

The Adventure Zone: Amnesty – Episode 19

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Griffin: Previously on The Adventure Zone...

[theme music plays]

Griffin: The vision that you see is a meteor, and it is coming at you faster and faster.

Minerva: My planet... It, too, was connected to another place, far flung from our own world. Like your world, ours became tethered.

Griffin: And the Interpreter turns back to face you and gives you a little bow, and she says...

Interpreter: Again, my sincere apologies. [echoing voice] I wish she'd stop coming here. It's her world's fault that Sylvain's dying in the first place.

Griffin: And the words you just heard did not match up to the mouth movements that she made.

This man laughs, and he points at Ned on a television screen, and he says...

Prisoner: I know that bloke.

Indrid: Unfortunately, my time here has come to an end.

Duck: Can you take this goat man with you? Take him far away from here, and leave him somewhere where he's not gonna do anymore harm?

Griffin: You can tell, this is a cottonwood tree.

Clint: What can it do?

Griffin: This bough starts to split in half, longwise. It is like it is tearing itself in half. It releases these spores. You hear a cracking sound. An old, dead pine tree has snapped, and is falling right towards you.

[theme music plays]

Griffin: So I know we had a bit of a cliffhanger ending in the last episode, what with the tree falling over on Ned and Billy. But with your permission, Dad, I want to jump in sort of in media res to kind of that parlor room scene. You had a very successful roll, and so it felt weird to be like, "Yeah, that's right, you investigated so good. Here's a fuckin' tree."

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: So we'll say, you and Billy saved each other. You both pushed each other out of the way. It was very, very heroic.

Clint: Well, can we—

Travis: Wait, saved each other like, spiritually, Griffin? Do you think like, they found each other, and they made each other whole again?

Griffin: Yeah, they knocked each other out of the way, and once they were laying in the snow, they were like, "Do you take the lord and savior, Jesus Christ, into your..."

Clint: Uh, we have to act it out. We don't want one of those cheap cliffhanger resolutions.

Griffin: Okay, let's act it out.

Clint: Okay.

Griffin: Crack. Rrrt.

Ned: Look out, Billy!

Billy: Baa, pizza!

Ned: Yikes!

Justin: Can I say, that was thrilling. I actually...

Griffin: I'm glad that we did that.

Justin: Yeah.

Travis: Put some foley in there, and some...

Clint: Trust my dramatic senses.

Griffin: For sure. So the—

Justin: It's got foley in there.

Griffin: Yeah. [laughs] The three of you are sitting in the Pine Guard HQ with Barclay and Mama, all around a table in the center of your space down there. There are some maps and books sort of spread out across the table that Barclay has brought down from Mama's office, and you are all reconvening after your investigation, and uh, Ned, you're probably still a little out of breath from escaping the forest. I think this like, *just* happened. And I want to do like, the parlor room scene of you all summarizing what you've learned, and coming up with the plan of attack.

One order of business, though, before we do that. Ned, after you escaped the woods, and everybody got back together to sort of uh, come up with a plan, what... where's Billy? What did you do with Billy?

Clint: Uh, Billy is going to stay at the Cryptonomica.

Griffin: Okay.

Clint: It just felt right. I've given him like a little jumper, a custodian's, y'know, coveralls thing. And it's got his name on it.

Griffin: Okay.

Travis: How did you do that so quickly?

Clint: It was used. I got it at the Goodwill.

Griffin: So Kirby was likely...

Travis: So you found... wait, hold on. You found an embroidered jumpsuit from someone named Billy that had put their jumpsuit at the thrift store?

Griffin: It's a pretty common name.

Justin: It's a pretty common name, to be fair.

Travis: I mean, I guess.

Griffin: Uh, I imagine Kirby was very confused when you dropped off this Ryan Gosling at the store.

Clint: Yeah, but he's a huge Gosling fan, so it really worked out. I mean, he—

Justin: It's as close as he's gonna get.

Travis: Kirby, Ryan Gosling got hit on the head really hard, and can only say 'pizza' and 'Duck.' You're gonna need to take care of him.

Griffin: [laughs]

Travis: We're in a full-blown, overboard situation.

Griffin: Okay. That's fine. So, uh, Mama is standing over the table. She's still on crutches, sort of recovering from the injuries that she sustained while she was exploring Sylvain last arc. She's also got a cold, it seems like. She's doing a lot of hacking and sneezing, but she's trying to keep it together as you all sort of wrap up this hunt. And Mama says...

Mama: Alright, I uh... I admit, I've been a little out of the loop on this one. So we got something's causing deadly accidents all around Kepler. What do we know?

Aubrey: It has to do with like... not just accidents, but like, changing the future? I don't know how much you know about the multiverse, Mama, but—

Mama: I know more than you would believe.

Duck: Somebody get a whiteboard in here.

Aubrey: Okay, so every decision we make, spider web, spider web, spider web. Explanation, explanation, explanation. And that's what's going on.

Duck: Let's just sit down. Everybody sit down. Watch this DVD of The Butterfly Effect.

Aubrey: Yeah.

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: It's Ashton Kutcher's magnum opus.

Justin: Now, are we doing that?

Griffin: Yeah, you take a break to watch the whole movie, The Butterfly Effect. It is not as good as you remember, and you don't remember it being great.

Duck: Alright, everybody. Now, listen. This isn't important, but if you all do want to follow it up with Butterfly Effect 2, or BE2 as we in the—

Griffin: You just leave the Effects letter off of it?

Justin: What? No, B-E makes be. So it's be. BE2. BE2.

Griffin: Gotcha.

Justin: So, BE2. None of the returning sort of performers are in this one, but uh—

Aubrey: Oh, they couldn't even get Ethan Suplee? He's so good.

Duck: Here's a great thing. Here's the best thing about Butterfly Effect 2. It is better than Butterfly Effect 3: Revelations. So you can expect—

Aubrey: Okay.

Mama: There's a third one. Damn.

Duck: That is a high, high praise. High praise.

Mama: Okay, but do we know what this thing is?

Aubrey: The movie?

Mama: The thing that's changing... that's cause... I need everybody to sort of focus up. We are talking about a thing that has killed people.

Ned: There is a very large tree. And as it grows, it changes the future. Every time a branch shoots off from this tree, it's a different timeline. And I think it's using that to create all these new timelines.

Aubrey: Y'know, when we say it out loud, we fought a giant thing that had like, incorporated a bunch of different animals into it, and like, a water spirit that like, could be anywhere there was water. And this is a tree.

Mama: Yeah, I mean, it's just a tree. Why don't you all go nip this in the... I mean, do we know where it is?

Aubrey: Nip it in the bud. Finish the sentence, Mama.

Mama: Nip in the... I saw where it was going, and I didn't want to... I want to kill this thing, and I knew if I went down that road, it'd be another 15 minutes of tree jokes.

Duck: You shouldn't feel ashamed of that.

Mama: Alright, well, do we know where it is, though?

Ned: Yes. I have the location, courtesy of my friend Billy. And I'm sure if he... if we just follow the tracks of the Sno-Cat, we'll be able to get back to it.

Mama: Now, wait a minute. Who's Billy? Did you tell somebody else about what we do here, Ned?

Duck: Ah, shit.

Ned: Shhhhhhit. Damn it.

Duck: Goddamn it, Ned.

Ned: Damn it. Sorry.

Duck: Goddamn it. Alright, listen. Well, this one's my fuck up, so I guess I'll just... let me own this one so Ned doesn't get us any deeper. Um... so, I rescued... [tongue clicking] The plant has some goats that work for it. Like, professional goats. And...

Aubrey: Business goats.

Duck: Business goats. And I uh, I saved one of their lives. Um, and... then it became very sort of spiritually indebted to me. And then, Aubrey made it talk.

Aubrey: Yeah, that one's on me.

Duck: That one's on Aubrey, for sure. She made it talk, sort of. But it's like... it's not a mon—it's like, it's chill, I guess is what I'm trying to get across.

Aubrey: Yeah. On a scale of one to ten, I think we've established, it's like an eight.

Duck: Yeah, it's just like... it's really chill.

Griffin: The whole time you're saying this, Barclay is like, standing behind Mama, and making just a grim face and shaking his head 'no,' like, "What are you doing?" And sure enough, Mama is sort of stunned. Like literally mouth agape, listening to what you're saying. She says...

Mama: You... saved one of these things? You brought... [laughs] You brought one of these things back to Amnesty Lodge?

Duck: I knew you wouldn't understand. I—

Mama: No, I understand real good, Duck. I understand what you've... [laughs] What you've done. You have violated the safety of this place that I've worked so hard to protect. You have befriended an Abomination, Duck?

Aubrey: No, Mama, if I may, I know how it sounds all kind of laid out like this. But it happened like, in sequence. It was the kind of thing of like, the thing was injured, Duck brought it back here to question it, to find out what was going on, like, had it chained down. We couldn't talk to it, 'cause it didn't understand English, and so like, that's why I made it talk, and—

Mama: And now you're best buddies, he's gonna come to your Christmas party. Is that what you're telling me?

Aubrey: Well, he's helped! We wouldn't have found the tree without him. We wouldn't... he helped us fight off other bad creatures. So like—

Ned: And y'know what, bad creatures... Y'know, Mama, you basically run a hostel for sasquatches, and vampires, and—

Aubrey: No offense, Barclay.

Griffin: Oh, she is not having any of this. She pounds her fuckin' fist on the table, and she says...

Mama: Ned, they are—the Abominations aren't—they are different from the people who have found their way over here from Sylvain. Do you get that? The Abominations—I've been fighting them a lot longer than y'all. They don't just deal in claws and fangs and knives. They can get in your head. This thing is trying to worm its way into your inner circle, so that when you're most vulnerable, he can take you out! This thing... they are capable of playing mental games, too. And you all are just playing it fast and loose with it.

Aubrey: He mostly just says 'pizza.'

Duck: Yeah, he only says 'pizza' and 'Duck.'

Ned: And he has helped us quite a bit.

Aubrey: I'm not super worried about his mental acuity.

Duck: Do you want to... hey, Mama, do you want to talk to him?

Mama: [laughs] Yeah, why don't you bring him around, and I'll have myself a nice chat with your friend?

Duck: Now, I under... that... listen. I'm no dunce. That's—you're gonna kill him. Nice try. Listen, he's safe...ly... stored somewhere. Can we focus on this mean tree, and then move on from there?

Griffin: She says...

Mama: We are going to need to deal—

Griffin: And as she's talking, there's a knock at the cellar door. And you hear Jake Coolice shouting from outside, and he says...

Jake: Hey, Mama? Uh, everyone? You're... you're gonna want to come see this.

Griffin: Uh, and uh, he opens up the door, and Mama kind of like, sighs and looks down for a bit, and then, uh, follows Barclay up and up the stairs, and out of the Pine Guard haven. Do you all follow, or I assume so.

Travis: Yeah.

Griffin: This is my least favorite part of playing role-playing games.

Travis: No, y'know what? We stay in the basement and let the action unfold outside.

Griffin: Yeah, exactly. Uh, you all emerge from the cellar, and you see just an assembly of Amnesty Lodge residents standing on the porch.

[ambient music plays]

Griffin: There's Dani, and Moira, and Agent Stern. They are all just sort of observing the scene outside. The cottonwood snow that you sort of discovered, Ned, that has sort of fallen every time that there's been one of these accidents, it is falling in sheets. And it is not just—it's not just localized in your immediate vicinity, either, as it kind of has been whenever these accidents have happened. Through the trees, lining the access road out to the main drag of cliff side, and then, y'know, over the precipice of the cliff, down into the heart of Kepler, this false snow is just everywhere. It is all over Kepler.

And Mama says...

Mama: If this is following the pattern, that means... something big is about to happen, and we have no idea what it's gonna be.

Duck: Well, listen. Let's get in the fuckin' truck, and let's go kill this tree before it's got a chance to do anything.

Aubrey: I'm—I'm fully on board with that.

Duck: I have a uh... a suspicion, I would say, from talking to Juno. I think that... y'all ever heard like, copper in a tree can kill it? Like, even like, a single copper nail, uh, in a tree can kill it?

Mama: I didn't think that was actually true.

