost place.

Zee is curled on the ground with his arms around his knees - a book and fallen SNOW GLOBE nearby.

Justin, Lyric, and Nia all look at Zee from outside of his room - unsure about going in. Nia nods to Lyric and Lyric NODS back, then they PUSH Justin in.

He looks back at them, *Seriously?*, then creeps forward.

JUSTIN

Hey...are you okay? It's me.

Zee has no idea he's there. Lyric starts recording.

NIA

(whisper)

If he gets aggressive, stand tall
and put your hands in the air!
That's what you do if you see a
bear!

LYRIC

(to Nia)
Bars.

NIA (CONT'D)

Bars.

JUSTIN

Zee... I found your piece from
Zombies... did you give that to me?

Zee's unfazed by his presence. Justin gets an idea.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

...EGBA.

Zee finally looks right up at Justin... as if the real Zee hidden deep down finally heard his best friend's code. Justin notices and walk towards him, to the GASPS of other friends.

NIA

(quiet, to Lyric)

Wait, what's an EGBA?

LYIRC

(quiet, to Nia)

I dunno, but they sure seem to have
a lot of best friend secrets. Feel
like you and me should have a
secret handshake or something.

NIA
You mean "You and I."

LYRIC
And this is why we don't have a
handshake.

As soon as Justin puts his hand on Zee's arm Zee reacts as if it's the worst thing he could have done.

ZEE
NO TOUCHING!! NO TOUCHING!!!

As Zee gets vocal and the kids start reacting, please note that Nia's now hilariously standing tall with her hands in the air as if Zee is a bear.

LYRIC//NIA
Whoa whoa! Runnn! / Scare the bear!
BE the bear!! ROAR!!!

Zee starts RIPPING papers off the wall and searching frantically for a white marker.

ZEE
(talking aloud to no one)
...playing what Seeker loves to
hate... the mark appears, your time
to go...! unless you play, but--

JUSTIN
What are you trying to tell me?

Zee finds a marker and starts DRAWING something. Justin tip toes closer to see what it is... it looks like a WHITE FROG? More importantly, he notices a black SMUDGE on his hand--

Zee sees how close Justin is and goes AFTER him.

ZEE
--as a team!!

Nia YANKS Justin out of the room and they SLAM the door, using all of their strength to stop Zee from bursting through it. They lock the locks and run down the stairs as Z screams:

ZEE (O.C.) (CONT'D)
ME!!

EXT. ZEE'S HOUSE - FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

The kids RUSH outside and onto the grass, out of breath. After some moments of heavy breathing:

LYRIC

Just more crazy talk. Awesome.
Totally worth risking our lives!

NIA

There was one thing though... he
said "Seeker."

They all look at each other, worried.

JUSTIN

I don't know what any of this
means, but somehow Zee does. We
need to figure out what it is.
Right now it feels like the only
way to get Carla and Quincy home...
(then)

Wait a minute. Look?

They follow his glaring toward someone across the street
through the tall hedges down the bluff... it's HYDRO the Ice
Cream man, watching them! As soon as they lock eyes, Hydro,
caught, puts the truck in DRIVE and speeds off.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

The weird Ice Cream Man! I think
he knows something!!

LYRIC

Let's get em!!

They hop on their bikes and the chase BEGINS!

INT./EXT. (THE CHASE) HYDRO'S CAR - SAME

Hydro looks at his rearview and sees them coming. CRAP.

He *would* make a speedy break for it but he's stuck behind a
VAN - so he quickly CUTS through a nearby neighborhood:

EXT. (THE CHASE) - DEALS CIRCLE NORTH - CONTINUOUS

The kids catch up and make it up to Hydro's windows--

JUSTIN

We need to talk to you!!

LYRIC

Yea! And two pushup pops and an ice
cream sandwich for Nia!

NIA
The one with chocolate chips!

Hydro looks at them, then puts his hand on a dangling HANDLE--

JUSTIN
Uh oh...

And with a smirk... he turns on the *ICE CREAM TRUCK JINGLE*.

INT./EXT. VARIOUS HOUSES IN NEW NEIGHBORHOOD

-A young INDIAN GIRL stops playing her video game.

-A little ASIAN BOY lying under a table stops coloring.

-BLACK TRIPLETS pop their heads out of a blanket fort.

TRIPLETS
ICEEEEEEE CREAMMMMM!!!!

They THROW off the blanket and SPRINT through the house.

-The Indian Girl TOSSES her remote and RUNS.

-The Asian Boy SLAMS his head on the bottom of the table, rubs it, then starts running like he's drunk... Ouch.

EXT. (THE CHASE) - HARRIET'S BLUFF ROAD - CONTINUOUS

NIA
Incoming!!!

An ARMY OF NEIGHBORHOOD KIDS with \$1 bills SCREAM & chase the Truck with \$1 BILLS in hand, completely slowing them down.

Up ahead Hydro's already about to turn left and start circling out of the neighborhood, his plan working perfectly. Justin notices a gate-less impasse between houses coming up.

JUSTIN
This way!

Justin leads them through a bumpy shortcut between houses and they sadly have no choices but to run over somebody's garden.

RANDOM ANGRY MOM
Oh no y'all didn't!!! Hey!!

CUT TO:

Hydro rounds the corner, not slowing for the kid army, and notices in his side-mirror that he lost J, Lyric & Nia.

As he stops checking for them, smirking, we see through that mirror that they APPEAR and are IN FRONT of the army now!

BACK TO:

JUSTIN
Operation: Chain-Link!!

With all the speed and strength she has, Nia SPEEDS UP to the back of the truck and GRABS ONTO IT!! Justin does the same, right next to her grabbing onto her chair, and Lyric on rear.

Completely out of sight but hitching a ride, they hold tight as Hydro obviously drives them out of the neighborhood.

EXT. HYDRO'S JUNKYARD - SOON AFTER

Where old cars and beaten up furniture go to die. This place is a gated trash heap protected from the outside world.

The kids let go as Hydro drives in, parking the ice cream truck. They hop off the bikes, GASPING for air.

LYRIC
Okay...that...was freaking awesome.

NIA
...This isn't.

She shows them her hand...the SYMBOL is on it.

NIA (CONT'D)
(scared)
Quincy told you something was on
Carla's hand too... Before she--

HYDRO (O.S.)
You stupid kids.

Hydro hops down out of the ice cream truck and storms toward them. This isn't the somewhat-sweet Hydro we met before.

HYDRO (CONT'D)
What do you want? You're on private
property, now. So legally I could
feed you to my dogs if I wanted...
if I had any dogs.

NIA
I'm almost certain that's not true
either way.

LYRIC
Who are you?! Are you The Seeker?!

JUSTIN
What did you do to our friends!

LYRIC
(quiet, to himself)
Well I wouldn't call 'em "friends"--

HYDRO
(to Justin)
Ha! Am I The Seeker?! Are you the
easter bunny?

NIA
Tell the truth! And, give us as
many details as possible so when we
expose you everything is accurate!

HYDRO
The truth is... it's not my fault
you broke the rules.

The kids look at each other. *What is he talking about?*

HYDRO (CONT'D)
(convincing himself,
childlike)
I have no reason to be mad at
myself cuz I didn't do anything. I
didn't! I just tell kids to play
the game but I don't make them
break the rules!
(to himself, manic)
You had no choice, Hydro. Remember?
It's not your fault!

The kids look at each other: ?????

Hydro heads toward his house and is taking off his GREEN GLOVES for the first time, where Justin sees a SMUDGE on his hand... the same one Zee had. It's the SYMBOL that's mostly gone but will never truly leave. He looks back at Nia's.

JUSTIN
(to Hydro)
Wait... did you disappear too?

Hydro stops... quiet. Cold.

HYDRO

Who... who told you that? Can you talk to it? No, there's no way--

JUSTIN

Where'd you go? Is that where Zee was?? Where's Carla and Quincy?!

HYDRO

(not listening, losing it)
Unless it's getting stronger? Ha!!
You're not tricking me! I'm not going back there! My brain's staying right here! Back to work!

Hydro nervously *LAUGHS* as he RUNS back to his truck, turns on the *JINGLE* and gets back on the road in search of more kids.

Justin, confused & defeated, watches his only lead disappear. He turns to say something but Nia & Lyric are already on the front porch of Hydro's house trying to break open window.

LYRIC

Nope, no screws.

NIA

Perfect, then it should pop righttt-- out, yep.

Nia pops the window screen off and jimmies the window open, climbing through - Lyric's right behind him.

LYRIC (CONT'D)

So I couldn't burst Zee's door down but you can break into Ice Cream man's window?

JUSTIN

(stage whisper)
Guys!! Get outta there!

He hurries over and climbs right in too.

INT. HYDRO'S HOUSE - HYDRO'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The kids land in Hydro's room and it's a different kind of weird. It looks like it belongs to a 10 year old? The bed's in the shape of a CAR, dude - toys & games litter the floor.

NIA

Isn't Hydro a little old to have this kid stuff?

JUSTIN

Nia you could disappear any second. We have to move. Look for clues.

LYRIC

Okay. Let's split up.

JUSTIN

Split up? No? Can we just look in
every room together, but fast?

LYRIC

I like that better.

NIA

Makes more sense.

QUICK MONTAGE:

-They tear the bedrooom apart. Justin finds DRAWINGS in the nightstand - similar to Zee's walls, but less manic.

-They search the dirty **LIVING** ROOM. Nothing.

-The **KITCHEN?** Wayyy too much junk food but not much else.

INT. HYDRO'S HOUSE - GUEST ROOM - CONTINUOUS

It looks like it hasn't been touched in years - plain powder blue walls and bed. There's even a METAL BLUE COOKIE CAN.

LYRIC

I doubt there's anything in here.

NIA

I dunno... everything else about
Hydro seems pretty messy. This is
the only place that's... normal?

JUSTIN

Meaning that it's not.

Nods. They start upturning, and Justin opens the:

CLOSET

Where he sees DOZENS of the EXACT OUTFIT Hydro wears: white Ice Cream Jumper and Green Gloves. What a weirdo. Even stranger: there's a SECOND identical DOOR in the closet. But--

LYRIC

It's locked. Of course.

NIA

Let me see.

Nia examines.

NIA (CONT'D)

Perfect. Standard privacy doorknob.
I need something small and pointy.

JUSTIN (O.C.)

Got it.

J enters with the METAL BLUE COOKIE CAN from the room.

Nia opens it...and there are SEWING PINS in there.

LYRIC

Nice! How'd you know there'd be
pins in there?!

NIA & JUSTIN

There's always pins in there.

If you don't get that joke, trust me - you know someone that will. Nia chooses which needle, and starts picking the lock.

CLICK. The door opens.

INT. HYDRO'S HOUSE - ATTIC - CONTINUOUS

Two walls are covered in PICTURES and NEWSPAPERS CLIPPINGS, making them look like Detective boards. On one, *everything* about THE SEEKER: monster sketches, Myth breakdowns, etc. Nia takes out her NOTEBOOK and start jotting things down.

On the other: newspaper cutouts of missing kids over the years from the surrounding neighborhoods. Justin looks briefly at a huge NEWSPAPER CLIPPING **HUNT FOR MARY MILLER GOES ON** and next to her is a separate clipping... of Zee.

He grabs the photo of his old smiling friend off the wall, looking down at it, and past it on the desk below he sees a BROWN LEATHER JOURNAL sticking out from some papers.

JUSTIN

I found something.

They walk over as he tries to open it, but it won't budge.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

Whaddaya think Nia?

Nia puts her notebook down, grabs the journal to investigate.

NIA

It's a trick lock! Just looks real
so people think they can't open it.

CLICK! She unlocks it. They found the holy grail. Pages and pages of scribbles and info about a place called **NOWHERE**.

LYRIC

What does "Make a Deal, Take a Deal" mean? He wrote it a lot.

JUSTIN

Looks like he's talking about a place called... "Nowhere"?

Suddenly they're all seeing the book THROUGH Nia's hands. Pieces of her are suddenly SEE-THROUGH.

NIA

(trying to remain calm)

Guys, It's happening. Okay, okay. We knew this was coming. It's fine. I'll be okay. Right? Yea. Yea!

Justin tries to hug her but as he touches her, the familiar purple smoke steams off his clothes. That freaks him out more than he's willing to admit.

NIA (CONT'D)

While the fact that I just exuded smoke is terrifying... it's also fascinating. WOW! What did I feel like?! Does the purple smoke smell-- I'll ask you later.

Nia's almost completely gone. She squeezes the journal tight.

NIA (CONT'D)

(tearing up)

Wow I'm... I'm getting nervous now. I feel funny. Just... promise we'll find each other, ok? You promise?

JUSTIN/LYRIC

We promise.

As a tear rolls down her cheek and over her confident smile... The Seeker has its hold on her. With the only remaining evidence being a puff of smoke... Nia's gone.

JUSTIN

Nia...

Lyric starts to tear up... this was hard for him to watch.

LYRIC

What if... what if we can't find her Justin?

(MORE)

LYRIC (CONT'D)

What if we can't find each other??
We don't even know even know where
we're going!

Justin puts his hands on Lyrics shoulders.

JUSTIN

We're the Finder Four. This is what
we do. We're gonna find them, okay?

