

The The Adventure Zone Zone: Amnesty Wrap-Up!

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[theme music plays]

Travis: Hi! It's us! It's the four of us, the McElroy boys.

Justin: The McElboys, do they call us.

Griffin: The four horsemen of comedy.

Travis: I wasn't—that sounds—ooh. That's a scary—that makes it sound like we're here to tell jokes and maybe kill you. Uh, so this is another The The Adventure Zone Zone. Uh, we're gonna talk about Amnesty, and answer some of your questions. There were a couple... well, there were a few things that uh, left you with the old head scratchin's.

Justin: Did we say our names? 'Cause I wanna call dibs on Pestilence.

Travis: Oh, okay. Well I'm... in torn between War and Death.

Griffin: I'm War! I'm gonna be War!

Travis: Okay, then I'm Death.

Clint: Oh great, I get Famine.

Travis: Dad can be Famine.

Clint: Yeah, I get Famine.

Travis: Yeah, you're Famine.

Clint: Wonderful.

Griffin: We're also gonna talk about Graduation, correct? Yes?

Travis: Oh, yes.

Griffin: Which we've now announced, and is out there?

Travis: Yes. Uh, let me give you guys a real softball. What I've done differently here, by the way, everyone, I went through your questions, and there were a lot of common themes. So we have some specific questions, but mostly, we've got some like, general discussion topics.

So, Duck's real name, Justin. Would you like to speak on that? Because that went over some of our listeners' heads, and they were confused as to why he hid it.

Justin: This is your old uncle Justin here, ready to tell you that Wayne Newton is known as Mr. Entertainment. Um, he's kind of a Las Vegas staple. If you've ever seen Ferris Bueller's Day Off, which, fuck, you haven't, 'cause you're eight. Again, I forgot. Sorry.

Griffin: [laughs] I don't know if—I don't know if dragging our listeners is the best thing for—

Justin: I'm not dragging them, they're—do you think—there's infinite stuff that they know about that I don't!

Griffin: That's fair.

Justin: Infinite. It's not a drag, it's just stating facts. It's a drag on me.

Griffin: Ferris Bueller is Justin's TikTok.

Justin: Like the Ke\$ha song?

Griffin: Oh jeez.

Travis: Oh god.

Justin: Oh boy.

Clint: Well, he was also—he was also in National Lampoon Vegas Vacation.

Griffin: Goddamn, why do you think they've seen—

Justin: Oh yeah, that seminal classic film for kids.

Griffin: [laughs]

Travis: [laughs]

Justin: I love all the Vines. 'Member all the VV Vines? They called them triple V's. It's Vegas Vacation Vines.

Griffin: Big hit.

Justin: Big hit. Anyway, uh, Wayne Newton is a, uh, sort of a... a little bit cheesy Vegas presence. And I thought, I liked the idea that Wayne, uh, Newton, his mom was a big Wayne Newton fan, and she named him after Wayne Newton, which is... she thought was fuckin' radical, which is why she always hated 'Duck,' is because she was such a big Wayne Newton fan.

Now, of course, when Duck was growin' up, Wayne Newton was a bit more of a presence than he is right now. So he, y'know, he got tired of being teased, and uh, he started going by Duck. That is the incredible, true story.

Travis: So there you go.

Clint: Aren't you glad she wasn't a fan of Engelbert Humperdinck? That would've been even worse.

Justin: That would've been wild, yeah.

Griffin: That would've been a rad name, actually.

Justin: Yeah. Thank you for choosing a, uh, by several decades, more outdated reference than mine, Dad. I do appreciate it.

Clint: You're welcome, buddy.

Travis: Uh, Griffin.

Griffin: Yeah?

Travis: What is—what a—what was going on there with Leo and uh, Indrid at the end there? Is Leo the new Mothman?

Griffin: Yeah, I uh... for the endings, I really—I had like, ideas. I had beats. I had—basically, for Balance, I did like, offers I think is what I called them, and they just happened to align very well with what you all saw your character arcs post-adventure being.

The Mothman thing, like... I... I thought, y'know, the law that was kind of keeping people from staying in Sylvain, that like, that was keeping the Sylvans from coming home, y'know, had been effectively lifted, because you'd restored the heart of the planet and everything was all good. And so, y'know, maybe Indrid would want to go home, and go home. And luckily, he would be leaving behind like, a group of mystic seer superheroes that could easily take up the charge for him.

Justin's choices for like, Duck and his ending, like, just straight up didn't align. And I think we may have even taken a pass at the ending where we tried to make it align, and it just did not work. So it was like, "Ah, fuck it, Leo is still at home, and..."

Travis: Yeah.

Griffin: He has psychic visions, and probably not much else to do. Dr. Drake is, y'know, still uh, busy at the Green Bank Telescope, and doing all that stuff, so... yeah, Leo's the new Mothman. [laughs] But like many, many,

many, many, many things in this campaign, it was like, something I had way deep in the background that just like... didn't really pan out or get time to explore very much, so...

Travis: Now, Griffin, you mentioned it briefly in there, but the Sylvans being exiled.

Griffin: Right.

Travis: I always thought that that was like, they had, I don't know, whether by accident or something, had like, crossed over and just weren't allowed to come back? Or was there—were they being punished for something?

Griffin: Um, again, like, this is a thing I think we tried to explore the first time you all like, as a group, went to Sylvain. And that episode, probably more than any, is the one that we had to like, doctor, because it was just so wildly lore-heavy, and like, way too dense, and was setting like a really, really bad tone for the rest of the campaign.

But yeah, basically like, the big thing that was happening in the world then was this uh, limiting of how much of this like, life-sustaining power people were allowed to have, and people were allowed to take. And so, there was a, y'know, a lot of Jean Valjean-style stuff going on, where people were trying to, y'know, siphon off too much light, and if you did that, they would kick you out. Because exiling people, essentially, just means there's more to go around for everybody else.

This was like, uh, some of like, Woodbridge business that we, again, didn't really get to of, y'know—

Travis: 'Cause he sucked, right?

Griffin: Yeah, he sucked, but he was also charged—

Travis: Piece of shit.

