

EXPLORERS

TREATMENT // DRAFT DATE: December 2nd, 2018

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by: team@wonderunit.com

A group of kids get stuck in the underground tunnels of New York City. In their struggle to find a way out, they uncover an old forgotten secret.

This adventure finds them each battling their growing cynicism in the face of the wonder of an unknown world – trying to find their significance in a world that wasn't built for them.

ACT 1

Opening Credit Sequence

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - DAY

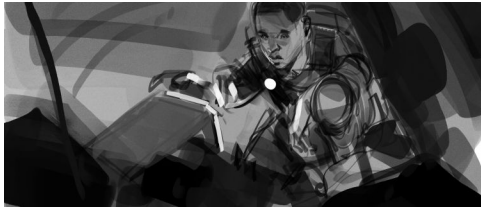
Montage setting up the world, showing all the characters in their normal lives. This story takes place in the area of Two Bridges in New York City. It's the area between the Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges. It's an area yet untouched by the encroaching gentrification of New York. In the periphery of the neighborhood, huge skyscrapers are being constructed, disturbing the people of Two Bridges. Many of the kids in the neighborhood spend their time skating in the skatepark under the Manhattan Bridge. Other kids spend their time roaming the surrounding neighborhoods on bikes, antagonizing people. They are known as Wheelies. Sometimes the Wheelies come into the skatepark, antagonizing the skaters. The skaters try to ignore them until they leave.



Ryan Makes An Unexpected Discovery

INT. UNDERGROUND TUNNELS

In an underground tunnel, we follow Ryan, a 13 year old, Black kid. Unlike other kids in the neighborhood, Ryan spends his time exploring the underground tunnels of New York, looking for old forgotten relics. He traverses these tunnels, connecting to a huge foundation dig for a new skyscraper construction. Although he doesn't find what he was looking for, he makes an unexpected discovery: a large, turn of the century, cornerstone brick.



Ryan Sneaks Back Into Class

INT. CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

Ryan, wet and dirty, sneaks back into his history class almost unnoticed. We meet Malcolm, another 13 year old kid, sitting next to Ryan. Ryan tries to get Malcolm's attention, but Malcolm couldn't care less about Ryan's finds, or anything he has to say for that matter. Ryan and Malcolm used to be best friends, however, they've grown apart. Malcolm doesn't want to be associated with Ryan publicly.



Ryan And Malcolm Walk Home

EXT. NEW YORK CITY STREET - AFTERNOON

After school, on their way home, Malcolm walks at a faster pace to avoid Ryan. Ryan wants to share his discovery with Malcolm, but Malcolm has no intention of looking lame in front of an older, cooler group of kids. Malcolm strives for the cooler kid's acceptance.



Enter The Projects

INT. HOUSING PROJECTS ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

They make their way to their apartment building they both live in, the Alfred E. Smith housing projects. Ryan invites Malcolm over to hangout the next day, but is awkwardly turned down when Malcolm says he has to help his mother.



Jordan Helps Finance Bro

INT. LUXURY HIGH RISE ELEVATOR

We meet Jordan, a Black, 19 year old. He's a porter working in a newly built luxury apartment skyscraper. He's helping a new tenant move in, an audacious finance guy, who makes snap judgements about him. The banker imposes his realities onto Jordan, who is unsure and uncomfortable with his future. At 19, Jordan has aged out of being a kid. He's out of high school. He's not in a position to go to college. His mother and the world are pressuring him to pursue a particular future he is unsure about, but also not happy with his limited options. He's growing cynical.