Lyric listens, and nods. He grabs Nia's notebook and wipes
his tears. Justin looks around on the ground for something.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

The journal?

They look around for it, but it's not there?

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

When the Seeker grabbed her it
didn't drop Hydro's journal?

LYRIC

You're right? Which means...

JUSTIN

She has it with her in Nowhere.

They look at each other, a plan forming. Quicker than it has,
Lyric hears a smoky *BOOM*. The SYMBOL's appeared on his hand.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

Let's head back.

LYRIC

Operation: Find the Finder Four.

INT. JUSTIN'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - LATER

Justin's filling his backpack with classic southern snacks.
He grabs a flashlight, then a JET LIGHTER out of the drawer:
Do I need this? He clicks it and it SHOOTS fire out of it
like rocket. He turns it off before he burns the house down.

He hears the GARAGE DOOR open, closes the pantry, and tosses
his bag to the side. Kiara walks in... to see Justin casually
drinking a glass of water... She's already skeptical.

KIARA

Uh uh...what happened?

JUSTIN

What? Whatchu mean?

KIARA

All them sodas in the fridge and
you're drinking water? Who died?
(catching herself)
Wow. That was so stupid and not
what I meant to say. I'm so sorry.

JUSTIN

I know, I know.

Justin is hard to read right now. This may be the last time he ever gets to see his big sis and he knows it.

KIARA

I know I asked earlier but seriously, are you okay? Do I need to fight somebody or something?

JUSTIN

No, no. I'm just really tired.

KIARA

Mmmk. Well, ya know I only get two hours of sleep before my next job so I'm going to bed. Night lil bro.

She smiles and heads out. For the first time, Justin hears the smoky *BOOM*. He looks down at his hand and there it is - the symbol. He stares at it a while, having his final moment of silence. We hear frogs *CROAKING* outside.

INT. JUSTIN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - SOON AFTER

Justin's about to head up to his room... but he looks over at the door to his mom's. He walks over, resting his hand on the knob for a bit. After a deep breath...he walks in.

INT. JUSTIN'S HOUSE - MAMA'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Justin walks into this pristine, untouched room fit for a Queen. Family picture frames and knickknacks give the room the same warmth that his mother must have had.

At the foot of the bed is a completed puzzle of a beautiful animated black family with a big blue sky above. With a closer look, we see there's actually one piece missing.

Justin stares at it for just a moment, then moves to the:

INT. JUSTIN'S HOUSE - MAMA'S CLOSET - SAME (INTERCUT)

He rummages through and finally finds a shoebox full of his prized possessions. He pulls out a FIRECRACKER and packs it. Once he feels prepared, he pulls out Zee's green GAME PIECE.

JUSTIN
We got this, Zee. I promise.

Suddenly he can see the gaming piece THROUGH his hand.

He hears a mysterious *BEAT*, then strange *NOISES* as he walks back in his mom's room: a *BURST* of lightning, the *HISS* of snakes, a doll asking "*Can we play all day?*" - the many sounds of NOWHERE. Then ALL AT ONCE... the sounds disappear.

THE SEEKER (V.O.)
I SET THE RULES AND I WILL WIN.

SMASH TO BLACK

INT. [NOWHERE] JUSTIN'S HOUSE - MOM'S ROOM - CLOSET - SAME??

Justin opens his eyes.. He's standing in the exact same spot? Is he... still in the real world? Nah he's not buying it. He adorably jumps into a BOXING stance just in case.

...But nothing happens. No danger comes. Weird.

JUSTIN
I don't like this...

JUSTIN'S MOM (O.C.)
Aww baby, there you are.

Justin freezes... it can't be. He turns to see a SHADOW cascading from inside the bathroom onto the bathroom door.

JUSTIN
...Mama?

JUSTIN'S MOM (O.S.)
Come here, handsome. Let me see ya!

It looks like the shadow from inside the bathroom is curling her hair. Justin starts creeping toward the bathroom door.

JUSTIN'S MOM (O.S.) (CONT'D)
(playful)
Come on boy, I don't have all day.

The shadow mom stops doing her hair as he nears and seems to turn toward him, ready to greet him. As he's close... her shadow HAIR CURLS start to MOVE BY THEMSELVES, like snakes!

JUSTIN'S MOM (O.C.) (CONT'D)
Let's play a puzzle!

JUSTIN
AH!! HECK NO!!

Justin SPRINTS out the door, and while we expect him to enter right into his living room, he instead steps into:

INT. [NOWHERE] - FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH - CONTINUOUS?

Justin SLAMS the door behind him and realizes it's not the same door? He turns but can't see much - it's pitch black.

From the other side of the door we hear:

JUSTIN'S MOM (V.O.)
But my baby, you love puzzles?
Where are you going?

He considers opening it to see her, but when the knob JIGGLES he IMMEDIATELY jams a nearby chair underneath. Quick breaths, a panic-attack building, he rubs the puzzle piece until calm.

He grabs the FLASHLIGHT from his backpack and knocks it on his thigh until it turns on - it's a barren CHURCH?? Colorful cathedral glass and red pews.

JUSTIN
Definitely a black church.
(suddenly realizing)
Wait, where-- WAIT! How did I get here???

He tiptoes down the aisle, utterly confused but on a mission.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
(whisper)
Nia? Lyric? Quincy?
(beat, ugh)
Carla?

SCARED OF GHOSTS (O.S.)
Are you a ghost??

Justin turns to a sweaty little girl, SCARED OF GHOSTS, (10), lying down on the pew and church-fanning herself. She's slowly inching away from him, cautious. He is too.

JUSTIN
Uh, no? Are you a ghost?

SCARED OF GHOSTS
I'll ask the questions, punk!

JUSTIN
Hey! Who you callin a punk, weirdo!

SCARED OF GHOSTS
Huh, you don't sound like a
ghost... unless that's what you
want me to think! Aha! Prove it!

JUSTIN
How am I-- ugh, fine. You can't
feel a ghost, right? Watch.

Justin reaches for her and she FALLS off the pew, avoiding!

SCARED OF GHOSTS
I knew it! You know we don't touch
down here! Get away smelly ghost!
How did you find my hiding spot?!

Justin sniffs his pits... *smelly*? The scared girl looks up
and around, seeing something we don't.

SCARED OF GHOSTS (CONT'D)
Bah!! I wasn't even scared!! I
wasn't even scared!!!

JUSTIN
What is happening right now??

She RUNS toward the door leading into Justin's Mom's room.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
Wait wait no not that way!

Scared of Ghosts THROWS the chair out of the way, running
from what we can assume are ghosts only she can see, and
before the door can open Justin sprints through another.

INT. [NOWHERE] - SIXTH GRADE LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS?

Justin rushes into an empty locker room and hides... then
realizes he's... in a locker room?????

JUSTIN
How do I keep doing that?!

He hears some lockers lightly *SHAKE*, and creeps forward.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
 (whisper)
 Lyric? Nia? Is that you?? Are you
 in here? Wherever... here is?
 (to himself)
 Geez. I'm scared.

As if the room heard him, a LOCKER he's passing OPENS and starts VACUUMING him inside! He grabs onto what he can--

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
 Whoa whoa wahhhh!!

SWOOP! SLAM! The Locker sucks him up, shuts closed, and once again Justin is trapped inside. He BANGS on the door.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
 Uck! Smells like dirty underwear!
 Somebody get me outta here!

He hears what sounds like another locker lightly *RATTLE*, followed by light FOOTSTEPS trying to be quiet.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
 Hello? Is somebody there?

The quiet footsteps stop. SILENCE... then the person *SNEEZES*.

VOICE (O.C.)
 Dang it. Uh... no?
 (to themself)
 Why'd you say that? You know you're not a good liar!

JUSTIN
 Wait a minute--

VOICE (O.C.)
 Erm, what's the password! If you say the password I'll let you out!

JUSTIN
 Quincy?!

Pause... Suddenly the locker door FLINGS open and Justin spills out right onto the cold tile floor.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
 Ow.

QUINCY (O.C.)
 JUSTIN!!!! Holy HECK. HOWWW.... did you know the password?! You really can solve anything!

JUSTIN
 (in pain from the fall)
 The password was your name? How was
 anybody gonna guess that?

Quincy reaches out a hand to help him up. Justin goes to grab-

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
 Wait... I don't think we're
 supposed to touch down here.

He stands up on his own.

QUINCY
 Oh... Why?

JUSTIN
 Don't know yet. Where are we? Are
 you okay?

QUINCY
 Yea! Umm, well, no. I mean, yea!
 (in one breath)
 I was looking for my sister but
 there are really, really, really,
 really, really, scary things in
 here so I was running a lot but
 then I found this place and there's
 a ton of lockers to hide in so I
 hid in one and I was hiding so long
 that I fell asleep and then you
 woke me up so I'm okay now cuz I
 had a great nap and I love naps.

Justin stares blankly.

JUSTIN
 ...right. Did you find out where
 Carla might be? Lyric? Nia?

QUINCY
 They're here too?! Oh no!

JUSTIN
 It's okay. We found each other.
 Maybe this place isn't that big.

As they leave, we get the feeling that they're being WATCHED.

INT. [NOWHERE] - RANDOM CLASSROOM - LATER

NIA quietly enters a classroom, checking the coast is clear.

NIA
(quiet, to herself)
Ugh! This place is HUGE!

She flips Hydro's Journal, reading the next page:

NIA (CONT'D)
"We named it Nowhere cuz there's nowhere to run, only places to hide. And what we're hiding from is whatever it is we're most scared of." Fascinating.

She hides behind the Teacher's Desk, reading on the floor.

NIA (CONT'D)
Oh my gosh, here it is! Make a Deal, Take a Deal!
(reading)
"The only way to leave Nowhere is if..."
(in disbelief)
No... Zee, what did you do?

Before she can unpack she hears the door near her *OPEN!*

Footsteps come close. Nia inches back beneath the desk when-- **SMACK**. She bumps her head and books **TOPPLE** to the floor!

The footsteps stop... she's exposed herself. Whatever this is, is about to **GET** her and just as she's about to **SCREAM**--

It's LYRIC!!! His shirt's tied around his head, he wears a packed BACKPACK and wields 2 WATER BALLOONS in one hand.

NIA (CONT'D)
LYRIC! LYRIC YOU FOUND ME! FINALLY!

Lyric seems to look through her, almost disappointed? He scans around... then walks away? As if she wasn't there?

NIA (CONT'D)
Lyric??

She reaches out to grab his leg but misses him because her head hurts so much from smacking it on the desk.

LYRIC
Nia? Justin? Quincy?
(beat, ugh)
Carla?

NIA
This isn't funny, Lyric!

LYRIC
Justin? Nia-- ah, forget it.

He gets back to reading off of Nia's notebook.

LYRIC (CONT'D)
(to himself, reciting)
"Unless you play but as--

He pushes forward as Nia stands, watching him, confused.

NIA LYRIC (CONT'D)
Lyric, quit! I'm right here! --a team." What the heck did
You're scaring me! that mean, Z?

He leaves. She looks at her hands to make sure she's not invisible, goes to chase after, but suddenly grows extremely TIRED. She looks the same, but mentally... has Nia just aged?

NIA (CONT'D)
(like a Grandma)
Now, what am I doin' in here? I
ain't got no business bein' in no
class... unless I'm the teacher?
Hmph.

EXT. [NOWHERE] - GRAVEYARD

Justin and Quincy walk through Tombstones on alert.

JUSTIN
Lyric? Nia? Are you out here?

QUINCY
Sis? It's me! Quincy! Your brother!
(then)
The one who sings!

JUSTIN
You have other brothers?

QUINCY
Nope. Why?

Who or whatever's watching them is getting CLOSER. Justin feels it and turns around, but nothing's there.

JUSTIN
Let's walk a little faster.
Something doesn't feel right.

QUINCY
Works for me! This place is creepy!

They speed up, calling out a little louder.

JUSTIN / QUINCY
Lyric! Nia! / Carla!

GIRL (O.S.)
Shhhh!

They JUMP to see a black GIRL, (9), hiding behind a tombstone. She's younger, but feels like she could beat them up. There's something dry about her that's oddly comforting.

GIRL (CONT'D)
You must be some of the new ones.

JUSTIN
New ones?

QUINCY
Who are you?!

GIRL
Shhh. You don't wanna talk too loud here, and try not to look anything. The kid whose memory place this is has been in Nowhere so long, just looking at the wrong thing might scare you. Imagine how bad it would be if he touches you.

She keeps moving. Justin follows, Quincy right behind.

JUSTIN
(whisper)
Wait, huh? What happens if he touches you? And why do we keep appearing different places?!

GIRL
Umm... It's like... ugh. I'm not good at explaining things.

JUSTIN
(to Girl)
I have to find my friends, so you have to try. What's a memory place?

QUINCY
(too loud)
I think we should get out of here, Justin. I don't trust her!

GIRL

Shh! Okay! Ugh. Umm. Every room is a different kid's memory, or their favorite place. The longer they've been here or the more scared you are when you're in one, the scarier the place is. Make sense?

QUINCY

Nothing you say makes sense!

GIRL

BE. QUIET!

