

(Printed with the demonstration version of Fade In)

EPISODE 205

NARRATOR

Let's begin.

October is leaving behind everything she's ever known, as she and Fish steam away from Herovia aboard the okay ship The Agatha. They plan to track down the Elemental Creature of Earth once they dock in Sandlantis, but for now they're stuck on this boat. Not super interesting, but it was so tough to track them down after that fiasco with the Creature of Air so, I'm taking no chances. At least everyone else on board is a Giant Insect, which is pinning October's Herovian xeno-racism hardcore. So that should lead somewhere.

TEA TIME

NARRATOR

We join them now for tea. Stuffy Spottingham the labybug and Chirpy Singer, his perky cricket fiancée, share a table with Duchess Antingburg the unpleasant. They've all got damp cups. October and Fish sit on a third side, cup-less. Fish is polishing off a platter of tiny sandwiches. The rolling waves of the Reddorblack Sea and the upper deck are visible through the windows lining every wall. This dining room is halfway between a nice hotel and a dining hall at summer camp.

SHELLDON SPOTTINGHAM

Tea, Miss With Legs?

FISH WITH LEGS

No thanks, I still want a mimosa.

SHELLDON SPOTTINGHAM

That waitress' tardiness will be reflected in her tip. Miss Jones, tea?

CHIRPY SINGER

Oh darling, humans don't drink tea, only the blood of their enemies.

OCTOBER

We drink tea.

CHIRPY SINGER

And the blood of your enemies?

OCTOBER

No. That's Draculas. And mosquitoes. And ticks. That's a weird stereotype to have about humans.

CHIRPY SINGER

Huh. You learn something new every day. Duchess, could I pour you some more tea?

NARRATOR

The Duchess pins her with an ice-cold stare, her antennae stiff with indignation. Chirpy shrinks.

CHIRPY SINGER

Oh! Sorry, 'your grace', I'm--

DUCHESS ANTINGBURG

Mind your manners, Miss Singer. You're not married yet.

SHELLDON SPOTTINGHAM

I'll thank you not to speak to my fiancée that way, your grace.

DUCHESS ANTINGBURG

Don't be so sensitive. I'm helping her. Imagine if she slipped up like that with the Immortal Queen!

FISH WITH LEGS

You guys know the Queen?

CHIRPY SINGER

No, of course not.

DUCHESS ANTINGBURG

I met her once when I was a young larva. My father played croquet with her late 16th husband.

SHELLDON SPOTTINGHAM

Isn't that lovely.

DUCHESS ANTINGBURG

Don't be jealous, Lord Spottingham. You can't expect The Immortal Queen to meet with foreigners.

FISH WITH LEGS

Foreigners? I thought you guys all shared a castle.

DUCHESS ANTINGBURG

Hardly. You see, Elemental Creature, Lord Spottingham here is not a true Antlantian.

SHELLDON SPOTTINGHAM

No, my lineage does not stem from Antlanta, though my brother and I grew up there. My father is in fact fourth in line for the Coccinellian throne. He nonetheless holds great sway with the peerage. But as you say, your grace, I am no ant.

(beat)

CHIRPY SINGER

This trip has been my first time out of Atlanta. Sheldon's been lovely enough to take me.

SHELLDON SPOTTINGHAM

Yes, I thought it would be nice to show my beautiful fiancée all that the world has to offer. Touring the colonies makes for a wonderful vacation; Sandlantis is full of history and exotic flavour.

OCTOBER

And political unrest...

FISH WITH LEGS

That's so exciting for you two!

DUCHESS ANTINGBURG

I usually avoid the colonies. Atlanta is so much more civilized. But my niece Antoinette has been staying in Casamanta to write one of her famous plays and I promised the poor girl I would visit.

OCTOBER

So you're taking a vacation in Casamanta despite the violent protests against the imperial occupation?

DUCHESS ANTINGBURG

(ignoring October)

Ant-ony and Cleo-ant-ra, she's calling it. Antoinette writes the most delightfully distracting plays.

CHIRPY SINGER

Are you nervous about the protests, Miss Jones? You shouldn't be, Sheldon says the local law enforcement have it all under control.

SHELLDON SPOTTINGHAM

It's unpleasant business, but nothing a few Warrior Ants can't handle.

OCTOBER

Ha. It takes more than just occupying territory. You need honour to be a warrior. You see, Fish--

FISH WITH LEGS

Don't include me in this.