Griffin: --with like, maintaining the uh, the survival of his entire civilization, and that meant like, these sort of draconian measures. And so, yeah, everybody who was exiled from Sylvain either did like, break a law established to maintain the existence of their people, or yeah, just like crossed over and ran away and left, and once you do that, you are not allowed to come... uh, you're not allowed to come back home, because their relationship with, y'know, things living on earth is extremely and understandably tenuous.

Travis: Uh, now, I have a—this is a question for all of us. Uh, people really were interested to hear our thoughts on like, the differences between the story as it kind of played out, and the characters, uh, the difference between Balance and Amnesty.

I will say, just story wise, one of the things that I have kind of compared it to a couple times now is that, I felt like Balance was much more of a – and this isn't like, a quality judgment so much as it is a structure judgment – an epic story, where it's like, building to a big thing, and it's, y'know, the whole thing is like, kind of one big arc, right? Of story.

Where Amnesty is much more episodic, where you have a build season over season, but it is more focusing on the like, if you look at the five sections of seasons, right? You can see a very clear build, season over season, and then starting back at the beginning, build again. And so, it was a kind of different way to take it, where, as I was playing, I wasn't focused on like, "Where is this going?" Y'know? Like, I was more just thinking of like, the task in front of us, and solving for that, right? And trying to catch things as they went on.

And so, kind of the same way it kind of played out with Aubrey, where I wasn't trying—with Magnus, I felt like I was always trying to get to like, "Yeah, but who is he *really*? Where is he gonna end up? What's his deal?" And with Aubrey, like, I was just doing it. Just doing the thing, and then when something about her would come out, Griffin would ask a question or y'know, Duck or Ned or Thacker would have a scene with her, and I would be surprised to find out, like, some development about her, because I just wasn't thinking, like...

Griffin: Yeah.

Travis: Long game as much with her as I was with Magnus.

Griffin: Hey, real quick. We're probably gonna do spoilers for Amnesty. I don't think we've said that up to this point, but yeah.

Travis: Oh yeah! So, many spoilers.

Griffin: So, be careful.

Travis: Yeah. Come on, people.

Clint: I think a huge difference—

Travis: What about you, Justin? Or Dad.

Clint: Uh, I think a big difference for me was the fact that, because it was in a less fantastical setting than Balance, it always felt like the stakes were a little higher. I mean, I know big things, dramatic things happened in Balance, but I think because Kepler was, y'know, a small town, and because things were, y'know, a lot more intimate and set in the one place... for me, anyway, it kind of felt like, y'know, when stuff happened to the characters, there wasn't gonna be any magic spell that brought them back to life.

Although, we did do that a couple of times.

Griffin: A little bit, yeah. [laughs]

Clint: But it always felt like the stakes were a little bit higher for me, and made it a little bit more, um, scary, to be honest with you.

Griffin: Yeah, roleplaying with actual laws and a law enforcement agency that enforces law was interesting.

Travis: That was weird.

Griffin: 'Cause, yeah.

Justin: Yeah, it's tough. I mean, that was—I came into it with a... I think my mistake with um, with Amnesty... and I think it's okay to talk about this stuff.

Griffin: Yeah.

Justin: Um, I think my mistake with Amnesty was like, I tried... I went in, um... okay, you ever break up with somebody, and then, it's like a long term relationship, and then the next relationship you get into, you immediately want it to be the level of like, intimacy that you had in the last relationship, right?

Griffin: Yeah.

Justin: That's the best metaphor I can think of, to like... Taako was so fully realized by the end of Balance, that like, I kind of—I like, kind of jumped ahead to that with Duck, and like, figured out too much stuff for him. And I think because of that, like, I didn't really have his—the essence of who he was as a person at the beginning.

Travis: Yeah, I—yeah, the same.

Justin: We discovered this stuff as we went. We discovered stuff as we went, like the inability to lie and stuff like that, but like...

Travis: [laughs] I loved that, by the way. That was one of my favorite qualities of Duck, by the way, that just—it was so fun and also, at the same time, like, told you so much about him. That was such a fun characterization.

Justin: The main thing that I was trying to do with Duck, and I can also admit this now, is, it is so fuckin' hard to roleplay a wizard. Especially, specifically in Dungeons & Dragons, because if you're in a narrative podcast, like, there's this constant pressure to like, do cool shit, and find like, the cool spell that's gonna turn everything on its ear.

And like, Duck could um... Duck had two moves – stab, and not lie. And that's like the two things—actions that he could take. And that made it a lot ea—more digestible, I think, for me.

Clint: Was that a factor in you wanting to make him Mundane again?

Justin: No. I mean, like, Mundane was a real challenge. That, for me, was like, how can we make this compelling at all? And it's really something that like, Griffin and I struggled with, like... can this even be entertaining? 'Cause like, I don't—I don't know. He's like, basically not even a superhero at that point. He's just like, a regular Joe. That's like a cool narrative thing, but like, it ain't easy to tell a story that way. But I'm happy with how it came out.

Travis: It was so inter—I went through kind of the opposite thing. Like, it's so funny to hear you say that, which is a lot how I felt as Magnus for a while in Balance. And then, I was so excited to play a Spellslinger. But because we played in this more, like, grounded world, I really felt that it was important to justify her being able to do stuff.

And so, I always tried to time it with like, uh, y'know, leveling up, rather than just like, "Uh, yeah, now she can uh, shoot lightning, 'cause..." Or—or, more just looking at the use magic. I didn't want to be like, "Yeah, she's gonna make a portal. A thing she's never done in her entire life, and has now—"

Griffin: Right.

Justin: Right.

Travis: So, that was—it became more of a narrative thing to like, figure out how to make that work.

Griffin: Yeah.

Travis: And I think... I don't think Justin was the only one who fell a little bit into like, the rebound kind of thing.

Griffin: We all did. Like, we all—that was the—and again, like, we're not dragging our own shit, but like, that was the hubris I think we all displayed when we started in on Amnesty proper, was this idea of just like, well, we knew what made Balance good there at the end. Let's just hit those dramatic beats right away. And then, it was like... that ain't how... that ain't how storytelling works, is probably—

One of the things—one of the other questions is, "What did you learn?" And like, that's probably number one, is like, you can't just jump into the third act of a story. Uh, and have it—

Travis: I came in so hot with Aubrey, of just like, "This is what she sounds like! And she has this loss, and she's this and this and this!" And then, after playing it for like four episodes, I was like, "Oh no. It's not that." Like, that was one of the best notes that like, we got from our audience, was people were like, "We're not crazy about the voice." And I was like, "Okay, cool." And then it just basically became like, my voice pitched up like, one quarter of an octave. And that was like, all it became.

