

Go Ask Ali(X)

Dramatis Personae

Lily: screen name: ensnaredbird. A voracious reader, loves bunnies. Too afraid of the world to put herself out there, has never been part of the ‘in’ crowd.

Jasmine: screen name: dancingwiththedevil. Bubbly and excitable, a bit rebellious, absolutely committed to her passions and hobbies. Much bolder online than in real life.

Quinn: screen name: bigbrainmoves. Inquisitive and unafraid to push the boundaries. Has gotten very used to rejection but still looking for the key to acceptance.

X: a nebulous entity. Seductive and trustworthy, but domineering and threatening all at once. Each character’s toxic partner, and the closest thing we have to a narrator.

Casting Notes: The pronouns in the script should be considered suggestion rather than gospel; any character is open to pronoun changes or adjustment of gender, with an eye to inclusivity for non-binary/gender-non-conforming performers. All of this is depending on the actor’s comfort and how they choose to bring the characters to life.

LIGHTS UP: the stage glows with neon lines along the floor and glowing furniture, like a chess board. Simple movable desks and chairs. The floor is covered with glowing neon books strewn about, like a chaotic library. X is always on stage, prowling around, watching the action.

X: 10pm, central standard time. User ensnaredbird has logged in.

(LILY enters trepidatiously.)

X: User info. Lily, 16 years old, high school student. Her parents probably think that she's asleep, so sudden log-offs from this user are likely. This is her first unmonitored online profile.

LILY: You don't need to say that... why do you even save that infor...

X: The technical term for this type of user is 'noob.'

LILY: I already don't like it here.

X: Oh, my dear, don't let my brusqueness fool you. Intended tone isn't always obvious in this realm. Don't worry. 'Noob' is a term of endearment. I'm here to escort you to the land of your dreams. Behold, the wonderland of the internet. Anything you want, even things you didn't know you wanted – we can guess and give. Try something, anything at all. Wonder beyond your wildest dreams. We'll do the rest. What do you want?

(LILY explores the various books scattered around the stage.)

LILY: Umm... I don't know... I like books, I guess? Do you have... book stuff?

X: Gonna have to be more specific there, darling.

LILY: *(picking up a massive tome)* What's this for? Is this book stuff?

X: In a sense. That's the fanfiction community. Looking for something spicy?

LILY: What does spicy mean?

X: ...Oh, you poor thing. You're not ready for this. Enable content filters.

LILY: I'm just going to trust you on that. *(hoists up another huge book)* Oh, I've heard of Norah London. She's a singer, right? I might like this...

X: How many of her songs do you know?

LILY: I'm not sure. Maybe, like, two?

X: Yeah, that's not going to cut it here. Not enough dedication. You've got some homework to do before I send you here. *(takes the book away)*

LILY: Well, that's not exactly "anything I want," then, is it?

X: Your interests questionnaire indicates that you are interested in indie video games. Have you heard of Lamb Mountain? It's been trending on Twitter for two days. The objective is to... build your own wool farm full of happy sheep. How saccharine. Right up your alley, isn't it?

LILY: Oh, I know that one! I just started playing it a few days ago.

X: Well, then. Let's get you started. Welcome to the Lamb Mountain community.

(Lights change and LILY is handed an average sized book. She opens it to the first page.)

LILY: Hi there. I just started playing a few days ago, and I'll be honest. I got a bit stuck on the second level, once you get into the town square. Where am I supposed to go?

(A nearby table glows. Lights up on JASMINE, who is filing her nails casually on the table.)

X: User dancingwiththedevil has replied to your post.

JASMINE: Hi ensnaredbird! I'm in the same boat, but I just realized that if you go into the general store and click on the bottle in the corner, a new task shows up in your to-do.

LILY: Oh, no way! I never would have thought of that. Thank you!

JASMINE: My sister finished the game before I did, so I've been looking for someone to play with. Would you maybe want to join my server?

LILY: ...I...I'd love to, actually!

(A whiteboard on the opposite side of the stage glows. QUINN is drawing a thought map.)

X: User bigbrainmoves has replied to this thread.

QUINN: Y'all. You're going to need a real expert to make sure you get the full game experience. Mind if I join the guild?

JASMINE: Sure, come on in! The more the merrier!

LILY: Hey, do you know this person?

JASMINE: No, but they seem chill. If something happens, we'll just report them. No worries.

X: Private chat room created. Join now.

(X pulls a circular table into the space.)

LILY: Is it wrong to do a little snooping before I start making friends?

X: It's expected, actually. Make sure you're not falling in with the weirdos, right?
dancingwiththedevil has sent you a friend request.

(JASMINE stands at center with a spotlight.)

X: User info. Jasmine, 15 years old, high school student. Profile opened three years ago. Active on boards for celebrity news, student activism, and true crime.

JASMINE: Whoa, whoa. You've gotta specify the kind of true crime. I'm a *Forensic Files* kind of gal, not the 'Ted Bundy is my boyfriend' kind.

X: You keep telling yourself that.

JASMINE: I swear I'm an ethical consumer –

X: Moving on. bigbrainmoves has sent you a friend request.

(JASMINE moves back and QUINN takes center.)

X: User info. Quinn, 18 years old, high school grad. Profile opened over five years ago. One of the top posters on the topic board for indie gaming, also active in world news and internet mysteries.

LILY: Wow, you're an expert.

QUINN: Hardly. But I do pride myself on getting the inside scoop.

JASMINE: Ensnaredbird - that's a cool username.

LILY: Thank you. It's inspired by my favorite book.

JASMINE: Ah, so you're a book girl.

QUINN: The technical term would be a nerd.

LILY: (*awkwardly*) Well, I don't know about that...

JASMINE: Oh, it's not an insult!

LILY: Really? Where I come from, it is.

QUINN: Well, you're in another world now.

JASMINE: Words mean whatever you want them to mean.

QUINN: And we've decided that "nerd" is a badge of pride. So you should own it!

LILY: I guess so.

JASMINE: Oh, don't be shy, doll. We all are here.