Suddenly we hear a *CHUCKLE* at a nearby grave. Uh oh. A wild, heavy boy COVERED in dirt, SCARED OF GRAVEYARDS, (13, looks like the kid that was forced to eat a whole cake in *Matilda* if he actually ENJOYED it), smiles. The Girl knew he'd show.

GIRL (CONT'D)

Great. Well...

Without another word, she nonchalantly picks up a large STICK off the ground... and TAKES off running! SoG starts the chase, so the boys takes off too?! They leap over tombstones, SoG having to take the long way around.

JUSTIN

Why's he chasing us?! Didn't the Seeker take him too?!

GIRL

Some kids've been in here so long they've gone coo-coo!

QUINCY

WAIT! The SEEKER took us?! SO THIS IS REAL?! I THOUGHT I WAS ASLEEP!!

Justin doesn't see a root sticking out of the ground and TRIPS - stumbles for a while, refusing to fall, until a tombstone catches him. He pushes himself off of it and quickly recognizes his own name on it! **JUSTIN MADDOX '09-'22**

We feel a huge panic attack building up that is quickly thwarted when he's THWACKED on the leg with the Girl's stick.

JUSTIN

Ow! Did you just hit me with that?!

GIRL

Snap out of it! He's gaining on us!

Scared of Ghosts IS right behind them and they keep racing away again, but it's too late! SoG DIVES at Justin, but just as it looks like he'll get him Justin JUKES out of the way, causing the loony kid to nosedive into a puddle of MUD. Ouch.

EXT. [NOWHERE] - MIDDLE OF THE WOODS - CONTINUOUS

Having escaped, Justin, Quincy and Girl stop running and lean against trees, catching their breath. They're in the woods.

QUINCY

These kids are crazy!!

GIRL

Nice juke back there. We're here.

She pops off the tree, walking deeper into the woods.

JUSTIN

Here, where?

As they get deeper and deeper, she stops at one specific tree - looking around to make sure no one is watching.

GIRL

Do you feel scared right now?

JUSTIN
Maybe a little--?

QUINCY
I'm scared most of the time--

GIRL

(hilariously deadpan)

If you're scared The Seeker will smell it and find us here possibly splitting us up forever and without me it'll take you way longer to find your friends so are you scared or no cuz we should pause here if you are.

The boys' eyes go wide. *What theeee?*

QUINCY

K, since you know so much... where IS The Seeker, huh? Does it live in an evil castle or something? How do we know YOU'RE not the monster!

MARY

It isn't one thing, it's like um.... ugh, I'm not good at explaining things, but--

JUSTIN

Like a lot of little things put together?

MARY

Yea. The Seeker turns into each of our fears and loves to scare us. Like... like we're playing Hide and Seek forever, but against what we're scared of.

QUINCY

Do you think it wants to eat me? Cuz I know I'd be delicious but I don't want it to know that.

MARY

...no. I think it just wants to play a game it can't lose. Now are you scared or not?

Justin grabs his puzzle piece and rubs it. Calming himself.

JUSTIN

...no.

Justin looks at Quincy... who *SIGHS* and *MAKES* himself sure.

QUINCY.

I'm lots of things. But scared? Pfft! Nope. Not me. No way.

She picks up a large rock and throws it up at something, we hear it *CLINK* and a wooden rope ladder falls from above. Justin & Quincy look up, finally noticing the TREE HOUSE.

JUSTIN

We can't follow you up there without at least knowing your name.

GIRL

...Mary.

JUSTIN

Justin. This is Quincy.

QUINCY

But you can call me... Quincy.

Mary stares at him, deadpan and confused, then climbs.

QUINCY (CONT'D)

Are you sure about this?

JUSTIN

I know. But she did just save us. I think we should go with her.

QUINCY

Oh... no I just meant climbing the ladder. I never know if my feet or hands should go up first so I kinda just end up jumping the whole time--

JUSTIN

Dude.

QUINCY (CONT'D)

Okay, right, sorry.

Justin looks around to make sure no one is watching, then starts climbing. Quincy goes to start, but doesn't know how... so he AWKWARDLY JUMPS on it like he said he would.

EXT. [NOWHERE] - TREEHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Mary & Justin climb into this tiny warm safe space and click on lanterns. The windows are stuffed so lights cant be seen.

MARY

Welcome to my hiding spot. I hide the ladder so nobody can use it.

On the desk is a makeshift MAP made of white crayon on black construction paper. Names of LOCATIONS with childish DRAWINGS along with LISTS OF FEARS. Mary grabs it and hands it over.

MARY (CONT'D)

It's a map. It should make finding your friends easier. Don't worry, I can make more.

Justin gives it a look, then goes to ask one more question--

MARY (CONT'D)

Before you ask why I'm helping you... I heard you calling out your friends' names in the locker room and followed you. I haven't seen anyone actually look for people here in a long time. Most kids just give up after a while.

She shyly smile. There's more meaning there than he knows.

JUSTIN

(to Mary)

Look Mary, this might sound crazy, but there's a way out of Nowhere. I don't know what it is yet, but--

MARY
I know the way out.

As Justin stares blankly at her, in the bg, Quincy's head can finally be seen on the top of the ladder - he's hilariously out of breath from jumping. Going for the final JUMP UP that would get him into the treehouse... his hands slip and we just hear him fall all the way back down with a... *THUD*.

QUINCY (O.S.)
I'm okay!

JUSTIN
(to Mary)
You know?? Then why are you still here?

MARY
If you make a deal with The Seeker, you get to go home but you promise to work for it by tricking other kids to cheat.

JUSTIN
No... that can't be the only way?
What happens if you just stop working for it?

MARY
Bad idea. Nowhere stays with you. The Seeker can't totally pull you back but if you break your contract, your body stays there, your brain kinda stays here. So you're stuck halfway, forever.

JUSTIN
Stuck halfway... Wait... Halfway--

Justin, putting the pieces together, takes us to--

INT. [REAL WORLD] ZEE'S HOUSE - BACKYARD (FLASHBACK)

Back at Zee's house before the game of Hide & Seek.

MRS. MURPHY
As soon as he got home the first thing he said was "I wanna play a game with my friends." Ever since then he hasn't really been... him.

LATER

Back at Zee's house after the game of Hide & Seek.

ZEE
On this day you sealed your fate...

INT. [REAL WORLD] ZEE'S HOUSE - ZEE'S ROOM - (FLASHBACK)

Back in Zee's room after Zee RIPS papers off the wall.

ZEE
(talking aloud to no one)
..playing what Seeker loves to hate-

JUSTIN
What are you trying to tell me?

INT. [REAL WORLD] HYDRO'S HOUSE - ATTIC (FLASHBACK)

Back in Hydro's attic after Nia disappeared.

LYRIC
--What if we can't find each other?

JUSTIN
We're the Finder Four. This is what
we do.

SPLIT SCREEN: ZEE'S BACKYARD & ZEE'S ROOM FLASHBACKS

| | |
|---|---|
| ZEE (BACKYARD) <u>Justin, find-- /</u> No touching NO TOUCHING! | ZEE (BEDROOM) <u>ME! /</u> NO TOUCHING!! NO TOUCHING!!! |
|---|---|

EXT. [NOWHERE] - TREEHOUSE - BACK TO PRESENT

JUSTIN
(quiet, to himself)
 "Find me." He could only say half.

MARY
(mostly to herself)
 I hate anyone that takes the deal.
 Chickens. Cowards.

JUSTIN
 Unless you take it on purpose...
 because you have a plan.
(then)
 (MORE)

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

Mary I might have one more friend in here. But, he'll be harder to find. It was last year.

MARY

Well then he could be anywhere. Any idea what his memory room might be? Does he have a favorite place?

JUSTIN

...Yea. His backyard! There's a huge tree next to a--

MARY

Yellow snack table. I've been there, yea. Been a while. Hmm.

They roll out the map on a nearby table. She traces her finger across to find it. As she does, **THE MAP + THE LINES AND CIRCLES SHE DRAWS ON IT APPEAR ON SCREEN.** (THINK: a video game corner map, or the cutaway maps in *Emperor's New Groove*)

MARY (CONT'D)

Here. The good news: your other friends have to be between here and there. The bad news: it's basically on the other side of Nowhere. Won't be easy to get to.

Quincy FINALLY makes his way back up, *huffing and puffing*, dirt and twigs sticking out of his hair.

We see ON SCREEN some of the rooms get crossed out and some get circled as Mary is helping them out, building a path. Justin watches her work, forming the obvious plan.

JUSTIN

Come with us.

MARY & QUINCY

Why?

JUSTIN

Because you know this place. We'll find our friends twice as fast with your help, and... I think there's another way to get us out of here. All of us.

Mary pauses, absorbing this... and nods, trying to cover her thankful and excited smile.

QUINCY

Aww man, are we leaving already?! I just got up here!

INT. [NOWHERE] BARBER SHOP - LATER

Mary, map in hand, walks with Quincy & Justin.

ON SCREEN we see the small identical map appear & disappear.

MARY

We'll stick near the rooms that popped up recently. Your friends shouldn't have gotten too far.

She leads them through the front door and briefly into:

INT. [NOWHERE] BOWLING ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

The sounds of MULTIPLE bowling balls hitting MULTIPLE bowling pins. Mary freezes, looks at the map, then turns back around.

MARY

Uh oh. Go back. Go back. Back.

INT. [NOWHERE] BARBER SHOP - LATER

They're back. Slight relief from Mary.

MARY

Wrong door.

She crosses out a room with an **X** and the ON SCREEN map appears, doing the same.

MARY (CONT'D)

We would've been stuck in there for months.

Quincy hilariously mouths *MONTHS?* to Justin as Mary folds the map up, the on screen map disappears.

INT. [NOWHERE] LASER SPY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

One of those arcade laser spy games but in a room TWICE the size. There are GREEN LASERS stretching from wall to wall.

JUSTIN

Whoa. Laser spy room. I love these.

QUINCY
I hate these!

MARY
Not a game. There are two cages in the corners above us. I won't tell you what's in them so you don't get scared, but if one of us touches a laser... they open. Not good.

QUINCY
I thought you DIDN'T want us to get scared?!

JUSTIN
I don't see any cages?

MARY
Let's keep it that way. Do not touch each other. Got it? Let's go.

Mary starts through the lasers first, like Mission Impossible – not her first rodeo. Justin eyes a nervous Quincy–

JUSTIN
You got this, okay? Take it slow.

Quincy nods as Justin pushes forward. Quincy really takes his time. He looks... well, ridiculous. But it's working.

QUINCY
Thank goodness Carla makes me stretch every morning.

Justin catches up to Mary... looking for a way to say this:

JUSTIN
(whisper)
Hey, um... so when we find my friends... I don't think we should tell them about making a deal with the Seeker.

MARY
Oh? Why not?

JUSTIN
I just, ya know, think it might freak them out a little. I mean not *freak them out*, but, ya know. Let's just keep that between us. Cool?

She stops, turning back to him.

MARY
What are you not telling me?

CUT TO:

Quincy's paused to take a breather. He goes to step over a laser then sees a kid, (8), SCARED OF CAGED ANIMAL, crouching behind an indent in the wall- his face in his knees, shaking.

QUINCY
(soft)
Oh... hi.

Scared of Caged Animal looks up at him, quietly crying.

SCARED OF CAGED ANIMAL
(soft)
Hi.

QUINCY
Are you okay? Do you need help?

SoCA keeps looking up at where these invisible cages are that Mary talked about. He nods his head in response.

QUINCY (CONT'D)
Don't worry, I saved my friend up there from a locker. Saving people is kinda my thing now. It used to be singing... I can still do that too, though. If you were wondering.

BACK TO:

Mary's all caught up and doesn't like it.

MARY
Sounds to me like your bud worked for the monster, felt bad, and quit. He tricked you, Justin.

JUSTIN
(hushed)
You don't know Zee. He was the leader of the Finder Four forever and wouldn't do that to me-- or, any of us, I mean. He always has a plan. If they know he took the deal, they won't trust him.

MARY

I don't know about this but if it's between making maps for the rest of my life or this, I guess it's worth a shot... I won't say anything.

Justin nods, thankful. As Mary is about to turn back to keep moving she sees Quincy heading toward something hidden behind the indent in the wall. She can't see SoCA, but SoCA's HAND appears and he reaches out to grab Quincy's.

QUINCY

I'll get you outta here, buddy.

MARY

QUINCY DON'T TOUCH HIM--

And right as their hands touch a *SURGE* of something dark courses through their bodies... something bad just happened.

Just like that, Quincy can now hear loud *HOWLS* and *RATTLING CAGES*. He looks up at the cages and sees why this kid's been crying - 2 GIANT MONKEYS. I mean, yea they're **HUGE**, BUT--

QUINCY

They're adorable! Is that what you're scared of?!

And now, one notices that Quincy can see it... so it *YELPS!* The sound catches Quincy so off guard that he JERKS back and pushes the scared kid's hand into one of the lasers!!

EVERY LASER in the room flips from Green to **WHITE**-- And just like that the giant monkeys get incredibly quiet.

Justin's POV: no cages, but everyone else can see something.

JUSTIN

What's happening? What do we do?

Then the cages... OPEN. For the first time, MARY'S scared.

MARY

RUN!!!

As the giant monkeys LEAP out, just wanting to play but would absolutely crush these kids, they SPRINT for the door.

