

The Adventure Zone: Amnesty – Episode 5

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Griffin: Previously on The Adventure Zone...

[theme music plays]

Aubrey: It's just kind of the one thing my mom took with her when she fell out with the family. The Flamebright pendant.

Mama: It's called the Flamebright pendant, and you didn't think that that was germane?

Minerva: Where is your chosen weapon, Duck Newton?

Duck: You know what, honestly, it kind of creeped me out. So I uh, I had a friend hold onto it.

Ned: I got in a little bit of trouble in my not so shining past.

Mama: We can't let the folks of this fine town live in fear of some big monster who's lookin' to do 'em harm.

Aubrey: We are going to need to then set up some kind of oil and flame trap.

Ned: I'll pop the top on the Lincoln, and drive around until I lure him to the cave.

Mama: Just watch each other's backs, play it smart, and I guarantee you, we're gonna take the night.

Aubrey: Duck? Where you... where are you going?

Duck: I'm going to take back what's mine.

[theme music plays]

Griffin: Alright, we're gonna do this damn thing. We should mention that Dad, for the first time ever, is recording at his own setup at home. So if he comes in sounding like some sort of shrieking demon, or horrible gargoye...

Justin: [laughs]

Travis: Yeah, I do like that after four years, we were like, "You know what, we're gonna wait for the finale episode of this arc to have Dad do it on his own."

Griffin: Yeah.

Justin: I was listening to an episode of, um... the first live episode of the Magic Tavern. And at the beginning of it, they had a witch come on and curse them with technical difficulties. And I thought, "Fuck, that's good! I wish I could steal that!"

Clint: Wish we'd thought of that. Yeah.

Griffin: Yeah, okay. This is... if Dad is—

Justin: An in-fiction antagonist of audio difficulties? That's amazing.

Griffin: If Dad sounds blown out, it's because there's interference coming from the gate in the middle of the woods.

Clint: Oh, good. Good, good.

Griffin: There we go. That's set up. And let's... we've put this off long enough. Let's get busy.

[ambient forest sounds]

Griffin: Ned, you are sitting in the driver's seat of the Continental in the middle of the Monongahela National Forest in a small clearing, just a couple hundred yards away from the arch where you encountered the beast the

previous evening. You're parked just off the access road, a quarter mile up from which is Crooked Bend cave, where your accomplices lie in wait. And you've been here for nearly an hour, just sort of camped out, keys in the ignition, but the car and headlights turned off. You're sitting in your musked up Wookiee costume, which I can't imagine is terribly comfortable. How have you been sort of spending your time, just sort of hanging out here in your car in the woods in the middle of the night?

Clint: Wishing I wasn't there was one. Uh, and saying...

Ned: I wish I wasn't fuckin' doing this. I wish I wasn't fuckin' doing this. I wish I wasn't fuckin' doing this.

Clint: And listening to Broadway show tunes. I'm listening to Come From Away right now.

Griffin: Alright, I like that. I think you're in the middle of saying, "I wish I wasn't fuckin' doing this, I wish I wasn't—" When all of a sudden, just like last night, the ambient sounds of the forest grow quieter and quieter still. The hum of crickets and frogs and owls fades out, as if switched by a dimmer, until there's no sound at all. And then, immediately in front of you, you hear the sound of multiple mouths' pained breathing, and see the moonlight glint off of a shape, ten yards in front of you. What do you do?

Clint: I say one last time...

Ned: Oh, I wish I wasn't fuckin' doing this.

Clint: And then kind of rare up in the seat so that his head's poking up out of the top, hits the lights, lays on the horn, and says...

Ned: Here I am, ya big goof! Come on and get my ass!

Griffin: I think the headlights flash on as the engine starts with a roar, and a dozen pupils narrow as the beast is illuminated, right in front of you. And for a moment, it just stares at you, and it sniffs the air, catching your scent. And for a few beats, it just stops and stands there, surveying the car, almost like it's trying to make up its mind. And then, it takes a step forward.

[ambient fight music plays]

Griffin: And then another, deliberately slowly at first, and then a third, faster, before it breaks out into a full on charge in your direction with an echoing scream. What do you do?

Clint: Well, I pull a sick driving move. I throw it into reverse, and then slam my foot down on the accelerator.

Griffin: Yeah, a Tokyo drift.

Clint: I Tokyo drift, so I have the trunk is facing them, and I lay on the horn, and gun the shit out of that car.

Griffin: It comes pretty close to your car as you turn around and gun it. And just as you gun it, I think like, a claw narrowly misses the trunk. The car sort of lurches as you hit the access road and get on, and start driving towards the cave.

Clint: And I'm singing at the top of my lungs.

Ned: [singing] Boorn freeee! As free as the wiiind blooows!

Griffin: As you're driving, are you keeping an eye on the beast somehow?

Clint: Well, the rear view mirror.

Griffin: Okay. I think you are driving now, and singing into the wind, and occasionally, just peeking up into the rear view mirror, and you see the beast behind you. And then you look back at the road, and then you look back at the rear view mirror, and... you don't see the beast tailing you anymore. One minute, it was there, and then the next, it was just gone.

And you kind of turn back to look behind you, to see where it is, and you don't see it. And it's as you're turning back towards the front of the car to look at where you're driving, you do a double take, and you look with horror out your passenger side window.

And just behind the pine trees, lining the road, you see the beast barreling at speed with your car, and it's frenzied. Black slime is just spewing from its mouth, streaming behind it as it runs. And its eyes, its many eyes, are pulsating with bright, red light. And before you have a chance to do anything else, it takes one last, long step, and jumps in the direction of your car.

Ned: [singing to the tune of "Born Free"] Ohhh shiiiit!

Clint: I believe the smart thing would be to veer to the right.

Griffin: You jerk the wheel to the right, just as you see this frenzied beast leaping in your direction, and it just narrowly misses you, and sort of tumbles behind you and rolls, and then gets right back to that full gallop, now a bit further behind you. And as you veer to the right, you're on this narrow access road, and your wheels skip off the side of the road a little bit. And your headlights illuminate a pine tree right in front of you, and your car is flying with deadly speed toward it, and it's getting closer and closer.

Ned, you're lying on the ground, several years earlier. And...

Travis: How hard did he hit that tree?

Griffin: And as you come to, you see a black Imperial Crown Coup, wrapped around a tree. Its engine is sputtering pathetically, as smoke is pouring out from behind its crumpled hood. And in this moment, in the past, you forget where you are. It's night.

You remember that you just completed the biggest job of your career, and the trunk of the Imperial is loaded with your haul; though, you assume some of it was probably damaged in the crash. And in the driver's seat of this Imperial Crown Coup is your accomplice, who you can see is breathing, but lying unconscious, splayed out on the airbag that now lies deflated on the dashboard.

And you're on a country road somewhere, not too dissimilar from the one you're driving on in present day. And further down this crooked country road, you hear police sirens speeding in your direction. What did you do?

Clint: [sighs] Um, I'm gonna try to wake up the accomplice.

Griffin: Okay. The door on the driver's side is kind of crumpled in, and you can't seem to... you couldn't seem to get it open. The latch mechanism is just completely busted.

Clint: Um, I uh...

Ned: Well, sorry, old friend.

Clint: I'm gonna run back to the trunk and just stuff my pockets with as much of the stuff as I can. There's jewelry, there's bric-a-brac. There's some Hummel figurines, which is kind of a sweet touch, I think.

Griffin: Okay.

Travis: The Hummel figurines are probably broken.

Clint: No, no! I know how to pack stolen goods.

Griffin: They're surprisingly sturdy. Okay.

Clint: I fill my pockets, and then, I gotta run into the woods.

