

The Adventure Zone: Amnesty – Episode 1

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[theme music plays]

Griffin: We see a carpet of pine needles laid out over the quiet floor of the Monongahela National Forest. Bright light is beaming down from the waxing, nearly full moon overhead. It is summer in Kepler, West Virginia, and it is still. In this particular neck of the woods, not a creature is stirring.

The tall pines all around are motionless, bathing in this moonlight. There are no howls from the forest's depths, no frogs rattling in the creeks that crisscross the terrain, no crickets whistling their summer song. Kepler is quiet, too. Its citizens have long since retired for the day.

The steady hum of the funicular that connects the town to the ski slopes above ceased operations hours ago. Signs for the businesses catering to Kepler's night owls flicker and dim, as their proprietors close up shop.

Soft lights in the towns windows extinguish, one by one, save for the office window of the Amnesty Lodge on the outskirts of Kepler's topside, where the manager sips her evening tea, peering expectantly out this window, and into the forest beyond. And back in those woods, a stone archway stands in the center of a small clearing. The waxing moon reaches its zenith in the starlit sky above. The carpet of pine needles begins to vibrate in soft pulses, away from the center of this clearing. And, in an instant, the span of the arch is filled with the moonlight above, and the carpet of needles is stripped away as sharp winds blow outward, and away from the clearing in every direction.

The moon's reflection on the archway dims. The owner of the Amnesty Lodge finishes her evening tea, and extinguishes the last light of Kepler, West Virginia.

[theme music plays]

Griffin: Okay, hi everybody, welcome to the Adventure Zone. First proper episode of what we're calling the Adventure Zone: Amnesty. It's a new mini arc that I'm doing.

Travis: Can I— I know we just started, but what about Kablamnesty?

Griffin: Yeah, let's go ahead and change it to Kablamnesty. I think it's better on pretty much every conceivable level. And like, fuck me for my bad idea.

Travis: Yeah, right?

Justin: Yeah.

Travis: Ham-Ham-Kablamnesty.

Griffin: Yeah. That's a reference that nobody's gonna get. So uh, I guess a few things. One, I'm sick, and so, this is... the characters you hear in this episode that I do, this is probably not—

Clint: They're all sick.

Griffin: They're all sick. This is not what they're gonna sound like. Imagine just, I guess, a couple semi-tones higher, and not as gravelly. But the other thing is, so, for this first episode, I was thinking of the best way to introduce your guys' characters, and make them sort of more, uh, concrete with the short amount of time we're gonna have in this arc. And what I think we're gonna do is, for this first episode, your characters are going to be kind of individual. I have a couple, basically, individual scenes for each of your characters, before you all sort of form your group in the second episode.

Uh, so that's gonna be the structure for today. Also, uh, kind of like how we did arcs in the Balance campaign, this first episode is also just gonna be kind of like, more setup of the world, and the mystery. Um, and then, I'm going to sort of set you guys loose in episode two. So that's what we're gonna be doing today. Anything else before we get started?

Travis: I want to say a quick thank you to someone whose name I did not catch. But at PodCon, a volunteer gave me this really cool, metallic, six-sided dice. And it's red, and I think it's perfect for Lady Flame. And so, I'm going to be using it in this show.

Griffin: Perfect. Well, you will need another one. Everybody needs two six-sided dice.

Travis: Yes, I have two.

Griffin: For Monster of the Week.

Travis: I have two. And I wanted to say thank you to them, and I'm sorry I did not catch their name. But if you're listening, I'm using that dice, and I appreciate you.

Griffin: Uh, should mention that we are playing Monster of the Week. New game. If you listened to our setup episode, we kind of briefly, uh, go over the rules. But it's gonna be really cool, and the rules, I think, are gonna be pretty apparent, even if you didn't listen to the setup episode. I think you're not gonna have any problem following along.

So, y'all ready?

Clint: Kudos to Michael Sands.

Griffin: Yeah, well done, Michael.

Clint: Creator of Monster of the Week.

Griffin: Uh, sorry, I'm just turning up my audio a little bit. Okay. You guys ready to get going?

Clint: Yeah!

Justin: Yeah.

Travis: Is it too late to give Lady Flame a motorcycle with a sidecar that Dr. Harris Bonkers rides around in?

Griffin: It is absolutely too late. And uh, before we get started – Duck, you have a vision of the future. Roll plus weird for destiny's plaything.

Justin: Uh, seven.

Griffin: A seven is a mixed success. Can you tell me what it says for destiny's plaything when you roll a seven to nine?

Justin: Uh, at the beginning of each mystery, roll plus weird to see what is revealed about your immediate future. On a seven to nine, you get a vague hint about it.

Griffin: Alright. Duck, you see a vision, and it's a pretty simple vision. You're in the Monongahela Forest. And your vision is kind of obscured a little bit by the branches of the pines in this forest, but through them, you can make out a shape. You see a stone archway, just a few dozen yards away. Um, it almost sort of resembles like a Stonehenge archway. It's just three slabs of solid stone, with two sticking out of the ground, with one sort of balanced, perched between them. And it almost feels like this archway is beckoning you. And then, there's a sharp gust of wind that comes off this archway, and right as it hits you, you wake up. And you wake up to the sound of a phone ringing at your desk, where you are working an overnight shift in the ranger station in your leg of the Monongahela National Forest, right on the outskirts of Kepler, West Virginia, the town in which you live.

You did some research, Justin, on this exact subject. So, please correct me if I use sort of the wrong terminology—

Justin: Okay.

Griffin: — at any point.

Justin: I'll do— I'll do my best.

Griffin: But what is a day patrolling the trail like for Duck? What is Duck's like, job look like, here in the forest?

Justin: Forest rangers at the Monongahela Forest are district rangers who are largely, uh, resource specialists. So they're more like science people, as I understand it. But, so, I'm taking a little bit of liberty here with Duck, because it's not necessarily a park. Um, so he's sort of uh, a lot of his work, I think, is monitoring tree growth, um, checking for diseased trees. I like that idea, like, of keeping the trails clean, and um, I think he takes a lot of pride in it, and uh, is sort of careful about, um, making sure that it's on a good tilt.

Griffin: I dig that. I think, uh, just to sort of make this a little bit more action-oriented, to get you into the action a little bit more, um, I'm thinking like, because, during this graveyard shift in the forest, I think you are also kind of wearing the hat of a park ranger. Also, it's just not something you typically do, but like, answering, you know, distress calls about, you know, shitty campers, or something like that.

Justin: Sure.

Griffin: Um, and speaking of, the phone rings, and uh, it's sort of the first thing— the first thing that's sort of broken the silence of this quiet, uh, late summer evening. It's a really nice night. There's a nice breeze coming up off the Greenbrier River, and uh, the sort of balmy heat of August is finally starting to fade away. And you get this distress call, uh, where somebody is complaining about, uh, at the park and camp RV grounds, sort of on the outskirts of the forest. Someone was making a ton of noise, uh, just a little bit ago. And you've also gotten some reports from passing trail walkers that, uh, there's a big bonfire going on right in the middle of their campground. Which, Smoky would tell you, is not acceptable behavior.

And so, this is what brings you—

Travis: [Smoky the Bear voice] "Whoa, you've gotta shut that shit down, Duck!"

Griffin: Uh, we could introduce... Smoky— is Smoky a cryptid? Have we talked about this?

Travis: [laughs] Yes.

Clint: A talking bear wearing bluejeans. Hmm.

