

Dark Ride - As Above, So Below

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Background

“As Above, So Below” is an E-ticket attraction intended to anchor an elemental theme park with the introduction of two ruling spirits: life and death. Caught between the two, the ride’s story seeks to understand the delicate balance between life and death and the true meaning of both. Guests will encounter creatures of all kinds, such as the mythical creatures found Above, as well as dark creatures such as ghosts, skeletons, and zombies found Below. On behalf of the spirit of life, Vie, guests will discover what lies Below to confront the feared King of Death—Muerte.

Guests will travel the Blue River down Below in Viking longships, controlled by precise propulsion technology, leaving behind the land of the living which has started to be infected with Muerte’s rot. Though the world is gray and desolate due to Muerte’s reign, an undead population greets guests with reckless abandon and joy, an opposite experience to the world Above. When Muerte’s dark castle seems to be filled with much of the same revelry, doubts about Muerte’s terrible rule begin to bloom. Engaged in the chaos of the undead, guests are tasked to stop the plight of Muerte’s power and return the world Above to its natural, lively way. If only it were so easy.

Scene 1.1 - Exterior Queue - Vie’s Inn

Hidden among a wide array of foliage sits a small, picturesque tavern, tucked behind an overgrown garden of greenery. Built of stuccoed walls and a dense straw roof, the building is barely visible underneath thick, creeping vines. We approach a trellis archway with a hanging sign extending towards the street, advertising that this is Vie’s Inn. The name rings a bell, as we remember that the place is known to be hosted by the wielder of Life herself. Here, guests can visit and be entranced by her personage, one of few venues that she routinely visits.

A pond lies in front of the inn, complete with a sparkling fountain catching rainbows in the sunlight. Small birds (animatronics) hop around the surrounding trees, their lilting chirps creating a peaceful sound (directional sound). The smell of baked goods wafts from an open window (aromatic EFX), inviting the weary traveler to stop and rest. The exterior looks entirely perfect, a shot meant for a postcard.

Yet we don't feel entirely comfortable in the space, sensing something off about the tavern. The birds' chirping is beautiful and enticing, but there's no raucous laughter from the building, the inn unusually quiet for a place of revelry. In fact, there's so little noise otherwise that we might almost assume there's no one inside, even knowing the inn's popularity. Still, the atmosphere holds a certain charm, the strange quiet only mildly concerning.

A guard is posted outside, informing guests that room is limited inside the inn. To keep the place orderly, as Vie wishes, only a certain number of guests are allowed in at a time. He seems to have an internal timer because he intermittently lets groups in until it's our time to enter.

Rife with curiosity, we make our way inside.

Scene 1.2 - Interior Queue - Vie's Inn Barroom

Our eyes adjust to a dimly lit interior, stepping into a dining area fit for many patrons backed by a bar. Creatures of every shape and size make up the common customer, similar only through their differences. Maybe a bit rude, we stare as we pass by a fox standing on two legs (animatronic), holding a large mug of beer that he drinks carefully so he doesn't bump into his sabertooth-like fangs. He chats calmly to two sitting beavers (animatronics), their large leather wings draped back off the wooden stools. They give us a strange look and turn their backs to us, continuing their quiet conversation.

Around a pool table, two enormously large jackrabbits (animatronics) argue about how to set the game up properly. They shake their heads violently as though to show off their impressive antlers, nearly brushing the warm lights hanging down from the ceiling. Their disagreement seems heated, but they never rise above a harsh whisper, chancing glances at a door in the back.

A dusty jukebox lies unused in a back corner, the instrument reminding us of the odd silence in the space. A figure materializes next to the machine, appearing without warning, resembling a small ox with the body of a lion (pepper's ghost animatronic). Holding a finger up to her mouth, she warns us to not say a word and gives a sharp punch to the jukebox, kickstarting it into playing what can only be described as family-friendly club music (audio EFX). As quickly as she appeared, the ox vanishes, causing us to look around as if she might reappear elsewhere. The rest of the tavern stirs with a little more life, conversations growing louder, though no one jumps up to dance.