QUINCY

Not adorable! Not! Adorable!

Scared of Caged Animal simply doesn't run as fast as our heroes and his crying is slowing him down immensely.

Mary and Justin get to the door, throwing it open--

MARY
Let's go!! Get in here! Hurry!

Quincy runs through and right as the monkeys are about to POUNCE on that crying kid aka they're new toy--

INT. [NOWHERE] SUMMER CAMP CAFETERIA - CONTINUOUS

Mary SLAMS the door closed!

QUINCY
...I think I peed a little.

MARY
You deserve wet underwear! If you touch someone, you share fears, Quincy! Now you have 2. Good job. Hide! You got scared too so your other fear will be here any second.

JUSTIN
Maybe close your eyes to stay calm!

QUINCY
I can do that!

Quincy runs off... with his eyes closed. Good lord.

JUSTIN
CLOSE THEM AFTER YOU HIDE.

QUINCY
Oh that works better!

JUSTIN
(to Mary)
What should I do??

Mary looks around, hearing something only she can: The *BEAT*.

MARY
(scared)
Must be a floater. I hate floaters!
Umm, just don't get scared, okay?
It won't last forever, I promise--

Suddenly she's SLAPPING her arm as if her shirt sleeve is on FIRE. We can't see it, but she can.

MARY (CONT'D)
No no no I hate fire I hate fire.

JUSTIN
You're afraid of fire?!

QUINCY (O.C.)
(from inside a cabinet)
I accidentally set an old newspaper
on fire with a magnifying glass
once and it killed some ants-- I'll
never live it down--

JUSTIN
Close your ears too Quincy!

Mary's slapping her leg, terrified of this invisible fire.
She tosses the MAP so that it can't get "damaged".

MARY
Oh boy okay stop drop and roll--ah!
Okay stop drop and roll stay back!

Justin stands by helpless, when KASPLASH! Mary's hit with 2
WATER BALLOONS! Now drenched, she huffs & puffs in relief as
she and Justin look over to see her hero... IT'S LYRIC!!!

LYRIC
Geez! You okay, kid?! I didn't see
any fire?!

MARY
Yea. Thanks. I umm, I thought fears
only stopped when The Seeker wanted
them to, I didn't know you could...
stop them. Where'd you get those?

JUSTIN
Lyric!!!!!!

LYRIC
(ignoring Justin)
I brought em from home. Just happy
they came in handy for somethin'.

Mary looks between Lyric and Justin, weirded out that he
didn't acknowledge him.

MARY
(to Justin)
Is this one of your friends??

JUSTIN
Yea! Lyric stop messin' around!

Lyric looks over... but he only sees Mary.

LYRIC
 (to Mary)
 ...Who are you talking to?

MARY
 (to Lyric)
 Umm, Justin?

Lyric, alarmed by the sound of that name from a stranger, backs up and grabs another balloon - aimed at her!

LYRIC
 What did you just say?!

JUSTIN
 Lyric, stop!

He jumps in front of Mary to protect her, but from Lyric's POV he's seeing right through Justin.

LYRIC
 How do you know my friend's name?!
 What did you do to him!

MARY
 He's standing right in front of you? Justin you have weird friends.

LYRIC
 Stop lying!!

JUSTIN
 (gets an idea)
 Mary, point at me and say
 "Operation: Aqua Nowhere!"

MARY
 What??

JUSTIN
 Trust me.

MARY
 Uh, "Operation Aqua Nowhere."

With Justin still in front, Lyric hesitantly aims and throws his water balloon at Mary. He sees it EXPLODE before it reaches her? It hit SOMETHING and just drips to the ground.

Lyric, so confused, throws another. Same thing... One more.

LYRIC
 Justin? Are you really there?

As Lyric gets more calm, his drenched friend comes to vision.

JUSTIN
(coughing water)
Not for long if you drown me.

LYRIC
Justin!!! Haha! I found ya!!! Yes!
Dude YESSSSS !!!!

He runs toward Justin about to hug him but NO WAY--

MARY & JUSTIN
NO TOUCHING!!

Lyric freezes, listening.

LYRIC
Sheesh, okay? Who are you anyway?

JUSTIN
This is Mary. She helped me find
you. She knows all about this
place. Quincy actually found me.

LYRIC
Quincy?? Yea right. Where's he?

Justin opens the cabinet that Quincy's been hiding in. He has
his fingers in his ears and his eyes shut, barely awake--

QUINCY
(tired, repetitive)
La la la la-- I can't hear her so
I'm not scared. Don't open your
eyes, Q. Don't you dare.

JUSTIN
Bars. LYRIC
Bars.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
Hey, Mary... that kid back in the
laser room is gonna be okay, right?

MARY
Yea... His name's Theo. I tried to
save him once too. He's never left
his own room. When things... get
you here, it's like a bad video
game. No matter where you are in
Nowhere, The Seeker brings you back
to where you started.

Justin picks up the map, wiping it off. It actually does have BURNT ENDS on it. The fire was real... he just couldn't see.

Justin picks up the map and hands it to her. She's thankful.

MARY (CONT'D)
We should go.

LYRIC
I guess we should wake up doofus.

Quincy, fingers still in his ears, has somehow fallen asleep.

EXT. [NOWHERE] SOCCER FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Mary, Justin, Lyric and Quincy walk right into a soccer field with too many stray soccer balls all around. Mary leads a few steps ahead, scanning the area for any threats. Planning.

[JUST DURING MARY'S FIRST LINE THE MAP WILL APPEAR ON SCREEN HIGHLIGHTING WHAT SHE'S SAYING, SHOWING WHERE THEY'RE HEADED]

LYRIC
But I just came from this way?

MARY
Right, but she got here before you. There's no way she'd know there's a third door in this room, so you might have passed her somehow.

LYRIC
I think I'd know if I passed one of my best friends. How'd you make a map anyway?

MARY
We needed to know where never to go. When a new place shows up, we go see it, add it. It made living here... easier. I guess.

JUSTIN
Who's we?

MARY
Me and my little brother.

QUINCY
Your brother's here too? We gotta meet em! Where is he?!

Mary sort of freezes, touchy subject... Then pushes forward.

QUINCY (CONT'D)
 What did I say?
 (then)
 No really, I forgot. I didn't eat
 breakfast so my brain's fuzzy.

MARY
 If he wanted to be with me, he
 would be, but he's not. I'm sure
 he's fine on his own.

Then suddenly-- *RIBBIT!*

QUINCY
 AHH!

Like in the real world, a creepy WHITE TREE FROG appeared
 under Quincy...and scared him. Oh crap. Quincy looks at it
 and hears the *BEAT* crescendoing. Nowhere to hide out here.

JUSTIN
 ...You just got scared.

MARY
 Crap. The Seeker loves these stupid
 Frogs. Easy way to scare us. It's
 coming--

QUINCY
 Oh no not this again!

Immediately Quincy's DRAGGED away by something invisible!

QUINCY (CONT'D)
 WAHHHH!!!!

| | |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------|
| LYRIC Whoa whoa whoa!! | JUSTIN What the HECK?! Quincy!! |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------|

As Quincy is being dragged, kicking and swinging, the heroes
 chase close behind trying to figure out what to do.

QUINCY
 I think I'm gonna puke!!!

LYRIC
 What's the plan, Justin?!

JUSTIN
 Something's pulling him! We have to
 hit it!

As they run they snatch and throw ROCKS and stray SOCCER
 BALLS at the invisible monster(s??) dragging Quincy.

QUINCY

There's too many!

MARY

What are they?!

QUINCY

Evil little demons is what they
are!!! Demonssss!!

LYRIC

New plan Justin! New idea!!

JUSTIN

This might not make ANY sense but
if whatever's dragging him is
running backwards we might be able
to trap it?!

GIRL (O.S.)

Now that's what I call genius!

Suddenly one of the many SOCCER GOALS is dropped right in the path of Quincy's dragging, and whatever was pulling him is successfully, temporarily caught in it! The hero who tossed the soccer goal with perfect timing is none other than--

JUSTIN & LYRIC / STRUGGLING QUINCY
NIA!!! / NI--OWWWW grass burn!!!

NIA

I gotcha! I gotcha!

MARY

Wait kid DON'T--

Nia DIVES to grab Quincy's leg, voluntarily sharing fears with him, and with a SURGE of something dark she can see what's been there all along. Not to her surprise: GIANT BUGS.

NIA

I knew it. Grab and throw!! Go!!

JUSTIN & LYRIC & MARY

ATTACK!!! / RAHHH!! / Okay...

While Mary pulls on Quincy's leg the kids PELT the giant bugs with those soccer balls until they finally let go! As soon as Quincy gets away, Lyric already has another Soccer Goal on top of the first soccer goal, effectively trapping them!!

Quincy leans over, catching his breath, taking a moment...

JUSTIN

You okay??

QUINCY

...I... hate... BUGS!!!

INT. [NOWHERE] CHUCK E. CHEESE KNOCK-OFF - LATER

A HUGE Chuck E. Cheese-type park. Arcade games line the walls, a giant jungle-gym stretches through the air, and a HUGE ball pit connected to a slide in the center.

NIA

(furios, to Justin)

--and Lyric pretended he didn't see
me! I've been chasing him since!

LYRIC

What?! Dang, sorry Nia. I couldn't
see Justin either. This place is
doing something to my brain.

NIA

Oh? Oh, it's okay... mine too. I
actually really, really, really
have to tell you guys something but
I... UGH. I just can't remember!

LYRIC

You never forget stuff. Was it
something you read in the journal?

Nia looks around, just now realizing she doesn't have it!

NIA

No no no no no the journal!! I must
have put it down somewhere?!

LYRIC

Wait you lost it?! Nia! We need
that to figure out how to get home!

Justin is oddly quiet but they don't notice. Mary, on very high alert, throws him a subtle look as they continue on. He grabs the puzzle piece out of his pocket to keep calm.

NIA

Don't worry! I read the whole
thing, so it's all--
(pointing to head)
--up here. I'll remember, I swear.

The sound of a heavy NAIL hitting the ground... followed by another, and another... the SLIDE to the ball pit CRUMBLES.

The kids watch it fall, as does Mary's face.

MARY
She's here.

QUINCY
My sister?!

MARY
No. Tashi. A kid that deserves to be in a place like Nowhere. She's always off scaring kids in other rooms, but sometimes she's right here. In her favorite one.

SWOOSH!! The heroes don't notice a small dark FIGURE zoom by far behind them. Here we go. **The map appears on screen.**

MARY (CONT'D)
Through that door is a room with a ton of doors. We could find Carly--

QUINCY
Carla.

MARY
Carla, a lot faster if we make it through. Let's walk quick, but, back to back, but, all of us?

NIA
Huh?

JUSTIN
In a circle. She doesn't like to explain things. Good plan, Mary.

QUINCY
Aww man, I hate walking backwards. I never know if my hands or feet should go first.

Again, he's not lying. The kids form a sort of walking circle so that they have eyes in all directions, and Quincy somehow looks like he's doing the backwards robot. But terribly.

NIA
Did you know alligators and penguins can't walk backwards?

LYRIC

Oh, so THAT you remember?

NIA

I like penguins!

JUSTIN

It's good to have you back, Ni.

MARY

Can we focus?!

TASHI (O.C.)

Well look who it is.

And there she is. TASHI, (9), Black & Asian mixed. Torn to shred clothes and a head FULL of unkept hair like one of those old school troll dolls. An adorable savage.

TASHI (CONT'D)

Mary.

MARY

Devil. We need to get through that door.

TASHI

Still helping new kids, huh? Cute. You need to learn to have more fun.

MARY

And you need to find a room with a hairbrush.

LYRIC

Haha! Sheesh! Got 'er!

Tashi SHOOTS him a look, he GULPS. Welp. Tashi's mad.

NIA

Yea...we should run.

QUINCY

Ooo! Ooo! Follow me!

He takes off! The gang follows (Justin in the back). They RACE their way up the stairs and onto a very shaky BRIDGE that has a mind of its own. It SHAKES them to the ground.

They struggle to their feet but find their way across as Tashi steps on. Justin stomps on it to really throw her off.

The kids are running and see a way UP, but Quincy jumps DOWN the nearby SPIRAL SLIDE?! They follow, and we have a GOONIES moment - except Justin didn't see them go down so he goes up.

They spill out onto the floor... they're back at the bottom.

LYRIC
We're where we started!!

QUINCY
(proud of himself)
Yep! She probably thinks we went up, so now we can go to the door!

NIA
Quincy... did you actually make a good plan for once?! Bravo!!

QUINCY
Thanks!!!
(realizing)
Heyyy...

MARY
But where's Justin??

Justin makes a quick turn in the jungle gym looking for his friends and finds himself on an open platform where the fallen slide used to be. He's above the ball pit like a high diving board over a pool... or a plank on a pirate ship.

They look up and see Justin towering above them, sweating.

Mary's eyes bounce between the DOOR, JUSTIN, and TASHI in a cubby hole looking for them - soon to realize where they are.

MARY (CONT'D)
(stage whisper)
Justin you have to jump.

JUSTIN
(stage whisper)
Are you crazy?!

MARY
(stage whisper)
It's the only way to get through the door in time. Jump.

JUSTIN
(stage whisper)
I can't, I...I can't do it.

