



Episode 01: The Left Behinds

Intro

[Din of reporter voices in the background]

Captain Devol: Can I have your attention please. Hey--quiet down and listen up. Thank you. I'm Captain Devol, and I'm in charge of the federal task force searching for the five students who went missing from Cheltenham Academy.

We have determined that the students are in fact missing. Although we initially thought they might be hiding on the school grounds, that is not the case and this is not some sort of prank. The students are in serious danger and must be located. Time is of the essence.

[00:00:30] There is certain information we have uncovered that can't yet be released due to the sensitive nature of this investigation. And I won't be taking any questions.

However, I do have a brief update: We have obtained an audio recording device that one of the students was using around the time they all went missing. We have decided to release the first portion of this audio today in the hopes that somebody hears something, anything, that we might have missed. We encourage you to reach out with any tips, clues or suggestions. You can contact us at the website we set up: cheltenhamacademypodcast.com. That's C-H-E-L-T-E-N academypodcast.com.

[00:01:08] To be perfectly blunt: We need your help. These kids need your help. You might be their only hope.

[Reporter voices louder]

No, no, put your hands down -- I already said, there will be no questions taken. Let's just get right to the audio.

[Beep of audio recorder]

[Transition music playing]

Scene 1: Kody's Dorm Room

Kody: [00:01:47] Testing, testing. Is this on? Mic check. Ok, all good.

Hi everyone, Kody here. Today is March 24, 2020, and I'm a 6th grader at The Cheltenham Academy for Advanced Students. I'm making this recording as part of—

[Door opens]

Nova: Come on Kody! Quit goofing around and pack your bag. We need to get down to the front office. Mom and Dad will be here soon to pick us up.

Kody: Nova, you're interrupting my school project. And don't worry, I'm already packed. *[Sound of a zipper]* I just need to capture some audio before we go. As I was saying, ahem...

[Into the mic] Our scene begins inside the nation's most elite boarding school, where exceptional children live, learn and—

Nova: [00:02:26] We might be away from school for weeks, or even months. Don't leave anything important behind. There's no time for this. Put your tape recorder away and get to the office.

Kody: Ha, tape recorder. This is a digital voice recorder. It can hold more than 500 hours of audio but is small enough to fit in a shirt pocket. With a tape recorder you can barely—

Nova: Skip the infomercial please. If we're not in the office for roll-call, we're going to get detention. I can't have that on my permanent record.

Kody: Come on, nobody's getting detention. School has been suspended indefinitely because of the coronavirus.

[Into the mic, serious tone] It's a time of lawlessness and chaos...

Nova: I'm going to put this in terms a movie super fan like you will appreciate. We're at the scene where the zombie apocalypse is upon us. We have to evacuate before we're overrun and eaten, and the helicopter is getting us from the office. Let's go.

Kody: [00:03:19] And?

Nova: And what?

Kody: You gotta punctuate a speech like that with a memorable catchphrase — like: "Get to da choppa!"

Nova: *[Sigh]* Fine. "Get to the chopper."

Kody: Noooo. With the Arnold accent. "Get to da choppa!"

Nova: “Get to da choppa!”

Kody: Ha! Predator. Classic. Ok, fine. Let me grab a couple of things and I’ll meet you down there soon. Hey, Nova?

Nova: What?

Kody: Are you worried? About the virus, on top of all other weird stuff that’s been happening?

Nova: We’ll be fine Kody. As long as we’re smart, and follow the rules, everything should turn out fine.

Kody: Thanks, Nova.

Nova: Now, hurry up.

Kody: *[Into the mic]* We fade out of the dorm room scene with our hero—

Nova: *[Yelling from out in the hall]* Kody!

Kody: Yikes! End scene.

Scene 2: The Front Office

[Transition music playing]

[00:04:15] *[Phone ringing, busy office sounds]*

Mr. Z: *[nervous]* Um, ok, now how many students am I gonna to have to watch?

[car honking outside, helicopter whirring in the distance]

Ms. Winston: Let me see *[shuffling papers]*... 347 to the bus station, 229 to the airports, 147 out by car, 26 by boat and 11 by helicopter. And I’ll be transporting 3 myself. That leaves only 4 students who will be staying here. Oh, and you’ll also need to make sure Capone gets food and water.

Mr. Z: 4 students AND a guinea pig? Oh man, that’s a lot of responsibility.