And I think, from that point forward, I started playing her a lot more like myself, and seeing like, the impulse control, the ADD and everything, and originally, I saw her as being way more kind of chaotic and like, un— whoops, I keep making mistakes with my magic and destroying stuff! But then it was like, no, I think she might be more grounded than that, and more realistic than that, and uh...

Like, I think that was kind of the differences. When we started Balance, we were like, adding stuff to the characters.

Griffin: Add the fire one. Yeah.

Travis: Right. And then, with Amnesty, I think we had to chip away stuff that didn't work to find our characters.

Griffin: From a story—we've talked about characters. From a story perspective – and I'll go quick, 'cause we've been on this question for a long

time. Doing the story for Amnesty was actually much, much harder than it was for Balance, despite the fact that Balance was like this grand, epic, uh, campaign. Partially because like, that grand, epic campaign, I could make each chunk of it be whatever the fuck.

Like, that world and the campaign and the tone that we set for it kind of allowed it to be this infinite toy box, where... if I wanted to do an arc that is a wild west time loop, I don't actually have to bend over backwards trying to justify it. The justification is, there's some wild magic in this world, man. I don't know, that's why we gotta stop it.

In Amnesty, like, it was a lot harder being inside the confines of... I know what the theme and tone of this is going to be. Like, I want to tell a story about West Virginia, by which I mean like, not necessarily... I want to tell a story that is just full-blown rural Appalachia setting, y'know, et cetera. But rather, like, I want to tell a story about the folks who benefit from uh, y'know, artificial sort of manufactured conflict between people, which is like, the story of West Virginia in a nutshell.

And so like, that was super, like, helpful in a way, because it meant like, I had a direction for it starting out, but it also meant that like, I had to stick with that no matter what. And so like, I don't know, it was a lot more... despite the fact that it did end with a, y'know, cataclysmic, world-saving event, like, uh, having—staying within the confines of that was like, super tricky, but I think it ended up with a story that is like, wildly, tonally different from Balance.

Travis: Speaking of tonally different. Let's talk about Ned's death, and Thacker becoming a PC. So, one, people wanted us to talk about Ned's death. But then, there were lots of questions about like, was this always the plan for Thacker? Was he always like a backup player? What was gonna happen with him if he hadn't become a player?

So, first, Dad and Griffin, like... how did we come to killing Ned Chicane?

Clint: I felt like it was... I felt like Ned's story had come to an end. I felt like, the things that led up to Ned's passing, I think just really followed a

good pattern. I didn't necessarily want Ned to go, 'cause I loved playing Ned. But it just seemed like his story with Aubrey, and the things that developed for him that, y'know, for him to finally be a hero and save somebody's life in doing that... I just—I felt like it was *the* time for him to go.

Griffin: Like, there's actually systems in *Monster of the Week* for retiring a character. So like, if that really was the drive, Dad could've also just said like, "And then Ned runs away." Like, he could've just done what Aubrey said. That arc could've ended with Ned just fucking running away, and then Dad rolls a new character. Like, that is actually one of the advancement level up moves that you can take. [laughs] Your character retires to safety.

So like, that wasn't necessarily—like, Dad's desire—Dad's thinking about Ned's, uh, ending having naturally arrived like, wasn't necessarily the reason why he died. That entire, uh, arc was... in the same way that—that was like, our *Suffering Game*, right? For *Amnesty*, because in a lot of ways, it was like, I cannot really endanger these folks in the traditional method, uh, because they are, y'know, superheroes to a certain extent. Maybe less Duck, who was, y'know, specifically a Mundane, but...

And so, the thing that I came up with was like, this is the final escalation of *Reconciliation's* effort to uh, get this war going between Sylvain and earth, and so, they sent over this shape shifter. Uh, what did I call it? I had it in my notes. Every monster had a name, and they were very simple, like *The Beast*, *The Water*, *The Calamity*... *The Countenance* was what I called this one. Although, that never really came up.

And so, the whole thing was this arc is, it was building to a... to an inflection point. Like, it was building to a climactic moment. Everything that happened in that arc was building to this moment in front of the archway, and you all had plenty of chances to stop it or disrupt it or whatever. And you did, to an extent. Like, some of the things you did, like, at that final confrontation, you uh, I think you made some of the Hornets go away. Like, it could've been extremely, extremely bad.

And it was really bad, because there were also some terrible rolls there. But basically, like, it was all building up to this point where something terrible

was gonna happen. Because like, that was the way that this hunt had gone. You had done virtually nothing to slow this thing's, like, plans or whatever.

Justin: I think that it's important to note here that like, this is where—and we've talked about this, I think in every TTAZZ. This is a distinction between playing an RPG with your friends, and playing an RPG as a method of storytelling, right?

Griffin: Right.

Justin: Like, Griffin is—or, any DM or GM is not going to unilaterally decide to kill one of our other creations. We are telling this story collaboratively, right? There's moment to moment stuff that they will discover organically, like, as they're playing. And some big stuff has happened that way. I mean, like, some gigantic stuff has happened that way.

But, if Griffin, or again, if whoever is gonna take a player off the table, it is going to like, be a discussion beforehand. But, maybe not like, how exactly that happens or whatever. But like, it will be something they sort of talk about beforehand, because like, we're telling a story together. That's really—that starts to get a little bit like, take my ball and go home. Like, "Okay, fine, well, your guy is dead. So anyway, get a new guy."

And I think that we all kind of had a sense that we wanted that to happen to someone at some point in this arc, just to prove that we—like, to keep the stakes.

Travis: 'Cause it's grounded, right? Like...

Justin: Right. Well, and also, but like, for us as a show, like, I want—I want people to know when they're listening what we are capable of. And like—

Travis: And it's murder. [laughs]

Griffin: [laughs]

Justin: And it's murder. What it is is character murder. No, I mean like, I want people to understand this. I want there to feel stakes, right?

