

## The Adventure Zone: Graduation – Ep. 14, Spirit Day

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**Gary:** Hey, it's me, Gary! What's been happening on The Adventure Zone: Graduation?

[theme music plays]

**Gary:** Well, the Thundermen were sent on a real world assignment to go help two centaur herds solve a dispute over a magical apple. But actually, Higglemas Wigenstaff, the Sidekick and Henchperson Annex dean, sent them to collect that apple so that they could use it to turn his brother back into an elf from a dog. It makes sense if you've listened to the past episodes.

So anyways, the Thundermen are trying to figure out how to get that apple without getting anybody mad at them. And also, the Firbolg is worried that Althea Song, the investigator for the Heroic Oversight Guild, knows all about this stuff, because she might've listened in through a bug she gave him to record his conversations.

So, let's find out what happens, shall we?

[theme music plays]

**Justin:** [sings] Travis, taaake me away.

**Travis:** [sings along] Take me away!

**Justin:** [singing] Fly this Firbolg as high as you can into your imagination!

**Clint:** [laughing]

**Griffin:** Who's eating bones?

**Clint:** No, I'm warming up my die! I'm gettin' them all hot!

**Travis:** No, Griffin is right. It sounds like you're about to do some scrying.

**Clint:** [makes a strange gargling noise]

**Justin:** We didn't—we didn't need `em last time. I don't think there's much reason to think we'll need `em this time.

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Roll for initiative! Everyone's trying to kill you!

**Clint:** [laughing]

**Travis:** Is that what you want? Huh? No story? No character work? Just swingin' an axe at you? Is that... [huffs]

**Griffin:** [in a strange accent] I just want to cross blades and spells... with a band of brave adventurers at my side! [yelling] I just want to go—I want to fight a fuckin' dragon, Trav! I want to get some bebs. I want to get some gold... and buy a house!

**Travis:** Well, here's the thing. You're gonna fight some babes, you're gonna get some dragons, and you're gonna buy some gold.

**Griffin:** Alright, let's do it.

**Travis:** Okay.

[music plays]

**Travis:** So, when last we left the Thundermen LLC, we had just arrived at the camp of the centaurs of the Scarlet Woods. And you had walked in, uh, and you'd found Althea there. And we're going to pick right back up where we left off.

So, Malwin the Strong, the leader of the centaurs of the Scarlet Woods, turns to you and says...

**Malwin:** Uh, yes. So, if there is anything, uh, the Thundermen need, um... of course, you've already met Diana. She can help you with anything. Oh, and uh, there's also Calhain. Calhain can help you. Um, so, anything you need, Diana can also take you over to the camp of the centaurs of the valley, if you need. And they can help you over there. Uhh... so what—what can the centaurs of the Scarlet Woods do for you, to help with your investigation?

**Firbolg:** I have a question.

**Malwin:** Okay?

**Firbolg:** It is important, with any small business... to understand the needs of the client. What do you consider a success... in this... situation?

**Malwin:** Well, uh, thank you so much for asking.

**Travis:** I'm also—this is Travis. I have no idea if this is what Malwin sounded like last time, but it is now!

**Griffin:** [sings] Welcome to running a Dungeons & Dragons game! Make it up and just sound confident! No one has to know! You're just one guy! With just one brain! The weight of the world on your shoulderrrs!

**Clint:** [singing] Dun-un dun-un dun-un!

**Travis:** Okay.

**Malwin:** Uh, thank you so much for asking. I'm going to say... us having the apple, uh, to burn in a sacrificial fire. And the spirit of the Scarlet Woods being pleased. I mean, I guess the one is for the ot—as long as the spirit of the Scarlet Woods is happy when all is said and done, that's good. That's a good result.

**Firbolg:** How... will you know?

**Malwin:** Well... that's a bit trickier, because up 'til now, we've just been doing the same thing year after year, and it has continued to be good. So that was kind of—we don't have any, like, control group kind of tests against that to see if anything else would be good? But, so what we know works is... burn apple in special, like, sacred fire. Spirit of Scarlet Woods equal happy.

**Fitzroy:** Let me ask you a question. Do you think the spirit of the Scarlet Woods would enjoy... a 50% rebate mail-in coupon for a yearlong subscription to Boy Cloaks magazine? 'Cause I have one of those right now, and we could just be done with it. Do you know what I mean?

**Malwin:** Well, I'm pretty sure if the spirit wanted to read Boy Cloaks magazine, it probably wouldn't need to buy—it's a spirit, right? It could probably just go look at it. Wherever.

**Fitzroy:** What you just said is actually a lot wilder than what I said.

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Fitzroy:** I suggested your holy spirit—

**Malwin:** I mean, I'm just now thinking about this on the fly. I've never thought about it before.

**Fitzroy:** Well, that's us. We're innovators. Um... yeah, I think we'd like to explore sort of non-apple based solutions.

**Firbolg:** Mmm.

**Fitzroy:** And then, we'll go talk to the uh, the centaurs of the valley, and see if we can discover a sort of non-apple-based solution. 'Cause Wisdom of Solomon, baby. What if no one gets the apple?

**Malwin:** But... the whole... the whole thing is based around... the apple. We've been doing this for... as long as I can remember.

**Fitzroy:** It's a great tradish, and I love it, and I respect it. But you gotta diversify your portfolio. Y'know? Try offering up an ear of corn, or maybe a potato.

**Malwin:** The risk is too great for any kind of deviation at this point. The trial and error—if we were to displease the spirit of the Scarlet Woods, we would all suffer. We could potentially, if the weather was bad enough, and the hunts were bad enough... it could be devastating to our herd.

**Firbolg:** If I may... I believe we have a communication problem. What my friend is saying is, what you want is hard. So, if we convince you easier thing, is just as good... this is good for us.

**Fitzroy:** Yes.

**Malwin:** No, I—I got that.

**Fitzroy:** I think she did, uh, actually understand that, Master Firbolg. I wouldn't have said that part out loud. It kind of casts us in a bad light.

**Firbolg:** Mmm. [laughs] Yes. In hindsight... I can see this. Your—your request for proposal is a stringent one. But we will try to honor your RFP with limited deviation.

**Argo:** Have there—have there been years where, um, the apple was like, undersized? Or y'know, not quite as uh, y'know, fulsome?

**Fitzroy:** A little gamey?

**Malwin:** Well, of cour—I mean—

**Firbolg:** Mealy year.

**Malwin:** We didn't eat it. But uh, there were years where the spirit of the Scarlet Woods was not as pleased with the sacrifice. So y'know, the apple must've been, in some way, uh, lacking. Must have been somewhat displeasing to the spirit, because we have then had bad weather that year, or...

**Argo:** Okay. Yeah, that's what I was wondering.

**Malwin:** Yes. The hunts were, uh, y'know, a little more difficult than normal. So there must've been something wrong with the apple in those years. But that is rare. That is rare. In my time as leader, I could count, y'know, on two hands how many times we've had bad years.

**Fitzroy:** I think... let's explore our options. Just to see what's available to us. The three of us... will go, and... have a discussion with the spirit of the woods. The Scarlet Woods. Not just any woods.

**Malwin:** Thank you. Yes.

**Fitzroy:** Um, and... just sort of see where they're at. Explain to them our sort of apple crisis, and... maybe they'll be completely understanding about it. They'll be like, "Yeah, we'll take a pass on it this year. We still have some apple left over from last year that you burned all up." And then... y'know, maybe you'll still get the apple, maybe you won't, but it's nice to know, won't it? Just sort of where they're at.

**Malwin:** If you could meet with the spirit and get some of direction or guidance from them, that would be... amazing.

**Fitzroy:** Cool. So is there like, a magic tree we have to knock on to make them come out? Or, do we need to ritually, like, murder someone in the woods? 'Cause I'm not cool with that.

