

52 hertz

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/52976707) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/52976707>.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	Gen
Fandom:	Lifesteal SMP
Relationships:	Ashswag & Squiddo , background swagdoons - Relationship
Characters:	Squiddo , Ashswag , cameo appearances by multiple people
Additional Tags:	Road Trips , Non-Linear Narrative , Friendship , at least one homestuck reference
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2024-01-11 Words: 4,370 Chapters: 1/1

52 hertz

by [oneirogen](#)

Summary

SQUIDDO: So the plan is simple. We've got around thirty-six hours of driving to do until we reach the source of this weird frequency, then we figure out whatever is making it and then drive another thirty-six hours back so we can report to the Professor. Easy :D
ASHSWAG: How the fuck did you do that with your mouth.

or:
squiddo goes on a roadtrip.

Notes

another experimental fic, not proofread. this is technically in a minecraft setting even though it has cars, radios and dubious physics amongst other things, but squiddo has also canonically time traveled so let's just dial up the suspension of disbelief to a max.

[Muffled voices. The screen flickers – static – then abruptly blinks to life. A person wearing an orange shirt, a dull blue jacket and opaque sunglasses steps into the frame. The room they're in is painted in bright colors, a window open and a laptop booting up behind them.]

SQUIDDO: Hi guys!! So the other day Professor Squiddo ^[1] found these really weird signals coming from somewhere really far off and we're not sure what it means exactly but–

[A sudden loud noise, then a yelp from SQUIDDO as something purple comes flying on-screen, knocking them over. The camera angle changes, shows a split second of two people squabbling on the ground, then everything goes dark.]

[Whirring noises.]

[PLEASE STAND BY.]

[Scene: a new location, with enough lighting to make out the rose bushes surrounding a large tree. The camera focuses on the tree, then on SQUIDDO. They look slightly more disheveled than earlier. A leaf is stuck in her hair.]

SQUIDDO: So basically we're going to the end of the world.

^[1] *transcriptor's note: Professor Squiddo, (PhD in Glitches, Gnomes and Other Underworld Flora, Time Travelling, Local Gregexpert), distinct from Squiddo Minecraft (Traveler from the Farlands, the Fartherlands, from nowhere in particular, vanquisher of Greg-jar, unknown but significant relation to Herobrine).*

you've got this bag you carry around everywhere you go.

it's green and well-worn, sparsely decorated with gold-orange embroidery which has lost its color over time. logically, it'd be better for you to get a new one that isn't constantly threatening to unravel at the seams, but you keep it for sentimental reasons.

everything you own – the essentials, the important things, the things you can't bear to leave behind as you hop and skip from one adventure to the next – fits tightly into the bag. which is not *just* a bag and is kind of mostly your entire existence tucked neatly away into this thing made of cloth and aging leather, about the size of your torso.

so yeah. you carry around a bag.

As the designated driver for the first six hours of The Road Trip™ (sponsored by Womanbrine and Professor Squiddo Technologies) Ash gets to pick what they listen to, even though the only things that ever play on the radio are white noise, the hosts who provides updates on red zones or the same odd song on repeat.

Not a whole lot of room for choice here.

“I’m trusting you with this,” Squiddo tells him solemnly. Ash stares back at her, or at least somewhere in her general direction. A stray particle drifts away from him but it doesn’t get far before Ash plucks it out of the air and then tucks it back into the glitchy, scrambled mess that he calls a face.

“It’s just the radio, Squiddo.”

“It’s the *only* thing we’ll be able to listen to for hours, and if we have to listen to white noise for the next several hours I’ll do a pirouette off the handle of my own sword or something equally as tragic. I haven’t decided yet.”

“What’s the point in having a gun if you’re planning on pulling out a sword more often?”

“Ashswag!!”

“Okay, *chill* .”

He picks the radio host. Squiddo knows that this is solely because he likes to call in and argue with one of the hosts over the most inane things (“I’m going to figure out where he lives, and send him a wither rose,” he’d muttered darkly once), and acknowledges that this could’ve gone a lot worse.

Sometime earlier, in the quiet of the morning: the sun is shining, the frogs are ribbiting, the world is subdued in the characteristic way that autumn brings with it, and Professor Squiddo calls her to the lab with a cheery look that would be more reassuring if Squiddo hasn’t seen that exact same expression on her face even when talking about a time-traveling mishap.