Travis: Yeah. Yeah.

Justin: I don't want to just be like the Good Friends Club having adventures. Like, there have to be tension, or else it's not gonna... y'know, it's just not gonna land emotionally.

Griffin: Yeah. To that point, like, if Dad had gotten a full success on that one roll where he jumps in front of—y'know, he tries to tackle Dani to the ground, like... I don't know. How do I justify that he gets killed, and I fulfill Dad's way of thinking that his story has come to an end? I don't know, but he got the mixed success, so I gave him a hard fuckin' choice. That's the, like—that's the game.

Travis: And Ned made the choice. And that's the thing. That's why I think that narrative moment worked out so well, right? 'Cause it wasn't like, a complete failure, where Griffin was like, "Welp, you're dead." And it wasn't a complete success that Griffin had to force. Like, I really felt like that was a big character moment, where Ned got offered the choice of, like, you have to choose between you or Dani. And Ned sacrifices himself, a thing he would not have done before we started Amnesty, and I think shows—

Justin: Which is actually fascinating. It's fascinating, because he tried—Dad almost did that with Ned, right? At a point much earlier in the game.

Travis: Right. Yes. Right?

Justin: Dad?

Clint: Yeah, and you actually were the—as I say at just about every con we go to or every interview, Justin is the best at character police and acting police.

Justin: [laughs]

Clint: Well, I'm being serious.

Justin: That's kind of a backhanded compliment, but I will take it.

Griffin: [laughing]

Clint: No, it's—

Justin: I thank you.

Clint: It's a forehanded compliment.

Justin: The J-Man doesn't get a lot of superlatives in the ol' TAZ world, so I will take 'best character police.'

Griffin: [laughing]

Clint: No, you are. You are dedicated to staying true to your character, and there was a moment... was it at—

Travis: It was in the water one.

Griffin: No, it was in the hot springs, and Jake Coolice was trapped in it, and you were like, "I dive heroically into the water to save him!" Justin was like, "Fuckin' really?"

Travis: "No you wouldn't."

Clint: "No you wouldn't. You wouldn't do that." And he was exactly right. And that really resonated with me for the rest of the time playing Ned, because y'know, Ned wasn't a hero, and we had to—he had to earn that journey. He had to earn that title. And so, yeah.

Travis: And I also loved that it was Dani's girl—uh, it was Aubrey's girlfriend, y'know what I mean?

Griffin: Right.

Travis: Would Ned have done that for some random stranger? Would he have done it if it wasn't, y'know, to do something for Aubrey? I don't know. But like—

Clint: And it had an impact.

Griffin: We gotta crank.

Justin: We gotta get through more of these questions.

Griffin: About Thacker.

Travis: With Thacker.

Griffin: Yeah. I love that, because the discussion that followed that was, "Well, okay, how do we bring Ned back to life?" And then it was like, "We shouldn't."

Travis: We can't. No, that would take away from all of it.

Griffin: We really should not do it. Dad, why did you—I feel like Thacker actually came up very organically, and...

Travis: [whispers] It was my idea.

Justin: I thought it was my idea.

Clint: I thought it was mine.

Travis: Well, it was my idea...

Justin: I'm checking Slack, fuck you guys.

Griffin: Okay, that is exactly what I'm talking about. So, why—what was it about Thacker that you decided to, uh... full disclosure – there was a moment where it was like, “Okay, they still have that like, organic printer bag that the Countenance left behind. Could they use that to print a new body? Could they print a new Ned or whatever?”

Travis: We also talked about ghosts, 'cause we'd already established that with Dewey, and like, there's ghost characters. We talked about the... there's like, uh, y'know, an—not undead, but like, a monster character.

Griffin: Right.

Travis: Or a monster playbook.

Griffin: You could be—you could be a ghost in that. But then, it was also a question of like, well, okay, if he doesn't play Ned, are we gonna roll up a new character in the final arc of the show?

Travis: Right.

Griffin: And then... but Dad, you were really down to play Thacker. Like, when the idea came up, you like, jumped at it.

Clint: Yeah, just because there were a couple of times in previous stories where I kept trying to guide the story back to Thacker, because it just felt like there was this great resource. Somebody who had been to the other side, who had seen things from the bad guys' viewpoint, if you wanted to, and we basically had him in a cage in the basement. So...

Griffin: Right.

Justin: [laughing] A narrative cage.

Travis: Yeah, right?

Clint: And so, that storyline was there. And Griffin, you can answer this better than me, but I just always felt that Thacker was gonna re-enter the

storyline again. Maybe just joining as an NPC, y'know, to guide them wherever they were going to go. But it just seemed like we had this resource that was there that we needed to use.

Griffin: Also, fully, I had this in my mind the entire time. You could've done that at the very beginning. I think I had—I was paying attention every time that like, Aubrey was in the room, if Aubrey had like, touched Thacker. The like, Quell influence would've like—

Travis: Ohhh!

Griffin: Yeah. So that could—that literally—

Travis: 'Cause she's Sylvain.

Griffin: That literally could've happened at any point, so...

Travis: I see. I think that that was the—the big development in the conversation about it was when we were talking about that kind of, uh, recap, big, y'know, transition episode.

Griffin: Oh yeah, that was a wild one.

Travis: Where I think we were talking about, y'know, using big magic, and the idea of bringing someone back, and then I think we hit on the idea of using big magic to cure Thacker, which is like, a thing Aubrey had been talking about doing for a while.

Griffin: Right.

Travis: And then, that being like, the perfect opportunity to introduce Thacker as a player character. Once again, it was, I thought, an amazing narrative opportunity that kind of came up pretty organically.

Speaking, Griffin, Aubrey as Sylvain, was that something that you had kind of in mind from the beginning?

Griffin: Fuck no.

Travis: Nooo.

Griffin: And I had almost—

Travis: A lot of people asked me, like, was I surprised by it? And the answer is, in many ways, yes.

Griffin: Yeah. When uh... yeah. After, y'know, after Janelle says that in the elevator ride down in episode 30... what was it, 35? Was that the penultimate episode? I don't remember.

Travis: I think so, yeah.