**Argo:** We already did that. We already murdered somebody, so we've got equity.

**Fitzroy:** That's true! We did that! So if that's the ticket, we just gotta go back to that one murderin' spot.

**Malwin:** Well, the spirit of the Scarlet Woods resides... in the... Scarlet Woods. About a three hour ride from here.

**Fitzroy:** Oh! Horseback ride, or...

**Malwin:** Oh. I guess, yes, for you.

**Fitzroy:** Oh, right, yes. I suppose it's all horseback. [laughs] Um...

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Malwin:** I mean, that's not how we think about it, but... yes, I suppose.

**Fitzroy:** No, it would be totally wild if that is how you thought about it.

**Malwin:** Did you bring horses with you?

**Griffin:** Did we bring horses—how the fuck do we get around?

**Travis:** Well, you rode horses to the last town.

**Griffin:** We did.

**Travis:** And then you parked your horses and left them for fear of offending the centaurs.

**Griffin:** That's right, yes.

**Fitzroy:** Um, yeah, so I guess we could go find our... did we... I hope we hitched them. I don't really know a lot about horses. I think we just kind of left—

**Travis:** They were rentals.

**Fitzroy:** Yeah, I think we just kind of left 'em, though. Like, in the street?

**Travis:** No, you returned them to the rental com—there was a rental—they have depots all over the place.

**Griffin:** Oh, I see. Yeah, alright. Um, then—

**Clint:** Like those bicycles you just take out of the rack and run your card—yeah. Right.

**Travis:** Yeah, exactly like that, Dad. Not like car rental places, which is what I was probably referencing. [laughs]

**Griffin:** Right.

**Travis:** No, I do often think about that, though. 'Cause in the old west, people seemed to just be grabbing horses from places and leaving them all over the place.

**Clint:** And they didn't even really tie them, they just like, threw the reigns over a bar and the horse somehow knew to stay there.

**Travis:** There has to be lots of times where like, the sheriff of town is like, "What are we gonna do with all these extra horses?"

**Justin:** That sounds like it'll be a really funny sight gag in a Million and One Ways to Die in the West.

**Griffin:** Right.

**Justin:** The sequel to...

**Clint:** [laughs]



**Griffin:** And maybe we can do a thing where he gets his rental horse from the Alamo, since that also shares its name with a car rental company.

**Justin:** Oh! Yeah!

**Clint:** Ohh! Oh, that's a check mark.

**Griffin:** There's something—like, what I just said wasn't funny, but once, uh... once Seth gets his hands on it, he's gonna punch it up in a way that's gonna make us all bust up.

**Justin:** He'll punch it up.

**Travis:** 'Cause he'll get it from, like, the actual Alamo. And maybe it'll be in the basement, and that would be like, a nice, like, tie—y'know—you get it.

**Griffin:** Sure. Okay.

**Fitzroy:** Well, draw us up a map. We'll uh, hitch our ponies and ride. Uh, like a—like a cowboy. On my steel horse.

**Malwin:** Would—do you need to borrow some of our horses?

**Fitzroy:** You have horses?

**Malwin:** Yes, we have a lot of, uh, goods, and uh, y'know, materials to bring with us to set up camp. We can't carry all of that. We have horses and wagons.

**Argo:** Are you gonna charge us?

**Fitzroy:** Okay.

**Malwin:** No!

**Argo:** Oh, okay.

**Malwin:** You're working for us.

**Fitzroy:** He has to ask.

**Argo:** I—it's business. It's business.

**Fitzroy:** Um, cool. That's a plan.

**Travis:** Uh, Althea rises from the table and says...

**Althea:** Well, it seems like you boys have got this all under control. Uh, I'm staying in a tent just to the right of Malwin's, here. If you need me, you know where I'll be. But I am just an impartial observer here, so I'd rather not directly help with the mission. But if you need to talk, or... I don't know, if there's anything I can do for you, just come find me. Let me know.

**Firbolg:** Althea... may I speak with you... privately?

**Althea:** Yes, of course. Do you want to step over with me to my tent?

**Firbolg:** Thank you.

**Argo:** Uh—[clears throat] Before you go... [mumbles] Do you think that's a good idea, Firbolg? I mean, y'know... you're—you can't lie to her. Y'know.

**Firbolg:** Hmm. This is an excellent point, but I will have no use for subterfuge.

**Argo:** Okay... be careful. Go with whatever gods you go with.

**Travis:** Well yeah, Dad. Dad makes a good point. Let's uh, take a break from the story and just talk about the Firbolg's theological beliefs.

**Griffin:** Let's talk about the Firbolg's journey with Jesus Christ.

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Yeah, where are we at? Where we at? How's this walk?

**Justin:** I don't—I mean, I don't want—it's very private.

**Travis:** [laughs]

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Okay.

**Justin:** Between him and the lord.

**Travis:** Uh, the Firbolg and Althea make their way over to Althea's tent. You walk in. It's, y'know, pretty sparse. There's a bed and a small table. Um, it doesn't look like she brought much with her.

**Justin:** Can I tell you something? Fun fact, though?

**Travis:** What?

**Justin:** The Firbolgs worship a deity named Grond Peaksmasher. [laughing]

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Hell yeah!

**Travis:** [laughs]

**Clint:** Who used to play for the New England Patriots.

**Justin:** [laughs]

[music plays]

**Travis:** Um, and she holds the flap and ushers you in. And she says...

**Althea:** Yes, what—is everything okay?

**Firbolg:** Mmm... you know that I cannot... tell a untruth.

**Althea:** Yes, of course.

**Firbolg:** So I will ask this directly. Did you hear our conversation with Higglemas?

**Althea:** The—no.

**Justin:** Uh, I'm gonna roll insight.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Justin:** We got a... 17 plus four. 21.

**Travis:** Everything about her body language, her eye contact, just the tone of her voice makes you think that she is completely sincere.

**Griffin:** [laughs] So she's either telling the truth, or an extremely, extremely good liar.

**Justin:** Hmm.

**Travis:** I mean, to beat a 21, she'd have to be an *extremely* good liar.

**Firbolg:** Is the bug still functioning?

**Althea:** Oh, yes, of course. It channels to this crystal. I brought it in case you needed it, but I have not listened to it. That would be an invasion. A supreme invasion of privacy. I wouldn't do that.

**Firbolg:** I would very much like this crystal.

**Althea:** Of—of course.

**Travis:** And she hands it over to you.

**Justin:** Okay.

**Travis:** And she says...

**Althea:** But... and I will say this... I will choose my words carefully, remembering that you cannot tell a lie. Is there something you want to tell me?

**Firbolg:** [pause] No.

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Althea:** Okay. Just know, I'm here. We discussed this. If Higglemas is, in any way, infringing on your will, on your... ability to make your own decisions... I am here for you. I—I want you to think of me as a friend.

**Firbolg:** Mmm... this is something that must be earned, yes?

**Althea:** Yes. That is correct.

**Firbolg:** Hm. This crystal you have given... this is... a good start.

**Althea:** Well, I—I'm glad. I want you to be able to trust me.

**Firbolg:** Do you have... any... advice on our mission? It seems very... challenging.

**Althea:** It—indeed. It does seem... um... it does seem... a difficult path to navigate. Um, I don't want to get too directly involved, but... I would say... it's important to form a whole picture. To understand, not just what the leaders want, but what the individuals want. What do they really want? Not

what do they do, what do they expect to happen, what are the things that, y'know... but what do they want? What is the outcome? And work backwards from there.

**Firbolg:** Hmm. This seems like sound advice. I hope, when I have risen to your station, I can provide such sound guidance for the next generation of entrepreneurs!

**Althea:** Thank you, I think. Um...

**Firbolg:** This is great compliment.

**Althea:** Excellent. Well, then I am absolutely flattered.

**Firbolg:** Mentorship is sacred, and our duty to lower a hand to rise up the next generation of entrepreneurs.

**Althea:** Well... thank—thank you, Master Firbolg.

**Firbolg:** I, too, receive such guidance from you today, and this sacred bond shall not be forgotten.

**Althea:** Okay. Well... um... is there anything else I can do to help? Is there anything else you need?

**Firbolg:** I... do you have another magic apple?

**Althea:** No, I don't. [laughs]

**Griffin:** [laughs]

**Firbolg:** Then... there is nothing. Thank you. I will take my leave.

**Althea:** It is strange though, isn't it?

**Firbolg:** The magic apple? Yes.

**Althea:** Yeah.

**Firbolg:** Is a magical apple.

**Althea:** Have you—

**Firbolg:** I have never seen its like in all my days in the forest.

**Althea:** You examined the tree, yes?

**Firbolg:** Yes. It seemed perfectly normal. Almost too normal.

**Althea:** Yes. It—there's no dirt. It doesn't... it hasn't grown in as long as anyone can remember. Why would it change now?

