

ZEUS

Episode #101

"Pilot"

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UNOFFICIAL CASTING DRAFT

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1 EXT. VARIOUS MYSTICAL LANDSCAPES - DAY 1

Exotic landscapes flash across the screen. MONSTROUS CREATURES thrash and roar towards us.

WARRIOR (V.O.)

For ten years we have wandered these lands. Braved war. Famine. Monsters of land and sea. But from this mystical hell-scape... heroes emerged.

A KNIGHT, a FEMALE ELF, a SORCERER, and GIANT stand tall.

WARRIOR (V.O.)

From all over the world, they took up arms and embarked on an epic journey. A journey that will forever be known as -- Hero Quest!

2 INT. HQ STUDIOS - THEATER - DAY 2

Two hundred employees are crammed into the theater of the eponymous video game studio. They cheer, all pumped up.

WARRIOR (V.O.)

Now, with over 100 million players, Hero Quest is the biggest multi-player online role-playing game of all time!

A graphic displays a bar chart. World of Warcraft, Eve Online, Guild Wars 2... all dwarfed by HERO QUEST.

WARRIOR (V.O.)

And as we embark on our third major expansion, Hero Quest: "Raven's Banquet," we want to thank YOU. The senior team members of HQ studios!

The lights go up in the theater. They all go crazy. Then the lights cut off again.

WARRIOR (V.O.)

But, there are two people, without whom, none of this is possible. Ladies and gentleman -- the creators of Hero Quest -- Poppy Li and Ian Grimm!

A SPOTLIGHT COMES UP REVEALING --

(CONTINUED)

IAN GRIMM (pronounced 'Eye-An') a middle-aged man dressed in a weird Sci-Fi, western look. And POPPY LI, the brilliant and cocky but socially-awkward lead engineer stand on stage.

The crowd quiets.

IAN
...hi. I'm Ian Grimm.

This is hilarious. The crowd goes fucking wild. Poppy notices the reaction and jumps in, a little too loud.

POPPY
And I'm Poppy.

The audiences starts to react. She jumps in again.

POPPY (CONT'D)
(awkwardly)
Li. I'm Poppy Li. Hi.

The audience's rhythm is thrown. They clap respectfully. Ian stares at her, then --

IAN
Right. The Raven's Banquet will be our most ambitious expansion yet. One new continent. Thirty new dungeons. Over a thousand exciting new playable items.

POPPY
...and "Dinner Party!" A dynamic new tool for organizing players to meet up for large-scale events. Which I designed, and *someone else* on stage didn't believe in.

IAN
As you all know, Poppy and I can disagree sometimes.

The crowd chuckles knowingly at Ian's joke.

IAN (CONT'D)
See, I believe people play our game for the experience of power. War. Domination.

POPPY
...And I believe people play for connection. To build communities.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

POPPY (CONT'D)

And that's why I created "Dinner Party."

Poppy flips the screen to the user interface of an elegant application.

POPPY (CONT'D)

...Which we put into beta to see what the community would do. And this is what happened this morning.

Poppy flips the screen to some gameplay. HUNDREDS of Avatars gather somberly at a beautiful, snowy lake.

POPPY (CONT'D)

Tragically, one of our players passed away in real life. So his guild-mates decided to have a memorial for him in-game. "Dinner Party" allowed them to publicize the event, and hundreds of players laid down their arms to come and pay their respects. Ian may think that all the humans want to do is destroy each other but "Dinner Party" proves that wrong.

Poppy smiles taking it all in.

IAN

Wow. This is beautiful, Pop. This does kinda restore a little faith in humanity.

POPPY

You're not the only one with a vision, Ian. Now, let's move on--

IAN

Ooh. Ooh. Let's not move on just yet. You didn't watch until the end, Pop. See there's *another* group that wanted to join the memorial. Let's check out what they're up to over --

The image switches to another location. A GALLOPING CAVALRY OF MARAUDERS charges with a full head of steam.

POPPY

How did you just--

(CONTINUED)

IAN

(holding a remote)

I brought my own. Uhp, what's happening here? They've got a different energy.

(flips back over)

See these people are very somberly mourning their friend -- who again -- died.

(flips back)

And these guys are armed to the teeth. But why would someone bring weapons to a funeral? I guess we're about to find out.

POPPY

(realizing)

Oh fuck.

IAN

Don't worry Poppy. You see, these guys organized on "Dinner Party," so I'm sure they just wanted to make a connection and build a new community.