“Hey Squiddo,” Professor Squiddo waves them in almost absentmindedly, her lab coat covered in potion spills, some kind of slime and just, generally, the consequences of scientific experimentation. “I just found something interesting on my computers. Look, over here.”

The ‘something interesting’ turns out to be a graph on an oscilloscope. It’s connected to a bunch of other things too, but the important part of it, Professor Squiddo explains while wiping the gunk off her glasses, is the tracing (?) of a sound wave (??) from somewhere so far off that she hadn’t been able to accurately pin-point where or *what* it was coming from.

“So I need you to go and find it! And maybe bring back a sample or two, or three if you can.”

“Professor Squiddo... you know I don’t do this anymore. Not since—”

“I’ll pay you.”

“Okay deal.”

[A hand covers the camera, briefly fumbling with it before it’s stabilized. The hand moves away to show two people, SQUIDDO and ASHSWAG, sitting inside of a moving, rattling car. ASHSWAG stares out into the distance, either focusing on driving or doing a very good impression of it. SQUIDDO fiddles with the notebook in their hands. It’s labeled: ‘*squiddo’s adventure book*’.]

SQUIDDO: So the plan is simple. We’ve got around thirty-six hours of driving to do until we reach the source of this weird frequency, then we figure out whatever is making it and then drive another thirty-six back so we can report to Professor Squiddo. Easy :D

ASHSWAG: How the fuck did you do that with your mouth.

SQUIDDO: Keep your eyes on the road buster

ASHSWAG: Keep my eyes on *what*? There’s nothing even out here, it’s just corn .

SQUIDDO: ..Yeahhh, it’s not even good corn, like, hold on—

[The view momentarily goes dark as the camera is picked up and turn around. The camera refocuses on the view outside the wind-shield.]

[There is corn. There are also strange red vines interwoven through the cornfield. The camera seems unable to focus on it properly.]

SQUIDDO & ASHSWAG: Corn.

[RADIO STATION: SO YOU FOUND YOURSELF IN A CORNFIELD]

“Aaand we’re back from the sponsorship break. You’re listenin’ to So You Found Yourself In A Cornfield, I’m your host Reddoons, all alone today because *someone* had to be stuck in a localized blizzard. Round of applause for Wemmbu for having the world’s least effective warning system.”

“You guys really should have this memorized by now but here’s your regularly scheduled reminder that the Greg Dimension does not exist. The Greg Dimension has never existed. If you or a loved one believe in the Greg Dimension or find yourself experiencing symptoms of

item corruption, send yourself in for further testing and quarantine, you all know the drill here.”

“Movin’ on to more interestin’ things, chat, we’re getting a call from one of our regular listeners here. Hi Ash.”

[Five seconds of an incomprehensible eldritch noise.]

“Hmm yeah, I can’t legally say I’d recommend murder for solvin’ your problems but also, I’m not *not* saying that y’know?”

[Excerpt from the personal notebook entries of Squiddo Minecraft (DO NOT READ)
(ASHSWAG PLEASE PUT THIS BACK WHERE YOU FOUND IT)]

[written in glitter ink] *the roads are harsh and the trip is endless. everything is so dark, for the first time in my life i considered taking off my glasses. desperate times indeed*

[NIGHT ONE]

When the sun starts to set over the horizon, they take it as their cue to park the car and start setting up torches.

One for every two blocks of space is technically the recommended safety requirement, but Squiddo’s not an experienced traveler of decades for nothing. They place down torches in a neat circle around the car, taking four steps before anchoring the next one in the dirt. Out of some half-forgotten habit she checks for a shock of white fur and a leash—

There’s nothing there, of course. Skipper went missing a long time ago.

Void patches creep over the sky and earth, slowly coating the world until all that’s left within their visible line of sight is the distant, faint glow of a lava fall and everything inside their boundary line of torch light.

Ash rises from where he’d been hunched over their supplies, holding some kind of soup. She takes one of the bowls when it’s nudged towards her, cradling it in her lap and inhaling deeply.