Ms. Winston: Mr. Z, you manage to handle 20 students in your art classes every day.

Mr. Z: Yeah, but that’s just, like, class. That’s teaching art — I can do that. I rock at that. This thing you want — that’s admin stuff. This is practically running the whole school.

Ms. Winston: Watching 4 kids is not—

Mr. Z: And a guinea pig!

Ms. Winston: Watching 4 kids and a guinea pig is nothing like running the school.

Mr. Z: [00:05:13] I mean, that should be your job. You're assistant to the headmaster...

Ms. Winston: Assistant headmaster.

Mr. Z: ...so you must like responsibility. You probably crave responsibility. Not me. Count me out. You can do it.

Ms. Winston: Trust me, if we had a better option we'd much rather it not be you. Every other staff member has family or friends or pets at home that need them. Except you. You didn't even have plants to water.

Mr. Z: See! That's what I mean! Nobody relies on me for anything because they know I don't want to be responsible when things go wrong.

Ms. Winston: We even talked about putting Nova in charge instead of you...

Mr. Z: Yes! That's perfect!

Ms. Winston: ...but the school's policy and procedures explicitly prohibit leaving a student in charge when there's a staff member available who has not been incapacitated.

Mr. Z: Hmmm. How incapacitated would I need to be, and would that be painful?

Ms. Winston: [00:06:06] Everything will be fine. These are middle and high schoolers. They know how to feed and care for themselves. All you have to do is keep them from burning the place down.

Mr. Z: What? They burn things? Oh no.

Ms. Winston: [exasperated] It's just a figure of....never mind. [Door opens] Tyler! What are you doing back in the main office? You're supposed to be waiting in my car. We're leaving soon.

Tyler: I had to get out of there. Those other two kids got all upset and started crying. They think you're going to sell us to a prison labor camp in Siberia.

Ms. Winston: Wh-what? Why? Why would they think that?

Tyler: Because that's what I told them. It's the only thing that makes sense. The headmaster goes missing a few weeks back—and suddenly, you're in charge. Then this whole virus situation, and school gets canceled. Meanwhile, they stopped serving chocolate milk in the cafeteria. It all adds up.

Ms. Winston: [00:06:58] Adds up to prison camp? How does chocolate milk fit into that?

Tyler: Ok, maybe that part doesn't. I'm just mad that we stopped having the chocolate milk at lunch. That's gotta be fixed.

Ms. Winston: Get in the car!

Tyler: Fine, fine, I'm going. Mr. Z, when I turn up missing, tell my mom to bake me a cake with a nail file in it.

Mr. Z: You got it Tyler. Forced labor camps should be a reminder to practice your forced perspective drawing—you know, when you're back in your cell after breaking all those rocks. See you later.

[Door closes]

Ms. Winston: [00:07:29] Did you need to encourage the school's biggest conspiracy theorist into believing I'm a criminal mastermind right before I have to spend 5 hours in the car with him?

Mr. Z: Hey, if I have to suffer, so should you.

Ms. Winston: This is only for a week or two, tops. Just until their parents are able to get them. *[Door opens]* Look, here's one of the students staying with you. Alexander, come here and tell Mr. Z that everything is going to be fine.

Alex: [00:07:53] *[playing guitar and singing]* *We're all doomed and coronavirus gonna...* What rhymes with coronavirus? Does platypus?

Mr. Z: Alex, call your parents again and get them to pick you up. Tell them it's urgent. Tell them you're being left with someone who has absolutely no idea what's going on.

Alex: Not happening Mr. Z. My mom's busy in Vegas with my stepdad. As you know, my real dad is a rock and roll legend. He's in the recording studio...or on his yacht...or basically any place where he doesn't have time for any of his kids, much less this one.

Mr. Z: Oh man, sorry.

Alex: What? No, it's totally cool. Great art comes from pain, suffering and loneliness. If I'm going to be a rock and roll legend like my dad, the last thing I need is parents caring about me all the time.

Ms. Winston: Alexander, stop that. You know your parents care for you.

Alex: [00:08:45] I can't hear you over the sound of my misery. *[Playing guitar again and singing]* *The ancient Egyptians wrote on papyrus...* No, that--that's dumb.

Ms. Winston: Go wait with the other students in the library.

Alex: *[menacingly]* See you around Mr. Z. *[Plays ominous music on guitar as he leaves]*

[Door closes]

Mr. Z: Oh, I don't feel so good.