QUINN: If we weren't, the kids at school would like the same things we like. But we're a different breed.

JASMINE: And we wouldn't have it any other way.

QUINN: But we're always happy to meet more of our clan.

JASMINE: What's your real name?

LILY: Lily.

JASMINE: Nice to meet you, Lily.

QUINN: Welcome to the dark side.

JASMINE: (laughing) Shut up! We're not the dark side; we have video games and cookies.

QUINN: That's true. The dark side is over on The Channel.

JASMINE: (sound of disgust) We don't say their stupid name over here.

LILY: Sorry, what's The Channel?

JASMINE: Oh damn, you really are a noob.

QUINN: The Channel is just a bunch of assholes who have their own anonymous website. Basically the definition of chaotic evil. Any Twitter hoaxes, or big real life pranks, that's always The Channel. They just exist to fuck shit up.

LILY: Why?

QUINN: Because they can. Nobody knows who they are, so they do anything they want.

JASMINE: That's why you never go onto that site, because you never know who you're talking to. Over here, you know.

QUINN: And everyone's nice over here. We could fuck shit up, but we're not gonna.

JASMINE: Don't worry, little noob. You're safe with us.

LILY: I'm trusting you. And I'm looking forward to graduating from being called a noob.

JASMINE: That might take a minute. It's funny, so I'm gonna run the joke into the ground.

QUINN: Alright, children. As far as I'm concerned, you're both Lamb Mountain noobs, so it's time to start learning. Have you even seen the secret cave?

JASMINE: (gasps) Where is that?

QUINN: Oh, just you wait. Shall we begin?

LILY: Lead the way.

(The lights plunge into darkness. The lines on the floor glow in a grid that each person follows on their own path. LILY is following her line along the audience.)

LILY: I mean, I can't be mad. I am a noob. No matter what I do, people think I'm lost and confused. Because I am. The world is too big to make sense of. There's too many people filling it up, and each one has their own little cosmos inside their heads, a galaxy of thoughts all theirs. How could I make heads or tails of even one of them in my lifetime, let alone more? I don't think other people see each other that way. Somehow it's a lot easier for them to just... connect. Like a charger to a phone. I'm one of those old phones with a charging port that doesn't work anymore. They can't figure out which cord you're supposed to connect to me, so they give up trying. We're mutual mysteries the other can't solve.

QUINN: Okay, so behind the general store, do you see that boulder against the mound?

JASMINE: Yes.

QUINN: Push it.

(JASMINE pushes against the air. LILY comes to her aid, and they move the "boulder.")

QUINN: Excellent!

JASMINE: Teamwork makes the dream work!

LILY: Is this a cave?

QUINN: Sure is.

JASMINE: Did they really expect us to get to this without a walkthrough?

QUINN: Maybe not.

(The lights go dark again. Now the lights are glowing red, and sounds of dripping water inside a cavern are heard. Maybe a low rumble. QUINN holds a lantern as the other two run to her.)

QUINN: This, my friends, is under the map.

JASMINE: This looks like a completely different game.

LILY: Hold on. I thought the whole point of this game was making the most successful wool farm. Where are all my pet sheep?

QUINN: On the other plane.

JASMINE: It feels like we weren't supposed to find this part.

QUINN: Or maybe this is exactly what we were supposed to find. Some users believe that the surface game is just that - a surface. Like a facade for the real thing. This, down here, is the real game. And only the best of the best will ever realize it's here.

JASMINE: So what is this, exactly?

QUINN: That's a good question. When I found this the first time, my computer crashed and I lost all my progress. I've never been able to stay in this part of the map. Maybe that was meant to be; now I have company. We can explore together.

JASMINE: Divide and conquer.

LILY: I'll start this way.

QUINN: That's the spirit. Holler if you find something.

(The three split along the grid, JASMINE at center to the audience.)

JASMINE: Holy shit, I'm like Lara Croft. Or Nancy Drew. No, way cooler than her, she's from the 50's. Not Nancy Drew, but... maybe the chick from *The X Files*. She was cool. When I was little, I always wanted to be Lara Croft. Not just for Halloween, but really BE her. Evolve into her as I got older, like a Pokemon. And then I hit puberty, and I realized that dreams don't come true. You just pretend you're living the dream, and convince everyone that you're happy, and it tricks your brain into thinking you are. Because the more people tell you something, the more it feels true.

QUINN: This one's a dead end. Coming back.

JASMINE: No one can know I'm doing this, okay? If I tell my friend Jenna I play Lamb Mountain, she's going to stab me with a pencil. You laugh, but she did it in fourth grade once to a new kid who sat in her seat. The girl's ruthless. She asserts dominance, god damnit. I was jealous of how ruthless she was. I could never stab someone with a pencil. I don't have that kind of dominance. I wish I did.

LILY: I think I found something over here!

QUINN: What is it?

JASMINE: In video games, when you kill somebody, they still have like three lives left. So you can do whatever you want. You can *be* whoever you want. And no one has to know.

(X appears suddenly, handing JASMINE a wooden box. She tries to open it, but it's locked.)

LILY: A key, I think.

QUINN: Key to what?

LILY: I don't know.

JASMINE: I do!

(The three meet center stage.)

LILY: So there is stuff for us to find.

QUINN: Well? Go for it!

(JASMINE unlocks the box with LILY'S key. She looks inside, then flips it over and shakes it out, confused. A few small pieces of paper float to the floor.)

LILY: Well, that was anticlimactic.

JASMINE: No, no, it's important! There's got to be a reason why it was locked up. *(picking up each piece and laying them out on the floor)* B, E, R, L, I, and this one just has some random numbers on it.

QUINN: That's too specific not to mean something.

(X re-enters, tapping LILY on the shoulder before throwing a paper airplane her way)

LILY: Wait, you missed one! *(unfolding the airplane)* "You've been deadlocked."
What does that mean?

QUINN: Oh, my god. Deadlocked! That's it!

LILY: That's *what*?

QUINN: Every person who's made it to this part of the map talks about the 'deadlocked' theory. I didn't know what they meant before, but this must be it.