Griffin: Or no, it was 34. Uh, yeah. There was like a... I remember your response after that. Like, we all stopped recording, and you were like, "Huh." And I was really worried that you were like, uh... that I had like, hijacked the char—what I didn't want you to think is that like, I had decided that all of your past or whatever was uh, a lie, and you have been this god the whole time that you have forgotten about.

Travis: Nooo.

Griffin: Which wasn't necessarily the case.

Travis: No, but I mean, here's the thing. The way I see it, and I've seen it since the beginning, since Balance, is I like to kind of like, hand Griffin things and say like, "You can feel free to use this if you want to."

Griffin: Sure.

Travis: Like, here's the—like, Flamebright, right? Was that thing of like, Aubrey has this necklace, and it's a crystal. Maybe that's something.
[laughs]

Griffin: Right.

Travis: And like, I like being surprised by things like that. Because I trust Griffin to never like, change my decisions or take anything away from me. And so, like, another one was, when the episode went up, all these people started tweeting like, "Whoa, Dr. Harris Bonkers! What the fuck!" And I was like, "Wait, what happened? What was this?"

And I went back and listened to it, and Griffin had the scene where Dr. Harris Bonkers like, caught a snake with his hands? And I was like, "Hey, we need to talk about Dr. Harris Bonkers, Griffin." And it made complete sense to me, right? Once we discovered, uh, that Aubrey is Sylvain, and Dr. Harris Bonkers had basically spent all this time next to like, pure, uncut Sylvain.

But like, I love that shit.

Griffin: Yeah. I want to talk about the story, uh, the formlessness of the story, and how you all sort of uh, shaped it. Because like, and I've talked about this in like, interviews about this stuff before, but like, this was the season where I really didn't have a ton planned. Especially as we moved into the back half. Like, the first half was kind of a bit more guided in the sense that like, I was establishing the rules of these worlds, and characters, and all that shit.

But um, there were a lot of beats that just like, everything shifted around them. One being... uh, I can think of two—well, three, right? Like, Ned dying was obviously a huge, uh, pivot point. Aubrey melting the snow and starting this like, rivalry essentially with Keith and the Hornets. Like, that was not planned, and it led to some like, cool shit in the next couple arcs.

Uh, but the biggest one was Duck sort of uh, saving Billy and befriending him. Like, the idea of you all having a uh, y'know, a man on the inside with these like, uh, omniscient god-like aliens that have been sowing war throughout the universe? Like, that idea did not... enter my mind until Justin did what he did.

And so, like, I just wanted to say like, way, way more than Balance, the micro-decisions you all made. Like, the very micro, like, not even huge

character moments, but like, small decisions you guys made led to a fork in the stream that sent the story spiraling in a completely different direction.

Travis: It's so interesting though, because even from being on the inside of it, right? Like, I cannot imagine Amnesty without Billy. Like, y'know what I mean? It's... I think it's a much different story path than we took with Balance, but I think by the time we got to the end, I think about all the things that happened, and I think like, yeah, those are the things that needed to happen for Amnesty to be right. Y'know what I mean?

I think it was good that you came into it with a looser structure, after we were more experienced at like, playing games and telling stories together. Because it felt as... I mean, a lot of the questions were got were like, "Was that always the plan with Thacker? Was that always the plan with Aubrey?"

Griffin: The answer to all those is no. Like, nothing was always the plan at all. And what I love about the Billy thing is like, that only happened because of decisions that Justin made about Duck, like, not just fucking murdering. Like, that arc especially, Juice. Can you talk about like, what your decision making was? 'Cause you just did not want to kill anything.

Justin: Well, I struggled with it, right? Because... that—I mean, he's a forest ranger. And it's like, that—it just didn't seem like murder would come, like, very easily to him. I'm sure there is an example. There's probably one or two that just aren't springing to mind, but like... I don't recall him killing anything.

Griffin: Yeah.

Travis: Yeah.

Justin: I don't know that he did. If I did, y'know, maybe earlier on, or maybe I just didn't notice. But I really struggle with that, 'cause I kind of created a character who was a blunt weapon, who didn't really, like, have a taste for violence. And that would've been, like, I think that that is part... if you want to look at like, how Amnesty was different from Balance, like, I

think having your number one damage dealer be a pacifist sort of, that certainly changes your tone a little bit.

Dad, did you feel hamstrung with Ned's ability set? Did you struggle with like, how to contribute in individual scenarios?

Clint: Yeah, especially in action scenarios, and the hunts. I had to really struggle to... to figure out how—what good Ned would do. That was kind of why I really liked getting the Narf blaster, y'know, because... y'know, when all is said and done, when you're in the narrative stuff, and you're investigating, y'know, you can ask questions, and you have all this flexibility, and it's all observation, and everybody has the ability to do that.

But be honest, when you get into a combat situation, which there was always going to be a combat situation... Ned was not, y'know, a combat kind of guy. And I think, even if... I don't think he was even designed that way. Ned's a great side character for helping with everything else. So it got to the point where I, y'know, decided, well, y'know what? He would... maybe he would distract and run away. Or y'know, he would aid somebody else.

There were a lot of times I felt like I was passing along, y'know, to the next person, or I'm trying to help people with their rolls.

Griffin: The game is great about that, though. Like...

Clint: Yeah, the game is.

Griffin: Fully set up for that. Two quick things – the Narf blaster, one, I'm very glad came about, because I was really, from the start, trying to think of a way where um, none of you guys would have these big, heroic moments by shooting things with a gun. And I know, Narf blaster, you could argue is that. But like, the idea of glorifying...

Travis: It's so silly.

Griffin: Actual guns seems like a bad thing. But him having this magic Nerf gun was, I think, a decent way around that. Uh, and the idea of y'all being

pacifist, I did, like, for a while, when I was thinking about the ending, once I thought about Reconciliation and that being sort of the final beat, doing a sort of like, Undertale style, or really, any game with like a morality system, like, weighing your good versus your evil in all of the hunts. Your peacefulness versus your war-making.

But that... that was way too... I don't know. That was way too gamey. And also, like, y'all were super pacifist, I feel like, the whole season, except for the time that Thacker, I think, threw a spear through a guy's hand. That was pretty gnar.