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| LYRIC | NIA |
| Dude you can do it, come on. | <u>Leap.</u> <u>Vault.</u> <u>Dive.</u> |
| MARY | QUINCY |
| You have. To. Jump. | You'll break all your bones! I wouldn't do it either! |

With one foot off the edge, mustering the courage, a HAND suddenly PUSHES HIM OFF THE PLATFORM!

The *SURGE* of Tashi's fear entering him as he plummets down like Mufasa in *Lion King*. Briefly from his falling POV we see the Jungle Gym turn DARK while Tashi *LAUGHS* as he falls!

The ENTIRE ROOM transforms in his eyes to a POST-APOCALYPTIC VIBE - vines hang from the ceiling where only slivers of light pours in. Oh, and the ball bit? I'll explain shortly.

Justin SPLASHES into the ball pit as his friends RUSH to him, not seeing what he sees. He STRUGGLES to get out, but from their POVs, he's just embarrassingly drowning in a ball pit?

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| LYRIC | |
| J, as much as I would freaking love | |
| to play right now we have to move! | |

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| NIA | |
| Get up!! It's just ball pit! | |

| | |
|---------------|--|
| MARY | |
| (worried) | |
| Not to him... | |

From Justin's POV: HE'S. IN. QUICKSAND! And he's sinking!!!!

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| MARY (CONT'D) | |
| If he sinks to the bottom he'll | |
| wake up back in his memory room and | |
| it'll take forever to get back to | |
| him and find Carla. | |

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| LYRIC | |
| What are we gonna do?! | |

| | |
|--------------|--|
| JUSTIN | |
| ("drowning") | |
| OPERAT--! | |

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| QUINCY | |
| Wait! He's saying something! | |

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| JUSTIN | |
| ("drowing") | |
| Operation Tuh-- | |

NIA
What is it?! What's the plan?!

JUSTIN
OPERATION TUG-O-WAAA!!!

NIA & LYRIC
OPERATION TUG-O-WAR!!!!

THEY TAKE OFF. Lyric jumps on the arm of a Chuck-E-Cheese-like animatronic and RIPS its metal arm off?! Nia grabs 3 banners that lie atop broken games and keeps one--

NIA
Lyric, in the back! Not the front!

LYRIC
Right! I always forget!

She hands one to Quincy and the last to Lyric as he give the ARM to a confused Mary. They stand in a line and Nia throws her banner over Mary's head and around her waist, Quincy does the same to Nia, and Lyric to Quincy. A pulley system.

Tashi, watching their plan from above, rushes to stop them!

Mary sticks the robot arm in the quick sand, searching for Justin's sinking hand, and HE GRABS ON!

LYRIC & NIA
PULL!!!

Like Tug-O-War, the chain-linked team pull and yank and pull and yank and PULL until Justin is finally FREE!!!

He spits and breathes and stands up, about to head to the exit but NOPE. Tashi lands back at the bottom of the stairs.

LYRIC
What now?!

JUSTIN
This way!

They bear-crawl back up the spiral slide as Tashi goes BACK up the way she came. They continue up the next tube, karate chop through thick spider webs, pushing their way through hanging, torn PUNCHING BAGS covered in purple GOO and FUZZ.

Next they climb across MONKEY BARS. Lyric, last to go, sees Tashi gaining on them. He climbs FAST, and right as he reaches for the last monkey bar one side of it BREAKS OFF.

LYRIC

Oh gimme a break!

Lyric is dangling, about to panic, when he suddenly sees Justin's hand reaching for him. Lyric considers.

JUSTIN

Just don't get scared! Grab it!

He does. *SURGE*. Fears shared. But he pulls Lyric over. They look back - Tashi is too short to climb the bars!

The kids stick their tongues out at her... but she JUMPS OFF the plastic wall and climbs to the TOP of them. Unbelievable.

The final area of this jungle gym: a GIANT CYLINDER CACOON with a bouncy floor and thin bouncing rubber strings stretching wall to wall eight levels high. (The rubber strings you can climb on & bounce/jump off of just as easily as you can fall through them.) Many strings hang broken.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

When I was falling I saw a door in the ceiling! Get to the top!

The kids are bouncing and climbing and falling and climbing - this would be a lot of fun if it weren't for Tashi, who has just reached the first level of this rubber cocoon.

They're trying their best not to fall. One misstep could drop them who-knows how many floors down!

Once they're all at top level, there's the sort of door to the roof above that they all have to BOUNCE into. One by one they bounce up & in, the last two to go are Justin and Mary.

MARY

Right behind you.

Justin nods and jumps up. Mary, nervous she won't make it, bounces and bounces and-- her foot lands on a weak string that SNAPS. She FALLS two levels. She tries to hurry and climb her way up when Tashi GRABS HER FOOT!

She tries to keep climbing and shake her off, but Tashi won't let go, so she holds on to something and turns to focus on shaking her off, and that's when they make eye contact.

TASHI

Why do you keep trying to save us, Mary?! We're never leaving Nowhere!

MARY

Yes. We. ARE.

She KICKS her foot away - Tashi loses her balance and falls through the deepest hole in the cacoon alllll the way to the bouncy bottom. She stirs. Mary takes a deep *SIGH*, and climbs.

EXT. [NOWHERE] ROOFTOP - CONTINUOUS

Mary climbs through a hatch onto a rooftop where the rest of the kids catch their breath. Justin rubs his puzzle piece.

JUSTIN

Is everyone okay? Anyone feeling scared?

MARY

I'm fine.

QUINCY

Tired, but alive!

LYRIC

That was the coolest moment of my entire life.

NIA

(to herself, slightly senile)

Where... Now I can't remember how many dang... ah. What was I sayin'?

The roots of Nia's hair slightly turn grey. Justin notices.

JUSTIN

Nia? You okay?

NIA

Huh? What? Sorry.

She takes a deep breath. Her hair turns back to normal.

NIA (CONT'D)

Sorry, got a little scared at the end. I'm good. Guys I still can't remember what I read in the journal. What do we do after we find Carla? We still don't know how to get home.

LYRIC

Maybe this will help.

Lyric pulls out Nia's notebook from his backpack.

LYRIC (CONT'D)

I edited together what Zee was trying to tell us. It didn't make sense because he was only saying half at a time. But it rhymed.

NIA

(getting it)

Bars. Of course.

Lyric hands her her notebook. She reads:

NIA (CONT'D)

"*On this day you... what word is that?*

LYRIC

"Sealed"? Are you okay?

NIA

Oh I'm fine. You just spelled it wrong. Ahem.

(then)

"*On this day you sealed your fate, playing what Seeker loves to hate. Once you're tagged then you will know, the mark appears, your time to go. Down below there's no more dreams, unless you play, but as a team. Justin, find me.*"

(then)

Unless you play, but as a team?

LYRIC

That's the part I don't get either. Plus, he said find him? Huh?

QUINCY

I don't get it?

JUSTIN

Like he said, we'll find his memory place, together. Zee always knows what to do.

Justin & Mary share a look, and Lyric notices. *What was that?*

INT. DENTIST OFFICE - LOBBY [NOWHERE] - MUCH LATER

The kids run into an office, SLAMMING the door behind them.

The map ON SCREEN shows they're WAY off course, but close-ish to a large area marked CARLA ??? Lots of X's have been added.

NIA

OKAY. WHAT...WAS THAT?!

QUINCY

I didn't know puppies could be
so... slimy?!

LYRIC

Seriously! How much further?!

MARY

Look. Tashi threw us way off
course! I'm doing as best as I can!

JUSTIN

(quiet)

Get down!

They do. On the other side of the front desk glass, THREE NOWHERE KIDS stealthily jog together to a nearby exit.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

That's weird right?

MARY

Three kids hiding together? Yea. I
haven't seen that in... years.

LYRIC

(whisper, to Nia)

Years? How long has she been in
here?

Nia shurgs. Mary signals the others to tail the kids.

INT. [NOWHERE] WORK SPACE - MOMENTS LATER

Our group hides behind cubicles & desks as they tail the mysterious group. The three kids look around to make sure no fears are nearby, then slide a FRIDGE out of the way of a DOOR. They shuffle in and somehow pull it back into place.

JUSTIN

Have you been in there?

MARY

(reading map)

If this is Amitai's Mom's office
from take-your-kid-to-work-day, the
door over there is the trampoline
park. So that one--

Looking at the map... tracing along with her finger.

MARY (CONT'D)
 Is the amphitheater, right. Weird?
 There's no hiding spots in there--

QUINCY
 Did you say theater?!

Quincy races forward toward the fridge--

JUSTIN
 Quincy, come on!

They help him push the fridge out of the way anyway, curious.

EXT. [NOWHERE] PARK AMPITHEATER - CONTINUOUS

There's about 25 NOWHERE KIDS all sitting in the bleachers of this outdoor theater, and seated in the middle is:

QUINCY
 Carla!!!!!!

Carla POPS up in disbelief. This is the first time we're not only seeing her vulnerable, but seeing her smile.

CARLA
 QUINCY?!? GET OUT OF MY WAY! MOVE!!

They're running towards each other and as Quincy realizes they shouldn't TOUCH, slowing down... she doesn't. She BEAR HUGS him and we hear the SURGE. They now have one more fear.

QUINCY
 Whoops.

CARLA
 Nope, I don't care. I needed a hug
 bad and I got one, so there.

JUSTIN/LYRIC/NIA/QUINCY
 Bars.

JUSTIN
 It's good to see you're okay.

CARLA
 ("thanks, you too")
 Whatever?

They don't notice that Nia's walked over to TWO KIDS struggling to get open a leather JOURNAL with a lock on it!

NIA

Oh I think that's a trick lock, you guys! It just looks real so people think they can't open it-- whoa, deja vu? Huh... wait. Wait! I think I dropped this somewhere! Where'd you find it?

MARY

(to Carla)

Why are there so many kids here?

CARLA

(Quincy-like but cooler)

Right, yea. So I kinda told them that I know these kids called the Detective Dummies and since I went missing they'd probably find a way to break me out of here so if they showed me how this place works they'd break em out too then I made everyone pick a place where I knew Quincy would wanna go and this is kinda like a theater.

(bragging)

He has a solo in the kids choir.

QUINCY

We just call it "the choir"!

MARY

(low, to Justin)

I don't like this many of us in one room. It's not safe.

RANDOM KID

Is that Mary? If she's with them we really are getting out of here!

RANDOM KID 2

Mary saved me twice when I first disappeared here!

RANDOM KID 1

Me too!!

RANDOM KID 3

Three times for me!

Kids start *CHEERING*, excited for the chance to leave. Nia rejoins, but is rereading the journal on the side.

QUINCY

Woo! We just have to find one more friend!

LYRIC

Once we figure out how he and our
ice cream man got out of Nowhere,
we will too!

The room gets weirdly silent, Nowhere kids look around at
each other, confused. Even Mary.

LYRIC (CONT'D)

What?

RANDOM KID 3

Ice cream man?

MARY

Everyone in Nowhere's a kid? What
ice cream man?

Lyric and Justin look at each other, confused. Nia's folds
the journal and puts it in her jeans so she can participate.

NIA

He was definitely here. He called
himself Hydro?

Mary actually *LAUGHS*, a few others that recognize the name do
too, thinking Nia's joking. They realize she isn't.

MARY

Hydro can't be a grown up. He's my
little brother?

JUSTIN

What?? Your brother took the deal??

LYRIC

(to Nia)

What deal?

She shakes her head, unsure... *but this does ring a bell?*

LYRIC (CONT'D)

(low)

What is it, Nia?

Justin's not sure how to say this, but:

JUSTIN

Mary... Hydro's a grownup?

COMMOTION throughout the room as the kids get hit with this.

RANDOM KID 2

How is that possible?!

RANDOM KID 4
I've been here for eight years.
Does that mean I'm...
(counting on fingers)
Eighteen??

RANDOM KID 7
We don't grow down here but do up
there?! That means I'm thirty one!
I'm basically a grandpa!

The kids are FREAKING OUT. This is getting out of hand.

JUSTIN
Don't get scared everybody! Don't
let this scare you!

Too late. A few *RIBBITS* and *CROAKS* from below make at least TWELVE kids *YELP*. One of them... being Carla.

They look down to the expected instigators: the dang TREE FROGS. Suddenly, they begin to croak again but on. THE. BEAT.

They stop, hopping away, but the BEAT continues in the distance, from every direction - like a stampede closing in.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
Some of our fears are coming.

Each kid is on their feet now, facing every direction - our heroes in the middle, back to back.

They hear the REFRIGERATOR barricade from the **work space** get THROWN to the side, followed by a slow door *CREAKING* open.

Justin reaches in his pocket for his special puzzle piece, rubbing it. He's calm and ready. But Carla? Not so much.

WOOSH!!! MAYHEM. A bunch of kids' fears run in like animals escaping a zoo! MUMMIES, GIANT BUNNY, A FLOATING CHRISTMAS SWEATER?? Sure! In the POV of all these kids, we see them coming. In the POV of Justin and his friends, these kids are SCATTERING in all directions to run from seemingly nothing.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
Lyric? Nia? You scared?

They have their eyes closed tight.

LYRIC
No sir!

NIA
Not me!

JUSTIN
Mary? Quincy?