JASMINE: What is the theory?

QUINN: I don't know exactly, but everyone who talks about it believes that there's something in the game that the developer wanted us to find. A secret.

LILY: So there's some connection between these pieces of paper.

QUINN: Must be. Do those letters spell anything?

LILY: I can't think of anything.

JASMINE: Not in English, anyway. It sounds like the French word for 'book.' "Livre."

QUINN: Maybe that's it. It's in another language.

X: (*from offstage*) Oh, Lily. I hear footsteps coming up the stairs.

LILY: Shit shit shit. (*to the others*) Sorry, y'all, I need to go. I... have an exam tomorrow.

JASMINE: (*teasing*) Fuck you for being responsible. Just when we were figuring it out, too.

QUINN: Leave it to me. I'll do some digging.

(The lights change again as JASMINE and LILY exit, leaving QUINN alone, perusing the books on the floor. X stays to mess with her, throwing books her way and moving her furniture. It's like a weird game of musical chairs. QUINN treats the audience like her friend.)

QUINN: Now we're getting somewhere. A light breeze to tip you over and down the rabbit hole. And there's plenty of ground to sink into and under. Go ask Alice if you don't know where to go. It's me. I'm Alice. And Wonderland is mine now.

To most people, this is a hellscape. It's frenetic, fanatic, a fantasy scape of binary code where you don't speak the language, and you never will. But if anyone's thinking binary, it's you. Either you get it, or you don't. It's true or it's not true. One or the other. That's your world.

(X lays out a path of books for QUINN to walk, jumping from book to book like hopscotch.)

QUINN: In Wonderland, the information never ends. The visions are real *and* not real. Everything is true, and everything is false. That's what makes it so wonderful. The anti-conformity of it all.
Everyone who doesn't live in Wonderland judges you for loving it.

X: "Terminally online," –

QUINN: They say.

X: "Touch some fucking grass."

QUINN: These are the people who've never been pushed into a gym wall so hard their skull cracked. These are the people who hear nothing when someone gets called a slur. They pushed me into Wonderland.
Jokes on you, motherfucker. You have your truth. And it's bullshit. So now, I free myself from your truth.

X: *(seductively, grabbing QUINN's hand)* Free.

QUINN: Free.

X: What do you think freedom means?

QUINN: Let go of my hand.

X: Not when I know something you don't.

QUINN: I'm trying to think.

X: And I'm helping you. Look at the paper again.

QUINN: L. I. B. R. E

X: *(in french)* Libre.

QUINN: Libre.
Not livre. Libre. Free.

X: Send a group message.

(JASMINE and LILY re-enter. X has set up the space with a whiteboard for QUINN.)

JASMINE: So. What did you find?

QUINN: The letters are for “libre,” which means ‘free’ in French.

JASMINE: Ooooooh, okay. What about the numbers?

QUINN: Well, at first I thought they were coordinates, but every computation I tried went to just an empty field on Google maps. There’s got to be something I’m missing.

LILY: They could be other kinds of numbers. Maybe phone numbers, or addresses...

JASMINE: What could these numbers have to do with the word ‘free?’

LILY: (chuckling) It’s the sheep in the game calling out for help.

(JASMINE and QUINN are not laughing.)

QUINN: Oh my god. Lily, you’re a genius. That’s what this is. It’s a cry for help. Somebody trapped in the game calling out to be freed.

JASMINE: Like the ghost in Ben Drowned?

QUINN: Maybe. Or maybe they’re alive and well.

LILY: Y’all, I was just teasing, honestly.

JASMINE: (to QUINN) That explains the deadlocked clue too!

LILY: Isn’t Deadlocked the name of the game publisher?

JASMINE: Yes, but it also means inaction. Being trapped.

QUINN: So our word clues are about being trapped and wanting to be free.

JASMINE: And the numbers hold the key to how we do that.

QUINN: It's the publisher putting a clue in the game. They want us to free them.

LILY: Wow, that's a big jump.

JASMINE: Lil, come on. Don't be a buzzkill.

LILY: I'm not trying to, really. But this just seems a little ridiculous.

QUINN: What's ridiculous about it? We're following the clues.

LILY: Maybe these aren't clues. They're just coincidences.

QUINN: Coincidences are for normies.

LILY: It's just a video game.

JASMINE: Well, in a video game, you design the world. You get to craft each detail and include or exclude anything you want. Why would this stuff be here if it didn't mean anything?

LILY: I'm not saying it doesn't mean anything. What I'm saying –

QUINN: What you're saying is that I spent my night working on these clues for you two, and now you've decided I'm full of shit.

LILY: No! No, that's not what I meant!

JASMINE: I think Quinn's right. She's the detective, we're the noobs. If there's anyone we can trust, it's her. Isn't it?

LILY: (beat) Yeah. Of course. I mean, I definitely don't know what I'm doing, so. Maybe I should just hear you out. I'm sorry.

QUINN: It's okay. Thank you. (beat) Okay, so let's say the numbers are addresses. Everybody, go poking around google maps and see if you can find any corresponding address in the US with street names that start with the letters L I B R E.

JASMINE: Maybe we should focus on mountain ranges?

QUINN: Good thought. Start in the Appalachians and work out, yeah?

(They frantically but methodically search through the books strewn across the stage. X occasionally comes around and takes a book away or hands one of the girls a new one.)

ALL: This is fucking bonkers.

LILY: Oh my God, I've already started fighting with them. It's over.

JASMINE: I don't blame Lily for being a little weirded out.

QUINN: I don't know why I'm so defensive. It is weird. She's right.

ALL: But that doesn't mean it's wrong.

LILY: I don't fight with my friends. I avoid it at all costs.

JASMINE: Sometimes being right is worth fighting for.

QUINN: I know I'm on the right track. For the first time in...eternity. I can't let go now.

LILY: How did we get here from my stupid sheep joke?

JASMINE: It's really unlikely that this is going to lead anywhere.

QUINN: Occam's razor, right? Surely this is too complex to be true.

