

47 Southbound

Vignettes from Azuaveria — Episode 6

@dressupgeekout

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The southbound Number 47 bus, resplendent in its “express” livery of turquoise and wisteria, came to a screeching halt at the southwest corner of Port and Laysan, where Bisky was waiting with that pensive expression plastered onto her face. She may as well have carved a slit in her lower lip, considering how long and forceful she would bite it. She was never aware of it, though. When you’re lost in thought, your muzzle will do whatever it very well pleases. Simply not enough brainpower to charge your thoughts *and also* keep you conscious enough to worry about what your face looks like.

The bus door opened with a muted squeak. “Port—and—Laysan,” announced an electronic voice in the most stereotypically Sokuiter accent imaginable. Bisky, as well as every other Sokuiter, found the voice perfectly amusing. If Port Sokuiter ever had a quintessential inside joke, this was it. She also heard the sound of some glitzy pop music emanating from someone’s boom box. Bisky swiped her TranspoCard through the machine and it accepted the transaction with an upbeat chime, as if graced by a magic wand from a cartoon show. The digital display, one of those older models which looked like a pocket calculator, confirmed the remaining balance of \$4.75. She tried to remember to fill it up at some point.

“Afternoon,” said the bus driver, a stout male cat in his white uniform. Bisky responded in the traditional Mephitidaeian manner—briefly touching her forehead with an index finger—and then muttered to herself, “Why did I do that?” as she waded towards the back of the bus to find a seat.

Mostly business suits and work-blouses on this bus. An elderly graymuzzle and his awkward shopping cart full of seemingly random stuff nearly blocked Bisky and her tail from passing through. Overall, the bus was reasonably packed. Several animals were forced to stand and hold onto the railing. Bisky accepted she

would have to be one of them, and lowered her tail into an unnatural position to make room for others. Gotta be polite.

The bus pulled out and began its stop-and-go journey down Port Avenue. The sky opened and closed itself periodically, alternating between clouds and sunshine, typical South Azuaverian weather. Bisky found herself uncomfortably close to the snep teenager, seated and clutching his stereochain with unreasonable force, bobbing his head in a manner which did not match the music. It was a rather modern and attractive device, with glossy accents of brushed eucalyptus. Bisky was not musically inclined, but she knew the blingy noise oozing out of his boom box was outright gagworthy, absolutely unworthy of being touched by such a nice stereo. At least he got off only a couple of stops later, near the performing arts plaza. She stole his seat, relieved.

She would roll all the way to Lomacquirage Street, nearly the end of the line, in the Cargo District, then head west and make a couple more turns until she reached her apartment, one of the cheap and common units made out of repurposed shipping containers. And this truly was the center of the Cargo District, where animals drove forklifts down the streets nearly as often as actual cars. It was a dense maze, frequently unnavigable, where home life integrated seamlessly with longshorebeast life. Sometimes the streets themselves would be reconfigured in order to make room for more shipping containers. Aye, frequently recounted was the legend of a drunk dockworker who mistook his house for actual cargo and accidentally loaded it onto a container ship bound for a remote island. He had to wait six months before his home finally arrived back at home. Bisky didn't believe it.

Lomacquirage Street was the most accessible drag in the District, that is, it most closely resembled the rest of the city, where the boundaries between work and home were more thickly delineated. If animals from other neighborhoods of Port Sokuit found themselves in the Cargo District for any reason whatsoever, in the majority of cases it would be for an attraction on Lomacquirage Street. And in the majority of *those* cases, it would be to take a tour of the Maritime Museum, or have several drinks at Schooner Bailey's, which incidentally were her second and fourth most favorite places in the Cargo District, respectively.

And all the while, Bisky thought. She thought about Dalebius. She thought

about that stupid fox with that stupid backpack. She thought about Joyce and she thought about taskiak. She thought about the family bakery, and she thought about Gardenia. And balhámotesse, and what it would take to become a licensed skipper, and her financial situation, and the photo she wasn't able to capture, and whether she needed to pick up some oat milk from the grocery store, and that fire which broke out in the Leeward Neighborhood the other day, and the possibility that she thought too damn much and might need to see someone about that.

Before she knew it, she stood at her front door. She unlocked the steel cross-lashings which held the door in place, and headed inside. Three flights up the stairs and she'd be in her studio apartment, her most favorite place in the Cargo District, where she would drop her bag on the palmwood floor, take a shot of dioxylycin, and fall on her couch muzzle-first, listless and numb from the pain of her own thoughts.