

“Yeah, but without your footprints, we would’ve been completely lost.”

“Monster instincts always come in handy!” said Barthy.

“Best of all, the monsters of the forest don’t have to pay to see us anymore,” said Alan, “they can see us here in the village for free.”

The gang said goodbye to the little villagers and set off for home. They were all happy for what they did that day.

“That was fun,” said Hiroko, “it’s hard to believe that children as sweet and innocent as those children could be seen as a threat.”

“Well, you can never be too careful,” said Taro, “those kids could invent bulldozers and destroy the entire forest!” Hiroko laughed. Barthy was rolling his obese body along and trying to catch up with them.

“I’m hungry,” he said, “I want a cheeseburger.”

“How about some broccoli fondue?” asked Hiroko, suggesting something a bit healthier, “that still has cheese on it.”

“Yeah, but that’s just like putting chocolate on whole wheat pasta; you try to make it better, but it just doesn’t work.” Vincent was taught a valuable lesson as soon as he was thrown into the dirty dungeon; that people (even if they’re freaks of nature) shouldn’t be judged, especially if it’s obvious that they’re not doing anything wrong. If they can live peacefully with other inhabitants, then they’re allowed to stay as long as they want.



He was wearing a red robe and a crown, except the robe hadn't been washed in a while. A kid had the key to the cell. He used it to open the cell so the king could be free. Hiroko looked at the king in awe as soon as he stood up.

"Are you... his majesty, the King of the Forest?" she asked. The king looked down on her and smiled.

"Who else would I be, Fred Astair?" he asked. He walked gallantly down the hallway with the children.

The king got upstairs with the children, and Vincent's half-unconscious body was lying on the ground.

"I give up," he said, "one thing I didn't know about kids is that they're much more powerful in large groups."

"I must thank you all for defeating my cousin and giving me back my position," said the king, "you see, he is a Technite, part of a bunch of radical anti-human group that wants the liberation of all partner music monsters. He has his badge to prove it."

"Are the Technites named after Technosis, the human-made music monster that tried to destroy the human race twenty years ago?" asked Taro.

"Exactly." The king looked toward his big window and stared down at the beautiful forest in his possession. "From now on, I declare all hybrid zoos to be closed down and all hybrid children to live in peace once again!" Everyone cheered. The forest was restored to what it once was; a place for any living creature to call home.

The hybrid children went back to their forest village and reunited with their monster partners. They were doing what townspeople normally did; they talked with one another, bought things that were being sold (using pinecones and pebbles), and helped each other. The houses that were once abandoned belonged to their owners once again. Alan, who was reunited with Alonso, was selling the blankets that he crocheted.

"We couldn't thank you enough," said Alonso, "thanks to you, we brought down King Vincent."

"But you were the one that escaped and let the other children follow you to the castle," said Hiroko.

“Yaaaaa!” he said. He ran toward King Vincent, but Vincent repelled him using his beam breath attack. Alan bounced back toward the group and hit the floor.

“Mabel, you’re an excellent battler,” Taro said to Mabel, “go out there and get him!” Mabel hopped toward the center of the room. She looked at him, and he looked at her back, like something out of an old western movie.

“Well, aren’t you going to do something?” asked Vincent. Mabel used her super speed to move to the other corner of the room. She kept glaring at him. Vincent didn’t want this to take much longer, so he started attacking. “Psychic ear beams!” Blue beams shot from both his ears, but Mabel dodged it with her amazing speed.

“Go Mabel!” Mabel was doing well until Vincent managed to attack her with his claw as she was rushing toward him. Because of his amazing strength, she fainted. Taro rushed to his partner and dragged her back to the front of the room.

“Now tell us,” said Barthy, “what did you do to the king?”

“I’m not telling you, especially since you’re around humans!” said Vincent.

“There you are!” said a voice. It was Alonso! The brave boy came all the way from the zoo. Vincent was perplexed.

“How did you escape?”

“The same way I did last time.” He walked closer to stand up to his enemy. “I will bring you down.”

“What? But there’s only one of you, and one human child is inferior to a top-leveled music monster.”