As we reach the bar, we can pick out the labels on the bottles of ale and glasses of every color filling the shelves. The bartender, a cat with double the number of arms (animatronic), wipes down the counter with a soft whistle. A patron of wolfish descent, though paired with the colors of a parrot (animatronic), complains loudly to him about how reserved the pub's seemed lately. The bartender murmurs an agreement before being cut off by the music halting with a scratch. A soft, lovely voice then speaks over an intercom system to the room, reminding them that music can be a loud distraction to the peacefulness of nature (audio EFX). The room seems to return to its solemn normalcy as our group steps through a back door.

Scene 1.3 - Interior Queue - Vie's Inn Office

We step into an office, a dark wooden desk dominating the space. Behind it, fiddling with an object in her hand, sits the life spirit herself, VIE, looking as beautiful as we could have imagined (animatronic). Her skin echoes the bark of the trees outside and her hair falls in waves of green vines. Draped in petals of every color, she speaks with an animal companion, her eyes almost piercingly white. Her animal companion, CALLOWAY, rests on a small perch in the corner, a raven with the tail of a rattlesnake (animatronic).

They discuss to one another the success of the inn. Vie, especially, seems enamored with her guests' behavior, describing how calm they seem. To her, the picture of life is illustrated by the respect her citizens have for her. Calloway agrees with her sentiments, seeing the remarkable serenity of the pub. We refrain from jumping in with our own thoughts, but it's hard to accept that subdued atmosphere as desirable.

We continue through the room to a side door, noticing Vie palming a black crystal.

Scene 1.4 - Interior Queue - Vie's Inn Backroom

Avoiding a haphazard pile of boxes (props), we stumble into the storage area. Through a glass door, we can see a greenhouse behind the inn (projection), Vie's own hand-crafted landscape. Inside, leaning against a pile of crates, are two slim tigers with the bands of an armadillo stretching across their backs (animatronics). They lean closely into one another, speaking in hushed whispers about the strict rules set by Vie, complaining that a world ruled by life should feel joyous. Glancing around cautiously, one raises a question of her power, saying that they've heard rumors of the spirit of Death, MUERTE, being a more successful ruler.

A rumbling sound shudders through the room, shaking the boxes around us (directional sound). Through the glass, the visage of a perfect garden begins to wilt, sinking into colors of rot brown and husky black (projection). With a startled shriek, Vie runs from her office to the garden, calling out to her plants as she rushes by. We quickly follow suit, wondering if her magic is failing.

Scene 1.5 - Pre-Show - Vie's Greenhouse

Bright spots of sunlight blind us (scenic lighting) as we step into the humid building, gathering around Vie (animatronic), who kneels over a wilted rose bush. The scene is much worse than what the door first showed, with the rot spreading through every plant and creating dark veins along the floor. Plants of all kinds are beginning to decay, turning the once-bright greenhouse into a sad, decrepit place. Vie palms the brown petals of her rose bush as if they will spring back to life. When nothing happens, she smacks a palm to the ground and rises to her feet, turning around. When she sees us, she jumps a little, but regains her composure quickly.

VIE: You there! What do you know about this?

We murmur denials of any knowledge as Vie eyes us with an untrustful gaze. Thankfully, Calloway appears, landing softly on a branch above our heads.

CALLOWAY: Vie, my spirit, this is not their doing. They simply have been visiting the tavern.

Vie lowers her gaze, accepting him. Despite this, her anger is palpable, the plants seeming to quiver in fear.

VIE: Then someone has to be held accountable, Calloway! I can't allow my poor children to wither under this ridiculous blight.

CALLOWAY: Of course, my spirit. I suppose we could always announce a public sentencing, proving your continuous and unfaltering strength.

Calloway's long tail seems to whip back and forth in glee.

VIE: Hm, that could work . . . But we just had one a couple weeks ago. Besides, this problem still won't be solved. Look around! For years now I've watched this infectious rot destroy that which I have perfected. And now it has infiltrated my greenhouse, my sanctuary!

Vie gestures with an aggressive passion.

VIE: I cannot allow this to continue!