Ms. Winston: Don't worry, Alex will spend the whole time practicing his guitar — it's all he cares about. And you'll have Nova here to help. She's never broken a school rule in her life.

Mr. Z: Thank goodness.

[Phone ringing in background]

Ms. Winston: And then her little brother, Kody. You know he can be a little mischievous, but he's—

Kody: **[00:09:22]** I'm right here, Ms. Winston.

Ms. Winston: What!?! Kody have you been hiding here the whole time?

Kody: Not hiding, just standing off to the side. I'm little, so adults don't usually notice me when I'm quiet. It's kind of like a super power.

Ms. Winston: Next time you sneak up on me I'm going to confiscate that recorder.

Kody: I thought Nova and I were getting picked up by our parents. What happened?

Ms. Winston: I just talked with your sister about it. Go to the library and she'll explain.

Kody: Ok. Goodbye, Ms. Winston. I hope you'll be ok during the quarantine.

Ms. Winston: Thanks Kody. And don't worry — if everybody does the right thing, this will all be over and you'll be back in your movie class in no time. Now head over to the library.

Mr. Z: Ok, that's three. Who's the last student? Another quiet rule-follower, I hope.

Ms. Winston: *[quieter as Kody walks away]* Well, not exactly...

[Phone ringing with secretary answering 'Chelton Academy' in background]

Scene 3: Library

Kody: **[00:10:21]** Come on, please, say it again. I didn't have the recorder going.

Nova: Kody, I'm not repeating myself.

Kody: But I need it for my school project — an audio documentary. If I do a good job, the next step could be directing a small, independent film. And after that...who knows? By the time I'm in 9th grade I could be directing the next superhero franchise!

Nova: Is your tape recorder powerful enough to pick up the sound of my eyes rolling?

Kody: Isn't there some sort of rule that you have to help me?

[Alex intermittently strumming and singing in the background]

Nova: *[sighs]* Well, now that you mention it, there actually is. Student Code of Conduct — Article 3, subsection 2: When the opportunity presents itself, thou shalt assist any student engaged in the pursuit of excellence. I guess you got me there.

Kody: Yes! I love it when the Code of Conduct works in my favor. So, you know, start assisting my excellence by setting the scene for me — I mean, for the *audience*.

Nova: **[00:11:18]** Here's the short version: Mom and dad are pre-eminent scientists working around the clock on a coronavirus cure, and they want us to wait here for a couple of weeks so they can stay focused. For some reason they made this decision even though I am a gifted scientist myself who could definitely be a major help. Not to mention my photographic memory and—

Kody: Big deal, I have a photographic memory also.

Nova: Yeah, but I use mine to memorize the periodic table and DNA sequences. You wasted yours memorizing movie dialogue.

Kody: Wasted? How could somebody so smart say something so dumb? I don't have time to get into another argument with you about this. Just finish explaining the scene.

Nova: Ok... Almost everybody gets to go home, but you and I are stuck here. And so is Alex, who is brooding over there and hasn't stopped muttering since he arrived.

Alex: I'm trying to come up with a catchy word that rhymes with coronavirus. You don't understand how frustrating this is. I'm on the verge of a guaranteed hit song, but nothing good rhymes with coronavirus!

[footsteps as Charlie enters]

Charlie: **[00:12:20]** Hey, Guitar Zero! I got a rhyme word for you! You're a moron...o...*[losing confidence in the burn]*...vi--Moron-o-virus!

Alex: Shut up Charlie.

Nova: And worst of all, we have to stay behind with the most obnoxious student in school history with the worst grades in school history. But he can throw a football. Whoop-dee-doo.

Charlie: My grades might not be good enough to get my face carved up on nerd Mt. Olympus next to you and George Washington. But I just turned in a 10-page report on The Hobbit, and I've got news for you. I'm definitely gonna get an A this time!

Nova: Oh, I love that book! *[surprised]* I can't believe you read the whole thing.

Charlie: Read it? Are you crazy? It's like a billion pages long. I watched all the movies — that was plenty. Three whole movies, and not one car chase!

Nova: **[00:13:09]** You know...the movies are pretty different from the books.

Charlie: What? How different?

Nova: Pretty different. Legolas is a character in the movie but he isn't in the book — at all.