Ryan In Room, Studying Brick

INT. RYAN'S ROOM - NIGHT

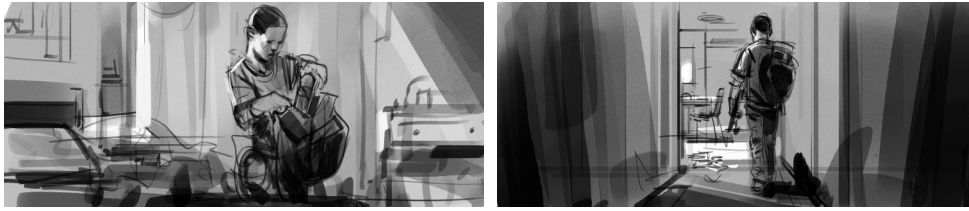
Late that evening, Ryan is in his tiny room, studying his brick. His life at home is one that's lacking communication. He has a single mother who works long, odd hours as a nurse. He shares a room with his older brother, Jordan, who he barely speaks to. Ryan overhears Jordan and his mother arguing, but tries to tune it all out.



Ryan Wakes Up In An Empty House

INT. RYAN'S ROOM - MORNING

Ryan wakes up alone in an empty house. He walks by a reminder of Jordan's verbal fight with their mother; an accidentally broken clock. He walks over it and walks out of the apartment.



Ryan Skates Through, Sees Malcolm

EXT. NEW YORK CITY STREET / OUTSIDE SKATEPARK - LATE MORNING

Ryan skates through his neighborhood and stops by the skatepark to look in. He sees his brother Jordan getting some skate practice in. He's also disappointed to see Malcolm, smoking with his older friends, not helping his mother. Ryan continues skating on.



Inside Mr. Oliver's Pawn Shop

INT. MR. OLIVER'S PAWN SHOP

Ryan enters Mr. Oliver's Pawn Shop, which feels much more like an antiques museum, filled with old relics. Ryan comes here frequently - borrowing books and sharing his underground finds with the sage expert. Mr. Oliver is Ryan's connection to the world most have left behind. He propels Ryan's curiosity in the past. Ryan realizes that his discovery may be greater than he initially realized. His newly found brick is actually a time capsule filled with objects from building workers, more than a hundred years ago. Ryan wants to know where the brick came from.



Ryan Researches Brick At Municipal Archives

EXT. NYC MUNICIPAL ARCHIVES / ENTRANCE - AFTERNOON

Ryan heads to the Municipal Archives to research the contents of the cornerstone brick.



INT. NYC MUNICIPAL ARCHIVES / LIBRARY

Through the building's library, Ryan sneaks deep into the restricted archives. Neck deep in his curiosity, Ryan finds himself the subject of another's curiosity. Mikayla, a 21 year old college researcher, sees Ryan's brick and immediately becomes engrossed in the trail Ryan just started to follow. Mikayla helps Ryan research the workers mentioned in the contents of the brick. To their surprise, the workers disappeared.



Trouble At The Skatemark

EXT. SKATEPARK - EARLY EVENING

Having just been kicked out of the archives, Ryan's taking Mikayla to Mr. Oliver's. As they're passing the skatepark, they see a large group of Wheelies antagonizing the skaters. They enter the skatepark. The leader of the Wheelies showed up to harass Jordan. However, Malcolm, in an attempt to appeal to his friends, makes fun of the leader under his breath. The wheelie overhears Malcolm's comment, which initiates a confrontation, resulting in Malcolm and Ryan being pushed to the ground. Reluctantly, Jordan protects his brother by knocking out the Wheelie. This results in Ryan, Jordan, Malcolm and Mikayla being chased by the Wheelies.



The Chase

EXT. NEW YORK CITY STREETS / TWO BRIDGES / CHINATOWN - CONTINUOUS

The group is chased through Two Bridges and Chinatown. They end up cornered by Wheelies. Ryan feels the vibration of an underground subway train and leads them down a busy subway station.



Down The Subway

INT. EAST BROADWAY SUBWAY STATION - CONTINUOUS

The group manages to catch the train just as the doors close. But the Wheelies force the door open, getting on to the train, making their way toward them. After a short standstill, Jordan attacks and holds off the Wheelies, allowing the rest of the group to escape. A cop on the train witnesses the scuffle, intervenes and chases them down the subway platform. Chased to the end of the platform, they are forced to go down into the tunnel, with the Wheelies right behind them.