Griffin: Yeah. I think absolutely. So, Duck, this is uh, what brings you to the park and camp lot five, a little after six o'clock PM. Uh, and at this lot, you see a mid-sized RV parked in its appropriate space, but it looks like it was recently kind of wrecked. The front driver's side corner of the car is just crumpled up. The headlight's just gone. The lot's trash receptacle has been upended, and is similarly kind of roughed up, and its contents are laying all around the lot. And just as these complaints attested, there's a big fire roaring in the middle of the lot in a pit.

It's not quite a bonfire anymore, but you can tell from the charred wood that's rolled away from the pit that it probably used to be. Uh, and the lights inside of this RV are turned off. What do you do?

Justin: Uh, can I read a bad situation?

Griffin: So, yes. This is our first move that you can do. But remember, and this is gonna be something that I think we're all gonna have to get used to, you don't just say the move that you're doing. I want you to tell me what Duck is doing, and then, you read a bad situation, right? So, it is narrative descriptor first, move second. Does that make sense?

Justin: Alright, got it. Yes. Uh, so, I'm gonna take out my uh, mag light, and just sort of do a sweep of what I can see, and try to get the lay of the land before I rush into anything.

Clint: Is Duck strapped?

Justin: Uh—

Griffin: So this is— we didn't talk about guns in the setup episode, but like, unless your character has a fuckin' really good, solid reason to carry a

firearm with them, which is also something that I have plans for, 'cause I don't love the idea of an arc where just like, it's a bunch of gun-toting shooter folks all the time. So, unless you have a really good reason to have a gun, I would say definitely not.

Justin: Yeah, I don't.

Clint: Okay. I'm just thinking of animals, and...

Travis: I should probably change mine, then. 'Cause in my gear, I had picked a gun. But I could go with heirloom sword. That feels magician-y.

Griffin: I think, in general, for weapons, don't stress about weapons. I want to ground your characters in the real before we do like, stuff like that. And pick those weapons, but I might just give them to you at some point during this arc, but you wouldn't start with them. Because you are not, you know, monster hunters right now. But we're, uh, delaying. So go ahead and roll, plus sharp, which is the stat that you use for 'read a bad situation.'

Justin: Ten.

Griffin: Alright, that's our first [Borat voice] 'a-great success.'

Travis: [laughs] No.

Justin: I hold three on a ten.

Griffin: Yeah, so, when you read a bad situation, you roll plus sharp, and on a ten, you get three hold. And hold, you spend immediately to answer the following— to ask me the following questions, which I will answer based on what you said you were going to do. So you said you were like, flashing your light around this scene, looking around. Uh, so I can answer a lot of stuff for you. And then, what's really cool about this is, whenever you uh, act on the answers, you get plus one to your rolls, uh, ongoing.

So uh, go ahead and pick your questions, and I will answer them.

Justin: Are there any dangers I haven't noticed?

Griffin: You— while you're looking around the scene, you hear the sound of a shotgun shell being loaded, uh, into a shotgun just behind the door of the RV. Um, you actually can tell that like, whoever's doing it must be kind of nervous, 'cause you heard like, some rattling, and some like, scraping as they were like, trying to put this shell in. But you hear a shotgun shell go into a shotgun in the RV.

Justin: What's my best way in?

Griffin: I mean, the best way into the RV is obviously the front door, but sort of, building off of the last thing that you noticed, your best way in would be very, very cautiously, and not trying to startle or surprise the person inside.

Justin: What's the biggest threat?

Griffin: The person with a shotgun inside of the RV.

Justin: Well, I mean, obviously.

Griffin: Yeah. I mean, sometimes, that's just what the—

Justin: I mean—

Griffin: — the answer is gonna be.

Justin: Yeah, I mean...

Griffin: Um, there's not much. I mean, the fire could potentially be dangerous, but it looks like it's dying out, and you get the idea that like, in a few minutes, this thing's gonna fall apart, and that won't be a threat to the forest. Um, but the, obviously, the person with a shotgun inside that RV could be a situation that you're gonna have to deal with.

Justin: Okay.

Griffin: So while you're acting on that stuff, then, you get a plus one to your rolls. But because you rolled so well, you have a pretty comprehensive understanding of what's going on. There's a nervous person with a shotgun inside that RV.

Justin: Uh, I call out, pretty loudly.

Griffin: Let's hear that voice.

Clint: [laughs]

Duck: [clearing throat] Excuse me.

Griffin: As soon as you yell that, a shotgun blast shoots through the door, which you are not anywhere near. Uh, it doesn't shoot quite through the door; it was just like, a buckshot blast. You see like, a big dent form, and you hear a, uh, sort of a yelp come from inside the RV.

Justin: Uh, I pull out my radio.

Duck: Uh, uh, I'm over at lot five. I'm uh, gonna need some... ugh, police support, I guess. Uh, I'll keep you updated with the situation. I'm not engaging, obviously. But uh, keep me updated.

Griffin: Okay.

Clint: [speaking through hands] "One Adam twelve, one Adam twelve, there's a man at lot five."

Griffin: Uh, what do you do? You wait patiently for the police to arrive to play the role-playing game?

Justin: No. [laughs] I just wanted to— I'm trying to do what I would do in the real situation—

Griffin: I feel you.

Justin: — which, I don't think he'd be like, "Alright, motherfucker. Time to go."

Travis: "Let's dance!"

Justin: He fuckin' chucks his radio at him. [laughs]

Griffin: After, uh— after the uh, shotgun blast shoots through the door, you hear a voice from inside go...

Woman: Aw, shit. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry, sorry, sorry. Are you okay out there? Did I hit anybody?

Duck: You are, uh... my friend, you're in violation of... well, now, several park rules. Number one, obviously, you've got a fire situation we need to deal with. Number two... um, well, it's not ranger season, partner, and these grounds are uh—

Griffin: [laughs] Partner?

Clint: I like this— [crosstalk]

Griffin: Yeah, alright. I'm into it.

Duck: My— my name is District Ranger Duck Newton. Um, the—

Griffin: The Duck— the door to the— you're just having this conversation with a closed door. The door slides open as you start talking.

Justin: I thought he fired the shotgun through the door.

Griffin: Uh, it just kind of dented it. But she— it's—

Justin: It's a bad gun.

Griffin: She opens up the—

Clint: And there must've— there had to have been some blowback, too.

Griffin: Yeah. She opens up the door as you're talking, and sets down her shotgun. Actually, like, puts her hands up, and then realizes you're not a cop, and like, puts her arms down. But then she puts her hands back up again. She's like...

Woman: I don't... Okay.

Griffin: And then she puts her hands back down, like, "Okay, you're not—you're not a cop. It's probably okay."

Uh, inside the RV is a young woman, probably about 20 years old. Uh, she's wearing a tank top. She's got a toboggan on with ear flaps. She's drinking a bottle of Yuengling, that when she sees that you're not a cop, but still like, an employee of the park, she kind of tries to scoot it out of your line of sight with her foot. Um, and she is disarmed, and has her shot gun down. She says...

Woman: Sorry, what's your— [southern drawl] what's your name?

Duck: My name is Duck Newton.

Griffin: She starts cracking up, laughing. Like, kind of slapping her leg. Uh, she's still, obviously, kind of nervous, but this has kind of cut the tension a little bit. She says...

Woman: You're kidding me. Duck?

Duck: It's a nickname.

Griffin: She says...

Pigeon: No, no, no. My name is Pigeon. That's cra— that's crazy, man. What are the odds?

