

## The Adventure Zone: Graduation – Ep. 1, Orientation

Published on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019

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[theme music plays]

**Travis:** This world has many names across her many lands, but my favorite is simply Nua. As the light from her sun crests Nua's horizon, we see what appears to be the beginnings of another ordinary day.

A blessing of unicorns rouse themselves from slumber and begin to graze. Villages and towns come to life and hum with commerce and gossip. The faeries have wound down another night of reverie, and are just settling into their forest beds. All across Nua's face, rooms of royal accountants have already been hard at work for hours. Yes, everything appears routine and mundane... but it is not. You see, this isn't just another day – this is the first day of school.

The light continues to spread, and we see its illumination touch upon a village. The true name of this village is Hope, but it's known by all the locals as Last Hope. You see, Last Hope is the final city before one finds themselves between a rock and a hard place, in the form of the Godscar Chasm, and the Unknown Forest. If you were foolish enough to stumble into this position, you may be surprised to discover the cornucopia of potential lethal fates that await you.

Nevertheless, this is where our journey takes us, and so, we must push on.

Just before the darkness closes in, and our deaths become all but inevitable, a ray of sun gleams off a golden spire atop a shining tower. For the first time, we catch a glimpse of Hieronymous Wigenstaff's School for Heroism and Villainy.

Wigenstaff's has stood as the preeminent learning establishment in Nua for over two and a half centuries. Three out of every five professional heroes and villains have walked Wigenstaff's halls. And every year, more and more young hopefuls have stood before this school's golden gates and dreamt of

their future fame or infamy. This is where we find ourselves now... but alas, we must continue a little further.

We are still at Wigenstaff's campus, but we approach from a much different direction. We found ourselves now at a wrought iron gate on the school's far wall. At the base of the tower, we can now see the Annex. Wigenstaff's Sidekick and Henchperson Annex is run by Hieronymous' younger brother and lifelong sidekick, Higglemas Wigenstaff. The awkward building sits, appropriately, in the tower's shadow.

It's clear from its construction that the Annex was something of an afterthought, giving one the impression that it was shoved against the tower when no one was looking. But if you remembered nothing else from what I have said, remember this... Do not be fooled by appearances.

The Annex's role is no less important than the towers. Sidekicks and henchpersons may not receive the same accolades, but the system of professional heroes and villains could not function without them. Even more so, the economy would crumble without the opportunities the support arts provide to those blessed with work ethic, but little less.

Our journey comes to an inauspicious end. We find ourselves in a room, empty save for three simple beds and a cat. This is an Annex dorm room, where three students will make their home for the next five years. The beds are simple and serviceable. The cat is difficult to perceive. We barely have time for our eyes to adjust to the shadowy room when there is a noise at the door. The cat disappears – not under the bed or behind a door, but into thin air.

The first of the rooms three occupants have arrived.

And I'll let you decide among yourselves—

**Griffin:** Oh, now it's us to play. Okay.

**Justin:** Dungeons & Dragons is back. Roll to enter room.

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Let's do it.

**Justin:** Roll for initiative. Roll for room initiative!

**Clint:** Right?

**Griffin:** Hold on guys, hold on. I gotta talk about Supernatural for ten minutes.

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Do you want to start playing, or should we, um... I'm gonna go eat some granola bars real close to the microphone. [laughing]

**Clint:** [laughing]

**Griffin:** Oh boy.

**Clint:** Ah, revenge is sweet.

**Travis:** Oh, we have a lot of fun here, but...

**Griffin:** Uh, I'll go in first.

**Travis:** Okay! Describe your entrance, and your appearance.

**Griffin:** Uh, my entrance has, uh... I think I've been sort of presenting myself the entire time I have been, since I stepped foot onto the Wigenstaff's campus – the Wigenstaff campus proper, let alone this rinky-dink Annex, has been a look of just... huge disappointment. Just wild and profound confusion and disappointment that um, this is where I now find myself matriculating.

Uh, and I think that this dorm room... would you say, is it pre-dirtied, did you say?

**Travis:** I mean, I would say it's just... y'know, it's your traditional, old timey, stony room. It's not like... it's not dank. It's not like a dungeon or anything. But y'know, how often does the staff get in to clean there when no one's around? Y'know what I mean? Like... eh. It's probably—maybe it's two star accommodations.

**Griffin:** Right. Um, I—yeah, I'm just going around like, testing out the mattresses, not necessarily loving them. Uh, and... my—I like this Terrace House style. Should I describe my steez? My style? What do you want here?

**Travis:** Yeah, what are you rockin', y'know?

**Griffin:** Yeah, so I'm a half elf. I'm uh... y'know, I look—I look really good. Like, sexy, handsome, good looking, very sexual and handsome.

**Justin:** [laughing]

**Griffin:** Good and popular and handsome. Uhh, and strong. And I'm rockin'... y'know, a half robe. Got some tight trousers on under that. I got some fake glasses on to make me see erudite.

**Travis:** Nice.

**Griffin:** In front of my new colleagues here.

**Travis:** Speaking of, the second of your, uh, of your roommates, the second of the door roommates, arrives. Who is the second to arrive?

**Clint:** Oh, I'll be the second to arrive.

**Argo:** [in a confident voice] Uh, hello! Argo Keene, here. And you would be...?

**Fitzroy:** [in a proper-sounding voice] Uh, pleased to make your acquaintance. I am Sir Fitzroy Maplecourt, and I... am looking forward to... sharing... a room with you, where we will both sleep? And all our stuff will be in the same room?

**Argo:** Yes, that's marvelous, isn't it? It's—do I... have to call you Sir? Is that part of the gig?

**Fitzroy:** Uh, I mean, it is only customary, don't you think? So, are you sure that this isn't just a confus—like, all three of these beds are for me, because it's just the one room per person, like civilized—

**Argo:** No. No, our names were written on the door, on little pieces of tape, if you remember. Mine... mine was there. Argo Keene, and then your... Maple syrup thing was on there. So yes, this is the room I'm supposed to be in, I'm pretty sure. [laughs]

**Travis:** Now, I'm going to interrupt here for just a moment, Dad. Tell us a little bit about what, uh, Fitzroy might see upon first glance at Argo Keene.

**Clint:** Uhh, a very handsome, very sexual, uh...

**Travis:** Okay.

**Griffin:** [bursts into laughter]

**Travis:** [laughs]

**Justin:** I see a horny season. I'm pretty sure.

**Clint:** No. Argo is, uh—

**Travis:** Welcome to our most sexual season.

**Justin:** A highly sexual season.

**Griffin:** [laughing]

**Travis:** Just wait until Archie and Jughead show up, and everyone starts smoochin'!

**Clint:** Oh, Argo is a, uh... he's a Water Genasi, and he's uh, very athletic build. Got kind of a... he's kind of a... roguish looking, uh, rogue kind of guy.

**Griffin:** Yeah. [laughs] He is roguish.

**Clint:** He's got, uh... like a light bluish green tint to his skin, and there's like, scaling. Like small scaling.

**Travis:** That does sound sexual.

**Griffin:** Genasi is like, half element—we never—

**Clint:** Right. Half elemental, like, it could be a genie. It could be something else from the elemental plane. And uh, in this case, a human variant. He's got a long, dark blue hair, tied back, like in a tail—in a ponytail kind of deal, and a handlebar mustache. He's got a cool...

**Travis:** Whoa.

**Griffin:** Yeah. You had me until then.

**Clint:** Handlebar mustache! Very dashing!

**Travis:** You are—hey, Dad? Listen. You're committing to a lot here with this character.

**Clint:** I know it. I know it.

**Travis:** Okay. You're sure about this handlebar mustache thing?

**Clint:** Yeah, and I'm sure about the jodhpurs. He's wearing jodhpurs.

**Travis:** Wow.

**Griffin:** Holy shit. This is like—you're imagining this, Travis, kind of college-aged, right? So like, I grew a mustache. We all grew a mustache in college, right?

**Travis:** Yes.

**Justin:** Sure.

**Griffin:** And it didn't stay for good.

**Clint:** Well, maybe I'll shave it at some point. You never know about Genasi. They're like the water itself. They flow and change.

**Travis:** As Argo is stroking his handlebar mustache, and I imagine, Fitzroy is uh, pretty horrified... your third and final roommate arrives.

**Roommate #3:** [in a deep, gruff, heavily accented voice] I will sleep on the floor.

**Griffin:** I just got shivers! We have—god, no, we could be playing this game for two years! We'll get two years of that! I'm psyched!

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Fitzroy:** Um...

**Argo:** There's no need to sit on the floor, my friend! Or, sleep on the floor. The beds—there's three beds! One for each of us!

**Roommate #3:** I cannot sleep on this. I... have tried. It... hm. I will sleep on the floor.

**Argo:** Well... I—I suppose that's alright. That means you could have two beds, I guess, Fitzroy.

**Fitzroy:** It's the principle of the thing more than... I don't need to sleep astride two beds, as if I were some sort of... I don't know, like I was doing dressage on two horses. Are you—on the floor? On the floor with the dirt and... bugs?

**Roommate #3:** Yes.

**Fitzroy:** Okay.

**Argo:** I admire your fortitude!

**Fitzroy:** Is there an administrator or some office here where I can go? Where is the master of facilities that I can speak to, or the housekeeping staff? I'm—I'm worried there's been... a terrible, terrible mistake.

**Argo:** You mean the RA? You need the RA.

**Fitzroy:** The royal ambassador? Yes, I will accept the royal ambassador as well.

**Travis:** Uh, now, Justin, tell us a little bit about your floor-sleeper.

**Justin:** He is a uh, a Firbolg, which is like a um... sort of a forest-dwelling... pseudo-giant. Not like, giant sized. Big. Seven, eight feet. Y'know, around there.

**Griffin:** Jesus Christ. That's a big... that's an absolute unit.

**Justin:** Yeah. It's part of why the floor is kind of a better option. [laughs] He uh... has bluish, grayish skin. If you were to, um, look at his clothes briefly, you might think that he's wearing like, uh, tanned hides. But if you examined more closely, it's uh, clearly sort of a highly treated, uh, leaf. Like, layers upon layers of leaves that have been worn into sort of a protective coating, with like, small rocks and pebbles sewn into the fabric, as it were.



And he is dirty. He doesn't seem to care very much about that. Doesn't seem to bother him. Um, and he—y'know, his hair is matted. Uh, and he is very large. And he is now seated on the floor.

**Argo:** So, uh, my friend, what is your moniker? What is your name, by the way?

**Firbolg:** I... have no name.

**Fitzroy:** Oh god.

**Firbolg:** We have no use for this... naaame.

**Fitzroy:** [nervous laughter]

**Firbolg:** I am... of my clan. Or... was.

**Fitzroy:** Or... Orvatz? What was it?

**Firbolg:** I *was* of clan.

**Argo:** So—so what do we call you?

**Fitzroy:** Yeah, what's—but what is your name, though? Like, what should your name be? Here?

**Firbolg:** I have no use...

**Fitzroy:** This is cool. Cool cool.

**Firbolg:** Of this naaame.

**Fitzroy:** How about just 'bud' for now? Buddy. Pal.

**Firbolg:** If this is what you wish...

**Fitzroy:** Buddy.

**Firbolg:** I am... 'Bud.'

**Fitzroy:** Bud, or big friend—Bud works on several levels! Because it's, uh—

**Voice:** [clearing throat loudly] A-he-he-he, a-he-he-he-hem!

**Travis:** You look up at the right back corner of the room, and you see, perched on the little stone shelf, a little stone gargoyle, who now seems to be animated.

**Fitzroy:** [startled] Oh my god!

**Gargoyle:** Uh, alright, students. Uh, welcome to, uh, Hieronymous Wigenstaff's School for Heroism and Villainy; specifically, the Sidekick and Henchperson Annex. I'm Gary, and I'm here to handle announcements and answer your questions. Uh, first announcement, no matter what anyone tells you, we do not urinate or defecate directly on the floor. This is just a lie that older students tell first years. It does not magically disappear. It just magically sits there, and it magically grosses everyone out.

**Griffin:** [laughing] I look uncomfortable, because I've already done it.

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** I did it as soon as I got here.

**Justin:** [laughing]

**Griffin:** But I saw somebody else doing it first.

**Gary:** There are state of the art bathrooms located all over campus. Please, you, dirty bird. Saw that. Not again, alright? Secondly, as I'm sure most of you know, the school employs several evil teachers. This is no secret.

However, please respect their privacy and do not ask in what way they are evil.

Finally, you are cordially invited and 100% required to attend the welcome orientation at noon today in the dining hall. Lunch will follow, so come hungry, and remember – if you need anything, just say, “Gary, help!” And uhh, I'll do what I can.

**Travis:** And he settles back into place.

**Bud:** I... do not understand this.

**Fitzroy:** Yeah, I think I'm coming up empty here, too. Is the—is the living stone man up there Gary? Or is that some sort of voice box, walkie-talkie situation?