Charlie: Ugh, no! How can they do that? Don't they have to put something at the start of the movie to let you know? Like, "The Hobbit is *based* on a true story."

Alex: Based on a true story? Are... are you under the impression that any part of The Hobbit actually happened?

Charlie: Huh? No. I mean, I don't know. I wasn't alive back then. None of us were. So who knows? The point is, somebody should have warned me that the book and the movies are different.

Nova: Look, as long as your report stuck to the main plot points, you should be fine. What themes did you cover...something like the triumph of good over evil? Or the fact that bravery comes in many forms?

Charlie: Well the title of it was *[said with great importance]*... The Hobbit: Legolas was a Elite Athlete.

Nova: You're going to get an F.

Alex: Definitely.

Nova: And detention.

Alex: Definitely.

Charlie: Awww, man.

Alex: Hey heads up, here comes Mr. Z.

Mr. Z: **[00:14:19]** *[nervous]* Hey guys, what's going on? I mean, what's going on, *students?*

Charlie: Mr. Z, why'd you have to give me an F on my art project?

Alex: Because there is no G... [*plays G chord*]. F is as low as grades go... [*plays F chord*].

Mr. Z: Charlie, your assignment was to do a pencil sketch of the school's guinea pig. You turned in a photo of yourself playing football.

Charlie: But I signed the photo — *in pencil*. That should be at least a C-plus, right? When I'm a mega famous football star, you're gonna wish you held onto that.

Mr. Z: Oh, I held on to it. I'm a teacher, so if I have any chance of retiring before 80, it's sad to say that your picture is my only hope.

Charlie: Well, make sure you tell the other teachers. They keep putting my signed photos in the trash.

Mr. Z: Listen everyone. You have a huge campus all to yourselves. Take a walk through the atrium. Help yourself to the food in the kitchen. Go paint a picture in the art studio. I'll be around in the teacher's lounge if you need something. But if you follow my advice, you won't need me at all. Just be cool.

Charlie: [00:15:28] Sounds like a plan, Mr. Z. Ok, since I'm a senior, Alex is a junior, Nova's a sophomore and little man over there is like a toddler or something—

Kody: Hey, I'm in middle school!

Charlie: Don't get your diapers twisted. Anyway Mr. Z, since I'm the oldest, I'll run the show here on out while you're chilling in the teacher's lounge.

Mr. Z: Uh, Ms. Winston said you would try to take charge and that I was supposed to respond by saying... hold on, she wrote it down here for me [*shuffles paper*]: No way. Absolutely not. Nova is in charge when Mr. Z is not in the room.

Charlie: Are you kidding me? I can't be bossed around by some sophomore! Seniors are top of the food chain. I have earned the right to tell everyone from kindergarten through 11th grade what to do. That's high school law.

Mr. Z: Yeah, Ms. Winston actually predicted what you would say... [*shuffles paper*]: Food chain... high school law... yeah, she pretty much got it word for word. She said the answer is still — no way.

Charlie: Yeah, well if she's so smart, what am I going to say next?

Mr. Z: She said you'd say, "Bro. Come on. That is totally unfair."

Charlie: Bro—no—That's not what I was going to say. But never mind because I forgot what I would have said. It was going to be a lot better than that, though.

Mr. Z: All right, I'll leave you all to it. Remember everybody — don't cause any trouble.

[footsteps as Mr. Z leaves]

Nova: [00:17:01] I can't believe that he's the only adult here. We're basically on our own.

Kody: I know, right? I swear, one morning before film class, I came into the cafeteria, and Mr. Z was dumping half a bag of Skittles into the middle of a Fruit Roll Up. Then he wrapped it all up, so it was like a pouch, and he put the whole thing in his mouth and ate it! That was his breakfast! It was insane.

Nova: Ugh. I got a sugar rush just picturing that.

Charlie: That sounds pretty delicious, not gonna lie.

Nova: Speaking of food, I'm going to go check on Capone.

Kody: Hey Alex, can I record you practicing some of your music for my documentary?

Alex: Sure, that would be gr—

Charlie: You don't want that noise. His music is like a garbage truck driving off a cliff. Let me grab something real quick and I'll get you an amazing sound worth recording.

[footsteps as Charlie leaves]

Kody: That sounds awesome, thanks Charlie!

