THE ABSURDISTAN CHRONICLES · VOLUME 6

NAMI AND THE SLIDE INTO THE MAYOR'S OFFICE!

JUST ONE QUICK RIDE



Based on a true fictional event.

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JUST ONE QUICK RIDE

For every place that is supposedly just around the corner.

A story from Goldhain and the neighbouring possibilities.

Based on a true fictional event.

Prologue - Just One Quick Ride



The new slide at Goldhain's leisure pool had not officially opened yet.

Unofficially, it was finished, gleaming and surrounded by so many warning signs that Nami liked it immediately. It began on a tower beneath the glass roof, wound twice around the large palm pool and, according to the plans, ended in a broad run-out beside the wave pool.

The lifeguard needed someone for one final test.

"Just check whether the last section is comfortable," he said.

"Just one quick ride," Nami promised.

She wore her dark-blue track jacket, her cobalt-blue curls tied up in a glorious tangle, and held Iman firmly in her arms. The little plush octopus was not an approved testing instrument but had more experience of Nami's ventures than most experts.

At the top, Nami sat down in the stream of water. The dark opening lay before her. Behind her, the starting gate closed with the sound of a final decision.

"Ready?" called the lifeguard.

Nami held up Iman. "We have never not been ready!"

The gate opened.

Water pushed her forwards. The tower vanished. The slide took her in like a river that had long been waiting for precisely this opportunity.

After three seconds, Nami knew that the final section was very comfortable.

After five seconds, she knew that this could not possibly be the final section.

I. Bend Seven

The first bends behaved themselves. Right, left, a small wave, then a tunnel with blue points of light. Nami laughed, hugged Iman close and counted along.



Bend five was faster than expected. Bend six curled almost completely around the palm rock. According to the plan, bend seven should have led into the run-out.

It led uphill.

Nami slowed just long enough to frown. Then a stronger current seized her and shot her through a glass tube over the roof of the pool.

Below her was not the wave pool.

Below her was Goldhain.

The slide crossed the street. People stopped and looked up. A woman carrying a shopping basket waved. Nami waved back as well as she could without letting go of Iman.

A bus stopped beneath the next bend. Although there was no bus stop, the driver opened the door and climbed out for a better view. Two children pressed their noses to the window. Nami lifted Iman briefly so that he could wave too. The children cheered.

The slide passed over the market square. Ruby was just leaving the bakery and recognised the cobalt-blue bun behind the glass. She held up a cinnamon roll. Nami gestured regretfully towards her speed. Ruby nodded in understanding and wrapped the pastry for later.

Then came the clock tower. The tube swung so close that Nami could read the time. It was 10:12. The bell struck ten times, considered the situation and added two confused chimes, as though even it wanted to confirm the hour.

"That was not on the plan," she said.

Iman smiled as he always smiled. Plush octopuses possess an admirable serenity in the face of

structural deviations.

The tube curved between two houses, nearly brushed the clock tower and headed towards the town hall. Nami watched the stone portal draw closer. For one moment, she hoped the construction would turn away before reaching it.

It did not turn.

A round hatch opened in the masonry.

Nami and Iman vanished into the town hall.

II. The Pneumatic Post

The interior of the town hall had been designed to be drier.

At first, the slide ran along the ceiling of the lost property office. Through the transparent wall, Nami saw shelves full of umbrellas, keys and solitary gloves. An employee looked up as Nami shot past. Nami raised two fingers in greeting.

Next came the registry office. A couple sat before a registrar and were signing documents. When Nami raced through the tube behind them, the bride turned and waved enthusiastically. The groom accidentally signed the tablecloth.

The next bend passed through the planning department. Three people were leaning over a plan on which the slide itself was drawn. One pointed to a dashed line. Another looked up at the ceiling. Nami was already gone.

"Perhaps they are testing it too," she called to Iman.

The tube descended. It crossed the archive, rose again and ran straight through a meeting on municipal water management. Twelve people sat behind the glass at a long table. The chair was speaking about controlled routes for water.

Nami shot past.

Every head turned at once.

At the far end of the room, a sign read: MAYOR - UPPER FLOOR.

The slide followed the arrow.

III. The Gradient of Government

The slide became steeper in the stairwell.