The Marauders reach the funeral. There's a beat of confusion -- then -- the lead KNIGHT CHOPS OFF THE HEAD OF A HIGH PRIEST. All hell breaks loose.

They start EVISCERATING EVERYONE. It's a bloodbath.

IAN (CONT'D)

Nope. And the slaughter begins. Murder, murder, murder, murder. Death. Destruction. Look, this guy's trying to swim away -- nope disemboweled you with a hatchet. Oh, this lady's gonna save the day -- no, there goes her head. Oh and if the killing wasn't enough, Let's burn down the city!

The Marauders have laid waste. Destruction complete.

IAN (CONT'D)

What a great dinner party!

CUT TO:

TITLES

3 INT. HQ STUDIOS - DAY 3

MISSION CONTROL - an area of monitors displays all the worldwide stats of the game in real time.

A COUNTDOWN CLOCK ticks down the days/hours/min until update. It reads: 4 days 6 hours.

4 INT. HQ STUDIOS - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY 4

DAVID BRITTLEBEE, the hapless producer, stands in front of the smaller, core dev team. He clicks through some slides.

DAVID

Okay, the update goes live on Monday. On budget and on time. Very exciting. Brad, where are we with monetization?

IAN

Yes, let's hear from the soulless corporate shill.

BRAD

Hey, nerd, it's my job to keep the lights on in this jerk-off fantasy factory. The micro-transactions are an elegant way to do it.

POPPY

You turned the Enchanted Woods into the "Tostitos Fiesta Forest."

BRAD

For a weekend! Which paid for the dye in Ian's beard and the cases of cat food Poppy needs to maintain her spinster lifestyle. So you're welcome.

C.W.

If I may --

C.W. LONGBOTTOM, an elder with serious gravitas, pipes in.

C.W.

I think the update should feature more 'cut scenes' in between the gameplay. Backstory that's the thing!

(CONTINUED)

DAVID

Our data shows that people skip that.

C.W.

Only the Philistines.

IAN

That's right. True fans recognize a great writer like C.W. Longbottom when they see him.

BRAD

He's not a great writer.

POPPY

The man won a Nebula award!

BRAD

In 1972! You two met him at a state fair where he was selling rotisserie chickens.

DAVID

Guys, please. We have spent thousands of man hours and millions of dollars on this. I want to make sure we're all set to launch.

POPPY

We're not. Something's not right.

Poppy scrolls through some slides. She comes to a drab set of GARDENING TOOLS -- A SHOVEL, RAKE, HOE, etc.

POPPY

The Homesteader Package. It's tucked too far down in the options menu.

IAN

Because it's boring. No one wants to play house.

C.W.

Maybe it needs a backstory. Who birthed these mysterious terra spades? The Gods themselves? Did they suckle at the bosom of Hera like babes at their mother's teat?

(CONTINUED)

POPPY

I love that. Super weird. I'll take C.W. for the week.

BRAD

The expansion is fine. Just release it as it is.

IAN

Thank you, money guy for your thoughts. Why not get *everyone's* opinion on major creative decisions? David, you're the least creative person in the room, what do you think might improve the game?

DAVID

Oh, well, if you're really asking--

IAN

I'm not. I'll tell you what's missing --

POPPY

Don't say a new weapon. Don't say a new weapon...

IAN

A new weapon.

POPPY

Come on, man. We already have *hundreds* of weapons!

IAN

Yes, but we're missing something *great*. Sure we've got spells and fire-swords, but we need to get back to something raw. That's what the people wanna see.

POPPY

Do you think I don't like murder? I love murder. I love the feel of crushing a man's skull with a thunder hammer. But I also love gardening!

(then)

Actually, I don't like gardening. But other people seem to!

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

POPPY (CONT'D)

And I want them to be able to do that without being disemboweled by some max-level fourteen-year-old fuck-face from Kansas.

IAN

I'm making a new weapon.

POPPY

And I'm gonna figure out a way to get people to create instead of destroy. And I'm gonna get them to buy my...afterbirth metal, uh --
(motions to C.W.)

C.W.

...shears of Antilles?

POPPY

Shears of Antilles. Fuckin' A right.

CUT TO:

5 INT. HQ STUDIOS - OTHER SIDE OF THE OFFICE - SAME TIME 5

ANGLE ON: a small window to a dark room, marked "GAME TESTING". A peering set of EYES gaze out.

6 INT. GAME TESTING ROOM - SAME TIME 6

RACHEL (22), a punky and tough game tester, looks out the window and complains to DANA (22) sweet and studious, who never takes her eyes off the game.