“When did I say that I was alone?” To everyone’s surprise, hundreds of hybrid children of all ages stampeded into the room, and they didn’t look too happy. Vincent was astounded at how they could form such a large group.

“My word... where did these children get 500 notes?” The children crowded around Vincent and stared at him with angry eyes. Vincent didn’t know what to do. “Well... hehe... there’s an easy exclamation to all of this... and... oh, jeez, I’m screwed.” The children closed in on him and unleashed their attacks. Boom! It was a beautiful sight; all of the elements and many types of colors could be seen in the blast.

“There’s no way he could survive this,” said Alan as he was observing. When all of the colors disappeared, Vincent was on the ground unconscious. The children thought they had defeated him, but then he opened his eyes. His sat up to brag about his vitality.

“Hah! I still have a few hit points left!” The children were so close to defeating him, but Alonso still had an idea.

“That’s nothing that a little wailing on can’t fix,” he said as he was punching the palm of his other hand. Some of the kids (including him) cornered in on him and beat him up using mostly their fists.

“I’ve found the king!” said one of the kids. The gang ran after the group of children down the stairs.

After going down another set of stairs, they got to a creepy dungeon. At the foot of the stairs were cells with iron bars. Some of them contained monster skeletons. At the end of the hallway was a cell; it had a regal-looking epiat (the species that Vincent was).



“Who’s there?” he asked abruptly.

Alan. “Are you the corrupt king who threw all the hybrid children into zoos?” asked

“Yes, I am!”

“And you’re the king’s brother, aren’t you?” asked Barthy.

theory. “Actually... I’m the king’s COUSIN!” The gang was half right about their

“We paid 500 notes like the guard wanted.”

“Oh, yes, that’s Pete. I keep forgetting to fire him. Anyway, what the devil do you want?”

“We want you to release those children!” said Hiroko, “they’re not animals.”

“Never! I care too much about these creatures to let them be harmed.”

“These children won’t harm a soul!”

“That’s what they want you to think. Have you humans seen what you’ve done to your own world?” This gave the gang some thought. “You’ve raped your own planet and caused war between other humans. It’s you who cause soil erosion. It’s you spill oil into the ocean. It’s you who have melted the polar ice caps with your greenhouse gas emissions.” Just then, the door opened widely. It was Taro, and he was just as mad as the gang was.

“For your information, the reason my basement flooded was because of the leaky pipes, not the ice caps!”

“How the devil did YOU get in here?”

“I happened to have 500 notes on me.”

“As I was saying, humans are dangerous to any planet and I will not tolerate them living in my forest. I have confined the hybrid children to zoos, so the music monsters of the Grace Note Forest will be happy, safe, and healthy. Besides, you humans are always imprisoning animals. I say you deserve to know how THEY feel.”

“What did you do to the king?” asked Barthy.

“I will not tell you where he is.” Alan clutched his claws and became angry.

“Fifteen bucks says that there are still a few left.” Taro was a bit annoyed by his sister’s singsong tone, but he thought that there was no way that he would lose the bet, so he agreed to it.

“All right. In twenty minutes, I’ll be five bucks richer.”

20 minutes later...

Some time had passed and the entire basement was flooded. Taro was still lying on the couch, but he couldn’t believe his eyes.

“Son of a gun,” he said in disbelief.

“Can I have my fifteen dollars now?” asked Hiroko. Taro sighed. He reached into his pocket and pulled out some crumpled dollar bills, a five and a ten.

“See you later.” She ran upstairs happily. Taro was still amazed that his sister predicted something correctly. Just then, a plumber walked downstairs with a wrench in his hand.

“I’m here to fix the pipes,” he said. It was then that Taro realized that Hiroko had tricked him.

“Hey, wait a minute...” he said.

Hiroko ran as fast as she could back to the portal station. After paying ten dollars for the new round ticket, she went through the same portal she went through last time.

As soon as she got back to the Rhythm and Melody World, she exchanged her remaining five dollars in for 500 notes.

At the castle, the eleyr guard was getting more impatient, and the gang was getting more worried.

“Hehehe... they should be here any second now,” said Barthy. Coincidentally, Hiroko came in riding on Mabel.