Vie suddenly stoops low, once again petting the roses she had touched before.

VIE: Just look at my babies. Even my magic can't touch them anymore. Something must be done.

Calloway hops on one branch lower.

CALLOWAY: But, my spirit, what can be done against an invisible threat?

Vie reaches into the petals of her dress, pulling out the black crystal we saw her handling earlier. She tosses the stone up once and catches it.

VIE: Maybe it's not so invisible. Calloway, tell me, don't you think it's odd how the King of Death seems perfectly content to rule down Below?

Calloway flutters his wings.

CALLOWAY: I admit, I don't see how anyone would want to own such a desolate landscape. Your terrain is much more desirable.

VIE: And isn't part of Muerte's power the ability to cause death, to rot?

CALLOWAY: Though I'll say I've studied your abilities much more thoroughly, I do believe that is part of his power, yes.

Vie looks back up from the crystal in her hands, now facing us directly.

VIE: I believe we must have a coup on our hands. The spirit of Death, Muerte, is obviously unhappy with the lack of life he must lead and has decided to attempt to take the world Above. This must be ended.

CALLOWAY: I agree wholeheartedly, my spirit. Death has no place in life Above.

Vie floats over to a small path on the side of the greenhouse, a pedestal placed next to the glass walls. She waves an arm for us to follow her.

VIE: My dear guests, I'm so glad you've decided to join me, for it seems I have a task for you. Complete it, and I will reward you generously.

Vie drops the crystal into a notch on the top of the pedestal, causing Calloway to squawk in alarm from above. The glass shifts and moves, opening up a doorway to an underground tunnel (projection mapping). The rot is even more prominent in the tunnel, causing the walls to glow an ominous dark green.

VIE: Here, I hold the one and only path down Below that promises a return Above. I require you to take this path and find Muerte. Stop this coup, force him to recede his rot, and you will see such treasure even Midas himself would weep. Do you accept this task?

We agree, though the tunnel emits a thunderous rumble (audio EFX), causing us to be a little terrified, nevermind actually meeting the King of Death himself.

VIE: Good. I will see you when you return, travelers. Good fortune to you.

We leave the greenhouse and enter the tunnel, wondering what a meeting with the spirit of Death will look like. Well, we suppose we are about to find out.

Scene 1.6 - LOAD - The Blue River Dock

The winding tunnel leads us to a massive underground dock, hidden from the outside world. A strange mix of life and death greets us, every aspect of life infected with death's presence. The planters line every edge but many of them are withering away, crumpling into themselves. Workers, dressed for sailing, are hurriedly moving to keep the docks running, loading boats and ensuring safety. Mostly human, the workers each sport a unique set of antlers atop their heads that set them apart. Though even these people aren't safe from the rot, with some of their antlers having turned a dusky gray and a few having broken entirely.

We are guided by the kind workers toward the docks, seeing a few boats bobbing in the harbor. These ships are mostly indistinguishable, meant to be basic forms of transportation, except for one. The massive ship is made of twisting wood, merging seamlessly with thick green vines. These vines pop with color occasionally due to the sprouts of flowers along it. Detail built into every little part, this ship must be Vie's, her own personal transportation Below.

The large vehicles impress us with their beauty as we approach, preparing to board. Modeled in the image of a Viking longship, each row seats four, with a total of six rows. Offering assistance, the antler'ed workers ensure we board the boats correctly and instruct us to not touch the dangerous water, infected with the spirit of Death's power.

Our ship jolts forward, beginning the journey below with a cool breeze whipping by us. Perched by the exit, Vie waves us goodbye (animatronic), sitting with the regality of a queen.

Scene 2 - The Transition

Creaking with the movement of the water, our ship sails peacefully down the river, escaping the cave to find bright sun and a lush forest landscape. Pine trees tower overhead, causing cool shadows to fall intermittently over the land (scenic lighting). Berry bushes dot the water's edge, their vibrant red hues looking deliciously juicy.