**Bud:** The dirt that we make is delicious to plant.

**Fitzroy:** Oh god.

**Griffin:** [laughs]

**Argo:** So you're wanting to—

**Bud:** I see no need to...

**Argo:** Right.

**Bud:** To make it uhh, it disappears. I will continue. I will continue to bring my dirt to the dirt.

**Argo:** Hmm. God, this is gonna be a great semester.

**Fitzroy:** It's, uh—I'm really looking forward to it. I may stack my beds up, two tall, in a new invention that could prove very lucrative. I'm very excited about. Just to keep a sort of different strata.

**Argo:** Bud—Bud, could we at least pick a corner? Could you, like, perhaps have your corner to make dirt in? And—and we'll, y'know, we'll continue to—

**Bud:** I will go to the wood. I am not animal.

**Argo:** Hmm. No. Hmm.

**Travis:** I do love that Justin has just clarified that he's going to shit in the woods, because his character *isn't* an animal.

**Griffin:** Right.

**Clint:** [laughing]

**Justin:** [laughs]

**Bud:** I am... and you may have the, um... sleep. Pillow. And... the bed. You may stack to make it, um... extra soft. [laughs]

**Fitzroy:** Yeah, that's a good—that was a good one.

**Argo:** Yes. [laughing nervously] Um, or we could make bunk beds! Bunk beds would be cool, in case we ever have company!

**Fitzroy:** What is a bunk... what is a bunked bed?

**Argo:** Uh, at sea, it's actually a hammock, so I've only read about them. But you have a bed on top of a bed, and there's space for someone to get into the lower bunk, and someone gets up into the upper bunk, and it's all very... jolly and fun!

**Bud:** This is, um... hammock. There is no shame in this.

**Clint:** [laughing]

**Griffin:** [laughing]

**Fitzroy:** Oh, okay. Gary, help! Gary, help?

**Gary:** Uh, yeah, what do you need, kid?

**Fitzroy:** Are there really supposed to be three of us sleeping in just the one person—room for one person?

**Gary:** You got lucky. These are the nice ones. Sometimes there's like, five or six in a room. This is pretty nice. You must've registered early.

**Fitzroy:** Would it be possible to have one more five or six room... taking some... people from this room... as the additional members of the aforementioned five or six room?

**Gary:** Listen, kid, you don't know how lucky you are. What you've got built in here? Friends. Huh? Lot of people come to school, they don't know anybody. You get out there, "Ohh, what do I do? Who do I hang out with?" Right? Now you got built in, uhh, friends. People you know. This is great. You're lucky.

**Argo:** Along those lines—

**Justin:** Um, I'm gonna do—I'm gonna do an insight check.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Justin:** Uh, on Gary, to try to determine, uh, the extent to which our, um... will, our, y'know... sorry. Our um—the extent to which Gary is actually on our side. His concern for us as students, versus, y'know, just being a job.

**Travis:** Okay. Give me a first roll of the show to understand Gary the gargoyle.

**Justin:** I want to understand Gary the gargoyle. I got a 14, and plus three.

**Travis:** Ooh, okay, 17!

**Justin:** Uh, 17.

**Travis:** So, you get the idea that he is, um... here's what you know about the Gary the gargoyle system already, right? So, it is individual gargoyles in every room. Um, and it's kind of a hive mind with individual consciousnesses. So it's not just one voice that speaks out of them. So every different Gary does have its own personality, it just shares the same information.

Um, you get the impression from Gary that he is there to help. He does want you to have a good time. I mean, he's just getting to know you. Maybe over time, he'll come to have a special bond with you. But right now, he is just there to help. But he does care about your enjoyment, and making sure that you are taken care of.

**Justin:** Okay.

**Clint:** So let me ask you a question. If we have a conversation, and Gary overhears it, will the next day, we'll get a bunch of computer ads for products that related to—

**Griffin:** This is important.

**Clint:** --what we talked about?

**Travis:** Hmm. Maybe!

**Clint:** Cool.

**Griffin:** I put a piece of tape over my Gary's eyes.

**Travis:** That's good. Gary can be hacked.

**Griffin:** Yeah, I don't want the dark—

**Justin:** Fantasy tape?

**Gary:** I understand. A lot of people do this. It doesn't bother me at all. I have hands and arms. I'll take the tape off when you're gone. Um, do you have any questions? Anything I can help you all out with?

**Fitzroy:** Is off-campus housing... an option?

**Gary:** No. Next question.

**Fitzroy:** But wait, that means this is prison!

**Gary:** No, it's not prison. It's just, the nearest town is Last Hope.

**Fitzroy:** Okay...

**Gary:** And uh, you need to be ready at a moment's notice for assignments, and y'know, it's so we can keep an eye on you or whatever.

**Fitzroy:** Cool beans.

**Gary:** Listen, uh, you got some time before the orientation at noon. You should go, like, explore campus. Familiarize yourself with it. 'Cause classes start tomorrow, y'know? So like... make hay while the sun is out and stuff, y'know?

**Justin:** Yeah, uh, I think I'm gonna go do that.

**Griffin:** [laughs]

**Justin:** I'm gonna, uh... I'm gonna start exploring the um, perimeter of the, uh... Wigenstaff's. I want to know how far I am from the wild. Uh, I want—I feel a great sense of comfort there. I need to know how far I have to go to reach the wild again. It was all very disorienting coming in. Obviously not a

big traveler. Firbolg tend to live in, uh, clans, in very isolated—y'know, sort of isolated to their region, so um... he hasn't been away from them very much. So, kind of getting the sense of his environment.

**Travis:** Uh, so, here's what I can tell you. This is something you would already know. It's part of all of the pamphlets, and y'know, uh, information. All the... the documents about Wigenstaff. So the campus is laid out, uh, north of the city of Last Hope, in the crux of the intersection of the Godscar Chasm, and the Unknown Forest.

Both are incredibly deadly, but between Last Hope and Wigenstaff's, there is some forest. It's just not nearly as wild as the Unknown Forest. It's just, y'know, like, some trees and stuff. It doesn't even have a name. It's just, uh, y'know, coughs of trees and hills and that kind of thing.

**Justin:** Um, I'm gonna do... I'm gonna go to the edge of the Unknown Forest.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Justin:** And I'm not gonna go in it, but—

**Griffin:** Go kill the—go kill the final boss, man. Just do it.

**Justin:** I'm gonna go kill the final boss of the whole game.

**Griffin:** Then we can be done! Yeah!

**Justin:** Fucking wrap it up. No, uh, I want to—I want to check it out, to the extent that I can safely, and sort of get a sense of like... how fucked I'd be in there. 'Cause I'm pretty good in the woods, and I want to know what I'm dealing with.

**Griffin:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Um, so, are you all—uh, Fitzroy and Argo, are you going to explore as well?



**Griffin:** Um, yeah, I think it would be good to keep us together. I want to also clean the room up, leave my mark on it. But I can do that later.

**Clint:** Yeah, and I think Argo's gonna go along, 'cause he is not quite 100% sure that Bud's not just gonna start shittin' everywhere, and he just—

**Travis:** That's fair.

**Clint:** He just wants, just, y'know, get to know him a little bit.

**Griffin:** Yeah. I think also, there is a part—there is—you made a prison joke earlier, but I think there is a part of Sir Fitzroy that is like, real uncomfortable here. And when Gary mentioned having buds built in, he was like, "Oh wait, that's a good idea. This guy's huge and this guy has a mustache, so what does he know?"

**Travis:** As you exit the Sidekick and Henchperson dorms, you are accosted by a large man with a big beard and big hair. And unintentionally, here's my second weird voice of the episode. I promise, they won't all be like this.

**Groundsy:** [in a high, Irish accent] 'Ello 'dere kids, I'm Groundsy the groundskeeper!

**Clint:** [snorts]

**Fitzroy:** You have to be shitting me.

**Groundsy:** Welcome to Wigenstaff's!

**Fitzroy:** It's, uh, an honor to make your acquaintance. I am Sir Fitzroy Maplecourt, and I—

**Groundsy:** Oh, fancy lad, aren't'cha? Oh, it's good to meetcha, Sir Fancy Lad!

**Fitzroy:** It's a... it's a great... it's a great name, Groundsy. Does everyone here have such a whimsical name?

**Bud:** I too am wondering this.

**Groundsy:** Nope! Just, uhh... who else did'ja run into before me?

**Argo:** Well, let's see, we've had another double G, Gary the gargoyle.

**Groundsy:** Ohh, Gary!

**Argo:** Does everybody's names start with G's here?

**Groundsy:** Nooo, just poor planning on my part! I should've been later in the day, I guess! Ohhohoho.

**Bud:** There is, um... a nobility to this name. You work in the ground. Your name is Groundsy. There is nobility in this.

**Groundsy:** ... Okay!

**Fitzroy:** [laughs] He says dope shit like that all the time. It's very deep.

**Argo:** Yeah, it's really—it's really cool, yeah.

**Groundsy:** Well, I wasn't expecting it. It was very deep. Uhh... well, I'm here! I take care of the grounds, and I move around. You'll see me all over 'da place, and you can come talk to ol' Groundsy anytime! But don't... come... to my hut. That's Groundsy's place. That's where Groundsy gets to be Groundsy, y'know what I mean? So please... please... that's Groundsy's time. Please don't come to Groundsy's hut.

Uh, but if I'm out and about on campus, feel free to stop me and ask me any questions ya might have!

**Fitzroy:** So just for future reference, Groundsy, in the future, whenever you accost students like this... I had no interest in going to your house before we started speaking.

**Groundsy:** Nooo, please don't even introduce the idea. That's Groundsy's place.

**Fitzroy:** Right. Well, I didn't introduce the idea, you did. That's what I'm saying. Now I know for sure you've got werewolf eggs, or some sort of, I don't know...

**Groundsy:** You don't need to think about it anymore. Don't... don't trouble yourself. That's Groundsy's business.

**Argo:** Gary, help! ... Gary?

**Travis:** Ga—Gary's in your room.

**Griffin:** [laughs]

**Travis:** You can't summon him. He's not Janet.

**Clint:** Oh. I thought he was in every room.

**Griffin:** [laughing]

**Justin:** Well, we're outside.

**Clint:** Oh.

**Justin:** Which is kind of a room. God's room.

**Clint:** Well, okay.

**Argo:** Groundsy, help!

**Groundsy:** ... Okay.

**Argo:** Doesn't work that way?

**Justin:** [laughs]

**Groundsy:** I mean...

**Argo:** Well, could you—since you're in charge of the grounds, could you take my friend here and show him—

**Groundsy:** I'm not a—whoa, whoa, whoa. Thank you for the promotion. I'm not in charge of the grounds. I keep the grounds. Y'know what I mean? Like, I'm... I keep the ground. I don't own the ground. I'm not in charge of the grounds.

**Argo:** I see.

**Bud:** Can you... can you tell me of this... forest?

**Groundsy:** Ohh! The Unknown Forest, ya mean?

**Bud:** I'm realizing now that perhaps information on it is... hard to come by.

**Groundsy:** Yeah.

**Clint:** [laughing]

**Griffin:** [laughing]

**Groundsy:** Yeah, a little sparse.

**Bud:** I have... I need... I... please forgive. I how not much need to talk.

**Groundsy:** Okay. Uhh. Well, the Unknown Forest, there is certain rules put in place. You're not allowed to get too close to it. You can go observe it.

There's nothin' against that. But uh, do not enter the Unknown Forest. That way lies only death. Uhh, and give it a wide berth, y'know what I mean? It's to our north. To our northeast. There's a door, a gate. The gate that you came through, the wrought iron one, just past me hut. Make sure you also give me hut a wide berth. Don't go near Groundsy's hut.

**Fitzroy:** Which would you say is more dangerous?

**Bud:** Hmm.

**Groundsy:** Mmm... uhh, both in different ways.

**Fitzroy:** Okay. I gotta get in this hut.

**Groundsy:** No—ohh. Doon't. I got my eye on you, boy! Fancy lad, don't go near the hut! I'll knooow.

**Fitzroy:** It's Sir Fancy Lad.

**Groundsy:** Sir Fancy Lad, excuse me.

**Fitzroy:** This has been fun.

**Groundsy:** Okay.

**Argo:** Well, we're gonna make our way to the—one of the places you told us not to go. So, onto the Unknown Forest!

**Griffin:** [laughs]

**Groundsy:** I'm not your boss.

**Travis:** Um, so, we're heading to the Unknown Forest. So, you head past—

**Griffin:** Wait, wait, what?!

**Justin:** Yeah, I don't want to go anymore.

**Griffin:** I don't want to go in—yeah.

**Justin:** I heard him. I get it. It's bad. I won't go in there.

**Travis:** Yes. Okay. As you exit this uncomfortable conversation with Groundsy the groundskeeper, you now have two options. You can go to the left, and uh, pass around the school by the barn side, or you can go to the right, and pass around the school on the battleground side. Uh, and you do not have to all go together for this, because you will end up at the same place.

So, if some of you would like to go check out the barn, if you would like to go check out battlegrounds, or if you would like to all go together, that is totally cool.