**Firbolg:** I have been wondering this. I have... wondered... another thing. [pause] The seeds... from the other apples. I know some were burnt, but others... no. And I... [sighs] I have wondered what has become of these seeds.

**Althea:** Hm. I don't know. It's good... good question though, Master Firbolg.

**Firbolg:** Who is saying don't know, Travis or Althea?

**Travis:** [laughs]

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Althea does not know.

**Justin:** Okay. [laughs]

**Travis:** I know everything!

**Griffin:** Sure. [laughing]

**Clint:** [laughing]

**Justin:** And if not, you'll make it up!

**Travis:** I would never! I actually have written down in my notes here, 'this is where the Firbolg asked about the seeds.'

**Griffin:** Whoa!

**Clint:** Ooh.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Firbolg:** I have... [sighs] Have you had dealings with centaurs?

**Althea:** Oh, yes. In my travels, I've worked with centaurs before.

**Firbolg:** I barely understand my roommates. What can you tell me of the... centaur nature?

**Althea:** Um, now, are you asking specifically about these two herds?

**Firbolg:** Umm... yes. Hm, yes.

**Althea:** Well... [sighs] I didn't want to get too involved, so I'll—

**Firbolg:** You've made this clear.

**Althea:** I—I will give you once piece of information. Uh, and y'know, I'll just save you some time asking around, 'cause I'm sure it would come out eventually. There was a time when Malwin, the leader of the centaurs of the Scarlet Woods, and Arturis, the leader of the centaurs of the valley, were engaged to be married.

**Firbolg:** Hm. It did not go... well?



**Althea:** No. There—there reached a point in the marital negotiations... where it had to be decided whose herd would be joining whose.

**Firbolg:** Ahh, yes.

**Althea:** And neither one was willing... to... cede leadership of the herds to the other.

**Firbolg:** [sighs] And you have... checked around for a second magic apple, right? You're pretty clear that you do not have it?

**Althea:** Oh, yes. I don't have much in the tent. Like, if it was under the bed, or—

**Firbolg:** It's just that your sounds are very complicated.

**Althea:** Oh?

**Firbolg:** Your... way of dealing with this, the intrapersonal is really more of a territory of human resources!

**Althea:** I see. Um... well, then, perhaps you can discuss it with your CEO. And your... CCO. And, uh, see if you can figure it out together? Maybe your friends can help you understand.

**Firbolg:** And perhaps, we both agree, there is still chance I will find second apple.

**Althea:** I—yes. I mean, I guess there's always—

**Firbolg:** We must keep hope alive.

**Althea:** Sure.

**Griffin:** [laughs]

**Firbolg:** And you don't... you've made this clear, you don't have it.

**Althea:** I do not.

**Firbolg:** Do you—have you seen anyone else have the magic apple?

**Althea:** No, but if you're interested in magic and talking about the magic of the apple, you might speak with Calhain?

**Firbolg:** Calhain has the second apple! The case is solved!

**Althea:** No. Calhain is Malwin's—

**Firbolg:** [yelling] Argo!

**Althea:** Malwin's magi—

**Firbolg:** [yelling] I have solved the mystery!

**Althea:** No, it's—no, Calhain is—

**Argo:** [yelling] I'm very proud of you! You're a good, good Firbolg!

**Firbolg:** [yelling] Arrest Calhain!

**Althea:** No, Calhain is—

**Firbolg:** [yelling] For the theft of the second apple!

**Althea:** No, Calhain is just—

**Firbolg:** Thank you for your service to this case.

**Althea:** Calhain is just Malwin's magical advisor.

**Firbolg:** [interrupting] I will take my leave in the morning.

**Althea:** No, it's—okay.

**Firbolg:** Please fill out this comment card.

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** [laughs]

**Althea:** No, Calhain is just Malwin's magical advisor.

**Firbolg:** [yelling] Argo, release Calhain!

**Argo:** [yelling] Got it!

**Firbolg:** [yelling] He is—release him!

**Argo:** [yelling] Oh, I—alright. I'm sorry, I apologize. It was a prank. I was pullin' a prank.

**Griffin:** [doing a silly voice] Oh, it's all—it's all good! It's fun! I like doin' a roleplay with you! That was fun!

**Travis:** Now, what voice is that, Griffin?

**Firbolg:** [yelling] Give him one of the discount cards for his inconvenience!

**Travis:** Lord a'mighty.

**Griffin:** That was Calhain.

**Firbolg:** Ten percent off!

**Travis:** That is not how Calhain sounds.

**Firbolg:** Thunderman services.

**Griffin:** [doing a silly voice] Hey, it's me! Hey, it's me, Calhain!

**Travis:** [doing a silly voice] Hey, it's me, Calhain! I'm a magical fella!

**Griffin:** [doing a silly voice] I like to goof around!

**Clint:** [laughing]

**Justin:** Alright, I'm ready to take my leave of this situation.

**Travis:** Okay. So you meet back up with, uh, Argo and Fitzroy. So why don't the three of you make a plan of attack, as it were, of how you would like to investigate this case?

**Griffin:** Um, I would like to just, real quick, and we don't even have to... do a whole scene about it. But if we are going to be exploring alternative solutions for this from the woods side, I would like Rhodes and Mimi and Moon to at least be... y'know, trying to do the same for the centaurs of the valley side.

I don't know what that looks like. I don't know that looks like sort of like, um... figuring out sort of other ways to divine the future that they could sell them on. But just like... y'know, trying to do kind of the same thing that we're doing. Otherwise, like, there's no point for us to do what we're doing.

**Travis:** Cool.

**Argo:** Alright, I'm gonna add something to the conversation, just because I feel like it's my responsibility as the CCO. And also, as the... rogue. The thief. The, y'know, shady guy in the group. Um... [clears throat] We keep talkin' about finding a second apple, and don't we really need three apples? I mean, think about it – if we were to ultimately keep everybody happy, it'd be give an apple to one centaur tribe, give an apple to the other centaur tribe, and still take one apple back to... Higgensworth.

**Fitzroy:** Higglemas. Let—let me dissuade your fears and confusion, Argo Keene. CCO. Beloved CCO of the Thunderman LLC. Uh, you're going to steal that apple.

**Justin:** Am I here for this conversation?

**Griffin:** Uhh... I don't know.

**Clint:** I don't think this is—

**Griffin:** I don't think this is especially—yeah. I don't think this is something you'd have to lie about.

**Justin:** It's okay if not, because I really have to use the bathroom.

**Griffin:** Oh okay, then yes, the Firbolg has seen his way out of this.

**Justin:** So if I'm not here...

**Griffin:** Yes, okay. Uh, we could say this took place while you were, um... talking to Althea.

**Fitzroy:** Um, one way or another, by hook or by crook, probably by crook, you're going to acquire that apple in a way that hopefully, no one will see or notice, as is your custom. The question is what happens after that. Because if that—if that happens, and we have not sort of, um, satisfied the client on both sides of things, there will be outright war between these two herds. And that doesn't sit... like, we're bad guys, but that's capital B and A and D bad.

**Argo:** Right.

**Fitzroy:** So, ideal situation... you climb up that tree... which, how is your tree scaling abilities?

**Argo:** Climbing is, uh... I have a plus... ten in...

**Fitzroy:** Wow, that's a—wow. As we all know, we do sort of numerically...

**Argo:** I don't really see a tree-climbing... I don't see a tree-climbing—I see acrobatics. Would that be tree climbin'?