A few animals dart in and out of the forest, searching for food (projections). Unlike the magical creatures we met earlier, these animals are as normal as the forest itself. A squirrel scampers up one of the trees, its tail whipping back and forth. A deer on our left side grazes the long grasses, keeping its head alert for predators. On our right side, a wolf prowls through the trees, eyeing the deer on the other side of the river. The scene is idyllic, but not as beautiful as Vie's garden we saw before, this land instead being absent of her power.

We continue along, seeing a few other forest friends make an appearance. Yet with each appearance, the animals seem to be losing their color. The squirrels turn from a burnt orange to a dull gray, the birds retaining only their brown coloring. Even the trees and bushes seem to be leached of the brightness they once held. Slowly, the world melts around us, the husks of a desolate winter remaining (projection mapping). The sight reminds us of Muerte's power we witnessed in the greenhouse.

Our boat rounds a corner, the lifeless forest ending abruptly against a rock wall. Inky black veins spread from a tunnel through the wall, the river flowing through it. We brace for what lies ahead, entering the cavern. A curved sign above the tunnel reads a few final words: "To Fall Below Is To Embrace Above".

Scene 3 - The Outskirts

A sharp, cool breeze shocks us as we fall down a short drop, the water splashing the sides of the boat but leaving us dry. As our eyes adjust, we are met with a dark landscape, mimicking the deadened landscape we just saw Above. The ground is barren with a gray hue, withered, crumbling trees appearing in rare, solitary moments. Though the forest is

long gone, its denizens still exist, except now they appear in different forms (projections). Some take on a skeletal skin, such as the rabbit hopping by that is missing its fluffy tail. Others seem virtually the same except for their rotting corpses. A pack of wolves runs by us, nipping at each others' zombified forms. The rest have dropped a mortal skin, glowing in a ghostly transparent form. All of the animals interact with each other, playing and jumping around, seeming more joyful than their counterparts Above.

In the distance, we spot the hazy skyline of a town on the water (forced-perspective). Our boat meanders by a small dock where a fisherman sits with his line cast lazily behind him (animatronic). He's dressed in dark denim overalls, sporting a scraggly beard, and a straw hat with many holes. None of this distracts from his body, which is made of bone instead of skin. With a bucket of bait next to him, he flicks through a magazine. When he spots us cruising by, he gives us a wave and hollers for us to join him. Our boat drifts closer, allowing us to hear him a little clearer.

FISHERMAN: Why don't yous catch a few fer me while yer in there? I been havin' no luck with the line here!

He laughs with reckless abandon, holding his head so it doesn't fall off his shoulders. We pass by, leaving the dock behind. The same scenery continues until the pounding hooves of a horse echoes behind us (directional sound).

VOICE: You there! Halt!

Our boat freezes, turning to face the commander. A ghostly officer dressed in a sharp blue uniform and matching hat sits astride a horse (animatronic). The horse, colored entirely black, seems mostly alive, except for its blazing red eyes, implying its designation as a resident of the land Below. OFFICER MURDOW holds a baton pointed at us.

OFFICER MURDOW: You're not from around here, eh? Well, look out for a band of criminals around these parts. Useless thugs, the lot of them, robbing helpless folks. I assume you haven't seen them, right folks?

We shake our heads nervously.

OFFICER MURDOW: Of course not, otherwise you'd report them, of course. Well, if you do come across them, especially in that town up ahead, make sure to give a call to me. Ol' Swift Death here is the fastest mount in the land.

She gives an affectionate pat to the horse's side, though the horse continues to give us a nasty look.

Our boat turns forward once more, leaving behind Officer Murdow and her trusty steed. The town, once so far away, now looms ahead of us. Passing by an outcropping of small buildings and sheds, we enter the area, a small sign saying, "Welcome to Ruin".

Scene 4 - Town of Ruin

The town, obviously designed around the river, buzzes with an extreme energy. People of every kind whiz around us, paying little regard to our passage. The town is small but quaint, made of stone and wood, with some buildings having been visibly repaired many times but still standing strong.

A rotting shopkeeper hums as he organizes the items on display (animatronic), his doors open wide to invite customers in. Down a small alley to the side, a group of ghosts laugh as one phases into the shop to toss some fruit out the window (pepper's ghost animatronics). The shopkeeper startles, running to intercept the troublesome gang.