Nami reached a speed at which individual office doors appeared only as brown streaks. She passed the tax office, the dog-licence desk and a room marked Committee for Forward Planning. No one inside had planned far enough ahead.

A chime sounded. A calm voice spoke through small loudspeakers in the tube.

"Next stop: Citizen Services."

"I do not wish to get off," Nami called.

"Your request is being processed."

Points appeared ahead. The tube on the left led to the council chamber, the one on the right to Citizen Services. The mechanism clattered indecisively and chose straight ahead, even though no route was marked there.

A temporary section of pipe juddered into motion. Apparently, the slide was still connected to the town hall's old pneumatic post. A bundle of files

flew from a side pipe and glided beside Nami.

She stopped the top folder with her foot. Its cover read WATERWAYS - URGENT.

"Appropriate," said Nami.

The folder disappeared down another branch. Nami remained on the main route, which now led directly towards a heavy wooden door.

A brass sign hung above it.

MAYOR.

IV. Water in the Office

The mayor was dictating a letter when the wall behind his desk sprang open.

Water came first. Then three ring binders. Then Nami, holding Iman tightly and landing in the office on a magnificent fountain.

The mayor's swivel chair completed a slow turn. His chain of office lifted briefly from his chest and floated on the water like a golden sea serpent. Papers rose, spun and settled on furniture that had never before been confronted with the concept of a flood.



Nami sat behind the desk in a shallow puddle. Her hair was wilder than ever. Iman was wet but continued to smile.

"I can explain," she said.

The mayor clung to the desk. "That would be appreciated."

Nami pointed towards the tube. "The slide took a wrong turn."

"Slides do not take wrong turns."

A small hatch opened behind him. The file marked WATERWAYS - URGENT shot out and landed in his lap.

He looked at the folder, then at Nami.

"In Goldhain," he corrected himself, "I should not say things like that."

The calm voice from the tube announced, "Terminus reached."

V. Assessing the Damage

Within ten minutes, the office was full of people.

The planning department arrived with drawings. The lost property office brought towels. The fire brigade observed that the water was already draining back into the tube and was therefore "unusually cooperative". A clerk tried to record the order of events but gave up when the pneumatic post box ejected a pool shoe.

Nami helped collect papers from the lamp. Iman sat drying on a stack of regulations.

An archive employee placed every wet page between sheets of blotting paper. It emerged that most of the documents were already copies of copies and that the water had barely reduced their legibility. Only one application for a garden shed had dissolved completely. The applicant, who happened to be waiting in the corridor, took it as a sign and withdrew the request.

The mayor wrung out his jacket sleeve. "How much water does this system normally carry?"

The lifeguard, now connected by telephone, quoted a figure.

The mayor looked at his carpet. "And how much of it is here?"

"Judging by the noise, probably all of it."

There was a gurgle beneath the desk. The last of the water flowed tidily back into the tube. Nami pointed. "At least it cleans up after itself."

The mayor smiled despite himself.

"Who approved this route?" asked the mayor.

Everyone looked at the head of planning.

The head of planning pointed to the drawing. "The dashed line was intended to show a proposed maintenance passage."

"It runs through my office."

"Only at this scale."

"At what scale does it not end here?"

The head of planning adjusted his glasses. "An optimistic one."

Nami put the wet pool shoe into the lost property basket. "I can slide back and see where the points are set incorrectly."

The mayor raised both hands. "No one is sliding anywhere until I have inspected this route personally."

The room fell silent.

Nami smiled. "Good idea."

The mayor realised too late what he had decided.

VI. The Site Inspection

One hour later, the mayor stood in the leisure pool.

He wore a borrowed bathrobe, a helmet and his chain of office because the minutes required a site inspection in an official capacity. Nami had placed Iman in a little waterproof pouch. The head of planning, the clerk and two members of the water committee waited behind them.

"We shall travel slowly," said the mayor.

The lifeguard looked at the slide. "It only has one speed."

"Then we shall select the official one."

Nami sat down first. The mayor followed with the expression of a man who had signed too many decisions in his life. The starting gate accepted them together.

The first bends passed peacefully. At bend seven, the mayor did not scream. He merely produced a very long and formal sound.

High above Goldhain, he looked down. "That is a public road!"

"Yes!" called Nami.

"Why are the people waving?"

"Courtesy!"