Travis: Well, that happens. Uh, Griffin, you mentioned the ending, right? A lot of people wanted to know about Beacon and the ending, and what exactly what happening there, and was that the plan all along for Beacon? And any thoughts on this?

Griffin: No. Like, again, no. It wasn't the plan all—like, nothing was the plan all along. That wasn't the plan until like, an hour before we recorded. Like, I had this idea of... I don't know how much I really want to get into, 'cause there's a certain amount of like, if I try to explain the mechanics of Beacon, like, where he came from—

Travis: Can I say how I understood it, and you tell me—

Griffin: Yeah.

Travis: Okay. How I understood it was, the Reconciliation, they had like a system in place of voting, if they ever felt like their plan was aggression and not suppression. If it was like, now we're trying to take out planets, rather than just taking out planets that are going to be a threat.

Griffin: Right, if they became the thing that they swore to destroy.

Travis: Right. And when he put Beacon into the dome, it was like inserting a virus in a thumb drive.

Griffin: A virus. An idea into—

Travis: Into the system.

Griffin: Yeah.

Travis: Yeah.

Griffin: That's it. And—

Travis: And so, his aggression then like, poisoned the system and made them all feel so aggressive that they had to cease the project.

Griffin: Yeah, like—and the idea of... Justin and I never had a formal conversation about Duck's destiny. Which like, as a Chosen, that's your whole shtick. And if we had never gotten around to some sort of moment of Duck's agency being a... a pivotal, like, either force for good or for bad in this world, like, I think that would've been really kind of strange. And so, yeah.

Justin: Yeah, I dug that um... I dug that, in the end, Duck's thing that he had to do was give away Beacon. Like, that it—it lent a nice parallel to the story, I think. Y'know, he wouldn't take him up initially, and then, y'know, to sort of finish the arc, he had to like, return him somewhere else. It wasn't even like he was wielding Beacon as a weapon as much as he was just the messenger. Taking it was his destiny.

Travis: And I don't know if you intended this or not, Juice, but what I also really loved about—

Justin: Probably not, Trav. Probably not, bud.

Travis: Okay. Is that it kind of implied that the reason Duck was chosen is because he didn't want to fight, right? Whereas somebody who was like, super bloodthirsty had wielded Beacon, like, they probably wouldn't have come to this moment. So you needed someone who specifically did not want, like, to do it, to wield the most aggressive weapon known to man.

Griffin: Comically aggressive.

Justin: I'm much more interested in... I'm much—and now I'm getting—now I'm bloviating. But like, I'm very much more interested in, we know that it wasn't a destiny in the traditional sense, because Minerva just chose Duck from the parties that were available. So it wasn't that. I'm much more interested in like, what do you do with the opportunities that are presented to you?

Travis: Yeah.

Justin: And that, I think, is more interesting to me than like, Duck denied his destiny or accepted his destiny. It's like, Duck made the most of an opportunity that was in front of him, and he played his part in the bigger picture.

Clint: By the way, by the way, Beacon? My favorite NPC.

Griffin: Beacon was very good.

Travis: So, you have brought this to me. Let's do a quick kind of—we'll do a rapid fire answer here. Favorite NPC? My favorite was Muffy and Winthrop, just 'cause they went from being these weird, mentioned characters, to being like... [laughing] Hunters of man.

Griffin: You all were more plugged into like, the social response to Muffy and Winthrop, but they were still fully poachers, yes?

Travis: Not just poachers – murderers.

Griffin: They were still full-blown poachers. Okay, cool.

Travis: They hunted human beings, Griffin.

Griffin: Everyone seemed to be very into them. I guess I like that moral conflict.

Justin: They reminded me of the couple from National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation.

Griffin: Oh yeah. Yeah yeah, absolutely.

Justin: Just to—that's our second National Lampoon Vacation reference for the ep.

Griffin: Um, I liked... uh, I mean, I liked Keith and Hollis. I like this idea of like a cool—I guess Keith doesn't really fit in there, but Hollis being like, this cool as shit stunt biker, y'know, trying to break the law. That act of rebellion, I thought, was very cool and a neat foil to Aubrey.

But the character that kind of surprised me the most was Janelle. 'Cause that was the NPC that, by far, you all spent the most time with. You spent more time with Janelle than you did with Mama, which is like, who I kind of based the whole campaign around when I was like, designing it. And the relationship that came out of you and Janelle, Aubrey, I thought was like, really neat, because it wasn't instantly this deep, emotional, maternal connection. And it almost—I don't think it ever was like a maternal connection, as much as it was just like, you all becoming friends who mutually respect each other.

And y'know, that's true of Minerva and Duck as well, and that like, evolved into a more serious relationship out of that. So yeah, my favorite NPCs then, I guess, are the ones you all actually spent time with. [laughs] What about you, Dad?

Clint: Well, Beacon, but I also liked Boyd Mosche. I liked Boyd a lot, just because it deepened Ned's story, and I like it—I like the kind of bad guy characters.

Travis: To answer another question real quick, yes, that was Sephiroth. Griffin created a Sephiroth summon in the game. Once again, like another kind of virus program that Billy put in there. Sephiroth attacking everyone, 'cause he had played Final Fantasy VII, and it was really great.

Griffin: There was a lot of like, classic PlayStation shit that influenced this campaign, and I love that. Because originally, I was planning on like, having it be set in the late '90s, and so like, y'know, that actually being a focus. But weirdly, that aesthetic, which I am super into, ended up being a big part of it.

Justin: More questions!

Travis: Okay. Who was that woman at the end talking to Thacker?

Clint: It was the Quell, right?

Griffin: Yes. I mean, come on.

Clint: It was the embodiment of the Quell, and that's—and because—

Griffin: I did the techno-slur. You all knew what's up.

Travis: Griffin, what happened to Pigeon?

Griffin: Uh, I guess—I—she went to jail. What happens usually when people shoot somebody.

Justin: Check out our fuckin' stage play.

Griffin: [laughs]

Justin: Will we ever adapt Amnesty? I don't know, do you have \$120 that you are offering? 'Cause it takes a lot of money to get a production like that off the ground, question asker.