Into The Tunnel

INT. SUBWAY TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

The Wheelies trail them in the dark tunnel. Everyone is alerted to a train speeding toward them. The group manages to avoid the train by running into a maintenance room.



Safe In The Room?



They catch their breath for a moment. The room's grating floor is wobbly and unsafe. Through the floor is what appears to be a bottomless pit. One of the Wheelies breaks into the maintenance room. Jordan grabs him, and throws him onto the grated floor. The grating gives out and all five of them fall into the darkness.

ACT 2

The Drop

INT. TUNNEL DROP

Ryan, Mikayla, Malcolm, Jordan, and the Wheelie all plummet to structures deep below the subway system.



After The Fall, The Group Is Split

INT. TUNNEL BOTTOM

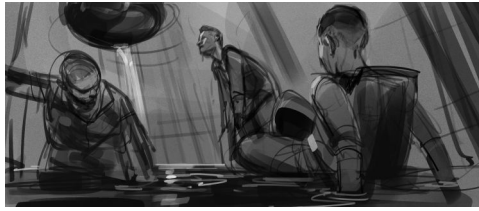
Jordan and the Wheelie fall together, hitting the ground hard. They are in a large cement room. Ryan, Malcolm, and Mikayla are nowhere to be found.



Ryan, Mikayla, And Malcolm In Water

INT. UNDERWATER

Meanwhile, Ryan, Mikayla and Malcolm land in murky sewage water. They are in a large collecting pool with deafening waterfalls emptying into the basin from as far up as they can see.



Back At The Pit

INT. TUNNEL BOTTOM

Back in the cement room, Jordan is panicked. He's looking for a way back out, but they are incredibly deep. The Wheelie is fallen and seemingly hurt. Jordan calls out for Ryan but there's no response.



Assessing The Situation In The Water

INT. SEWAGE OVERRUN BUFFER

Gentle introductions are made between Mikayla and Malcolm. Mikayla tries to keep cool in the face of their predicament, but her anxiety is beginning to show. Ryan is composed, and Malcolm mentions to Mikayla that Ryan comes down here all the time. Ryan is quick to correct him with the fact that he has never been this deep before. Ryan guides them onward.



Wheelie Is Paralyzed?

INT. TUNNEL BOTTOM

Jordan begins to venture alone to find a way out. The Wheelie, a 19 year old, skinny, Black guy, who is trapped under some fallen grating, claims he can't feel his legs. He pleads for Jordan to not leave him. Annoyed, Jordan attempts to pull the Wheelie from underneath, and the Wheelie screams in pain.



Run To Jordan

INT. TUNNEL HALLWAY

Ryan, Mikayla and Malcolm hear a scream and run toward it.



United, Or Are They?

INT. TUNNEL BOTTOM

The group reunites. Upon seeing the situation, they all talk over whether they should help the Wheelie, the guy who got them stuck down there, or just leave him. Ryan and Malcolm are more compassionate, but Mikayla and Jordan think they should keep moving and leave him there. Just as they are about to leave, it becomes apparent that Vince, the Wheelie, was faking his injury to test the groups capacity for compassion and to find divisions between them.



Vince Disrespects The Place

INT. TUNNEL

Vince, the Wheelie, shows an unpredictable recklessness while they are searching for a way out through the tunnels, much to the group's dismay. No one wants him there. Vince destroys a beautiful found relic in the space. Offended, Ryan asks him why he would do that. Dumbfounded, Vince has nothing to say.