**Griffin:** I am definitely going to the battleground, 'cause I am hoping to find some sort of proper knight training facilities. It would bring me great comfort to know that there is some, uh, state of the art knight training facilities in this place. So... uh, I'm swinging by there. I don't think barn is gonna get me where I need to go.

**Justin:** Uh, and I am gonna go past the barn. I'd like to kick it with some fuckin' animals.

**Travis:** What about you, Argo?

**Clint:** Uhh, I think he'll go to the battlegrounds. Y'know, he's not real comfortable around animals so much... [in a faint Irish accent] After a life on the sea. Sorry, I didn't mean to do Groundsy there, I'm sorry.

**Travis:** Hey, yeah, watch out. That's my IP! Um, so, we are going to go barn-side first. You pass the Annex on your right; a squat, square, wood building, smushed against the white stone tower. You see Groundsy's hut on your left. The windows are painted black, and there are several locks on the doors. He also has an abundance of lawn decorations.

Just past the hut, you see the barn. It's your standard wood affair, and long enough to house several animals. The barn doors are open, if you would like to venture in. I assume you do.

**Justin:** Uh, yep.

**Travis:** Yes.

**Justin:** Yes, I am going in.

**Travis:** Inside, you, at first, find what one might expect to find in any barn. Several horses, cows, a few sheep. But as you move down the aisles, the denizens of the barn become more exotic. You see a unicorn with a bandage on its leg, a hippocamp swimming in a special water-filled stall, and a jackalope resting quietly in a hutch.

In the last stall, separated from the rest, you see what appears to be a baby Pegasus. And behind you, you hear...

**Voice:** Oh, hello. You must be new.

**Bud:** ... Yes.

**Voice:** Oh my. Sir Firbolg, I had no idea. It's an honor to meet you.

**Travis:** And you turn to find a – let's just say it – a beautiful centaur man. Uh, and you know, because he is the only centaur professor on campus, this is Hernandez. He is the animal handling professor here.

**Hernandez:** It—it is an honor to meet one of the Firbolg. I know everything about you, but I—y'know, as I, too, care for animals, I, too, am of the land. But I so rarely get the opportunity to discourse with someone else who loves the woods and the land and the forest as much as I do.

**Bud:** Yes.

**Griffin:** [laughs]

**Hernandez:** Yes, I do know your people to be fairly soft-spoken. Um, perhaps you could help me.

**Travis:** And he points to the stall with the baby Pegasus and says...

**Hernandez:** I—I found this baby Pegasus wandering outside the unknown forest. I waited there with her for a day, and her parents never came, and I fear that she has been orphaned. But she won't eat, and I worry... I worry about her. Do you have any insight into this?

**Justin:** I cast *Speak with animals*.

**Travis:** Excellent.

**Griffin:** That seems like a good way to do this.

**Justin:** Seems—yeah. Seems extremely competent. [laughing] Okay, so I've cast that on myself. I will ask the Pegasus.

**Bud:** Pardon me.

**Pegasus:** [fearful] Huh? Huh?

**Bud:** Shh. There is no fear. I am... friend.

**Pegasus:** Uh... okay?

**Bud:** This centaur... wants to know why will you not eat?

**Pegasus:** I'm... I'm waiting for my mommy and daddy.

**Bud:** Oh... where are they?



**Pegasus:** I—I got—[shaky breathing] We—we were attacked, and I—I got separated, and I waited. I waited and waited for them, and they did not come.

**Bud:** Ohhhh... no, youngling. I am... very sorry. Um... but I... I think you may be alone for a while.

**Pegasus:** Oh no...

**Bud:** But... this is okay. I... I am alone, too. I was part of a clan, and now, I am... on my own. But look at me. Big and strong, right?

**Pegasus:** ... Yes.

**Bud:** You, too, can be big and strong. But you must eat to grooow like me. [laughs] You want to grow strong, right?

**Pegasus:** Yes.

**Bud:** Here. I have... hmm... ahh, berries. Do you like berries?

**Pegasus:** Yes, very much.

**Bud:** Please. Try.

**Travis:** And she begins to eat.

**Bud:** What... who attacked? Did you... did you see?

**Pegasus:** It was so dark, and it moved so fast. It... it wasn't big, but it... it moved so fast.

**Bud:** I am sorry you had to see this, youngling. But... for now, we will both eat our berries and be quiet, huh? I think sometimes they forget how to be quiet.

[music plays]

**Travis:** And now we move to travel with Argo and Sir Fitzroy.

**Griffin:** I've made several meaningful, emotional connections with animals along the way also.

**Travis:** Oh, super cool.

**Griffin:** We didn't see it. It wasn't in frame. It was just out of shot.

**Clint:** Yeah.

**Travis:** You pass with the Annex on your left. Um, now, as you round the tower, you can see the battlegrounds. To the untrained eye, it could easily be mistaken for just a patch of dirt. But for those in the trade, the signs of a century's worth of fights are clear, made even clearer by the scene playing out before you.

In the center of the grounds is a remarkably tall woman. One might say that this goliath holds a large kite shield, but that would not do her justice. She wields it like a protective force of nature. On either side of her, you see a dark skinned man in cloth armor, wielding a two-handed staff, and a dragonborn with silver scales and a silver sickle, shining in the morning sun.

The two alternate strikes on the goliath, but seem unable to pierce her defense. Then, the dragonborn charges in with sickle raised, but swerves at the last second to reveal the man coming in low behind him. He swings his staff below the goliath's raised shield, and gently taps her ankle. Immediately, the fight is done. The three begin rapidly reviewing the exchange in perfect detail.

You are spotted by the staff-wielding man, and he makes his way over.

**Man:** Oh, hello, new students.

**Fitzroy:** Hello! Pleased to make your acquaintance. I am Sir Fitzroy Maplecourt.

**Jimson:** Well, that is quite a name. My name is Jimson, but I am certain my reputation precedes me.

**Fitzroy:** Do you have a funny last name, like Jimson Digglemas, or... Jimson Gemtoes?

**Argo:** Weed? Jimson Weed, maybe? Would that work? Um, no.

**Jimson:** [laughs] No.

**Travis:** Uh, I would like... uh, let's see... uhh, both of you to roll a... just give me a straight up wisdom check.

**Griffin:** Oh. I have zero of that. That's a ten.

**Clint:** That's a 16.

**Travis:** Okay, great. Um, so, uhh, this is... Jimson. You know this from a lot of promotional materials for the school. He is the battlegrounds trainer for the sidekicks and henchpeople. He is also a world-famous arena champion in the featherweight division.

**Griffin:** Um...

**Argo:** Big fan! I'm a huge fan. I've read the scrolls about your latest bouts, and uh, really... [claps] Really excited about, y'know, tucking it on and duking it out and learning all your moves! [laughs]

**Jimson:** Well, that is lovely. But it sounds like maybe you've never been in a fight.

**Argo:** Oh, I've... I've been in a few fights, yes. [laughs nervously]

**Jimson:** Okay.

**Fitzroy:** I've, uh... I've sparred my fair share of spars.

**Griffin:** And I jump into like, dueling position. Perfect sparring... I don't—I mean, I, Griffin, don't know what that means.

**Jimson:** Well, that is excellent form. Are you one of the new hero students?

**Fitzroy:** [laughs] I mean—ye-yes. That's what I'm saying, there's been a horrible, horrible, horrible mistake.

**Jimson:** Oh. How so?

**Fitzroy:** I've—I seem to have been misplaced in the sidekick slash henchperson program.

**Jimson:** Ohh. You're Sir Fitzroy.

**Fitzroy:** Sir Fitzroy Maplecourt, yes.

**Jimson:** Of course. Of course. Crush. Crush, honey.

**Travis:** And the uh, dragonborn turns.

**Crush:** Yes, Jimson?

**Jimson:** This is uh, Sir Fitzroy. The one we were talking about. The student who used to be in the hero tract, but isn't anymore.

**Fitzroy:** That's—okay.

**Jimson:** Oh. Forgive me if that came across as callous. We're very excited to work with you. We've never had a student with your abilities before. It's very interesting.

**Fitzroy:** Fascinated. Cool. Like a... oh, cool. Like a science experiment. Fun.

**Jimson:** No, please don't misunderstand me. You're very special. You should feel very proud.

**Fitzroy:** Yes, so proud. So proud. Proud like a baby child of mine. Love it. Love the powers.

**Jimson:** Oh, excellent.

**Fitzroy:** That was—I was being extremely facetious. They've ruined my life.

**Jimson:** Well, your life isn't over yet.

**Fitzroy:** Feels like it! Feels like it.

**Jimson:** Y'know, if I may be so bold, I, too, have suffered through disappointments and loss. And sometimes, I, too, felt like I was lost in the moment. But it's amazing what you can make it through, and who you might become on the other side.

Now, you better hurry along. You wouldn't want to be late for the orientation, would you?

**Fitzroy:** Hate to miss that.

**Jimson:** Farewell.

**Travis:** So, the three of you reconnect back at, uh—near the entrance to the main tower. Um, do you want to do a little catching up on the adventures you went on?

**Fitzroy:** Uh, I had my feelings hurt by a strong man. What about you, Bud?

**Bud:** I met a small Pegasus that had been attacked. Her family, destroyed. Very sad.

**Fitzroy:** Yes. Holy crap. I can't think of anything sadder.

**Argo:** I um... I met, uh... I met someone who was, uh, wanting to—who is training us, and I opened up and told him how I excited I am, and he completely shut me down and paid attention to Sir here. It was awesome!

**Fitzroy:** That happens a lot.

**Argo:** It does a lot around you, apparently.

**Fitzroy:** Very charismatic.

**Man:** Excuse me. Are the three of you going to stand around all day, chatting, or could you move along? Maybe clear the space? Because some of us are rocking some pretty big hangovers and ringing headaches, and just can't sit here and listen to any more of your bullshit.

**Argo:** [laughs] Oh! Uh, pardon me, friend, but this is Sir Fitzroy Applejack, and he is a very important person. Just ask him!

**Fitzroy:** I appreciate the Sir. You got the last name—yes. I—please watch who you are addressing.

**Man:** Oh, I am very sorry.

**Justin:** Is Applejack right?

**Griffin:** No, it's—

**Justin:** Dad said it wrong so many times, I'm confused now. We're introducing these characters. Fitzroy...

**Griffin:** Maplecourt. Maple like the syrup, court like a judge sits in.

**Justin:** I'm gonna think of a basketball court, and everybody's stuck to it from all the syrup.

**Griffin:** That's good.

**Travis:** There it is.

**Clint:** Maple... court.

**Man:** Oh, I apologize. I did not realize that you were important. What was that name one more time?

**Fitzroy:** We just did a whole thing, but it is Sir Fitzroy Maplecourt, Knight and Absentia of the realm of Goodcastle.

**Rolandus:** Yes, I am aware of Goodcastle. My name Rolandus Fontaine.

**Fitzroy:** Damn, son! Wow!

**Rolandus:** If this were a fancy name competition, we would be equally matched.

**Griffin:** [laughs]

**Fitzroy:** The fancy name team! Okay, I didn't recognize you!

**Rolandus:** A pleasure to make your acquaintance. Uh, allow me to introduce my friends. This terrifying sorcerer to my right is Zana. She's a villain, but don't hold that against her. [laughs] And to my left, this is Rhodes the ranger, another hero like myself, and like you. Such a pleasure to meet another hero of breeding.

**Fitzroy:** Well, now you've made it weird.

**Rolandus:** Oh?

**Fitzroy:** It's just you—yeah. I mean, you brought—yes. I mean, you talk about the breeding of... anyone can be a hero.

**Rolandus:** You... are a hero, aren't you?

**Fitzroy:** I am still waiting to see how many credits are going to transfer over from knight school. But I think in spirit, yes, you could say I'm a hero.

**Argo:** I wonder why they stuck you with us, then, 'cause we're not heroes. And I'm going to be a—a sidekick, and... I wonder why they put you in with us!

**Bud:** I am a disgraced nothing. Worse than the dirt below your feet.

**Fitzroy:** Okay. Maybe that's it! Maybe you two are my sidekicks, and that's what—there's been a—again, a terrible mistake. And I'm the hero, you two are my sidekicks, and you are going to train under me, perhaps?

**Rolandus:** Just to clarify, very quickly... are the three of you dorm mates?

**Fitzroy:** We are dorm... sharers.

**Rolandus:** Ah. Okay. So you are a sidekick or henchperson. Thank you so much for clarifying. I almost wasted my time and energy fighting through this hangover to be cordial. Now, if you'll please excuse me, I'm going to settle back down into this ringing headache and pretend like none of this ever happened.

**Travis:** And then you hear a voice from behind you.

**Voice:** Come now, Rolandus. No need to be shitty. These are our new friends, and they deserve our attention, I guess, as much as you do.

**Rolandus:** Oh, Buckminster. I didn't expect to see you back for another year. I assumed your daddy would send you to another school, or, I don't know, the military, or maybe prison?