**Travis:** Athletics.

**Fitzroy:** I don't know. You could like, throw a boomerang or whatever the hell. But listen – we need you to steal that apple, and then everybody else be like, "Where'd the apple go? Who cares, we have all these other awesome sort of things going on. The apple is old news." So, there's not going to be three apples. Uh, there's going to be one, and then, zero by way of your actions. I'm hoping.

**Argo:** Alright. Alright. I just, uh, y'know, just... I just wanted to make sure the option was out there about stealin'.

**Fitzroy:** It's all—I mean, it's always out there.

**Argo:** Yeah, okay. I felt like I wouldn't'a been doin' my rogue job, y'know, if I didn't at least bring it up. So, uh... Firby, are you back?

**Travis:** So! The Firbolg has returned from his meeting with Althea.

**Justin:** That's a weird euphemism for 'go to the bathroom,' but okayyy.

**Griffin:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Um, and uh—

**Clint:** How was your "meeting" with Althea?

**Travis:** And has rejoined, uh, the other Thundermen. So what's—what's next, fellas?

**Fitzroy:** Road trip! Road trip?

**Argo:** Yeah, I think—[clears throat] I think somebody needs to go talk to the Scarlet Woods god.

**Travis:** The spirit of the Scarlet Woods.

**Griffin:** I think—I think—can I—I don't want us to just—I don't think we should split up. That may be an unpopular opinion, but I feel like we should do... whatever happens next together, 'cause we've had a lot of us splitting up lately.

**Justin:** Let's go fuckin' talk to the god.

**Clint:** Yeah, I'm down for that.

**Firbolg:** I...

**Justin:** Yeah, let me say that in character, too.

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Firbolg:** I will... ah... believe we should talk with this... spirit of the Scarlet Woods. If it would parlay with us.

**Fitzroy:** Does anyone know how to talk to a sort of... intangible forest spirit? And I'm lookin' at you, Master Firbolg. I hate to cast dispersions, but it seems like if one of us had done it, it would be you.

**Firbolg:** Mmm... well, if one wishes to speak with Grond Peaksmasher...

**Griffin:** [laughing]

**Firbolg:** He must only, uh, wake him from his deep glacial slumber... and sacrifice—I am realizing I am not allowed to tell you this. Um, but no, I

believe if the spirit of the Scarlet Woods is... real, it is... watching us. From a distance.

**Fitzroy:** Yes, yes, fantastic. Fantastic. Well, let's mount up.

**Argo:** Yeah, and I think we all ought to go, because we've already seen that there's—y'know, these roads around here have got their fair share of uh, of baddies on `em.

**Firbolg:** This is true.

**Argo:** So I think if we keep the party together for protection, too... you guys might need my keen battle skills.

**Fitzroy:** Yes, and this big bag of Combos isn't going to eat itself.

**Argo:** Ooohoo.

**Fitzroy:** It's pepperoni pretzel.

**Firbolg:** You know the way to my heart.

**Travis:** Through Combos?

**Justin:** Ye—who are you?

**Griffin:** We're on the road.

**Justin:** Sorry, who are you?

**Clint:** [laughing]

**Travis:** Oh, sorry. I was just—

**Justin:** I locked that tent flap. [laughs] I was—



**Travis:** I was just, uh... Jorsh, another centaur walking by.

**Jorsh:** You like Combos?

**Justin:** [laughs] Um...

**Clint:** Well, because centaurs are the ultimate Combo!

**Griffin:** [laughs and claps]

**Justin:** I think that we can—wow. Oofa doofa. Physical reaction on that one. Um...

[music plays]

[advertisements play]

**Travis:** Just a couple of quick announcements. There's going to be a live stream with me and Janet Varney, just kind of hangin' out. We're doing, uh, a silly thing, just to be a little entertaining. That's gonna be Thursday, May 14<sup>th</sup>. That's gonna be at nine PM eastern time, six PM pacific time, uh, Thursday the 14<sup>th</sup>. Me, Janet Varney. You can check it out at [bit.ly/McVarney](http://bit.ly/McVarney). That's M-C-V-A-R-N-E-Y, and come hang out with us!

Uh, also, go check out all the other amazing shows on [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org). Check out all the McElroy projects at [McElroy.family](http://McElroy.family). You can preorder The Adventure Zone graphic novel, book three, *Petals to the Metal* right now, if you go to [TheAdventureZoneComic.com](http://TheAdventureZoneComic.com). Check out all the McElroy merch at [McElroyMerch.com](http://McElroyMerch.com), and have a great day!

[music plays]

**Justin:** I think that we should go to wherever the... there's gotta be a different place where the sacrifice happens, right?

**Griffin:** Yeah, I mean, they told—they suggested that, uh, there is a place we can go that is three hours from here on horseback. So...

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

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

**Travis:** Okay, great! [makes horse hoof noises]

**Justin:** At first light. Right? You want to sleep?

**Travis:** At first light? Yeah, you probably want to sleep. And you had mentioned wanting to talk to Rhodes and company.

**Griffin:** Yeah, I didn't know if you wanted to do an actual scene about that or not, or if you just wanted to get movin'.

**Travis:** Well, I mean, then we'll just say like, y'know, you communicate to Rhodes that like, hey, talk to them about... do some recon on like, what their end goal is with the divination, and what we can figure out and stuff.

**Griffin:** Yeah. I don't want to intimate that we want to take the apple, specifically, but like... I just want them—I just want their herd kind of... on the same page as the—

**Travis:** Yeah, I think you can phrase it as like... what—what—much like you asked Malwin, like, what outcome will make you feel satisfied?

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Travis:** And not just like, "Get the apple!" But like, what's the end result that you are looking for?

**Griffin:** Sure.

**Travis:** So, you get a good night's sleep. Is there any other prep you want to do? Anything, any questions you want to ask anybody? Any food you want to gather? Any... I don't know. Whatever.

**Griffin:** I mean, I figure we will come back here after... we talk to the spirit of the woods. Unless, of course, we are destroyed by dryads or whatever the fuck the spirit of the woods has goin' on. So...

**Travis:** Um, cool! So, uh, you borrow some sturdy mounts from the centaurs, uh...

**Justin:** Sorry – walk me through the ethics of this real quick?

**Travis:** Oh, they're just horses.

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Justin:** So we were offended... we thought they'd be offended—

**Travis:** You were worried—yes.

**Justin:** —by our horses, but if it's horses that are friends of theirs, it's fine?

**Travis:** Well, it kind of sounds like you made some assumptions about centaurs, didn't you?

**Griffin:** I'm getting faint.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Clint:** Eat a Combo.

**Justin:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Eat a Combo. That'll get your blood sugar back up. [pause] Are you okay now?

**Griffin:** Yes. I want to go. I want to go.

**Travis:** Do you want to stop somewhere and get a soda for the road?

**Griffin:** What I would love is to do the next thing in the adventure that we are all embroiled in.

**Travis:** Okay. You ride hard. The horses, their flanks glistening with sweat beneath you, as their hooves pound on the slightly damp morning dew covered woods! And you arrive... after about three hours.

[someone bangs on the table to imitate horses galloping]

**Travis:** That's horrible.

**Griffin:** That's so bad.

**Justin:** Horrific. Horrific.

**Travis:** That's a horrible sound.

**Griffin:** That sounds like a very small, metal horse... tripping on some—

**Travis:** A steel horse.

**Griffin:** A steel horse tripping on some ice or something.

**Travis:** You arrive, uh, at the location that was drawn for you on the map by Malwin. Um, and what you find is a stone circle inlaid in the ground in the clearing of the woods, the Scarlet Woods. And there is a ceremonial fire pit built in the middle, uh, that raises up, and then, you can see a big stone bowl that is charred with generations of sacrificial flames there in the center of it.

It's a fairly large bowl. Uh, I would say, about six feet wide. Um... so, you could stand on the side and reach and touch the center, but it is, you imagine, when fully lit in the dead of night, a beautiful, beautiful pyre.

But now, uh, here in the clearing with sunlight streaming down, it just looks like a big stone bowl. Almost like a bird bath.

**Justin:** Um, I would like to... this is gonna sound weird, but... I would like to investigate to see if, um, I can—like, if there's any remnants of previous burnings, or like, anything like that. Uh, if that would be possible.