Jordan Tries To Take The Lead, Ryan Leads

INT. TUNNEL

Walking down the tunnel, the group arrives at the rubble of a collapse. Seeing a large fissure above, Jordan suggests that the group go up the crack to see where it might lead them. Vince takes the opportunity to suggest that Malcolm thinks that idea is ridiculous. Upon Jordan pressuring the group to follow, Ryan suggests that they keep moving down the manmade path, as there is likely to be an exit along the way. They move on. Jordan is frustrated by his own inability to lead the group.



Everyone Puts Up Fronts

INT. TUNNEL

Jordan, Mikayla, and Malcolm project specific character stereotypes. Vince asks needling questions to the group, questioning who they really are behind their facades. The group would prefer to not engage with Vince.



Ryan And Mikayla Trail The Group Talking

INT. TUNNEL

Ryan and Mikayla trail behind the group. Ryan is introverted and difficult to get to open up. Mikayla tells Ryan that other people may never care about the stuff he is interested in, but that doesn't mean it's not important. Ryan discovers a mentor in Mikayla and continues to place greater philosophical trust in her.



Vince Picks On The Meek

INT. TUNNEL

Vince, once again, pushes the group to expose their true identities, and with that, their insecurities. His questions barely hide his intentions, but the group falls victim regardless.



Mikayla Notices A Thing

INT. TUNNEL

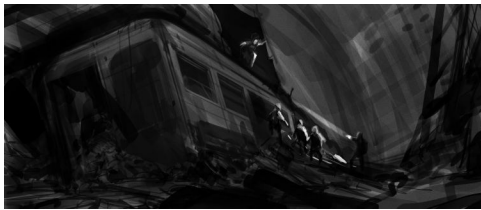
Mikayla notices a series of small pictograms on the wall. They look somewhat familiar. She wonders if they mean anything.



Tunnel Obstructed

INT. SOME SET PIECE

Further down the tunnel, it is almost completely obstructed. More than collapsed, it appears that the ground has completely shifted and compressed, leaving a long, winding, shallow crack they can barely crawl through. Mikayla and Malcolm do not want to pass through. After some coaxing, they cautiously enter the crack. Ryan guides them through, with Vince entering last. The space is uncomfortable for even the slightest claustrophobic. Malcolm claims to feel the rock moving, trapping him in a tight space. Ryan feels it too. The rock is vibrating and dust and debris fill the space. Ryan's quick to maneuver through the crack to safety with Jordan closely following. Malcolm watches Ryan disappear and starts to freak out. Annoyed and behind Malcolm, Vince pushes Malcolm loose and continues to push him out through, to the other end. Every man for themselves, group not bonded, no trust.



Out The Other End

INT. TUNNEL

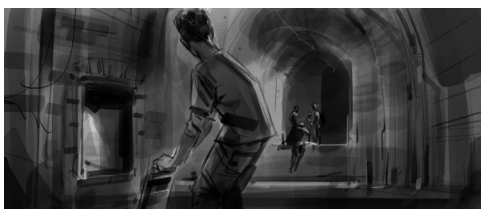
Malcolm is hurt that everyone left him behind. In fact, everyone was selfish. Vince takes the opportunity to point out that they were just acting like anyone else would act if their back was against the wall. He tells a story about how even the tightest of friends would abandon each other given the right circumstances.



Vince Sees An Exit, Doesn't Tell Anyone

INT. TUNNEL

The tunnel opens to a larger space, with taller ceilings, piping and old metal machinery. Vince is walking high on an elevated ledge, tight rope walking the railing. This makes the group uncomfortable. He invites the group to come up and join him. Jordan advises everyone else to ignore Vince and see where the piping leads to up ahead. Left behind, Vince looks around the space. He finds a small door with a crawlspace. He crawls in, seeing a ladder. He looks all the way up the ladder and smiles.



Vince Pits Kids Against Each Other

INT. TUNNEL

Armed with the knowledge of a way out and the group's individual insecurities and contradictions, Vince has a seemingly overpowering confidence. He exposes their "truths" and pierces their projections of themselves.



Kids Doing Kid Stuff.