OCTOBER (CONT'D)

--These ants are all over Meditterantia and now they're even poking feelers into Breezil, but your military doesn't intimidate us.

SHELLDON SPOTTINGHAM

We have no military presence in Breezil.

OCTOBER

Right, because the MAGI Coalition is exclusively a "trade" deal with the Mystical Animals...

FISH WITH LEGS

You'll have to forgive my soon-to-be best friend. Her people skills need work. I'll put it on the Abby list.

CHIRPY SINGER

Abby list?

DUCHESS ANTINGBURG

No need to apologize, Elemental Creature. Thus far, this voyage has been a fascinating study in the nuances of being uneducated.

MANDY AND BRODY

NARRATOR

Mandy Mandel the mustard-dressed mantis hurries into this uncomfortable scene, tying on her apron.

MANDY MANDEL

I am so sorry. I was busy helping the professor down in the cargo hold--

SHELLDON SPOTTINGHAM

That's all well and good, Mandy, but our friends would like to order something.

MANDY MANDEL

Yes, Lord Spottingham.

FISH WITH LEGS

Wait, I thought you were the maid. You made everything in our room so shiny.

MANDY MANDEL

We're a little short-staffed right now.

OCTOBER

How short-staffed exactly?

MANDY MANDEL

I'm your waitress, maid, bartender, chief steward, cook, second mate, third mate, nurse, and engineer. Apparently.

OCTOBER

Wow.

FISH WITH LEGS

That's a lot of things.

MANDY MANDEL

I can handle it. I think.

CHIRPY SINGER

She was telling us earlier that she's a genuine native of Sanlandtis. Isn't that fascinating?

(beat)

Oh! And they don't really eat sand in Sandlantis, it's a misconception!

SHELLDON SPOTTINGHAM

Oh, Chirpy. Please.

OCTOBER

Glad you got that out before any of us embarrassed ourselves.

MANDY MANDEL

...Are you ready to order?

FISH WITH LEGS

Yes! A virgin mimosa for the fish with legs.

MANDY MANDEL

Alright.

SHELLDON SPOTTINGHAM

Miss Singer and I are quite fine, thank you Mandy.

OCTOBER

I'm good.

DUCHESS ANTINGBURG

I shan't be ordering anything--

MANDY MANDEL

Okay, then, I'll--

DUCHESS ANTINGBURG

I wasn't finished.

MANDY MANDEL

Oh--

DUCHESS ANTINGBURG

Bring me a pot of hot water and retrieve my tea case from my room. But don't enter my room. You need only open the door a crack and retrieve it from the small table on the right.

MANDY MANDEL

Yes, your grace.

DUCHESS ANTINGBURG

I want your word that you will not rifle through my things with your unruly mantis claws.

MANDY MANDEL

You have my word, your grace.

DUCHESS ANTINGBURG

Good. Now go.

NARRATOR

Mandy does a feeble curtsy. She then rushes back out of the dining room and collides with Brody Body, the beetle all in black.

MANDY MANDEL

Oh! Brody.

NARRATOR

He catches her romantically around the waist and draws her close, then spots their audience through the window and stiffens. Mandy's antenna twitch bashfully.

DUCHESS ANTINGBURG

Ugh, sickening. It was unseemly the way they carried on after we left port. I saw their antennae touching, right out in the open! That should only happen between husband and wife, by the Eternal Flame.

NARRATOR

Mandy touches Brody's face, then scurries off across the upper deck toward the main stairs.

CHIRPY SINGER

Darling, would you go fetch my purse from our room? I'd like to leave a little something for that poor overworked mantis girl...

SHELLDON SPOTTINGHAM

Are you certain, my dear? I wouldn't want to abandon you...

NARRATOR

He subtly indicates the Duchess with his lower hand.

CHIRPY SINGER

I can manage.

SHELLDON SPOTTINGHAM

Then I'll be quick, Miss Singer. Your kindness becomes us both.

NARRATOR

He squeezes her hand, then rises with a slight bow.

SHELLDON SPOTTINGHAM

Please excuse me, everyone. I'll return shortly.

NARRATOR

He heads for the door and passes Brody, lingering by the doorway. Brody pulls his cap down anti-socially.

SHELLDON SPOTTINGHAM

Good day.

NARRATOR

Brody nods sullenly at Shelldon's nod, then slouches slowly into the room, still avoiding eye contact. Wow, he has worse social skills than October.

FISH WITH LEGS

Hello, new friend. How are you doing this fine day?