RACHEL

They're having another meeting without us. Why don't they want our opinions? We play this game 24 hours a day.

DANA

I don't mind. Besides we've only worked here for like two months.

RACHEL

So? You have so many great ideas.

DANA

I do?

(CONTINUED)

RACHEL

Yeah, like the one you had about increasing the Hill Trolls kick radius. That was brilliant.

DANA

I don't remember that.

RACHEL

You don't? It was a few days ago. You were wearing that cute red top. I complimented you on your lipstick and your hair and stuff and you said you wished the trolls could kick better?

DANA

Huh. You have a really good memory.

Dana reaches over to grab an energy drink. Rachel takes the opportunity to secretly (and sweetly) smell her hair.

Rachel is truly, madly, deeply in love.

DANA

What are you doing?

RACHEL

Oh - I like your smell. I mean, your hair smells good. I need a new shampoo. What is that?

7

INT. HQ STUDIOS - BULLPEN - LATE NIGHT

7

Brad wanders around the bullpen, searching.

BRAD

Poppy?

He turns to a nearby employee: PETE the PROGRAMMER.

BRAD

Hey, where's Poppy?

PETE

She's taking a sound bath.

BRAD

A what?

8 INT. HQ STUDIOS - PROGRAMMER'S ROOM - LATER 8

Poppy lays on the floor with her eyes closed. C.W. sits on the couch scribbling feverishly.

BIZARRE SOUNDS pulse through the room. Brad enters.

BRAD

What in God's name is going on in here?

C.W.

(sotto)

Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response. It relaxes the brain, thus stoking creative thought.

BRAD

It sounds like someone rubbing lotion on their hands.

C.W.

That's exactly what it is.

BRAD

You people have human heads in your freezers. I'd bet my mortgage on it. You figure out how to sell the Homesteader Package yet?

C.W.

The farming tools are a little less sexy than I originally thought. But admittedly, I'm finding these lotion sounds quite erotic.

BRAD

Is there an adult in the room?

Poppy shoots up.

POPPY

I got it. Holy shit. I figured it out.

C.W.

Wonderful. What is it?

(CONTINUED)

POPPY

Okay, check it out. If we only give the players rewards for bad behavior, then they're always going to act badly. If we reward them for *good* behavior, then it opens up other aspects of the game and they make better choices. Forced morality! And that's why we have to add my newest feature.

BRAD

Which is?

POPPY

Syphilis.

C.W.

Syphilis?

BRAD

You wanna give the players Syphilis.

POPPY

Not all of them. Just the bad ones. To incentivize them to make better choices. You wanna act like a Barbarian? You get a Barbarian disease.

BRAD

... I don't think that's --

POPPY

We should add all sorts of real world consequences. Scurvy. Gout. Osteoporosis. You feast *only* on the blood of your enemy? You get reflux. You decide not to build a home to protect your family from the elements? Whoops, they just died of melanoma. And it's your fault for being a dick.

BRAD

Poppy... this seems... unhinged.

POPPY

As unhinged as a series of non-stop wars? Seriously, how long can that last?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

POPPY (CONT'D)

This is a way to keep people
playing forever. Real stakes!

C.W.

Well, first off, can I just say --
I LOVE IT.

POPPY

How much time do we have?

BRAD

Four days! That would take months!

POPPY

I'm gonna need a bigger team.

9 INT. SOUND STAGE - LATER

9

Ian, in a mo-cap suit, wields a SHOVEL. A ton of
employees sit everywhere, taking notes.

On a monitor we see: A PARTIALLY RENDERED animation of a
THOR-LIKE KNIGHT that moves with Ian.

IAN

There's a heft to this one but it
lacks grace. I think we want to try
a few different stabby motions.

10 INT. SOUND STAGE - CONTROL ROOM - INTERCUT

10

David presses the audio feed button.

DAVID

Ian, I'm afraid we're running out
of time here --

Poppy enters.

POPPY

David! I got it! I have a fix!

IAN

Hey Poppy! Great news! I figured
out the new weapon!

POPPY

My shovel? You can't take my
shovel. That's the main item in
the Homesteader Package.

IAN

Not anymore. It's destined to become the greatest weapon we've ever had. So simple. Yet so satisfying.

Ian slams the shovel into a watermelon. ON A SCREEN: The shovel hits a head and it explodes.

IAN

Still missing something. But I've got a big feeling on this one. Pop, you wanna gimme a hand making this puppy sing?