SHOPKEEPER: Hey! Get yer devilish behinds out of my shop!

Thundering hoofsteps echo through the town (directional sound) as Officer Murdow appears in a flash.

OFFICER MURDOW: Stealing wares? I'll stop 'em before they do much more, rest assured. Where'd they run off to?

SHOPKEEPER: Gah, they're probably at the next shop over by now, but I'm sure that horse there can sniff 'em out.

The horse gives a fierce snicker, digging its hoof into the ground.

OFFICER MURDOW: She sure can. I'll find those thieves and put an end to this!

Officer Murdow rides away, but the ghosts reappear in the alleyway, snickering to themselves and motioning for us to be quiet as our boat drifts down the river.

A particularly voluptuous woman walks through town in high heels, carrying an umbrella matching her skeletal figure. A group of zombified men hang with their feet in the water, ogling the woman as she passes by (animatronics). One of them gives a sharp whistle and waves a hand. The woman ignores him, nearly stepping on his hand, but stops in front of a place that slightly resembles a brothel. Turning, she gives the men a wink before heading inside.

Children run over a bridge passing over the water, their giggles echoing as we go under (animatronics). On the other side, a group is taking a smoke break (animatronics). Several of them compete to make the craziest shapes, with one woman managing to make a whale out of one breath (smoke EFX). They all laugh when one takes a wrong breath and coughs up lungfuls of smoke.

The same kids appear once more, this time chasing a black cat. The cat leaps nimbly on top of a salesperson's tent (projection), disappearing into a building's open window. The kids, however, crash into the tent's wares, knocking over stacks of items (SAE diorama). Apologizing, the kids run away from the fuming salesperson with overly large smiles.

Though not once does a single citizen involve us, we can't help but feel as though we are in the middle of action. A large castle looms at the end of the town, the river continuing to wind through its front door. As we leave the town, we remember the constant laughter throughout it.

Scene 5 - Muerte's Estate

Tall spires bend into archways as we enter the gothic castle, shouts of merriment echoing from within (directional sound). Our boat strolls through the halls, the building formed around the river as its central piece of architecture. People of all kinds fill the building, dressed to impress in formal suits and ballgowns.

It's clear that this revelry is greatly supported by the abundance of drinks being poured, with many being served through varying games. A large crowd has gathered around a few ghosts flipping cups on a table (pepper's ghost animatronics), chugging drinks that pass straight through them to splash on the floor (liquid EFX). Cheers erupt from bystanders when a cup lands on its head, the winner accepting a paper crown from a nearby friend.

Further in, one room is strangely quiet, gathered around an old TV set (SAE), their faces aglow. One woman, her scraggly hair piled in a luscious updo, lets out a loud wail and sobs into her partner's lap (animatronics).

DISTRESSED WOMAN: They're meant to be, I swear it!

Curious, we eye the show playing, which seems to be a sappy romance. Apparently, it's not going well.

Lively orchestral music leads us to the next area: a decorated ballroom. Adorned in shiny gold, the ballroom is filled with dancing skeletal guests (animatronics), their laughter adding another harmony to the band playing in the background. We gasp as part of their formal dance involves the removing and exchanging of limbs among partners, with many dancers holding only an arm or a head.

The song remains in our heads as we continue through the castle, looking for its leader.

Scene 6 - Encounter with Death

We reach the back of the castle which holds merely a formal bar and quaint dining area. The bartender appears the most human of all the residents we've seen thus far, with pale skin and pure white hair. As we come closer, we realize this is no human, but MUERTE, the spirit of death, a tilted crown of bone placed carelessly upon his head (animatronic). King of the realm, he appears at ease with the patrons who wait for their drinks, laughing along

with them. The only evidence of his significant power is his black eyes, no whites showing whatsoever, along with his black rotted hands with dark veins creeping up his forearms.