Alex: Shut out of a middle schoolers documentary. This is the kind of rejection that's only going to make me stronger. *[plays guitar, fades out]*

[transition music]

Kody: [00:18:15] Ok, it's on. Are you sure this is a good idea?

Alex: It's not a good idea. You're not supposed to be throwing a football in the library.

Charlie: Zip it, Beethoven. Go play your banjo and leave us alone. Trust me, little man, this is a great idea.

Kody: So you want me to stand here and hold the recorder up in the air— like this? And you're going to throw your football at it?

Charlie: Not *at* it. Just right past it. I want to see if the mic can pick up the velocity of my throw. It's going to be like a thunder clap.

Alex: You're not thinking this through.

Nova: Hey guys, what's going on?

Alex: Why do you have the guinea pig?

Nova: I was feeding Capone and giving him some fresh water. But he seemed lonely so I brought him to read with me in the library.

Charlie: [00:19:05] Keep that thing away from me. Rats carry diseases, you know. I don't need to catch the bubonic coronavirus plague from it.

Nova: Capone is a guinea pig, not a rat! And he is adorable.

Charlie: Yeah? Well, that dumb rat is the reason I got an F in Art class. Keep him away so I can do this throw.

Nova: He is not... Wait... What throw?

Charlie: Keep veeery still little man.

Nova: Kody, why are you holding up your recorder like that?

Kody: [*nervous*] Make sure the ball doesn't hit my recorder. Or me!

Alex: [*strums guitar, singing*] I once met a man in Tennessee who was blinded by a football...

Charlie: [00:19:43] Here it comes! [*sound of exertion*]

[*clash, bang, canvas rip sound...*]

[*guinea pig skittering*]

Nova: Oh no! Capone is getting away!

Kody: You almost killed me!

Charlie: You flinched, you chicken! I didn't tell you to knock over that lamp!

[*guinea pig skittering*]

Nova: Quick! He's heading for that rip in the painting! Grab him!

[guinea pig skittering]

Alex: Good job, Charlie. When the headmaster comes back and sees this, you're going to have detention forever.

Charlie: That painting is over 100 years old. It was probably ripped a little anyway. I didn't even throw the ball that hard.

Kody: Yeah you did — that thing was flying.

Charlie: Really? Was there a thunder clap — like, even a little one?

Nova: [00:20:19] Hey guys, come look at this. The rip Capone went through...

Alex: Whoa! There's no wall back there. It's like a...hidden passage or something.

Kody: Oh, this is perfect! If my audio documentary can be more like *The Goonies*, then I'll *definitely* be able to turn this school project into a movie deal!

Alex: There's something written on the back of this painting: Nickel, Iron, Silver, Gold. What the heck does that mean?

Nova: It doesn't matter. Out of my way. I'm going in.

Charlie: Are you crazy? There are probably spiders back there. And more rats. Your rat was probably going to visit his rat family.

Nova: It's *my* fault that Capone got away — and yours, but... I never should have taken him out of his cage. I have to go after him.

[more canvas ripping sound]

Alex: I'm coming, too. This is pretty cool! I mean, whatever. I'll come because I like dark and depressing places.

Kody: Wait for me... Charlie, you're not coming?

Charlie: No way.

Kody: [00:21:19] *[into the mic]* The strongest member of the group stays behind, cowering in fear, as the rest of us head off for adventure—

Charlie: Hey! Fine, I'm coming. You better delete that cowering part, or you and your recorder are going for a swim in the boys' toilet.

[vacant cave background noise]

Alex: Man, I can't see a thing back here.

Nova: Turn your phone flashlights on. We need to find Capone.

Kody: Hey, what's this here?

[sound of slipping in the dirt]

Nova: Kody! Look out!

[sound of Kody falling, and a thud]

[Beep of audio recorder]

Outro:

[Din of reporter voices in the background]

Captain Devol: [00:21:49] Hello. Once again this is Captain Devol. As I said at the start, please go to cheltenacademypodcast.com to let us know what you think. That is C-H-E-L-T-E-N academypodcast.com. You'll find more information there about the students and the school that might be helpful. We're also on Instagram, Facebook and all those other online places the kids are using these days. Except Tik Tok-- we haven't figured out what that is yet.

Most important, please share this audio with your friends and family. The more people who hear this, the better chance we have for a positive outcome. I know there are a lot of questions about whether we have more evidence and audio to release. We will take that under consideration. But for now, this will have to do. Good luck.