Griffin: Alright. That's what we see. We see Ned go to the window, and try to get the door open, is unable to do so, and apologizes to his accomplice before running to the back of the car, grabbing everything he can as the sirens are getting closer and closer. And then, he dashes off into the woods with one last look over his shoulder, before disappearing into the night.

[ambient music plays]

Griffin: Act under pressure.

Clint: Okay. Ten.

Griffin: Great. Um—

Clint: And I think I add one for cool, don't I?

Griffin: Uh, yeah. When you're driving also, you get a plus one, so that's a twelve, I guess.

Travis: Super cool.

Griffin: You see that tree flying toward you, and you jerk the wheel to the left, and get back on the road, and avoid it by inches. And with the beast in hot pursuit, you tear down the road in your busted up Continental. I think after your first crash into the arch a couple episodes ago, you've probably just got the one headlight functioning. And as you drive—

Clint: And the other one's just like, dangling by a couple of wires. [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah. And as you are driving, speeding down this access road, your one headlight catches Mama and Barclay hiding out in a bush in the distance, right next to a sign hanging over a craggy hole in the rock face by the river – a sign for Crooked Bend cave.

Aubrey.

Travis: Yes?

Griffin: Aubrey, you're in Crooked Bend cave, where the trap is set. The oil is spread along the floor in the cave's entrance chamber. It's a huge space that's, right now, lit by flood lights that Duck borrowed from the ranger station. And these flood lights are shining along the smooth, tan walls of this cave, bouncing off several stalactites hanging from the ceiling of this area. What have you been doing, as you've kind of just been waiting in this space for the better part of an hour?

Travis: Well, I want to, you know... I don't know if everybody did this when they were a little kid playing hide and seek. But like, when you bounce kind of from hiding spot to hiding spot, because you keep thinking of a better one.

Griffin: Yeah.

Travis: Like, that's what Aubrey's been doing, waiting like...

Aubrey: Oh, no, wait.

Travis: And like, moving to behind a different...

Griffin: Where did you land? Where you hiding right now, in this moment?

Travis: I think, actually right now, she might be between spots. You know, like, she hasn't stopped switching spots, and I think it's the result of nerves. But I don't think she knows that. But she's headed towards... she sees a rock that's kind of got—it's two rocks side by side, where there would be a good view between them of the entrance. She's headed for that.

Griffin: Okay. I like this. Okay, so you're sort of scampering from one spot to another, as you've been waiting here for such a long time. And while you're doing so, the stillness of this cave is broken as you hear footsteps racing down the slope into this main chamber. And a few seconds later, you see Ned, still in the Wookiee costume, singing at the top of his lungs, running into this cave.

Aubrey: Hi, Ned!

Ned: Uh, hello Aubrey! How's your evening?

Aubrey: Going well!

Griffin: Ned, I imagine you take your position as you enter the cave. And just a few moments later, the beast makes its entrance. It slides down the slope into the cave, and skids to a halt in the center of this chamber. And I think it kind of hits the oil patch, and sends up a big splash that kind of covers its fur a little bit, and it also kind of drifts a little as it hits the ground.

[ambient fight music plays]

Griffin: And um, because you were sort of out in the open as you were changing positions, you are—you're both just fully exposed to each other. And now, you can just tell how different the beast looks from what you saw last night. It looks furious. Its eyes are glowing red. The animals absorbed across its pelt are all twisting, and sort of beating against its body as it looks in your direction and howls.

What do you do?

Travis: I think Aubrey says...

Aubrey: Sorry about this.

Travis: And shoots some flame.

Griffin: We see, Aubrey, you raise your hand, and a spark ignites on your glove, which manifests into a small flame, which you clench in your first, and you take a deep breath, and you close your eyes.

And now, we see you in that chamber, earlier this afternoon. You're holding a flashlight, and you're surveying this big chamber. And Barclay steps into your flashlight's beam, and he puts his hand to the ground as he kneels down, and he says...

Barclay: Yeah, I—I think this is the place. So, what did you... what did you have in mind?

Aubrey: Uh, well, I was thinking like, oil on the ground. And then, fire. Um...

Barclay: I don't want to fill this cave up with oil, and then have you all get in it, and then you set it on fire, and you die. I want to try to like, control it with some strategic oil placement.

Aubrey: No, that's fair.

Barclay: So, any guidance you can give me for some like, specific oil placement, would be ideal.

Aubrey: Um... Okay, here's what I want. Give me a big patch right in the middle. And then, a second ring around it. So, kind of a target shape. So that way, if we get him in the middle, we can then keep him from fleeing with a second barrier. Does that make sense?

Barclay: Yeah. I'll make that second ring a, uh... [laughs] A burning ring of fire? Eh?

Aubrey: Eh?

Barclay: I'll make it nice and big so you guys have some space to work. That's—that's a good plan. I think we're gonna get him in that.

Aubrey: Thank you.

Griffin: And then, I think the two of you, I think he hands you a couple of canisters of oil that they use for the lanterns back in the lodge. Um, and the two of you take a few minutes to set up this trap. Big, big patch right in the middle, and a big ring that it is sort of, uh, that you have one stream of oil connected to so you can just sort of light the whole thing up in one go.

And it's quick work. You just spread this oil out on the ground, you take a few minutes to survey the scene, find some good places to hide, and uh, Barclay, after finishing up helping you out put this oil down, he says...

Barclay: Aubrey, I gotta ask. Why are you doing this? Like—don't get me wrong, I'm extremely grateful for the help. I've been trying to get Mama to expand the Pine Guard's ranks for months. I guess she's been burned before, and she uh, she hasn't had the folks that she felt like she could trust enough with our secret. But you, like... what are you doing here?

Aubrey: Well, you know... honestly, I don't know. It's one of those things... I'm sure, you, as a Bigfoot, can relate to this. But just the feeling of... I feel like I'm—like I belong. Like I'm supposed to do it.

Griffin: He smiles, and he's like...

Barclay: Yeah, I know that feeling. I had a lot of dark days before I knew that feeling. It makes me... it fills me that with joy that you, uh, you feel that way, Aubrey.

Aubrey: Well, I'm not one for impulse control. And so, if my gut is like, "Yeah!" Then I'm like, "Yeah!" And I'm... why question it? If I feel like I'm supposed to be doing it, and I can help... yeah.

Barclay: Agreeing to do this thing's one thing. But tonight, you're gonna be... you're gonna be facing down death. And I've been at this a little while, and so, like, my only advice... well, it's... Jesus. It's tough, Aubrey. Because if you were anyone else, I'd advise you to just lean into the fear you're gonna feel when you look in that thing's eyes when it's on you. 'Cause fear is good for most folks, Aubrey. It keeps them... it keeps them ready. But you? I've known you a day, Aubrey, and I can tell, you're powerful in a way that I've never really seen before. And that power...

Griffin: And he stands up from his kneeling position, and he faces you. And he says...

Barclay: We got a saying back in Sylvain. "Wild winds don't turn the mill." That power you've got, if you don't keep it under control, it can be turned against you in an instant. It can be turned against the people you love in an instant. Do you know what I—do you know what I mean? Do you know what I'm saying?

Aubrey: Yeah. But frankly, Barclay, the same could be said about a sword, or a gun, or a car, or anything.

Griffin: He says...

Barclay: Or a Bigfoot. I—look, I don't mean to tell your business. I'm sorry. I don't mean to preach. I know that you can handle yourself. It's just, I am... I'm speaking from experience, Aubrey. It takes one misstep. It takes one moment. And you can find yourself using that power in a way that you will regret for the rest of your life.

[ambient music plays]

Griffin: Roll plus weird for use magic.

Travis: Uh, it is... well, it's an eight, frankly. Um...

Griffin: Okay. That's good. Uh, pick a glitch for me, from your list of use magic glitches.