Duck: Well, I didn't think Bigfoot existed, but here we are, huh?

Clint: [laughs]

Duck: Now, in our sort of understanding of things, in the... I mean, I'm a forest ranger, right? It doesn't. It's a legend, but like—

Aubrey: You are?!

Duck: Okay. The legends... I mean, there's a lot of legends we've found out in the past few months have been true. So I think that this thing might abide by those rules. They had to come from somewhere, right? And if it didn't come from reality, where might it have come from?

Aubrey: So, just to... if I may extrapolate here, what you're saying, Duck, is that we need to take a hammer and a nail and just walk up to the tree, and hammer a nail into it?

Duck: Uh, yeah. Now that you say it kind of with a little bit of that tone, it does... it's a little... yeah, I understand what you're saying. But um—

Aubrey: Then again, I kinda see now that I say it. What are we worried about? The tree running away while we try to do it? Like... okay. Maybe.

Duck: I mean, I guess we try that. And I mean, like, I wish I had a bigger copper something. That's my dream, is like, a copper nail gun, or um...

Ned: I... y'know, I've got nail guns at the Cryptonomica from where we've been building all the sets for, y'know, Saturday Night Dead.

Duck: Okay.

Griffin: Dad is um... that's a very handy... I would say you have nail gun at the Cryptonomica. I don't know that you have five nail guns for—

Clint: Well, that'll cover me. Good.

Griffin: Yeah.

Duck: And when I say nail gun, I don't actually—the problem with nail guns, y'all, is that it's not like... it's not like Home Alone taught us. Nail guns don't really like, pull the trigger and they fire a nail across the room, right?

Aubrey: Well... hold on. Actually, um, y'know, I did some high school theater. That should be surprising to no one. And uh, there's some... there's some workarounds for that that you can do.

Duck: Some mods?

Aubrey: Yeah. It's not great, as far as like, danger goes. But you can... you can uh, trick those safeties.

Ned: Yeah, and not only that, but I can... this one does do that, because Kirby has, well, a rather unusual butt cheek wound that would probably come from us horsing around with the nail gun.

Griffin: Having a nail fight with your employee, Kirby?

Travis: To pull back the curtain for everyone at home, I just gave an explanation of how we could rig it. But Dad was insistent that he wanted to give Kirby a butt wound.

Griffin: Yeah, with a nail fight he did. Okay.

Duck: Alright, here's the plan. I picked up a bunch of nails from when I went to visit Juno. We'll go grab the nail gun from Ned's place, we'll try the nail gun. I'm having a hard time imagining it working, but like, let's give it a shot. Backup plan, I have a sword that I think would love to do a little Paul Bunyan action, so we could give that a try if all else fails. And then, Aubrey's got magic, so...

Ned: Got the fire. She's got the fire.

Duck: Well, we're not gonna be using any fire, thanks very much.

Ned: Wait, wait, wait, don't tie her hands.

Aubrey: I can control it!

Duck: I'll tie her hands. We're not gonna be tossing around a bunch of fireballs in a fucking forest, guys. Sorry. They do revoke your license for that as a forest ranger, if you bring a magic person to light trees on fire, guys.

Aubrey: Okay...

Ned: Well, last resort, maybe.

Duck: No! God, listen, that's not—that's no resort. Not applicable. I have to go to work tomorrow, alright? No way.

Griffin: [laughs]

Aubrey: Okay, we'll call it plan z.

Duck: There's plan no! That's it, no!

Ned: Z2.

Duck: Besides, there's other things that can kill trees, right? It doesn't have to be the one thing that also sets other cool ass trees on fire.

Aubrey: Got it.

Griffin: [laughs] Alright.

Aubrey: Got it. I won't unless I absolutely have to.

Duck: I'm done. I'm done. I'm out.

Griffin: Alright, regulators mount up. Um, you swing by Cryptonomica, you grab the nail gun. Do you also grab Billy while you are there, or are you leaving him in the safety of the Cryptonomica?

Clint: [sighs]

Griffin: Up to you.

Travis: On the one hand, I would appreciate the help. But on the other hand, this tree seems to have some kind of sway over the goat people. And I don't want to have to fight Billy.

Justin: Yeah. Mmm... yeah, I don't want to bring Billy.

Griffin: Okay. You all leave Billy behind. He looks at you, actually, as you swing by, and—

Clint: Aww.

Griffin: --kind of cocks his head as he sees you leaving without him, and he goes...

Billy: Duck?

Duck: Uh... Pizza. We'll pizza right back.

Griffin: He nods solemnly in complete understanding.

Travis: Of course. I leave him a \$20 in case he wants to order some pizza.

Justin: [laughs] Can you imagine that conversation? "Uh, hello, this is Dominos."

"Pizza!"

"Okay, good. What kind of—"

"Duck!"

"You want duck pizza? That's foul, no way. We don't sell that."

"Pizza!"

"I get it."

Travis: That's fowl! That's fowl, he says!

Justin: Fowl. Oh, great. Good.

Griffin: He says...

Ned: Kirby, show him a movie. Show him, um...

Aubrey: The Notebook.

Ned: Show him one of his own movies.

Duck: I got BE2 all loaded up in there already, if you want that bad boy.

Griffin: Kirby says...

Kirby: Aw, fuck yeah, BE2. That's my favorite. It's way better than BE3.

[music plays]

Griffin: We've done a couple hunts now, and this is sort of a different like, approach, right? Because you all... this thing's not moving. It is a tree. You know where it is. It is not like you are trying to lure it somewhere, and then like, get the drop on it so it can't escape. It's not going to escape. It's a fuckin' tree. So I guess like, this is a different kind of advantage for you all. Like, what is your... what is your approach as you all make your way into the forest? Ned, you have no problem following the tracks of the Sno-Cat. What's your strategy as you make your way into this sort of encounter?

Clint: We need to come from up wind, because they can smell fear.

Justin: Um, I think we're taking it reeeeeal careful. We know where it is. And I'm not saying we're like, crawling, but we're not taking a lot of unnecessary risks getting to it.

Griffin: Uh, do you want to... why don't you read a bad situation? Right? Like, that sounds like what you are describing here.

Justin: Okay, that's fair. And that is a roll of... what rolls against read a bad situation?

Griffin: Uh, sharp.

Clint: Sharp.

Griffin: Nice. Jesus. That is a twelve. You all are on a hot streak. I hope that it does not end when you are crossing swords with this big tree. Uh, oh no, I spoiled the fact that they have so many swords. Uh, okay, so, on a ten plus, you hold three, holy shit. You get to ask three questions, and every time you act on the answers, you get plus one ongoing while the information is relevant.

What's my best way in? What's my best way out? Are there dangers we haven't noticed? What's the biggest threat? What's most vulnerable to me? And what's the best way to protect the victims?

Justin: Well, let's see which ones I can answer for... our in and out, I don't know. Dangers we haven't noticed, I don't know. Biggest threat, the tree I guess. What's most vulnerable to me, the tree.

Griffin: [laughs]

Justin: What's the best way to protect the victims... I don't think there are victims. So I will say, what's the best way in?

Griffin: As you approach the tree, you do sort of get a lay of the land. You see... first, you see the injured goat man, the one that Aubrey sort of flung into a tree, and just really messed him up. He is... and Ned, you saw this goat man sort of crawling around when you first found the tree. Right now, he is laying among the roots of the tree. The tree is sort of growing out of this gnarled dome of roots. It seems like it is like, semi-absorbed into the roots. Like, he has just been sort of sucked into them, and he is not moving.

Justin: Who?

Travis: The goat person?

Griffin: The goat person, yes.

Justin: Okay.

Griffin: You also see... You would just see this; I don't necessarily think that you need a question for this. You see another goat man. He is holding on with both hands to a chain, and dragging something through the snow, and you see that what he is dragging through the snow is Indrid Cold, who is bound up in this chain, and the goat—

Travis: The Mothman!

Griffin: The Mothman. And uh, this goat man, shovel goat man, brings Indrid over, also to the roots of the tree, sort of ties the chain around one of the roots, and secures him. Indrid has got a black eye. His hair is matted a bit. You can see a little bit of blood, there. But otherwise, he is just kind of staring calmly into the middle distance.

As you sort of get the lay of the land, right? You see these two other goat men. Duck, I think you get the like, line you can come at this clearing from where they're not necessarily going to see you as you make your first approach. So that is what I will give you for best way in.

Clint: Has Indred got his glasses on?

Griffin: Uh, yes. Indrid has his glasses on.

Clint: Okay. Well, I'm asking, 'cause if he... I was wondering if he was in Mothman form.

Griffin: If he wasn't, he'd be in Mothman... yeah, he's not. He's got his glasses on.

Justin: Okay. Um...

Ned: [whispering] We have to save the Mothman.

Aubrey: Yes.

Duck: Yeah, that's a whole tourism industry right there for Point Pleasant. I won't let it go down the tubes.

Justin: My next question is...

Aubrey: We don't want it to become Point So-So, y'know what I mean?

Justin: Ha. How do I help the victims?

Griffin: You realize the chain is not padlocked or anything like that. The best way for you to protect the victim would simply be to put yourself between him and the goat man. Both of the goat men's instruments, the shovel and the shears, are still there. The best way to protect Indrid is to, y'know, release him and keep the attention off of him so that the goat men don't go after him.

Justin: Okay. Lastly, what's the biggest threat?

Griffin: This is a tough one.

Justin: That's what I figured.

Griffin: There... so this thing like, splits off its branches, and uh, every time it does so, it like, shoots out these spores. And again, it splits off in these like, symmetrical patterns, and right now, you see... like, you see trees, uh... you know... Duck knows a tree. Uh, this one—

Justin: Thank you.

Travis: Duck knows trees.

Griffin: There's a lot of unusual things about this tree. But like, by far, the strangest thing about it is it has started to almost split in half entirely. It's a

very tall tree, so there's a good ten feet of trunk. And then, above that, it seems like the rest of the trunk has started to just like, peel away. Its two halves have just peeled away from each other. And in that gap, just spores are shooting up like crazy. It looks like a snow machine.

And as it has done so, the rest of the branches have fanned out completely, and it's almost like it is forming just like a perfect circle of branches and black leaves, all around the tree. That is, by far... I think you, Duck, in particular, you see that and know that it is extremely bad.

Duck: Aw, shit. Alright. Listen, guys. I've had a lot of insights in the past no seconds, and uh... [laughs] I'm well prepared to dole out a plan. Here's what I'm thinking. Ned, you take care of the tree. Get the nail gun. Blast it. Blaze it with the nails, okay? Full fire.

Ned: Okay. Good. From the cover of the brush, probably, I think.

Duck: Uh... I mean, if you think you're good enough shot there, 'cause... really go for it.

Ned: I think it's worth the risk, yeah.

Duck: Alright. Aubrey, I want you to take care of the spores, okay? Does that make sense? Do you think you can handle that? That seems like something you'd be good at disrupting.

Aubrey: Sure. Yeah. Okay.

Duck: Alright. I'm gonna rescue the Mothman.

Griffin: Okay.

Duck: And maybe they'll rename Point Pleasant after me.

Griffin: Point Ducktown.

Aubrey: Duck Pleasant. It's Pleasant Duck.

Duck: Uh, probably Duckberg. Thank you.

Griffin: [laughs]

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: Fair. Okay. Who's, uh... are you doing these things simultaneously? Are you trying to like, get the... what's the...

Justin: No, we're gonna do them as soon as I say go.

Griffin: Okay.

[long pause]

Duck: Go.

Griffin: [laughs] Alright.

Justin: Had to be quiet, so he can get a stealthy approach, if possible.

Griffin: Yeah, for sure. I think you can all get a stealthy approach. Ned, are you really hiding in the brush, and gonna try and take pot shots at this thing with your copper nails? Or was that a goof about how cowardly you are?

Clint: It is kind of how cowardly, but he realizes he's... at some point, he's gonna have to emerge into the open and start shooting away at it.

Griffin: Uh, I like that. Ned. Okay. You are... how close are you getting to this thing? Are you taking the stealth approach through this route that Duck discovered?

Clint: Well, it's not like it has eyes, right? So, assuming it can't see me is not a good idea.