**Fitzroy:** You're the bully, right?

**Buckminster:** Well, here's the thing. Let me tell you. Pay no attention to Rolandus. He's just a piece of shit.

**Fitzroy:** Right.

**Rolandus:** How dare you, Buckminster. Do you know who you're talking to?

**Buckminster:** Uh, yes, I do. I believe I'm talking to the son of a... let me check my notes here... deposed king? Is that correct? Former king? Making you a former prince? Is that corre—let me check. Yes. What do you think, Rainer?

**Travis:** And he looks to his right, uh, and you—next to him is a smiling, shining young woman with long, blonde hair, sitting in a very ornate, floating chair. And she says...

**Rainer:** Yes, I... yeah. I think that checks out. Deposed king. Yeah yeah yeah.

**Rolandus:** I—well—he—he rules in exile. He is gathering powerful friends. He has plans. We'll get it back.

**Buckminster:** Yes, I—yes, I am aware. Now, please, Rolandus, Zana, Rhodes... pleasure. Please, go inside and get seats, and let us talk, and you enjoy your hangover in the shadows, where a hangover does best.

**Rolandus:** I am going to go inside, but not because you told me to. Because I want to.

**Travis:** And uh, Rolandus and Zana and Rhodes go inside.

**Buckminster:** I am so sorry about him. He is, uh, as I said, a real piece of shit. He's not... honestly, he's not that bad. I mean, he is. But he—what you

see is what you get. Unlike me – I am a piece of shit, but I'm just very charming. Uh, so, let me introduce myself. My name is Buckminster Eden. I am the son of the Iron Lord, which I'm sure requires no, uh, explanation. Oh, and here?

**Travis:** And you see, uh, he had been in the shadows about five steps back, a taller man, a bit beefier, bald, steps up. And he's definitely older than Buckminster. You put him at probably 28.

**Buckminster:** Uh, this is my sidekick, Leon.

**Leon:** [quietly] Uh, hi. Hi, everybody. Good to meet you.

**Buckminster:** Uh, I could not do without him. Without him, I'd have to carry my own stuff, fight my own battles. He is essential. And to my right, this is my friend Rainer. She... let's see, she is a... hmm. She's a shining ray of light in these dark times. Disgustingly upbeat. Wonderfully, wonderfully loyal. And the most talented necromancer I've ever met, so there's that.

**Rainer:** Oh, stop. You flatter me so much, Buckminster. Thank you so much. It's so nice to meet you! What are your names, new friends?

**Fitzroy:** [quickly] It's Sir Fitzroy Maplecourt, knight and absentia.

**Rainer:** ... Okay?

**Fitzroy:** I did it really fast that time. But you heard all of it.

**Rainer:** I still caught it! What about you, my Genasi friend?

**Argo:** Uh, Argonaut Keene at your service!

**Rainer:** Whoa!

**Argo:** Pleased to make your acquaintance.

**Rainer:** That's a cool name! What about you?

**Bud:** I... am here.

**Rainer:** Okay!

**Fitzroy:** It's complicated.

**Rainer:** Okay. What do you call him?

**Fitzroy:** We call him Bud.

**Rainer:** Okay, thanks Bud! Um, I'm, as he said, Rainer. Uhh, anybody want to ask about the chair? Go ahead and get that... out of the way? Anybody?

**Fitzroy:** I thought it would be fairly impolite.

**Rainer:** Oh no, I don't mind! Do you want to know?

**Fitzroy:** Yes.

**Rainer:** Okay! So, I have a chronic illness that makes it difficult for me to walk or even stand up sometimes, so I commissioned this chair, and a master carpenter built it for me, and then an artificer, y'know, worked their stuff on it. So now it floats, and yeah, I can pretty much go anywhere, and it does this!

**Travis:** And she presses a button on the arm rest, and uh, you see like, lights shine from underneath the chair, and they like, kind of shift colors to different colors of the rainbow.

**Fitzroy:** You have under—you have ground effects?

**Rainer:** I do!

**Fitzroy:** That kicks a lot of A. A lot of tushie.

**Rainer:** I know! And it's got a bunch of secret compartments in it, and uh, I've got a snack drawer over here...

**Travis:** And she pops it open, and there's like, some trail mix in there.

**Fitzroy:** You are the first cool person that I've met here so far, so, it's a pleasure to make your acquaintance.

**Rainer:** Hey, thanks! I think you're cool, too!

**Fitzroy:** So are you a villain?

**Rainer:** Yyyes.

**Fitzroy:** Okay.

**Rainer:** The—yes. There is that. Um, Buckminster's a hero, believe it or not. [laughs] Just a joke. Uh, and I'm a villain. Um... I think that mostly has to do with the necromancer thing?

**Fitzroy:** Right. It's the—the—it's the dynamics I'm still getting... uh, I am a transfer student from Knight School. Perhaps you've heard of it.

**Rainer:** Oh, from Clyde Nite's Night Knight School!

**Fitzroy:** Clyde Nite's Night Knight School, yes.

**Justin:** [laughing]

**Fitzroy:** And there, it was all just sort of chivalry and good deeds and what have you, so, the idea of a—

**Rainer:** Mm, very old school.

**Fitzroy:** So please don't take this the wrong way, so the idea of attending school with, uh, villainy... is... not something I'm entirely comfortable with.

**Rainer:** Well, y'know, in this day and age, it's more titled than anything else, y'know? Like... [sighs] The more we work together, the easier it is out there in the field, y'know? To make sure that everybody's on the up and up, and make sure everything's working out.

**Travis:** And y'know what, this would actually be a great time... Griffin, why doesn't everybody roll, uh, a very, very low history check for me?

**Griffin:** Oh, well, I have minus one intelligence, so this is gonna go—oh, it's a 16 total! Hey!

**Travis:** Okay, cool. So, then I'm gonna say that you know this. Everybody knows this. That basically, the way that this world works is that there are people who are hired to be villains, and people who are hired to be heroes in a town, in a city, in a kingdom. Right? And then, the battles that they wage, quote unquote, the, y'know, their antics, their stories, raise the profile of the kingdoms.

But the Heroic Oversight Guild exists to make sure that heroes don't start taking bribes, or hurting people, or anything like that. And that, um, villains don't hurt too many people, and keep it to like, injuries, instead of like, killing. And that it—it kind of becomes a very much like, uh, almost Looney Tunes-esque battles, back and forth, to make them more showy, rather than actually having any kind of end goal.

**Griffin:** Okay.

**Travis:** So, at this point, it's more about the hero and villain titles, uh, you are on the hero track or the villain track, depending on what your skillset is, of how showy it will be when you attack or anything like that. It has very little to do with any kind of morality.

**Griffin:** Using D&D parlance, like, our alignment could be one thing, but we could still do...

**Travis:** Absolutely.

**Griffin:** A different job. Okay. Interesting.

**Travis:** Absolutely. There are many heroes that are like, chaotic, or y'know, chaotic good, or even maybe chaotic evil. Um, but—or lawful evil or whatever. But the Heroic Oversight Guild keeps them in line. And what you also know is that, when someone is branded as 'evil,' it means that the Heroic Oversight Guild has determined that they are no longer qualified to work professionally as a hero or villain.

So that's why there are so many evil teachers here at the school, is, they used to be former heroes or villains—

**Griffin:** Ahhh, okay.

**Travis:** Who have lost their accreditation, and now have turned to teaching.

**Griffin:** That's a cool idea, Trav.

**Travis:** Hey, thank you so much.

**Rainer:** So, with introductions aside, what say we head in and get this orientation underway?

**Fitzroy:** I'm already feeling oriented as hell, but um... sure.

[theme music plays]

**Travis:** Hi everybody! It's me, your dungeon master and your best friend, Travis McElroy! And I'm so excited that you are here. I'm so excited that we are here. We have been talking about and planning Graduation for like, six or seven months at this point. I have put way too much work and thought into it, and I'm so excited now that you get to listen to it! And I have a lot of announcements to make here in the break, so I will make this as quick as possible.

First, I want to say a special thank you to everyone who shared the trailer, and thank you to Janet Varney, Mimi Chu, Griffin McElroy, and Evan Palmer for the amazing work that you all did on the trailer. It's—I think it's breathtakingly beautiful. I love it so much.

Um, and special thanks to another actual play D&D podcast called The Broadwords. The Broadwords is an all-female and nonbinary led actual play show, and it is also where I first debuted Buckminster Eden. I love playing him so much that I incorporated him into Graduation. If you would like to hear more from him and Leon, go listen to The Broadwords. It's a great show. You're gonna love it.

Uh, also, thank you to Kay Welch, Brandon Lee Mulligan, Matt Mercer, Sateen Phoenix, Chris Perkins, and Griffin McElroy for being my DM mentors. Uh, and more than anything, thank you to Justin, Griffin, and Dad for helping me create this world, and for playing with me in it.

Now, some NPC names. There have been a couple in this episode, and there's going to be even more in the future. So far, we've got, Hernandez is named after Scott Hernandez, Rhodes is named after Renee Rhodes, Zana is named after Lindsay Zana, and Rainer is named after my dear, dear friend, Rachel Miner.

Uh, there's going to be lots more NPCs coming, lots more NPC names that have already been named, lots more NPCs that will need names. So, uh, be sure to keep tweeting about the show and using the hash tag, #TheZoneCast, and your name might get used for an NPC.

Uh, and now, I have a couple ads. Some sponsors to tell you about. First, let me tell you about Blue Apron. I don't know if you can tell from my voice. I've been a little sick. And y'know, I love having a hot, fresh made meal to kind of warm my bones, make me feel better when I'm not feeling great, and Blue Apron has that in stock. You can do that without having to like, drive to the store, which you never want to do when you don't feel good.

You'll always have exactly what you need, and you can make it at home. It's got flexible menu options and an ever-changing mix of meat, fish, plant forward, and vegetarian recipes. And they have seasonally-inspired produce, step by step cooking techniques, and chef-tested recipes. They're incredible. It's one of my favorite things.

You're gonna find new recipes, new flavors, new things that you love. Let Blue Apron help make cooking at home a sustainable part of your weekly routine. To start making delicious, brag-worthy meals at home without the hassle, try Blue Apron. Check out this week's menu and get \$60 off when you visit [BlueApron.com/Adventure](https://www.blueapron.com/Adventure).

And just, uh, here's some sampling of November recipes, by the way. Pork meatball Italian wedding soup, stuffed delicata squash, crispy pan-fried ramen, cheesy beef focaccia pizza, pork banh mi, parmesan and panko-crusted cod... oh, those all sound amazing. I'm so hungry now.

So, check out this week's menu and get \$60 off when you visit [BlueApron.com/Adventure](https://www.blueapron.com/Adventure). That's [BlueApron.com/Adventure](https://www.blueapron.com/Adventure). Blue Apron: A better way to cook.

Uh, and I also want to tell you about Quip. Oh, these are heavy-hitters. Blue Apron and Quip is two of my favorites. So, listen. Before I started using Quip, I had no idea how bad I was at brushing my teeth. If you had asked me, I would've said, "Yep, I'm doing two minutes. I'm thorough. I'm giving it the time it deserves." But Quip has a built-in timer that pulses every 30 seconds, so you know when to switch to, y'know, different quadrants of your mouth to make up that two minutes. And turns out, I was not getting anywhere near two minutes.

And plus, it has gentle vibrations, so it's gonna clean your teeth, but it's not gonna like, make your gums feel beat up. It's not big and bulky like a lot of electric toothbrushes, so it's easy to travel with, and it's easy to use. And, they send you new brush heads every three months for clean, new bristles right on schedule. Uh, and they also have my favorite toothpaste I've ever used.



So, Quip starts at just \$25, and you'll get your first refill free at [GetQuip.com/Adventure](http://GetQuip.com/Adventure). It's a simple way to support our show and start brushing better, but you have to go to [GetQuip.com/Adventure](http://GetQuip.com/Adventure) and get your first refill free. Go right now to [GetQuip.com/Adventure](http://GetQuip.com/Adventure).

Uh, and a couple announcements before we get back into the action. First, our Candlenights tickets are going on sale November 8<sup>th</sup>. That's Friday, November 8<sup>th</sup>, at 12:00PM Eastern, and that's mine and Justin's birthday, so a really great birthday gift would be if you would all buy up all those tickets. Uh, and we're gonna be at the Keith Albee in Huntington, West Virginia this year, so we're gonna have way more seats for y'all, and we hope we get to see you there!

In case you don't know, Candlenights is kind of our family friendly, uh, y'know, home town show. It's gonna be, I think, My Brother, My Brother, and Me, Still Buffering, Sawbones, and Wonderful. We're not gonna be able to do Shmanners, because at that point, Teresa will be about eight and a half months pregnant. But it is going to be an absolute blast, and we hope to see you there.

You can go to [McElroy.family](http://McElroy.family) to get those tickets and find the links and everything. We'll announce everything. We'll also tweet the links out and stuff from Adventure Zone, and from the McElroy Family Twitter account.

Also, the third TAZ: Balance graphic novel, Petals to the Metal, the preorders are open now! So don't wait, head to [TheAdventureZoneComic.com](http://TheAdventureZoneComic.com) and preorder yours today.