Travis: Okay.

Griffin: And this is... this is a very fun thing about Spellslinger. And when you're picking these, I would, again, get down on my knees and beg you not to pick the thing that is gonna be the most like, help you win the game. But instead, the thing that is going to be the most narratively interesting.

Travis: No, I think I'm gonna have to go with, the magic draws immediate, unwelcome attention.

Griffin: Okay.

Travis: Yeah, 'cause I think the plan had been, from a hiding place, ignite the fire, and then, Ned and Aubrey would skirt the ring, and get outside the cave.

Griffin: Yeah. But because of this unwanted attention, that escape plan is no longer on the table. I—yeah, that is taken off the table. We see the fire erupt from your open palm in slow motion, and spread across the surface of the oil patch. And we see the beast's heads turn in unison towards the heat and the light, as the oil below it and covering its fur ignites, setting the beast ablaze for six harm.

Justin: Whoa.

Griffin: And the ground shakes as its screams reverberate through the cavern, and you see its eyes actually tear open further, revealing some more of that red light. And you also see holes burning in its patchwork pelt, and it's revealing this black slime carapace within. But the beast, instinctively, from that spot in the middle of the floor, turns towards you, Aubrey, and

takes a swing. And I think you have to roll, and as you do, you land inside of the ring of fire. And now, all three of you are trapped in this fight, sort of engaging with this beast.

And, Duck.

Justin: Hey. Welcome to the podcast, Justin Tyler McElroy.

Travis: Special guest.

Griffin: Duck, from your position in the cave, uh, which, where is that?

Justin: From what I heard, I was in the ring of fire, correct?

Griffin: Uh, yeah, you are all in the ring of fire now.

Justin: Well, then, it seems like that's my locale.

Travis: [laughs]

Griffin: Well, it's a big ring of fire. I'm imagining, were you hiding out, waiting for the trap to be sprung? What were you doing?

Justin: Uh, yeah. I think that would make the most sense.

Griffin: Okay. I think the ring of fire is like, the whole circumference of this chamber.

Justin: Okay, yeah.

Griffin: It's more to contain him than like—

Justin: I would say towards the back, then. Like, towards the back, away from the entrance.

Griffin: Are you hiding behind something?

Justin: Uh, nope.

Griffin: I guess you're just sort of back towards the entrance, and you saw the beast like, run in past you, didn't really pay you any mind.

[ambient fight music plays]

Griffin: And then, you saw Aubrey set the fuckin' room on fire. And you see this explosion just tear through the beast, and you watch as it rears up and see its patchwork pelt tearing and burning in the flames. What do you do?

Justin: I rush it with my weapon.

Griffin: We see you reach over your shoulder, and you grab the hilt of your weapon, this instrument of destiny that you still don't quite understand. And I think we see you from behind, actually, just your silhouette as you rush towards this beast in the pyre. And you race towards it, ready to strike toward the flames.

And then, we see you, just a few hours ago, as the bell above the door to the Cryptonomica chimes as Ned and Duck walk into the museum, while you go and take back what's yours.

And at this point, you and dad go for it, and describe how this hand off happens.

Duck: Well... Where is it?

Ned: Uh, in the Chicanery. I keep only the most secret things back there, so nosy Kirby doesn't get it.

Duck: Yeah.

Ned: Come on.

Justin: I follow him to the back.

Clint: And we go back, and come, finally, to a door. A quadruple locked door. Ned puts his Clic reader's glasses on, and goes through a set of keys, and unlocks it and leads Duck back into the Chicanery.

Griffin: So you take him back into the inner sanctum, as it were?

Clint: The inner, inner sanctum.

Griffin: Inner sanctum. Yeah. This is the room you talked about earlier, that Kirby's not really allowed into. And uh, is Duck like, the first person who's ever been in here that isn't you?

Clint: Yes. Oh, nobody's allowed back in the Chicanery.

Griffin: Alright.

Clint: It is the innerest sanctum. And there are, uh... God, now a character voice I can't get out of. There are display cases. There are all kinds of display cases and shelves...

Travis: And empty Coke Zero cans everywhere.

Clint: Oh, no. The new Diet Coke. Feisty cherry. Mmm.

Travis: Ohh. Still looking for sponsors, by the way, if you're listening, Diet Coke.

Griffin: Yeah, Diet Coke's a big one for podcast. If you could lock down Diet Coke for your podcast, you're set for life.

Clint: Listen, I love this new Feisty Cherry, because not only does it have that cherry flavor, but it has that little bit of kick of heat in it.

Griffin: Yeah.

Justin: Yeah.

Clint: But uh, all these locked display cases. One of them has an Oscar in it.

Griffin: [laughs] Ned stole a fucking Oscar?

Clint: When you look at it—

Griffin: No, no, we gotta dial in on this. Who did you steal an Oscar from, and what's the Oscar?

Clint: It's uh, Clooney's Oscar for Sicario.

Griffin: That's mean.

Clint: He won an Oscar for Sicario.

Griffin: I know. He went through so much to make that movie.

Clint: I know, but—

Griffin: Why would you steal his fucking Oscar for it?

Clint: No, no, no, no. Well, there's a story behind it. But just to say that, he thought it'd be kind of cool to steal something from Danny Ocean.

Griffin: Yeah, sure, okay.

Clint: And there's other things. There's a briefcase with Mal Evans' name on it. But we finally end up at a case in the back, uh—

Justin: Syriana? Did you mean Syriana, by the way?

Clint: Yeah. What'd I say?

Justin: I want to keep you from getting a bunch of tweets. Syriana.

Griffin: You said Sicario. That's a different flick.

Justin: Sicario.

Clint: Oh, did movie, yeah. Syriana. No tweets, please.

Griffin: Yeah. I think you walk by all these cases. There's a box that you actually got out earlier in the day, in which you keep some of your, uh, some of your most prized possession. It's where you keep your Magnum. And uh, the uh, the ammo for it. You came back here and got strapped, as it were, when you left your meeting with Mama in the lodge. And there's a few other things in there, too.

There's some... probably a couple passports and driver's licenses with different names, but Ned's picture on it. Some watches, a set of pearl earrings, a few rings, and uh, and beneath it all, I think, we, the audience, just like, catch a glint of it for like, a second, as the two of you walk by. There's a pendant on a silver chain, set with a large, bright red stone. And you walk past that as you arrive at the case with the weapon of destiny in it.

Clint: So, it's the only item in the, uh... it's the only item in the case, and it's dark. Each one of the cases has their own light switch, so that a little spotlight, kind of, you know, highlight it. You know, like you do. And I flip the switch on, and it illuminates the weapon.

Duck: [sighs] I really... I'm having kind of second thoughts.

Ned: About?

Duck: At this point. [sighs] Oh, God, man. Once I open that case, I mean, this is... real. This is happening. And it's... it's so annoying.

Ned: A... annoying? What do you mean annoying?

Duck: The sword, man. It's so annoying.

Ned: Does it talk in a funny voice? I mean...

Duck: Just open the fucking case before I change my mind.

Ned: Alright.

Clint: Back on with the Clics, key, open it up.

Ned: There it is.

Griffin: I want this moment of the case open, and Duck, you are standing in front of it. And on this cushion, you see the weapon, and are just kind of confronted with your past, with all of the moments that your destiny has called out to you, and you have turned away from it. And for the first time, you're actually considering doing the opposite.

Justin: What I see in front of me is a coil. It's a coil of a... it looks like a sword that's been coiled, basically. There's a hilt, not terribly wide, but there's a hilt there. And then, the sword is kind of rolled, almost like a whip, I guess.

Griffin: Um, and we should mention, this is like a chosen thing. You built this weapon using a series of tags. Can you tell me what those are, just so I know for the fight?