Duck: [Deadpan] Don't that beat all? Uh, listen. We need to get this fire under control. This is— this is a real danger to the, uh, to the park. And this is kind of a little bit of a dry season for us, so we've got uh, an elevated risk,

and uh, we're gonna need you to bring that down. Obviously, trying to shoot me with a shotgun was a problem, but I don't have the ability to arrest you or anything. What's going on?

Griffin: She laughed at the sort of incident of both of you kind of having bird names, but she's starting to look a little bit shaky again, and she reaches down and shakily grabs the Yuengling, and she's like...

Pigeon: I know, it's against the rules. But if you had the kind of night I've been having, I don't think you'd do any better.

Griffin: She takes a slug, and she says...

Pigeon: I uh— I need to keep that fire going, because I ran into something out in the woods. Me and my buddy, Pete, we ran out into something in the woods. And he's still out there, somewhere. We— we were looking for mushrooms, and we got attacked by... some big motherfucker. Some kind of like— it was a bear, but I've seen bears. And this was like— this was like several bears, sort of all rolled up into one superbear.

Travis: "He was wearing blue jeans..."

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: She said...

Pigeon: I built that fire to try to keep 'em away, but I— I know I was breakin' the rules. But, I was just kind of waiting for it to go off before I could go out and try to find my— my buddy again.

Duck: Hey, listen. I like a story as much as anybody. What is it, is it Friday night?

Pigeon: Yeah.

Duck: Well, there'll be traffic from the high school football game, so I'm assuming... [tongue clicking] We got about 20, 30 minutes before the cops get here. Honestly, the response time isn't great. Uh, why don't you do away

with the story? I got a little time to kill. Why don't you tell me what's really goin' on? Are you hiding from somebody? You messed up with drugs? What's— what's the deal?

Griffin: Uh, so this would be a great time for 'investigate a mystery.' Because you have kind of— she has sort of stepped you into what is the mystery of this arc, and if you want to find out more details about the monster, and what's going on here, then you can sort of interview Pigeon by uh, doing this move.

[dice rolling sound]

Justin: Oh. Wow. Twelve.

Griffin: Holy shit. Twelves are cool—

Travis: Her whole life is laid before you, as if reading a book.

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: There's a way to, uh, when you level up, you can improve your moves, so that there's sort of an additional condition, where if you get a twelve, you get like, a bunch of great stuff. But right now, it's just a big success. So for investigate a mystery, which is different from read a bad situation, you get three hold— uh, you get two hold, actually, on a ten plus, and you get to ask some questions.

Justin: Now, okay, this is— point of order, here. Previously, when I was using holds, I was asking you as sort of like, uh, omnipresent...

Griffin: Yeah.

Justin: ...omniscient narrator.

Griffin: Right.

Justin: Um, which it says, I'm still asking the keeper in this investigative mystery.

Griffin: It's the same— it's the same thing.

Justin: If I'm using 'investigate a mystery,' am I getting answers through them as a conduit, but confident that this information is legit?

Griffin: Right. It is— in both things, 'read a bad situation' and 'investigate a mystery,' are both contextual. When you read a bad situation, I will only divulge information based on what you can see, based on what you're doing to read the situation. When you investigate a mystery, if you're talking to her, she's not gonna be like, "Well, the silver sword you need to kill the dragon..." Like, she's only gonna tell you what she knows. It's always— it's always conditional.

Justin: Okay. So uh, let's see.

Griffin: Also, like, a thing— an important thing. Um, there's a lot of, there's what's called the keeper agenda, which is sort of a facet of all the, uh, Apocalypse games. And a big one is, and this is sort of an umbrella for a lot of this stuff. I am a fan of your guys' characters, which means, I'm not going to do anything intentionally to mislead you, or put you in a situation where like, if you, like... if something was left unsaid, I punish you for that. And with that in mind, I will always tell you the truth in—in these situations. So you can—you can take what is, uh, what you investigate here, and you info you glean, as gospel. Unless there— there are characters who will, like, you know, be liars. But then, we'll cross that bridge when we come to it.

But what you—what she tells you is, you know, the truth. What you do to like, sort of rectify that for Duck, to make it something that he believes, is up to you.

Justin: Okay.

Griffin: So two hold. Two questions.

Justin: So um, what sort of creature is it?

Griffin: Uh, she says, uh...

Pigeon: I— I told you, it was some kind of bear. It was so dark, and um, I dropped my flashlight somewhere back there. But it has like, kind of, kind of patchy fur. Like, I don't know how to describe it. Like, patchwork fur? Like, it almost looked like it... it almost looked it had a horn coming out of its body? Not out of its head, like a bear-unicorn or something, but like, out of its shoulder. And um, that's about all I saw. It was big, man. It was about eight... eight feet tall or so? Just a big, nasty bastard.

Duck: A big... did you say a big nasty badger?

Pigeon: Ba— bastard. It might've been a big badger, I don't know. It was dark.

Duck: Yeah, I was gonna say. I mean, it's not impossible. Uh, did you see which way it went?

Griffin: Is this your second question?

Justin: Yeah. Where did it go?

Griffin: Um, she says, she points just back into the woods, sort of behind lot five. Um, she says, uh...

Pigeon: Uh, it— it sort of pursued me, here, to my camp. But then, when it got to me, it sort of turned tail and— and ran away, as soon as it got close to the camp. That's why I built that fire. But yeah, it turned tail and just ran right back in there.

Griffin: Um, and you can see, as she's describing this, that there's a path of sort of some broken branches on the ground, and some disrupted piles of leaves. Uh, and in there, you actually also see, sort of some droplets of what looks like black blood, or some sort of black ooze that you could follow as a trail, because you asked this question and got this information, back into— back into the woods. She actually sees you kind of notice some of this blood on the ground. She's like...

Pigeon: Aw, yeah, I did, um... I did shoot it. Which is probably also not okay, but like, my life was in danger? It was self-defense. But I'll tell you, bud, it didn't seem to do much of anything. So um, I guess I— it's not illegal, if it doesn't really hurt the animal.

Duck: Well, it's obviously still illegal. I think both you and I know that.

Griffin: She says...

Pigeon: Listen, I'm— I can't, um... I'm— I'm kind of nervous about— I heard you call the cops earlier. I know you said they're on their way. Is there any way you can kind of wave them off? I swear to God, I was attacked, and everything I've done is just sort of in response to that, and I'm— I'm pretty freaked out right now. I really don't want to go to the pokey. Which is not what human beings call it, I'm just really nervous.

Travis: [laughs]

Duck: Pigeon. What's your last name, Pigeon?

Griffin: I don't... I didn't give Pigeon a last name.

Travis: Pigeon Pigeonson.

Justin: Well, you can pick any fuckin' last name in the world, Griffin. Start yes-anding, please.

Pigeon: Uh, Wilson. Pigeon Wilson.

Duck: Wilson. Are you— are you Vicky's girl?

Pigeon: Yeah. That— that's me. Vicky's girl.

Duck: [sighs] Alright. Listen. I can tell, you're pretty scared, and you didn't mean to take a shot at me. Honestly, I mind less about that than the fire. You know, some of these trees— look around. Some of these are 60 years old. Can you imagine? A loose match, a cigarette? 60 years old, just gone.

Pigeon: Yeah, no, that—

Duck: That's what bothers—

Pigeon: That'd be horrible. Um—

Duck: I'll make you— I'll make you a deal. If you can promise me to never start an open flame like this again, and only occasionally taking shots at rangers with shotguns—

Clint: [laughs]

Duck: — then, uh, I think we can wave 'em off. They're probably gonna have quite a few drunks to take care of, anyway.

Clint: Friday night.

Duck: Friday night. Yep. I hear ya.