Griffin: There are two goat men that could ostensibly see you.

Clint: Oh, right. Oh, what the hell. I'm gonna get within about ten feet of the trunk. Of the big trunk.

Griffin: Okay. Yeah. Then, act under pressure.

Clint: Act under pressure, that would be cool... and...

Travis: It would be cool.

Griffin: It would be cool if you got a good roll here.

Justin: It'd be cool if you add a lot of preamble. Whoa, hatching patcha!

Griffin: Uh, Ned got a six. However, because you were on... you were, y'know, following this sneaky path that Duck pulled out for you, and uh, you have not been sort of discovered, you get a plus one on that, which brings it up to a seven.

Travis: So it is a mixed success.

Griffin: It is a mixed success. I will give you a, um... price to pay. You walk towards this thing, and you start... you said you were peppering it? You're just rapid firing some nails into the side of it?

Clint: Let's see what one nail does, 'cause Duck did say one nail would do it. So let's see what one nail does before I start just holding the trigger down.

Griffin: Okay. You fire a nail off, and you are definitely close enough that it does not have a problem connecting with the tree. It uh, you see it sort of jam into the tree. The whole scene is sort of covered in moonlight, right? It's always close to a full moon whenever you guys are doing this. And you see the nail go into the tree. And as the nail sticks into the tree, you see it just instantly sort of reflexively start shuddering.

[ambient music plays]

Ned: It worked! I'll be damned! [laughs]

Griffin: As it does so, you hear this really loud and very unsettling rattling noise coming from the tree.

Duck: Hell yeah, Ned, you nailed it, man! We win!

Griffin: And you see the bark on the trunk, sort of around where the nail went in... it just like, starts to crack, and fall apart—

Duck: Oh, nice, dude!

Griffin: And it... this huge chunk of bark just sort of sloughs off the side of the tree. And a fairly small branch just like, snaps in half. And as you pull the trigger this time, the nail gun is jammed.

Ned: What?!

Duck: God.

Aubrey: Dip.

Griffin: And now, I think everybody kind of... the scene knows that you all are there. However, you all established that these things are trying to kind of happen simultaneously. So Aubrey or Duck, who wants to go next?

Travis: Well, Duck has said that I'm not allowed to use fire... I am going to use magic.

Griffin: Okay. To accomplish what?

Travis: Don't know yet. I mean, I have a thing that's trap a specific person, minion, or monster.

Griffin: I would give you that.

Travis: Yeah?

Griffin: Yeah, for sure. I mean, this is part of the monster's effect. I think this is like... it's a tree, so it's pretty fucking trapped already. So like, this is how it is affecting the world, I think that that would totally apply here.

Travis: Okay. Aubrey whispers...

Aubrey: I would like to contain the spores?

Travis: And like...

Griffin: You hear a voice say, "That's a weird one, man. Okay..."

Aubrey: I know! Listen. I know.

Griffin: You don't actually hear that.

Travis: Oh.

Griffin: Okay, so, I guess roll... are you doing this with... you have to tell me like, what that actually looks like before we like, try to roll. How are you trying to contain the spores?

Travis: So like, I've done wind before, and so, I think I'm trying to like create some kind of like... the wind is blowing them back to the tree.

Griffin: Uh, yeah, okay. You can like, sort of creating a whirlwind that traps them around the tree so they can—

Travis: Yeah, yeah.

Griffin: Okay, that's cool.

Travis: A swirl, rather than it like, blowing out into the world.

Griffin: For sure. I like that. Okay.

Travis: And do I get one forward because of our sneaky plan?

Griffin: No, you get one forward because of Duck identifying that the spores are super dangerous.

Travis: Okay, great. Well, I'm just putting that into the roll. So I just wanted you to know.

Griffin: Alright, let's see. Alright, that's a nine. Nine is a mixed success. It's going to have a glitch. The effect is weakened, it's of short duration, you take one harm, ignore armor, it draws immediate, unwelcome attention, or it has a problematic side effect.

Travis: Uh, let's go with problematic side effect.

Griffin: Um, okay. Uh, you create this whirlwind, and the spores that were shooting out of the huge rift in the middle of the tree, and also the spores that have started to like, just sort of emanate out of it as uh, Ned shoots the nail into it; they do start to swirl around the tree. It's like it's creating like a localized snow globe effect, right where you are.

As a side effect, the tree is now going to be harder to attack at range, just because it is like... it is sort of shrouded in this seed storm. Which brings us to Duck.

Duck: Hey, Indrid, are you with us?

Griffin: Uh, there is a goat man like, right there with Indrid. I think before you can...

Justin: Is he looking at Indrid, or what's the deal?

Griffin: Yeah. He definitely has his back to you.

Justin: I am going to pull out Beacon, and attack the chain that's binding Indrid.

Griffin: Uh, okay. And there is a goat man who's like, right there. So if you do this and don't do anything with the goat man, the goat man is gonna getcha.

Justin: Yeah, that's fine.

Griffin: Okay.

Justin: I need one action's worth of things to do.

Griffin: I feel you. Then this is gonna be an act under pressure, because there is pressure in the form of this enemy goat.

Justin: Mmkay. So that is cool. And am I act... I'm gonna give myself a plus one on this, because—

Griffin: Yes, because you identified how to save...

Justin: I'm acting on the information...

Griffin: Yes.

Justin: Oh, God. It's still just an eight.

Griffin: Uh, okay. This is a hard choice I'm gonna give you.

Justin: Okay.

Griffin: You get the drop on the goat man, and as he's watching over Indrid, after having just sort of tied him up to the roots.

[ambient music plays]

Griffin: All that the goat man sees is your shadow as you lift Beacon up over your head, and as you are sort of frozen in this moment, you recall a memory.

Duck, you are eighteen again. It's been several months since Minerva first appeared to you that night, awakening you with this vision of a house fire and this apocalyptic fire storm outside. And since then, you have rebuffed her offers of power and a heroic destiny. And in this memory, it's night time,

and you are in the abandoned, closed down clothing retailer, Altizer's. Your friends have cleared the floor in the main showroom, and set up like an audience of beat up mannequins as you and your friends play field hockey in the store.

Juno Devine, your current coworker, is there, and she's playing goalie, defending a goal that's sort of posted up in the men's casualwear department. And is it like a fairly big group of friends? You described this scene in the last episode, and I'm wondering how rowdy it got.

Justin: I mean, we have close friends, but it's more of like a hangout where a lot of people sort of know that it's there. Y'know what I mean? It's sort of a defacto hang.

Griffin: Little Roundhouse situation, but with drugs and hockey?

Justin: Yeah, exactly.

Griffin: Alright, I like that.

Justin: And by the way, Roundhouse did have plenty of drugs and hockey. It was just behind the scenes.

Griffin: [laughs] That's fair. Okay, you are breaking away towards Juno. And uh, she is trying to defend your shot, and she says...

Juno: Well shit, Duck, are you ever gonna use that stick to take a shot, or are you just planning on doing the foxtrot with it all night?

Duck: Well, Juno, I was planning on shoving it up your ass, but I guess if I have to make a choice...

Justin: And I slap the ball into the net. And it's the most amazing shot.

Travis: [laughs]

Griffin: [laughs] The mannequins come to life and applaud.

Travis: And one of those mannequins goes on to write Mighty Ducks and includes the slap shot in it, based on what they saw that night.

Griffin: They are all Kim Cattrall. Um, okay. Juno looks sort of disappointed, and then like, takes her gloves off, and pulls a cigarette out from behind her ear and lights it up, 'cause you're all a bunch of rowdy bad kids.

Justin: Yeah.

Griffin: As you turn around to sort of accept your accolades from the other players, Minerva is just like, right in your face. Just inches in front of you.

Duck: Jesus!

Griffin: Juno sort of exhales, and says...

Juno: You alright there, Duck?

Duck: Yeah. I was just thinking about how much I love The Offspring, and I got really excited.

Griffin: [laughs] Minerva says...

Minerva: Duck Newton! Participating in a bit of competitive recreation, I see. This could serve you well. It could develop your agility as you square off against your foe in a melee.

Justin: Um... uh, and I just nod. [laughs]

Clint: [laughs]

Justin: Just nod.

Griffin: She says...

Minerva: Duck Newton, please do not ignore me. Tonight is an auspicious occasion. I require your undivided attention.

Duck: Hey, I'm gonna go take a leak, y'all. I'll be right back.

Clint: [laughs]

Justin: And I'll go into where we always... where everybody takes a leak. And that's in the former housewares department. And like, everybody takes leaks here.

Griffin: Jesus.

Justin: I was gonna say... I realized, as I'm saying it, it's the worst.

Griffin: It's the most horrible thing you've—

Justin: Oh, y'know what, actually? There are probably bathrooms. [laughs]

Griffin: No, you can't retcon it. You're taking a leak just like—

Justin: It's a department store, Griffin! Of course there are bathrooms!

Griffin: On the floor.

Travis: Does the housewares department have like, display toilets for sale that you guys use?

Justin: That was the joke, but there probably are bathrooms.

Griffin: You're bad kids. You're peeing on the floor like a bunch of dogs. You are doing that, and Minerva says...

Minerva: Oh. I will give you some privacy.

Griffin: As you are just sort of pissing on the floor, like a house cat—

Justin: No, I don't need to actually piss! I was just trying to get away from them.

Griffin: Oh, okay.

Travis: It was subterfuge.

Justin: Yeah, thank you.

Griffin: Okay, you're not pissing, but it's everywhere. And Minerva says...

Minerva: I'm sorry to interrupt. It seemed like you were having a jovial time.

Duck: Yeah, I'm just trying to like, fuckin' chill. What's up? I told you, I'm not interested. Move on.

Griffin: She says...

Minerva: I understand that. But I have one last offer for you.

Griffin: And outside of the store, I think everybody inside the shop kind of freezes as headlights creep across the drawn blinds of the store. And you hear a vehicle come to a stop, just outside of where you are. And you hear Juno actually shout from the other room. She's like...

Juno: Oh, shit! It's the cops, everybody get down!

Griffin: And you hear a car door open, and you hear footsteps coming out of the vehicle, and you hear this faint, sort of metallic crunching noise. And then, you hear someone sort of exhale a deep sigh, and Minerva says...

Minerva: Duck Newton, it would behoove you to go outside before any of your friends are able to see what's happening out there.

Duck: Why, what's happening?

Minerva: You'll see.

Griffin: She's like, so pumped. She's like, so excited.

Duck: Oh, goddamn it. Alright. Fine. Fine.

Griffin: As you step outside, you just see this car pull away. It's a cab that is pulling off into the distance. It's sort of getting off the main drag, and onto the highway out of town.

Clint: Kepler's one cab.

Griffin: Its one cab. And several feet from the entrance to the store, there's like, this little uh, grassy sort of cutout in the sidewalk where a tree is growing in the middle of the town. There's a few of them sort of peppered across the main drag, sort of giving the downtown area of Kepler a bit of greenery. But in this little small patch of grass, you see a shape glistening in the moonlight. It is a sword. It is a long, straight, thin blade with a leather-bound hilt, and this intricately forged guard that appears to be in the shape of a mouth.

And Minerva suddenly disappears and reappears right behind the blade, and gestures towards it. And she says...

Minerva: I know your hesitance, Duck Newton. You have voiced it clearly, and I would not deign to ignore it. But you have been chosen, Duck, and that is a decision that cannot be reversed. I would ask of you this – take up the blade. Take up your fated instrument. And if you do not feel the call to pursue your destiny, I shall take my leave until you have grown to accept the tasks appointed to you.

Duck: Um. Well, I am, of course, honored. Uh... [laughs] Uh, I mean, I'll keep the sword. That seems pretty kickass. But I don't know what I'm supposed to... you want me to go kill the rest of the MacLeod Clan, and then I'll be the only one? Like there can only be one of us? Have you seen that movie? There could be only one?

Minerva: You know I have not seen any of your earth...

Duck: I haven't seen it either. It's like a sword guy? I don't know. It seemed kind of dumb to me, but uh, I'll keep the sword, hell yeah.

Justin: I pick it up.