ALL: Nothing's accidental here.

LILY: It'd be pretty cool if there was a whole other mystery to solve other than the main game.

JASMINE: Besides, there's got to be a reason why this game is trending. Other people are finding this, too.

QUINN: It's my game. I make it what I want, and I want to solve a mystery.

LILY: I have to solve the mystery.

JASMINE: This has been placed here for the best of the best to find.

QUINN: God knows I want to be the best.

LILY: What does it feel like to hold the trophy high?

JASMINE: To feel adoring eyes and the warmth of endless crowds cheering?

QUINN: Or at least a thousand news articles.

ALL: Same difference.

LILY: The best of the best are beloved in wonderland.

JASMINE: The warmest love, even just for a flash in time.

QUINN: I've been looking for that my whole life.

ALL: And now it's finally here.

LILY: 834 Libby Avenue in Chattanooga is an abandoned Italian restaurant.

JASMINE: 9200 Bridgeton Way is in Pikeville, Kentucky. It's a wool factory. That's ironic.

QUINN: Irony is dead. I found 5771 Evergrown Street in Salem, South Carolina. Guess what that address is.

ALL: What?

QUINN: Deadlocked Game Inc. headquarters.

ALL: (beat) Oh my god.

LILY: This is real, isn't it?

JASMINE: Wait. So there's three locations. Which one is supposed to be the main one? Like, where somebody is trapped?

QUINN: I can't imagine it's their headquarters. I think that's just telling us that we're on the right track.

LILY: Wait!

(She comes up to the whiteboard and starts drawing.)

LILY: Here's the three locations. What shape does that look like to you?

JASMINE: A triangle.

QUINN: The Bermuda.

LILY: Close. It's a mountain.

QUINN: And in the center of Lamb Mountain...

JASMINE: If we find the location in the dead center of this, we'll have what we need.

ALL: This is fucking real.

(The lights change, and the lines on the floor glow changing colors. The girls are gathering books in their arms, searching for more evidence, following the floor lines like a tightrope. X is helping, guiding them in a certain direction or messing with their books.)

ALL: Dear internet.

LILY: I'm looking for information about an abandoned Italian restaurant in Chattanooga.

JASMINE: Here's the address for an old wool factory I need more info on. Is it still operating? Any info much appreciated!

QUINN: Past and present employees of Deadlocked Games: what do you know about the history of the publisher or the land the headquarters sits on? Anything you can tell me?

X: Ask Wonderland and you shall receive.

(X catches LILY by the hand and walks her across a path of books. There's a dance-like quality to it, with the same grace and danger of a good tango.)

LILY: Reply to ensnaredbird: I think I know that restaurant! It closed suddenly in the 80s because the health department shut it down.

X: Are we quite sure the health department shut it down?

LILY: What do you mean?

X: Reply to ensnaredbird: I used to live on the same block. The owners had to shut down due to overwhelming legal costs from a lawsuit. The investigation never went anywhere.

LILY: Reply to ensnaredbird: Rumor mill at the time reported a mass poisoning incident. Big negligence suit on their hands.

X: Surely if it was an accident, they could have fought the suit.

LILY: Either way, there's some dead souls at play here.

X: You've gained 100 followers, by the way.

LILY: 100? From that post?

X: Drop in the pot compared to the number of views. You've attracted attention, detective.

JASMINE: New reply to dancingwiththedevil!

(X and JASMINE repeat the same movement sequence.)

X: There have been some weird rumors about that wool factory for years.

JASMINE: It's supposedly open, but no one's ever seen the place functioning.

X: Youtube link: urban explorer tries to enter Pikeville wool factory.

JASMINE: The place is empty!

X: Is it a front for money laundering?

JASMINE: Or something more sinister?

X: Looks a bit like a prison, doesn't it?

JASMINE: Libre.

X: New message from anonymous user: Is this about the Deadlocked theory? If so, I have information for you.

(JASMINE disappears. X and QUINN repeat the 'tango' one last time.)

X: Reply to bigbrainmoves: I'm an ex-employee. The guy in charge is such a micromanager. We're not even allowed to say his name publicly, for fucks sake.

QUINN: Reply: Can confirm. He's always putting extra files and clues into the games, and none of us can figure out why.

X: He's a mystery.

QUINN: So's his game.

X: Reply: He lives only a few miles away from headquarters. Talk about no work-life balance.

QUINN: He lives in the center of the triangle.

JASMINE: *(re-entering)* The founder lives in the center of the triangle!

LILY: Where did you come up with that?

JASMINE: Somebody private-messaged me an address. It's gotta be his.

LILY: Uhhhh... that's creepy as shit.

JASMINE: *(a little unsure)* I mean, it's not like we're trying to do something bad with it.

LILY: It's the principle of the thing, isn't it?

QUINN: Listen, we're not the Channel. We're using this information for good.

LILY: Are we sure that person isn't from the Channel? Show me user info.

X: User info not found.

(All three turn slowly, confused by this sudden lack of information.)

JASMINE: What?

X: User info not found. It's just a username with no personal information.

LILY: Keep digging, then.

X: What, do you want their home address now? Isn't one per day enough?

QUINN: This is a waste of time. If they have the address, they're an insider. And they wouldn't have told us this information if we weren't on the right track.

LILY: What track? What the hell are we even looking for?

JASMINE: Lily, calm down.

LILY: I am fucking calm!

X: Google Target Advertisements: The Calm Time app has over 500 guided meditation tracks –

LILY: Not now.

X: I'll be back.

JASMINE: Lil, you've seen it yourself. There's some fishy shit at every address we've looked at. The clues are lining up.

LILY: (*getting upset*) Jesus, Nancy Drew, this isn't a book. It's real life.

JASMINE: (*stung*) I thought you said it was just a video game. Which one is it?

LILY: It's neither. And both. God, I don't know...

JASMINE: Exactly. Maybe you don't know. Why are you being so self righteous, you fucking noob?

QUINN: Both of you, stop!