INT. TUNNEL

Following where the piping leads to, the space opens up to a large room with a huge well in the center. The well is empty and appears to be bottomless. Vince, Malcolm, and Mikayla sit around the well, making sounds and rhythm into the abyss. It's nice. Ryan explores the space, marking and collecting more objects. Jordan watches his brother from a distance with initial disgust. However, as Ryan illuminates the space with his blacklight, revealing his markings and looking genuinely happy finding a new object, Jordan's look shifts from disapproval to curiosity. Vince observes the change in Jordan.



The World Is Crashing Down - Boom

INT. WELL ROOM

Ryan drops to the floor to feel the ground. Malcolm says, "Did you hear that?" Ryan looks up. Debris rains from the ceiling. Ryan tells everyone to exit the space. Everyone runs. Mikayla trips on a metal pipe on the floor. She's stuck. Malcolm stops for her and turns back. She tells him to go. A large boulder falls on her leg. More boulders fall and smokey debris completely envelop the space. She crawls from out of the fog, the others usher her to safety. The room has completely collapsed in on itself. The environment has become more than a dangerous space, it's now a threatening character; introducing the possibility of death.



Conflict Between Vince And Jordan

INT. TUNNEL

With their way back collapsed, and the exit completely closed off, Vince's frustration with the environment begins to reach its limits. He begins to fiercely lash out at the group and Jordan jumps to meet him head on.



Vince Reveals Past

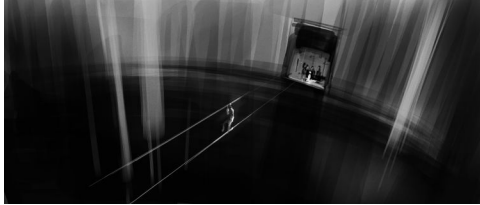


In the midst of this conflict, Vince reveals information about his past. Vince grew up as a foster kid. He was transferred from abusive home to abusive home, not treated as a child, but as a paycheck. On his 18th birthday, he was kicked out on the streets, homeless. The group sympathizes and begins to see the humanity he holds so close to his chest.

Crossing The Chasm

INT. GAPING SEWER SHAFT

The group's dynamics start shifting as they come across a gaping sewer shaft. The group is forced to walk across a tight wire, while using fabric around a wire directly above it, just out of arm's reach. Malcolm offers his hoodie to Vince as a nice gesture. The group slowly cross. Mikayla slips, but manages to make it over. Crossing the chasm brings them closer together as a sense of teamwork is instilled.



Mikayla Loses Faith

INT. TUNNEL

The group begins to notice that Mikayla might be struggling to keep herself together. She's thirsty and drinks the small amount of water they have left. She asks the group for a minute. She's tired and they have no idea what time it is. Vince's attention to her panicked nature seems more compassionate than menacing, although he seems to say all the wrong things, making it worse.



Jarring Discovery

INT. TUNNEL

The group finds a large amount of old building materials and tools. The group discovers an old burial ground with a pile of bodies. It seems they were trapped down here. As Mikayla finds answers to some of her curiosities, she realizes these are the workers who disappeared. The group communicates their worries about being trapped here themselves. Ryan finds plans for a large building. He keeps the plans to himself, however Jordan sees.



Forced To Work Together

INT. TUNNEL

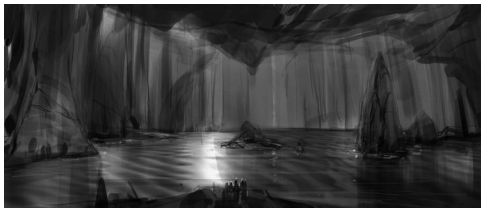
In order to progress, the group has to climb up a large rock structure. The entire group has to work together.



The Beautiful Lake

INT. UNDERGROUND LAKE

Climbing up from the rock shaft, The group discovers a beautiful underground lake in a large cavern. A lighthearted moment is shared. They're all swimming, and in Vince and Malcolm's case, learning to tread water.