Duck: [whooshing noises] Look at me! [whooshing noises]

Minerva: How, uh, how does it feel?

Duck: Uh, pretty kickass. Yeah. I mean, I'm not gonna go like, what, stab Dracula, whatever the fuck. But it's alright.

Minerva: But you could. You have the power to stab... you said Dracula?

Beacon: Minerva, instruct this beef boy to unhand me, please.

[music plays]

Griffin: [laughs] How does Duck feel about that?

Justin: He's shocked. Drops it on the ground like, what the fuck.

Beacon: Oh, excellent. Excellent. Another skilled combatant.

[music plays]

Griffin: This is the offer I have for you. You're gonna be able to swing down with enough force to cut the chain, and free Indrid, and you're gonna be able to do it, because you got the drop on this goat man. Your movement is so swift, you're going to be able to do it. The price to pay is, Beacon will be damaged.

Justin: Um...

Griffin: Not broken. I won't take that from you. But there will be some damage to the blade. You're swinging metal down onto hard metal, and you can get through it, but the durability of Beacon will be worn down a little bit.

Justin: Is this a choice I'm having to make?

Griffin: Yep.

Justin: Are you making me make this choice?

Griffin: I am making you make this choice.

Justin: I think it's what I would've done. Yeah. That's what I would do.

Griffin: Okay. You swing the blade down, and there is certainly some resistance as you chop the chain sort of against these hard roots. But you get through it, and the goat man sort of looks up at you in surprise, and you're definitely gonna have to deal with that soon.

Travis: Pizza? [laughs]

Griffin: Indrid sort of instinctively... uh, this one does not talk and say pizza.

Travis: Oh, okay.

Griffin: Indrid sort of instinctively tries to roll out of the way. Uh, and—

Justin: As—okay, in that moment, I get one more action.

Griffin: [laughs] Okay.

Justin: I want... when the goat man turns around and looks at me, I rear back my fist.

Griffin: Mm-hmm.

Justin: And I punch Indrid in the face.

Griffin: ... Okay. Yeah, I'm not gonna make you roll for that. Why... okay.

Justin: To knock his glasses off.

Griffin: Oh, okay. You punch Indrid in the face, and he says...

Indrid: Duck, what are you—

Griffin: And then, he becomes the Mothman. And I think seeing this, a lot of things just happened in front of this goat man very quickly, and he starts to crab walk backwards away, just for a moment, until he sort of composes himself. So now you have put some distance between you and the goat man.

Duck: Fly, Indrid, fly!

Griffin: Indrid gets to his feet, and he grabs you by the shoulders, and he says...

Indrid: Duck... Duck, I... my visions. There's a hole in the ground. There's a large hole in the ground, in the middle of Kepler, and buildings have fallen into it. I see cars, I see twisted wreckage and bodies—

Duck: No, listen, listen. We don't have a lot of time. I've seen it too. I know, it fuckin' sucks. I saw it in a dream, and I thought it was just that anxiety dreams or whatever. But now, apparently, it was a prophecy. I get it. This one, I've seen too, and I swear to God, Indrid, we're not gonna let it happen.

Griffin: He nods, and flies away.

Aubrey: Also, I took care of Keith, and you don't need to worry about it! I'll call you!

Griffin: He gives a thumbs up. Goodbye.

Justin: Mothman got thumbs?

Griffin: I'm free!

Travis: [laughs]

Griffin: As he flies away, you pull Beacon out of the roots where he's kind of been embedded. And as you do so, you realize that where the chain sort

of connected with the blade, there is a pretty good... there's a pretty good like, divot in the side of the blade. It has been sort of dented inward, and looks kind of rough around that spot.

Beacon: That's just wonderful, Duck. What a wonderful battle scar this is. And using me to my true purpose... Beacon, breaker of chains. Beacon, the emancipator, as I have always been known. Wonderful. This is exactly how I would want to go, Duck. You know me so well.

Griffin: Uh, Ned.

Clint: Ned is gonna do something which will seem a little weird.

Griffin: Okay.

Clint: In the context. But I think just think it's information we need. Ned's gonna investigate a mystery.

Griffin: Okay. Roll plus sharp. That's very bad.

Clint: Shit.

Travis: Mm, you did a bad job, Dad.

Griffin: Uh, Ned rolled a five.

Justin: Por no.

Griffin: There is no recovering from that.

Travis: Oh, I get it, Justin.

Griffin: I'm gonna take a hard move here. The hard move is that the goat man that is embedded in the roots of the tree, I will call him Shears Goat Man, starts to move. And he sort of wrestles with these roots that are all over him, and he pulls himself out of the roots in the tree. As he emerges from the tree, you realize that he has merged with this white bark. It is

growing out of him, now. It is almost... it is forming around his spine like a brace.

You get the impression that this thing probably like, broke its back when Aubrey flung him against a tree, and now the tree has healed him in a way by giving him this like, external, uh, chitin made of this white bark. But it has like, corrupted him in a way. It's sticking out in this huge, gnarled lump that extends just over his head, and his eyes are clear white.

And he picked up his shears, uh, and starts walking towards you, Ned. Uh, Aubrey.

Travis: Well, I'm going to... so, we've got a goat man on Duck, a goat man on Ned. The...

Griffin: You're easy, breezy, beautiful. You got nothing.

Travis: Yeah, I'm feeling great. The nail gun is...

Griffin: Jammed.

Travis: Jammed.

Griffin: Yeah, this easy fight is going extremely good, it seems like.

Travis: Yeah. Um, has Ned dropped the nail gun? Ned, do you still have the nail gun?

Clint: I still have the nail gun.

Griffin: He still has it.

Travis: I'm going to... combat magic blast force.

Griffin: Okay.

Travis: The uh, the goat man approaching Ned.

Griffin: Okay. The half wood...

Travis: Duck can take care of himself.

Griffin: Okay, cool. Yeah, Ned can't.

Travis: And y'know what? I fucked up that goat before with this, and I'm gonna do it again.

Griffin: Alright. Roll to kick some ass. That is a ten.

Travis: Ten!

Griffin: That is a big ten. On a ten plus, you get to choose an extra effect. You both deal damage to each other, but you can also gain the advantage, take plus one forward or give plus one forward to another hunter; inflict terrible harm, plus one harm; you suffer less harm, minus one harm; or, you force them where you want them.

Travis: I'm gonna force them where I want them.

Griffin: Okay.

Travis: Knock him backwards.

Griffin: Okay.

Travis: And that is three harm total.

Griffin: Okay. You knock them backwards, and this hard shell around its back sort of collides with the tree again. Only, this time, he does not, y'know, crumple instantly. He is definitely damaged, and you actually see like, just a split in his skin, and this white sap just kind of starts pouring out of him. And actually, as he hits the tree, you all see more bark... and not just bark, but like, actual chunks of wood from the trunk, uh, start falling off around where the nail hit the tree. It is... and as it does so, I think it loses like, a lot of branches. A lot of the branches where this nail went in just sort of fall to the ground harmlessly.

Uh, and then, he stands up, and he takes the shears, and he snaps them in half, and now just has sort of two blades. And he flings one at you, Aubrey.

Travis: Okay.

Griffin: And you take... you take two harm as this thing cuts into you.

Travis: Well, I ignore one, thanks to my cool vest.

Griffin: Yeah, then it definitely—it does not like, cut into you. The vest definitely protects you a bit, but it kind of, as it makes its way harmlessly over your shoulder, uh, I think it sort of cuts across your neck a little bit, and you get a sort of superficial one harm. So go ahead and mark that.

Travis: And once, y'know, he's knocked out of the way, Aubrey says to Ned...

Aubrey: Get the nail gun working!

Griffin: Uh, Duck.

Justin: Yeah.

Griffin: What do you do?

Justin: Uh...

Griffin: You're definitely still engaged with Shovel Goat Man. He, seeing that the Mothman flew off, has picked up his shovel and is a... he is a threat. There is still the half wood goat man, who definitely looks like, bigger and nastier than Shovel Goat Man does. Uh, he has just been knocked into the tree, and then you have the tree itself, which has started to continue to rot around where this nail has stabbed into it. And then you have this like, flurry of spores that are sort of swirling around the tree that Aubrey made.

Duck: Hey, listen, partner. I have this sword. His name is Beacon. Uh, and I could use him to chop your head off. But I'd really rather not do that,

'cause one of y'all is a pal of mine, and I'm having a hard time just sort of like, ending you? So it would be great if you would just put down your shovel, and go live a new life somewhere, and get a job. As I'm saying it, I know it sounds ridiculous. I'm probably gonna need to punch you in the face. Okay. Y'know what? Yeah, let me just punch you in the face.

Griffin: [laughs] Okay. Uh, go ahead to roll and kick some ass.

Justin: Am I acting on my read a bad situation?

Griffin: I don't think so. Not for this action, right?

Justin: It doesn't feel like it, yeah.

Griffin: You don't really have anything on him. That is a fucking eleven.

Justin: Alright.

Griffin: You are just punching him with your fist?

Justin: Um... yeah, I really... oh, man. I'd love to just use Beacon on these guys. I'm having a really hard time of it. I don't, like, I don't know. It just doesn't seem right to me that like, one of them would be chill.

Griffin: Sure.

Justin: And I'd be friends with it, and the other one—

Travis: Someone point—I saw someone point—

Justin: I'd bisect. Like, it just feels weird.

Travis: I saw someone point out on Twitter, and like, I love this, that like, basically, the difference between the Pine Guard and like, the Bureau of Balance is like, when we were the Bureau of Balance, it was like, "We'll murder everyone!"

Griffin: Yeah, sure.

Travis: And this time, it's like, "Well, this person's actively attacking us, but I don't know."

Griffin: Yeah. I think it's just one harm that you do, but you get to choose an extra effect, which is gain...

Clint: Doesn't Beacon have a flat? Isn't there a flat to the blade?

Griffin: I mean, there is now that he fucked it up on the chains. You get to gain the advantage, plus one forward, give one to another hunter, terrible harm, less harm, or force them where you want them.

Justin: Uh, I'm gonna force them where I want them. I would like to use that advantage to... and tell me if this jives with your sort of... to disarm him.

Griffin: Um, I don't think so, man. I feel like you are sort of... it feels like a lot to accomplish just with one thing, right? Just to completely neutralize him just by punching him.

Justin: Y'know what, I'll just knock him to the ground, and hopefully I can like, knock him out on a tree stump or something.

Griffin: Yeah, I don't know that that happens. What happens first is, because he has sort of range on you, if you're coming in with a fist and he's got a shovel, um, this thing is done fucking around.

Justin: I brought a fist to a shovel fight. [laughs]

Griffin: You brought a fist to a shovel fight. This thing is done messing around.

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: It is, y'know, big and very strong. It rears this shovel up, and just brings it right down on your skull, and you take three harm as this thing tries to just bash your fuckin' head in.

Justin: Damn.

Griffin: Uh, and you sort of—

Travis: You ignore two.

Griffin: You—yes, you do ignore two.

Justin: Still, that's not none. [laughs]

Griffin: You sort of shake it off, though, and punch him. And as you punch him, he does fall backwards, and lands on the roots at the base of the tree. Uh, Ned.

Clint: Ned's going to act under pressure to unjam the nail gun.

Griffin: Uh, okay.

Justin: With his nail gun repairing experience.

Griffin: Yeah, I mean, it is pressure... there's pressure here. You got a big tree, you got two nasty goat men, and you're trying to do this in kind of a fake snowstorm. So go ahead and roll plus cool. Oh my God.

Clint: Shit.

Griffin: That's a five.

Travis: Have you leveled up recently, Dad? 'Cause you just—

Griffin: Oh yeah, you do need to—

Travis: Ned just rolled a five.

Griffin: Yeah, mark experience for all your failed rolls here. Uh...

Clint: I just... wait a minute. I have something I want to try.

Justin: Okay. Rerolling.

Clint: Um...

Travis: Is he going back in time?

Justin: [laughs]

Clint: No. Uh, Ned has a thing called artifact, where he quote unquote “found” a magical artifact, and it’s a lucky charm for him. I want to use luck.

Griffin: Oh! Okay.

Justin: Fair.