Justin: The form is handle.

Griffin: Right.

Justin: Artifact, blade, and uh, chain.

Griffin: Chain. Chain being like, its...

Justin: Well, you know what. It actually, for what it is, it would probably be like—

Griffin: It'd probably be a long.

Justin: Long would probably be... yeah.

Griffin: I like the idea of a chain sword, but I think this is much, much better, yeah.

Justin: That's another thing. Yeah.

Griffin: Okay, long. Yeah. And that's cool. All those inform the things that, narratively, this weapon can do. Okay.

Justin: And I reach in, really slow, and I take the handle. That's what it's called? There's another word—

Griffin: Hilt.

Justin: Hilt? Yeah. There's a crossbar. That's what I meant to say. A cross guard. So I grab the hilt, and when I do, it starts to unfurl. And I hold it up, and it unfurls into a blade. And Ned and I hear...

Voice: Well, looked what the cat dragged in.

Duck: Hey, Beacon. Aw, Christ.

Beacon: Well, Duck Newton. I never thought this day would come. Have you had a fun 20 years, Duck?

Griffin: [laughing]

Beacon: I could sum up my—

Duck: I know, man. I know that you've been—

Beacon: I could sum up my time, if you like. Let me summarize. A man comes into the room. He lays some trash on the ground. He leaves. That happened a thousand times, Duck.

Duck: Yeah, I know. I know it's been...

Beacon: Who's your friend, Duck?

Griffin: Can Ned hear this voice?

Justin: Yup. 'Cause there's a mouth.

Griffin: [laughs] Oh God.

Clint: I am totally blown away.

Ned: You're a ventriloquist, Duck!

Duck: No.

Ned: I did not know that!

Beacon: This is no parlor trick, beast. I'm surprised—imagine my surprise. I almost didn't recognize you without a can of soda and a magazine. My name is Beacon. I am the light that stands at the edge of the darkness. I am the tower above the fog. I am the most beautiful, terrible weapon ever crafted, and I have spent the last 20 years in a flea market. And how are you?

Ned: You're also a bit of a prick.

Beacon: Well, I'm a sword. Get it?

Ned: [laughs]

Beacon: Do you see? For 20 years, I have wasted my rapier wit.

Ned: [laughs]

Griffin: [laughing] Jesus Christ.

Beacon: That's two in one.

Ned: That's a very cutting comment, my friend.

Beacon: Do you—well, look at you, attempting a turn of phrase. That must've been exhausting.

Duck: Do you see what I mean, now? I mean, I got about five minutes of that, and I mean, I was already really, really not sure about this. And he started chattering away, and I was like, "Okay, this is not for me." He was kind of the frosting on the cake. Not the whole reason I bailed, obviously.

Griffin: How does it feel, Duck, to hold this weapon? Obviously, there's a slight annoyance that comes alongside it. But the sword is not lying. This is a powerful thing, and you know it is a powerful thing, and you probably haven't touched it in two decades. How does it feel to be holding it again?

Justin: It's heavier than I remember. But it... there's something about it that feels right. It's like, you know what it's like? It's like when you leave your backpack somewhere, and even though you're not carrying the weight of it as you leave, you realize that something is missing. And even though it's a weight, you... it is something you have lost, have misplaced. And getting it back, even though it's weight, feels right. And I think that that is the closest approximation to what Duck is feeling at the moment.

[ambient music plays]

Griffin: So we're back in the present, and we see Duck charging, and he has his hand on the hilt. And as he withdraws the blade, and it extends to its full length, he strikes towards the beast. Roll to kick some ass.

Justin: Hell yeah. Aw, choice! That is a twelve.

Griffin: Holy shit.

Justin: Yeah, I rolled an eleven. I got a plus one on it.

Griffin: Duck's rolls are on point. Okay. Uh, pick an extra effect.

Justin: I'm going to... and the monster currently is where?

Griffin: It's in the fire patch. But because of the length of your weapon, I think you're able to stab and slash at it without getting in the fire.

Justin: It's in the middle, though, right? It's where we want it. Okay. Um, I'm going to inflict terrible harm.

Griffin: So that's one extra?

Justin: So three harm altogether.

Griffin: Okay.

Justin: I think I rush it, and bury it into the monster's... as close as I can get to like, center mass.

Griffin: Yeah.

Justin: And I bury it into its gut, and I hear...

Beacon: Oh, yes, this is much more like it. See? I love being put to work, Duck. We could've been doing this for 20—

Justin: And then he jerks it out so he doesn't have to hear the sword anymore.

Griffin: I think, as you sort of rip the blade out of the beast, you kind of like, whip it backwards. I imagine you're still a little unsure of this. You're not a sword fighter, right? But instinct kind of took over.

Justin: Right.

Griffin: And as you rip the blade out, kind of up and back over your shoulder, uh, you cut a huge gash through the top of this beast as you do so. And a torrent of this black slime sprays through the air, and finally, as you sort of slice through it, its patchwork pelt just falls away. It is cast off into the fire below. And in this moment, you see the beast's true form emerging from its chrysalis.

It's now standing six feet tall, six feet wide. It had a bit of padding from the beasts it had absorbed into it. It's a figure roughly lizard-like in shape, comprised entirely of that black slime material. A tail unfurls at the back of

it. It extends out about three more feet, and that tail ends in a razor sharp point, just dripping with that slime. And its face is like, decomposed, with these thin strands of slime connecting its top and bottom jaws. And its hollow eye sockets are filled with that furious, red light. And this creature, now exposed, emits a shrill howl.

And as that howl subsides, you can hear more sounds, now coming from the mouth of the cave, past the fire. You hear a shotgun discharge twice. You hear a tree crack in half. You hear a mountain lion snarling in defeat. And you can tell that reinforcements are here, and that Mama and Barclay are keeping them out, just as they promised.

And with a mighty leap, this beast hurls itself out of the flames in the center of the room, and it scrambles to its feet right in front you, Ned. Ned, what do you do?

Clint: Shit my pants.

Griffin: Alright, so that's Ned's action.

Clint: I think Ned's gonna use the magnum. He's not much of a runner. No, I'm gonna pull the magnum out of its shoulder holster - I got one of those cool underarm holsters - and shoot the fucker in its head.

Griffin: [laughs] Okay. Is Ned a confident user of this firearm? I imagine this is kind of a relic of his past. Not that you were going around breaking into George Clooney's house and then shooting a bunch of people on the way out.

Clint: No, I don't think he's very competent with it at all, because he wasn't a strong arm guy. He was just—he was a burglar. He was a sneak thief. He would steal, but he would not rob. So, no, he's not. But with a 357 magnum, especially that close, you don't really have to be a marksman.

Griffin: True. And I think you are close, so I think this would be a kick some ass, and not just three damage, 'cause this thing is gonna be able to get at you, too. By the way, I should've mentioned this. I think, as you stab the sword in the beast, Duck, you were far enough away to stay out of the

fire. But, as it sort emerges from its cocoon, I think it whips around. And that tail, that razor sharp tail, slashes across you for three harm.

Justin: Okay.

Griffin: Which, I guess, would just be one harm, because you are tough.

Justin: Do I—how do—real quick, point of order. How does recovering harm work?

Griffin: You were at zero harm. The injuries that you—

Justin: I had two that held over, but it's like—is it like, per engagement, sort of?

Griffin: Really, it's per injury. So, if you have these like, minor injuries, which the fight that you had with the beast last time, uh, the injuries you sustained were minor injuries. Those, you treat overnight, or whatever. Bigger hits, if Ned or Aubrey take that three harm hit, they're gonna need to do something about it, or else, things can get bad. A three harm hit is like, you know, a real bad like, bruised rib or something. Anything past four harm, you need to go to the hospital, because you are then unstable.