MARY
Seeker didn't scare me with its
stupid frogs!

QUINCY
Uh, not scared! But, very confused?

Carla is slowly backing away from her weird fear... a GIANT CARLA, stomping toward her.

NIA
Quincy! You shared fears right?

JUSTIN
What's she looking at?

QUINCY
Umm, I think my sister is scared of
being really, really... tall?

GIANT CARLA
(Not scary, just... Carla)
Why ya running, big bully?

CARLA
(trying to be tough)
Why don't... you go mess with
somebody else, bigger bully!

GIANT CARLA
Not so tough now, are ya?

GIANT CARLA goes after her, Carla DUCKS under her huge swing.

QUINCY
Nice duck sis! Watch out watch out!

Carla DIVES out of the way of GIANT CARLA's HEAVY STOMP.
The kids FEEL the ground shake, but they can't see it.

QUINCY (CONT'D)
Go left! I mean right! Wait wait!
Left and then right! Sorry you
turned around--

CARLA
You're not helping, little brother!

JUSTIN

Wait! Quincy how big is it? Could it fit through a door??

QUINCY

No way! She's a million feet tall!

NIA

I doubt it's that many feet--

JUSTIN

Mary! Which door's the way out of here?

Mary pulls out her map while Justin dives into his backpack.

MARY

That one!

JUSTIN

This might not make any--

NIA

Oh just say it!

Justin grabs the FIREWORKS!

JUSTIN

We'll need to get in front of that door.

LYRIC

(getting excited)

Wait. This what I think it is?

Justin tosses Lyric the JET LIGHTER - J, Nia, and Lyric nod.

LYRIC & JUSTIN & NIA

Operation: Firework Party.

GIANT CARLA's STOMP shakes Carla to the ground. She scrambles, and when she flips over she sees a HAND in her face - Justin's. He helps her up, SURGE, now HE can see Giant Carla. On the other side of Giant Carla is Mary by the door.

JUSTIN

WHOA. Okay. We're gonna have to run underneath.

CARLA

Are you crazy or just stupid?!

JUSTIN

You a baby or a big baby? Trust me!

As Giant Carla takes one GIANT STEP Carla and Justin SPRINT underneath her toward Mary's direction. As they pass and GC's turning, on their heels, Nia tosses Justin a firework.

QUINCY
Lyric! Now!

Lyric, lighter in one hand, firework in other turns on the jet lighter and RUNS down the line, lighting everyone's.

JUSTIN
Throw and Go! One, two...three!

They toss their fireworks in the air where they EXPLODE and BLIND Giant Carla - she *ROARS*. The gang is already on each others' heels running to the door that Mary had open.

INT. [NOWHERE] LIBRARY - CONTINUOUS

The whole gang back together again runs into a quiet Library and falls to the floor, taking a beat.

QUINCY
I know you guys couldn't see it but
that was pretty cool!

They all shoot looks at him. Justin stands up.

JUSTIN
We all need to share fears.

Everyone looks at him, not sure if they agree...

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
Each time we've touched we saved
each other. Facing our fears is
easier together, as a team. That
way, someone always has your back.
No matter what.

He sticks one FINGER out. Everyone hesitates... but joins.
Mary is the last to. One *SURGE* after another.

NIA
We should tell everyone what we're
afraid of. It's important.

LYRIC
Well, we know Quincy hates bugs.

QUINCY
I HATE bugs.

It gets quiet. Comfortably awkward.

JUSTIN

Nia your hair turned gray earlier,
and you've been forgetting things.
Are you afraid to get old?

NIA

Only technically. I'm afraid to
umm... end up like my grandma. She
lost her memory. That's why I like
learning, I think, cuz if I have
more stuff in my brain maybe it'll
take longer? That's kinda silly,
but, it's true.

They all soften up. Lyric's turn.

LYRIC

I'm afraid to lose people. Mostly
my friends. I guess that's why I
couldn't see y'all earlier when I
was scared? I dunno. It's lame.

JUSTIN

It's not lame.

CARLA

Yes it is?

Justin shoots her a death look, and she's immediately sorry.
Like... she actually looks sorry?

CARLA (CONT'D)

Ugh. No it's not. I'm sorry. I'm
afraid of... myself. Ok? Or, who
people think I am. I'm not good
with people so they think I'm mad
all the time, which makes me mad
all time so sometimes I'm mean and
I'm afraid that even though I don't
think I'm a mean person maybe I
just am and I can't stop.

QUINCY

I don't think you're mean, sis?

She smiles. Lyric's ready to chime in - Nia smacks him on the
neck. All eyes are on Justin now. He shifts, uncomfortably.

JUSTIN

(struggling to speak)

My mom, umm...

(MORE)

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

last year-- a year ago-- uhh-- well, you know she was sick? And umm... she passes away. So I started getting really bad dreams and they were all about her. How I wish that I could, umm... be with her again? But, in a bad way. So I'm afraid that one day, when I'm having a really bad day, that I'll just go be... with my mom again.

Sympathetic nods all around. Dang, that's deep. All eyes on Mary to finish it up. She grabs the map, flips it over.

MARY

I keep a list on the back. Clowns, spiderwebs, fire, heights, rollercoasters, small spaces, tornadoes, flying, shadows... and pirate dentists. I think I forgot to write one.

QUINCY

I hope not! That's a big deal!

A light bulb just went off in Nia - she grabs the journal.

NIA

(to herself)

Deal. Make a Deal, Take a Deal.

She starts flipping through ferociously. Lyric looks over.

LYRIC

Hold on, when did you get Hydro's journal back?!

Justin basically turns red as Nia *GASPS*, dropping the book.

NIA

I remember. I remember what I was gonna tell you. Hydro left his sister. He wrote how he got home.

LYRIC

Okay?? And?? What is it?

NIA

(doesn't want to say it)

If you strike a deal with the monster, it will let you go back to the real world, but only--

JUSTIN
 (taking responsibility)
 If you promise... to work for it.

His friends can't believe their ears.

CARLA
 I'm confused. Are you saying Zee--

JUSTIN
 Is the reason we're here. That's
 how he got back to the real world.
 I'm sorry I didn't tell you.

LYRIC
 (absolutely livid)
 So Zee, who attacked you, whose
 house we played hide & seek at in
 the first place, we're looking for
 him down here because he told us to
 when you knew he was working for
 the monster the whole time?!

JUSTIN
 I didn't know the whole time!

LYRIC
 I don't care if you knew for 3
 seconds! He tricked us and you
 didn't tell us! Friends don't keep
 secrets!

JUSTIN
 I knew you wouldn't wanna find him!
 That you'd think he's a traitor!

LYRIC
 So you lied to us?! That makes you
 the traitor! Why do you even
 believe Zee in the first place?!

JUSTIN
 BECAUSE HE'S MY BEST FRIEND!

Nia and Lyric's hearts... shatter.

NIA
 ...But we're your best friends too?

JUSTIN
 It's not the same. When my mom was
 in the hospital, Zee was with us
 every single day. He would never
 betray me. Ever. I trust him!

LYRIC

But you don't trust us? You never helped Nia when she was taking care of her grandma? When my dad was in jail you never came to visit with me, did you? Just cuz we weren't there doesn't mean we don't care, Justin.

Lyric looks at his friend with hurt and disgust... and storms out of the room through the **DOOR ON THE RIGHT**--

MARY

(to Lyric)

No no wait wrong--

—and slams it behind him.

MARY (CONT'D)

...door.

Justin's having a panic attack, but for the first time he has nowhere to hide. He walks away from them to a corner of the room, reaching in all of his pockets for his puzzle piece, and realizes... it's not there. He starts breathing HEAVILY--

NIA

Why do you do that?

JUSTIN

(trying to keep calm)

Look, I... I didn't mean to say--

NIA

You're having a panic attack aren't you? Every time you do you run away so we can't see.

Justin's trying to breathe, he's trying not to cry.

NIA (CONT'D)

Pretend that your feet both have the number one on them.

JUSTIN

Wh-what?

NIA

All we're gonna do is count to ten. But imagine that every time we say an even number, you took a step forward with both feet. Got it?

Justin, somewhat confused, nods.

NIA (CONT'D)
 One... two-- that's one step
 with both shoes. / Three...
 four-- we're halfway to the
 door. / Five, Six-- keep
 picking up your kicks. /
 Seven. Eight-- and not a
 second too late. Nine. Ten.

JUSTIN
 One...two / three...four / Five,
 Six. / Seven. Eight. / Nine.
 Ten.

NIA (CONT'D)
 And we made it to the end. Breathe.

Justin takes a deep breath, panic attack subsiding. He's embarrassed, but thankful - still quite reserved though.

NIA (CONT'D)
 My grandma had panic attacks when
 she got really confused. Instead of
 doing everything on your own, you
 can let us help. We're your
 friends, we're supposed to make
 things easier.

JUSTIN
 I don't need everyone to think I'm
 weak or a bad leader just because
 my mom isn't around anymore. Or
 Zee. I couldn't save them, but I
 can take care of myself--

Nia surprise BEAR HUGS him. He's trying to wiggle free.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
 Nia. Stop.
 (holding back tears)
 Nia, get off.
 (choking on his words)
 Nia... let go.

NIA
 I'm not letting go until you let
 go, Justin.

And just like that, the switch has been flipped and Justin finally FALLS into his best friend's arms and starts to bawl. It's a hug that he's needed for a very, very long time.

They eventually pull apart. Nia softly smiles.

NIA (CONT'D)
 "Operation: Who Let the Dogs Out"
 was your idea. "Operation: Devil's
 House?" You.
 (MORE)

NIA (CONT'D)

"Operation: Firework Party" you made up forever ago and it worked! Even "Operation: Tug-O-War" ...actually that was mine. Two winters ago. You're welcome.

This gets the softest chuckle out of him.

NIA (CONT'D)

Zee is a really good leader... he is. But so are you. It's hilarious every time you say "this might not make any sense" because it always does. You didn't realize, but while Zee always had the confidence to make our plans happen, you were the one coming up with them. We're a team. Even the leaders of the Finder Four can't take on everything themselves. Okay?

JUSTIN

I'm sorry, Nia.

NIA

I'm sorry too.

Nia wipes tears out of his face. Holding him again.

MARY

And I'M sorry to interrupt, but...
I've got bad news.

Nia and Justin nod toward one another - *let's keep going.*

MARY (CONT'D)

If we're gonna find your friend Zee... we have to leave Lyric.

JUSTIN

What?

MARY

Just-- look at the map.

There are **TWO DOORS** on it. The door on the left shows a longer path to Zee's memory room, while the door on the right (the one that Lyric went into) shows a potential direct path - but has a huge X through it. The biggest X on the whole map.

MARY (CONT'D)

No one has ever made it through that room. Ever.

(MORE)

MARY (CONT'D)

Every kid we've seen go in doesn't come back out, and if we don't make it through... we'll all have to start over again.

Justin considers his options. He looks back at Nia, pleading with her eyes for him to make the right move.

MARY (CONT'D)

If we go the other way, it'll take us longer but I know we'll get to Zee's room safe. And if by a miracle Lyric doesn't get sent back to his own, he'll meet us on the other side. Deal?

JUSTIN

Sorry.. But no. We're a team. We're not leaving my best friend behind.

Mary stares at him, worried, but understands. She walks past a smiling Nia to the door. Her hand rests on it, nervously.

CARLA

So... what's in this room, Mary?

She crumples her map and stuffs it in her pocket--

MARY

I have no idea.

She opens the door.

INT. [NOWHERE] PIANO RECITAL - THEATER WING - CONTINUOUS

The group walks into the barely lit wings of a nice elementary school theater, unsure of where they are. INSTRUMENTS, PROPS, and MIC STANDS are in boxes by the walls.

As they walk, Mary nearly steps right into a LARGE HOLE until Nia & Carla both throw their arms in front of her. She *SIGHS*.

MARY

I already hate this place.

The Group splits around it, Justin at the front now, so he's the first to see:

JUSTIN

LYRIC!!

Who's standing close to the middle of the stage with his back to them, frozen in place. The gang rushes toward him and Lyric keeps his feet still while looking over his shoulder:

LYRIC
Stay back!

But it's too late. The kid whose room this belongs to, STAGE FRIGHT, (10), is hiding low to the floor behind one of the curtains - and as the kids run by, she simply sticks her hand out and grazes their legs, each of them gaining her fear.

Suddenly they see the room as Lyric does: a PACKED audience of INVISIBLE PEOPLE (floating dresses and suits) and a few other NOWHERE KIDS in the seats eating POPCORN, chatting, BROCHURES in hand. **None of them sit in the front three rows.**

Also, the entire stage that Lyric is on... is one giant PIANO.

And if the theater seemed dark before, it's even darker now with just one large spotlight over the entire piano stage.

QUINCY
It's... beautiful.

CARLA
It's... a piano recital? What's so scary about that?

Justin looks around the room briefly but is too distracted by his friend not turning to face him. He goes to enter stage--

JUSTIN
Lyric, are you okay?

LYRIC
Get away, Justin!

JUSTIN
I didn't mean what I said--

BUMMM!!! The PIANO KEY that Justin steps on turns YELLOW and as soon as it makes a sound a GIGANTIC HOLE appears on stage stretching all the way from stage left to stage right between the boys and the back wall.