Griffin: Okay. I know what happens here. This is great. You are picking nervously at the nail gun, just tinkering with it. Your hands are shaking, they are cold, you are trying to make out the mechanisms of this nail gun in the middle of this maelstrom of the spores coming out of the tree.

[ambient music plays]

Griffin: And through those spores, you look up as you hear the crunching of snow moving closer and closer to you. And you see a figure, charging at you through the storm. And you look back down at the nail gun, trying to fidget with it, and then back up at the figure as it gets closer and closer...

Ned, you flash back to like, a pretty innocuous day, several years ago. We haven’t really established what the timeline is, but it is after the day of the crash, and sort of your escape, your whistle stop tour of east coast destinations, moving southbound until you arrived in Kepler, and met Victoria, the proprietor of the Cryptonomica, who basically gave you a job and gave you room and board.

And you've been there for several months, and we haven’t really explored too much, this time of your life. But like, how has life living in Cryptonomica and y'know, getting your feet below you in Kepler? What does that look like? How have you been like, helping Victoria out around the museum?

Clint: Well, for Ned, it's been kind of boring. This... he's kind of had this sedentary life, y'know, doing little things around—as little as possible, to be honest with you. Dusting, y'know, and he's not really into this shit. It's just not that interesting to him.

Griffin: Yeah.

Clint: He's just kind of hiding out, and he misses the thrills, not really realizing that by, y'know, adapting to this life is what's gonna keep him from ever getting back to that life.

Griffin: Can we explore like the... You mentioned that like, it is kind of boring here. And you have been like, living out of the Cryptonomica and working there. Um, and it's gotta be different from the Cryptonomica as it is under the Ned Chicane brand, right?

Clint: Oh, yeah.

Griffin: It is definitely more sensational now than it was back then. Back then, it was a fairly, y'know, authentic monster museum.

Clint: Well, and not even so much of a monster museum as it was really... it was almost like a very scientific approach. It didn't really claim that things were real, y'know what I mean? It just was like, more of an investigative... it was much more uh, believable. I mean, it was much more realistic, and it was, here are the stories from this area. Almost like a story telling. It wasn't really so much of a sensationalist thing.

Griffin: But it was also like, dead. I think back then, because it was very straightforward—

Clint: Oh, nothing.

Griffin: Like, nobody was coming to it. And so, what I really like is, the nature of your relationship with Victoria, who just like, likes your company. She was super lonely, as she's kind of outcast in this town, so she just, y'know, likes having a friend. Likes having someone be around. I think

there's like this push and pull with you during the months that you lived there where you maybe, because of your inherent showmanship, try to add a little bit—

Clint: Oh, comes up with ideas.

Griffin: Add some spice to it.

Ned: You ought to really, yeah, how about... you need displays. How about things that look like, uh, a Sasquatch? Or y'know, models? All you've got are like, print outs of stories and yeah, the Bigfoot picture is good, but how cool would it be if you got an artist to draw like a fully blown, y'know, fine portrait of Bigfoot? And just things like that.

Take some of this junk and jazz it up, make it look like it's real stuff. Like, maybe that really is a scale from the Loch Ness Monster. And it could be just a big salmon scale or something. But that's what you need. You gotta get traffic. You gotta get people in the door!

Griffin: That is what the scene is, then, for sure. You and Victoria are in the Cryptonomica. You have hired somebody to paint this big portrait of Bigfoot. And uh, he comes in the door. You hear the bell above the door ring, and it's a kid named Kirby, who comes in and sets his paints down in front of this big canvas that you have set up for him, and walks over to the RC Cola vending machine, gets one out, cracks it open, starts drinking, and starts painting as you and Victoria kind of just like, clean up around the store.

I may have called her Mama earlier, which may have been a slip of the tongue. But uh, you all are sort of just cleaning up the store and watching Kirby do his work. As she looks over sort of your projects, and looks at the store and kind of like, takes stock of how much it's changed. And she says...

Victoria: Hey there, Ned, can I talk to you outside for a minute?

Ned: Uh, certainly, Victoria. Certainly, certainly. Carry on, young man, with your artistic endeavors.

Kirby: Well thanks, sir. I'll try not to let you down.

Griffin: And he keeps at his work.

Ned: And how about a coaster under that RC, please?

Griffin: He says...

Kirby: Oh my God, I'm so sorry.

Griffin: And he reaches into his bag and pulls out like a CD jewel case and sets his drink down on top of it. You go outside with Victoria. It's like a nice fall day; the leaves have just started to change and are falling in droves, which makes you realize like, you're gonna have to rake very soon, but you try to put that unpleasant thought out of your mind as you and Victoria talk. She says...

Victoria: Ned, I gotta say, I know I was hesitant at first about some of the changes you suggested. But I think you've brought life into this store in a way I was never able to. I just—I... I just wanted to say thank you.

Ned: Oh, no. Vicky, I owe you this. You took me in, you gave me a place to live, and you gave me your friendship, and... no, the ledger is very much still in your favor. I owe you. I mean, yeah, it's been... yeah, boring as shit, but y'know, I have appreciated your kindness. It came at a time when I really needed a friend, and I'm glad it was you.

Griffin: She says...

Victoria: Yeah, I know life in Kepler ain't the most glamorous lifestyle to live. It's probably certainly not as exciting as uh, some of your earlier days.

Ned: It makes Hooterville look like Paris, to be honest with you.

Victoria: Yeah.

Griffin: She laughs, and she says...

Victoria: But I gotta say, like, I enjoy your company, as insincere as your company seems sometimes. But listen—

Ned: Thank you.

Victoria: What I wanted to talk to you about, what we haven't really talked about much is, y'know, what the Cryptonomica's all about. I'm curious, and I want the truth for once from you, Ned. Are you... are you a believer?

Ned: Uh... no. No, not really, Victoria. I think it's interesting and everything, but I... I am not a man of faith. I don't really believe in too much, except for myself. I, y'know, I find it interesting. I think it's fun to contemplate, it's fun to think about, but... [sighs] I am not convinced.

Victoria: Well, you put on a good act.

Griffin: And you can tell she looks kind of disappointed. She says...

Victoria: I don't blame you, though. Most—

Ned: Don't get me wrong. I believe in the Cryptonomica. I believe that it serves a purpose. I think it's fun. I think it's expansive to make people think outside the world that they know. I believe in the Cryptonomica. I just don't believe in all the crap we've got in it.

Griffin: She says...

Victoria: I guess that's something. It does serve a purpose, Ned. I'm glad you get that. It's a serious world we live in, Ned, full of serious problems. Real problems, and y'know, folks are just engineered to fight for solutions to those problems. And it's a fight worth fighting – I don't mean to minimize that. But it's just... this world is so much bigger, and so much more mystifying than most folks are willing to give it credit for.

And that's why... [laughs] That's why we have trouble growing our business here, Ned. That's why folks in Kepler don't really like the Cryptonomica. That's why city hall would be happy to shut us down. We're a... y'know, we're a thorn in their philosophical side. This place voices the inconvenient

position that there's more to this life than the troubles we conjure up for each other. And that's why this place is important. That's why I think it's important. I'm glad it sounds like we're on the same page about that.

Ned: Well, don't take my demeaning manner as any implication that I don't believe it's important. I do believe it's important. And I think it's a wonderful place, and I think it does something good. But... Victoria, you don't really believe in eight foot hairy Bigfeet, and men looking like moths. You really... I mean, you don't really believe in that stuff, do you?

Griffin: She leans against sort of the railing of the porch out in front of the Cryptonomica, and just kind of looks out as the leaves as they're changing and dancing around in the wind. And she says...

Victoria: I believe in strange things, Ned. [coughs]

Griffin: And she starts coughing, and really hard. And you've seen these fits a lot in the months that you've been living with Victoria, and they are getting worse very quickly. This one is a particularly difficult one, and she kind of like, stumbles backwards and sits in a rocking chair out in front of the porch and tries to collect herself.

Ned: Did you ever go see Dr. Ninny about that cough?

Griffin: She smiles, and she says...

Victoria: Ned, I've been seeing doctors about this cough for... longer than I've let on.

Griffin: She says...

Victoria: A wanted criminal breaks into a dying woman's home, and she gives him room and board, and hopes against hope that he'll turn out better than he was when he slipped in through the window. And she's the only one in town who would give him that chance, and it just so happened that hers was the place that he burgled.

I don't know how you don't believe in the strangeness of things, knowing that.

Ned: Victoria... I believe that there is... there's things that happen in the world. I don't know if it's luck, or fortune, or whatever. But I do believe that there was something involved in bringing me to you, and bringing me to this place. I have no idea what that force is, or why that happened. But I'll give you that much – I believe that there is such a thing as good fortune, because I am fortunate enough to be your friend.

Griffin: She looks up at you and smiles. And you can tell that she has tears welling in her eyes that she, y'know, quickly tries to fight off. And she says...

Victoria: I think you were brought here for a reason too, Ned. And that's... that is why I am gonna leave the Cryptonomica to you when I am gone. Um, I already made up my mind about that. Nothing you can do to change it.

[music plays]

Victoria: And I won't be here. You can do with it what you like. But I would hope... I would ask that you just... keep Kepler as curious as you can.

[music plays]

Griffin: And then something super lucky happens. You hear something moving around in the brush, and you hear like this noise, like... [hissing noise] And it's getting louder and louder, and right when this goat man's about to collide with you, you see the jet pack. You see the Flymaster that has been sort of blasting around Kepler for the last two days, since you lost it following your stunt.

It flies into the clearing and just collides with the goat man, knocking him off of his feet and out of this path of collision towards you, and finally gives up the ghost and just kind of lands at your feet, finally dormant, as you get that nail slid out of the gun, and get it functioning again.

Justin: I'm proud of you, son!

Clint: Good boy!

Justin: That's my son!

Clint: Ned looks over at Aubrey and tosses the gun in her direction.

Aubrey: Yes, gun! Give.

Ned: And listen, Aubrey – copper conducts heat!

Aubrey: No, I promised Duck.

Ned: Not fire! I'm not saying fire!

Aubrey: No, he's looking. I can't do it now, Ned.

Duck: I'm right here, guys. Come on.

Griffin: Uh, okay. Aubrey, you have the gun.

Travis: Okay.

Griffin: Again, there is this storm all around the tree that is whipping up a frenzy that makes it kind of hard to shoot at it at range. You can still do it, but I will... you will be at a disadvantage.

Travis: I'm gonna get up close to it, then.

Griffin: Like right up ons?

Travis: Yeah.

Griffin: Okay.

Travis: And so, you said the tree was kind of splitting, right?

Griffin: Yeah, for sure.

Travis: To spray up the things? She's gonna shoot a line of nails following that line, all the way down to the base of the tree.

Griffin: Okay, I like that. If you're doing that, and you're trying to like, do this sort of precise motion in the middle of the storm, I'm not gonna make you roll to kick some ass, 'cause the tree has no like, direct way of hurting you.

Justin: The tree has no ass.

Travis: Uh-huh.

Griffin: But it is... Tree doesn't have ass, also. Thank you, Justin. So go ahead and act under pressure.

Travis: Is that cool?

Justin: See, I'm using Duck's experience as a forest ranger, there, to tell you that trees don't have ass.

Griffin: Yeah, sure.

Clint: [laughs]

Travis: Fuck.

Griffin: Uh, Aubrey got a six on your roll. You could... if somebody can help you out to give you a plus one, to bring it up to a mixed success, or you can drop a luck point to pull this off for sure.

Clint: Could you not say that Ned tossing her the gun was helping out?

Griffin: Um, yeah, I think you could say that. You do still need to roll for it, right?

Justin: We apparently burned all our good rolls on like, getting Ryan Gosling movies to appear on Netflix.

Griffin: [laughs]

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah, Ned, roll to—

Travis: So we'll say like, Ned tosses the thing, and then like, turns up the pressure on the compressor. And that's Ned helping.

Griffin: Well, he does need to still roll, so it's a possibility that he didn't turn up the pressure, he turned it way down, and the nails just fall out impotently from the end of the gun. Which I love that visual. It's not really gonna move the chains, though.

Travis: Bwee bwee bwee bwee.