And one last thing – if you enjoyed this episode, be sure to tell everyone you know, and for real, thank you for all the support. It means so much to me. You're all amazing. And now, let's get back into the show. Enjoy!

[theme music plays]

**Travis:** So! You enter the school proper. You enter into the main hall. Now, this is also the dining hall. There's a raised platform at the front edge of the

hall. On it is a massive table with seating for 25, and this is the staff table. Currently, however, only 14 seats are occupied.

At the center is Hieronymous Wigenstaff. He wears shining, blue armor with gold accents. You know full well that he's at least 500 years old, but you'd swear he couldn't be a day over 400. He is looking confidently around the room, unafraid to make eye contact with anyone. That's how confident he is.

The hall itself is full of eight person tables; though, currently, no one is sitting so that everyone can face the stage. You also notice that the hall appears to be buffet-style, with options to fit the students' various cultural and physical dietary needs. The walls are decorated with portraits of some of the school's most illustrious alumni.

Once the hall is filled, a human man with kind eyes stands from his chair at the staff table and clinks his glass.

[glass clinking]

**Griffin:** [quietly] Great foley work.

**Travis:** Yeah, thank you.

**Griffin:** That's that pro DM shit.

**Tomas:** Hello everyone. Uh, for those who have not met me, my name is Tomas, and I am the guidance counselor for both the school and the Annex. My door is always open. Please do not hesitate to ask for help. Now, before we go to the action, just a reminder that the campus is full of state-of-the-art restroom facilities, no matter what anyone says.

**Griffin:** [laughs]

**Tomas:** Okay, now... to the elf himself, he led the charge at the battle of Blood Valley, he brought the warring kingdoms of Ricart and Dawnbreak to peace talks and kept them at the table 'til they signed the treaty, he founded

this very school and gave us all jobs... pause for laughs... Hieronymous Wigenstaff!

**Fitzroy:** Woo! [claps] Yes!

**Hieronymous:** Thank you.

**Fitzroy:** Oh my god! [clapping]

**Hieronymous:** Thank you. Thank you Tomas, and thank you all. It is such a joy to once again begin another year. What a pleasure to see so many familiar faces, and how exciting to see so many new ones as well! I've said it before, but this time, I really mean it – I think this is going to be the school's best year yet!

Now, I'm sure you all have heard the stories about me, and let me assure you... they're all true. [laughs] But, what you may not know is that I wouldn't be where I am today if it weren't for the support of my brother and sidekick, Higglemas Wigenstaff.

**Travis:** And he gestures to the chair to his right, and realizes it is empty. He looks around the room.

**Hieronymous:** Uh, Hig. Hig, are you... here?

**Travis:** A glowing illusion of an old elf appears in the chair. It is Higglemas Wigenstaff. He appears to be quite a bit older than his older brother, Hieronymous. His robes are ill-fitting, but his scowl seems perfectly tailored to his face.

**Higglemas:** What do you want?

**Hieronymous:** Uh, it's... it's orientation. Come down from your office and greet the new students.

**Higglemas:** Piss off. Too busy. I'll, uh... I'll do it from here. Uh, welcome to the school. If you need help, please don't. Hesitate to ask. Higglemas out.

**Clint:** [laughing]

**Justin:** [laughing]

**Griffin:** [laughing]

**Travis:** And the illusion fades.

**Hieronymous:** Uh... oh, that Higglemas. What a kidder. Uh, all the staff is here for you, even those that are hard at work. Uh, classes begin tomorrow, so be sure to take the day to familiarize yourself with the campus, and make sure, uh, to make some new friends! Now, let lunch be served!

**Travis:** Uh, and a very brawny human man steps to the front and says...

**Stuart:** Hello. My name is Stuart LaBeouf. I am the chef here, and I do not like nicknames. Please, uh, enjoy lunch.

**Travis:** And he goes back into the kitchen.

**Clint:** That was Shia LaBeouf?

**Travis:** Stuart LaBeouf, thank you very much.

**Clint:** Oh, sorry.

**Justin:** Oh god, I just realized this is a world without Shia LaBeouf, and I got kind of—

**Travis:** You don't know that! We're just at the beginning!

**Griffin:** [laughs]

**Justin:** Yeah, but you would—it would've been a reference. I mean, they would've said something.

**Travis:** Maybe this is Shia LaBeouf's great, great, great, great grandfather.

**Justin:** Yeah, but he would've said, "That's my great great grandson."  
Y'know what I mean? Like—

**Travis:** This is—this is a time before time, Justin!

**Justin:** I'm just saying that, this world, there's not one currently, and that's very sad.

**Travis:** Not yet. Okay.

**Griffin:** That means there's no Even Stevens in this world.

**Travis:** Not yet.

**Justin:** Aw, Griffin! Well, no, now, that's not—it's possible that—

**Griffin:** They made it with somebody else. Ohh, shit!

**Justin:** No, y'know what? It wouldn't even be Even Stevens. It's like a different show. It wouldn't even...

**Clint:** Are there Holes?

**Travis:** In this world, they're just holes, Dad.

**Clint:** Oh man.

**Justin:** They're just holes. There's no movies about them. Everybody's like, "One of those round things where there aren't stuff."

**Travis:** They don't even have a name for them yet. No, I'm not gonna say that, 'cause that'll commit me to the bit too hard, and uh, I don't want to have to remember that in 20 episodes.

So, uh, you've all grabbed your lunch. I don't know what Genasis or Firbolgs eat.

**Griffin:** But you know what I eat? That's presumptuous.

**Travis:** I assume something fancy.

**Griffin:** No.

**Travis:** Oh!

**Griffin:** [laughs] I eat real, y'know, farmer food, dude. I eat the plain run of the—no, that's not true. I eat some fancy stuff.

**Travis:** Yeah. I thought so. So, you have your plates on your trays. And you look around the room, and you see just what you'd expect. Returning students filling out tables with familiar friend groups. You see groups of magic casters amusing each other with illusion and by transmuting food. A table of rogues take turn losing and winning the same money back and forth with marked cards and loaded dice. A table of clerics sit reading in companionable silence.

**Clint:** Damn clerics.

**Travis:** You see—you see new students wandering aimlessly, looking for open tables. Uh, and then, thank god, you're saved, because Leon approaches and says...

**Leon:** Uhh, hey guys. If you—if you want, you can come sit with us. Buckminster sent me over to get you. You can sit with us and Rainer.

**Fitzroy:** Um... do you have room?

**Leon:** Yeah. There's plenty of room. We always make room for friends.

**Travis:** And he gives you a thumbs up.

**Fitzroy:** Oh jeez. Cool, yeah! I'm in. Are we in?

**Clint:** Are... are these teachers? Or are these like, other students?

**Griffin:** Uh, Leon's a sidekick.

**Clint:** Okay.

**Griffin:** Buckminster's a hero, and Rainer is a villain.

**Clint:** Alright, but they're not professors, right?

**Travis:** No.

**Griffin:** No.

**Clint:** Okay. Okay.

**Travis:** I would not commit you all to sitting with teachers on the first day of school. You would not survive that.

**Clint:** Well, see, that's what I was saying. I mean, we didn't want to sit with teachers, because then, y'know, we're gonna be the suck ups, and the teachers' pets...

**Justin:** Sure.

**Travis:** No, these are not teachers.

**Griffin:** So I'm definitely gonna try and sit with the teachers.

**Travis:** At some point. Okay.

**Griffin:** No, like, I'd love—I need to find out about these hours. I have some credits I would love to get transferred over. And nobody's been able to

answer my questions about that. So I kind of want to take a—I want to take it all the way to the top.

**Travis:** Roll a charisma check for me.

**Griffin:** Uh, that is a 13 plus two. 15.

**Travis:** A 15, okay, great. Uh, you approach Tomas, the guidance counselor, and he says...

**Tomas:** Uh, yes. Uh, you must be...

**Travis:** And he closes his eyes for just a second.

**Tomas:** Uh, Sir Fitzroy Maplecourt.

**Fitzroy:** Knight and absentia of the realm of Goodcastle, yes! Good! Oh, fantastic!

**Tomas:** Yes. How can I help you?

**Fitzroy:** I'm in heck. And I—it's just—I don't think I'm supposed to be in the junior... junior varsity program here. I am—I know that I have some credits I am awaiting to be transferred over from Knight School, where I'm sure you know I attended for quite some time, and... now I'm here, and yet, I seem to be with the new... the freshmen, and so, I'm just wondering if I need to take this all the way to the top, or who I need to speak to, or is there a petition I need to file...

**Tomas:** I don't mean to upset you, but um... I was under the impression that you failed out of Clyde Nite's Night Knight School.

**Fitzroy:** Failed... is... failed is a way of... hm. Failed's one way of... but not my way of, uh... I have credits. I should have credits.

**Tomas:** I—I can look into it. I will see what I can do for you, Sir Fitzroy.



**Argo:** Bud, what is your stance on—I know your stance on beds. What is... what is your stance on tables and chairs?

**Bud:** Um... I am not of this world, but... I... may sit.

**Travis:** [laughs] I love these conversations with Bud. It's like Tuesdays with Morrie over here.

**Argo:** I tell you what, Bud. I don't feel particularly welcome here at this table. Why don't you and I go find ourselves a place to sit?

**Justin:** I want to sit with Leon. He invited us over there. I don't want to sit with the guidance counselor. Do we have to sit with the guidance counselor?

**Travis:** No, go sit—go sit with Leon, man. You've got agency.

**Justin:** Is that okay, Dad? I mean, he invited us, and I don't want to be rude.

**Clint:** Oh... yes. Let's do that. Yes. We'll go sit with Leon.

**Griffin:** I'm retreating—I'm retreating from this ploy. It did not work, and I'm gonna go sit with Leon and them also, but just be very—

**Travis:** Excellent.

**Griffin:** Very dejected, not eating my food.

**Travis:** You sit, you have a lovely meal, you get to know them.  
Buckminster asks...

**Buckminster:** What is your specialty, Fitzroy? What—excuse me, Sir Fitzroy. Uh, what is it that you do?

**Fitzroy:** Uh, well, I was nearly a graduate of the Knight School program.

**Buckminster:** Oh, Clyde Nite's Night Knight School?

**Fitzroy:** Yes. And then all of a sudden, sort of against my will, I changed tracts, you might say, to the magic program, and that's where I... that's what I'm doin' now, apparently.

**Buckminster:** Oh, you developed your magic? So late!

**Fitzroy:** So late, yeah, totally. You would think that it just wasn't comin', and you would live in a comfort. A sort of comfort, knowing that fact. And yet, um... y'know... life finds a way.

**Buckminster:** So are you now a magic user? A necromancer, a sorcerer, wizard, healer...

**Fitzroy:** Undecided. Yeah. I still don't really have a good grasp on it. Um, I know prestidigitation. Do you know prestidigitation?

**Buckminster:** Yes. Everybody knows prestidigitation. I'm... yes.

**Fitzroy:** Okay, I'm just—I'm—

**Bud:** I do not know prestidigitation.

**Fitzroy:** Yeah, it's like, I'm new to this. You don't have to be snide about it, like... I know like, three spells, and so, like, one of them is...

**Buckminster:** I'm sorry. I did not mean to give you a hard time. Just a gentle ribbing amongst friends.

**Argo:** He's very sensitive.

**Bud:** But... it is a cantrip.

**Buckminster:** Oh! Okay.

**Bud:** Not a spell. To be fair.

**Buckminster:** Ah, good natured ribbing all around. Now, Bud, uh, tell me about yourself.

**Bud:** Who is... Bud?

**Buckminster:** Sorry. You, my Firbolg friend. Uh, what—

**Fitzroy:** We've been calling you Bud all day.

**Bud:** Ahh.

**Buckminster:** Yes.

**Bud:** Bud.

**Buckminster:** What do you do?

**Bud:** Is this... is this... are we happy with Bud?

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** [laughs]

**Buckminster:** I mean, we can keep work shopping.

**Bud:** Is it settled?

**Buckminster:** No?

**Bud:** To be Bud?

**Buckminster:** It kind of feels like you don't want it to be settled on Bud.

**Bud:** I have lived for many summers. I am not a Bud.

**Buckminster:** What about, uh, Fitzroy Maplecourt?

**Fitzroy:** No, hey.

**Bud:** This is perfect.

**Fitzroy:** No, wait, hold on.

**Buckminster:** No, just ribbing! This is continued ribbance.

**Fitzroy:** But then you—you could delineate us, because then he would just be regular Fitzroy, and I could be Sir—

**Buckminster:** Yes. So Fitzroy 2, what do you do? Uh, what's your special skillset? Are you, uh, like myself, a rogue? Are you a magic user? Are you a fighter?

**Fitzroy 2:** Uh, I am a... the magic of the forest. I commune with the magic of the forest.

**Buckminster:** Druid.

**Fitzroy 2:** Yes. Druid is the word. Yes.

**Buckminster:** Yes, you are druid. Okay. Great. Got it, got it. File that away. Okay. Uh, what about you, uh, Argonaut?