It smells faintly of dandelions. Ash sits cross-legged next to her with his own bowl of soup. It’s even harder to look at him now, his silhouette flickering in and out of the dark.

The taste of dandelion isn’t something either of them would be writing home about, but at least the soup is filling and Ash is warm.

[From the personal archives of Womanbrine: the only remaining record of an interview with Squiddo Minecraft, shortly after the defeat of Greg.jar and prior to her (temporary) disappearance.]

???: "--what would happen to a world with no space left to grow?"

well

that's simple. it just starts

devouring

itself

[RADIO STATION: SO YOU FOUND YOURSELF IN A CORN FIELD]

[Yawning noises. Paper shuffling, a high-pitched chord rings briefly for a second.]

"There's no way anyone's tuning in at this hour. If you are, what are you *doing* with your life? Go back to sleep, it's god-knows-when hours of the mornin, you should all be sleeping. *I* should be sleeping."

"I don't get paid enough for this."

"Anyway, so we've got a report comin' in that an earthquake happened over the night, further up north-ish. No one's dumb enough to go travelin' that far out though, so we're estimating zero casualties; physical, emotional or otherwise."

[The lens zooms in on wreckage in the distance. The ground appears to have been caved in, displaced slightly, and then placed back in a way that can only be described as *wrong*. Behind the camera, SQUIDDO giggles nervously.]

SQUIDDO: We were waay too close, another chunk closer and we probably would've gotten caught up in... that.

[Camera pans over to the car. ASHSWAG is slumped against it, head tipping towards the side every few seconds before jerking back up.]

SQUIDDO: And we had to wake up at daybreak too so we'd be able to cover more ground, but uhm. Ashswag clearly isn't doing too well. [laughter]

[Silence for a moment. The lens zooms in and out on ASHSWAG's face. He doesn't seem to notice.]

SQUIDDO: [softly] It's nice having someone around though, even if he's barely conscious.

a list of some things taking up space inside the bag tossed haphazardly into the backseat:

- a set of spare clothes.
- a sheathed dirk.
- a roll of bandages. it's a pathetic excuse for one. bundled next to it; small vials of potions in a kaleidoscope of color.
- a faded bowtie for your trips to the lifesteal region.
- thread and little needles, carefully placed in a box
- a notebook with a bright cover.
- a small cotton blanket wrapped around bright red, glowing pieces of a crystalline structure.
- gun
- carefully tucked away to the side; numbers scribbled all over a slip of paper.

years ago, before you'd made a name for yourself, before the adventures, before, before—

don't lose that, i'm not going to write it all over again, ash says, and places a note in your open palm, like an offering. it's a list of numbers; a collection of player tags, from ash, from blockfacts, from the few people you'd met over your travels and wanted to keep.

it's small enough to curl your fingers over it and make it disappear entirely under flesh.

you might as well have been given the entire world.

The nether is overwhelmingly warm. She hadn't been prepared for the rush of heat the first time around and neither had she been each subsequent time, even dressed plainly in a single layer of clothing.

Obsidian, with its sharp, skin-shredding edges is a bother to gather and to carve the ruins for safe teleportation into, so when they'd stumbled upon a mostly still-intact portal they both took a break from driving to stretch out their legs.

What's the point in a road trip if you're not able to have some time to yourself to goof off?

It had taken a bit of maneuvering to get the car in through the portal frame, and it was absolutely going to be hell trying to navigate the terrain on wheels, but that was a small price to pay for the decreased travel time and the feeling of slowly being cooked alive in a metal casing.

But none of that matters!! Right now, Squiddo is on a mission. They don't have the *time* for trivialities like 'heat stroke' and 'burns' and 'at least take fire res with you, in the name of the stars and all that is holy.' They have things to do! Places to be!

Mushrooms to gather.

Silently, Squiddo sends up a prayer for wisdom and guidance and less burns. She does not feel enlightened, but she steps into the sand anyway.

The portal leads to an area of the Nether filled with soul sand for chunks as far as the eye can see. It clings to her boots with all the strength and grip of a toddler who wanted to be carried. She makes a mental note to dump soul sand in Ash's shoes just to see what he says.