Justin: Four or more. Not past four, four or more.

Griffin: Right, right, right.

Justin: But I recover the injuries.

Griffin: Yeah, it's all—

Justin: As long as they're below four.

Griffin: Yeah.

Justin: I recover overnight or whatever.

Griffin: Yeah.

Justin: Okay.

Griffin: Yeah, I think you just go back and, you know, put on a band aid. And you're more or less good to go. So Ned, roll to kick some ass.

Clint: Kick some ass. Alright. It is an eight, and I have zero tough, so... eight. So I pull it out of the holster, I point it at his head, and I say...

Ned: You feeling lucky, punk?

Justin: Fun.

Griffin: And I imagine you then pull the trigger? That's when you do it?

Clint: Yeah.

Griffin: Okay. Uh, yeah, you shoot this thing right in the face. What's the harm on your revolver?

Clint: The revolver is two harm.

Griffin: Yeah. Uh, you point this gun at its face and pull the trigger, and there is another spray of black slime. And I think all three of you are, for a moment, temporarily kind of deafened as the sound of this gunshot just like, explodes in this cavern. It is indescribably loud, and the beast rears back and is sort of, takes this shot head on, no pun intended.

And as it comes back down from rearing back, I think it hits you with one of its claws. It has this like, lizard-like form, but its two front arms end in these deadly claws, that I think it just like, jabs into you, which knocks you backwards. But it also hits you for two harm.

Ned: Ow! Oh, oh, oh, ow, ow.

Griffin: And you are knocked away from the fire in the center of the room, and we jump to Aubrey. Aubrey, the fire in this room is now burning, I think, a lot hotter than you originally anticipated. This cavern is actually starting to

get a bit sweltering, and smoke is accumulating in the top of the chamber as the beast reels back from Ned, and kind of comes down a few feet closer to this blaze. It's nothing that is like, posing any threat to you right now, though. What do you do?

Travis: Is there any system, like, bloodied or anything in this game, to know, like... Now is the time for finishing moves.

Griffin: How close it is? Um, no, not really. Everything like that, and this covers a lot of stuff like this in this game, is all narrative. This thing, you can tell, you have burned away its armor. That gunshot would not have done as much damage if it still had that patchwork pelt. But because of the trap you guys laid, and uh, the stuff that you did, it now no longer has that armor. So, it is exposed, and you know what it's weak against, and you've dealt a shit ton of damage to it so far.

Travis: Okay. Um, I'm just gonna... shoot fire at it again, I guess.

Griffin: So this is your first time using your magic as a kick some ass attack.

Travis: Yeah.

Griffin: I want to make it clear. Spellcaster has use magic, which you can do to sort of create these different effects that you pick from a list. If you want to use your magic attack that you created when you made your character, your fire blast, all those tags you chose, it is a kick some ass roll, but you just do something completely different than the other characters.

Travis: Yes. You are correct. Okay, well, she looks this thing in the eye, and she says...

Aubrey: Three thousand years ago, on the banks of the Nile, the Egyptian priests believe that if a person—

Griffin: It just screams at you.

Aubrey: I am that person. That's what I was getting... anyways, fire!

Travis: And then, okay. So that's a ten.

Justin: Nice!

Travis: Um, well, it's eight plus two for weird. Ten. On a ten or above, um, the fire doesn't spread, which is super cool. And she does like, the same, you know, snap to create the thing, fire hands, misdirection, all that same shit that she does in her act, to shoot a blast of flame at this motherfucker.

Um, and so, the base is blast, so it's two harm, and effect is fire, which adds two harm fire to it. So, four harm.

Griffin: Okay. And what's your bonus effect? 'Cause this is also a kick some ass roll, so you get something special for what you rolled. 'Cause this thing's gonna hit you back. So, the effects are, you gain the advantage. Take plus one forward, or give plus one forward to another player. You inflict terrible harm. You suffer less harm, or you force them where you want them.

Travis: You know, I'm gonna go with terrible harm.

Griffin: Alright. A popular choice for everyone.

Travis: Well, this is final battle shit, you know?

Griffin: Yeah, sure. Okay, that is five harm total. Uh, because you have blast, which has the tags 'obvious, loud', I think it's even louder than the gunshot that just went off. I think, again, all of your senses are now kind of reeling—

Travis: I also want you to just picture, when that goes off, the first time it being Aubrey's doing it in anger, and in—she's just laughing hysterically after it happens, like...

Aubrey: Did you see that?! What was that?

Griffin: Alright. It—you are cackling, laughing as this explosion goes off in the center of the room, and this thing takes five huge harm. And it takes this

damage, and reels backwards, uh, and you can actually see inside of its like, black carapace. You actually see this like, faint orange light for just a second, which kind of fades away as it comes back down to the ground. And as it comes back down to the ground, Aubrey, it doesn't slash at you with its claws. I think it just like, head-butts you, and you go flying backwards. And as you sort of smash against the cave wall, several feet away from where you were just standing, you kind of bust your head against the wall, and land down on the ground, and take two harm for that.

Aubrey: Ow.

Griffin: Uh, Duck. You see your new friend Aubrey, Torch Girl as you call her, get tossed backwards, rag dolled by this thing, after she explodes it again. You are holding the blade in your hand, and what do you do?

Justin: What's my sort of... which way is the beast facing? Which way, where—

Griffin: Not towards you. I think the beast is still facing toward Aubrey. You're standing kind of off to the side, just a few feet away. This is kind of tight quarters, so you're not too super far away from this thing.

Justin: Okay. I will, uh, I guess I'm gonna try to tackle it. Yeah. I think that's what I'm gonna try to do. I'm gonna take a run at it from the side with Beacon, and try to knock it off balance.

Griffin: Uh, in any particular direction?

Justin: To its side. I'm basically just trying to get its attention with stabbing.

Griffin: So what we could do here is, we could do an assist roll, right? Instead of you, traditionally, trying to kick some ass, if you want to try to find a way to help out the other players by hindering this monster, you could do help out, where you can grant them advantages if you succeed. Which I think is narratively more interesting than you just continuing to slash and slash and slash at it.

Justin: Yeah. Here's what I'm gonna do. I'm going to tackle the beast, and try to uh, occupy it, so I can give Ned a real clean shot at it.

Griffin: Okay. Cool. Go ahead and roll to help out. This is plus cool.

Justin: Uh, seven, and then Duck's cool is two.

Griffin: Okay, so that's a nine. It's a mixed success.

Travis: Man, Duck's really cool.

Griffin: Yeah. On a mixed success, your help grants whoever you try to help out plus one to their roll. But you expose yourself to trouble or danger, which is fucking fantastic.

Justin: Great.

Griffin: So you have... I mean, to continue the threat of Monster Hunter talk on this program, have you mounted the monster? Explain to me like, where you are.

Justin: Yes, I have mounted the monster. I should also mention that I put on my bandit cloak before I did this—

Griffin: Yeah, sure, so you're gonna get lots of sick drops.

Justin: So I can carve off some trade in materials.

Clint: What the hell are you talking about?

Travis: Oh, we gotta get you on Monster Hunter, Dad.

Griffin: Yeah, don't worry about it, Daddy. Uh, alright, Ned, you see Duck run and tackle into the monster, and it sort of lurches to the side a bit as Duck collides with it. And then, you see Duck is now on top of this big, slimy beast, granting you a pretty nice opening for whatever you decide to do next. And you will have plus one on whatever this roll is, as long as you are sort of using this window that Duck has opened up for you.

Duck: Hey, uh, Ned, if you have any, uh, options other than shooting it, I would just endorse those so fully, man. Like, you have no idea how little I want you to shoot this fuckin' thing.

Ned: Ah, I get you, friend.