Infighting is exactly the kind of thing the Channel would do. We have to stick together. We are trying to save a man's life. His voice is in that game, and our job is to amplify it. It's not just a game. It's Wonderland. It's a mirror to the world we know. Otherwise what purpose does it even serve?

LILY: Surely I'm not the only one who thinks this is crazy.

QUINN: Of course it's crazy. But this is where we are now. Either you're in it or you're not.

JASMINE: Lily, we've trusted you this whole time because we thought you could see Wonderland for what it was. We trusted you to believe in what we could make the world if we looked at it another way. Are you with us or not?

LILY: *(beat)* Are you asking if I trust you?

JASMINE: I'm asking if *I* can trust *you*.

LILY: Of course you can.

JASMINE: Then keep walking and don't look down. It'll play tricks on you if you let it.

QUINN: *(looking to X)* What do you think? Are we on the right track?

X: Every path in Wonderland leads somewhere.
Your threads have collectively reached over 8000 views.

LILY: Are we sure about this?

ALL *(minus LILY):* This is where the clues go.

X: This is what he led you to.

QUINN: This is the developer's story.

JASMINE: He's been seeing shady shit go down in his town for years.

QUINN: Maybe his family is attached to the restaurant.

JASMINE: Or the wool factory.

QUINN: He knows things. And he's trying to tell the world through his games.

JASMINE: And if we can meet him in real life, we can set him free.

QUINN: This is someone who's fighting for what's right.

JASMINE: Whatever he knows must be torturing him.

QUINN: I've been there before.

JASMINE: You watch the news enough, you start to feel like there's no hope.

QUINN: With people like him, maybe there is.

JASMINE: People like us can make hope.

QUINN: If we're going to do this, we need backup.

JASMINE: What about the people who followed our threads?

QUINN: I'm starting a discord server for our plan.

JASMINE: Imagine when the developer realizes how many people are on his side and want to help. He's going to be so thrilled!

X: Bigbrainmoves has started a new server. You have 100 new requests to join.

QUINN: Y'all. I need you to co-moderate this server. Double check people's profiles when they request to join. Don't let any of the freaks from the Channel fuck this up for us.

JASMINE: We're starting a fucking revolution!

LILY: *(to the audience)* We're fucking vigilantes!

X: 500 new requests.

LILY: We have no proof of this. No one can get in touch with the developer. How do we know he wants to be found?

X: 800 new requests.

LILY: I can't see anything in front of me anymore. The paths don't lead where I thought.

X: 1500 new requests.

LILY: I don't recognize my friends. I thought they were quiet like me, but they're louder than anyone I've ever met. My ears burn. I can't say no to them. How do I disconnect?

X: 2000 new requests. Your server link has been shared 5000 times.

LILY: Everything is darkness, but I swear I'm free falling. There is nothing underneath me, and I couldn't see it even if there was.

X: 5000 new requests.

LILY: Everything is glitching, glitch in my brain. Frenzy, fanatics all around, we are all fanatics and I can't tell if the glitch is sheer ecstasy or panic. Maybe it's both. Am I crazy? Tell me we're not crazy, please!

JASMINE & QUINN: Welcome to Wonderland!

X: Ensnaredbird, you are now a mod on the biggest server in the gaming community.

LILY: I'm drunk.

X: No, you're not.

LILY: I'm drunk. I'm stumbling, I'm falling over, all over and through time, space, space-time. Where am I?

X: You're with your people. In Wonderland. This is ecstasy like you've never felt before, and you don't know what to do with yourself.

LILY: I'm crazy. We're crazy! What we're doing is absolutely fucking crazy!

(X wraps LILY in a tight embrace. She tries to break free.)

X: You don't understand, little girl. This is joy, joy that makes you feel so high that the world shifts. You'll probably never be this happy anywhere else. In my world, you get to fly this high all the time. Isn't that what you want? This is your theory. You made it happen. Soon everyone will know how brilliant you are. How brilliant we are. And once they know, you'll never come down from this high. The cliff you're on, it's the edge of your best life. Don't you want it?

LILY: *(tense beat)* I want it.

X: Say it.

LILY: I want that life.

X: You want to be remembered.

LILY: I want to be remembered.

X: You want to change the world.

LILY: I will change the world.

X: You can't do anything earth-shattering without a little adrenaline.
Stop resisting. It's irritating me.

(LILY stops struggling and embraces X.)

That's a good girl. Feel the adrenaline, my love. Feel the power. You deserve it. It's all yours. Let it fill you up and take you through the sky.

(X lays LILY down on the floor and quietly leaves. LILY looks at the audience slowly.)

LILY: I'm glitching. But I'm not gone yet.

(JASMINE and LILY have their own corners of the stage. X disappears and reappears in the flicker of the lights. LILY does not speak during the following, but slowly gets to her feet.)

ALL: T - 3 days until raid.

QUINN: We have fifty people planning to meet just outside Franklin at the address in the center of the mountain.

JASMINE: According to one of our server members, the developer's tweets have become increasingly erratic and cryptic.

QUINN: They've uncovered a cipher in his tweets from the last three weeks. Each tweet has contained a hidden message based on seemingly random letters that are capitalized.

JASMINE: Yesterday's tweet contained one five letter word:

JASMINE + X: *(X appears behind her)* Libre.

ALL: T - 2 days.

QUINN: The other words: “Basement. Corrupt. Stifle. Smothered.”

JASMINE: “Squalor. Mother. Gagged.”

QUINN + X: “Help.”

JASMINE: It all adds up. The secrecy, him never being in the office, his codes in his games...

QUINN: We’re dealing with someone who’s being held hostage, or at the very least kept against his will at home. He knows too much, so he’s dangerous.

JASMINE: And we’re going to save him.

QUINN: He needs an advocate. Now he has fifty.

LILY: *(quietly)* We can’t do this.

X: *(suddenly appearing to her)* So what are you going to do about it?

LILY: What can I do?

X: Scream. Fight. Shake them to their senses.

LILY: They won’t listen to me anymore.

X: Maybe you didn’t try hard enough.

LILY: Maybe I don’t want to try harder.