BRODY BODY

Yeah, that's nice. Listen, we just left Breezillian jurisdiction and have officially entered international waters. Do you care? No, but Captain Hummer thinks these announcements make us more legitimate.

OCTOBER

More legitimate?

FISH WITH LEGSS

But the Agatha is already the premiere vessel of the Reddorblack Sea!

CHIRPY SINGER

Yes, she's a lovely boat that's reliably served noble Empire passengers for 15 years running.

BRODY BODY

Yeah, whatever.

NARRATOR

He turns and stomps quickly away and out of the dining room.

DUCHESS ANTINGBURG

What a rude creature. But I suppose one can't expect proper etiquette from a peasant.

NARRATOR

Chirpy crosses all her arms.

DUCHESS ANTINGBURG

Tell me about yourself, Elemental Creature. I must say, your presence on this blasted vessel was quite a pleasant surprise. I was afraid I'd be forced to socialize with the likes of these two.

FISH WITH LEGS

Okay... I'm Fish with Legs. I'm a fish with legs. I'm the Elemental Creature of Water, and I'd like to address what I consider to be pretty rude behaviour that you're using with my new friends.

DUCHESS ANTINGBURG

How droll! You can't be rude to a human, they don't have manners. Just... look at it. Missing so many parts, and all soft and oily on the outside. I believe they smell with those holes in their face.

OCTOBER

It's called a nose.

DUCHESS ANTINGBURG

And the moistness of its ball eyes. Truly disturbing. Not really a person at all.

FISH WITH LEGS

Okay, so. Please take this as constructive criticism and not a personal attack... but this is the particular kind of behaviour I was--

DUCHESS ANTINGBURG

Still, humans can't help the way they're made. Not like those slum-jumpers, who choose to overstay their welcome and reach above their station.

CHIRPY SINGER

Slum-jumper!?

DUCHESS ANTINGBURG

Insects like you have no respect for structure and order... It's in your nature. Look at those flaccid, loose antennae!

CHIRPY SINGER

(scoffs)

FISH WITH LEGS

I think that hurt Chirpy's feelings, so maybe we could apologize to her?

DUCHESS ANTINGBURG

Apologize!?! To a slum-jumper!?!

[chirpy stands abruptly]

CHIRPY SINGER

I think I'll wait for Shelldon out on the deck.

NARRATOR

Chirpy heads for the door.

DUCHESS ANTINGBURG

Good riddance.

FISH WITH LEGS

Okay! October, I need the room. The Duchess and I are going to have a special chat.

OCTOBER

What?

FISH WITH LEGS

A special one-on-one seminar about tolerance. And I don't think your presence will be constructive.

OCTOBER

Oh. Okay. See you later I guess.

FISH WITH LEGS

Love you, see you later!

OCTOBER

...Sure? You're... Swell. Too. Goodbye.

FISH WITH LEGS

Now, Duchess... [ad lib a respect/tolerance talk]

UPPER DECK

NARRATOR

October leaves and steps out onto the upper deck. Chirpy is crouched by the railing furthest from the cabin, near the front of the ship. October skulks forward across the open deck, past the cushioned beach chairs littered under the the shelter of the freestanding roof.

OCTOBER

Chirpy?

CHIRPY SINGER

Skreep!

NARRATOR

Chirpy jumps, popping to her feet. October freezes.

CHIRPY SINGER

Oh, Miss Jones! You startled me.

OCTOBER

Oh, uh. Sorry.

NARRATOR

October awkwardly joins her at the railing. Down below, Brody is disassembling the cargo crane on the main deck. A big piece is already wrapped in oilcloth at his feet.

OCTOBER

So that was pretty rough in there. I didn't think bugs were like that even with their own kind.

CHIRPY SINGER

(laughs) Their own kind? Oh, Miss Jones... Ants like Duchess Antingburg will never see me as one of their own.

NARRATOR

Chirpy pushes off the railing, and drops full-length into a deck chair. October follows cautiously, pulling out her book. She perches on a second chair and starts drawing.

CHIRPY SINGER

You see... The nobility of the Royal Ant Empire is deeply rooted. The Duchy of Antcaster and the Spottinghams have been allied for decades. We run into the Duchess at every social event we attend and she is the worst. As you've seen.

OCTOBER

Yeah, she's pretty bad.

CHIRPY SINGER

You have no idea...

OCTOBER

But it's not like I give a bag of newts what some bug thinks of me.

CHIRPY SINGER

Hm... It must be nice to be an outsider. You don't have to care what anyone thinks.