Duck: No, this is not sarcasm. Please, Ned, for the love of Christ.

Ned: You—you don't—

Duck: I didn't—hey, listen. If you want to say I didn't think through this, that's completely fair. We can totally sort of debrief afterwards. But please, something other than shooting.

Ned: So you *do* want me to shoot him.

Duck: Oh my God. Oh... well, that's it. This is where I wrap up, huh? Alright. Well, them's the breaks, I guess.

Griffin: Ned, what do you do?

Clint: Oh, God. Um, alright, so... if Ned can't shoot it because Duck told him not to, um... okay, I know. The big, heavy walking stick. I'm gonna jam it right down this thing's throat. Just ram it right down whatever it has left of a mouth and a throat. This heavy, wood walking stick.

Griffin: Cool.

Clint: Just like a giant tongue depressor. Just ram it right down his throat.

Griffin: Uh, cool. Roll to kick some ass, and you will get plus one on this roll because of what Duck set up there, plus your normal tough roll.

Clint: Okay, well, my tough is zero. My roll is eleven, plus one makes it twelve.

Griffin: Jesus, these fuckin' rolls. Okay.

Clint: Swear to God. I love these new die.

Griffin: Alright, pick an extra effect from the list for uh, kicking some ass so very good.

Clint: I think... no, I'm gonna pass it forward. I'm gonna pay it forward. Pay it forward to Aubrey.

Griffin: Uh, okay. You grant Aubrey plus one forward on her next roll as you jam this thing down the monster's throat. And as you do so, I think it rears its head to the side, and kind of like, yelps, as much as it can help with a big walking stick in its throat, in pain. And then, when it brings its head back around, it just smashes into you.

And I think it probably just does one harm as you are knocked backward. And as it does that, Duck, you're also kind of tossed from its back, and you land several feet away. And as you hit the cave floor, you also take one harm.

Clint: How many harmses is... do I get?

Griffin: Seven. But once you've taken four, it's serious damage.

Clint: Okay.

Justin: Yeah. And Griff, please, if a harm is below two, please don't bother me with it.

Griffin: Okay.

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: Uh, and now, this thing is looking super not good.

Travis: I know what I want to do! I know what I want to do! I want to enchant a weapon and set that walking stick on fire.

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah. Okay.

[ambient fight music plays]

Griffin: Uh, roll to use magic.

Travis: Uh, well, that didn't work. But I want to use my luck here, 'cause I really want to do this.

Griffin: Okay. You're spending a point of luck to—

Travis: Yeah, 'cause I think this is a big, finishing move.

Griffin: Yeah, I love it. Okay. Mark luck, and you have spent one luck.

Travis: I want to do a cool line.

Griffin: Yeah, do a cool line.

Aubrey: Fuego, you bastard.

Griffin: The monster lands on the floor with this walking stick in its throat, just kind of barely emerging from its mouth. And Aubrey, you're laying on the floor right in front of it. And you just sit up, and you grab the walking stick with your hand, and we see it glow. And as it glows a bright orange, I think the chamber grows silent, as we watch the inside of this monster glow. Softly at first, and then brighter, and bright orange. And then, in a spray of black mist, the beast explodes.

And as it explodes, I think all three of you are flung backwards, away from the beast, as this wave of force shoots out at you. And Aubrey, because you were right up against the wall, I think you smash up against the wall again, and you bang your head again, and as you land on the floor and you roll a couple feet as you bounce off of it, the scene around you just kind of starts coming to you in flashes.

You see Duck and Ned struggle to climb to a kneeling position. You see the smoke that was filling this chamber is spreading much faster, now. This fire has grown wild. And the smoke is filling your lungs, and now you're kind of unable to catch your breath. And in another flash, you look toward the mouth of the cave, and you see that wall of fire still roaring high. And as your vision finally fades, you see a figure appear in the fire. You see a large woman, wrapped in her duster, leaping through the flames in your direction. And then, you lose consciousness.

[ambient music plays]

Griffin: Hey, everybody, this is Griffin McElroy, your temporary dungeon master, your best friend, and your old, old sailor, coming into the docks. Got a bunch of fish that I'm here to sell to the townsfolks. And uh, thank you so much for listening to The Adventure Zone. This is the final episode in our Amnesty mini arc. We have had so much fun doing this one, and I feel like we all really learned a lot about what we want to do for the next full season of the podcast.

So we hope you enjoyed it, and we are going to be moving onto Travis' game next, a mini arc that he is calling Dust. And we are gonna be playing a new game called Urban Shadows, if you want to go ahead and start reading up on that. And you'll find out a lot more when we do our setup episode for The Adventure Zone: Dust, DMed by Travis McElroy, starting next week.

But for right now, let's talk about some advertisers. First off, I want to tell you all about Casper. Support for The Adventure Zone comes in part from Casper this week, who is offering a competitive, limited time, presidents' day offer for the first time ever. Casper has three mattress lines to choose from: the original Casper, the OG. The innovative Wave, and the streamlined Essential. Ooh. Essential. Gotta get that essential sleep for your most essential bones.

Casper isn't just a mattress company. They also have sheets and pillows and bedframes, and even dog beds for your essential dogs. We have a Casper mattress here in our house, in our guest room, that I've slept on a couple times, mostly, as long as I'm talking about it, when I do get very bad gas or some sort of stomach issue, and I don't want to be in my regular bed with

Rachel, just blasting up a storm. I'll sleep on that Casper, and it's nice and soft.

Also, my guests sleep in it, and it's very comfortable for them. They tell me how comfortable it is, although, I think they'd be less comfortable knowing that I go in there to have tummy sickness. I don't think this is a good advertisement.

Anyway, for a limited time, visit Casper.com/savings and receive up to \$200 for your purchase of \$2,000 or more. This special offer expires February 20th, 2018. See Casper.com/terms for more details.

The Adventure Zone is also supported in part by Blue Apron. Blue Apron partners with sustainable farms, fisheries, and ranchers, to bring you all the ingredients you need to create incredible home cooked meals. Ingredients come paired with an easy to follow recipe card, and they're delivered directly to your door, weekly, in a refrigerated box. We love Blue Apron. I've used it for a long time, and learned a bunch of very valuable cooking skills, and made a bunch of really tasty dinners for me and the family. And uh, I'm a big fan.

You can rediscover how fun cooking can be while enjoying specialty ingredients and exploring new flavors and cuisines. Get \$30 off your first order by visiting BlueApron.com/Adventure.

Got a few jumbotrons to tell you about. Before we get into those, I have a quick correction for a jumbotron I really goofed up a couple weeks back. It was all about the Legion of Renob, which is an actual play podcast that sounded like a lot of fun, and I did call it Legend of Renob. Many times, apparently. That's not what it's called. It's Legion of Renob. And a few of our listeners pointed out that Renob is the word 'boner' spelled backwards. So take that information, internalize it, let it allow you to grow as a person, and then, go check out Legion of Renob.

You can find out more and listen to the whole podcast at Legion of Renob. And that's Legion, of, and then the word 'boner' spelled backwards, dot com.

Our first jumbotron this week is all about D20 Dames. Do blood-soaked dungeons and ale-infused hijinks peak your interest? Then roll initiative with D20 Dames, a storytelling podcast powered by D&D and conjured into existence entirely by witches. Err, women. I don't know why I read 'err' that way. Err, women.

Every other week, these daring ladies explore a fantasy world with epic shenanigans along the way, like beheading or befriending monsters, and punching a whole lot of creeps. Uh, jump into this story now, at D20 Dames. That's D, and then the number 20, Dames dot com, or subscribe on iTunes. Seriously, go find it now. Misadventure awaits. Go listen to D20 Dames. Go scratch that actual play itch. It's good for what ails you. We all need more adventure in our lives. What are you gonna do, go fuckin' hang gliding? Naw.