There are no natural paths for them to follow so they place down cobblestone at their feet and make their own: little winding bridges that overlap with each other when they inevitably go in circles. It takes what could've been thirty minutes or five hours, but eventually the valley ends and opens up into a forest, filled with vibrant reds and greens and warm-bright oranges.

They jump off the cobblestone and slough their way through the last few blocks of soul sand, letting out a whoop when they finally step on soft, solid *grass*.

Wanderlust and Squiddo have always been good friends. This – seeing new things, finding the old and lost and forgotten things – it's what she lives for, it's at the core of her coding; throwing herself head first down rabbit holes and paths even the trail blazers don't bother with, out of nothing but an endless sense of curiosity and wonder.

Traveler, adventurer, field researcher. They've seen almost everything under the sun and in the dark and still finds herself hungry for the next lead to sink their teeth in.

The path less taken takes her down a field of mushrooms that end up being pilfered into her pockets, further down past the lava lakes, and she's wobbling on a tower of cobblestone, just starting to consider turning back to go find Ash when–

A chunk distorts–

The world

s l i p s

to the side

and then you can see.

[Excerpt from *FLOWERS, WEEDS, and OTHER ASSORTED PROTESTS of NATURE* by
?????]

[Page 69]

Most people would consider it an odd-looking thing. A grey-black that looks almost blue in certain lights. The stem pricks your skin at the lightest touch. Deceptively delicate petals that could cut paper.

In your own hands, it's an acclaim of victory, of preservation. The aftermath of something defeated.

Placed – given – to another's hands, it becomes an implied I'm going to hurt you. You're going to rue what you've done – and even the youngest of players doesn't need to be told that these are actions that are not taken lightly.

[Page 23]

The properties of stew are often affected by the kind of flowers used during the cooking process. Known examples of this include:

Poppies for better night vision.

Azure bluet for inflicting temporary blindness. Effects of combining this with the poppies are not well-documented.

Oxeye daisies for regeneration, which makes it a popular choice as gifts.

Cornflowers for a jump boost.

Dandelions and blue orchids for increased saturation.

Lilies of the valley tend to poison the drinker, and should be avoided.

>Continued on page 24

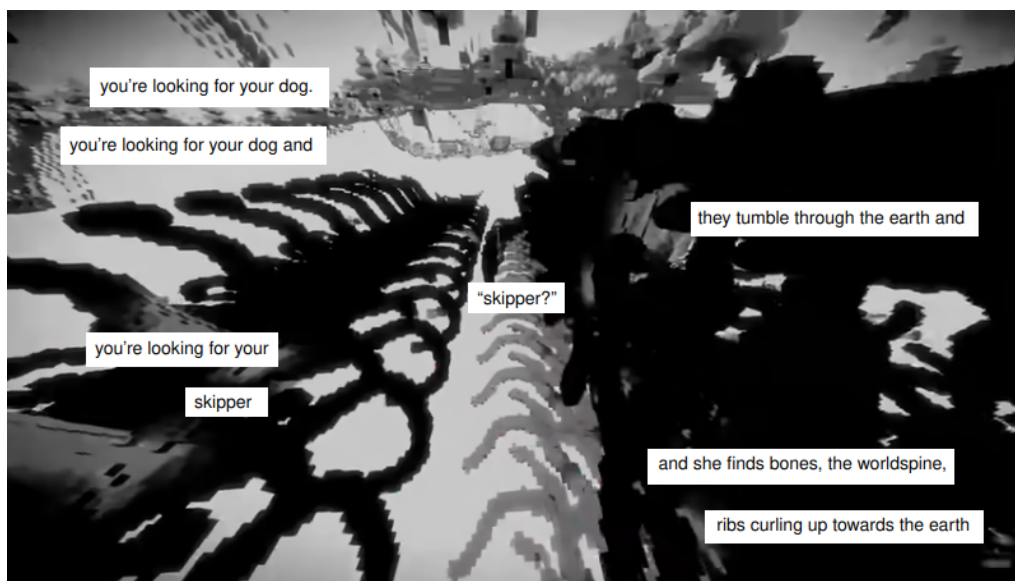
[From the personal archives of Womanbrine: a photo of SQUIDDO and BLOCKFACTS standing in front of an old mansion. The armor they're wearing has visible stains on it, as do the weapons they're carrying. SQUIDDO has an arm slung around BLOCKFACTS' shoulder. They're both grinning, but look exhausted.]