They passed through the portal of the town hall. The entire wedding party in the registry office was now waving. The mayor automatically raised one hand.

When they crossed the meeting on water management, the participants applauded.

The lost property office had prepared. An employee held up a sign reading Enjoy the Ride and handed the mayor a lost hat as he glided past. He caught it, put it on by reflex and lost it again on the next bend. The lost property office recorded the incident as a temporary loan.

The registry-office ceremony had ended by now. The newly married couple stood ready with glasses. Nami and the mayor could not clink them, but the bride splashed a small sip towards the tube. The mayor lifted his chain of office in salute.

"Do you know all these people?" he called.

"Since the outward journey!"

The mayor nodded as though this were a recognised form of civic engagement in Goldhain.

The site inspection developed into a high-speed state visit.

VII. The Chain of Departments

In the council chamber, the points turned left this time.

Nami and the mayor sped into the finance committee, where the cost of lengthy official routes was under discussion. They left at the far end of the room, crossed the archive and arrived in the planning department eight seconds later.

"This is faster than the lift," called the mayor.

"Much faster!"

The slide carried them onwards to the post room. As they passed, they received two stamped envelopes. The lost property office gave Nami the pool shoe back even though it was not hers. At the registry office, the mayor was accidentally handed a change-of-name form.

The other participants followed behind them. The clerk lost her pen, caught it again on the next bend and continued writing during the ride. At every junction, the head of planning shouted "Interesting!", which nobody accepted as an

apology.

When they landed in the mayor's office again, the puddle was smaller. The mayor remained seated on the carpet for a moment.

"How long did the entire circuit take?" he asked.

The clerk checked her watch. "One minute and forty-two seconds."

The usual official route took thirty-five minutes.

Everyone looked at the slide.

VIII. The Grand Plan

That afternoon, the route was not closed. It was surveyed.

Lena arrived with a notebook, Lin with a tool bag and Leyla with a spirit level, although nobody knew what for. Nami explained every bend. The mayor stood before the plan and began marking departments with coloured pins.

"If we build a stopping bay here," he said, "the post room could receive direct deliveries."

"And a dry lane for files here," added the clerk.

The head of planning drew in a second set of points. Nobody left him unattended.

Nami suggested padded run-outs. Lin wanted sensors that could distinguish people from files. Lena insisted on a manual stop button. Leyla straightened the sign at the entrance, which was indeed four millimetres out of level.

Iman sat in the centre of the table and held down one corner of the plan with two fabric tentacles.

"He is the project manager now," said Nami.

The mayor regarded the plush octopus. "Does he have administrative experience?"

"Since this morning."

"More than some committees."

The minutes granted Iman the status of advisory observer without voting rights.

The meeting lasted three hours. In that time, it produced four variants, seven cost estimates and an argument about whether a slide inside the town hall should be treated as a corridor, a lift or a body of water. The legal department provisionally chose "moving traffic space with moisture".

Nami drew little waves wherever the journey was especially fast. The mayor added red circles to departments that needed to communicate frequently. Gradually, the accident became a network. Not more beautiful than before, but more useful.

When everyone left the room, the first wet plan remained on the table. The ink had run, but the route itself was still clearly visible: from the swimming pool to the mayor's office, as though it had always belonged there.

IX. The Question of Dryness

The greatest problem was not speed. It was clothing.

People who worked in the town hall did not wish to arrive dripping at meetings. The water committee proposed towel stations. The planning department designed warm-air tunnels. The mayor considered waterproof ceremonial robes until someone showed him a drawing.

Nami tested various solutions. A bathrobe clung to her back at bend five. A rain cape billowed and briefly turned her into a very fast sail. A large umbrella lasted precisely until the first bend.

Eventually, Lin developed a narrow dry capsule that glided through the tube on a cushion of water. It looked like a cross between a bath and a pneumatic-post container.

The mayor climbed in, travelled from Citizen Services to the post room and arrived with dry shoes.

"Approved," he said.

The open water lane remained for Nami. "The traditional route," she explained.

Iman received a tiny capsule with a viewing window. He fitted perfectly and looked even more official than before.

X. The Trial Run

The entire town hall assembled for the final trial run.