**Travis:** Sure, go for it.

**Justin:** Let's see, that is a... 14. Plus zero.

**Travis:** 14 plus zero. Uh, so, 140.

**Justin:** [laughs] Sure.

**Travis:** So, uh, you—

**Justin:** That common core.

**Travis:** Yep. You investigate, uh... what you find is, you have, uh, a pretty thick layer of char on the bowl. And then, uh, around the base, uh, y'know, it's—there's been rain and dew and all that stuff, but you can see that, after generations and generations, the dirt around it is slightly darker from ash, and y'know, that kind of stuff. Years of use. But it's been a while since... y'know, a year since the last sacrifice.

**Justin:** Right.

**Travis:** And so, like, there's no discernable remnants.

**Justin:** Can I also do detect magic real quick?

**Travis:** You sure can.

**Justin:** [makes a strange noise] I didn't know what you were waiting for.

**Travis:** Okay. Well, I think it's because one of you, your skin turns a color and glows, and one of you just is like, "Hm, what's up?" And I can never remember which one.

**Griffin:** I glow.

**Travis:** Okay. Um, you do... I mean, you detect... nature magic. I mean, there is definitely... this is a magical area. Now, it is unclear to you whether this is a magical area because of some presence, uh, or if it is a magical area because it is imbued with the magic of the sacrifice of this apple, which is clearly magical, and the belief surrounding it.

Um, but there is definitely a charge of magic in this clearing.

**Justin:** Okay.

**Griffin:** Um... this is—I'm—this is stupid, but I just yell out like...

**Fitzroy:** Hello? Hello? Spirit?

[wind blows lightly through the trees]

**Fitzroy:** Spirit?

**Travis:** All three of you make a perception check for me.

**Griffin:** Ooh, that's good. 21.

**Travis:** Nice.

**Justin:** Uh, 15.

**Clint:** I actually added—rolled a nat 20.

**Griffin:** Hey!

**Travis:** Sick!

**Clint:** And what do I add to that?

**Travis:** Well, a nat 20, you just see straight through the woods to the other side. You can see your back as you look around the earth.

**Griffin:** [laughs]

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Uh, so, I'm going to say all of you are able to perceive that... when you begin calling out in this area, there is an increased breeze. Not dramatic, right, but suddenly, you hear the wind moving slightly through the trees. The leaves, uh, y'know, rattling against each other. And you, Argo, hear... if you didn't know better, you'd think you heard...

**Ghostly Whisper:** Yes.

**Travis:** ... blow in the breeze.

[music plays]

**Argo:** Um... did—okay, I'm assuming you fellas—did you hear something? Did you hear somebody say 'yes'? You didn't, didja? Um... uh, hello. Uh, of whom do I have the pleasure of addressing?

**Spirit:** [quietly] I think you know the answer to that.

**Fitzroy:** I'm so sorry. Could you please speak up just a little bit?

**Travis:** The wind whips through the trees now, and says...

**Spirit:** [louder] I believe you know who I am.

**Fitzroy:** That's so much better, thank you.

**Spirit:** What have you brought me?

**Argo:** [whispers] Give 'em the Combos.

**Fitzroy:** You—do you like road snacks? Sort of tube... tube shaped... how do you feel about sort of processed meat pastes stuffed within a crispy, uh, salted sort of cracker situation? Can I interest you in that? It's not really an apple; in fact, it's kind of the opposite food of an apple. And I feel like a real boob right now.

**Travis:** There's no answer.

**Fitzroy:** That's a no on the Combo. Wait, are we supposed—do you want us to just dump the Combos in the fire pit and set them ablaze? Is that how you eat? [pause] I'm—I guess we just gotta dump the Combos and set them ablaze. I think it's how they eat.

**Argo:** Or is this more of a blood situation?

**Fitzroy:** Let's start with Combos.

**Argo:** I mean, I know that's leanin' into the stereotype a little bit of the whole sacrificial bowl and everything. But... yeah, start with the Combos. Go with the Combos.

**Fitzroy:** Right. I would rather lose the Combos than lose our blood, so let's start with these.

**Travis:** All three of you make a constitution saving throw.

**Griffin:** Well, that's not good.

**Justin:** Fair. That's fair. That's fair.

**Griffin:** Uh, 11.



**Justin:** 17 plus... one. 18.

**Clint:** This is not gonna be good. Eight plus one. That's a nine. [laughing]

**Travis:** Okay. Doot doot doot doot... uh, both of you take nine points of psychic damage.

**Griffin:** Ooh, shit!

**Justin:** Me?

**Travis:** Uh, and the two of you are knocked prone.

**Justin:** Me?

**Travis:** No.

**Griffin:** No, you saved.

**Travis:** You saved.

**Justin:** Yeah. Nice.

**Fitzroy:** Okay. Okay.

**Travis:** Which I actually find very fitting, 'cause the one who wasn't talkin' mad dumb shit about Combos was untouched.

**Griffin:** Combos are fucking good.

**Clint:** You said nine?

**Travis:** Nine points.

**Firbolg:** I apologize for my compatriots, and I... celebrate your... ahh, discipline of them.

**Travis:** The wind begins to specifically circle you, uh, Firbolg, and you hear the whisper in your ear that says...

**Spirit:** What have you brought me?

**Firbolg:** [pause] A... question.

**Spirit:** Ooh.

**Firbolg:** What... do you want? Other... than the apple? If there is no apple... what would you accept in exchange?

**Spirit:** This... is a big answer to a big question.

**Firbolg:** From a big Firbolg.

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Spirit:** What will you trade me for the answer?

**Firbolg:** I have berries. I know you are not into Combos.

**Spirit:** I demand a sacrifice.

**Firbolg:** Mmm... hmm. Of... do you have a preference?

**Spirit:** Something you are not easily willing to give.

**Firbolg:** Mm. Oh... you see, there is only one apple, this time. Did you know this?

**Spirit:** Then that makes it even more special.

**Firbolg:** Ah. Ah... I understand. Mm. No. This is not right. I cannot understand the heads of the gods. But... I think maybe I see.

**Spirit:** I know what you can trade me.

**Firbolg:** Mm?

**Spirit:** The truth.

**Firbolg:** Go on.

**Spirit:** All I need is your permission.

**Firbolg:** To...

**Spirit:** To know... the truth.

**Firbolg:** About what?

**Spirit:** You.

**Firbolg:** Mmm...

**Spirit:** And then I will tell you the truth about me.

**Firbolg:** [exhales] What do you... wish to know of me?

**Spirit:** So I have your permission?

**Firbolg:** Ahh, ehh... I wish to know what I am giving up.

**Spirit:** That is another big question.

**Firbolg:** Oh...

**Fitzroy:** I think that's what they call compound interest. No, I just wanted to impress you. That was—that's not—

**Clint:** Are we—are we privy to this?

**Justin:** Yeah, you're hearing this.

**Travis:** You're hearing it, but barely, and you are both still prone on the ground.

**Firbolg:** I will give you the truth of myself. I will not give you the truth of others.

**Spirit:** Excellent.

**Travis:** And you feel, um... pressure behind your eyes for a moment. And your vision goes white for just a second. And then, suddenly, images flash through your head. Images of being yelled at by a larger, uh, Firbolg. Images of you being found in your home, um, with things you are not supposed to have. Images of them turning their backs on you. Images of you wandering, alone, in the woods. And when it's all done, you find that you are on your knees, um, much like your two compatriots were.

**Spirit:** Yes. Now I understand. And now you will understand.

**Travis:** And you also, in this moment, it becomes clear to you that what this spirit wants is the things that are—it's tough to give away. Things that are desired by others. Things that are unique. Things that are important. Because without that, it's not a sacrifice. It's not about the item. It's not about the giving. It's about the giving up.

**Justin:** Hmm.

**Fitzroy:** I really... really... really like these Combos. And... our ride back is going to be... *miserable* without them.