POPPY

No. I'm busy. I'm going to give everyone Syphilis.

IAN

Great. Carry on.

DAVID

Wait. Ian is making shovels into killing machines and you're talking about STDs? We don't have time or the money for this.

POPPY

David, your job isn't to tell us how much time and money we do or don't have.

DAVID

That is literally my job.

IAN

Your job is to support the creative. And I am the --

POPPY

We are the creative.

IAN

Sure. Whatever. And I'm telling you that the update is not ready yet. And Poppy is telling you that she's very sick and needs penicillin. Either way, let us do our thing.

POPPY

Ian, give me the coders. You don't care about them anyway.

IAN

I love my staff and I need all of them. Every single person in here is essential to my team.

POPPY

How about Mary and Jim?

IAN

Mary and Jim are the most important people in here. I can't do it without them.

POPPY

Point them out.

IAN

Who?

POPPY

MARY AND JIM.

IAN

Hm... Let's see...

POPPY

Ha! There *is* no one named Mary or Jim!

GUY

Actually my name is Jim.

POPPY

Seriously? Wow. I am so sorry, Jim.

DAVID

Guys, seriously, does any of this really matter right now?

IAN

It might not matter to you, David. But I can promise you it matters to that twelve-year-old girl in China who comes home from a day of uncertainty to the game she loves.

POPPY

And now a speech. Ian, please --

(CONTINUED)

Ian looks REGAL on the monitors. The ENGINEER, swells a little music.

IAN

To know that every last detail, has been carefully crafted. To show her that, yes, out there, in the cold reality of life she may feel like nothing. But in here, she's everything. That's why we put in the work. Because she matters. She is, in fact... A hero.

The Employees clap, inspired.

POPPY

Oh, come on. They only clapped because you look like Braveheart on the monitors. You didn't actually say anything.

IAN

Okay, let's get back to work - where were we? Damnit. I can't remember. Jim, what was I doing?

JIM

Uh... When?

IAN

Damn it Jim. You're useless. Mary, help me out.

POPPY

There is no Mary! And if there is, she better keep her mouth shut because I'm making a fucking point.

DAVID

Poppy!

POPPY

I'm sorry. That just slipped out. I'm under a lot of stress.

IAN

Must be a symptom of the VD.

POPPY

David! Make a decision.

11 INT. OFFICE - NEXT DAY

11

David lies on a couch. He speaks to a woman, CAROL, who sits at her desk taking notes.

DAVID

It's like I'm stuck in the middle of my parents divorce again forced to take sides. And I know what you're going to say. "It's my job to take sides." I'm the boss. But all these "creative" types make me feel like I'm not the boss, and maybe that's because my Mom said I wasn't "creative" or "talented" and my dad was too drunk to stand up to her. Oh god. I just -- I don't know what to do. Please, just tell me what to do.

CAROL

I have no idea. Because I'm not a therapist. This is Human Resources.

DAVID

Right. But maybe you could just help me out.

CAROL

(sighs, then tries)

Okay, what's your management style?

DAVID

I like to think of myself as the conductor of an orchestra. I don't play an instrument and I don't understand music but when I wave my hands in the air, it just kinda comes together.

CAROL

That's not what a conductor does.

DAVID

It's worked so far.

CAROL

You need to be decisive. If you don't have time to fix both issues then pick one and stick with it.

(CONTINUED)

DAVID

You're right.
(consider, then)
Which one?

CAROL

Oh my god, I don't know, man.
That's your job. But I do know
that you need to stand up for
yourself. Stop being so agreeable.

DAVID

Yeah, you're totally right. That
is my problem.

He lies back on the couch.

12 INT. HQ STUDIOS - DAY 12

The COUNTDOWN CLOCK ticks down : 3 days 5 hours TO LAUNCH

13 INT. HQ STUDIOS - POPPY'S OFFICE - LATER 13

ON SCREEN -- AN ELF LORD vomits into a bucket.

POPPY (O.S.)

This isn't right. I said the elf
should have IBS. The excrement
should come out the other end.

Poppy chides PETE the Programmer.

PETE

Are you sure about this?

POPPY

No, I'm not sure. I'm not sure
about any of this. But I just
wanna get people to have respect
for themselves and their fellow
humans.

PETE

Speaking of, do you think I could
take off before midnight? It's my
birthday.