OCTOBER

I'm a researcher, not an outsider.

CHIRPY SINGER

Doesn't one follow the other?

NARRATOR

Chirpy sits up. October quickly closes her book.

CHIRPY SINGER

I used to be an outsider. Before I entered their world. Though in some ways I still am one.

NARRATOR

She strolls toward the water wheel at the back of the boat, leaving October behind.

OCTOBER

Um... Are you--? Okay.

NARRATOR

October hesitantly gets to her feet to follow.

CHIRPY SINGER

Atlanta is the most beautiful place in the world. It's a sprawling paradise of a city, and it's massive. It flows like a living thing. But I'm not from there. I'm from a little factory town that sits right where the Grand Pan-ant-ma Canal reaches the ocean. I'm common. My family makes boats.

[they're at the water wheel]

Like this one.

OCTOBER

...Huh.

NARRATOR

Chirpy strokes the back railing thoughtfully, her eyes on the carved water wheel. Her plum skirt and long antennae whip in the wind coming off the water. October sits on the stairs going up to the pilothouse and resumes drawing.

CHIRPY SINGER

We'd build masterpieces. Each as beautiful as this one. Once we finished, they'd go off to have their names burned in and we'd never touch them again. But on their way out of the city, they'd pass through the canal. And I'd watch each take its maiden voyage and dream of boarding it and being taken far away. Eventually I got tired of dreaming, and I took myself away. To Atlanta.

I met the Spottingshams at a show one night. I'm a musician. And... for a while, Lord Spottingham and I had a perfect life. We went to jazz clubs and fancy restaurants. We were in love. It was a dream come true. But that... woman!

NARRATOR

She stomps her foot.

CHIRPY SINGER

And people like her, they make it all so hard. I finally am one of the people aboard the boat, but it's never as simple as that. Sometimes I wonder if I wasn't better off on the shore.

NARRATOR

Chirpy takes a seat next to October.

(beat)

OCTOBER

I don't know why you want her approval. All those posh bugs are just elitist. You have this queen bug who bathes in blood to keep her youth--

CHIRPY SINGER

What?

OCTOBER

--And these rich bugs who look down on the poor bugs. And the poor bugs have no chance to make something of themselves.

CHIRPY SINGER

You do know bug is an incredibly offensive slur?

OCTOBER

Sorry "Giant Insect" --

CHIRPY SINGER

Well some people prefer Giant Invertebrate. It's more inclusive for Giant Arachnids and--

OCTOBER

Okay. Whatever, my point is: that's why Herovia is great. Everyone is equal. We all work for the High Council and the High Council works for Herovia.

CHIRPY SINGER

But doesn't your council still have power over everyone else?

OCTOBER

Well, yeah... But you don't just get put on the council because your father is from royalty. You get power in Herovia by working hard and proving yourself. Which is what I'm doing.

CHIRPY SINGER

I once thought hard work and determination was all one needed in life, but... I'm not so sure these days... It seems so much easier to move up with a head start.

OCTOBER

Well as soon as you stop believing it can work, it won't.
That's what makes the work so hard.

CHIRPY SINGER

Hm. I suppose we're not so different you and I... Perhaps we
could have been friends in some other world where the
borders were--

OCTOBER

Hold on. Do you hear that?

CHIRPY SINGER

Pardon me?

OCTOBER

Sh.

NARRATOR

...I don't know what her deal is, all I'm getting is the
water wheel and--

[muffled angry voices]

Oh, what do you know.

CHIRPY SINGER

Oh. I hear it!

*[muffled voices continue for a beat
then stop]*

OCTOBER

(beat)

They stopped.

NARRATOR

October stands up, alert. No, I dunno, your hearing is
better than mine. She rushes forward around the upper cabin,
Chirpy bounding beside her, and they just catch a glimpse of
something dark going overboard by the ship's nose.

[splash]

OCTOBER

What the hex was that?

NARRATOR

They run down the steps to the main deck, colliding with the
foredeck's railing to look down over the water. Just
bubbles.

OCTOBER

Was that Brody?

CHIRPY SINGER

Oh my word, what do we do?

HUMPHREY HUMMER

Flaming husk, hold on!

NARRATOR

The cicada captain appears to throw open the emergency locker in the front of the main cabin. He grabs a bright orange ring, with a rope attached, and heaves it out over the water. It bobs, mingling with the last of the bubbles from Brody's disappearance. The waves are quiet. No Brody.

OCTOBER

...Fish with Legs!