Ryan On The Island With Jordan

INT. LAKE ISLAND

Ryan and Jordan cautiously make attempts at reconnecting.



Conversation On The Island

INT. LAKE

The group's false fronts begin to come falling down. Internal tensions rise to the surface as they begin to share certain truths about themselves.



Confessions

INT. TUNNEL

They each come to terms with parts of themselves; things they would like to change.



Underground Lake, Man Made Statue

INT. UNDERGROUND LAKE

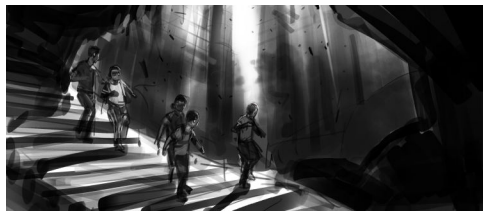
Jordan, exploring the space, emerges from the water, excited, telling Ryan he should see what's on the other side of the wall. This requires Ryan to pull Malcolm a long distance under water to get to the other side. While under water, Ryan sees a city deep below, but follows on. When they emerge from the other side, the group discovers a great statue and the remnants of colossal structures, with a stairway leading down, in between the statues. Ryan matches his cornerstone brick as the same brick used in the stairway. The area begins to rumble and shake before the ceiling starts to collapse. A plume of dust comes from the shaft of the stairway. Ryan knows where he is. Contrary to turning away, he runs down the stairway, jumping over rubble, making his way to the bottom of the collapsed stairway. He starts removing the rubble. Everyone joins in to help. They see light through the cracks of the boulders. They push through.



The Choice To Move Forward

INT. STAIRWELL BENEATH LAKE

The sound is deafening. Ryan looks up and sees bright floodlights hundreds of feet up. They are at the bottom of the incredibly deep foundation construction dig site, where Ryan found his brick. There is a gigantic pile driver slowly raising up to drive down, deeper into the earth, shaking everything. There are conveyor belts transferring up debris to multiple levels. This is their way out. Ryan's incredibly happy and relieved. Malcolm calls up, raising holy hell to try to get workers attention. Ryan scans the space looking for a way to get out. Jordan, who's quiet and off to the side, follows the path of the stairway to its logical continuation. He sees where the stairway continues and uncovers the hole. Jordan calls up to Ryan. He makes a plea to Ryan and the rest of the group to continue their journey. They'll never get this chance again. This is what his brother Ryan has been dreaming of. The rest of the group is convinced to at least spend 10 minutes looking. Ryan reluctantly goes with the group.

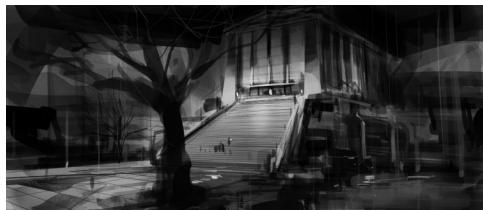


ACT 3

Entrance Into The Cavern

INT. CAVERN ENTRANCE

The five kids squeeze through the small hole revealing a massive underground cavern, with water flowing in from the hole. The area is huge - roughly the size of a football stadium. Although it's not clear exactly where the ceiling is, it seems to go up at least a hundred feet. The cavern is filled with water. Water is spraying in from a few cracks in the walls, and there are large streams of water coming in from the ceiling. There are dead trees and unlit lamp posts lining a winding path to a large structure. Wide stone stairs lead up to what appear to be a large fortified building: The vault. It's half federal reserve bank, half mayan ziggurat. The kids stand on a stone ledge overlooking the site. It's beautiful. Jordan puts his hand on Ryan's shoulder and looks down at him, proud.