Travis: I'm sure—there are opportunities for it, it's just a different kind of story than Balance, so we have to like, think about it.

Griffin: Real quick. Folks are gonna murder me if I leave Pigeon at that. She—she—I imagine that there is a happy end there, because what

happened was an accident, but like, that story didn't necessarily end super well for her. Uh, and again, if you had spent more time with her—you all let her into the like, secret, and we talked about this during the campaign, and then like, didn't contact her anymore. And so like, I don't know. I don't necessarily think that story evolved very much.

Travis: Why did the shape shifter want Ned to steal Shadetree from Mama? That was just to sow discontent, right?

Griffin: In the whole thing, yeah. Everything that he did in the entire—or I guess, I don't... yeah, I guess that he did, uh, was to... was to tear your party apart, and to start this war, and to try and destroy the Green Bank Telescope. Those were his three... those were his three objectives.

Travis: Uh, one last big question. What inspired your PCs? Uh, I can start, 'cause I've said it many times.

Griffin: Yeah, we've talked about this, I think.

Travis: Well, sure. Just real quick. Because people also ask... I got a ques—well, we can transition into a couple quick questions. Somebody asked, "How did Travis decide he wanted Dani to be Aubrey's love interest?" And also, "Did you create Aubrey with bisexuality in mind?" And that's from India and Becky.

Yes, I created her with bisexuality in mind, 'cause I based her on like, five bisexual women that either I am friends with or fans of. She is named after and most directly inspired by Aubrey Plaza, but also my friends, Tybee, Kate, Verona, and Gabby.

And I—I didn't intend her to immediately get into a relationship with Dani, but then, she kind of met Dani during this huge, like, fluctuation in her like, understanding of reality. And I think Dani like, become an anchor point for her, and I think Aubrey also then was giving to Dani both like, this feeling of belonging, right? Both because she was Sylvain, and because she accepted her for who she was.

So I think, as I saw that relationship develop, I saw them both like, giving so much to each other that I just could not imagine Aubrey not being with Dani.

Griffin: Yeah. Uhh, who else has a question here that we want to do?

Clint: Well, Ned was inspired by uh... I saw Brian Blessed on the Graham Norton show, and just thought that was pretty—but also, Svengoolie, Zacherle, and all those great old monster movie hosts. I just—I love those characters.

Griffin: Uhh, “Griffin, what are your thoughts on Barclay and Stern? Were you expecting that ship to develop or not?” Yeah, fuck yeah. I wanted—like, again—

Travis: Who doesn’t want Bigfoot to date an FBI agent? [laughs]

Griffin: Well, right, and that’s like... I did want that from the start. But like, if y’all don’t spend... this is the thing. And I promise, I’m not being like, catty or whatever. But like, if y’all don’t spend time with certain characters, if you don’t spend time with Pigeon, if you don’t spend time with Agent Stern, like, I can’t... I can only do so much development in the background, because then it’s just me talking to myself.

So the idea of an FBI agent hunting down Bigfoot, but then, y’know, unknowingly falling in love with them? Like, of course that’s my shit. Come on. And so like, but again—

Travis: That’s everyone’s shit!

Griffin: I can only do—I can only do so much with that if y’all don’t, y’know, hang more with them, I guess.

Travis: Griffin, Erin wants to know, how did you do the computerized conversation with Billy?

Griffin: I just talked to you guys, and then I went onto like a website and redubbed it. The end.

Travis: Uh, Justin. Duck and Minerva are very good and wholesome. How long did you have this in mind? That's from Abby.

Justin: I can't say that it was like, long term. Um, I kind of realized it in the same way that you might realize it about a real person, like, that you had an affection for them. I can't say it was long term, because I had no idea, like—we did not have the time to realistically flesh that out. Like, realistically, you're not gonna see that relationship blossom, um, in real time. Uhh, it just—it wasn't that sort of story. We didn't have the time to, I think, dig into it that way. The world was sort of hanging in the balance so early on.

When we did the time jump, it sort of occurred to me that like... what does this guy have? Like, what is he—where would he—what would his next sort of thing be? And then, who does Minerva have? Like, what is—is Minerva staying here on the planet? And if so, why? And then I thought about like, the intimacy that would breed from someone being like, that directly connected to you. Like, seeing everything. Watching you change, watching you grow up, watching all that stuff. And like, the sort of intimacy that would be there.

And Duck was always kind of a loner. We never really met anybody that like—I mean, there's Juno. But like, he didn't have a lot of like, connections or bonds to people. So I thought it made sense, uh, for the two of them to have a relationship together. They both seemed to really enjoy each other and respect each other, and... it's great.

Travis: Griffin, how did Janelle break her leg? That's from Mary.

Griffin: There were so many people who reached out, thinking like, this was the teaser for Amnesty 2, and it's not. This was a—like, I thought about this. Just, at some point, like, there would be a character with an injury. They were hiking the whole fuckin' planet, trying to like, restore life to it. She tripped or something. Like, that's about where I've got. Like, it... it's just like a thing that happens sometimes with people.

Travis: Uh, so, I think that's—

Griffin: Can I do—can I do this one really quick?

Travis: Yeah.

Griffin: “Griffin, what things did the players do during the finale that caught you off guard?” ‘Cause you each did at least one thing. For Thacker, it was saving Vincent. You saved Vincent. I fully thought you all were going to have to have this tragic fight with a possessed Vincent, and Thacker just straight up deleted that confrontation. Just fully nullified it, which is like, wild and not really what I expected. It’s not like Vincent dying was a huge fulcrum upon which the rest of the finale rested, but it was a surprising thing.

I mean, for Duck, it was just the choice you made in the final scene. Like, where you—where you ended up, like, did not... the idea of Duck leaving West Virginia was like, not something that I anticipated, but you fully justified it, and it was a huge surprise.

And I think for Aubrey, it was when you brought Billy back into like, tangible form.

Travis: Yeah.

Griffin: ‘Cause I was thinking there would be a whole thing of like, you can't just leave this station unmanned after you, uh, after you like, defeat Reconciliation or whatever. So like, who’s gonna have to stay behind to try and like, restore peace? And it was Billy. And that’s great, ‘cause I loved the final scene you all—like, that is the extent to which you all sort of like, chopped and screwed the story and the ending.