“I’m back!” she said. She got off Mabel’s back and handed the eleyr 500 notes. “Here’s your money.” The guard was satisfied.

“All right, you can get in,” he said. He moved aside and the gang stepped inside the castle.

The castle was humungous, with a fancy red carpet stretching from the entrance to the stairs. There were many rooms, including a conference room where the current conference was being held.

“Wow, the king of the forest has a pretty sweet life,” said Alan.

“I’d like to check out those stairs,” said Barthy. The gang ran up the huge stairs and into the upstairs corridor. There were many rooms, but they didn’t know what purpose they served. At the end of the corridor was a big, red door with gold trimming.

“Where do you think that leads?” asked Hiroko, “maybe we should look inside.” She looked at her friends and nodded her head in agreement. They crept up to the door and Mabel turned the doorknob with her raptor claws. As the door opened, the gang saw a gigantic room with several big windows. A being in a purple cape was swirling his gin and looking out the middle window. “Are you the king?”

“Who’s there?” asked the creature. He looked like a bat monster (an epiat, to be exact) that stood erect like a human and had wings on his arms. He also had an eye patch.



“Oh my god!” said Hiroko, “it’s the official symbol of the Republican party!”

“Quiet!” said the eleytr in a harsh voice. The voice was so loud that everyone quieted down in an instant. “You are not allowed to trespass!”

“Then why is the drawbridge is down?” asked Alan.

“Because there is a conference going on.” A miwreckmore in a dress came up to the guard and handed him her invitation.

“I’m here for the conference,” she said.

“You may go on through, ma’am.” The monster walked through the entrance safely.

“What do we have to do to enter?” asked Alan. The eleytr guard thought for a moment.

“Uh... give me 500 notes.” The gang was confused.

“That’s all?” asked Barthy. He looked toward Hiroko, expecting her to have the money. “Do you have 500 notes?” Hiroko looked through her wallet and found nothing.

“I’m flat-out broke,” she said, “let’s see... 500 notes are about equal to \$5.00 in American currency... I’ll just borrow \$5.00 from my brother! But wait... that means I’ll have to buy another round-trip ticket to the Rhythm and Melody world. I’ll borrow \$15.00 from my brother! I’ll be right back.” Hiroko signaled for Mabel to kneel down so she can get on her back. As soon as she was on her back, she galloped off.

“Hurry back,” said Alan.

Fifteen minutes later...

Hiroko was back in the real world at her house. She found her brother in the basement. He was reading his book on the couch beside the stairs, as if nothing was about to happen.

“Oh, good,” said Hiroko, “I found you.”

“What do you want, Hiroko?” asked Taro.

“I bet you fifteen bucks that global warming will melt the rest of the polar ice caps in the next twenty minutes.”

“That’s impossible. Global warming has already melted them all. We didn’t miss a single one.”

“Salutations,” he said, “what brings you here?” The monster didn’t expect company, and he was doing something that someone would normally do alone. “I’m Alan. I’m sorry about the rustling. I put leaves in my crocheting bag so I can protect my needles.”

“Why are you here by yourself?”

“I’ve been here by myself for a while now. My hybrid partner, Alonso, was taken somewhere and I haven’t seen him since.”

“Alonso!” exclaimed Barthy, “We just saw him at that zoo!” Alan was appalled.

“They threw him in a zoo? That’s terrible!”

“He said that the king ordered his guards to do it.” There was a brief pause while Alan was thinking.

“I think I know what the royalty is up to. You see, King Vincent has a jealous brother who was mad when Vincent became king instead of him. I think he may have finally sunk as low as to usurp the throne.”

“You mean... he killed him?” asked Hiroko.

“Maybe, but this is just my theory.”

“Do you think he’ll let us into the castle?” asked Barthy.

“No way! He’ll never let commoners like us inside the castle. I guess we could try.”

“How can we try?”

“I don’t know. We’ll have to think of that on the way to the castle.”

As the monsters left the village, they didn’t experience any danger. Since it was only the beginning of fall, there were still mosquitoes in the air. After a while, Hiroko’s legs got tired.