The King of Death seems neither dangerous nor threatening, dancing behind the bar as if he's lived behind it all his life. He casually drapes a towel over his shoulder, balancing glasses in both hands. As we pass through, we hear whispers of Muerte's generosity, the gratefulness the residents feel to have such a benevolent king (directional sound).

We reach the end of the bar when Muerte finally notices us, waving a hand in greeting.

MUERTE: New guests! It's been a long time since I've had anyone come by for just a quick visit.

Muerte nudges one of the patrons who jovially laughs along with him at the joke.

MUERTE: Please, sit tight and I'll grab you something. Might as well make your trip a fun one, eh?

A royal guard (animatronic), the first one we've seen, quickly rushes through the room to Muerte, pulling him aside to speak to him quietly, causing some guests to quiet in curiosity. Muerte nods along in quiet contemplation before sending the guard away and turning back to us.

MUERTE: Ah, I see. Not a leisure trip, huh? Well, I suppose I should've expected this from Vie by now. Follow me and I'm sure we can sort this out.

He waves a hand for us to follow him along the river out of the castle.

Scene 7 - The Overlook

We emerge to an overlook above the town (forced-perspective scenic), seeing the chaos from another angle. Muerte walks beside us, hands behind his back, watching his people.

MUERTE: I have been granted a terrible gift, one that desires to feed, threatening any life it comes across. Every day I reign it in with great effort, hoping I can stop death. Every day, I fail.

He lifts a hand and the ground around us cracks and splits, rotting before our eyes (projection).

MUERTE: Sometimes it gets away from me, I admit. You can return to Vie and assure her that my power will leave her realm, but I think there's another message you ought to bring along with you as well. Look at my people.

Muerte gestures towards the town below.

MUERTE: I may control the power of death, but with it I promise my residents life and freedom. From what I hear, Vie offers no such thing. I believe that, if for some reason, my people can find more life in death, then maybe they weren't really living at all. Vie should allow herself to reconsider what life really looks like, because I think it might just look like this.

Muerte stops in time with our boat. With another wave, the rotting ground rights itself, turning back to its pale self.

MUERTE: All will be well. Enjoy your trip back Above.

Our boat begins a final ascension, leaving behind our scenic view of that joyful town. As we leave, we take one last look at Muerte who takes a seat at the overlook's edge. Before everything goes dark, we see him wave to his people down below.

Scene 8 - Return

Our boat settles and sunlight returns, revealing the same river's edge we passed in the beginning, now lush and colorful one more. Vie, picture-perfect, waits patiently by the shore, standing as she sees us (animatronic).

VIE: Welcome home, friends! Well done on your successful trip, Muerte's terrible rot has receded, thanks to you. In fact, I've never seen anyone quite as successful as you all. I may just have to send you all back out again someday.

Vie laughs, a fluttering thing that sounds a little mischievous.

VIE: Anyway, please enjoy being back Above and grab a drink at the tavern! Ta ta, now!

Scene 9 - Unload - The Blue River Dock

Our ships coast back into the large underground dock, the place refreshed and holding no sign of death. The workers' antlers have even perked up some, now standing a little taller. They quickly help us out of our boats, sending the boats along and maintaining efficiency in the space. Kindly, they make vague comments about how exciting the trip must have been and how glad they are to see us returning.

We exit through a small pub area, few patrons remaining (animatronics). The ones that do murmur quietly to each other about how glad they are that Vie has left the inn for a while, relieved to have fewer restrictions, at least momentarily. To the side, a large dining area is available to enter, offering the authentic experience at Vie's inn, and packed with visitors.

Scene 10 - Dining Experience - Vie's Inn Eatery

We veer off to find some food in Vie's Inn, seeing the opportunity to immerse ourselves in the story even further. Similar antler'ed workers help serve patrons at this establishment, dressed in earthly tones to mimic who they work under. The quick service restaurant is highly decorated, obviously Vie's doing considering the colorful elements of nature added around the room, with many vines and flowers wrapping around wooden beams.

We place an order and wait patiently for our food, taking the time to notice some of the smaller details of decoration. Despite Vie's overwhelming presence, small details of death are present, reminding us that Muerte hasn't disappeared just yet.