**Travis:** Make a constitution saving throw.

**Griffin:** Aw, man! That was a joke!

**Justin:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Uh, that's a 14 plus five.

**Travis:** Okay. This time, it hurts a little bit, but not enough to do damage.

**Griffin:** Yeah. Fuck this spirit. Kick its ass.

**Justin:** [laughing]

**Spirit:** Do you understand now?

**Firbolg:** Mmm... yes.

**Fitzroy:** Uhh... quick...

**Firbolg:** Please... keep my truth... for yourself. If it is shared with others, it is less... special. Eh?

**Spirit:** Of course.

**Fitzroy:** So just quick sidebar, 'cause it did take us three hours to get out here. And we are looking at a three hour ride back, potentially without Combos, depending on how this next part plays out. Does anybody have something... they think that we could give them right now? 'Cause we could go home and think about it, but boy howdy, we're talking about another six hours on horseback, and I don't know about you two, but my googer is trashed. So... any ideas?

**Argo:** Didja—Firbolg, didja find out anything in the, y'know, in your conversation?

**Firbolg:** What it wants is sacrifice. But... [sighs] If we sacrifice, then we... will have the... mm. Blessing of the spirit, eh? This, I don't think... will help the centaurs. It must be a sacrifice from... them, I am thinking.

**Fitzroy:** The—even better, then. Um... so, can we go—are we allowed to just leave, or... are they gonna—is they—is the spirit going to sort of hurt us with wind again?

**Firbolg:** It wants nothing more from us, I... I think.

**Fitzroy:** Cool. Cool. Well, this was cool.

**Firbolg:** Unless you want to offer a different variety of Combo? Perhaps another, uh, uh, uh, another blast of painful magic?

**Justin:** Uh, let's talk out of character for a second.

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Justin:** Are we... which I feel like we should do more, so we can like, actually—

**Griffin:** Actually speak?

**Justin:** Yeah. Um, I don't know that we're gonna get anything more out... I mean, I get it. It needs a sacrifice. I don't know, and I don't think that... Trav—I don't know—and as much as you feel comfortable telling us, like... does it need to be a sacrifice from—I feel like if we go back to the centaurs and were like, "Good news, we made a sacrifice. We gave up our, y'know, right arms or whatever. Everything's gonna be cool." Like, I don't think that they're going to be particularly jazzed about that.

**Travis:** Yeah. I think that your instinct is correct, that this needs to be them doing it to feel like they, uh, have the blessing.

**Griffin:** Right.

**Travis:** Um, I will also say, uh... to—because I am a kind and benevolent DM, you have to think in terms of like, there is... there has been, every year, only two of these apples in the entire world. And so, to equal the sacrifice of that, that would take—for like, a blessing of a whole year, would be much more significant than probably anything you're carrying on you right now.

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Justin:** Right. That was my—that was my impulse.

**Griffin:** Well, according to my inventory sheet, I have a bedroll, and I have a 50-foot coil of hempen rope.

**Travis:** Oh, okay, wait, hold on. I didn't know you had a 50-foot coil of hempen rope. Those are hard to find. 'Cause you can find the 40 and the 60 easy.

**Griffin:** Yeah. Well, if I'm being hon—

**Travis:** Not enough, it's too much... yeah.

**Griffin:** Can I be honest?

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** It was a 60-foot thing of hempen rope.

**Travis:** Huh.

**Griffin:** But I cut off ten feet of it to make some belts.

**Travis:** Oh.

**Clint:** Nice!

**Travis:** I've never thought about doing that before. I've always just been frustrated that the 60-foot was too long. I never thought about cutting it.

**Griffin:** No, yeah. So, before I enrolled at the university, there was like, a really brief season there where webbed belts were hot again. And so, I made—I tried to make a couple for myself, but I didn't—by the time I finally cracked it, they were sort of out of fashion again.

**Travis:** So, you headin' back, or...

**Griffin:** Yes, please.

**Travis:** Okay. Uh, once more, your steeds pound across the plains, and... that was cool. And everything is... y'know, it was a good ride, altogether. You rode through some glens. Rode through some streams. This time, you really kind of took it easy on, y'know, on your taints. You didn't have to ride so hard. And you just had a nice ride together as friends.

**Clint:** So it was more like... [slaps a table to imitate a horse walking]

**Travis:** No, that sounds like a horse with like, six legs.

**Griffin:** More of a canter, you would say, then.

**Travis:** Yeah. Uh, so you arrive back at camp, and now, it is, uh, the afternoon. Um, you have a little bit more time in this D&D session. [laughs] Uh, so now, uh, armed with that information, and the information you've already gathered, what other questions do you have? Who—who would you like to talk to now? What would you like to investigate?

**Justin:** Uh, maybe Calhain?

**Griffin:** Yeah, that seems like a good next step.

**Travis:** Okay! Uh, you head to Calhain's tent. It is a deep, rich purple fabric with lots of gold designs on it. You can spot it as a magic user's tent a mile away. You knock on the flap, which is awkward, but you can't think of what



else to do. And the tent flaps open, as if on their own, and you hear a voice say...

**Calhain:** Yeah, come in.

**Clint:** [pause] So we go in.

**Griffin:** Yeah, we go in.

**Travis:** Okay. You enter, and you find, uh, pretty much exactly what you'd picture as like, a wizard's tent. Y'know, there's some bottles bubblin' and a cauldron stirring itself. All that kind of thing. Y'know, maybe some kind of weird dragon slash bird, sitting on a perch.

**Griffin:** Fuck yeah! Some fuckin' pewter figurines!

**Travis:** Yeah, dude, it's sick. There's some staffs with crystals on top of 'em.

**Griffin:** With gems. Yes, dude!

**Travis:** Yeah, dude. It absolutely rules. And you see, uh, a human man, uh, sitting at a table working, and he looks up and goes...

**Calhain:** Oh, hey. Uh, you guys must be from the school. Hi!

**Griffin:** How's his cloak game?

**Travis:** It's pretty good. Uh, it's a pretty rich looking fabric. Very thick velvet. Now, it doesn't quite fit him. It looks like maybe it was off the rack.

**Griffin:** Oh! Oh, I just threw up.

[pause]

**Clint:** Um... uh, I think Argo would like to uh, try to get some information from Calhain about... the apples. I don't know whether to do an investigation check, or persuasion?

**Travis:** You could just ask him.

**Clint:** Okay.

**Travis:** Just use the power of your human voice.

**Argo:** Hey listen, you. Uh—

**Calhain:** Cal—Calhain.

**Argo:** Calhain, good to see ya. Listen, we been nosin' around—

**Calhain:** And you are?

**Argo:** Um, uh, Argo Keene.

**Calhain:** Oh, pleasure to meet you.

**Travis:** And he sticks out his hand.

**Argo:** Good to meet you to. Yes. Uh, I'm not shakin' hands, but uh, I mean—

**Calhain:** Oh, are you ill?

**Argo:** No no no, I just uh—I've got a—I'm just a germaphobe. Um, listen, um, do you—

**Calhain:** Okay.

**Argo:** I'm sure you've investigated this whole apple thing. Have you come up with any reason why there's only one this year instead of two?

**Calhain:** Oh! Uh, well, I mean, that's the question, isn't it? [laughs quietly] From what I can tell, it just, uh... I can't find any cause for it, magically speaking. Um, the only thing I can think is, maybe there's some kind of... cycle? Or... it—I honestly don't know if I knew, I'd tell you.

**Argo:** Has that ever happened before?

**Calhain:** Well, not as far as the centaurs know. I've only been working with Malwin for like, the last couple of months. Um, but they—it seems new to them.

**Griffin:** Can I roll an insight check?

**Travis:** Sure.

**Griffin:** I don't really... there's something weird about this dude. Uh, I got a 16 plus zero.

**Travis:** That's pretty good. Uh, he seems, uh... uncomfortable, discussing the fact that he does not know why there's no apple.

**Griffin:** Umm... okay. What is—and what is Calhain's position here? Just like, magical advisor?

**Travis:** Yeah, magical advisor. He's, uh, a wizard.

**Griffin:** Okay.

**Fitzroy:** Calhain, listen. One magic user to another. And by the way, these pewter figurines are off the chains, my man.