“This is a lot of walking,” she said, “I’m still worn out from when that nutura chased us.” Mabel took pity on her, so she leaned down so she could get on. “You mean it, Mabel?” Mabel nodded her head. Hiroko climbed onto her back and she started hopping to catch up with the others. Over the horizon, the very north side of the forest could be seen. There was a huge castle with a mote and everything. The gang ran down the hill to get closer. Unfortunately, it was when the gang got close that they realized that the castle was heavily guarded.

“What should we do?” asked Barthy.

“The drawbridge is down, I say we should go with our guts,” said Alan. They walked across the drawbridge, but as soon as they got to the big, open door, a huge monster blocked the way. It was an eleytr (a bipedal, furry elephant with hooves, a pan pipe, and pants).

plant used to be. My monster and I trespassed there one day, and the rest is history. We cannot return home and let our parents see us like this, so we all lived in a village. Some of the original hybrid children have grown up and had hybrid children of their own. I originally came from Argentina.” As soon as Barthy heard the word “Argentina,” his memory sparked, and he immediately felt nostalgic. “One day, an army of soldiers captured all of us and threw us in this zoo.”

“That’s terrible,” said Barthy.

“The king had ordered his soldiers to capture us, but the king is usually kind to all creatures, including humans. He would never make his soldiers do such a thing.”

“This is awfully suspicious,” said Barthy.

“Don’t worry, we’ll bust you and your friends out of here,” said Hiroko. She and the monsters ran past the ticket office and out of the zoo.

“Wait... did they pay?” wondered the monster at the ticket office.

The gang was walking in the forest again, not knowing exactly where they were going, but they had some idea.

“So... can you fill me in about this king guy?” asked Hiroko.

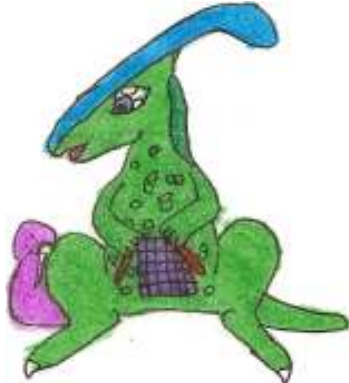
“I don’t know anything about the king of Grace Note Forest,” said Barthy, “I knew he was a nice guy, but why did he become so strict?”

The forest was filled with tall trees. They were gracefully towering over all of the forest’s creatures. In the clearing was a village.

“What’s that?” asked Hiroko. The village had some small, colorful huts on the ground, and some in the trees, too. There were also shops that took in pinecones as currency. But something was wrong. This village would’ve been bright and cheery, but... it was empty. The entire village was abandoned.

“I think this was the village where Alonso and the other hybrids used to live,” said Barthy. Looking at the town gave the gang a sad feeling because they knew that at one time, the town was full of happy hybrids and music monsters, and that things were better, but those days were no more. A rustling in the not-so-far distance made the silence disappear. “What’s that?” Another rustling was heard. It came from one of the huts.

“Should we go in?” The two agreed and they opened the door to the hut. Inside was a small pseudo kitchen with a barrel full of water and a small table. Next to the barrel was a small, green dinosaur with a horn on its head, like a parasaurolophus. He was crocheting with purple yarn, and the rustling was his crocheting bag. “That dinosaur looks just like you, Mabel.” Mabel was a bit insulted by what she said, because she was obviously bigger than the other monster. The monster looked up at the gang.





“Dance!” he said. The girl didn’t want to give in to temptations, but she got up and pretended to dance anyway. The monsters watching her laughed. Some of them threw food at her.

“This is terrible,” said Hiroko, “these children look oppressed.”

In one of the cages, the strange-looking boy that was being chased was thrown back into his cage, still unconscious.

“You won’t be escaping anymore!” said one of the aliukes. He locked the cage and left him. The boy started coming to his senses. When he opened his eyes, he saw what he usually saw in his zoo-oriented life; monsters looking at him from the outside.

“Estoy aquí otra vez,” he said, “¿por qué estoy aquí otra vez?”

“Mommy, he’s talking funny,” said an abala (a monster that looks like a puppy). The boy knew that his attempt at freedom failed. “I’m never going to live on the outside.” After seeing this, Hiroko, Barthy and Mabel ran up to the cage.