The edges of the paper are curling inwards. Scribbled on the lower left corner: Year XXXX, post-beating Herobrine.]

[RADIO STATION: SO YOU FOUND YOURSELF IN A CORNFIELD]

--your regularly scheduled reminder that the Greg Dimension does not exist. The Greg Dimension has never existed. If you or a loved one believe in the Greg Dimension or find yourself experiencing symptoms of item corruption, send yourself in for further testing and--"

Ash drums his fingers on the hood of the car, then reaches in to fiddle with [the radio](#). The disclaimers tend to be grating, especially when sounds get distorted and stretch in the Nether.



and she sees.

“Hey Ash.”

“Hi Squiddo.”

She stares down at him, reaching forward to poke him gently with a toe. Ash doesn't move, just lies there in the soul sand like a corpse. He's going to be so annoying about having to get the grains out later, she can already tell.

They flop back next to him with an *oof*. “What are we doing on the floor?”

“I'm ascending to godhood. But for real this time. Do you think they allow heretics to apply?”

“...I think you're experiencing what we in the business call, ‘overheating.’”

“Oh.”

“Yeah. Where's the leftover soup?”

[NIGHT TWO]

Earlier, still dazed from the heat, Ashswag had looked her over and asked them if they were okay. She'd pushed their shared bowl of soup closer to him, replied with “yeah!!”, and then took advantage of his disorientation to change the topic.

You know. Like a horrible friend and a LIAR.

Their lower back hurts. Every miniscule shift sends a jolt of pain down the outside of her leg, like an echo of the initial burst of agony that had hit her when she'd fallen off the cobblestone or from the sky, a long time ago. She grits her teeth and breathes out slowly, willing the muscle to relax through sheer force of will.

Squiddo doesn't sleep.

you fall from the sky and the first thing you do is check for your bag.

you'd lost it somewhere in between fighting all the gregs – which *hurts* to think about for some reason, even though the evidence of the battle is immortalized right in front of you in the form of the world's most messed up christmas tree. you blink, vision doubling, and barely keep yourself from retching when you push yourself up onto shaky feet.

the red miles, you think, following the trail of not-grass and crimson back towards the village. the villagers are stumbling out of their homes, gasping and staring at the – *thing* reaching up to the heavens.

your fight is over. you don't have a home to go back to – all you can do is hope nothing fell out of your bag, wherever it is.

[The camera shakes, struggles to focus on anything. SQUIDDO bursts into view, face uncomfortably close to the lens.]

SQUIDDO: Okay we're leaving the Nether right now and I just wanted to see what would happen if we kept this recording while we go thro–

[The video cuts off abruptly.]

[RADIO STATION: SO YOU FOUND YOURSELF IN A CORN FIELD]

“--this is your host, Wemmbu. Reddoons has been temporarily relieved from his duties because he keeps...” [shuffling noises] “...waxing poetry about all the horrible ways he hopes this one caller would die. Which is against company policy since the threats aren't, and I'm quoting this okay, 'gruesome enough,' and because 'you need to stop flirting on airtime,' according to this notice.”

[A deep voice mumbles something in the distance, too low to pick up.]

“I think that might count as harrassment dude. And- wait, we got a caller.”

“Oh hey Squiddo. Yeah I don't think we'd be forgetting your birthday party from hell anytime soon.”

“..... *Why* do you want to know where to buy a camera near the *Farlands*?”

[A black screen. Some flashes of light indicate someone is fumbling with the camera.]

SQUIDDO: [indistinguishable squiddo noises]

[From the computer files of Professor Squiddo:]

Described as an entity that resembles a spider, though it does not have the correct amount of legs or eyes. The entity does not have any color variation on its 'skin', just pure red. It does not eat, does not rest, only single-mindedly hunts until satisfied.

Amendment: the entity does not have eyes at all. [Redacted] describes it as similar to a negative space.

The entity's dimension is similar in effect; red and white, does not appear to contain any natural elements outside of air. The 'ground' is a facsimile of its face. Banishing the creature involves placing a culmination of its essence on a totem within its home dimension. [Redacted] claims to have successfully done so, finally removing the threat from our world.