POPPY

You could, Pete. Or you could
stick around and help make this
work for that Chinese girl who
does the game or whatever.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

POPPY (CONT'D)

Because when she comes home and sees that we've made her a hero by making her matter in her life. Because she is... she is that hero we were just discussing. And so can we.

PETE

Huh?

POPPY

It works better with the music. Just get back to work.

Brad and C.W. approach holding several posters.

BRAD

Poppy! Pop tarts. Pop goes the weasel cause the weasel goes pop.

C.W.

Pop your boils so the puss can secrete.

BRAD

What the fuck?

C.W.

It's the best I could think of.

BRAD

You're a writer.

POPPY

This is fun. How long does the show last?

BRAD

We've got a way to help you with selling the Homesteader Package.

POPPY

Okay...

C.W. flips the poster: It's a SEXY, SEMI-NUDE TREE NYMPH with a GOLDEN SHOVEL covering her particulars.

POPPY

What am I looking at?

C.W.

Picture it, the hero must vanquish his enemy.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

C.W. (CONT'D)

But the weapons of the old Gods
are insufficient. So he must pray
upon the altar of-

BRAD

Jesus, skip the story.

C.W.

The story is everything you
Neanderthal! Now, if you please...
the hero must pray upon the altar
of Ares to send him-

BRAD

A Golden Shovel. Which we will
mark up to a hundred bucks a pop.
Maybe a few whales indulge but
either way it drives interest to
the cheaper version which will be
in your package. The Wood Nymph is
the loot crate that gets their
attention.

C.W.

What happens when the shovel is
awarded? It must leave the bosom
of this fair maiden. Then what
might the hero gaze upon?

She just stares at them.

POPPY

I am so utterly and completely
confused.

C.W.

Rest assured there will be a
considerable amount of backstory
explaining everything.

POPPY

You want me to code a whore.

BRAD

Yes!

POPPY

And how does that help me?

C.W.

Oh that's the best part! Because
once you purchase the Homesteader
Package, you bed the Nymph!

(CONTINUED)

POPPY

Uh huh.

C.W.

And it is the Nymph... that *gives*
you Syphilis.

Poppy stares, dumbfounded.

POPPY

I assume Ian loved this?

BRAD

Haven't brought it up. He's in the
temper tantrum stage of his
creative process.

14 INT. HQ STUDIOS - IAN'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

14

A group of programmers watch Ian in a fit of childish
rage -- Throwing things, screaming, swinging the shovel
everywhere.

A loop of the DIGITAL SHOVEL plays on a TV screen.

IAN

No, no, no, no. It's still not
right.

A programmer, MICHELLE, speaks up.

MICHELLE

Which part?

IAN

I don't know. Did we have
animation try a horizontal slash?

MICHELLE

Seven times.

IAN

What about an uppercut motion?

MICHELLE

Yes. We showed it to you at 3 AM.

IAN

What did I say?

(CONTINUED)

MICHELLE

That it made you "want to uppercut everyone in the office until our heads flew to Mars."

IAN

Fuck, fuck, fuck.
(then)
Run it again.

15 INT. HQ STUDIOS - THE NEXT DAY 15

The COUNTDOWN CLOCK ticks down : 2 days 2 hours TO LAUNCH

16 INT. ANOTHER OFFICE - LATER 16

TIGHT ON: Rachel speaking with someone. A real intimate moment. She's baring her soul.

RACHEL

Okay, it's time I just come out and say it. I think about you all the time. Stupid things, like the way you cover your mouth when you smile because you're self-conscious about your snaggletooth but it's the most perfect thing that has ever been put into a person's body. I know this is totally crazy but I think you feel something too. So this is me asking you, if you feel the same?
(beat, then)
So, you think that'll work?

REVERSE TO REVEAL: CAROL FROM HUMAN RESOURCES.

CAROL

I don't know.

RACHEL

But you're Human Resources. You handle work-related personal problems.

CAROL

Dear God, you work with this person?

RACHEL

That's why I'm trying to find out what the line is.

CAROL

I really don't think you should be telling me any of this.

RACHEL

Oh shit, are you gonna rat me out?

CAROL

If I were to 'rat you out', it would be to me. I'm starting to think that no one in this office understands what I do.

Poppy barges in the office.

POPPY

Carol -- Oh sorry. Are you in a session? I was just feeling kinda depressed. I'll come back.

CUT TO:

17 INT. HQ STUDIOS - BULLPEN - LATER

17

Carol has assembled the whole team. Ian, David, Poppy, Brad, C.W., Rachel, and Dana.