X: But you think you’re right. Don’t you?

LILY: I think morality is glitching.

ALL: T - 1 day.

JASMINE: The thrill of skipping school is small, but staggering.

QUINN: My dog has been looking at me funny all day. I think he knows.

JASMINE: Your dog is feeling the tectonic shift of what we're about to do.

QUINN: I used to read dystopian novels and hope to meet someone like the heroes. Someone who fought for the greater good, no matter what happened to them.

JASMINE: And now that I'm grown, I can be that hero.

LILY: Icarus was a hero before he met the sun.

JASMINE: Why do I feel dizzy? Am I getting sick?

QUINN: That's the tectonic shift, baby.

X: Your plane leaves in half an hour.

QUINN: Are you picking up Lily? I haven't heard from her.

JASMINE: I haven't heard from her either. I thought you were getting her?

LILY: I'm coming alone.

JASMINE: Are you sure? I'll come get you.

QUINN: We don't want you to get hurt.

LILY: I'll be fine.

QUINN: Are you sure, honey?

LILY: *(beat, fighting back tears)* I'm sure.

JASMINE: You know where to meet us, right?

LILY: Of course. Signing off. See you tomorrow.

JASMINE: See you on d-day.

QUINN: See you on the day of victory.

LILY: *(suddenly)* It's doom, Jasmine!

(She turns around to see QUINN and JASMINE are gone.)

LILY (con't): The dizziness. I feel it, too. It's doom, I think.
It's doom.

ALL: D-day.

(X disappears and reappears around the stage, like a ghost.)

LILY: My train gets in at 12pm. I know I'm late. That was by design. I'm such a pussy.

X: 11:30am: local farmers start to notice a weird number of vehicles with license plates from other states. It's not fifty. More. Must be more. They're here for you, Lily.

LILY: I have to hitchhike the last few minutes. A kind old woman drives me into the center of Lamb Mountain. Or rather, Franklin, North Carolina. It's a real place. You can touch the grass.

X: 12:15pm. The first call to an emergency line. A massive crowd is descending on one run-down farmhouse. You're too late, Lily. What do you think you can do?

LILY: The first thing she notices is the smoggy haze stretching for miles. Then the eternal string of cars on the side of the dirt. This town hasn't had this many visitors since the dust bowl.

X: The people are chanting. A roar you feel in your bones. Do you feel it, Lily? Are you scared, little girl?

LILY: I ask my shepherd who lives in that house. She says no one. And the sounds hit my ears, and now my brain knows what my body's known all along.

X: "Let him out," they cry. "Set him free." They believed you, little detective. Look how powerful you are.

LILY: Her eyes are wide. She's scared. We both feel the energy bubbling through the air. The electricity left Wonderland to scorch the earth.

X: Look at all the little mosquitoes. Buzzing, bracing, lifting –

(JASMINE and QUINN's silhouettes are seen in shadow.)

ALL: Is that a crowbar?

LILY: We watch from the safety of the car before I crash through the side door and my feet run towards the crowd, as though I ever had a choice.

X: The mosquitoes shift. A crowbar reaches out from the mass aiming for the door – whack. Whack. Whack.

(X is entwined with JASMINE and QUINN. They form a massive arm, beating viciously at the stage.)

JASMINE: I thought no one was supposed to bring weapons?

QUINN: No one was supposed to!

X: The door breaks!

(The three fall on top of each other, looking around in stunned silence.)

ALL: It's empty.

X: Nobody's home.

JASMINE: Dust covers every inch.

QUINN: No one's set foot in this home in years.

ALL: It's empty.

JASMINE: No one screaming for help.

QUINN: No one fighting us back.

ALL: Just silence and dust.

(A police siren is heard wailing in the distance. The lights flash red chaotically as the lines on the floor blink. It's an assault on the senses. LILY is trying to find her friends, but JASMINE and QUINN are running frantically, disoriented. X watches from above.)

X: All hell breaks loose.

QUINN: Some of us scabble through the emptiness, searching for a man held against his will.

JASMINE: Some of us know in our bones that the police siren is coming for us.

LILY: Jasmine! Quinn!

QUINN: I look to my left, and someone is shoving people to the ground, smiling. There's no benevolence in that smile. It's the thrill of the kill.

JASMINE: I'm trying to run the other way, but I can't. I'm drowning in people, screeching like animals, running left and right.

QUINN: Somebody wraps their arms around an ancient dusty vase. Like that's why they came in the first place.

LILY: Who am I even looking for?

JASMINE: Why did we come here? What were we here for?

QUINN: Jesus Christ, we have to go!

JASMINE: Over the sound, someone's asking why he's not here. They still think we're the heroes.

QUINN: I feel everyone's bones push against mine, our skin squishing, but everything is numb.

JASMINE: My lungs burn. The air is draining like a bleeding wound.

QUINN: Climbing altitude, world is blurry. I'm going to die here.

JASMINE: I race for what I think is the door we came in. Am I free? Is this still real?

QUINN: No. None of it's real. No one's here.

LILY: Jasmine! Quinn!

JASMINE: Lily?

LILY: Jasmine! Jasmine, over here!

(They run to each other, JASMINE collapsing into LILY's arms.)

JASMINE: Lily, my God! It wasn't real! He's not in there. No one's in there. The cops are coming. We just broke into an empty house. Oh my God, what have I done? What the fuck have I done?

LILY: *(softly)* It's really you.

JASMINE: What?

LILY: I...I know everything about you, but I've never seen your face. You look exactly how I pictured you.

JASMINE: Lily, I fucked up.

LILY: I know.

JASMINE: I fucked up so bad. I was trying to do the right thing. Fuck, I just wanted to do the right thing.

LILY: We all did.

JASMINE: I got you into this – you should hate my guts.

LILY: I wanted to do the right thing, too.
You have beautiful eyes.

JASMINE: *(beat)* So do you. *(beat, suddenly)* Oh shit, Quinn! Where's Quinn?

LILY: Let's go find her.

JASMINE: Oh, God, I can't go back there. Not with all those people...