Griffin: Okay, Ned, roll to help out. That is plus cool. This is maybe our first help out roll, which is very exciting. That's an eight.

Clint: Eight!

Griffin: Uh, on a seven to nine, your help grants them plus one to their roll, but you also expose yourself to trouble or danger. Okay. Uh, so, this brings it up to a seven for you, Aubrey, which makes it a mixed success. Describe this scene of you approaching the storm and trying to like, just empty a clip into this tree with almost zero visibility.

Travis: So I'm gonna say she gets like, real close. Like right up on it, y'know? And like, then just like, basically draws a line straight down. Like bap, bap, bap, pap, pap.

Griffin: Okay. I like the visual of you like, taking a deep breath and trying to like, really nail this one. No, God, we gotta stop fucking saying that.

[music plays]

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: Uh, you take a deep breath and try to center yourself and gain your composure in the middle of this just like, furious storm, and you raise the gun, and...

Aubrey, you have this moment where you remember a very powerful memory. And it was the moment that you sort of first realized that you wanted to be a magician. And we haven't really talked about that, and I'm curious what inspired that, to sort of set up whatever this scene is going to be. I don't really know what it's going to be. What was sort of Aubrey's inspiration for wanting to get into magic? Was there a certain magician that she idolized? Was there a show that she saw that like, changed the course of her life?

Travis: So, I mean, I guess it probably would mirror my own. But we're not really the same age, so like, timeline wise, this wouldn't be the same thing. But there was a magic special that I remember watching as a kid that was like, filmed at the Magic Castle. And it had like, Lance Burden and a bunch of people in it. But one of the scenes, it was uh... and I wish I could remember the name of the performer, but she is like, doing this magic act where she's like, dancing with a mannequin. And she is manipulating the mannequin's arms and stuff to do tricks. And it's both like, really fun and very impressive.

And I think that that kind of like, more of like, a performance art like, character building kind of thing, really appealed, y'know? Aubrey's a theater kid.

Griffin: Yeah, sure.

Travis: And I think more than just the like, sleight of hand, like, watch me do a magic trick. More of like, I'm gonna build a scene and make the show the show, and the magic facilitates that. I'm also gonna say, because this is true of me as well – Houdini is a big inspiration for that, of like, it's not just the trick. The trick isn't the thing. The thing is the show.

Griffin: Okay. Then why don't we do this? You saw that special. It really spoke to you as like, this really cool, y'know, new mode of performance. Uh, and so, y'know, the usual stuff, maybe. Like you buy the books, you watch

some... you get the special VHS videos that teach the tips of the masters, and sort of start practicing your magic.

Maybe this scene is just like, you performing for your parents. Like, doing your first private magic show to show off what you have learned from these books that they have bought you and given you as gifts and stuff like that. Is that cool with you?

Travis: Definitely.

Griffin: Okay. What's this look like? You are performing for your parents. What kind of tricks are you... what kind of basic stuff were you doing?

Travis: I'm probably like... ten years old.

Griffin: Okay.

Travis: Y'know, like, the cup and ball. Maybe like, the big finale is like a... y'know, a handcuff escape. I'm probably doing, y'know, the like, oh, roll up some newspaper, and I pour the water in. Ooh, where'd the water go? That kind of thing.

Griffin: Okay.

Travis: Not necessarily easy stuff, but like, pretty basic magic. But, she's trying to do a lot of like, stage craft with it, too.

Griffin: Yeah, that's always been her jam.

Travis: So it's like...

Aubrey: This newspaper I've saved for 50 years. This was the newspaper that came out...

Travis: And remember, she's ten.

Aubrey: ...when Kennedy was shot.

Travis: And that wasn't 50 years ago. Y'know, she just doesn't... she doesn't know dates.

Griffin: [laughs] Okay.

Travis: And she's doing a lot of that. Oh, these cups were salvaged from King Tut's tomb! This pitcher of water once belonged to Julius Caesar! A lot of that kind of stuff.

Griffin: Belonged to Julia Roberts. Why don't you...

Travis: Julia Roberts!

Griffin: Why don't you—

Travis: Over 50 years ago!

Griffin: Because this is not like, magic magic, why don't you roll to act under pressure as you are... that's right, I'm going to make you... you are pressured as your parents are watching you, scoring you. Judging you.

Travis: Listen, we've all been there.

Clint: Hey!

Travis: God knows, when Dad watches me do a podcast, it's terrifying.

Griffin: Sure.

Travis: I got an eight.

Griffin: Alright, mixed success. We'll say that you are doing... give me one of the tricks.

Travis: May I make a suggestion?

Griffin: Sure.

Travis: I think mom is impressed and dad is not.

Griffin: I think so, too. But what is... actually, no, that seems mean. I don't want to characterize the dad like that. Obviously, you guys had like, beef in that one scene you were doing, but it's still like, a loving, supporting environment.

Travis: I think the mixed success is like, everything goes well, but I can't get the handcuff trick to work.

Griffin: So the handcuff trick to work is the big finale, and everything else has been going fairly well, and as—

Travis: And I branded them as like, these handcuffs belonged to Houdini himself. Even though they bought them for me at the store.

Griffin: Sure. And as you do the things that you have practiced so many times, like, you were very excited to finally show off your skills. You pull your wrists apart, and they are still securely fastened inside the handcuffs, and you try and try again, but you are just trapped in them during the middle of your show.

Aubrey: Uh, hold on. Give me a sec. Hold on. Um, okay... that, and then do... Okay! Um, and... that... it's all part of the show! Ahh, ohh, how well I... um... hold on. Hold on.

Mom: Do you—

Aubrey: Damn it.

Mom: Do you need help? And don't cuss.

Aubrey: No, I can do—I've done—I know what I'm doing!

Griffin: Uh, they sit there patiently, but you can tell that they're like, worried about you. And finally, your dad comes over and is like...

Dad: Alright, let me just see what happened here. I don't want you to hurt yourself.

Griffin: And uh, he starts sort of tinkering with the handcuffs, and uh, gets them off of you. And your mom can kind of tell that you're disappointed, and she says...

Mom: Aubrey, the show was wonderful. You'll get the handcuff trick down, don't be upset.

Aubrey: It didn't work...

Mom: I know, but you haven't been doing this for very long, baby. Listen, you don't need to be perfect at this. People are gonna love you.

Aubrey: Yeah, but Houdini was performing when he was like, a little kid. And—and he was...

Mom: People still had to practice. Houdini still had to practice, Aubrey. Listen, people are going to love you when you're doing these shows, no matter what you choose to do. But magicians are responsible for delighting and surprising people, and you delight and surprise us every day. Nobody expects you to be perfect at this, Aubrey, right from the start. You have time to learn.

Griffin: And then suddenly, the memory shifts. And it's not your mom in front of you anymore, telling you these things. It's Janelle. And you are in sort of Janelle's office in Sylvain, and she's poured you and herself a cup of strong, hot tea. And she's seated at a table with you, sipping this tea with you, and she's more formally dressed than you've ever seen her. She's in this like, black, y'know, nice ensemble. She's not using her—she's not wearing her usual colorful scarves. In fact, she has one like, draped around your shoulders, something she put there to sort of warm you up and bring you comfort. And she says...

Janelle: You'll have time to learn. I know this is difficult to believe, but you do. The surviving remnants of this world have unreasonable expectations for you, true. Sylvain will express her needs when she is ready, and I trust you

to listen intently for her. You have time to learn to listen. But you do not need to bear that weight today.

Aubrey: But you don't know that. You don't know how much time I have. No one does. I'm—I have to go out there and fight monsters and scary things. And not just that, there's real danger in the world. I mean, there's accidents, and plane crashes, and house fires.

Griffin: She talks just like, right over you, almost like she can't hear the words that you're saying. And she places a hand on your cheek, and you realize that you've been like, sobbing as she's been talking to you. And she says...

Janelle: Today, it is okay to take care of yourself, and to allow others to take care of you, and to mourn.

Griffin: And that's when you realize, she is dressed the way that she's dressed because you just came from your father's funeral. And then you realize - this is not your memory at all. This is the memory of Alexandra, the newly christened audience to Divinity and Interpreter of Sylvain.

Travis: Oh, shit.

[music plays]

Griffin: And sure enough, you launch a line of nails, following sort of the path of the main split in the center of the tree. And as you do so, sure enough, the bark and wood all around this line, it just sort of... it doesn't sort of fall off like it did for Ned's one nail. It just sort of explodes. And as it does so, the tree just completely splits in half. The two halves just bend away from each other.

As they do so, the force of this explosion and the chunks of wood coming off the tree, they launch into you, Aubrey, for two harm. Ned, one of the boughs of the tree just falls and conks you on the head for two harm.

Clint: [whistles]

Griffin: One of the halves of the tree, as it falls, it falls right on top of the goat man that Duck knocked to the roots, and just crushes it into the roots, and he lets out one last, loud bleat, and gives up the ghost.

As the dust settles from this big explosion that happens, you all see something in the center of these two halves, just still sticking out of the trunk. And it is tethered to the two halves of the tree that have been split apart. It is connected to it by these long strands of this white sap. You see this humanoid form that appears to just be made out of this white sap. It is reaching upwards, and like, it is holding onto these long strands, and trying to like, pull the tree back together, and doesn't seem to be paying much mind to you all. It is just trying to sort of put together what you all have destroyed.

Duck, you are up.

Duck: Yeah. Hey, y'all, I know it ain't copper, but I'm gonna give it a shot.

Justin: And I'm gonna kick some ass. Just kick... now can I kick ass?

Griffin: Yeah.

Travis: Now does this thing have an ass?

Griffin: Yeah, this thing for sure has an ass.

Justin: It has manifested an ass. I'm gonna kick that ass with Beacon.

Griffin: Alright.

Clint: Kick that sap ass!

Beacon: Yes, this is more like it. Excellent. Let's go!

Justin: Nine.

Clint: And we're back.

Griffin: That is a nine. Uh, okay. You and the tree are going to deal harm to each other. What that means for the tree, I'm going to leave a little bit abstract. What do you do to the tree with Beacon? How are you sort of dispatching it?

Justin: How big of a trunk are we talking?

Griffin: I mean, the trunk has been split down to the ground. The humanoid creature sticking out of it, I mean, it's about your size.

[music plays]

Justin: Alright, so here's what I do. I'm worried about the edge of Beacon being damaged. So I uncoil Beacon, and I... [clang] Oh. I just hit my mic stand.

Travis: Oh, I thought that was a foley.

Clint: That was cool!

Griffin: That was fucking awesome, dude!

Clint: Wow!

Justin: Alright, leave that in and pretend I did it on purpose. So, I uncoil Beacon, and I whip it around the thing, and just yank as hard as I can. I'm just trying to like, saw it in half. The humanoid.

Clint: Oh, God.

Griffin: It grabs onto your wrist as you wrap Beacon around it, and like, leans in close to you, like bringing its face right to yours as you rip Beacon outwards and cut this thing in half at the torso. And its upper half just goes flying through the air, and lands on the ground, and disintegrates. And behind the form that you just cut in half, you see that half wood goat charging at you, and right as you dispatch the sap being at the center of this tree, the whites of its eyes just go dark. And the sap that was pouring out of

it just instantly comes to a stop, and the goat just dies while running. It dies on its feet, and it falls over.

And with that, there is one last sort of exhalation of spores, and then they all just fall down, right on top of all of you as Aubrey's whirlwind finally dies down. And the stump at your feet starts to rot in fast motion, leaking out this sap that's just evaporating before your eyes. And as the stump disappears, there's an object left sitting on the ground. It's a seed – a large, opalescent pod with tufts of soft fibers, reaching upward from its crown.

And there's a quiet for a moment as the wind dies down, and the spores stop shooting out of this tree. And in that moment, this time, you all see it.

[music plays]

Griffin: You all see these humanoid figures of white light – these four armed beings that are just about your size. One of them climbs out of the trunk of the tree, as if he was just hiding in there the whole time. And another one climbs out of the half wood goat's corpse, and the other one sort of pries itself out from under the fallen tree, from the corpse of the goat that has been crushed there.