CAROL

Okay, I called an emergency meeting because I have noticed a lot of abuse in this office.

DAVID

Oh, no. Has someone been harassed?

CAROL

Yes. Me. I am being harassed. You're all abusing the office of Human Resources.

RACHEL

Speaking of abuse. Why are the testers never invited to the meetings? We have ideas too.

POPPY

I'm sorry. Who are you?

RACHEL

Rachel Knight. I've worked here for almost six months.

(CONTINUED)

IAN

Oh good. The brand-new employees have some ideas on how to improve our billion dollar enterprise. Lay them on us.

RACHEL

Well, actually, Dana is the one with brilliant ideas.

DANA

(thrown)

What? No, I'm not.

RACHEL

She wants to increase the Troll kick radius.

POPPY

Really? I suppose your brilliant friend would like to increase the kick radius to... one eighty, three hundred sixty degrees?

IAN

Perhaps we could design a troll leg that just pops off and flies around the game and wins the whole goddamn thing while we're at it.

RACHEL

You're such a dick.

C.W.

You're a dick. And in what universe can a brand-new employee call her boss a dick? This jumped-up popinjay is entirely unprofessional.

RACHEL

(re: C.W.)

This guy sleeps in the office.

IAN

Only when he drinks too much.

RACHEL

Which is every day. I think he might live here.

(CONTINUED)

C.W.

A bard has no home. He goes where
the prose takes him.

RACHEL

The prose takes him through a
fifth of scotch and drops him off
in the custodial closet every
night.

POPPY

(out of nowhere;
admitting)

I'm coding a whore. I'm not proud
of it. But I can't think of any
other way for people to stop
killing each other.

DAVID

A whore? We can't put a whore in
the game.

BRAD

Poppy, that was on the DL.

DAVID

We're two days from launch.
Nothing should be on the DL.
Especially not putting sex workers
into a game for children.

IAN

Carol, can we do this some other
time? We are in crisis right now.
I am so close to figuring out this
last problem but I just need time.

POPPY

You're not figuring it out because
you're all bravado with no
substance.

IAN

I know what the players want to
see up on that screen.

DAVID

Well, Poppy, he is right about
that. His ideas have gotten us
this far.

(CONTINUED)

POPPY

He might know what the players want to see. But I know what they want to feel.

DAVID

Ian, she definitely has a point there. Her engineering has gotten us to this point.

IAN

So who is it?

DAVID

Who is what?

POPPY

The person who gets the staff!

DAVID

Maybe we should take a vote.

CAROL

No votes. David, we talked about this.

DAVID

It's just that I'm put into an impossible situation where I have to choose between Mom and Dad.

Everyone is confused. A few people raise their hands.

CAROL

(explains to all)
David's parents do not work for the company.

IAN

(getting up)
Please. This could take all night.

POPPY

(also getting up)
Jim! Pete! Where are you? We're off the whore thing. Back to the drawing board. Might as well get Mary too.

DAVID

Sit down. Both of you! It's not all about you.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DAVID (CONT'D)

Hundreds of people have worked far too hard for this update to be ruined by your egos. I'm calling it. I'm sending everyone home -- the update is done. It is good enough. "Raven's Banquet" is ready to ship. And that is my decision.

David nods to Carol, smiling.

CAROL

Well, that took two days longer than it should have.

IAN

Fine! I don't care. Ruin our stupid game. I've got better things to do anyway.

Ian storms out.

POPPY

Yeah. I don't need this shit. I've got plans with the girls, the girlfriends that I have. I'm going out with them. Girls' night!

Poppy storms out. The crew is left in silence.

DISSOLVE TO:

18 INT. HQ OFFICES - LATE NIGHT

18

THE COUNTDOWN CLOCK reads: 1 day 22 hours until launch.

For the first time, the office is quiet. Empty.

Then --

The elevator doors open and in walks Ian. He spots the SHOVEL nearby and picks it up. He speaks to it.

IAN

(dramatically)

Reveal yourself to me.

SQUISH SQUISH. Ian hears a noise from off-screen. He follows the sound to Poppy's office.

19 INT. HQ OFFICES - POPPY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

19

Ian opens the door and flicks on the LIGHT to reveal: Poppy lying on the ground, listening to ASMR lotion sounds. She bolts upright.

POPPY

Argh!

IAN

What are you doing? Are you listening to someone beat off?

POPPY

What? No. It's lotion sounds. It helps me think. It's not weird.

IAN

It's weird.

POPPY

Just go away. Why are you even here?