“Why are you here?” asked Hiroko. The boy was relieved to see another human being.

“All of the hybrids are here,” he said, “I am Alonso, and I have lived in this world for quite some time.”

“Why are you wearing a costume?” asked Barthy, “you look just like a tudeloop.”



“This isn’t a costume.” Hiroko and the others became confused.

“Then what is it?” asked Hiroko.

“It’s what I actually look like.” Hiroko didn’t believe a single word of what he said. “You see, fifteen years ago, the power plant at the edge of the forest had a meltdown. A lot of monsters died, but the children in the forest at the time had their DNA altered by the radiation, which had melodies in it. As a result, they were turned into half-human half-music monster creatures.” Hiroko and the monsters were intrigued by this. “The radiation has died down, but there is still some in the area where the power

“I think I saw him go that way!” one of them said. The two monsters ran past Hiroko, Mabel, and Barthy.

“What’s going on?” asked Barthy. They kept running after the strange boy. The boy was running out of breath, but he was still determined that he would loose them. One of the aliukes put a tranquilizing dart into the blow pipe and blew. The dart flew through the air, headed for the boy. Just as he was sure that he was out of their sight, the dart got him in his left buttocks. He felt a sudden shock, and then he felt drowsy. He collapsed on the ground and was out cold.

“Got him!” said the aliuke. The two monsters ran over to the child and threw a big net over him. As soon as he was covered, they dragged him off.

“What are they doing with that poor boy?” asked Hiroko.

“Do you think we should follow them?” asked Barthy. They each looked at each other and nodded their heads. Hiroko, Barthy, and Mabel ran away from the bush they were standing by and followed the two aliukes that were dragging the boy in the net.

By a tree stood a grey truck with the words “Grace Note Zoo” on them. The boy was still unconscious, even though he was being dragged through stones and twigs. As soon as they got up to the truck, they opened the back and tossed them in there, like he was a piece of garbage. They closed the doors mightily, like it was a job well done. One aliuke got in on the driver’s side, while one got in on the passenger’s side. They started the truck (in the third decade of the 21st century, cars in the real world have gotten far more advanced, while vehicles in the Rhythm and Melody World have only advanced far enough to look like cars from the mid-20th century).

“We have to follow that truck!” said Hiroko. The three of them ran after the truck as fast as they could. The truck rolled out of the woods and onto the path. It drove the speed limit (whatever the speed limit was), but they still followed them. Barthy couldn’t really catch up; he was doing a combination of running and rolling, and he wasn’t getting very far.

It seemed like forever that the truck would finally stop somewhere, but it eventually did. It drove up to a fenced-in place. It had a gate that said “Grace Note Zoo” on it, just like the truck. The gate was already opened, so they drove right on through. Hiroko and the others hid behind a bush.

“Why are they putting that boy in a zoo?” asked Barthy. They sneaked into the gate and under the entrance, so they wouldn’t pay a fee to get in. Nobody saw them; mission accomplished. In the zoo were many cages. To their surprise, there were children in the cages instead of animals. These children looked like they were wearing music monster costumes, though. Some of the children looked sad, some looked lonely, and some looked bored out of their minds. The music monsters that paid to get in were interested in watching these children. The younger monsters had merchandise, like t-shirts or balloons. One young monster was at the cage of a girl that looked like a minigryphon. She was holding her little sister, which looked like a chimi (the infant stage of the minigryphon).



“Taro!” she said. Taro looked up from his reading, not very amused at the interruption.

“What is it?” he asked.

“Um... have I been spoiling Barthy lately?” Taro was waiting so long for his sister to notice her mistake.

“Yes, you have! I’ve been telling you that for that past three months now.” He took a thick book out of his book bag and opened it to one of the pages. He showed his sister the page that had information about the glylin, Barthy’s species. The page showed a fit, natural-looking glylin. “THIS is what a normal glylin should look like. Because of his lack of exercise and overeating, he’s become a blob! And I believe you’re the one who’s supposed to tame him.”

“Let’s not forget, Taro, I’m not really his human partner. We found Barthy in a ditch years ago and decided to take him in!”