Griffin: Um, she—she smiles, big smile. She actually runs up and— and gives you a big hug. She's like...

Pigeon: Aw, Duck, thank you so much. I really appreciate it. I— I swear, I'm done with fire. I'm pretty much done shootin' at rangers. I just— I would say I'm relieved, but I'm still pretty worried about Pete. He— he's my buddy. He's still out there somewhere. He got separated while we were running away. Do you think you could try to see where he's at? Try to— try to find him for me?

Duck: Yeah. I'll uh, I'll take a look. No promises. It's a big forest.

Pigeon: Okay. Are you, uh— are you— are you packing heat? 'Cause I'm real worried, now, about the bear, and you gettin' hurt by the bear. Are you strapped?

Duck: Uh, I'm not strapped, but I'm also not gonna engage. Um, the problem I'm having, Pigeon. Hold on, let me— let me— [over radio] come on back. That was a false alarm, there. I uh—

Person over radio: It was a false gunshot? What— how does that work?

Duck: You know, nah, it was— it was a couple kids playin' with cherry bombs. I just uh, little act— overactive imagination.

Person over radio: Those fuckin' millennials, man, I'm tellin' you.

Duck: I know. I hear that. I hear that. Alright, so you can wave the boys off. Thank you.

Griffin: Um, she— she leans into the RV, and she pulls out a hunting rifle that she kind of hands to you, and she's like...

Pigeon: I know you don't want to engage, but it might want to engage with you. Are you sure you don't want to...

Duck: Pigeon, you brought a— you brought a lot— you brought a lot of guns out here, eh? This is your second gun, Pigeon.

Griffin: She says...

Pigeon: This one's Pete's. This is his. We each brought one gun.

Duck: Oh, that's Pete's gun. Alright, well, I'll hold onto it in case I run into Pete, so we can get that back to him. I'm gonna—

Travis: So you can kill Pete?

Duck: I'm gonna make a call and make sure that, uh, Pete's got all the proper paperwork for this. But uh, yeah, I'll hold onto it for now, if that'll make you feel better. The problem I'm having, Pigeon, is uh, about the biggest animal we get in these parts is a good old *Ursus americanus*, the black bear. It's our state bear. Did you know that?

Griffin: She says...

Pigeon: Yeah, everybody knows that. I take West Virginia history, but—

Duck: Quick, state flower, go.

Pigeon: The rhododendron. But I'll tell you, Duck—

Duck: Alright, alright.

Griffin: She says...

Pigeon: I'll tell you, Duck, though, you're wrong about that, bud. You got something way bigger in these woods.

[theme music plays]

Griffin: Aubrey. So, the early days of a professional magician's career are pretty difficult ones. Your gigs are almost, uh, inconceivably humble, with crowds that don't really pay attention, and venues that generally just don't pay. And it's on one of those days where we find you, Aubrey Little, the Lady Flame, on your grind. You're doing a show on a small, sort of temporary stage, in the lobby of a resort in Snowshoe, West Virginia, which is pretty—pretty close by to Kepler. Um, it's about as prestigious as the last, you know, dozen shows you've done. There's a small gathering of guests, sort of with nothing better to do, just sitting around the lobby, kind of half watching. Um, there's a kids' birthday party in the corner of the room that is just paying you no mind at all. Um, it would almost be sort of too insulting to do if the pay wasn't decent, and you need bus ticket money if you're gonna line up your next gig.

So Audrey Little— Aubrey Little.

Travis: Thank you.

Griffin: What does your act look like?

Travis: Um, well, Aubrey's act is very... It's uh, sleight of hand, is what we're looking at, so—

Griffin: But with fire.

Travis: Yeah. So, the flourishes and the misdirects are all centered around fire. But that's more kind of like, the showier tricks. I mean, basic stuff is, you know, your card tricks, your rings.

Griffin: Yeah, got it.

Travis: You know, your basic rabbit out of the hat. Hence, Dr. Harris Bonkers, PhD.

Griffin: Like, if you're a fan of like, old school magic performance, these are the tricks that you learn first, right? It's not like you're David Blaine like, eating a bunch of snakes, or leeches, or whatever, and then barfing them up, and like, oh, it's new magic. This is like, it sounds like you're talking about sort of that old, old-school shit. But with fire.

Travis: Well, here's the thing, Griffin. Here's the thing about magic and magic performances, is like, you have the basics, right? Where your sleight of hand, the— you know, "Look over here, here's the ball. Oh, where'd the ball go?" Is like, that's the basic. And then, it's how you perform it. It's your patter, your flourishes, that's what separates you. Because really, a lot of the building blocks are the same of every trick.

Griffin: I gotcha. Alright.

Travis: It's what you add onto it. So Aubrey's thing is very, um, you know, the flash. The literal flash of the fire or the sparks, um, patter.

Griffin: Then, let's get started. I want Aubrey to, like, a few sections in this little bit, and I'm gonna fudge the rules a little bit. But I want Aubrey to go ahead and do her first trick of the night.

Travis: Okay.

Aubrey: Alright, now, everybody, I want you to listen closely. Three thousand years ago, on the banks of the Nile, the priests used to believe that if someone believed hard enough, and pushed their will to the brink, they could conjure, from nothing, flame itself. I am that person. With the

strength of my will alone, not only can I conjure flame from nothing, but I can manipulate that flame to become whatever I desire.

Travis: And she begins concentrating, and has the concentrating face as her hands move through the air, dancing, dancing, the hands dance. And then, she ignites a pile of metallic shavings that she has palmed to create a flash, in an attempt to manifest, uh, a flower that she has up her other sleeve.

Griffin: Okay. Um, by the way, what's the background music? 'Cause you sort of painted a picture of her having a sort of non-traditional magician aesthetic, and I'm wondering if that is also like, part of the act.

Travis: Yeah, so I would say that she has like, a little like, soundboard that she carries with her, that's kind of plugged into a mini speaker. You know what I mean?

Griffin: Yeah. What's it playing?

Travis: Um, I would say, it's kind of like... imagine a lot of the incidental music from Prince of Egypt, but added to it is like—

Griffin: Okay. But not like punk rock?

Travis: Well, added to it is like, punk EDM.

Griffin: Okay, fine. That's a lot of fucking genres, but I'm into it. Okay, so—

Travis: Listen. It's not— let me tell you, straight up. I would say that the music background is the weakest point of her act.

Griffin: Sure. Um, so, I'm fudging the rules a little bit here, because for this part, I just want you to do a straight up or down roll. And based on what you decide... so, if it's something that is going to be like, sort of dexterous, like, requires a lot of hand-eye coordination or something like that, I want you to roll plus cool. If it's something where you're trying to like, misdirect the audience, I want you to roll plus charm.

Travis: No, it's misdirect. Um, and so, with that, I got a ten.

Griffin: Okay. Uh, I think with a ten, you—you crush it. You cause this burst of flame to shoot out of your hand, and suddenly, there is a flower in your other hand. And with that, with a performance that steady, uh, I—I think the audience is now just sort of like, paying attention. You actually get some scattered applause throughout the audience. Which, you have done shows in like, resort lobbies like this, where you have not gotten any applause at all. So this is like, this is awesome. The kids' birthday party, a couple of the kids actually are sort of—their eye catches the flash of fire, and they start applauding, too.

And this one—one kid in the back yells...

Kid: Hey, do you do balloon animals?

Aubrey: I do not. But thank you for asking.