I also want to tell you all about Join the Party. Join the Party is a character-driven, fifth edition, actual play... actually, they say 'real play.' Is that what we're calling it now? Anyway, real play podcast that sounds like an audio drama. They got fights, but also robots, political intrigue, queer characters, skater teens, and transcripts for every episode. When three unlikely heroes are plucked from jail to defend the wedding of the millennium, they're sucked into an adventure of talking gargoyles, anarchist bandits, and the royal betrayal. Something old, something new, something borrowed, and something that might just kill you, on Join the Party.

You can check it out by subscribing to Join the Party wherever you listen to podcasts, or find them on JointhePartyPod on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Tumbo. Or, Tumblr. But, the teens are calling it Tumbo.

I want to thank everybody who has been tweeting about the show using the #TheZoneCast hash tag. I really appreciate folks spreading the word about the whole show, and about Amnesty. You all have been really, very kind to us in telling all your friends who you think might be into this sort of supernatural drama thing that we made here with this mini arc. And we hope that you will continue supporting the mini arcs, as we get a little bit closer to season two. And if you do that, you might end up as a character in the show, at some point. I'm kind of done naming new characters for

Amnesty. I don't know what Travis' plan for Dust is. But I'm sure we'll find out in the coming weeks.

But yeah, if you could spread the word, we really do appreciate it a whole lot, and thank you very much in advance. I also want to thank Maximum Fun. You can go to MaximumFun.org and check out all the great podcasts there, all for free, and I guarantee you're gonna find something that you're just gonna really fall in love with. Shows like Stop Podcasting Yourself, and Judge John Hodgman, and Lady to Lady, and Switchblade Sisters, and Tights and Fights, and so many others, all at MaximumFun.org. And if you want to hear and see the video stuff that we all do, you can go to McElroyShows.com.

Also, we are making a graphic novel adaptation of the first arc of The Adventure Zone: Balance, called Here There Be Gerblins. And you can find out more about that and snag a preorder at TheAdventureZoneComic.com.

I'm gonna let you get back to kind of the come down of this episode, and again, thank you all so much for all the support that you've shown for TAZ Amnesty. It means a lot, and we'll be back next week with the setup episode for The Adventure Zone: Dust. So, I'll talk to you then. Bye.

[ambient music plays]

Griffin: Aubrey, the next day comes to you in waves. You find consciousness in these brief flashes again. A nurse comes in to check your charts. Ned and Duck swing by for a visit. A different nurse changes your IV. And in one of these flashes of consciousness, there's Mama, and she's in the hospital bed right next to yours.

And her hair is a bit singed, and she's wearing an oxygen mask, but she's otherwise no worse for wear. And she's holding your hand, and she's smiling behind her mask. And then, in another flash, it's morning, and Mama's bed is empty.

And Barclay is sitting in the corner, and he's reading a Lamplighter. And as you start to stir, as you finally wake up, you see him peek over the paper, and he looks a bit startled. And he says...

Barclay: Welcome back.

Aubrey: Where's Mama?

Barclay: Oh, she's—she's fine. She um, she ran off last night. Asked me to come in and stand vigil.

Aubrey: And Dr. Harris Bonkers. How's Dr. Harris Bonkers?

Barclay: Dr. Harris Bonkers is back at the lodge. Dani's watching him.

Aubrey: Okay.

Barclay: Mama said she had to run an errand. She, um... she actually left you something.

Griffin: And he reaches into a jacket. He's wearing a big pea coat. And he pulls out a piece of paper. You can actually tell that it's a medical chart that has been like, folded up, and uh, written on. Your name is written on the outside of this letter. He hands it over to you, and uh, he says...

Barclay: I'll go, uh... I'll go tell the nurse that you're up. Any luck, uh—

Aubrey: Get me some Jell-O.

Barclay: Yeah, I'll make sure to score you some Jell-O. Don't worry about it.

Aubrey: Lime. Make sure it's lime, please. This is important.

Griffin: He laughs. He says...

Barclay: I—I talked to them. They said, any luck, I can take you back to the lodge tonight to recuperate. Aubrey... you did unbelievably well last night.

Aubrey: Then get me two Jell-Os.

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: [laughs] He laughs, and he walks out of the room. And you open Mama's letter. And it reads...

Mama: "You and I don't know each other very well yet, Aubrey Little. So you'll have to take my word for it that I'm not the kind of person who finds themselves satisfied, or impressed by the exploits of other folks very easily. I'm quick to shut folks out, and I know that. This life I lived requires it. But Aubrey, I am proud beyond belief to know you.

You did something last night that few folks can do, and I'm not talking about shooting fireballs out of your hands, or slaying a monster the size of a Volvo, either. I'm talking about the moment that you decided to step foot into that cave. You did something hard last night, something scary, and necessary, and you did it without hesitating. Not for a second. And that courage, Aubrey... I'd say you remind me of myself when I was younger, if I didn't think it made me sound like a self-flattering old fart. But yeah, you know.

Life is tough for everyone who lives it. Not just this glamorous life of monster hunting, Aubrey, all of it. Everyone's. Most folks just stumble through it, feeling lost, and directionless. No sense of purpose. I know that feeling all too well, before I started doing this work. Before the lodge. We don't know each other very well, Aubrey, but I know a calling when I see one. You belong here at the lodge. You belong in the Pine Guard, protecting this world alongside me and Barclay. And Ned and Duck, too. I'm pretty sure those two wouldn't last a second in these woods without you.

I'm hoping this letter finds you in the same enthusiastic mood I saw when I first met you, Aubrey, 'cause I got kind of a big ask. Stay here. Help us fight back against the dark. You keep at it, I promise I will help you find out where your powers come from, just as soon as I get back. Oh, right—I gotta leave, just for a bit. Barclay will get you set up while I'm gone. I got some unfinished business needs taking care of, and that's all I can say about that right now. I'll catch you up next time I see you.

I'm reading this letter back right now, and I realize, it's all sounding a bit melodramatic, so you'll have to forgive me for that. I don't want to scare you away with a bunch of talk about saving the world. See, in my experience, that's a bit too intangible a goal for someone to fight for, anyway.

That's the advice I'm gonna leave you with, Aubrey. When you're out there, toe to toe with some demon, and you find yourself asking what you're doing it all for, just do what I do. I don't think about the world, Aubrey. I think about Amnesty Lodge."

[music plays]

Mama: "I think about it on a nice day. Dani's out in the garden outside, and it's in full bloom. There's a breeze off the river, pouring in through the windows, carrying the song that Moira's playing at the piano through the whole building. Jake and Barclay are back in the springs, and Jake's howling about the X Games or some shit. And all these folks, folks who thought their lives were finished once, they're together. They're happy. They're safe. I don't know about you, Aubrey, but to me, that sounds like a place worth fighting for."

Griffin: And as you lower the letter, you see your jacket slung over the chair in the corner of your hospital room. And it's a bit roughed up after your eventful evening, but it's held together. And through the arms of the chair, you can see inside the lapel. And you see, sewn into the fabric, the Pine Guard patch.

[music plays]

Griffin: Duck, you're home the night after the hunt. How are you, uh... how are you doing?

Justin: Pretty shaken up I think. Um, I think that Duck maybe doesn't, uh... I'm not gonna say wasn't in control, but he was more capable than he sort of thought he would be. And I think it's left him a little unnerved.

Griffin: My next question is very important for me to know, because I'm very excited to hear the answer. Where do you even put a talking sword in your apartment?

Justin: Where do I put the talking sword in my apartment? Uh, well...

Griffin: Do you stuff it in a box in the closet despite its protests, or do you sort of give it a nice little habitat?