“You don’t think I know that? Now leave me alone.” Barthy rolled over to Hiroko, expecting her to admit that she had questionable taming skills.

“Alright, you were right.” With that, Barthy smiled.

“Listen, I’m going home. Since Barthy is too overweight to protect you, I’ll have Mabel stay here with you guys. The portal station is just a mile away, so I won’t need her.” Taro took his book back and walked away. Hiroko looked at Barthy, eager to do something.

“So... what are we supposed to do now? I don’t know how to ride a skipper.”

“We’ll just have to hoof it,” said Barthy. The three of them walked deeper into forest until they noticed another chase going on. They couldn’t see it; they could only hear the sound of the rapid footsteps.

“I hear something running.”

“In the Rhythm and Melody World, you’re either predator or prey.” As the footsteps were coming closer, they knew that they should probably move out of the way.

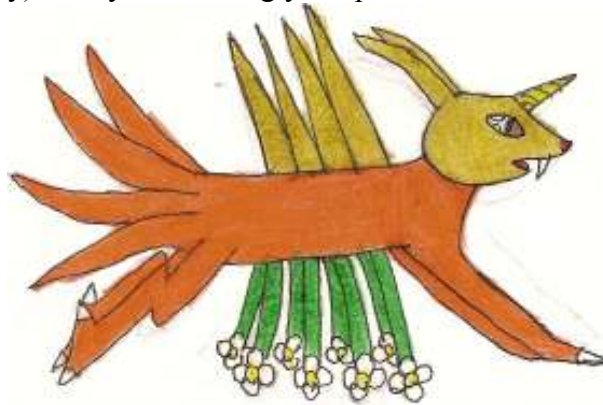
“It’s coming closer!” The “prey” revealed himself. It was a boy with somewhat dark skin. He didn’t look like an average boy, though. He had long ears with three points at the end of them. He was wearing a yellow shirt and pants with three orange stripes on them. He had paws for hands and feet. He was running for his life, but Hiroko and the monsters didn’t know why.

“¡Mal!” he said. “¡Muy mal!” He ran right pass them without a second thought.

“Was he wearing a costume?” Two aliukes (a skinny, purple, weasel-like creature with wing-like ears) with round, white hats came out of the bushes with blow pipes.

September, 2034

All was quiet in the dank forest of the Rhythm and Melody World, after a spring shower. Birds were making their routinely noises. Not all was quiet in the Grace Note Forest, though. Through all of the pine, a chase was going on. Hiroko, (Haruko's daughter), was fleeing for her life, with her ponytail waving behind her. Her morbidly obese glylin (a green, bunny-like creature with gliders for wings) was rolling along as fast as he could. They were being chased by a natura (a yellow, greyhound-like monster with plants on its body). They unknowingly trespassed in her territory.



“That’s one mad monster!” said Hiroko. Barthy stopped rolling and started running with his tiny, stout legs (or what used to be legs). No matter how fast he would run, the natura would always catch up to him. “Barthy, look out!” Just as the natura was about to sink her claws into the portly monster, he rolled off to one side. Hiroko ran off to one side as well. Their actions were so brisk that the natura was unaware of how they disappeared. She looked around some more before finally giving up. As soon as she walked away, Hiroko and Barthy stepped onto the path again.

“That was close,” said Barthy.

“Are you kidding? We could’ve been killed!” Barthy thought about how Hiroko had been treating him for the past year or so.

“Do you think you’ve been... you know...” Hiroko didn’t know.

“What?”

“Spoiling me?” Hiroko had never heard such a thing from Barthy before.

“What do you mean?”

“Open your eyes! Can’t you see how fat I am?” Hiroko scratched her chin.

“You never mind that I never get any exercise, and you let me eat tons of stuff that I shouldn’t be eating!”

“Now that you mention it, you are a bit chubby.”

“A BIT chubby? I’m so fat I have my own gravitational pull!” Hiroko giggled at what he said. “It’s not funny! Just ask your brother.”

“Alright, I will.” Taro, her blond-haired teenage brother was reading a magazine beside a tree with his skipper, Mabel. His book bags were resting at his place. Hiroko was anxious to ask her brother the question.