**Argo:** I uh, I'm—

**Buckminster:** Do you prefer Argo?

**Argo:** Argo to friends, yes. I'm leaning towards your profession, actually. The rogue...

**Buckminster:** Oh!

**Argo:** The whole roguish thing.

**Buckminster:** You're looking to intern to the roguish arts!

**Argo:** I am, yes.

**Justin:** Now, did he decide on that because he looks roguish already? So he's like, "Well, I might as well lean into it."

**Travis:** It's gonna be hard to be like a rogue cleric, like, "Oh, I don't like that shifty cleric."

**Argo:** It's the jodhpurs.

**Buckminster:** The jodhpurs, sure. The traditional rogue garb.

**Argo:** I come from a sailing background, and the sea, and...

**Buckminster:** Ooh! A seaman!

**Argo:** Life aboard—yes. We don't—we try not to say that, because it opens too many doors.

**Buckminster:** Well, uh, this is all excellent. You are such a wide array of skills. I, myself, as I said, am a rogue. Uh, Leon here is kind of a fighter, would you say?

**Leon:** Yes. Um, I would say fighter. Yeah.

**Buckminster:** Yeah, Leon's a fighter. And as we already said, Rainer—

**Rainer:** I'm a necromancer!

**Buckminster:** Right. Yes. No need to demonstrate. [quietly] She does this weird thing with squirrels. It's cute, but at the same time, deeply, deeply troubling. Um, don't ask her to do it. Uh, at least not while I'm here.

**Fitzroy:** Hey, will you do the thing with the squirrel?

**Buckminster:** Oh, no, don't—

**Rainer:** Yes! I'd love to!

**Travis:** Um, and a compartment in her chair opens up, and a squirrel skeleton comes out, and does a little, "Hello my baby, hello my honey, hello my ragtime gal!" across the table.

**Fitzroy 2:** This is ghastly.

**Travis:** And it's cute.

**Fitzroy 2:** This is ghastly.

**Travis:** But it's very troubling.

**Fitzroy:** I like that... not very much.

**Fitzroy 2:** I—this was a pain to me. This is... this was a pain. To me.

**Buckminster:** Yeah. I said.

**Fitzroy 2:** To see... this... is a pain.

**Buckminster:** Okay. Um. I was wondering if I might be so bold as to invite you all on a tour after lunch. I'm paying forward a debt I was given my first year. I will then give you a tour, and then I won't have to worry about my spiritual debt anymore. What do you say?

**Fitzroy:** [sighs heavily]

**Argo:** Just... anything that makes your life easier, I'm sure we're down for it.

**Fitzroy 2:** I will join this.

**Fitzroy:** Yes. Maybe you can show me where the sauna is. The relaxation...

**Buckminster:** Ohhh...

**Fitzroy:** What?

**Buckminster:** Bad news.

**Fitzroy:** Are you kidding me?

**Travis:** Uh, and as you're finishing up your meal, here approaches Rolandus.

**Rolandus:** Uh, yes. Hello. Uh, first, allow me to apologize. I have had some water and some coffee, and a lot of bacon, and I realize now that earlier, I was being a bit of a shit, as Buckminster put it. So, allow me to apologize, and to invite you to join myself and Rhodes and Zana tonight for a little rite of passage ceremony.

**Fitzroy 2:** We are already taking the tour.

**Rolandus:** This is no tour, my friend. This is... a centuries old ceremony to welcome first years, y'know, make them part of the group. It is a very, uh, dangerous, uh, and terrifying rite of passage.

**Buckminster:** Uh, he's making it seem very weird, but it really is a rite of— it really is a thing that they do every year with new students. It's not as weird as he's making it seem for some reason.

**Argo:** There aren't paddles involved, are there?

**Buckminster:** No. No paddles. And we'll go with you, if you want. We're happy to tag—

**Rolandus:** Oh. Okay. Uh... I guess, yes. If you would like to go, we will also go, even though it may be past some of our bedtimes. So... might I mark you all down as yeses on your RSVPs this evening?

**Fitzroy 2:** I will do the weird thing.

**Rolandus:** Excellent.

**Fitzroy:** Is it going to—am I going—is there—okay. Do I have to carry a lemon with my butt?

**Rolandus:** You don't... have to, but you can if you want to, I guess.

**Fitzroy:** Then that's a—that's gonna—that's—sure. Yes. Absolutely.

**Argo:** That would put me right off lemons, and I need those for scurvy.

**Rolandus:** Yes. Of course. Totally understandable. Then tonight, when the moon is high and the wolf howls, and the bat flies... about nine o'clock, I'd say... then, shall we meet by the edge of the Unknown Forest. See you then.

**Travis:** And Rolandus twirls his cape and exits the room.

**Buckminster:** Now, it is time for the tour! Follow me, won't you? Keep your elbows and legs inside, y'know, at all times, that kind of thing. And do be careful of the stairs.

**Fitzroy:** Why?

**Buckminster:** `Cause they're old.



**Fitzroy:** They're just—they don't do anything—they don't come to life and eat you, they're just stairs, and they—

**Buckminster:** Yes. Some of them are a bit uneven. Seems like some of them were a bit of a rush job.

**Argo:** Do they move around at all? Do they just stay in place? Do they move around?

**Buckminster:** Mostly stay in place. They're stairs.

**Argo:** Of course.

**Buckminster:** Why would they move?

**Argo:** I read.

**Buckminster:** But that would be the most impractical thing I've ever heard of. Of course they stay in place.

**Argo:** I didn't say it made sense. I'm just asking.

**Buckminster:** You silly billy. Alright. Now, let us begin our tour at the top of the, uh, tower. Uh, well... I say top. Not quite the top. We'll go to floor number four, because floor five is, of course, Hieronymous' office. And you only go up there by invitation. So, here on the fourth floor...

**Travis:** And you make your way up the central spiral staircase of the tower.

**Buckminster:** Uh, we have the survival classroom, we have the persuasion classroom, the accounting classroom, and of course, sneakery. Sneakery is taught by our very own—

**Justin:** Where they make the sneakers.

**Buckminster:** Where you make the sneakers! Nooo, it's where you learn to be a sneaker! It's also the only classroom in the tower with a balcony, fun fact. Uh, now, any questions? Sorry, I didn't mean to rush.

**Argo:** Who teaches this sneakery class?

**Buckminster:** Ah, yes! Uh, quite a character. Um, he's a bit of an acquired taste. I enjoy him immensely. His name is Jackal, and he is, believe it or not, a kenku. Don't see a lot of those. Very fun. He, like I said, he's... a trip. Uh, that fool will appear all over the place. Very fun, if you're into that kind of thing. Have fun with that. And of course, our accounting department... oh boy. We are so lucky. Taught by Bartholomeus. Yes, that Bartholomeus.

**Griffin:** The owl that Tumblr wants to have sex with.

**Travis:** The owl that everyone wants to smooch on the face. Um, give me a—all three of you, a, I guess, wisdom roll? Knowledge roll?

**Griffin:** Uh, 12.

**Travis:** That's good enough. Bartholomeus is very famous.

**Clint:** 18!

**Justin:** I got a two. I don't know—dad's an expert in this horny owl.

**Travis:** Yeah, Dad knows everything about this smoochable face.

**Griffin:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Um, so, in this world, the skill that is prized above all else in heroes and villains, and even in sidekicks and henchpeople, is accounting. Because at this point, you're basically a government servant, and your job is to make sure you're not overspending. Because at any point, it may be determined that it is more expensive to have you on payroll than to just hire a new hero or villain.

And so, oftentimes, the sidekick's main job is to keep up with the finances of the hero and villain, but everyone is responsible for it, and every kingdom is looking for a fiscally responsible hero and villain. And you know that Bartholomeus is the number one accountant in the land. It is an honor to get to learn from him.

**Griffin:** Is he here? Is he present?

**Travis:** He is not currently.

**Griffin:** Okay. Um, so, this tower... this is Griffin asking. I was about to do Fitzroy, but uh...

**Travis:** Okay.

**Griffin:** This tower is where the hero and villain classes are, right?

**Travis:** Correct. There is crossover. There are definitely some, like—you will be taking sneakery, everyone takes accounting, um...

**Griffin:** Okay.

**Travis:** Like, there is—there is definite crossover, but there are some hero and villain only classes. For example, strategy. Strategy is reserved for heroes and villains. Survival is for heroes and villains. Persuasion is for heroes and villains. Uh, but there is a lot of crossover.

**Clint:** Are there any electives, like bowling, or PE, or anything like that?

**Griffin:** Just easy A's.

**Travis:** Well, yes, there is PE. There is PE. The PE is in the form of the battle training and shield work.

**Clint:** Good, good, good, good.

**Buckminster:** Um, so! Now, let us move to the third floor. Here, you have research, healing... healing, also, by the way, is the nurse's office. So if you, y'know, need any patching up, this is where you'll head to. The potions classroom, of course. Strategy, and of course, over there is magic class. So, any questions here? Or... no? Okay! Moving right along. Doot doo.

**Fitzroy:** Who teaches potions? Who teaches potions? Is he bad but lovable?

**Buckminster:** No, his name's Mulligan. He's a fine teacher.

**Clint:** So is evil and good like a fluid concept here?

**Griffin:** Evil just means you've been discredited by the Heroic Oversight Guild.

**Travis:** Yeah, it means you used to be a professional hero or villain, and then you broke enough rules of the Heroic Oversight Guild that you were branded as evil, and therefore, no longer allowed to, uh, to act professionally as a hero or villain. But you are still able to teach, so a lot of evil people find themselves teaching at various schools.

**Buckminster:** So, we make our way down to the second floor. Now here, we have a lot of uh, like, the admin. Y'know, here's the admin office, the teacher's lounge, over here is the guidance counselor office, and placement, of course. Couldn't do it without placement.

**Travis:** And what you know about placement, what Buckminster is talking about is, in the later parts of the semester, in the later part of the year, older, higher level students will be sent out on real world assignments to practice their skills. And placed with them will be sidekicks and henchpeople to kind of act as resources for them while they are out in the field. So there will come parts of the year where you will be sent out with some of these, uh, older year students to assist them.

**Argo:** It is possible to request a specific assignment, isn't it? To be assigned as a sidekick to, perhaps, a specific person?

**Buckminster:** You... you can. There's not as much weight put on that as when a hero or villain specifically requests you. Uh, for example, at this point, Leon is always with me. Leon is my sidekick. And you—you can request, but at that point, it's really up to the hero or villain.

**Argo:** Sure, of course.

**Buckminster:** Whether you're paired at that point. Um, but yes, it is possible. There is a system put in place for it. And now, we are returned back to the first floor. Here, of course, we have the dining hall, we have the entry hall, and we have the research library. So, that is at your disposal 24 hours a day. But don't be a nerd about it, y'know? Be cool.

And now, let us head down to the basement! This is my favorite part of the tour. Here in the first level of the basement, we have, uh, two of the pride and joy rooms here of Higglemas Wigenstaff's School for Heroism and Villainy. Over here, we have the test tavern.

**Travis:** And you know about this from all of the pamphlets and promotional materials. The test tavern is a life sized, one for one replica of a tavern where students, uh, one, hang out. It is a practical tavern. But two, it is where the class of... well, what is basically drinking has come to be taught. It's called, officially, social graces, but everyone knows what it is. And you go in there, and it practices your charisma checks and your chances to learn information from patrons and incorporate yourself into a new town, and that kind of thing, through tavern work.

**Griffin:** Are there like—is it staffed with local community theater actors, or are they holograms, or...

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Well, the—you can get a job as—

**Justin:** I need to know this too, by which—I need to know everything about these rooms.

**Travis:** Yes. Uh, student employees. You can earn money by working here in the tavern.

**Justin:** Dibs! Jesus!

**Travis:** Well, it might be tough. [laughs] Bartenders known for their chatty nature. We'll see how you do.

**Justin:** Yeah. But if you can win him over, man...

**Travis:** Yes.

**Buckminster:** And over here, uh, on the other side of this floor, is the test dungeon, which, of course, is a recreation of a dungeon, staffed by—oh! Here they are! Staffed by the skeleton crew!

**Skully:** Uh, yeah, y'know we don't like bein' called the skeleton crew. My name is Skully. This here is Bonesy, and over there is Rattles.

**Argo:** I can see you're trying to get as far away from the whole skeleton thing as possible.

**Germaine:** Well, that was just a joke. Those aren't our real names. Wouldn't that be ironic? Because I mean, we were, at once, living creatures. Those would be weird names. My name is Germaine. This is Victoria, and this is Rattles.

**Griffin:** [laughs]

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Germaine:** That one is real. That... that's unfortunate. That is just a coincidence right there. We are—it's a pleasure to meet you. You must be new students. Uh, we are your practice skeletons.