**Calhain:** Thank you!

**Fitzroy:** And you have got to hook me up with your supplier. Um... I know—I feel like you know a little bit more than you're letting on, about this magic

apple. And listen, I know magic stuff, but y'know, you've been here longer than I have. You gotta have some sort of theories cranked up, right? Some sort of... hypotheses? And that word's a toughie, huh?

**Calhain:** Well, I mean... the truth is, I... [sighs] Can I be—can I level with you guys?

**Fitzroy:** Yep.

**Calhain:** I'm at a complete loss. I—I don't even know... where to start with like, this magic apple thing. The tree is really weird. Uh, it's not really my... area? Uh, I mean, I've been... please don't tell Malwin this, but like, I've been trying to like, figure it out, but I do not know.

**Firbolg:** Mmm...

**Fitzroy:** Welp, then... we're gonna go.

**Calhain:** Well, what do you guys know? Maybe we can like, compare notes?

**Fitzroy:** Nah... sorry, man, the vibe's all wrong.

**Justin:** [laughs]

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Fitzroy:** I don't know what else to—I don't—listen, Calhain. I don't know what else to say, and you forced my hand, because I've just learned that we're not gonna get anything out of this conversation. Um, and we try to keep it sort of exciting around here. But yeah, the—I gotta tell ya, Calhain. The vibe's just all wrong, bud.

**Calhain:** Oh. Well, I mean, I appreciate your honesty.

**Fitzroy:** Yeah.

**Calhain:** And thank you for telling me what you need. Uh, I respect that, and your feelings are valid.

**Fitzroy:** Yeah, cool.

**Clint:** While you're engaging in conversation, could Argo take a quick sneak peak, just really check out the surroundings? Or have we already had that with the insight check?

**Travis:** Yeah, so uh, while the insight check is for a person, if you want to do an investigation—

**Clint:** Perception?

**Travis:** Investigation is what you would be doing. Now, the question is—

**Clint:** I want to do an investigation—

**Travis:** Well, hold on! Hold on!

**Clint:** Okay.

**Travis:** The question is, are you trying to do it stealthily, or do you care if he sees you looking around?

**Clint:** No, I want to do it stealthily.

**Justin:** I was about to ask another question, so maybe you could do that with advantage.

**Travis:** Yeah. So first, roll a stealth check with advantage.

**Clint:** 13 plus ten. That's 23.

**Travis:** Man, that's so good. Now roll again with advantage. It's hard for you to get caught at shit, huh?

**Clint:** That is a 12 plus ten. 22.

**Travis:** Still good. Okay. Uh, so, go ahead and ask your question Fir—well, yeah. Go ahead and ask your question. And then, Dad, I'm gonna have you do the investigation check afterwards.

**Clint:** Okay.

**Firbolg:** I wish to know... something.

**Calhain:** Oh yes! And you are?

**Firbolg:** I am a Firbolg.

**Calhain:** Oh, pleasure to meet you!

**Travis:** And he sticks out his hand.

**Firbolg:** Ah, yes.

**Justin:** I shake his hand, I guess?

**Griffin:** Make a constitution saving throw.

**Justin:** [laughs]

**Travis:** [laughs]

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Firbolg:** The... tree.

**Calhain:** Yes.

**Firbolg:** Does it ever... change?

**Calhain:** Huh.

**Firbolg:** Do the leaves, um... turn green and grow and change with the normal, ah, ebb and flow of the suns?

**Calhain:** Uh, well, that I can answer!

**Travis:** And he reaches behind him, and he pulls out a book, and it's labeled, y'know, The Magic Tree. And as he flips through it, he says...

**Calhain:** This is, uh, the centaur's log. And every year, uh, they draw the tree on one side, and then, list the events on the other. And it's not very intere—it's very, like, bullet point. Winter tree, lowered thing, got apple. That kind of stuff. But, the drawings are interesting.

**Travis:** And as he flips through, you can see that it is exactly the same. Even though it's drawn by a different person, or with different material, or whatever, you can see that the shape of the leaf, uh, y'know, canopy of the tree, is exactly the same every year.

**Justin:** That is not that informative though, because... it would be the same, because it's at the same point in the year.

**Travis:** Yes, but it hasn't grown. Like, the shape of it—the tree has not grown in hundreds of years. It has not changed. It looks exactly the same.

**Griffin:** I think we've pretty well established that this is a weird fuckin' tree.

**Justin:** I think it's something different. I think it's something more than that, though. It feel—I don't—and I may be completely on the wrong path, but... it feels like... [pause] It's like, maybe illusory? Or... um... like, manmade? Like, uh, either one of those two is the only things like... even if it was a magical creation, right? Like, of things that have a magical life, still, I would think would adhere to what we understand as like... plant biology. Right? Like, you would still—even if it was a magical tree, it would still grow and change and...

**Griffin:** Right.

**Justin:** Die, unless it was like... like I said, illusory, or actually not a tree.

**Clint:** Because this tree looks too symmetrical, looks too perfect.

**Griffin:** Right.

**Justin:** Yeah. Exactly. Um... y'know what? Say I floated that—some version of that, to uh... so I don't have to repeat myself. Floated some version of that to Calhain.

**Calhain:** Yes. I—I was thinking the same thing. It seems like this tree's only purpose is as an apple delivery mechanism. I... I can't imagine why, other than... for what the centaurs care about. But it just kind of seems like... it's there just to make apples every year.

**Fitzroy:** I mean, in the tree's defense, that's what sort of all apple trees are there for. [laughs] An apple tree is there sort of mostly to make apples. They're not, y'know, usually crankin' out chili or something. Y'know?

**Firbolg:** No, but you misunderstand. Um... the tree has its own life. Its own... rotation, that must be respected. We take of the fruit, but we return to the tree. It provides shade, but also, um... new leaves that become the dirt. The tree... is part of the cycle, hm? The circle... of nature that encompasses all.

**Fitzroy:** You wanted to say the other thing, didn't you?

**Firbolg:** The circle of... mmm... existence. The circle of...

**Fitzroy:** [laughs]

**Firbolg:** No, but I—this tree is... it feels like this tree is outside the circle. And that... makes me afraid.



**Travis:** Dad, roll your investigation check.

**Clint:** That is a ten... plus... three. That's 13.

**Travis:** Um, it's not hard for you to kind of spot as you're stealthily checking out his equipment. It is also store bought. Um, this is—there's a lot of like, insignias on it. Like, almost like, um... y'know, the barcode stickers on things. You can see where he bought, uh, the vials of stuff, and the um, the robes, and the staffs, and all that kind of thing. It looks like they were all purchased.

And you also find a diploma... from Wigenstaff's School for Heroism and Villainy.

**Fitzroy:** Oh, dunk, you went to Wig—

**Griffin:** Oh wait, I guess I didn't see it.

**Clint:** Hmm.

[pause]

**Argo:** Um... oh! By the way, uh, I see that you're a... fellow alum!

**Calhain:** Oh, yes! I graduated about ten years ago!

**Argo:** Oh! What was your, uh... I mean, uh, hero, villain? Sidekick?

**Calhain:** Um... I—[sighs] I was a hero.

**Argo:** Oh, that's awesome. That—what'd ya specialize in?

**Calhain:** Magic.

**Fitzroy:** Oh dunk, you know Festo?

**Calhain:** Yes, of course! They're great.

**Fitzroy:** So fun. So fun. So, uh—

**Calhain:** They love to party.

**Fitzroy:** So, so you know, then, that we're here from the school, and we're trying to get a good grade...

**Calhain:** Yes, of course.

**Fitzroy:** Okay. Just, you haven't done much to help us with that. We thought we'd get a little—

**Calhain:** Sorry, I didn't catch your name.

**Fitzroy:** Ah, I am Sir Fitzroy Maplecourt, knight in absentia of the realm of Goodcastle. And... we...

**Calhain:** Oh! Pleasure to meet you!

**Travis:** And he sticks out his hand.

**Fitzroy:** Yeah. See, the fact that the hand thing keeps coming out... the fact that the hand thing—y'know what? I'll bones it.