LILY: *(taking her hand)* Yes, we can. We have to find her.

JASMINE: Please don't make me go back...

LILY: Jasmine, help me do the right thing. Right now.

BOTH: *(beat, turning back)* Quinn!

(The lights change, and QUINN is lying on the ground, X circling her like a lion.)

QUINN: My watch stops ticking. I feel a sharp pain in my ankle that takes me to the ground. I try to crawl out of the crowd, but it's not a crowd anymore. It's a beast, a three headed dragon with one shared mind. I made that dragon. I gave it life. And now I'm crawling from it on my stomach like a wounded dog, watching the dragon I birthed become morphed beyond my wildest nightmares. I didn't know we had dragons in Wonderland.

There has to be something we missed. The dragon can't be wrong.

What did we do wrong?

X: *(hovering over her)* The capitalization was a glitch.

QUINN: What?

X: In the newest iOS update, users have reported a glitch where some of their tweets have random letters capitalized once published. You picked 8 tweets out of 20 that spelled a word. The others were gibberish.

(QUINN tries to pull away from X, but X pins her by the ankles.)

QUINN: The person who did that decoding... was part of our server.

X: They lied.

QUINN: They were our friends. They wouldn't lie.

X: Really?

QUINN: There must have been a mole.

X: *(mocking)* Not in your precious secure server.

QUINN: Someone from the Channel. They would do this. It had to be them.

X: The Channel had nothing to do with this. This was all you.

QUINN: No.

X: Your server was secure. But sometimes little lies slip between the cracks. You don't even realize you're lying before you are.

QUINN: It had to be someone else...

X: You were wrong. You lied.

QUINN: *(screaming)* I don't believe you! You're a fucking liar!

X: Yes.

QUINN: It's real! It's real, I know it!

X: You don't know anything, you stupid kid.

(QUINN lunges for X, screaming like a tiger. X shoves her to the floor with a vicious push.)

QUINN: I hate you! I fucking hate you.

X: You don't get the right to hate me now. Not when you used me for this.

QUINN: I hate you... *(devolves into broken sobbing)*

(X backs away, unmoved, as JASMINE and LILY run to QUINN and embrace her, collapsing in a heap on the ground.

The lights calm down, the sirens fade out. Eventually the lines on the floor start glowing a serene light blue, the same color from the top of the play.)

X: 10pm. User ensnaredbird has logged on. Previous inactivity period of one week.

Notification: over 50 YouTube video essays with the subject DeadLocked, or DeadlockGate.

How creative. Would you like to watch –

LILY: Block search term.

X: Notification: New York Times just released a full 5 page breakdown on the cult of teenage girls who descended on a small town in North Carolina.

LILY: I said, block search term.

X: I did, babe. You can't block what I can't see.

LILY: What do I have to do to avoid this?

X: Log back off.

LILY: I want to see my friends.

X: They're not here.

LILY: Tell me they didn't get arrested. (*instant regret*) Shit, shit, I don't want to know.

X: You're lucky the property owner didn't want to press charges. They're still looking for their stolen shit. Some of it's popped up on Ebay. Long forgotten family heirlooms, lost to Wonderland. What are you going to do about it?

LILY: (*genuinely asking*) What am I supposed to do?

X: Don't look at me. There's no blog for sorry criminals.

LILY: (*snapping*) I wasn't even in the fucking house!

X: Devin couldn't pick you out of a lineup, but that doesn't wash you clean.

LILY: That's his name? The developer?

X: Devin Lockheart. He's been trending on twitter for a week. To think, he wanted to be anonymous. Funny how that works.

LILY: He knows?

X: He knows a screaming horde of crazy teenagers ransacked a house because they thought he was being held hostage in it. That's all he needs to know. Personally, that would make me an agoraphobe for life, if I wasn't one already.

LILY: He should have sued us all.

X: You can't sue the anonymous. Besides, according to his public statement, he understands how it all went wrong.

LILY: He made a statement?

X: Search result: Youtube video. Lamb Mountain creator on the DeadLocked cult.

LILY: We weren't a cult.

X: You weren't?

LILY: *(beat)* Save in my "Watch Later" queue.

X: Notifications set for every five minutes until you give up.

(X sits next to LILY and pokes her repeatedly, with beats of silence in between.)

Notification.

Notification.

Notification.

(This continues until LILY is defeated.)

LILY: Alright, fine, fucker. Play it.

(Lights change. Cold white spotlight on X, who is now in the role of Devon. LILY has a dimmer spotlight, reminiscent of an interrogation room.)

X: *(with a heavy sigh, genuinely grieved)* If I had known that by leaving a couple clues to unlock a secret ending in my game, that I would create...well I didn't create it, exactly. What even is it? A cult? A mass hysteria?

Sorry. I'm getting distracted. I didn't script this, in case you can't tell. I... I don't know what I'm supposed to say to this. What do you say when you're the unwilling messiah of a conspiracy theory, for fucks sake? I disown it, obviously. I... I can't understand how these kids could have...

When it was trending on Reddit, I was excited. That's the thing I hate. I was so fucking excited, because that was exactly what I was hoping would happen. You don't put a secret ending in your game if you don't want people to try and find it. But I didn't...God, I didn't want this.

I'm sorry. I'm sorry to the people who owned that house. The only joy I've felt in the last week is knowing that no one lives there.

I'm sorry to these kids. I can't help but feel like I misled you. I mean, I didn't. You're kids, but you're not stupid. You saw what you wanted to see. Why don't I feel clean yet?

I'm sorry. Just in general. I hope you never have to see my face online again. You never were supposed to in the first place.

(Lights return to previous look. X is no longer playing a role.)

LILY: He's just a quiet guy, isn't he?

X: Exactly who you thought he was. Except without all the secrets.

LILY: Show me one news article.

X: I've got 10 to choose from.

LILY: Just one, for fucks sake. Pick me one.

X: CNN has the most intriguing front picture.

(A spotlight on QUINN, lying on the floor crying. The spot fades out quickly.)

LILY: Jesus. Poor Quinn.