**Fitzroy:** So we can just sort of wail on you, and you're cool? You'll be okay with that?

**Germaine:** Yeah! Yeah, do you want to try it out?

**Fitzroy:** Oh my god, are you sure?

**Germaine:** Yeah!

**Travis:** Roll for initiative.

**Griffin:** Oh! Oh my god! That's a 17.

**Clint:** Uhh... four.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Justin:** Aaand... 15.

**Travis:** Okay, great.

**Justin:** Plus... hold on... what's my... uhh... plus one. 16.

**Travis:** Okay. So, Sir Fitzroy, you go first.

**Griffin:** I say...

**Fitzroy:** Are you a hun—are you really sure?

**Germaine:** Oh yeah, absolutely!

**Victoria:** Oh yeah, you can totally attack us!

**Rattles:** [horrible monster sounds] Aghaghagahgha!

**Fitzroy:** Are you gonna hit us back?

**Germaine:** Yeah.

**Fitzroy:** So we're like, in a—we're fight—we're gonna fight? I thought we were just on a tour.

**Germaine:** Well, uh, you'll see.

**Travis:** And as much as a skeleton can, he winks. It's more of just like, he nods his head in a weird way and kind of flexes, but he doesn't have anything to flex. And maybe he just says...

**Germaine:** Wink!

**Clint:** Yeah, that works.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Fitzroy:** Uh, okay... Uh, I was gonna do *shocking grasp*.

**Germaine:** Oh.

**Fitzroy:** It's a spe—yeah, but I don't—you're bones. So I don't know, like... I don't know if you will conduct it, even. What do you think?

**Germaine:** I mean, yeah, it'll still hurt me. Go for it.

**Fitzroy:** Okay, I'll try.

**Griffin:** Uh, and I put my hand on—

**Fitzroy:** Where do you want me to touch? Can I touch your skull?

**Germaine:** Yeah, sounds great.

**Fitzroy:** Okay.



**Griffin:** I touch his skull, and I cast *shocking grasp*. That's a fucking crit! That's a nat 20, baby! I'm gonna blow this skeleton the fuck up!

**Justin:** Holy shit.

**Griffin:** What's up, skeleton?!

**Germaine:** Niiice!

**Travis:** He says, as he kind of scatters in about a five foot radius. But then, the bones kind of bounce back together.

**Germaine:** Oh, that was so good! You attacked me so good!

**Fitzroy:** I've never done it that good before! Oh my god, these guys are gonna think I'm some sort of arch wizard! I'm really bad at this.

**Germaine:** Yeah, that was really amazing! Uh, now, it's my turn!

**Travis:** Uh, that is a nat 20.

**Griffin:** [flabbergasted gibberish]

**Justin:** Whoaaa.

**Griffin:** Okay.

**Travis:** So you're going to, hypothetically, take, uh, let's see here... uh, yeah, five points of damage.

**Griffin:** Okay...

**Travis:** How much life do you have?

**Griffin:** Uh, I have 14.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Griffin:** I haven't said my class yet. It's complicated.

**Travis:** What is your class?

**Griffin:** I'm a barbarian. I'm a magic barbarian.

**Travis:** There you go.

**Griffin:** So I'm a little bit beefier than the average cloth-wearer.

**Travis:** So you take five points of damage. You feel it. It hurts like shit. And then you heal, and you're back up to 14.

**Griffin:** Oh, good.

**Fitzroy:** Hey, that hurt, and then it didn't.

**Germaine:** Yeah, so, that's kind of how it works here, right? So you'll be sore, like, for sure. But nobody dies in the training room. That would be kind of a shitty training room, wouldn't it?

**Victoria:** Ha ha, yeah!

**Rattles:** [monster sounds] Grablahgrabgah!

**Germaine:** That's Rattles. Uh... we don't talk about it. So, do you want to keep fightin', or...

**Fitzroy:** I'd like to see what my associates are capable of.

**Germaine:** Yeah, do you all want to take a swing? Go for it! I think, uhh... Firbolg. You're up, my dude.

**Bud:** I will not attack this skeleton.

**Germaine:** Aww, come on.

**Bud:** Why?

**Germaine:** 'Cause it's fun? It's practice? It's... y'know, show us what you can do.

**Fitzroy:** I did it. It's not fair if you don't.

**Bud:** Well... it must be fair.

**Justin:** And he pulls out a staff from behind his back, and casts *shillelagh*, and attacks the uh, uh, skeleton across the skull. It's an 18.

**Travis:** That hits!

**Justin:** Plus five. 23.

**Travis:** It hits real good!

**Justin:** So that's one... d8... what do you guys think an eight looks like? If you were to say, give me a d8, what would you say that looks like?

**Griffin:** It looks like two pyramids.

**Justin:** Six plus three... nine.

**Germaine:** Aww, yeah! See, that was so good! Don't you feel good?

**Bud:** Um... I suppose it was... uh, thrilling.

**Germaine:** Yeah! You shillelagh'd the hell out of me!

**Bud:** I guess I did.

**Germaine:** Yeahhh! That's that smile I like to see! Alright, you're up, uh, Argo! I don't know why I know your name, but I dooo.

**Griffin:** [laughs]

**Bud:** Incredible skeleton.

**Clint:** Okay. I got a "Hi, I'm—hi, I'm Argo." Uh, Argo, uh, was gonna attack with his rapier, but doesn't think it'll do much damage against a skeleton. Is that right?

**Germaine:** I'm magic as hell, my dude!

**Clint:** Alright! So, he uh, pulls his rapier out. He calls her Hertha, and uh, does a sneak attack.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Griffin:** Don't you need to sneak?

**Clint:** Well...

**Justin:** No one has ever seen it coming more than this skeleton that is begging for you to attack it.

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Clint:** But a foe is distracted. He was distracted with the attack on him.

**Justin:** [laughs] Okay.

**Griffin:** Oh god.

**Justin:** So while I'm attacking... [laughing] You just come up behind?

**Clint:** Hey, that's how rogues roll, baby!

**Travis:** I love it. No, it's perfect. Okay, roll attack.

**Clint:** Roll attack... that... I don't know what it is. Oh, it's a 20! It's got a little dragon symbol, but there's no other 20 on this die.

**Travis:** Well.

**Clint:** So it's a crit 20.

**Griffin:** What the fuck is going on?

**Travis:** We have rolled three critical 20s out of four. Okay. Uh, well, that hits, and you just get him real good, and he's like...

**Germaine:** Aww, no, that one actually hurt. That one actually hurt really bad.

**Argo:** Oh, sorry. I—

**Germaine:** No, I'm just kiddin'! Oh, it was just a joke!

**Argo:** [laughs]

**Germaine:** No, it doesn't hurt.

**Argo:** You are a jolly, jolly, jolly...

**Germaine:** I'm magic as hell, my dude! Alright, you guys, it's been really fun hangin' out. Uh, we're gonna go, I don't know... probably take a nap or something in the dirt. Uh, you all enjoy the rest of your tour!

**Fitzroy:** Wait, do you need someone to free you from this eternal torment?

**Germaine:** No, this is great!

**Fitzroy:** Okay.

**Germaine:** I get paid. I get to hang out. Man, I used to work in another dungeon, and when I got attacked, it hurt like hell.

**Fitzroy:** Right.

**Germaine:** Y'know? But here, uh, I'm respected. Uh, I'm able to work on my novel. Uh, it's great.

**Fitzroy:** I just didn't know if you needed us to go find like a cursed blade that could end this curse, and then you could—

**Germaine:** What?!

**Argo:** 'Cause we will!

**Germaine:** You want to kill me?! We just met!

**Fitzroy:** No, but if you want me to...

**Germaine:** I do not!

**Fitzroy:** Okay.

**Argo:** So you're a happy skeleton.

**Germaine:** Yeah!

**Argo:** Oh!

**Germaine:** Can't you tell from the smile? Ha ha! Just a skeleton joke.

**Argo:** So how much EXP did we get for that?

**Fitzroy:** Yeah, did we level up?

**Germaine:** Zerooo!

**Fitzroy:** Not a very good training room. [laughs]

**Argo:** No, it's not.

**Germaine:** I mean, you learned life lessons, I guess.

**Fitzroy:** Fuck life lessons.

**Bud:** What is experience?

**Fitzroy:** Yeah, it's not gonna get me any new, uh, spells or attacks or skills.

**Justin:** What is experience other than life lessons? I need to know the distinction here.

**Travis:** Y'know what, Justin, you make an excellent point. You're all level 18 now.

**Griffin:** Alright!

**Clint:** Yeah!

**Justin:** Excellent!

**Buckminster:** So are we going to continue the tour, or... you want to see the next floor...? Y'know what, I'm just gonna go, and you all follow me, okay? Uh, so now, in the second level of the basement – this is another fun room – here on one side, we have the blacksmithing and armory room. And over here, we have the artificing and magical armory room. They are both really hot. So, there is that. Keep an eye out for that. Very warm.

Uh, but, they do keep the rest of the tower nice and toasty all year `round.

**Fitzroy:** Even in the summer?

**Buckminster:** Well... yeah. But that's why we don't do school in the summer, you see. There's no other reason.

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** [laughs]

**Buckminster:** So! Back up the tower, and out, and we shall journey into the Annex.

**Travis:** Now, as you go into the Annex, it is... far less, in all the ways. The stairs are wooden instead of stone, very rickety. The building... it's one of those where, if you didn't know better, you'd think it had been built overnight, and was going to last a week. But what you do know is, it has been around almost as long as the tower. The Annex is almost 250 years old, and still standing, and will probably stand another 250 years. So—

**Griffin:** Does it—does it—sorry, can I ask two quick questions?

**Travis:** Yeah, of course.

**Griffin:** I feel like that's what we gotta do in this kind of like, world building—

**Clint:** Gary, help!

**Griffin:** [laughs] Um, is—what's the student body here? I'm trying to get a sense of scale for this—for this school and Annex. How many people would you estimate are like, actually attending?

**Travis:** I would say probably 50 heroes and villains, and probably about 100 henchpeople and sidekicks.



**Griffin:** Okay. So this isn't—this is not—I know we keep using Hogwarts as a point of reference, and I know that is probably, uh, insulting, or uh, I don't know the word I'm looking for.

**Justin:** Legally dicey.

**Griffin:** Legally dicey. But it sounds like it is a much smaller sort of institution than that.

**Travis:** Oh, definitely. This is—it's a very prestigious school. Um, it is hard to get into. Now, as Fitzroy has pointed out many times, it is not as specialized as Clyde Nite's Night Knight School. So, it is, um, y'know... they're devoting resources to many different things. This is a much more, like, we're gonna teach you exact—this is kind of a Rambo school of like, we're going to teach you how to do it, and y'know, and that's it. We're not going to teach you other things.

Where, Clyde Nite's Night Knight School is a lot more about specifically being like, a knight hero.

**Griffin:** Right.

**Travis:** We enter the first floor, and here, you see classes labeled things like 'support arts,' and 'watch keeping,' and 'blame taking,' and 'cooking.' And he says...

**Buckminster:** Yes, uh, so that's the first floor. Uh, any questions here? No? Okay, pretty self-explanatory, these labels.

**Fitzroy:** It's just... so, the heroes aren't going to have to learn to cook or keep watch?

**Buckminster:** Nope.

**Argo:** Take blame? They don't take blame. Okay.

**Buckminster:** Well... no. That would defeat the purpose of henchpeople and sidekicks, Argo.

**Argo:** Trust me, I'm embracing it. I'm dying to be a sidekick.

**Buckminster:** Excellent, excellent. Now, here, we reach the second level of the Annex, and all of these rooms are... empty. Um, they keep promising that they're going to expand the henchperson and sidekick program, but these rooms have been empty for about, uh, 250 years, so don't hold your breath.

Uh, and now, the third floor... this is Higglemas' office. Uh, but y'know... fat chance ever seeing that dude. Uh, he never comes out of his office. Do you want to knock? Eh? Eh?

**Fitzroy:** Uh, I will—I—yeah.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Griffin:** I'm still getting used to talking in first person, or not.

**Fitzroy:** Uh, yeah, I want to knock. Maybe he can help me out with the hours thing.

**Buckminster:** Oh, yes, go for it!

**Griffin:** I knock on the door. Okay.

**Travis:** The door opens.

**Fitzroy:** Oh shit!

**Higglemas:** What? What do you want?

**Fitzroy:** Hi, uh, hello. I apologize, I was told you wouldn't actually be in.

**Higglemas:** Ohh, you're the failed one! Right?

**Fitzroy:** That is the worst—Sir Fitzroy Maplecourt.

**Higglemas:** Yes! You're the one who's magic came and ruined everything for you!

**Fitzroy:** Yep. I love talking about it so casually. Uh—

**Higglemas:** And you! You're the Firbolg!

**Bud:** Yes.

**Higglemas:** Ooh! I want to talk to you!

**Bud:** This is not mutual.

**Griffin:** [laughs]

**Higglemas:** Okay. Come into my office.

**Fitzroy:** There's a third one of us, too.

**Argo:** Yeah, that's fine. No no, don't worry about me. I'll just hang back here and—

**Higglemas:** You look very roguish. You... I don't know about. I think it's the mustache.

**Argo:** Yes. That hits a lot of people wrong.

**Higglemas:** It does seem like you've cultivated that look specifically... to kind of prove a point.

**Argo:** Well, it gets me into a lot of biker bars. But y'know, I can see how it would be off-putting so that you don't include me in your—

**Higglemas:** But you, the failed one, and the Firbolg, come in. I need your help, Firbolg.

**Bud:** Mmm. Yes.

**Fitzroy:** Maybe you—it could be like, honored knight?

**Travis:** Uh, and you walk into the room, and the door slams shut behind you.

**Griffin:** Do we leave the people who were giving us a tour?

**Travis:** Yes. Buckminster says...

**Buckminster:** Um, I guess... we'll wait. Um... give `em ten minutes, and then... rescue, I suppose? I don't know. I don't know what to do in this—this has never happened before on a tour.