And as they all sort of stand up and look at each other, all three of those things, the trees and the two goat men, just start disintegrating into these just black flakes that float up and into the air like embers from a campfire. And one by one, these three humanoid beings made out of this light just look at all of you, and just solemnly bow, and very quickly after that, they all disintegrate into these just little beads of white light that float up and off into the distance.

[music plays]

Griffin: Hey everybody, this is Griffin McElroy, your dungeon master, your big boy, and your best friend. Thank you so much for listening to episode 19 of The Adventure Zone: Amnesty. Sorry that it is late. There are a couple of reasons for that. One, we recorded for like two and a half hours, and then immediately went on tour, so I just didn't have the time required to make this episode what we wanted it to be. The reason... one of the reasons that

we were so busy, and I couldn't really finish post-production on it is because we were working on a new website.

It's TheMcElroy.family, or McElroy.family if you want to type in less letters. And this is kind of like our new hub for all of our shit. We are not leaving Maximum Fun. In fact, nothing is really like, moving from where it lives now – we're just sort of all collecting it on this website. We have been sort of branching out and doing more and more stuff, and lots of different stuff, that was kind of scattered hither and yon. So, we decided this would be the best place to do it.

We teamed up with Vox who helped us set up the website using their Chorus platform. It looks so good, we are so happy with how it looks, and hopefully, it will be a more sort of cohesive way to find the stuff that we do moving forward. Again, it is TheMcElroy.family, and so, that's gonna be the best place to find any of the stuff that we do moving forward.

No ads this week. Do have some jumbotrons, but before I get to them, I should announce – I believe this is the last episode of The Adventure Zone that we are going to be jumbotrons on. If you listen to My Brother, My Brother, and Me, you already heard us talk about it there. But basically, demand had so wildly outstripped supply that the process of doling out the jumbotrons and making sure that people got spots on the show who wanted them had turned into a real pain point for... Pain point. Listen to me.

I've had a website for like, fuckin' 12 hours, and now I'm a big business man. Uh, but yeah, it sucked. It sucked for everybody involved, it was more disappointing than it was delightful, and so, we are going to stop doing jumbotrons. Added benefit, it'll keep the ad spot a little bit shorter. This one's going to be quite short, because we also don't have advertisers this episode. But yeah, it's been a cool way to, y'know, connect with the audience, and um, help people, y'know, get some footing on the show.

But uh, we have lots of ways to get in touch with y'all now, and so, no more jumbotrons. Except for these two last jumbotrons. This one's for Maisy, and it's from Chris, who says, "Chris, it's been almost four years since you got me to listen to The Adventure Zone. You were so scared I'd judge you for listening to a D&D podcast. Luckily for you, I was already a huge RPG nerd.

Thanks for introducing me to these wonderful brothers, and for sharing our lives together ever since. I love you sweet pea."

There's a good message in that message, and it is that, y'know, tell your friends about the show, because you never know who is secretly really into, y'know, orcs and swords and axes and sorcerers.

Got another message here, and it's for Lil' Nom, and everyone else tender. And it's from Sarah, who says, "Happy Valentine's Day!" Yowza. "We couldn't one up the hoodies, so we're letting these boys affectionately call you out. Your perceptiveness and thoughtfulness shines through in all aspects of life, from your academics to your friendships. We're both honored to have you as our friend, occasional DM, and overall, our good omen. Tenderly, Lily and Sarah."

What an appropriate final jumbotron for The Adventure Zone. One that is ten months late. Ten months... ten months late, as the crow flies. Holy shit. So uh, thank you to Lil' Nom and everyone else tender, and Sarah for helping us just wrap things up in a very sort of tonally appropriate way.

If you could, please think about tweeting about the show using the #TheZoneCast hash tag. We really do appreciate you spreading the word about the show. We are going to do a new lunar interlude and some, y'know, a new arc coming up soon. Um, so, that's a good time for us to like, introduce new characters, and also just like, you spreading the word about the show really helps us out a ton.

Speaking of which, some quick programming notes. Obviously, we were a week late for this episode, so the next episode will be out in one week. And the next episode that's gonna come out will be our live Candlenights spectacular that we recorded here in Austin, Texas. I do not want to like, talk a big game, but it might be my favorite episode we've ever done live. It was uh, it was an absolute delight. We all walked off stage just like, beaming at uh, at the wild shit that we got up to in this episode. I'm very, very excited for you to hear it. It's a very great thing to just gather around the Yule log with the fam and listen to.

So that is gonna be up next Thursday. And then the week of Christmas, we will be taking off. So, next week, we'll have a new episode. It'll be our live Candlenights episode. And then, we will be back in January with new episodes of Amnesty. So, yeah, that's about it.

Again, our stuff is at McElroy.family. If you want to listen to the podcasts that we have on Maximum Fun, who has been a kind supporter of ours and a beloved partner of ours for a long time now, you can go to MaximumFun.org. They got lots of great shows there, like Stop Podcasting Yourself—oh, and the JV Club with Janet Varney just got added to Maximum Fun. It is a fucking great show, and I am so excited that we have Janet Varney's amazing podcast that I love on our network.

Again, that is at MaximumFun.org, and we have other stuff at McElroy.family. We have a mailing list that's at bit.ly/mcelroymail if you want to get directly to your inbox all the updates and stuff. And I think that's it. We'll be back next Thursday with the Candlenights live show, and then more episodes in January, so we will talk to you then. Bye.

[music plays]

Griffin: Aubrey, you all have made your way out of the woods, and you are looking over the cliff side outside of Amnesty Lodge with sort of the assembled lodge crew. And from your position, you can see something strange. It's what you all are kind of gawking at. Just below you, you have a great vantage point on it, looking down on river side from atop the cliff.

There is a massive sink hole, just off Main Street. You can see it so well. It has consumed what looks like a parking garage, one that was... it appears empty. You don't see any cars in it. It was late when this happened. Just at a cursory glance, it doesn't seem like anything too horrible happened. But, this sink hole... it seemed like it was expanding, and just kind of stopped a dozen or so feet from Saint Francis Medical Center.

If it had continued to grow, it would've been, y'know, disastrous for the dozens of people inside that building at the time. And there are, y'know, emergency response vehicles. You see flashing lights all around the sink hole

as rescue teams go through and just make sure that everything is okay. But the scene seems pretty calm, so you assume that things are okay.

But, you see Agent Stern come like, running down the path from Amnesty Lodge. He has changed out of his pajamas and back into his suit and long pea coat, and he uh, he's like, still fastening his watch around his wrist as he approaches. And he clears his throat and says...

Agent Stern: I'm going to head down and see if there's anything I can do to help. I will... I'll be back late, if you wouldn't mind leaving the lobby unlocked for me.

Griffin: And he—

Aubrey: We'll leave a light on for ya.

Griffin: He nods, and bolts down the access road towards town. And you all are just sort of standing there, looking at this sink hole out of town. I imagine, you've already sort of debriefed with Mama and given her the good news. But everybody is here. Everybody is sort of looking down on this thing that has happened, and Dani standing right next to you, she's got Dr. Harris Bonkers sort of positioned on her shoulder, parrot-style. She looks at you, and she says...

Dani: The, uh... the Abominations... they're... they're getting stronger, aren't they?

Aubrey: Yeah. This... this one was... this one was different.

Griffin: She looks... I mean, she looks scared. And she—

Aubrey: Hey, but I mean, look at it this way. We're getting stronger, too. I mean, like, I'm getting better at magic, and like, Duck actually chose to kill something. And like, Ned is at least 5% less of a coward. So like, huh?

Griffin: Uh, she gives like, a faint smile. But you can tell, she is... it did not bring her much relief. And she reaches over as you two are looking down over the devastation below, and takes hold of your hand. And as she does

so, Dr. Harris Bonkers kind of rouses and clambers over to your shoulder, kind of clumsily, and nuzzles into your hair.

Aubrey: Hey, buddy.

Griffin: And just then, flakes start falling from the sky. And I think you have like, a moment – I think everybody has a moment of like, panic. But then, as one lands on your nose, you realize, with relief, it's real snow. This gentle, quiet, windless snow has begun to fall in Kepler. This nice, peaceful moment is interrupted as Mama joins the party, overlooking the chaos below. And she puts a hand on your not-rabbit-occupied shoulder, and she says...

Mama: Can I, uh... can I have a word with you?

Aubrey: Y-yeah.

Griffin: Um, and you walk with her back towards Amnesty Lodge and towards the cellar door. She says...

Mama: We still need to have a talk about the Abomination that you all have adopted, and its whereabouts. But before all that, you want to tell me what Thacker's doing locked in the panic room?

Aubrey: Oh, God. It's a whole thing, Mama. Like, y'know, the tree makes bad things happen, released, made a pin drop, the net dropped or whatever. He got out, and we tricked him into the panic room. We have a lot to talk about.

Griffin: She says...

Mama: Yeah, I was... I admit, I was not the most plugged in this hunt. But listen – tomorrow, you and the gang are gonna need to try to get him sealed up in the kitchen again. He needs to eat, Aubrey. He's still a person under all that stuff.

Aubrey: Well, speaking of... I've been doing a lot of research. Y'know, studying and doing the books and everything, and talking with Janelle. And... I'd like to try to help him.

Mama: How do you mean?

Aubrey: Well... I wouldn't say I'm mastering it, but I'm getting a better grip on magic. And I think if we can figure out the right way to ask and like, I don't know, this might be bigger than the kind of thing I've done before, but... I was able to like, heal Keith. That's a whole thing I'll tell you about, too. If we can do some kind of like... big psychological healing, maybe? Maybe we could bring him back.

Griffin: She smiles. Like, the thought of her friend being exorcised in this way has never really crossed her mind as a possibility. And she smiles, and... it's the first time you've seen her smile since like, you told her that you all brought an Abomination into her home. And she says...

Mama: I would be thrilled to help you out with that in any way I can. For right now, though...

Griffin: And she reaches up to the railing of the porch, and uh, pulls down a plate that she had set up there with some food. And she says...

Mama: If you could get this to him somehow, maybe just open up the door, slide it in real quick, and get out. If he sees me, he's gonna freak out, and I just want to make sure he doesn't, y'know, starve to death before we can apparently rescue him.

Aubrey: Yeah, you... sure. Why not? And Mama, when that's done...

Griffin: And Aubrey kind of touches her sunglasses...

Aubrey: There's something else I need to talk to you about, okay?

Griffin: She nods and opens up the cellar door for you, and you approach the panic room. I think as we set up before, there's not like, a window inside. There's just like, a monitor. And as you step into the room, Thacker

is not like, in the position that you've kind of seen in this like, meditative, sitting on the floor, just kind of staring intently down at the ground. He is standing up. And he is looking directly up and into the camera, and you see him on the monitor, just like, staring. Just like, he's looking right at you from behind the door.

What do you do?

Travis: Is there any way to talk, like, into the room? Is there like, a com system?

Griffin: Yeah, I think so. We'll say there's a speaker on the door. Like a two way speaker.

Clint: There is.

Travis: So she pushes the button, and she's like...

Aubrey: Heeey. Um... I've got some food here, but you need to be chill. Like, a nine on a scale of one to ten of chill. And then you can have some food, and then I'm gonna close the door back, and it would be super cool if you didn't like, jump at me, or anything like that.

Griffin: You uh, release the button after saying this, and he doesn't move. You see him still standing, staring into the camera. And then, you hear a voice. And it doesn't seem like it's coming from the speaker. You just hear it. And this voice says...

Voice: [robotic voice] Why am I kept here?

[ambient music plays]

Aubrey: Huh?

Voice: [robotic voice] Why am I being kept here?

Aubrey: ...Thacker?

Voice: [robotic voice] Thacker is the name of this one? He is an unintentional host.

Aubrey: Who... who are you, then?

Voice: [robotic voice] At this moment, we seem to be Thacker. [robotic stuttering] But that is not who we are supposed to be. What have we done wrong?

Aubrey: Oh, man. Where to start? Um... are you from Sylvain?

Voice: [robotic voice] Sylvain can no longer sustain the life that [robotic stuttering] her surface. We are the counterweight that aims to bring the planet back into balance. Will you release us?

Aubrey: Hoo boy. Y'know, I think that that... I don't have clearance to make that decision, y'know?