There is so much—I know we don’t have time, but like, there is uh... I'll have to find some other way to like, talk about it. Maybe I'll do like a tell-all thing for a MaxFunDrive whatever. But like, there was so much shit that uh, that we didn’t get to with regards to like, old lore about the Green Bank Telescope, and how I tried to actually incorporate that into the—like, all this stuff that um, I guess we’ll have to get to later at some point.

But now, let's talk about the fuckin' future, baby!

Travis: Yeah. So, um, first, I think probably the biggest thing is like, going back to D&D. 'Cause also, a lot of people asked about like, Monster of the Week versus D&D. And I think... I loved playing Monster of the Week, but I think we... I think we looked at D&D all wrong a little bit when we started doing Balance of, we said, there's so many rules, and it's—y'know, it can feel so restrictive. But then, you can ignore as much of that as you want, right?

At least, for me, when I stopped looking at it as 'rules,' and started looking at it as possible story prompts, of like—if you look at all the ability checks and everything, like, that's a thing of like, I don't know, maybe I'm gonna acrobatics it, right?

Griffin: And y'know what I loved about Amnesty, and is something I'm for sure gonna take into the next season, is this idea of action first, and then game mechanics. Which is to say like, in Balance, you would say, "Uh, Magnus is gonna do an attack." And in Amnesty, you have to say like, "I rush in there, and I try to stab him through the hand, uh, trying to like, pin him to—" You have to describe the action, and then you do it.

Travis: Right.

Griffin: Which is like—it made the combat so much more visual, in a way that like, I for sure want to like, make sure we try and do that in Graduation.

Travis: And also, I will say like, a big inspiration for it was, like, we went and did Tiny Heist with Dimension 20, which comes out in January, and I'm very excited about. And the world in that was so well thought through that it was basically like a big playground for us, right? And so, that—like, that was another thing that I loved doing in Amnesty, and I think we kind of got to in Balance.

But in Amnesty, the first thing Griffin did was like, draw the map of Kepler, and it began to feel really, really, really, like... a real place that we were playing in. It became a lot more of like a sandbox.

Um, and so, I kind of carried that over into Graduation, and I've like, drawn maps, and I have like a layout of the school and everything, and that's... I like giving all of these different places that you could go look at it, and I know what is there. That you can say like, "I think I want to explore this," and I know what that is.

And I think D&D has more mechanics, also for a variety of things that a variety of characters can do, where I think... I think Monster of the Week works great if you have like a team of like, three to five investigators, right? But if you start to say like, I want to have like, ten NPCs in a scene, right? And the player characters. I think you need more variety in storytelling in a scene like that for them to be able to like, all feel like they're doing different things.

Griffin: Yeah. Travis, are you excited or nervous to take over DMing? 'Cause I can say, I'm extremely excited to not be DMing this time.

Clint: [laughs]

Travis: I am excited, and nervous. So I'm nervous because I've tried intentionally to keep the story looser in my head, right? Like, I have purposefully not sat down and said, "And this is where I want to be by the end of the arc." Right? Because I don't want to do that. That is not good storytelling.

But I'm excited, because I am so happy to have all the ideas out of my head so that I can sleep. 'Cause I keep laying down to go to bed and thinking of a new NPC. I, at this point, have designed, no exaggeration, 50 NPCs, and 40 of those I have done as fully playable characters in case I ever need to.

Griffin: Fuck yeah.

Travis: And I'm so excited to get that out of my brain so that I may rest.

Justin: Cool. I'm looking forward to playing it. Um, I still wish you guys had done, uh, my idea, which was Oops, All Jokers, where we all are different Jokers. [laughing]

Travis: I cannot wait to con Justin into like, Dming something that's not the Sherlock Holmes game.

Justin: Someone write me the rules for Oops, All Jokers.

Travis: Oops, All Jokers. [laughs]

Clint: [laughs]

Travis: And like, a lot of people asked about—because when I put it out, it was so funny to me that I said TAZ: G, and encouraged people to guess what it is, and nobody guessed Graduation. And there were a lot of really amazing guesses, and a lot of people started skewing towards like, space opera. Which, Hootenanny is the fun version of that.

Griffin: We got that out of our system, baby.

Travis: Yeah. And I like this idea of like, structure and characters, but basically is like a playground for you all to do whatever you want in the world. So like, really, so we sat down while we were in LA, the four of us, and for the first time, like, talked through the concept for the next game. And like, kind of hammered it out together. And while I'm still like, at the helm of it, this is really like, a co-creation of the four of us. You guys gave me a lot of great ideas.

Griffin: He's trying to shift the blame, if it goes stinky. Now he's gonna be able to shift the blame.

Travis: Yeah, I'm trying to spread the blame. No, but you guys gave me input into it, instead of me just like, sitting you down day one and surprising you with all the elements. And so, that's one of the reasons I'm so excited to sit down and play it, is because you guys have a concept of the world and the tone and everything before we sit down.

Um, and like, we've talked about the characters together, and we've talked about like, everything. I'm excited.

Justin: Listen, that's it. They don't get any more than that. That's it.

Travis: Did we say it's Graduation? It's Graduat—you saw that. Tell your friends.

Griffin: Yeah, you should watch the trailer if you didn't watch the trailer.

Justin: It's gonna be fuckin' great. Why are you—why are we still, y'know, horse trailering over this?

Travis: I have been thinking about this for six months or more!

Justin: And you've been talking about it for seven! I'm done!

Clint: [laughs]

Travis: I just want to tell everyone—I want to tell everyone about it!

Justin: I have to use the bathroom so bad, my back teeth are floatin'. I'm dying here. Come on.

Travis: I just created an NPC the other day that I'm so excited about.

Griffin: Thanks for listening, everybody.

Justin: I want you to create an NPT. That's a non-player toilet that I can use right now.

Travis: Maybe I will think of a whole, like, how does everyone go to the bathroom in there, y'know?

Griffin: Well, they shit, and then they make it—they shit right on the floor, and then they use magic to make it disappear. Bye everybody!

Justin: [laughing]

Travis: Graduation will be out on the 31st.

Justin: No, it's too late. It's over. Everybody left.

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