Each department sent one person. The post room loaded a capsule with letters. The archive sent an empty folder because it did not yet trust the route with its files. The lost property office sent the pool shoe on a circuit to determine whether it was missed anywhere.

Nami set off first with Iman. The new points responded cleanly. At the stopping bay, the water slowed them gently, a hatch opened and the post room accepted its letters.

The post-room manager stamped the back of Nami's hand out of habit. Nami received a blue circle, Iman a tiny one on his pass. Then an air cushion pushed them back into the main stream.

The finance committee waited at the next stopping bay. It had one ring binder, two calculators and a basket of dry socks. The capsule accepted everything except the basket, which was too wide. After a brief consultation, the socks were sent individually. They arrived complete but in a different order.

The mayor watched the test from the control room. He made a small mark for every successful junction. After the tenth, the list resembled an

official victory report.

Next came Citizen Services. Two visitors applauded because they believed the ride was part of the entertainment. At the registry office, the couple from that morning were now married. They had their photograph taken in front of the tube.

The dry capsules followed without incident. Only the pool shoe disappeared. The lost property office accepted this calmly; it was its natural condition.

This time, Nami finished in a padded basin inside the mayor's office. No paper became wet. The chain of office stayed in place.

"That," said the mayor, "is municipal progress."

XI. The Ceremonial Decision

The town council met that evening.

Item seven on the agenda was: Unintended slide connection between leisure pool and town hall; potential use. The mayor reported objectively. The clerk provided times. The planning department showed drawings that now contained considerably fewer dashed lines.

Nami sat at the back with Iman on her lap. She had expected to apologise. Instead, they asked her about bend radii, speed and the best position for a second entrance.

"At the pool," she said. "Otherwise the adventure starts in the office, and that is backwards."

The council voted.

Eleven members were in favour, two against, and one abstained out of concern for her hairstyle. The connection was approved as an "express official route of recreational origin".

The mayor held up the resolution. "Then we need an opening tomorrow."

"With a ribbon?" asked Nami.

"With a ribbon."

Iman received his own visitor's pass. Under occupation, the clerk entered Slide Companion.

XII. The Official Route

The following morning, the queue stretched across the town-hall square.

Some people wanted to try the slide. Others merely wanted to see whether the mayor would do it again. Ruby sold cinnamon rolls shaped like little spirals. Lin checked the points. Lena tested the stop button three times. Leyla straightened the opening ribbon.

Nami stood before it holding the large scissors. Iman sat on a cushion beside her and wore his pass.

The mayor gave a speech about short routes, courageous planning mistakes and the duty of government occasionally to arrive where no one expected it.

Nami cut the ribbon.

The crowd cheered. Water rushed. The first capsule set off carrying a sack of town-hall post. Then the mayor slid, this time without a helmet



but holding firmly to his chain of office.

Nami followed with Iman.

Above the city, the sun shone through the transparent tube. People waved below. In the town hall, the doors stood open and every department knew when the next wave would come.

For the first time, an official route in Goldhain was faster than its approval process.

Finale - Terminus

That evening, Nami returned to the leisure pool.

The official opening was over. The ribbon hung in two pieces from the railing, the town hall was drying and Iman now had a stamp on his visitor's pass.

The lifeguard waited beside the run-out. "Well?" he asked. "Is the last section comfortable?"

Nami set Iman on the edge. "Very. You just land a little far away."

"How far?"

"Three departments, one committee and a mayor's office."

The lifeguard looked at the slide. "Should I close it?"

A dry capsule returned from the direction of the town hall. Inside lay the cinnamon roll Ruby had wrapped for Nami that morning, together with a napkin bearing the mayor's-office stamp. Iman received a tiny biscuit that fitted precisely between two of his fabric tentacles.

Nami sat on a bench and shared the cinnamon roll. Through the pool's glass wall, she watched the tube cross the street. A capsule glided past every few minutes: post, files and, on one occasion, a bouquet. The people below barely

looked up now. Goldhain had already incorporated the impossible into its daily routine.

The calm voice came from the loudspeaker: "Next connection to the town hall in two minutes."

Nami grinned. "Absolutely not."

She picked up Iman, climbed the stairs once more and sat down at the start. The dark tube waited below her, and beyond it Goldhain and a government that had learnt that detours were sometimes the fastest routes.

"Just one quick ride," she said.

The gate opened.