Griffin: Uh, before you get to your second trick, you also notice some activity at the front door, as a, uh, a large woman, like, just this imposing figure, wearing a tattered, brown leather duster, is helping out one of the staff's— one of the hotel staff wheel in this ornately detailed wooden sculpture of an elk into the lobby, uh, on a— on a, you know, a palette. Uh, you notice that in the back of the room.

What is your second trick?

Aubrey: Now, before I continue, if I'm going to move forward with these amazing feats of will and skill, I'm going to need the help of a wise and venerable assistant.

Griffin: You see a couple of the kids start raising their hands, like...

Kids: Ooh, ooh, ooh!

Aubrey: Hold on, just one moment. Because now, I am about to introduce to you, the true, amazing wonder of my act. Folks, I'm ready to present... Dr. Harris Bonkers.

Travis: And she taps with her foot, and a little puff of smoke from a mini pyrotechnics machine goes on, and— and with that, the sides of a box fall away, revealing Dr. Harris Bonkers. PhD.

Griffin: Um, I think maybe like, one of the kids is like...

Kid: A bunny!

Griffin: But everybody else doesn't really know how to react to this. I think that would count as a trick, by the way, so go ahead and roll, uh, plus charm on that.

Travis: Okay. Uh, it was an eight.

Griffin: Uh, okay, yeah. I think you just get that result. I think one of the kids is like, "A bunny," and the rest of the audience doesn't really know how to react as Dr. Harris Bonkers makes his appearance. And as this like, cloud of smoke rolls up and dissipates, you see through it, the resort's manager has made his way from behind the front desk, and he's uh, conversing with this, uh, this large, imposing woman, uh, sort of taking this statue off her hands, and handing her an envelope, which she tucks into the pocket of her coat. And now, she's just hanging out at the back of the room, and sort of watching your act.

Aubrey: To you, he seems like just a bunny. But let me tell you: Dr. Harris Bonkers was once the greatest wizard who ever walked the face of the Earth. Until, one day, he touched on something too powerful for him to control. It backfired, cursing him into this poor and lonely shape. But I am able to communicate with Dr. Harris Bonkers, and Dr. Harris Bonkers tells me that there's someone here in the crowd who I need to bring up on stage; someone here with something to tell me. You, in the back, in the ragged duster! Would you join us on stage, please?

Griffin: Uh, this woman in the back of the room, sort of a— kind of an older woman, you think. Not older, maybe like uh, mid-50s or so. She kind of smiles, and like, shakes her head, like, "No, I'm— I'm good, thank you though." She uh, she gestures over at one of the kids at the party, like,

"Why don't you take one of them instead? I feel like they'd get a kick out of it."

Aubrey: Hmm, I see. A little trepidatious – afraid of what Dr. Harris Bonkers might know. Very well... if you're afraid...

Griffin: She gets that you're trying to goad her, and she kind of chuckles again.

Aubrey: Very well. Let's see, we need a volunteer. Who's... let's see...

Griffin: There's a kid in the birthday party who's wearing a, like a paper crown, who you take to be the birthday boy.

Aubrey: You, the little prince! Why don't you join us here on stage?

Griffin: Uh, the kids are kind of like, clapping, almost like they're making fun of this little boy, who kind of like, nervously, kind of, almost sullenly, walks up to the stage, and hops up next to you and Dr. Harris Bonkers.

Aubrey: [softly] Don't worry, kid. It's gonna be fine. [to audience] Now, what we are going to do here, he is going to—what's your name, son?

Randy: Randy.

Aubrey: Alright, Randy is going to communicate to Dr. Bonkers. And then, Dr. Bonkers is going to communicate to me. Are you ready, Randy?

Randy: Yeah, I guess so.

Aubrey: Okay.

Travis: And so then, she begins some very flourishy, like, card shuffles, um, and— and offers to Randy—

Aubrey: Now, Randy, I want you to pick a card, but don't show it to me. I want you to show it to Dr. Bonkers.

Griffin: He picks a card, and holds it to his chest, looks at it.

Randy: You want me to show it to your bunny?

Aubrey: To Dr. Harris Bonkers, yes.

Randy: Alright.

Griffin: And he goes and sort of flashes it to Dr. Harris Bonkers. Is Dr. Harris Bonkers a magic rabbit? What would stop this rabbit from just like, eating the card? He's just well trained?

Travis: He's a very well trained rabbit. He's very smart for a rabbit.

Griffin: Okay, I gotcha. I gotcha. Alright, continue the trick. The illusion.

Aubrey: Now, Randy. I don't want you to put it back in the deck. That would be too simple. I want you to hold it front of you. Don't show it to me, but concentrate on it as hard as you can.

Griffin: He's concentrating on the card.

Travis: And she puts her finger to the back of it, and snaps, and the card ignites in flame.

Griffin: Roll plus weird.

Travis: Okay, that's a ten. I rolled an eight, plus two.

Griffin: Okay. I'm trying to decide if that's very good, or very bad. I think following the rules of the game, I think it's good. But, it's also powerful. You touch your finger to the back of the card, and... What did you intend for it to happen?

Travis: Uh, the card, like flash paper, goes up.

Griffin: It actually kind of explodes in a big burst of flame. Okay, with that in mind, I think Randy sees that this fire is actually pretty big and scary, so

he kind of drops the card and hops off the stage. And Dr. Harris Bonkers also jumps out of the way. But this explosion – you've done this trick hundreds of thousands of times. Uh, this is not intended.

The burst of flame is actually enormous, and uh, I think the people in the front row also kind of scoot their chairs back, instinctively. And the fire doesn't like, stop. It's not like a blast of fire. It like, kind of hangs in the air, off your hand. And as you like, turn to look at your hand, like, the fire spreads, and now the curtain that's behind the stage also gets ignited a little bit.

There's, um, there's some flags, some like, little decorative pennants hanging from the ceiling that uh, also catch ablaze, and suddenly, the people in the audience are kind of having to pay attention to you. They are kind of yelling, and starting to turn and run, kind of scared.

Travis: I want you to know, I'm gonna say. This is a professional magician who works with fire. Hidden under the table is a fire extinguisher.

Griffin: Okay.

Travis: She would not be without a fire extinguisher as she is doing tricks around kids with flames.

Griffin: Yeah, sure.

Travis: So would that be act under pressure?

Griffin: Uh, yeah, I think act under pressure. I think that there's uh, there's fire kind of starting to spread around the—the curtains and pennants in the room.

Travis: Well, it's not good.

Griffin: What'd you get?

Travis: It's a four plus zero.

Griffin: Oh, boy. Well, mark experience.

Travis: Uh-huh.

Griffin: You really set that up for me, 'cause I didn't even think to make you... okay. This is a good game.

Uh, so, when you act under pressure, and you fail, something goes very, very bad. Uh, I get to make basically a hard move. And the hard move is that the fire just spreads pretty quickly. Um, you get the feeling that it's not spreading naturally, it's almost spreading in response to you, and the things that you're doing.

And now, the whole back wall of the uh, of this lobby, is kind of ablaze. It's sort of this one, long curtain, and it is all on fire, and you try to put it out with your fire extinguisher, but it's—it's just not effective enough. And I think the kids' birthday party in the back of the room is now just like, clapping up and down, cheering. This is the best fuckin' thing they've ever seen.

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: Uh, but some adults come, and grab them, and start to usher them out of the room. And you see that big, uh, that imposing woman in the back of the room, kind of look curiously at you, and then walk backwards out the lobby as the fire alarms start blaring. The lobby is on fire, what do you do?

Travis: Okay, she closes her eyes, and takes a deep breath, and then another, and then another.

Griffin: She's burned to death.

Travis: No, she's not.