The only problem with all of this is that the Greg Dimension does not exist.

They had to ditch the car along with the corn eventually. The FarLands can't be traversed by any way except walking, and Squiddo is absurdly grateful the pain in her hip has died down to a manageable level in the time between them leaving the Nether and finding a new camera because *god* would it have been terrible to walk for chunks like that.

They have half a container of soup each, and Ash carefully places the remainder of the dandelions into her hair. They'd probably have to actually open one of the dried fruit packets on the way back – or gods forbid, a *vegetable*.

The world shakes, malleable and contorting itself into new shapes. In between one step and the next, she can't be sure whether she'll see a section of blocks disappear right before her eyes. The wind blows her bangs into her face and Ash off his feet, and they've both dissolved into giggles no less than three times when they finally manage to reach the FartherLands.

Squiddo laughs, high pitched and wavering between delight and a tension that she can't shake away. "Well—" they pull out the compass from their bag and take a step forward.

"Into the maw."

[Excerpt from ???]

devouring itself, regurgitating itself, a cyclic phenomenon akin to an ouroboros loop where when something has to give but there's nothing left to take

548

549

550

551

552

553

554

There's nothing here.

She stands at the very edge of the world as it hums a long note, a noise so low that she feels it reverberating through her bones more than she actually hears it.

There is nothing here except The End.

Squiddo sits down right on the last block of grass, ignores the twinge in her hip, feet dangling in the air. The soft, faint crunches of dirt is the only indication of approach she gets before Ash sits down next to her.

He's lagging terribly here. It's a strain on any normal player, but it becomes so much more apparent when he's right next to her and struggling to hold his form together.

"We could go back," they tell him softly. It doesn't feel right, being anything outside of quiet here.

He shakes his head, particles drifting off with the motion. They catch one like it's any ordinary firefly and place it back for him.

They're caught here on the precipice of something, in between coming and going. Time slides around them – she's not sure if the minutes will be consistent if she checks. Squiddo stares straight ahead into the vast underlying skeletal system of the world and simultaneously into absolutely nothing at all, and feels extraordinarily tiny.

"You've been acting weird lately," Ash says, wincing when his voice splices.

"Are you asking me about my *feelings*, Ashswag," They wrinkle their nose at him, grinning when he turns his head upwards in a motion so slow that they just know he would be rolling

his eyes if he were capable of it.

“Nevermind, don't you dare speak to me anymore. Good *bye* Squiddo,” he intones, but doesn't actually make a move to get up. His ankles hooked over the edge of the block. When Squiddo tilts her head to look back at him, he's already looking at her, leaning back lightly on his palms.

Maybe one day she'll manage to verbalize this: adventure calls to her the way the sky calls to a bird. Wanting to go home but not having a home but a home is stifling. They have memories and images in their head they've done their best to capture with a camera, because it's fun, because it might make someone else laugh.

Staring into the void below them doesn't give her an answer. Maybe there isn't one for her, the same way the world's call goes without a response.

Her bag is a steady weight on her back, comforting - *a bowtie, culmination of essences, list of player tags* like a soft metronome in their head - a constant background presence as their fingers tug on the grass below her. At her side; Ashswag, the weight of his foot against her thigh.

“It's like,” she speaks, voice almost lost to the hum in the air, “You know when you're in between projects and you kind of want to work on something and you do have three billion things you can work on but you do *none* of that?”

“...Weirdly specific.”

“Okay cool you get it then.”

“There is *no way* that's what you've been sulking over.”

An affronted gasp. “I'm not *sulking*. ”

“Like a little baby—” he cuts himself off, slipping back when his arm dissolves slightly right at the joint. Hah, instant karma.

Which, also was probably their cue to leave.

[The camera pans over the ground and then to the path leading away from the end of everything. SQUIDDO hauls ASHSWAG up from the dirt then readjusts the camera when it tilts a bit. ASHSWAG keeps a hand on her elbow -- for who's benefit, it's unclear.]

SQUIDDO: Come on, we still have another two days of being stuck with each other in a tiny enclosed moving machine :D

ASHSWAG: Seriously, *how* are you doing that.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!