**Higglemas:** I need your help, Firbolg. Um, I need you... uhh... is there anything wrong with my dog? Please check my dog.

**Justin:** Um, I'm going to use... animal handling.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Justin:** Not gonna burn a spell slot checkin' on a dog. Uhh, that is a 16 plus three, 19.

**Travis:** Okay, great. You check him over. You don't see anything unusual or wrong with him.

**Bud:** No. He seems strong.

**Higglemas:** There's nothing wrong or off about him at all?

**Bud:** Umm... no.

**Higglemas:** Excellent! Excellent! That is exactly what I was hoping you would say! Okay! You can leave now.

**Fitzroy:** Is this a test? Was that a test?

**Higglemas:** No. I'm just wanting to make sure that my dog is healthy. This is—I love him very much.

**Bud:** Why did you ask this?

**Higglemas:** Well, y'know, he's getting up there in years, and it's very rare that anybody makes their way up here who gets any kind of insight into, y'know, animal health, and I just wanted to make sure that my dog was healthy. I don't have to answer to you! I'm in charge of this Annex!

**Argo:** You're in charge of the Xanax?

**Higglemas:** You're not in there, sir.

**Justin:** It's not my strong suit, but I'm gonna do insight check to see if I can pick up anything about his motivations.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Justin:** Um, that's a five plus three, eight.

**Travis:** Nope. [laughs]

**Justin:** Seems okay.

**Travis:** Seems like he just wanted you to check out his dog. His cool dog.

**Griffin:** What kind of dog is it?

**Travis:** Uh, it's like a collie.

**Fitzroy:** Um, before we do depart, I was wondering about my hours from knight school, and how they would be sort of adapted here for this school?

**Higglemas:** Oh, yes, of course. Of course. It's my top priority!

**Fitzroy:** ... The way you're saying that makes me think it's maybe not your top priority. I just—

**Higglemas:** Oh no, I will drop everything to make sure that your hours... right, from a different school that you failed out of... I will—I will not rest!

**Bud:** This seems like good news.

**Fitzroy:** Um... actually, Bud, I am fairly sure he is... clowning on me.

**Bud:** We feel settled on Bud.

**Fitzroy:** If you—I—I—for now, yes. Sorry. It's my top priority to think of a better name! See? We can all do it.

**Bud:** This is a great relief.

**Fitzroy:** Okay.

**Higglemas:** Oh, you're still here. Um... Hero, show them to the door.

**Travis:** And the dog walks over and opens the door with its mouth. It's like a handle, y'know? It's not that impressive.

**Griffin:** Right.

**Travis:** I mean, it's still pretty impressive.

**Justin:** Still pretty impressive.

**Travis:** But it's just a well-trained dog.

**Justin:** That's a well-trained dog.

**Griffin:** Uh, I cast prestidigitation as we leave, because one of the things is, you can create an odd odor.

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Justin:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** And I want it just right in his fuckin' face. Just make an odd odor.

**Higglemas:** [laughs]

**Travis:** And he just cackles. He thinks it's funny as shit.

**Griffin:** Okay. Good.

**Travis:** Uh, and you make it back out in the hallway, and uh, Buck says...

**Buckminster:** Well, that concludes the tour. Um... I say we all go settle in and skip bedtime and our late night cookies and milk to make it out to the edge of Unknown Forest for the rite of passage.

**Fitzroy:** Are they going to try and kill us?

**Buckminster:** No. We won't let anybody kill you.

**Argo:** Wound?

**Buckminster:** No! It's a school rite of pa—why would they—no!

**Argo:** Well it didn't really sound like it was part of the official curriculum. It sounded like it was kind of a shadow-curriculum.

**Buckminster:** Well, no, it's not. Yes. It's... just... for funsies. But uh, we'll be there. We'll keep you safe. Do not worry.

[music plays]

**Travis:** You've all snuck out of your dorms, made your way across the grounds, out the wrought iron gate, which creaked, but not loud enough that you're worried about anybody noticing. And you've made your way to the edge of the Unknown Forest. And there, waiting a good distance away from the forest, about 20 feet away, are Rainer and Leon and Buckminster and Zana and Rhodes and Rolandus.

Now, the forest itself is vast. As far as the eye can see, it stretches from the edge of the Godscar Chasm to the horizon. It takes up a large part of this continent, and here at the edge of it, somehow, the inside of the forest is darker than the night you are standing in. It is difficult to perceive anything beyond the tree line.

**Rolandus:** Ahh, you showed. I had my doubts. How very exciting. Your task, my friends, is simple. Do you see that large tree?

**Travis:** And he points to a tree that is the farthest tree on the outskirts. It's the closest to you on the outskirts of the Unknown Forest, and you can see upon it, hundreds and hundreds of names carved into it.

**Rolandus:** All you have to do is carve your name on that tree without losing your nerve.

**Fitzroy:** [sighs] This seems really easy.

**Argo:** Anything else we need to know about the little, uh, the little stunt?

**Rolandus:** Do you mean aside from the fact that the Unknown Forest is widely considered the most dangerous place on the planet?

**Fitzroy:** Firbolg friend, are you going to be okay carving the flesh of a tree?



**Bud:** Why would I not be?

**Fitzroy:** I don't—I'm just—I'm trying to be thoughtful. I thought that it's a plant, and I don't know if you could—I thought you could kill a plant if you carve it.

**Bud:** Plants are... yes. Yes. But plants do not feel.

**Fitzroy:** Okay.

**Bud:** They are plants.

**Fitzroy:** I'm still figuring—I'm learning the ropes.

**Bud:** Does a pl—does a plant cry out?

**Fitzroy:** I wasn't—

**Bud:** It is plant!

**Fitzroy:** Yeah, I wasn't expecting you to be so blasé about it, I guess.

**Bud:** I will not do this thing, but... if you must carve, then carve.

**Rainer:** I have a suggestion!

**Travis:** Rainer says, and she pops open one of the compartments in her chair and hands you a piece of black charcoal and says...

**Rainer:** You can write on the tree! You don't have to carve if you don't want to.

**Bud:** Mmmmm... yes. This I will do.

**Rolandus:** It's time to make your way there... if you dare. [laughs]

**Griffin:** I walk leisurely towards the tree.

**Clint:** Argo sprints toward it, full speed, unleashing his uh, his rapier as he does so.

**Justin:** Uh, I cast *jump* on myself, which triples my jump distance.

**Griffin:** [laughs] Jesus.

**Justin:** And I leap towards the tree.

**Travis:** Okay, so you all begin carving your names into the tree. And I would like each one of you to make a wisdom saving throw for me.

**Justin:** Wait, it wasn't hard to get there? Why didn't I walk then?

**Travis:** I dunno.

**Griffin:** You did a cool—you did a neat jump.

**Justin:** Well, y'know what, it was worth it. I don't regret it. It was neat.

**Travis:** Everyone was very impressed.

**Justin:** Good. Yes.

**Travis:** And now I need each of you to make a wisdom saving throw, please.

**Griffin:** Big seven.

**Clint:** Uh, that's a one.

**Justin:** 13 plus three. 16.

**Travis:** Okay. So, um, you, Argo, and you, Fitzroy, hear in your heads...

**Voice:** [echoing] You should not be here.

**Travis:** And without controlling yourselves, you fall back from the tree. Uh, you cannot help but scramble backwards. But you, uh, Firbolg... you hear the same voice, but it seems... hollow. It seems more like someone pretending to do the voice.

**Justin:** Hmm.

**Voice:** You—you should not be here. Uh...

**Bud:** Oooh... who is saying this?

**Voice:** Uh...

**Justin:** I'm gonna roll a perception check to see if I can—where is the voice coming from?

**Travis:** Okay.

**Justin:** 17 plus...

**Griffin:** Damn.

**Justin:** Three.

**Travis:** So, the voice is inside your head.

**Justin:** Five! Sorry. Five.

**Travis:** With a perception roll that good, deep, deep in the woods, you can see glowing, red eyes, looking now directly at you.

**Voice:** Uh... I don't... I don't know that I have a name.

**Justin:** I'm gonna walk towards that—the eyes.

**Voice:** No! Don't! It's very dangerous in here. I... I don't want you to get hurt. Please, go back.

**Bud:** Yes. I will do this.

**Voice:** Thank you. I just don't want people to get hurt anymore. Take your friends. Run. Run now.

**Bud:** What is the danger?

**Voice:** It's everywhere.

**Justin:** I have a pretty good sense... I mean, I feel like that I'm probably gonna head out. Um, and I want to convince them to come with me.

**Griffin:** Uh, did we—what's up with me and Argo? Were we like, knocked out by that, or...

**Travis:** No, you were just driven back—like, you—

**Griffin:** Were made afraid?

**Travis:** Could not stop yourself from running.

**Griffin:** Okay. Um, gosh. I mean, I sort of expected that this was a big prank to begin with, so I'm like, totally fine to leave. This is not a pride thing.

**Bud:** Argo. Argo, listen. There is a person in the forest. He is not a danger. But he does want us to leave. I... think we should go.

**Argo:** Well, I trust your judgment 100%. Let's get the hell out of here.

**Travis:** You come back, and everyone's laughing, and uh, Buckminster said...

**Buckminster:** What was it? Was it like, a roar in the woods, or like, a flight of birds? What was it? What—what spooked you?

**Bud:** There was a person in forest with red eyes who was very afraid, but did not mean us any danger, who said that we should return here.

**Buckminster:** ... What?

**Bud:** There was a person in forest—

**Buckminster:** No, I—yes, no, yes, we heard. No one sees something in the Unknown Forest. It's unknown.

**Travis:** And Rolandus says...

**Rolandus:** Perhaps the Firbolg's fear played tricks with his eyes.

**Fitzroy:** Um, no, I should mention, I was extremely scared. I almost did... did it on the floor, like they tell you not to do.

**Rolandus:** Yeah, we don't really do that. That's just a joke.

**Fitzroy:** Right, it was involuntary. But I—

**Argo:** Even the forest floor? I mean, that doesn't seem like that would be that bad.

**Fitzroy:** Anyway, I was super scared. I didn't see anything, so, um... it wasn't fear that—

**Groundsy:** What are you kids doin' out here after dark? You're not supposed to be here at the Unknown Forest! Get—now, it's time for you all

to get on back. Ohh, don't make me tell the professors about this! Ohh, ya get in trouble, ya do! Get on back!

**Argo:** It's Truy the truant officer.

**Groundsy:** Nooo, it's me again, Groundsy the groundskeeper. I can see we're here in the dark, I might look like a big beaaar! But I'm not. I'm Groundsy! And you all need to get to bed! It's gettin' late, and tomorrow, classes start! Get!

**Fitzroy:** Yes. Sorry, Groundsy. We were going through the most low stakes hazing ever, and I am happy now to return to my very tall bed.

**Groundsy:** Okay. Goodnight. Sleep tight. Do you need a warm glass of milk, or tuck you in?

**Justin:** This is an incredible level of service from the groundskeeper.

**Groundsy:** Not just anyone, only Sir Fancy Lad! He's—I like him. He's nice.

**Fitzroy:** Uh, yeah, that sounds great.

**Groundsy:** Okay. Pfft, I was just kidding. You're not going to get any of those things. You fell for another one of Groundsy's goofs!

**Fitzroy:** Cool. This has been sort of roundly the most disappointing day of my entire life.

**Groundsy:** Okay!

**Fitzroy:** Thanks for capping it off like that.

**Groundsy:** Goodnight!

**Travis:** So, the first day of school has ended. The moon rises high, and we see many things that we may not see in the daylight. A groundskeeper

returns home and stares secretly around before carefully unlocking his door. A younger brother furiously scribbles notes in the margins of old tomes, while muttering under his breath. An older brother stares into a fire, his eyes expressionless and cold. A battle-scarred couple share a night, quieting each other's nightmares.

Some students have been asleep for hours, while some find it impossible. Their bodies practically vibrate with the excitement and anxiety about what is to come. Somewhere, far away, but nearer than we would like, something else is also awaiting what is to come. But it thinks not of midterms and first loves – it dwells on blood and chaos.

As our trio settles into their beds, somewhere in the abyss, a monster smiles.

[theme music plays]

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