Justin: No. I uh... [laughs] I uh, I put it up with the uh, with the coffee mugs. It's kind of stuffed up there above the coffee mugs.

Griffin: Okay. In a cabinet you can shut?

Justin: Yeah, but I leave it open, 'cause I feel like I probably owe it. I owe Beacon that, at least.

Griffin: Yeah, I think Beacon is very grateful when you put him up there and give him a little sunlight.

Justin: Oh, no, he's still being really shitty about it.

Griffin: Oh, okay.

Justin: [laughs] But he does appreciate that, at least, I can tell.

Griffin: I think we see you there in the kitchen, just doing some chores, the night after the hunt. And you walk out, back into the living room, and in a flash, there's Minerva. Still a blue, glowing silhouette, standing in your living room. And she's got her back turned to you as you enter, but she quickly reorients herself and faces you. And she takes a beat, and she says...

Minerva: Duck Newtoon.

Duck: Oh, God.

Minerva: You're different! You've embraced your destiny, haven't you?

Duck: Yeah, I guess.

Griffin: She gives this big, hearty laugh, and she says...

Minerva: Are you still afraid, Duck Newton?

Duck: You know... I think I'm more afraid.

Minerva: More afraid? Even with the Weapon of Destiny clutched in your hand?

Duck: Yeah. I mean... In the moment, it's kind of more of an annoyance. But now that it's sort of... [sighs] I feel like I opened a door that I don't know how to shut. And for a long time, having a closed door was enough. But I don't know how to walk this back, and I... I'm not crazy about that feeling.

Griffin: She looks contemplative, for maybe the first time that you've ever seen from Minerva. And she says...

Minerva: I can understand that. But be not afraid, Duck Newton. You possess a weapon far greater than those wielded by your foes. You have me in your corner.

Duck: And what does that get me, exactly?

Minerva: A friendship you will learn to treasure, Duck Newton.

Griffin: She gives a big, bellowing laugh again, and she says...

Minerva: Duck Newton, your destiny is larger than you could possibly comprehend, my friend. With your bravery and my expert tutelage, you will find the strength you require to save—

Griffin: And just like that, Minerva disappears. And somewhere far, far away, we see Minerva. We actually see her, not just her shadow.

[blues music plays]

Griffin: She's about six feet tall, head shaved, and decorated with paint in an intricate pattern, down to her forehead. She's wearing a blue tunic over some bulky armor, and she's standing on this glowing circle in a dark chamber. And she's speaking to a silhouette in the rough shape of Duck Newton. And in a flash, Duck's shadow disappears, as Minerva was mid-sentence. And now, she's alone in this place, as the circle below her grows dim.

And she closes her eyes, and she sighs, and she stays like that, almost meditative for several seconds. And then she opens her eyes and smiles at the progress her counterpart has made. And with several large strides, she walks toward the wall of this chamber, and she slides open a window. And we see her there, smiling as the faint, orange light from outside beams down on her face, as she's filled, for the first time in a long time, with hope.

[blues music plays]

Griffin: Ned, you have returned after taking a well-earned day off from the Cryptonomica. You arrive with a chime from the bell above the door, and we see your museum, and it's as clean as the day you bought it. You see Kirby walking around with a rag, just sort of finishing up, getting everything polished up, right before you open the store up to the general public. And he sees you enter, and he says...

Kirby: Hey, boss. You feeling better?

Ned: I feel pretty good. Uh, you know, thankfully, the uh... my uh, Chewbacca suit took a brunt of the blow. But I'm feeling good. Feeling fine, like cherry wine.

Griffin: He says...

Kirby: You told me yesterday you were taking a sick day. Why were you wearing your Chewbacca suit?

Ned: Uh, you know what? I've kind of gotten to the point where I like it. [laughs] I just, uh, you know... it's uh, tapered, you know. It's not like your standard Chewbacca suit. You know, it's like one of those, uh, one of those

form fitting ones. And I think it kind of accents my... I have some pretty big shoulders, so uh...

Griffin: He chuckles, and he says...

Kirby: Well, uh, I kept the shop up and running yesterday. Got the place cleaned up, looking, uh—sorry, museum. Got the museum up and looking good. Did a bit of deep cleaning. Uh, you should really consider dusting this place a little more often than you do, which is, I'm assuming, literally never.

Ned: Never. Never. It adds to the ambiance. The dust, the cobwebs. Come on, do you know nothing of showmanship?

Griffin: Uh, and the two of you are having a bit of debate about cleanliness as the bell above the door rings again. And a young woman enters the room. She's got a camera strapped around her neck, and she's got a hiking pack. And she says, uh...

Woman: Is this the, uh... is this the Cryptonomica?

Ned: Welcome to the stygian darkness that is the Cryptonomica! As you enter, you will be faced with mindboggling sights! Things that threaten your very sanity! Welcome, welcome.

Griffin: I think you're giving this spiel as a second person walks in. An older man, also carrying a hiking pack. And he walks in, and I think he just starts looking around at the exhibits, and you have never seen, I think, two customers in this store at the same time. And Kirby smiles, and he says...

Kirby: I think, uh... I think our financial troubles are behind us.

Griffin: And he kind of waves you to come over to his desk. And you approach, and he opens up his computer, and you see the computer is open to his web page, TheLamplighter.org, and he gives the page a quick refresh, and I think you're both startled by the number that you see on the screen. 186,000 views.

[theme music plays]

Griffin: Kirby was impressed with the footage that you shot with his camera, you and your Bigfoot costume, fighting a bobcat. But still, he never expected it to actually go viral. And now, you see the description to this footage. "For the full video, visit The Cryptonomica. 43 Bedlam Lane, Kepler, West Virginia."

[theme music plays]

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[music plays]

Allegra: I'm Allegra Ringo.

Renee: And I'm Renee Colvert. And we host a podcast called Can I Pet Your Dog?

Allegra: Renee, can I tell you about a dog I met this week?

Renee: I wish that you would. In turn, though, can I tell you about a dog hero?

Allegra: May I tell you about a dog breed, in a segment I like to call Mutt Minute?

Renee: I would love that. Could we maybe talk about some dog tech?

Allegra: Could we have some cool guests on, like Lin Manuel Miranda, Nicole Byer, and Ann Wheaton?

Renee: I mean, yeah, absolutely.

Allegra: I'm in.

Renee: You're on board?

Allegra: What do you say we uh, we do all of this, and put it into a podcast?

Renee: Yeah, okay.

Allegra: You think? Perfect. Uh, should we call it, like, I don't know, Can I Pet Your Dog?

Renee: Sure.

Allegra: Alright. What do you say we put it on every Tuesday on Maximum Fun, or on iTunes?

Renee: Sounds good to me.

Allegra: Meeting's over.

[phone ringing]

Hal: Yeah, Mark.

Mark: Hey, buddy.

Hal: Oh, hey, what's up, man?

Mark: Um, so, I'm at this mafia restaurant.

Hal: What?

Mark: I'm gonna go in and ask these guys what they think the best pasta shape is.

Hal: Mark, they're probably eating—

Mark: I have a hunch that it's probably ravioli. But I mean—you know what? That's a good idea. Whatever they're eating, I'll just take a look in their bowls and see what they have.

Hal: Why don't you—maybe—

Mark: There's supposed to be a big meeting there today.

Hal: Can you see it from the street? That sounds really dangerous.

Mark: I'm just gonna go inside and ask.

Hal: Don't—don't bother them. They're probably eating, you know—

Mark: Look, I'm not threatened by them.

Hal: How about we tell them what the best pasta is on our podcast, We Got this, with Mark and Hal?

Mark: Oh, that's a great idea.

Hal: Thank God.

Mark: Tuesdays at nine.

Hal: On MaximumFun.org.

Speaker 1: Hey, I love that show!