Griffin: No, okay.

Travis: She's breathing quietly, calming down, and then she acts.

Griffin: Alright. What are you doing?

Travis: First, I'm gonna scoop up Dr. Harris Bonkers.

Griffin: Yup.

Travis: And then, I'm going to, uh, you know, get the fuck off the stage.

Griffin: Uh, yeah, I think the fire is mostly behind you at this point. So you have a pretty clear line to the uh, to the exit.

Travis: Well, I guess—here's my question. Is this the first time anything like this has ever happened to Aubrey?

Griffin: You tell me, dog.

Travis: I'm going to say no. I'm going to say—

Griffin: I will definitely say, it has never happened this powerfully before, if it has happened.

Travis: Yeah, I'm gonna say, little things like this happened a lot more, like, when she was a kid. Um, she has probably had weird kind of manifestations like this. And so, if the fire is somehow springing from her and reacting to her, I'm gonna see if she can maybe, without really knowing what she's doing, in calming down, see if she can get the fire to calm down.

Griffin: I want to challenge that and say, is that something Travis wants to do, or is that something that this actual person would do if they were in the middle of a burning building?

Travis: Well, that's such a good question, because it really depends on what the history of this with her is, you know? If she has had to deal with little things like this happening before, but never on this scale, I think that if the fire is behind her, I'm gonna try it once. Because maybe she used to play more like a kid lighting matches with this power when she was a kid, but it hasn't manifested since then. I'm gonna say, she's been able to turn on and off this fire before.

Griffin: Alright.

Travis: So she's gonna make one attempt at it.

Griffin: So then, you're gonna use magic, which is a weird roll.

Travis: Yeah.

Justin: What's weird about it?

Griffin: Uh, I guess, this would be, do one thing that is beyond human limitations, is one of the things that you can do with magic.

Travis: Yeah, well, I also have moves.

Griffin: You have like, your fire attack or whatever, but I don't think—

Travis: Well, no, no, no. I have moves. So, one is called 'not my fault,' which is plus one to act under pressure when you are dealing with the consequences of your own spell casting.

Griffin: That's definitely this.

Travis: Um, yeah. So, but, if it's weird, I rolled an eight plus two, so it's a ten.

Griffin: Okay. Um, I think with a plus ten, uh, you contain the fire. You see it start to retreat off the edges of the curtain that sort of lines the back of this room, uh, and sort of retreat, uh, uh, off the ceiling a little bit where it had started to spread. It's still definitely burning somewhat, but you get the sense that you have, essentially, like, saved this building. Um, I will also say that the fire and heat and smoke of this situation is now powerful enough that it's—it's becoming kind of unbearable to—to be in this place. But with your control, you controlled the fire. You almost spoke to the fire, and made it calm, somewhat. You—you have saved this building from being completely destroyed. But if you stay here any longer, it's going to be bad for your health.

Aubrey: Lady Flame out!

Griffin: Okay.

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: You step outside, um, and as you do, uh, you see some folks on their cell phones, trying to get reception. Again, you're in the US National Radio Quiet Zone, and so it's kind of difficult to get signal here. Uh, the kids are still applauding you as you come outside. Uh, in the distance, down the hill that you're on, you can see the lights of a fire truck kick on and start speeding up the road. And behind them, you see another set of lights kick on, and these are the lights of a police vehicle, sort of following to race up to this scene.

And you also see, out of the corner of your eye, to your left, uh, you see, at the edge of the building, that woman. That woman wearing the leather duster, and she is kind of frantically motioning for you to come over to her, as quickly as you can.

Travis: I do that.

Griffin: Okay. You move over to that woman, and you turn the corner, and you see her, uh, her big four wheel truck that she's got parked around the corner of the building. And as you come around the corner, she has a sawed-off shotgun trained on you. And she speaks quickly, and she says...

Woman: Alright, then, let's hear it. What are you doing this far from the gate? Didn't anybody tell you the rules? Just come on, now. I know real magic when I see it. Fess up. You thought you'd just go around blowing up ski lodges all willy-nilly like that?

Aubrey: I am flattered. Um, I'm a magician. Those were tricks. Um, I wish I could tell you how I did it, but as you know, magician's secrets. [laughs] Um, but...

Griffin: She says...

Woman: Alright, explain the trick of how you made the fire retreat. By the way, the cops are gonna be here in a couple minutes. How did you make that fire just disappear? I'm listening.

Aubrey: Uh... fireproof curtains. Now, if you don't mind, I'd be happy to talk to you more in the truck, away from here, please.

Griffin: She says...

Woman: Alright, well, I'm headed to Kepler anyways.

Griffin: And she sort of—

Aubrey: Where?

Woman: Kepler?

Aubrey: Never heard of it.

Griffin: She says...

Woman: Uh, well, I think it's where you belong. I'm a little bit— I'm just as confused as you are.

Griffin: She uh, holsters her shotgun in a, uh, a holster she has inside of her duster. She says...

Woman: Alright, hop in the truck. Let's— let's get the hell out of here.

Aubrey: Hold on. First—

Woman: Yeah?

Aubrey: I need you to apologize to Dr. Harris Bonkers for pointing a gun at him.

Woman: I'm very... That's your rabbit?

Aubrey: His name is Dr. Harris—

Woman: Dr. Harris Bonkers, I'm very sorry for pointing a gun at you.

Aubrey: Thank you.

Woman: Cops are gonna be here in about 30 seconds. Let's get the hell outta here.

Aubrey: Hold on. Dr. Harris Bonkers, do you forgive her? [pause] Okay. He forgives you. Let's go.

Griffin: She says...

Woman: I know Dr. Harris' name. What's yours, again?

Aubrey: It's Aubrey, but you can call me The Lady Flame. Now, if you don't mind, start the fucking car.

Griffin: She hops in the driver's seat as you hop in the passenger's seat, and turns the ignition. She says...

Woman: Alright, Aubrey, it's nice to meet you.

Griffin: And she extends her big hand, and she says...

Mama: I'm Mama.

[theme music plays]

Griffin: Hey, everybody, this is Griffin McElroy, your, once again, dungeon master, and your best friend. And this is still my voice sounds like, and boy howdy, am I just real sorry about that. Uh, so, I'm just gonna do this middle bit as quick as I can, because uh, apparently, um, if I don't have functional vocal cords, I am useless to society. So, I gotta sort of give myself the Mariah Carey treatment.

Anyway, I did want to mention that, this week, The Adventure Zone is sponsored in part by Audible. With an unmatched selection of audiobook and spoken word audio products, Audible is the internet's leading provider of spoken word entertainment. And I apologize to Audible for how much my voice is gonna break during this segment. Not much I can do about that.

Audiobooks are great for helping you to be a better you. Whether you want to feel healthier, get motivated, or learn something new. The Adventure Zone listeners might enjoy... let's see, what do I want to recommend? Oh, The Name of the Wind. I don't know that we've ever recommended that on the show before. By a friend of the show, Patrick Rothfuss. It's uh— I'm not just saying that 'cause he's a friend of the show. It's the best, like, fantasy book I've ever read in my entire life. Uh, and the whole series, the whole Kingkiller series is great, and the audiobook is fantastic, too. So go check that one out.

And if you want to do that, well, guess what? Audible is offering our listeners a free 30-day trial membership. You can get a free audiobook with a 30-day trial today by signing up. Just go to Audible.com/adventure, or text "adventure" to 500500 to get started. Thank you, Audible.