IAN

Because the expansion isn't good enough.

POPPY

I know. Why can't they see that?

IAN

I don't know. But the fans will.

POPPY

They always do.

Ian notices Poppy's screen.

IAN

What am I looking at?

She turns her screen around and we see animation of a MOTHER with her HUNCHBACKED CHILD.

POPPY

Spina bifida. That's the mom and that's her kid. See, he has to live with her mistakes.

(CONTINUED)

IAN

Jesus Christ. That is dark, Poppy.
How's this supposed to get people
to use your garden tools?

POPPY

I don't know, okay? All I know is
that if I can't figure it out,
it's gonna be shit and the game's
gonna be shit and if the game is
shit then I'm basically nothing.
Does that sound crazy?

IAN

Not to me.
(beat)
Can I show you something?

20 INT. HQ OFFICES - IAN'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

20

CLOSE ON: the screen, as an Avatar swings a shovel and
obliterates an enemy's head. Blood splatters everywhere.

POPPY

Wow, that's a lot of blood.

IAN

Yes! And yet I feel no joy. I
can't figure it out. I know this
will be huge. I feel it in my
bones. I just can't get it right.
Everybody else thinks it's fine.
What do you think?

POPPY

(sighs)
Just move.

Poppy sits down at Ian's computer to code.

IAN

What are you--?

POPPY

Shh.

Poppy puts on her headphones and continues to type.

IAN

Am I supposed to just--?

She puts up her hand to silence him. When she's done
typing:

(CONTINUED)

POPPY

There. Try it again.

Ian picks up the controller and swings the shovel again.

IAN

Oh shit! Wait. That was awesome.
(swings again)
Yes! Wait, what did you change?

POPPY

The sound.

He tries it again, noticing the sound this time.

POPPY

Here...
(continues typing)
Let me boost the mix and add
something to the striking
movement. Ooh, how about a little
haptic response in the controller.
There, try it again.

Ian swings the shovel. There's a WHOOSH as it cuts through the air. The sound as it crushes a head is LOUD and MAGNIFICENT.

IAN

Yes, yes. FUCK YES. That's it. Now I can feel the weight of the strike as it obliterates the skull. You did it. This is going to change everything. You brilliant little weirdo.

POPPY

Not that it helps me with my problem.

He grabs her shoulders with intensity. He's on to something.

IAN

Poppy, Poppy, Poppy. My problem is your solution.

POPPY

Huh?

IAN

We put my awesome shovel back into your boring Homesteader Package, and if the players want the greatest new weapon in the game, *which they will*, they'll have to buy your dumbass gardening tools!

POPPY

Sometimes I can't tell if you're convincing me or insulting me.

(then)

But that actually might work. And it'll force people to create instead of destroy!

IAN

Well, no. We can't force people to do anything. But you said you just wanna give them the tools and hope they make the right choices. So let's do that. Are you in?

POPPY

It'll take all weekend to build that out.

IAN

Then we better start now.

They pop open their laptops and feverishly begin.

CUT TO BLACK:

FADE INTO:

22 A WEB CAM IMAGE OF IAN AND POPPY --

22

IAN

Hello, HQ fans!

POPPY

Hey, guys! As you know, our latest expansion went live this morning.

IAN

We haven't read any reviews yet because we wanted to share this moment with all of you. We put our blood, sweat, and tears into this. And it means a lot. But before we see the reviews, I'd just like to thank you all for--

(CONTINUED)

POPPY

Can I give the speech?

IAN

It's not a speech. I'm just talking.

POPPY

You say that, but then you always end up talking forever and I'd like to inspire people with a speech of my own.

IAN

Again, not a speech. I'm just speaking from the heart.

POPPY

Okay, well, I have a heart. And for once I'd like to fucking speak from it.

IAN

Poppy, don't curse. There are children watching.

POPPY

Oh right. Sorry.

IAN

Don't apologize to me. Apologize to the eight-year-old girl in China. Apologize to the disabled Boy Scout, who stayed up all night to watch his heroes--

POPPY

Henry David Thoreau once said, "If you have built castles in the air--"

IAN

What are you doing?

POPPY

I'm interrupting your speech with my own speech.

IAN

I wasn't giving a speech.

POPPY

You were being inspiring.

(CONTINUED)

IAN

Thank you.

POPPY

That wasn't a fucking compliment!

IAN

Language.

POPPY

SORRY!

(then)

Why are we even doing this?

IAN

Because I wanted a real moment.
For the fans.