Clint: [laughs]

Aubrey: I'm just gonna put this sandwich in there real quick, and then I'm gonna... get to work on your request. Um, you help me help you, and please don't attack me when I open this door.

Griffin: Are you opening the door?

Travis: Y'know what, no. I'm not.

Griffin: Okay.

Travis: I'm gonna go fucking get Mama.

Griffin: Okay. You turn to walk away, and you hear this voice say...

Voice: [robotic voice] Please release us. Sylvain has become [robotic whooshing noise]. Those living on her surface would seek to shatter her body entirely in pursuit of their own survival. Please release us. By impeding us, you hasten the arrival of Sylvain's end.

Aubrey: Wait... Sylvain's end? Does this have to do with the crystal and the magic and stuff?

Griffin: With that, I think realizing that you're just not gonna release it, you see Thacker on the camera take a big step backwards, and sit down on the ground, and slowly angle his head back downwards to stare at the floor.

[ambient music plays]

Griffin: Ned, you have had an eventful few days, I think. I think the hunt has been like, particularly taxing for you, yes? You—

Clint: Three harm...

Griffin: Yeah. You lost your car, you ended up in the hospital at one point, you unintentionally antagonized the sheriff, things were challenging, your adrenaline was going – but now, things have slowed down. And I have a question: how does Ned feel about what he realized about Aubrey? That it was her home that he robbed that night, the night of the crash?

Clint: I think from the moment that he was in the unconscious state, and heard what Aubrey had to say, and kind of figured out what was going on, I think he has felt very uncomfortable around Aubrey.

Griffin: Okay.

Clint: I think he has... there was a lot of guilt involved with that night anyway.

Griffin: Sure.

Clint: But Ned, whether he's fooling himself or not, puts a lot of the blame on Boyd Mosche, his partner.

Griffin: Okay, sure.

Clint: Because I mean, in his long career, Ned never hurt anybody in the jobs he pulled. Not physically harmed anybody.

Griffin: Yeah, I buy that.

Clint: And took a lot of pride in that. And I think he fancied himself as a... almost like a Robin Hood. That's how he saw himself. And I think the violence that came about that night, and the unfortunate things, the death, and the fire, and everything else, I think he really lays at Boyd's feet.

But the guilt has really come crashing back on him quite a bit.

Griffin: I'm just curious how you feel about like, doing anything about this guilt, or are you going to sort of... y'know, maybe it's appropriate for your character, and this is not a slam, it's just like, how he has been developed. Is Ned just not going to confront it?

Clint: No, I think he has to. I think if... Every time he and Duck and Aubrey go out, I think they have become closer. I think they've become more of a unit. He realizes that, in order for that to continue, he's gotta open up. He's gotta tell... he's gotta tell her about it, and I think he decided his life is better cooperating with and working with Aubrey and Duck than the life on his own.

Griffin: Sure.

Clint: And that was one of the—I think that was one of the things that Victoria brought to him, too. Not just the Cryptonomica, but to show that he could have people in his life that he could count on.

Griffin: Then, here's the scene. You are returning to the Cryptonomica. You're in the Sno-Cat. You pull it into, y'know, the fairly small, humble parking lot of the Cryptonomica. And as you do so, you actually see that the wreckage of your Lincoln Continental has finally been separated from the funicular and towed back in front of your place of business. You see it illuminated by the headlights of your Sno-Cat.

The store is, y'know, dark. It has closed up shop hours ago, and you get out and approach the museum, and go to open the door. And as you place your

hand, y'know, on the handle, and start to put the keys inside, I think you... because of who you are and the past that you have, you notice something off. The door frame around the deadbolt is cracked and splintered. And through the gap that has been made there, you can see that the deadbolt is already unlocked.

What do you do?

Clint: Very cautiously, I think he calls upon his burglar instincts, his sneaky instincts, and opens the door just wide enough to slip through.

Griffin: Okay.

Clint: Because there's no lights outside, because he turned the headlights off. So it's not like he would be illuminated in the door. And he steps into the Cryptonomica very surreptitiously, and just really strains his ears to try to hear and try to look. There's a small, a little bit of light from some of the displays and stuff, but not very much.

Griffin: Okay. Uh, you slip into the main room of the Cryptonomica, and you find that it looks fine. It looks, y'know, exactly how Kirby usually leaves it when he wraps up one of his night shifts. It looks nice and dusted and mopped and cleaned. You actually see, behind like the front counter of the museum, you see Billy back there, and he's sleeping in a cot. Almost like Kirby like, tucked him in back there, and he is—

Clint: Aww!

Griffin: He is fast asleep, and just ripping the gnarliest snores you've ever heard, because he is still a goat. And yeah, everything looks fine, but except on the counter, towards the back of the room, uh, where there are sort of these displays full of pamphlets. Sitting on that counter are three padlocks that are all popped open. And as you get closer to them, and carefully creep over and look at them, you can tell that they are the locks that were threaded through the latches on the door into the inner sanctum.

Clint: He goes sprinting back to the inner sanctum.

Griffin: You open up the door, and it... it was a clean job, Ned. By which I mean, the room itself is clean. It looks like it did probably the day it was built. There are no signs of intrusion, no debris scattered all across the ground, room has just simply been emptied. Everything in here. Your trophies of your burglaries, your passports and documents. The small safe containing Aubrey's necklace, among other things... it is all just gone.

[music plays]

Clint: Clooney's Oscar?

Griffin: All gone.

Ned: Agh! Fuck me runnin'.

Griffin: And there is a light bulb hanging overhead that is illuminating this room, and it is shining down on the only item still remaining in this room. It is a note, written on the back of a Cryptonomica post card that is sort of folded up and laying on the floor. And as this light is sort of swinging over it, you see that it reads... "For my cut, plus interest. Not quite even yet. I'll be in touch. -B"

[music plays]

Griffin: Duck, you're back in your apartment, and you have just sort of started to peel off your thick layers of winter wear, and sheathe Beacon wherever you keep him, sort of now having time to survey the damage done to him. And you're sort of decompressing like that when Minerva appears in front of you, and she says...

Minerva: Another successful hunt, I take it. Congratulations.

Duck: Oh, thanks, Minnie. I appreciate it.

Minerva: I don't love that name, but you have exceeded my lofty expectations for you.

Duck: Yeah, I did... I fucked up, kind of. I fucked up Beacon a little bit. I feel kind of lousy about it.

Minerva: May I see?

Duck: Oh, yeah, sure.

Justin: I go to the underwear drawer and get Beacon out.

Griffin: Uh, she surveys the damage to the blade, and she sighs and says...

Minerva: Well, I suppose it can't be helped. I'm sure he will still serve you well. It seems like he still has some lethal capabilities. Um, Duck Newton, I... I know you are tired, but I have something I need to say to you, and it cannot wait a moment longer.

Duck: Alright.

Griffin: She gestures towards one of the chairs in your living room.

Justin: I take a seat.

Griffin: She says...

Minerva: Duck Newton... I am a murderer.

Griffin: And as she says that, you see her silhouette kind of like, deflate a bit, almost as if she's like... relieved from finally saying what she said. And she says...

Minerva: I told you earlier that my world, like yours, was tethered to an alien planet, besieged by abominations from the other side.

Duck: Mm-hmm.

Minerva: This was only part of the truth. I was the war councilor for my people. I pushed us into a conflict with that alien world. Our steel and fighting prowess crashed against their insectoid chitin, and hive mind

coordination, and there were losses. Incalculable losses on both sides, but ultimately, our world lost the war. They left us with just a handful of survivors.

And so, I forced the last great minds of our civilization to create a weapon that could defeat our foe for good – a disease. Lethal to our enemy, innocuous to ourselves. I delivered the payload myself, Duck Newton, and I watched as... every living being on that planet... I'm the only survivor of both worlds, now. And so, I sought out the reason for our shared fate, and in doing so, found earth and Sylvain. And you, like other chosen before you, were selected to keep your people safe.

That is just part of your destiny, Duck. Your true destiny is to not follow in my footsteps.

Duck: Damn, Minerva, that's a lot to dump on a guy. I've had kind of a full day already without starting to process your genocide. Um...

Minerva: There's... more I have to tell you, unfortunately.

Duck: Damn, more than genocide, Minerva? Shit.

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: She says...

Minerva: I told you this now, because my concerns about losing your trust... of damaging our... relationship... in a few moments, it's not going to matter anymore. Your power, Duck Newton, it stems from your connection with me and my world. That includes... your power of foresight. Surely, you saw it, Duck. What you saw in your vision, the meteor...

Duck: Yeah. Yeah.

Minerva: It was never coming to earth. It was coming for me.

[music plays]

Minerva: My world was prepared, once, for this contingency. I will go to ground and try as I always have to survive. But the mechanism through which I am able to speak with you... it will be annihilated.

Duck: What?

Minerva: This will be our last conversation, Duck Newton. I... I beg of you. Remember my word.

Duck: No, now, hold on. There's gotta be something... um...

Minerva: Keep your world safe. Keep Sylvain safe. Continue your training. It will be harder after our link is severed, but you mustn't lose faith.

Duck: Minerva, why now? Like, why, when I finally decide to do something about this destiny and power and all this garbage, now? Now I'm gonna lose it all? Now I'm gonna just be some dipshit with a sword? A fucked up sword?

Griffin: She looks to the side, uh, and like, cranes her neck upward, like she's looking out a window. And she says...

Minerva: I'm sorry, Duck Newton. I...

Duck: God, no, y'know what? Fuck me. I'm sorry. I'm being really self-interested right now. You got a meteor headed towards your house. Just get safe and take care of yourself and... and try to be okay, alright? I'll be fine here. I'll buy a gun or something. Jesus.

Griffin: She crosses one of her arms across her chest, and gives you a bow. A deep bow. And then she stands up and takes one last look at you, and pivots to the side one more time, and she says...

Minerva: It's time to stop hiding. You need to finish what I started. Go to him.

Duck: Go to who?

Griffin: And she turns back to you, and she says...

Minerva: Duck Newton... my pupil, my friend... I was not talking to you.

Griffin: And she disappears.

And then there's a knock at the door to your apartment.

[music plays]

Justin: I... go to the door and open it.

Griffin: You see, framed in the snow that is blanketing Kepler as twilight approaches, a figure standing at your doorstep. You see that he's wearing a pea coat and some beat up, fingerless wool gloves, one of which is wrapped around the hilt of a long broadsword that he's leaning against as you open up the door. And your eyes adjust to the light more, and you see the face of the person holding this blade.

Leo Tarkesian, your neighbor and friendly local grocer, clears his throat and says...

Leo: So uh... We should probably talk.

[theme music plays]

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[music plays]

Janet: Hey, it's Janet Varney of the JV Club podcast, and I am so excited to be joining Maximum Fun. If you're not yet familiar with the JV Club, it's a podcast with me and some of my favorite women, and in the summer, men, as we explore the highs and lows of our terrible teenage years into our adulthood.

For example, hear about Allison Brie's humiliating moment at a gymnastics competition, experience the shame of a knocked-out tooth with Jameela Jamil, or drop in as Jon Hamm imagines what would happen if Bambi met Godzilla.

So join me and all my once awkward, often still awkward friends, every Thursday by subscribing to the JV Club on MaximumFun.org.

[music plays]

Rachel: Hi, this is Rachel McElroy.

Griffin: Hello, this is Griffin McElroy.

Rachel: And this is Wonderful!

Griffin: It's a podcast that we do as uh, we uh, we are married, and how's the ad going so far? 'Cause I think it's going very good.

Rachel: [laughs] We talk about things we like every week on Wednesdays.

Griffin: One time, Rachel talked about pumpernickel bread. It was so tight. You cannot afford to miss her talking about this sweet, brown bread.

Rachel: We also talk about music, and poems, and y'know, weather.

Griffin: There was one—weather?

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: One time, Rachel talked about Baby Beluga, the song, for like 14 minutes. And it just really blew my hair back.

Rachel: [laughs] So check us out on MaximumFun.org.

Griffin: It's a cool podcast with chill vibes. Amber is the color of our energy, is what all the iTunes reviews say.

Rachel: They will now.

[music plays]