Uh, also want to tell y'all about Blue Apron. I have talked a lot about Blue Apron, because it is fantastic, and it taught me how to cook. Uh, it is a really, really fantastic service. They deliver fresh ingredients, and step-by-step recipes right to your door that can be cooked in under 45 minutes. The menu changes every week based on what's in season. They're doing a cool thing now where, for eight weeks, ending on February 26th, they're teaming up with Whole30 to bring you delicious recipes. Their menu will feature two Whole30 approved recipes each week, like Mexican-spiced barramundi with avocado, and uh, kale and sweet potato salad. It's really good stuff. And you can kickstart your new year with Blue Apron and Whole30.

Blue Apron is treating Adventure Zone listeners to their first three meals, a \$30 value, with your first order, if you visit BlueApron.com/adventure. So check out this week's menu, and get your \$30 off with free shipping at BlueApron.com/adventure. Blue Apron: a better way to cook.

Got a couple jumbotron spots, here. The first one is for Paul, and it's from Amariah, uh, Agnes Mint Nation, and Pez, who say, "Happy birthday, for October 2016." Yikes. This is maybe the latest one we've ever, ever had. Uh, "For letting a sullen wizard, deadly ranger, drunken cleric, and idiot monk realize their dreams, for making us laugh and giving us puzzles we sometimes ignore, for teaching us that defending the innocent and sacrificing them to giant spiders is equally effective, for all of our Brians, you're the best. Never leave us." And now I'm gonna do a quick fact check to make sure it does say Brians and not brains. One second. I got it. I got it in one. It is Brians. Hoo, crushed it. Thank you very much for this message.

Here's another one, and it's for Caesar, Argus, Matilde, Leon, Camster, Vlad, Lisk, Peldin, Theo, Shihon, and Matthias. And it's from your DM. And I'm guessing, if you're part of that group, and you recognize the other names, you know exactly who I'm talking about. "We haven't had a chance to play in a while. I just wanted you all to know that I missed you. But I've got lots of orcs left, and we'll see how many of you I can hit next round." Hey, hit him up. Hit this DM up. It's time. The adventure waits for nobody. Except for us, when we take a month off the show.

Anyway, thank you all so much for listening to Amnesty. I hope you're enjoying it. I know this episode is a little bit slow, but I thought it would be cool to sort of give you a little bit of character development on— on the boys' characters, before we sort of jumped into the mystery. Uh, we actually already recorded episode two, which will be up next Thursday. Uh, so, look forward to more of these sort of gravelly, dulcet tones. Um, but yeah, I'm really, really excited for where this arc is going. I love the that um, the boys made. And uh, I'm excited to endanger them with a big monster.

Uh, if you tweet about the show using the #TheZoneCast hashtag, you might end up as a character of the show. I have a couple already picked out for the arc, including Janice, who is, uh, you're about to meet here in a little bit. The mail carrier for Kepler, West Virginia, named for @StarFolly on Twitter. Thank you so much.

Uh, yeah. There obviously won't be a ton of opportunities, just 'cause it's a mini arc. It's just gonna be like four episodes or so. Um, but yeah, I wanted to try to get that— get that going again, like we did in the Balance arc. Um,

I would appreciate it if you would share this with somebody who has never listened to the show before, who you think might be interested in this kind of, uh, genre that we are going for.

Um, I also wanted to mention that, if you are in San Francisco, you should go see Travis and Teresa do a live episode of Shmanners at San Francisco SketchFest. They are doing that episode at 1:00 PM Pacific Time on Sunday, uh, with a special guest, Alison Rosen. Uh, it's gonna be a really fun show. So if you're in that area, uh, I would encourage you to go and check that out.

[voice cracking] Thank you to Maximum Fun for— oh, my God. [deep voice] Thank you to Maximum Fun for having us on the network. You can check out all the great shows that they've got, uh, there, at MaximumFun.org. Uh, and if you want to see more stuff that we do, you can go to McElroyShows.com. It's where all our podcasts and video stuff is. So you can find all that there, and I— I'm done. I can't anymore, and we'll be back, uh, next Thursday, which is gonna be, uh, January 18th, with the next episode of Amnesty. So I'll talk to you then. Bye.

[theme music plays]

Griffin: Ned. The bell over the entrance to the Cryptonomica chimes as Janice, Kepler's dedicated mail carrier, finishes her route. The Cryptonomica sits at the very entrance to Kepler, just alongside the Greenbrier River, which is glistening in the mid-morning sun. Uh, and uh, Janice strides toward you, Ned, and begins rummaging around in her bag. But instead, she first delivers a couple of pieces of mail to this room's other inhabitant, who is Kirby. Uh, he's here often enough that she knows just to bring his mail directly to here, at his request.

Uh, Kirby's in his late 20s, kind of sloppily dressed. He's drinking an RC cola, and uh, he's typing feverishly into an old MacBook that he has at a, uh, a sort of a makeshift desk, in like a corner of the Cryptonomica. Uh, and he has it positioned, his desk, by your modem, which he comes by to sort of plug into, which is kind of the nature of an arrangement that we're— we'll get into later.

Uh, and Janice finishes delivering the package, the mail, to Kirby, and then walks over to you, Ned, uh, and pulls out the last few pieces of mail from her bag. It's mostly just junk mail, but then, she pulls out another piece of mail in a large envelope, and she kind of reacts with surprise. And she says...

Janice: Oh, this one's certified, Ned. It looks important. Gonna need you to sign for this one.

Ned: Of course, uh, Janice. Certified... is it sent to me? I mean, in my name?

Janice: Yeah, dude. Why do you think I'd deliver it to otherwise?

Ned: Well, no, I mean— if it was sent to the business. You know. Uh, sure. Yeah. Here, let me uh... let me sign.

Griffin: Okay. You sign for it.

Ned: Edmund... Chicane.

Griffin: She's already like—

Ned: There you go.

Griffin: She uh, tears off like, the stub off the end of the certified part of the letter, and hands you the rest of it. And she pops on her headphones, and heads out the door, just with a wave. Um, and you have this piece of certified mail.

Travis: And it's haunted!

Griffin: It's haunted. A big ghost jumps out of it. No, you tear it open, and uh, it's an eviction notice.

Clint: [groans]

Griffin: You have... it tells you that uh, you are two months late on your rent for the Cryptonomica, and you have seven days to pay the last two months' rent. And you feel this pang of sort of like, anger, because this was definitely issued by somebody at city hall who is like, gleefully uh, pursuing the opportunity to get rid of your establishment. Like we talked about in the setup episode, there's this friction between like, the cryptid industry side of town, and the like, quaint uh, tourism industry side of town.

Uh, you also kind of saw this letter coming, because visitors at the Cryptonomica have been kind of few and far between, and revenue has dwindled. And before we go any further, I want to hear from you about what the Cryptonomica looks like. What do ya got in there?

Clint: Uh, Cryptonomica is really kind of divided up into two areas. There's one main area, uh, that is open to the— to the public, um, with a lot of glass cases, um, and a lot of uh, shelves, tables, mostly cases. I'd say it's dominated by the glass cases.

And there's another room, uh, a back room, uh, that is similar to the front room, but uh, but it's maybe about a third of the size. And uh, it has things in it, too, but that's not open to the general public.

Travis: Can I ask you a question, Dad? Is it like a—

Clint: Yeah.

Travis: Is it like a museum, or like a shop?

Clint: [sighs] I think it, uh, I think it's like... a shop...

Griffin: I mean, every museum has a shop in it.

Travis: Yeah, but I mean—

Clint: This is like a—

Travis: Is it like a gift shop, touristy thing, or is it like, "Look on these wonders!"