POPPY

Then let's just read the reviews
and be real.

IAN

Okay. Moment of truth. Here we go.

POPPY

Two years of our lives reduced to
a Metacritic score that will
probably be less than--

Ian clicks a button. They struggle to process what
they're reading.

IAN

Ninety!

POPPY

Whoa. That is *high*.

Ian pumps his hands in celebration as Poppy clicks a link
on the page.

POPPY

Ian... the User Score.

Ian looks at the screen. They both stare, dumbfounded.
We're finally seeing into these people's souls.

POPPY (CONT'D)

Huh.

IAN

Mm hmm.

(CONTINUED)

POPPY
...that's a nine point five.

IAN
Yeah.
(beat)
That's the highest we've ever--

POPPY
Yeah.
(beat)
They even noticed the--

Poppy SIGHS, holding back a flood of tears.

POPPY
I'm gonna cry.

IAN
Don't you go. Because if you go, I
go.

They laugh/cry a little bit. We stay on this a while.
Then:

IAN
(softly)
We did it.

POPPY
Yeah we did.

IAN
This is the real moment I was
looking for.

POPPY
Fuck.

IAN
Again, minus the profanity.

23 INT. HQ STUDIOS - MOMENTS LATER

23

Poppy and Ian walk out of the office. David has everyone
gathered. They launch into applause.

Brad comes running up.

BRAD
I just got the full analysis.
Steam, Reddit, Twitter, all
positive.

(CONTINUED)

IAN

And the most purchased item?

BRAD

The Homesteader Package.

IAN

And... are they saying *why*?

BRAD

Best weapon. Number one reason:
"cool sound". The number two
reason: "cool backstory".

IAN

Oh... where's C.W.?

DAVID

Haven't seen him.

IAN

Well, Poppy, your job is done. You
gave people the tools. Now let's
see what they're doing with them.

He motions to the wall of monitors. Each one displays the
game play of different users from all over the world.

Each one shows the SHOVEL BEING bashed into anything and
everything. Killing everything in its path.

IAN

And there you have it.

Poppy sighs.

24

INT. HQ STUDIOS - GAME TESTING ROOM - SAME TIME

24

Rachel turns from the window to Dana, who once again
happily plays the game.

RACHEL

Such bullshit. They're all
celebrating and it's like we're
totally invisible.

DANA

Why don't you just try to have
fun? We could -- Wait. That's
weird. The troll. Look at the kick
radius. It's been enhanced.

(CONTINUED)

RACHEL
Holy shit. That was your idea!

DANA
You know what this means?

RACHEL
Yeah. They're listening to you.

DANA
They're listening to both of us.

Dana smiles at Rachel, then quickly covers her mouth with her hand instinctively to hide her snaggletooth.

Rachel's heart melts into oblivion.

25 INT. HQ STUDIOS - SAME TIME

25

Everyone is drinking, celebrating, etc. Ian and Poppy walk through until Ian climbs the steps of his balcony.

IAN
I just want to thank everyone for believing in us and believing in Hero Quest! Your hard work is what makes this game great!

Poppy awkwardly muscled her way up there.

POPPY
You are the reason Hero Quest is great!

IAN
I literally just said that.

David speaks up from below.

DAVID
Yes and I'd like to--

IAN
That's it for the day. In fact, I'm giving you the rest of the week off. You earned it!

Everyone cheers and starts to disperse. David looks over the milling orchestra of lunatics. Success.

DAVID
Still got it baby.

(CONTINUED)

He mimes the gestures of a conductor, pleased. The door to the CUSTODIAL CLOSET opens and out walks C.W..

C.W.

(to David)

So sorry I'm late. Traffic was a nightmare. What's up?

Dana calls from inside the testing room.

DANA

Poppy! Hey, so sorry. But could you come to the testers room?

26

INT. HQ STUDIOS - GAME TESTING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

26

Poppy enters to find Rachel and Dana playing the game.

RACHEL

This is the Enchanted Lake. From the funeral. They're using "Dinner Party" again.

POPPY

What, to piss on the corpses?

DANA

No. Look. They came from all over. Thousands of them. It looks like they're... re-building.

RACHEL

They're using the Homesteader Package.

ON SCREEN: Thousands of Avatars are rebuilding their town. They use the rakes, the hoes, the hammers and, of course, the shovel.

Poppy smiles. She was right.

POPPY

Motherfucker. They're helping each other.

She takes it in. A glimmer of hope for humankind.

END OF SHOW