X: She wanted infamy.

LILY: She wanted to do the right thing, you insensitive prick.

X: Same difference. *(beat)*

LILY: Why didn't you tell us?

X: What makes you think I knew?

LILY: You know everything. You can do anything with that knowledge.

X: I do what you want. That's all I know. *(beat)* User dancingwiththedevil2 has logged on.

(JASMINE appears in a chair.)

LILY: Jasmine? Is that you?

JASMINE: It's me. I had to shut off my old account. Too many death threats in the inbox. I couldn't delete them fast enough.

And then I decided I didn't want to delete them. I'd just read them as they came in. Flooded in, more like. Stared at them for hours.

JASMINE (con't): And then I started printing them out. The pain had started to dull from reading them on the screen. They weren't real enough. So I printed all my death threats until I couldn't keep up. Page after page after page. I could have published a book to rival Tolstoy. But when my mom saw the *War and Peace* sized pile of violence draining her ink cartridge, she made me throw my laptop off the back deck.

LILY: Literally?

JASMINE: Literally. It crashed into an oak tree and got stuck there. I think I saw a bird pecking at it the other day.

LILY: Part of a balanced diet?

JASMINE: For a bird, I guess. Or a bird brain.

LILY: *(beat, smirking)* Fuck you.

JASMINE: That could barely qualify as a joke.

LILY: It made me smile, though.

JASMINE: You're a liar.

LILY: No, it did! I swear!

JASMINE: You're a very kind liar.

LILY: I'm really not.

JASMINE: You're certainly better than I am. *(beat)* I'll have to show you the Tolstoy sometime. Hate seems to inspire creativity.

LILY: I wouldn't call a death threat art.

JASMINE: Call it comedy, then. You have to. Most of them are puns on my screenname. Like they thought they came up with it first.

LILY: I guess "dancing with the devil" was asking for it.

JASMINE: I really should just change it instead of putting a 2 at the end. People are going to find this one soon. The new account won't matter to the mob. I don't think I want to change it.

LILY: You don't want them to stop sending death threats?

JASMINE: Part of me likes them. They're the jail sentence I should have gotten, but didn't. Jesus Christ, I'm a fucking lunatic. I sound crazy. Does that sound crazy?

LILY: No. Or maybe a bit. But I'm crazy too.

JASMINE: I'm sorry.

LILY: So am I.

JASMINE: *(beat)* Have you heard from Quinn?

LILY: I've been too scared to log on.

JASMINE: I've messaged her every day. Do you think she hates us?

QUINN: *(unseen)* I don't.

(The same spot from earlier comes back up on QUINN, who pushes herself to seated.)

I don't hate either of you. I can't. I don't recognize us. I look at myself in the reflection of my screen and I don't recognize that person. Who the fuck is she? Is she the same girl in every picture on every news site I know? She looks like me. But she can't be. That girl is fucking pathetic. Miserable. A filthy worm trying to crawl away from her wreckage as the world ogles and laughs. That's me. It's always been. I can't run from her anymore. The worm caught up to me.

I'm not a detective anymore. I never was. I was just a kid with a computer.

What am I supposed to say? I don't remember what we had in common, other than your ability to take my bullshit. You're the only friends I've ever had. And all you really like about me is how good I lie.

I'm sorry.

I'm sorry for everything.

Please don't hate me.

Please be my friends.

I don't have anything else left.

Goddamnit, I'm manipulating you again. It's not your fault that I suck.

But I swear I'm not trying to...

JASMINE: In Wonderland, everything is true. And it isn't true.

QUINN: I lied to you.

JASMINE: You didn't mean to.

QUINN: It doesn't matter what I meant to do.

JASMINE: Doesn't it?

LILY: I didn't know you have a tattoo.

QUINN: What?

LILY: I saw it under your sock. When we pulled you out of the crowd, and tried to set your ankle.

JASMINE: It's a dragon, isn't it?

QUINN: Yeah.

LILY: It's beautiful.

QUINN: My mom drew it. She's an artist. *(beat)* I shouldn't talk about her.

LILY: Why wouldn't you?

QUINN: She wouldn't want me to. When she saw the CNN picture, the air in the house went cold. It's been frosty like Alaska ever since.

LILY: I'm sorry.

QUINN: Don't be. Please don't be. I'm a liar, I deserve this. We're all liars.

JASMINE: But we aren't.

QUINN: Someone in that group was. Most of them. All of them.

LILY: Or maybe we were all just believing each other.

QUINN: Well, that's worse, isn't it? There has to be a mastermind. If there isn't, if we can't even blame it on the Channel and call it a day, then everyone is the danger. None of us can ever trust each other.

JASMINE: We can't live like that.

LILY: So what the fuck do we do now? *(Beat of tense silence.)* Other than writing an apology letter to Devin.

QUINN: Would that help?

JASMINE: It's better than nothing.

LILY: Now that will be a piece of writing to rival Tolstoy.

JASMINE: Lily, stop. You can't make me laugh at a time like this.

QUINN: Did I miss the inside joke?

JASMINE: You missed the publishing of my death threats.

QUINN: Oh, now *that* sounds like the worst possible use of paper. *(beat)* Lily, can I ask you a question?

LILY: Of course.

QUINN: How did you know?

LILY: *(beat)* I'm not sure, really. I guess I'm not really one of you.

QUINN: That's for the better.

LILY: It feels much, much worse.

JASMINE: We should have listened to you.

LILY: But I really wanted you to win. I wish the theory had been real. I wish Wonderland had proved me wrong.

I thought my chargers would connect here. But they don't.

QUINN: What are you talking about?

LILY: Nothing. Sorry.

I don't know what to talk about with you anymore. All I know we have in common is that Wonderland played a trick on us.

JASMINE: It's not really our fault.

QUINN: Whose is it?

(X appears suddenly as the lights on the floor change.)

X: New join request: User cybernoob, real name Dani, age 15.

(The three girls look at each other for a tense moment, then run for the exits. X smiles.)

Welcome to Wonderland.

Blackout. End.