NARRATOR

October is running, sprinting up the steps--

OCTOBER

Fish with Legs!

NARRATOR

--to the upper deck.

OCTOBER

Fish--! (panting)

NARRATOR

She throws open the door to the dining room.

FISH WITH LEGS

We were scared of the Draculas without taking a chance to get to know them. We were being prejudiced.

DUCHESS ANTINGBURG

I still don't see how this story is relevant to--

OCTOBER

Fish, Brody fell overboard!

DUCHESS ANTINGBURG

(gasps)

NARRATOR

Fish with Legs springs up and onto the table--

FISH WITH LEGS

Fish with Legs swimming powers!

NARRATOR

--Then hops over, heading for the door. She passes October.

Where? FISH WITH LEGS

At the bow! OCTOBER

The--?! FISH WITH LEGS

The front! OCTOBER

NARRATOR
Fish with Legs runs, springboards of the upper deck's railing, rising into the air, clears the foredeck, and dives into the water ahead of the boat.

...Wow. OCTOBER

MURDER...

NARRATOR
October rushes back down, the Duchess trailing behind her. Sheldon and the dashing Professor Waspington O'Connell have joined the captain and Chirpy.

Stay calm, everyone! HUMPHREY HUMMER

What was that yelling? Was there a fight? SHELLDON SPOTTINGHAM

Captain Hummer, I demand an explanation. Why is your staff jumping overboard? DUCHESS ANTINGBURG

What's going on? SHELLDON SPOTTINGHAM

Brody went overboard! CHIRPY SINGER

What!?! On purpose? SHELLDON SPOTTINGHAM

I can assure you that this was some sort of accident that was entirely the fault of the victim. HUMPHREY HUMMER

No, I saw someone running away! I think he was pushed. CHIRPY SINGER

HUMPHREY HUMMER

Absurd!

WASPIGTON O'CONNELL

Shouldn't you be doing something, Humphrey? He's your employee.

HUMPHREY HUMMER

I threw the life preserver! And technically he's a freelance worker, so I'm not liable for--

OCTOBER

Fish with Legs went down there, she's-- Fish!

NARRATOR

Fish with Legs emerges over the railing, climbing the life preserver rope. She looks... bedraggled. Maybe it's the expression on her face. No Brody. She drips onto the deck.

FISH WITH LEGS

I couldn't find him, October...

WASPIGTON O'CONNELL

Humphrey--

HUMPHREY HUMMER

I... Um...

FISH WITH LEGS

I looked all around. I swear.

OCTOBER

It's okay, Fish with Legs...

NARRATOR

October puts an arm around Fish with Legs, soaking her sleeve.

OCTOBER

You said you saw someone, Chirpy. Where'd they go?

CHIRPY SINGER

I-- I don't know, the edge of the roof blocked my view. But I definitely saw someone.

HUMPHREY HUMMER

Are we certain it wasn't just some sort of accident?

OCTOBER

It may have been, but if Chirpy saw someone--

MANDY MANDEL

Oh! I was expecting you to be upstairs.

NARRATOR

Mandy steps out onto the foredeck. That's... everyone on the boat now, minus Brody. There's a fraught moment where everyone stares at her. Shelldon takes off his hat.

MANDY MANDEL

Here you are, your grace, hot water. And I've retrieved your tea case.

NARRATOR

She smiles hopefully, extending the pot of hot water and large wooden box in her claws.

MANDY MANDEL

What's wrong?

HUMPHREY HUMMER

Listen, Mandy, come over here a moment.

NARRATOR

He leads her away, she's still clutching the box and the teapot. They speak quietly for a moment and then--

[teabox & water pot fall]

DUCHESS ANTINGBURG

My teabox!

SHELLDON SPOTTINGHAM

Duchess--

HUMPHREY HUMMER

Mandy, wait!

NARRATOR

Mandy shoves through to the railing and clings to it, leaning, looking down at the bobbing life preserver... Humphrey gets a hold of her arm so she doesn't go over. He gives her a bracing pat on the back as she collapses onto the railing, sobbing. Everyone else just sort of... watches. That's kind of a bummer. October leans over to the curled up Fish with Legs...

OCTOBER

Fish, we should look for clues. If Chirpy saw someone, this might have been...

[thunder rumbles in the distance]

...Murder.

NARRATOR

She casts her eyes around the deck, examining the Giant Insects around them. Who done it? The frugal captain? The

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

straight-laced nobleman? The conveniently tardy waitress?
We'll find out next time! Let's stop.