At The Vault Door

EXT. OUTSIDE THE VAULT DOOR

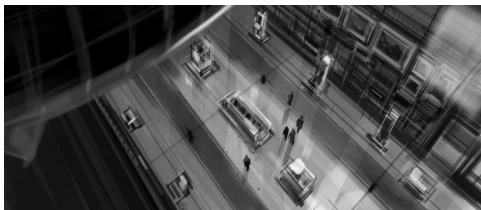
They arrive at the vault door. There's a large cylindrical lock. Ryan takes a piece of paper from his brick. He looks at the paper and turns each of the cylinders to match the numbers. He turns the latch. A loud sound of clanking and mechanical gear grinding comes from behind the door. Dust comes from under the door and it starts to open. The group rushes in, but Ryan looks cautiously back at the stairway. More water flows in from the surrounding walls.



In The Vault

INT. VAULT

The vault is beautiful. The group is eager to inspect the place. Ryan goes off on his own downstairs.



Ryan Finds Meaning In The Vault



INT. VAULT BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

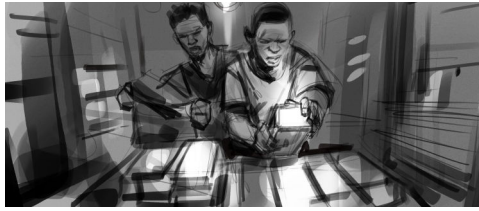
Ryan enters a bedroom. He sees a long decomposed corpse, hunched over in a wheelchair, at a desk. It's a cautionary tale of a man so obsessed with collecting earthly possessions that he ignored his family and loved ones, and here he died alone, surrounded by stuff.



Back Upstairs

INT. VAULT

Mikayla and Malcolm hastily grab at anything they can carry out. Jordan is looking for a bigger find. He finds a vault of gold bullion, exactly what he thinks would be the answer to all his problems.



Rush To Escape

INT. VAULT BEDROOM

Boom. Just as Ryan feared, the cavern is collapsing and water is filling the space. The way back is collapsed. Water begins to fill the Vault. Ryan runs up to find an exit. He comes across an exit hatch and collects the rest of the group to lead them there, but Jordan's missing.



It's Just Stuff

INT. VAULT WITHIN THE VAULT

Ryan races down to Jordan, but Jordan can't let go of the potential riches, negligent of the danger all of them are in. Ryan tries to convince Jordan to leave it behind. It's just stuff.



In The Hatch

INT. HATCH

The group is rushing to climb out. Water continues to rise up to them as they are climbing the ladder. The group rushes to the top to turn a radial valve lock, but water sprays in from above. Vince forcibly opens the valve anyway and they shoot up into the darkness.



Up Through The River

INT. LARGE BODY OF WATER

The group is shot up into a large murky body of water where they're forced to swim up to the surface.



In The East River



They emerge from the water in the blue light right before sunrise. To their surprise, they are just south of the Manhattan Bridge in the East River. From below them, a large amount of air erupts from under the water.

Walking Home

EXT. NEW YORK CITY STREETS - DAWN

The group walk through the streets in the early morning. Although not being able to bring back gold bullion, Jordan still has a pocket full of gold coins. So does Vince. Mikayla offers to let Vince use her shower. Ryan, Jordan and Malcolm walk into the distance.



Back At Home With Mom

INT. RYAN'S APARTMENT / LIVING ROOM

Back at home, Ryan and Jordan are just finishing cleaning the broken clock in the living room with a dustpan. Their mom is standing in the hallway dressed and ready for work. She looks at them, up and down. They are in wet clothes. She's late for work and she's not happy they didn't come home last night. On the mantel, in the living room, is the small wood carving of two men, one taller, holding hands. It's a piece of African art from the vault.



EPILOGUE

Exploring An Abandoned Station

Some time in the future, Jordan and Ryan are now exploring together, traversing the subway system. They arrive in an abandoned subway station. They look up and see Mikayla and smile. Cut to black. Title card: EXPLORERS.