The entire audience starts *LAUGHING* at them.

LYRIC
Dang it! If you wanna help so bad why don't you try listening! When you step on this thing the place starts falling apart!

JUSTIN
What do we do?!

LYRIC
You're asking me?!

AN INVISIBLE PIT BAND below plays a little 8-bar *JINGLE* while the ENTIRE CROWD stands up and moves one row closer to stage.

LYRIC (CONT'D)
Both times I've stepped on one
they've gotten closer. Don't. Move.

JUSTIN
Guys?! Any ideas??

The group's already searching desperately for clues offstage... but Quincy walks back to where he can see the audience.

MARY
Nope.

NIA
Nothing here.

CROWD MEMBER #1
(angry, demanding)
Play!!!

NOWHERE KID #1
(aggressive)
We want music!!! Now play!

The CROWD starts to angrily chat amongst themselves.

LYRIC
Justin, I'm trying not to get
scared here. Use your super puzzle
brain, man. What do we do?!

CROWD MEMBER #1 & NOWHERE KID #1
PLAY!!!

Justin looks down at his piano key where there's a giant **C**. He looks over to Lyric's that reads **E**.

JUSTIN
Nia write down that the answer
isn't E or C.

Nia takes out her little blue notebook to do so.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

If the crowd moves forward each time, we have 3 more tries before they get to us. Let's try another.

LYRIC

I don't know, Justin. I don't know.

JUSTIN

We'll figure this out, but we gotta risk it.

Lyric takes a second, deciding. Then he shifts his feet cautiously to make sure he doesn't hit his own key twice, and JUMPS to the next one: **F. BUMMM!** It glows yellow. INCORRECT.

Once again the whole crowd *LAUGHS* at them. And the moment the pit band starts playing the Jingle, the audience starts moving forward. They're only 2 rows away from stage now.

As Quincy looks down at the piano keys, then towards the crowd as the Jingle continues... BRAIN-BLAST. FINALLY.

QUINCY

(to himself, he thought)

I get it... oh my holy greens I think
I get it. This is-- HA!! Is this
how Justin feels all the time?
Haha! Wow wow WOW. THIS is--

CARLA

Q, I'm proud of you, but--

NOWHERE KID #2 (O.S.)

PLAY OR ELSE!!!

CARLA

We're running out of time here.

QUINCY

Justin!! D flat!!

JUSTIN

I know it's flat! It's part of the floor!

QUINCY

I mean step on D flat! The small black one between you and D!

JUSTIN

Alright! I'm trusting you!

He does, and the key glows... BLUE. The crowd *CHEERS*!

MARY

They didnt get out of their chairs.

JUSTIN

Quincy how'd you know?

QUINCY

The notes of the song that the band plays is how we get out of here! I know them cuz I have perfect pitch. My teacher told me that when I was practicing for my solo in--

JUSTIN/LYRIC/NIA/MARY

THE CHOIR. WE KNOW.

CARLA

Don't be jealous.

LYRIC

What's next!?

QUINCY

Umm-- it's... I don't remember. I need to hear it again.

JUSTIN

The only way to do that is if we mess up again and if we do that they'll be front row.

NIA

Or! Lyric toss us your tape recorder! We can play it back!!

LYRIC

Nia, you genius!

Lyric excitedly takes his tape recorder off while stepping backwards, quickly forgetting how close he was to the newly formed giant hole near him. Once his heel doesn't make contact with flat surface his arms FLAIL, sending the TAPE RECORDER flying through the air... and into the hole.

CARLA

Lyric, you idiot!!

Carla, Quincy, Nia, and Mary run over to the side of the hole to see if the tape recorder is gone forever. To their surprise: the strap's hanging on to a piece of floorboard sticking out from the back wall!

NIA

I'm going after it.

JUSTIN

It's too dangerous! I'll think of something else. Another plan.

NIA

I can do it. Don't move.

Nia scales the wall, action-movie style, to get to it. The closer she gets, the more displeased the crowd gets.

Some crowd members look BLOODTHIRSTY now - start to stand up.

JUSTIN

If we don't choose a note they're just gonna rush the stage anyway. Quincy, think. Try to remember just what the second note was. Focus.

Quincy *SINGS* what he remembers... Fine, it's beautiful.

QUINCY

I think it was G but I'm not sure!

JUSTIN

We'll take it. Lyric?

Lyric jumps to G and it turns... BLUE!! *CLAPS & BOOS*.

LYRIC

Yes!!!! Good job Quincy!

Nia is scaling, slow & pro, as her friends cheers her on. She inches toward the recorder strap, crouches, but can't reach. She takes out her NOTEBOOK PENCIL and uses the extra length to get under the strap - SHE GOT IT!

As soon as she lifts it a piece of the floor BREAKS underneath her feet and she starts to SCREAM and fall into the hole right as SLAP--SLAP!! Not only does Justin have her by one wrist, Lyric has her by the other! They lift her up onto the E note and she's safe again... but it turns YELLOW.

WRONG NOTE!! The crowd *LAUGHS* and moves to the front row. Uh oh. No more mistakes. Nia hands Justin the tape recorder AND notebook, who tosses them to Quincy, Carla and Mary.

CARLA

How the heck do you work this thing? It's ancient!

MARY

Hand it over. I'm the old one.

Mary toys with it, REWINDS, and hits play.

QUINCY
 Mmm... okay. Sis write "G sharp,
 C...mmm... F, D, D.

The crowd is getting restless, here we go.

QUINCY (CONT'D)
 Lyric! G sharp!!

Lyric jumps. BLUE! *CHEERS* from the crowd!

QUINCY (CONT'D)
 Justin! C!

Justin DIVES, just missing D and hit C. BLUE! *CHEERS!*

QUINCY (CONT'D)
 Nia! F!

She hops over. BLUE! *CHEERS!*

QUINCY (CONT'D)
 Now Justin, D twice!

Justin jumps over, then jumps up in the air. The key turns Blue twice, then the entire floor keyboard turns BLACK.

THEY DID IT! The CROWD LOSES IT! The curtains close over *APPLAUSE* as they escape through the opposite theater wing.

EXT. [NOWHERE] FAMILIAR BACK YARD - CONTINUOUS

The kids lean against a wooden fence.

LYRIC
 I can't believe I'm saying this
 but... dang. We couldn't have done
 it without you, Quincy.

Q's beaming. Justin takes a deep breath... finding his words.

JUSTIN
 Lyric--

LYRIC
 It's cool, you don't have to--

JUSTIN
 I'm not sorry.

Everyone looks at him. *Where is he going with this?*

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

I said Zee is my best friend, and he is. And if I wasn't so sad about my mom, maybe I wouldn't have said no to summer camp. Maybe I could've been there when he disappeared, and in here with him so he wasn't alone. I gotta believe that whatever his plan is, he's trying to save us. I have to. But... while he was at camp, I didn't even wanna get out of bed cuz I was so sad... and you and Nia helped me. You knew if I kept solving mysteries, doing what I love, it would make me feel better. And it did. You both knew because you're my best friends too. I didn't mean Zee was more of my best friend, I just mean it's different, but not in a bad way. I love you, man. I'm sorry. We cool?

Lyric smiles, nodding. They dap each other up.

LYRIC

We're cool.

CARLA

Whoa. We're here?

The group walks around the fence to see... Zee's memory place. His backyard. They made it. And after scanning the yard, they look over to the door of the house, where--

NIA

Zee...

Almost ghostlike, stands there... but he's see-through? It's as if he's there, but not there at the same time.

JUSTIN

I don't understand.

MARY

The Seeker traps half your mind here. So half the time he sees and hears the real world, the other half he sees and hears Nowhere.

Justin walks right up to Zee, waving his hand in front of his face. Zee doesn't react at all, he doesn't see him. Zee stands there as if he's waiting for something.

CARLA
Soooo now what?

Justin looks at him for a long time...

JUSTIN
We found you, Z. Tell us what to do.

Zee doesn't respond. After a moment.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
Egba?

ZEE
(filtered)
...Egbo?

They both smile.

CARLA
Was that English?

JUSTIN
E-G-B-O. E-G-B-A. "Everything's gonna be alright. Everything's gonna be okay." We made it up with my mom in the hospital for when things got really hard.

ZEE
We don't have-- Lyric record--

Zee starts shaking his head, trying to stay focused. Everyone looks at Lyric. He deletes audio and records.

ZEE (CONT'D)
...the way you came... its home terrain... a nasty fight... your deepest frights.

The ground starts SHAKING, and the BEAT sounds completely different this time. It's deeper, more final boss-y... as if The Seeker is right around the corner.

QUINCY
Uh?? Something is happening!

MARY
What's it mean?

JUSTIN
Lyric, play it back.

As if Zee heard him, he recites the OTHER half of what he's saying. He starts each sentence that the recording finishes.

ZEE

The way out is [the way you came],
but only fair [its home to
terrain.] Get ready for [a nasty
fight] the seeker is [your deepest
frights.]

Zee does something magical. He reaches into his pocket and grabs an identical GAMING PIECE to the one that he gave Justin. It's a signal. THE signal. Justin grabs his.

JUSTIN

Holy poop. I get it. ZEE! I GET IT!

THE GROUND TREMORS AGAIN.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

Guys! I told you *ZOMBIES!* is Zee's game, and he's never beaten me at it. That's why he gave me this piece! HE WANTS US TO BEAT THE SEEKER AT ITS OWN GAME.

THE GROUND NEAR THE TREE CRACKS. We hear the same creepy *SOUNDS* that we heard when Justin first entered Nowhere.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

"Down below there's no more dreams, unless you play but as a team." Zee made the deal because he couldn't beat The Seeker alone. He knew we'd play Hide and Seek at his house and attacked me so we couldn't finish the game, that way we all broke the rules no matter what.

(to Zee)

You invited all of us to your house because you knew how'd we play, and that we needed each other down here. To be a team. Didn't you?

Zee almost smiles when the ground TREMORS again. In NOWHERE we can't see her, but we hear a faint, distant, echoed:

MRS. MURPHY (O.S.)

Zee, honey, come inside--

CUT TO:

EXT. [REAL WORLD] ZEE'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - SAME

Zee's mom stands at the door as Zee stares into the distance.

MRS. MURPHY
--and eat your food before it gets
cold.

ZEE
I'm--

BACK TO:

EXT. [NOWHERE] FAMILIAR BACK YARD - CONTINUOUS

ZEE
--so...

JUSTIN
...us too. We'll be home soon.

Zee turns, and disappears into the house.

NIA
So according to Zee, the way back
home is--

BOOM!!! Blocking the kids from the tree that they originally played on is ALL of their deepest fears in a line. Quincy's GIANT BUGS crawl from out of the ground, GIANT CARLA stomps around the corner, growing even BIGGER, Justin's ZOMBIE MOM SHADOW appears from the dark, Mary's CLOWN & PIRATE DENTIST show up. One after another they appear until our heroes are completely outmatched. The tree GLOWS in a golden light.

JUSTIN
Past them.

CARLA
Fair...

QUINCY
And square.

LYRIC
No cheating.

MARY
No getting tagged.

NIA
We have to touch base.

JUSTIN

And we have to finish the game.

They nod and stand in a line on the other side of the yard. The tension is thick, the only noise now is the funny, gross *SLITHERS* & *CLICKS* of the final fear that appears: RAT-SNAKES. They look... just kinda sad, honestly.

QUINCY

Okay, umm, Mary? What are those?

MARY

Oh rightttt, rat-snakes. That's the one I forgot. I'll explain later.

GIANT CARLA

*I went up the hill, the hill was
muddy, stomped my toe and made it
bloody, should I wash it?*

No response. LET THE GAMES BEGIN. Giant Carla chases after Carla as a CLOWN and PIRATE DENTIST chase Lyric. Quincy's bugs shoot WEBS at him that he's fleeing and dodging as Nia & Mary grab sticks and swat at the Rat snakes.

ZOMBIE MOM

Quincy! Have you seen Justin?

QUINCY

GET AWAY MRS. JUSTIN'S ZOMBIE MOM!!

Quincy stops in his tracks before getting tagged by her, not falling for it - Justin distracts her to clear his path.

JUSTIN

I'm right over here!

Zombie Mom goes after him. The distraction was enough for the giant bugs to shoot a WEB and stick Quincy's right arm to his right leg! He's able to run, but MUCH slower. He runs past:

Nia: hits a rat-snake in the air and Mary homeruns it out of the backyard. Mary sees a clear path to the tree and SPRINTS over to it right as GIANT CARLA is walking by it. Crap.

While running, Justin looks over to Nia who's now talking to herself... hair turning white. *Oh no.* The clown that was just chasing Lyric notices too, and goes for the easy bait.

NIA

(old lady)

Where am I?! Why's it so LOUD?!

Justin beelines toward her... but she disappears! As do ALL of his friends on the playing field.

JUSTIN
I can't see Nia anymore!

The clown is closing in! It reaches its hand, about to tag but-- *BAM!* Nia's TACKLED out of way and into safety by Carla!

CARLA
Don't lose this for us, Detective Dummy!

NIA
(old lady)
I haven't been called that silly name since that bully, Carla--
(back to normal)
Oh. Hi Carla. Look out!