Clint: I think Ned portrays it that way. But it's, you know, every—every one of these wonders can be bought.

Griffin: [laughs]

Travis: Ah, gotcha, gotcha, gotcha.

Clint: These one-of-a-kind, amazing artifacts, and mystic tomes, whatever, can all be purchased for a ridiculous fee.

Griffin: The right price.

Clint: Yeah. And there are like, uh, spinners with uh, with pamphlets in it, and—

Griffin: I thought you were gonna say fidget spinners.

Travis: Yeah, I thought so, too.

Clint: No. No, that's—

Travis: With like, Bigfoot's face on 'em.

Clint: Uh, and then, and he's got a lot of uh, a lot of books, you know, about every cryptid you can imagine. Mothman, and uh, the Jersey Devil, and Nessie, and some that are kind of dedicated to uh, to some of the local, uh, cryptids that are rumored to be rumbling about. But Ned is gonna portray them to the public as amazing wonders, one-of-a-lifetime items, that can pierce through the veil of ignorance, and enlighten everyone.

Griffin: But Ned doesn't necessarily believe any of that.

Clint: Oh, hell no.

Griffin: Okay.

Clint: [laughing] No, he doesn't believe in any of it.

Griffin: Also in this room, as I talked about earlier, is a corner where Kirby is— is working at a desk, um, and he sees you open this letter. He stands up from the desk, walks over to a vending machine in the corner, and pops out— pops in a couple quarters, and he grabs a fresh RC cola. And he motions to you, Ned, like, "You want one?"

Ned: Uh, no thank you, friend Kirby. I'd much rather you get—get back to finishing whatever you're doing, so you can get the hell out of my shop.

Griffin: He kind of chuckles—

Ned: Museum! My museum.

Griffin: He kind of chuckles, uh, and he goes, and he sets the can of soda down, uh, on his desk. And he says, uh...

Kirby: Well, what'd you get, Ned?

Ned: I uh, received a communique from the local bureaucracy, Kirby. And apparently, they uh, would like me to vacate the premises, or pay them the exorbitant fees that they demand.

Griffin: He kind of like, puts his head in his hands, and like, rubs his temples for a second. He's like...

Kirby: You got an eviction notice, Ned? You gotta fix this. I like working here with you. It's a good arrangement. Why— is there anything you can do to drum up—

Ned: Yes, let's talk about that arrangement, Kirby. What exactly do you do around here?

Griffin: Uh, he—

Ned: What— what do you contribute to my wellbeing?

Kirby: Well, you know. I'm, uh, I'm an income generator, Ned. You know how this works.

Ned: Hmm.

Griffin: You— I'll explain, because this is a, like, a thing you would know. This is not like, I'm introducing this to the game, but this is something Ned would know. Uh, Kirby runs a local cryptid zine called *The Lamplighter*, and he writes about stuff. It's like a one-page weekly, where he writes about cryptid activity in Kepler, and its circulation... I mean, he puts it up in, you know, roadside restaurants, and uh, gets it out to a couple establishments outside of town to bring in some folks.

But your arrangement is such that, he writes about cryptids, and then, people, if they get interested in it, they come here to the *Cryptonomica*. Um, which is, I think, something Kirby had to give you the hard sell on. But it has worked in the past. Um—

Clint: Apparently not well enough.

Griffin: Yeah, this are definitely slow. He says...

Kirby: You're gonna have to drum up some cash, Ned. Can— can you just—

Griffin: He starts looking around the *Cryptonomica*, he's like...

Kirby: Can't you just hawk some of this old stuff? I'm betting some weirdoes out there would pay a pretty penny for it.

Griffin: And while he's saying that, he's eyeballing one exhibit you've got in particular. It's like a strange-looking weapon, mounted in a display case on the wall.

Ned: You know, I bought almost all this stuff on eBay. So, I'm not sure there's a lot of resale. Perhaps, back in my private stock... Yes, I think, perhaps, I may have to part with some of my extremely precious items in the back room.

Griffin: He says—

Ned: I know, I know. You've never been in it. I know, you don't know what I'm talking about. But, um—

Kirby: Oh, I go back there all the time.

Ned: Oh. You do?

Kirby: Yeah, man. I mean, I'm a journalist. I gotta know— I gotta know the truth of the matter. Gotta know what's going on.

Ned: Yeah... I may have to have that key back. Um—

Griffin: [laughs] He says...

Kirby: Listen. You might not need to sell anything. We could just do the usual.

Griffin: He says...

Kirby: In fact, it seems like you're hurtin'.

Griffin: He walks over to his desk, and he says...

Kirby: I think maybe it's time we pull out the big guns. I— I think it's time for a new exhibit.

Griffin: And he uh, he turns his laptop around, he spins it to face you, and you can see what's on the screen. It's the front page of the next issue of The Lamplighter, uh, and you see a headline in a staggeringly large font, just below the mast head, which reads, "Bigfoot: Hiding out in Kepler?" And Kirby says...

Kirby: I know it's pretty mainstream, but folks are just crazy about Bigfoot. You could become a destination for Bigfoot activity, and put the Cryptonomica on the map.

Ned: Well, um, Kirby, I think the seven people who will actually read that might be extremely interested. Okay, I think I can probably dust off some of the Bigfoot stuff, and set it up in a new display...

Griffin: He says...

Kirby: I don't know about your old Bigfoot stuff, though. I'm talking about a new exhibit, Ned. Something that is gonna bring in folks who have already been here, and make this place the Bigfoot capital of the world.

Griffin: He says...

Kirby: You—

Ned: Well, that's fine, Kirby, but I think what you're forgetting is, we have to have stuff from the real Bigfoot. And since there is no real Bigfoot, then there's no stuff from the real Bigfoot. So, what do you suggest I make a display about?

Griffin: Uh, he says...

Kirby: I mean, come on, man. You know. You know the deal. You gotta take matters into your own, perhaps, costume-wearing hands sometimes.

Griffin: And he winks. He's like...

Kirby: Listen, we both know that Bigfoot is bullshit. But desperate times call for desperate measures. Get out in the woods. Take some blurry fuckin' pictures. I don't know, whatever people usually do to make Bigfoot stuff happen. But you— you do that, and this place is gonna pop off, I'm tellin' ya.

Ned: You know... I do have that Wookiee costume from last Halloween.

[clapping]

Ned: And it's obviously a slight whelp of a child like you. But you... you can take shitty pictures, can't you?

Griffin: He's like...

Kirby: I'm on a tight deadline for the next issue, but um, I think that Wookiee costume would look great on you. You go out there, time lap— do a— set a timer on your phone. I can show you how to do it. I know you have trouble with some of your phone's more advanced functions. Um, but uh, I think that's gonna be great. And let me tell you, Ned, personally speaking, I cannot wait to see these photos. These are going to be some choice images, my man.

Ned: Alright. I'll do it. Will you keep an eye on the shop?

Griffin: Uh, he says—

Ned: The museum! The museum.

Griffin: He says, uh...

Kirby: Yeah, I'll do it. I don't know how late you're planning on being, but I can close up if need be. Let me tell you, I don't know how I'm gonna keep up with this... [sarcastically] this rush of customers, though. Oh, my God. You gotta remind me how everything works, 'cause it's gonna get so frantic in here with all the customers!

Ned: [laughs] Kiss my ass, Kirby.

Griffin: And Kirby laughs, and he cracks open that RC cola, and he sits back down at his desk, and starts working on the next Lamplighter as, Ned, you start planning your next grift. You are going to bring Bigfoot to Kepler.

[theme music plays]

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