**Calhain:** Okay! That's good manners.

**Griffin:** I bones it. Gently. Oh, the least amount of contact that you could possibly give with a bonesing.

**Calhain:** So, anything for a fellow... y'know, Wiggy!

**Fitzroy:** Is that what we sa—is that what we say?

**Calhain:** No, I was just trying something, and it didn't... it didn't land.

**Fitzroy:** M'kay.

**Griffin:** Um... I don't really have anything else for this dude. I think he's lying. Uh, I think he knows a lot more than he let on. Um...

**Clint:** I'm gonna talk out of character. Why not intimidate him if we think he knows something else? Let's push him a little bit.

**Griffin:** Oh shit, that's a good point. Yeah. I'm really good at intimidation.

**Clint:** Well...

**Fitzroy:** Um... listen pa—

**Griffin:** I'm gonna turn on my intimidating voice now.

**Travis:** M'kay.

**Fitzroy:** Listen, Calhain. There's—I've told you about the vibe, and how bad it is.

**Calhain:** Yeah.

**Fitzroy:** And... let's just say... something stinks. And so... the three of us? Mm-mm. You don't want to. So... either you start talkin', or... we're going to hurt you. [laughs] Is this anything?

**Firbolg:** I am terrified.

**Fitzroy:** Yes, thank you.

**Clint:** I'm standing in the background twirling my daggers. Just, y'know, idly.

**Travis:** Okay. Uh, then, make a... an intimidation check with advantage, because you have Argo, uh, backing your play with the—

**Griffin:** Okay. I have a plus six intimidation. And I rolled a 17 and a three. I will take the 17. Not the three. So that's a 23.

**Calhain:** Okay, I—listen, guys. I... [sighs] I really need this job, okay? I was a sidekick at the school, and I... I couldn't get a job once I graduated, and... so I started doing the wizard thing, just as like, a performance thing, and then, I got a job. I'm good at—I can do magic. I just... I... [sighs] I don't really know much about it?

**Fitzroy:** Prestidigitate for me. Prestidigitate—show me Prestidigitate. Make an odd odor.

**Travis:** He does it.

**Fitzroy:** Okay. See, that's the test.

**Clint:** May not have been magic. [laughs]

**Fitzroy:** That's how we...

**Firbolg:** Is very afraid.

**Calhain:** I—I under—I can do some magic. I just, I never really learned... about like, the theory, or learned about like, how it works? And so, like... I—I'm doing my best. Listen, I'm doing my best. I'm not trying to half ass this or anything, but like... I don't know!

**Fitzroy:** So, were you here when the two leaders of the two herds were engaged?

**Calhain:** No, that was long before my time. I've only been with them for like, a couple months.

**Fitzroy:** I guess then, Calhain, do you have aaanything we can use?  
[strained] Aaanything! Oh, gosh!

**Calhain:** Um...

**Clint:** I toss the dagger up, catch it by the handle and start cleaning my nails with it, and like, give him this look.

**Griffin:** I mean the—

**Travis:** Okay, y'know what? Y'know what, Dad? Make a dexterity check.

**Justin:** [laughs] Talk shit, get hit!

**Clint:** You really want to go against me on dexterity? Okay, that's fine.

**Travis:** I'm not against you, Dad. I'm the DM. We're in this together.

**Clint:** Okay, that's a nat 20. Plus seven.

**Travis:** You do it, and it fucking rules.

**Clint:** Plus seven!

**Travis:** It's so cool. And he says...

**Calhain:** Um... okay. I'll tell you this. I... [sighs] I don't think... this is just based on my own... I don't think the fact that the apple only sprouted—that the tree only sprouted one apple is a natural occurrence.

**Fitzroy:** Yeah!

**Calhain:** I think someone is behind it.

**Fitzroy:** Who?

**Firbolg:** Mmm.

**Calhain:** I don't know!

**Firbolg:** He who smelt it, dealt it.

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Argo:** Who would gain from this? Come on.

**Firbolg:** Who would wish to sow discord between the herds?

**Calhain:** Listen, I don't—I don't like pointing blame, but... Arturis has been itching for a fight, ever since Malwin left him. At least, that's what Malwin says. And so, maybe... maybe he's trying to start a war.

**Firbolg:** Well. If it is a war he wants... then, we shall work to prevent that most undesirable outcome with a limited amount of violence.

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** [laughs]

**Calhain:** If there's anything I can do to help, I—I don't want anyone to get hurt. I feel... partially responsible, because I wish I knew more about this. I wish I could help more.

**Fitzroy:** And we wish you did, too!

**Firbolg:** This is uniting us.

**Argo:** Can we hang onto the... oh, crap. Ohh, crap.

**Fitzroy:** What?

**Travis:** Oh?

**Argo:** I just had a—I just had a—uh... okay. Hey, listen, good talkin' to ya. We gotta go. Uh, listen. Love the place.

**Calhain:** Thank you!

**Argo:** Love the gimcrackery and the—and the tchotchkes.

**Calhain:** Thank you.

**Argo:** But we gotta—we gotta go. Okay, fellas? We gotta leave now. Okay?

**Fitzroy:** Uh, yeah. Let's go, I guess? Thanks.

**Argo:** Yeah, come on, come on, come on. Yeah, good seein' ya.

**Justin:** Alright, we're going.

**Argo:** Goodbye.

**Firbolg:** What was the reason for your hasty exit, Argo?

**Argo:** I—I just—what you just said there inspired me. What if... what if we have to get Malwin and Arturis back together? As like, a couple? You just said it, united us. Maybe that's what we're supposed to be doing! Maybe we've gotta get Malwin and Arturis back together so that they're one... one group, and then... take it from there! Does that make any sense?

**Fitzroy:** Yeah, but we just talked to like, some boring, bad wizard for like, five minutes, and... I think at some point, I did threaten to hurt him. And so like, I don't know why you think that we would be up for... sort of marriage counseling.

**Argo:** Well, I mean, we are multifaceted. That's one of the key elements of the Thundermen corporation is how flexible we are, and how diverse we are in not only our activities, but our interests.

**Firbolg:** Mm, this was a good attempt, but please leave communications to the communications department of Thunderman LLC!

**Argo:** I am a communicator!! I'm the CCO!

**Firbolg:** Mmm. This is a fair point.

**Griffin:** [laughs]

**Firbolg:** This will go on my... quarterly review. It is a great shame.

**Fitzroy:** Alright, I guess let's go talk to Arturis, then. And...

**Travis:** Where are you guys at right now?

**Justin:** We're just outside Calhain's tent, I think.

**Travis:** Uh, so, as you're waiting outside, you see Althea coming. And Althea says...

**Althea:** Oh, I was just looking for you guys. I was wondering if you would like to have dinner with me, and just, y'know, as friends.

**Fitzroy:** Yeah, what's—I mean, what's, uh... what are we talkin'?

**Althea:** I—like, what are we gonna—I hadn't... thought that far ahead—I just figured we'd... y'know, eat some food?

**Fitzroy:** I know, but like, I'm doin' paleo, so...

**Clint:** [snorts and laughs]

**Travis:** Um, and... Fitzroy...

**Griffin:** Mm-hmm?



**Travis:** Your chest starts to feel tight. It starts to feel like there is a weight pressing against it. And it start—

**Fitzroy:** This is a side effect of the paleo. Without complex carbohydrates... ohh my god. Anyone else feelin' this?

**Travis:** It starts to get difficult to breathe. Um, and it feels like someone is pushing on your eyeballs, and your vision starts to go blurry, and then, white.

**Althea:** Uh...

**Travis:** And Althea says...

**Althea:** Oh, god, are you—are you okay? What's happening to you?

**Fitzroy:** I think it's a heart attack? I'm—it's bad?

**Travis:** Uh, Althea puts her hand on your chest and says...

**Althea:** Lay down, lay down, lay down.

**Travis:** And she closes her eyes for a moment, and her hand glows, and she says...

**Althea:** Oh! Oh no. Uh... you've been cursed.

[theme music plays]

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