Nia PUSHES Carla out of the way as the clown DIVES for them and misses them both, hitting the ground HARD and knocking itself out. Nia RUSHES to base and makes it!!

NIA (CONT'D)
Safe! First again! Hey hey hey!

Mary & Lyric are backed into a corner as the pirate dentist peg-legs forward - a GIANT DENTAL PICK for one hand and a GIANT ELECTRIC WATER SPRAYING TOOTHBRUSH as the other.

Far behind the dentist, Quincy's FULLY caught in a spiderweb cocoon and hits the ground. The bugs don't stop spraying, slowing easing toward him while making sure he remains stuck.

MARY
Quincy's trapped. We're gonna lose.

Lyric looks at the web, then back at the dentist. Brain blast. As the dentist menacingly inches closer--

LYRIC
I got em. Run for the tree!

Lyric grabs a handful of dirt and THROWS it in Pirate's eye!

PIRATE DENTIST
ARGGG!!

As Lyric runs STRAIGHT past the dentist, barely missing the swing of his Dental Pick, the Dentist chases him while Mary is already half way to the tree base. She sees a floating flame on the way, scoops up a dropped water balloon and SPLASHES it - revealing Carla, who continues to run from GC.

MARY
Safe!

NIA
Good job Mary!

Lyric runs straight toward the spider web rope, looking back over his shoulder, and times it just right so as soon as he JUMPS OVER the spider web hold, Pirate Dentist runs INTO it, YANKING the bugs down with him and dropping his dentist pick hand, then his spinning tooth brush SPINS the web into a NEW cocoon trapping both it AND the bugs inside.

Lyric grabs the dental pick and cuts through Quincy's cocoon.

LYRIC
Quincy? Quincy you there?!

He feels a BEAR HUG. Lyric hugs back, and Quincy appears.

QUINCY
(nearly in tears)
My... hero.

LYRIC
Why are you making this weird.

They run to base. SAFE and SAFE.

Justin can't get to base, his Zombie Mom knows every move he's going to make. He tries switching paths but as he does he SLAMS right into Carla. They both hit the ground and that gives GIANT CARLA all the time she needed to catch up and HOVER over Carla. Carla crawls backwards, looking absolutely TERRIFIED when she does something no one freaking expects:

CARLA
I wanna-- I-- I WANNA STRIKE A DEAL
WITH THE SEEKER!!

EVERYONE freezes, including Zombie Mom and Giant Carla.

NIA
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?! QUINCY
Sis we're so close!

LYRIC
ARE YOU KIDDING ME?! MARY
CARLA!!!!

JUSTIN
Don't do this!!!

CARLA
(crying)
No!! We're not gonna win and I
wanna go home. I wanna go home!!
What don't you get?!

She stands up, slowly walking toward her friends to explain.

CARLA (CONT'D)

We're playing hide and seek against
THE SEEKER! If I go home and send
kids down here too, at least I'll
be home in my own bed. At least, I--
I-- I'll be with my mommy and daddy
again?! At least up there I'd be...

Carla puts her hand on the tree.

CARLA (CONT'D)

Safe.

ALL of the kids on the tree *CHEER* as Giant Carla *SCREAMS* and disappears!!! Carla just *laughs*, impressed with herself.

QUINCY

She's such a good actor!!!

She winks at Lyric, whose jaw drops. Is he... blushing? No.

Zombie Mom's the only thing standing between Justin and base.

JUSTIN

Get out of my way.

ZOMBIE MOM

I understand you're angry but you
watch that tone... sweetheart,
you're not seeing things clearly.

JUSTIN'S POV: looking for a way around her.

ZOMBIE MOM (O.C.) (CONT'D)

Justin. Just... Look at me.

Justin looks, and as he does, everything...

FADES TO WHITE.

INT. PRISTINE ROOM - TIME UNKNOWN

Justin opens his eyes, as if he just had a light shined in them. He blinks to see that this room... is perfect.

Black superhero posters on the walls, shelves upon shelves of puzzles, 2 water guns on the table not far. Fireworks. He's in awe. One table has a SHEET over it, covering something.

JUSTIN
Where... am I?

MONICA (O.S.)
(soft, near cry)
Moomoo?

He freezes...something isn't right. It...it can't be.

Justin turns to see... his mom. His *actual*...mom. She's alive, and healthy, and... real? But...? How? She covers her mouth and starts to tear up. She looks like an angel.

MONICA (CONT'D)
(crying)
Justin? Is it really you? Please
lord tell me this is real.

JUSTIN
This can't... you... you can't...

MONICA
Moomoo, it's me. I'm-- I'm right
here. It's mama, baby. I'm here.

She takes a careful step forward... and... he lets her.

EXT. [NOWHERE] ZEE'S BACK YARD - SAME

The kids watch a hypnotized Justin as ZOMBIE MOM takes a step toward him. She's tricking him, and they're watching.

NIA
What's happening?!

MARY
The Seeker's desperate. It's
tricking him... it's cheating.

QUINCY
We have to go help him!

MARY
NO! If we leave base, we'll lose.

CARLA
Justin!! Wake up! It's a trap!!

LYRIC
Come back, Justin! Wake up!!

Ignoring them, Zombie Mom takes another soft step closer.

BACK TO:

INT. PRISTINE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

MONICA

Look, I don't know how this is happening or what is real, but I'M real. I... am real. And I can tell that you are too. I am right here.

JUSTIN

(voice cracking)

...Mama?

She takes one too many steps forward and he takes one back. **When he hesitates the room gets SMALLER, walls subtly close in. The more she convinces him, the room gets bigger.**

She notices the walls closing in and stops, changing tactics.

MONICA

I don't want to know how you got here with me, it doesn't matter. Because all I care about is that you're here. And we can be together again. Look. Wherever you came from, you don't have to go back. You can stay here with me, and we can be together again. You and me.

She removes the sheet off the table and reveals a mostly completed PUZZLE with only one piece missing. THE piece. The piece that he's had and lost, is somehow in her hand.

MONICA (CONT'D)

We can finally finish our puzzle. Our last puzzle. But it doesn't have to be our last anymore! Now we can do another one, moomoo. And another. We can play forever, and we never have to hurt, ever again.

She tosses him the piece. He catches it - the room expanding.

Feeling it in his hand again calms him. She smiles.

MONICA (CONT'D)

Whaddaya say, baby? Will you stay with me? Can we start over?

Justin looks at the puzzle, then at her. He starts to cry. He looks unsure if he believes her.. but he doesn't care.

JUSTIN
(crying)
I miss you so much.

Another soft step forward. It's working.

MONICA
Me too baby. It's okay. You're
okay.

EXT. [NOWHERE] FAMILIAR BACK YARD - SAME

Zombie Mom is so close to Justin now. It's almost over.

NIA
(nearly crying)
Oh no...

INT. PRISTINE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

One more step forward from Cam.

MONICA
Finish our puzzle, my baby. Put the
last piece in. Then we can finally
move on. You can do this.

Justin wipes his tears and walks over to the puzzle, that
much closer to his mom. The last piece hovers in his hand.

As his fingers inch closer, her smile grows to a devilish
smirk. She begins stepping closer & closer... until her hand
ALMOST touches his, and-- he pulls back as Monica misses.

The room starts to close in, intensely.

JUSTIN
You're not my real mom.

MONICA
...Sweetie I-- I told you, it's me?
It's really--

JUSTIN
Cuz if you were you would want me
to stop pretending to be okay when
I'm not okay... You're gone, mom...
I've tried to pretend that you're
not for too long. But you're gone.

The sounds of his friends *YELLING* their support begins to creep in. They're breaking through.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
And now I have be there for my friends, be there for my sister and finally learn... how to be okay.

Justin SWIPES the puzzle off the table sending puzzle pieces FLYING toward her and as she stumbles backwards the WALLS CRACK with white and suddenly CRUMBLE around him as he realizes that he's still exactly where he was before:

EXT. [NOWHERE] FAMILIAR BACK YARD - SAME

Justin SPRINTS FORWARD, Zombie Mom attempting to tag him, but Justin JUKES past her and makes. his way. to BASE. **SAFE!!!!!!**

As the kids *CHEER* a bright yellow light SHOOTS from the tree into the sky and it opens it up, bringing light to the darkness. Nowhere begins to crack and fade away as all of the power the Seeker had is being taken back.

CHEERS from EVERYWHERE as hundreds of Nowhere kids in all of the many rooms see what's happening. Wow. Mary GLOWS YELLOW.

MARY
(to Justin)
Nice juke back there.

Mary walks up to him, smiling bigger than ever.

MARY (CONT'D)
(to Justin, nearly crying)
You saved all of us because you never gave up on your friends.
Thank you. Thank you so much.

She hugs him, so so tight.

MARY (CONT'D)
I guess I'll see you around? I'll be a little older, hangin out with a bunch of kids... Ugh. I'm gonna be really bad at explaining that.

She disappears into the light, then SMALL YELLOW LIGHTS float by them and join as Nowhere kids are transported back home.

She teleports. Carla glows yellow. She holds Quincy's hand.

CARLA
(sincere)
Good job, dummies.

She teleports. Quincy glows yellow.

QUINCY
I'm really happy we're finally
friends... Ooo, it tickles. Hehe.

He teleports. Now Nia.

NIA
I love you guys so much. I really
do. The Finder Four is back!!

She teleports. Lyric.

LYRIC
...Wanna play Hide and Seek when we
get home?

JUSTIN
You're insane. Get outta here.

Lyric *LAUGHS* and teleports. As Justin glows... ALL OF NOWHERE GOES SILENT. All that's heard is the *BEAT*, slower than we've ever heard. Weaker. Justin looks around to an echoed *VOICE*.

THE SEEKER (V.O.)
You think- you've won- I have many friends-
that play many games- you will see me again.

JUSTIN
(defiant)
If "The Seeker" and Nowhere is made
of all our fears, I don't think
you'll even exist anymore. Cuz we
were The Seeker the whole time...
but now we have nothing to be
afraid of.

A defeated *ROAR* that takes us out of Nowhere...for good.

INT. JUSTIN'S HOUSE - JUSTIN'S MOM'S ROOM - SOON AFTER

A POOF of smoke brings Justin back home. He SPRINGS awake, panting EXACTLY how Zee was in the opening of the film. The PUZZLE lies on the floor next to her bed, as it did before.

A flashback plays in front of Justin: it's him and his mom, last time they played this puzzle.

They sit on the carpet, tossing popcorn and laughing, so close to finishing the game. Monica coughs, falling back on an elbow, heartbreakingly faint, and Justin catches her. Holds her. She smiles, grabs his chin. Knowing this time will be the last. He's unsure why... but faintly smiles too.

The flashback fades. Justin walks over to the puzzle... and puts the last piece in. Finally finishing it.

INT. JUSTIN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - A MOMENT LATER

Kiara, pacing, types on her phone as Justin RUSHES in.

KIARA
BOY! Where the heck have you BEEN?!
I called LYRIC'S house, Nia's CELL--

He surprises her with a huge hug. She... melts into it.

KIARA (CONT'D)
Ha? What was that for, kid? You ok?

JUSTIN
I am okay... For real this time.
Thanks for always asking if I am.
From now on, when I'm not, I'll
talk to you about it. I promise.

He smiles and runs outside. All Kiara can do is smile too.

EXT. JUSTIN'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Justin grabs his bike, unsure of where to go first... then gets an idea and starts riding between two houses. We fly to:

EXT. HYDRO'S JUNKYARD - ALMOST SUNSET

Hydro checks his window, *Did someone break in?*, when he feels something odd. The Nowhere smudge on his wrist... fades away?

MARY (O.S.)
Hey Hyd.

He knows that voice. He WHIPS AROUND to see his now 26 YEAR OLD sister, MARY, staring him down... furious... and hurt.

MARY (CONT'D)
You left me... Why? Why Hydro?

Hydro takes a couple steps forward, ready for this fight... and to our surprise... he uncontrollably sobs. Mary stares.

HYDRO
(breaking down)
Mary... I'm so... sorry. My-- I...
my deepest fear was something bad
happening to you, so every time I
got scared I would... I had to see--

He sobs and shakes. He's just about to drop down to his knees... but Mary catches him. She holds him up in a hug.

MARY
I forgive you... I forgive you.

They cry, and hug, overwhelmed to have each other again. By the gate, Nia smiles. She grabs her bike and goes.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD GREEN RADIATOR - LATER

Justin waits at the Southern meetup spot as one by one, Lyric & Nia ride up on their bikes. Then Carla appears on hers, Quincy riding next to her. They get off, smiling. Justin too.

A BASEBALL CARD slaps the spokes of another bike approaching. ZEE'S. He looks like himself again. He hops down, all smiles.

JUSTIN
Zee?

He nods happily and looks over at Quincy & Carla.

ZEE
...Looks like the Finder Four need
a new name, huh?

With that, we fly sky high and away as the SOLVER SIX group hug Zee, while 3 familiar pups and 3 NEW pups ZOOM by.

SLOW FADE TO BLACK

ZEE (CONT'D)
Miss J's dogs got away again?!

LYRIC
We do NOT get paid enough for this!

NIA (V.O.)
Justin! What's the plan?

JUSTIN (V.O.)
Okay, if you listen closely, this
will make a whole lot of sense!

THE END