

The Adventure Zone: Graduation – Ep. 19, Creative Writing

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Travis: Hey, everybody! You may have noticed an episode is going up today, and it's not a normal TAZ week. That is because it is the first week of MaxFunDrive 2020, so I wanted to put out something extra special for you. This is not like a normal episode – this is kind of a special, so you'll notice there's not a lot of gameplay in here. In fact, almost none. And I just wanted to give you a little bit something extra to celebrate MaxFunDrive! And I really hope you enjoy it.

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[somber music plays]

Travis: You wake from a deep slumber. Before your eyes open, though, you are aware of two things. First, your bed is unstable. It feels like it's swaying back and forth. Second, the air smells different. If you had to put a word to it, you would say 'salty.'

Clint: Hmm. I like salty! Salty is good!

Travis: You open your eyes, and you discover that you are no longer in your dorm room. You look around, and you instantly know where you are. You are in the captain's quarters on the former whaling ship turned privateer vessel known as Mariah. It is exactly as you remember it, except for three distinct differences.

Clint: And what are those three differences?

Travis: In the corner of the room are four barrels. They are overflowing with lemons, limes, oranges, and kumquats. Hung over the desk is a beautiful portrait of your mother, Shebrie Keene. And this isn't necessary for the story, but since this is our first time seeing her, could you describe her?

Clint: Long, auburn hair. Terrific smile. Um, big, green eyes. Just uh... and a real tanned, uh, complexion. Just very healthy looking.

Travis: When you look at her face, what kind of spirit does it convey? What kind of feeling does it give you? And I guess those are two different questions. Question one being, if someone just is seeing your mother for the first time, what might they intuit her personality to be like?

Clint: Very loving. Um, very open-hearted. Which is kind of weird, for a privateer. [laughs] But uh, yeah, she just has that kind of face that people immediately trust and open up to, and wants to... y'know, want to have her help them and be part of their lives.

Travis: And how do you feel, seeing this painting? And being back in the captain's quarters, a place which I imagined, as a child, you called home for a while.

Clint: Little... little unnerved. It's... I mean, this was a place of, uh... nurturing and, still, I mean, shipboard life is hard. I think being in the chamber is comforting, but I think when he looks up at his mom's portrait, I think he's sad. I think it uh... it brings up some old feelings in Argo.

Travis: The third and most notable thing is that, hung over the bed is a colossal painting. It's from the perspective of someone standing on a dock and looking up at the Mariah. The captain stands at her bow. You cannot look away from the captain's face. It is you, but older. You have a full beard now, speckled with gray. There is a scar running from your forehead, across your right eye, and down to the cheek, and it is a damn fine look.

The painting is titled, 'The Kraken Brings the Mariah to Port'.

Clint: I think that's kind of amazing. I think it's kind of... offsetting. I think, uh—I think Argo immediately would want to try to find some kind of reflective surface to see if he really does look like that. If he is that old. He reaches up to touch his own face.

Travis: You feel a beard. You feel the same scar. You find in the dressing area, a full length mirror, and it's you. You... but not you. It's not the you you're used to seeing in the mirror, but it is unmistakably Argo Keene, but stronger looking. Scarred. Tougher. It's you, but you would guess, 12, maybe 15 years since the last time you looked in a mirror.

Argo: Okay, uh... I'm—okay. [laughs] I'm confused. I'm—what the hell? Um... I've lost my formative years! I—I was really lookin' forward to bein' the top of my peak of my powers and bein' a young gal about... okay. I gotta find out what's goin' on.

Travis: As you continue your search throughout the room, you find on the desk a set of orders. They read, "Argo, be a friend and do me a favor. Find the ship full of seditionists and do your thing. Yours, Fitzroy the Storm Bringer."

Argo: The St—he gave himself another promotion? He's a Sto—I'm not even sure what a Storm Bringer is.

Clint: Uh, is there anything else on the document? Anything like a... is it like...

Travis: There is a royal seal.

Clint: Alright.

Argo: Okay, this is... this is a wacky dream. This is one wacky dream.

Clint: Do I see anything else in the cabin?

Travis: No. I mean, it's the same cabin you would expect. There is a model of the Mariah as you knew it. There is furniture, dressing area, um... there is, y'know, a cabinet full of clothing. Map, cartography tools, but nothing that you wouldn't expect to see in a ship's captain's quarters.

There is a knock on the door.

Argo: Um... who is it?

Voice: Uh, it's I, sir.

Travis: And you, on some level, recognize the voice; though, you don't know how. It is the voice of your first mate.

Argo: Ah... the ol' first... mate. Whose name is, of course... uh, yeah, come on in!

Travis: And you know the name somehow. It's Thomas.

Argo: Thomas!

Travis: As Thomas enters, he salutes and says...

Thomas: Admiral Keene. We're closing on the target, sir.

Argo: I'm—what? Ah—whatmiral? Admiral?

Thomas: Uh, Admiral... Keene?

Argo: Oh! Uh, aye, me bucko! It's—it's me, Admiral... Keene. How am I lookin' today?

Thomas: Fierce as ever, sir.

Travis: And he smiles, slightly. And he says...

Thomas: You gave orders to let you know when we're near? Should we fly your flags, sir?

Argo: Um... y'know, Thomas, I think that's something I'd like to oversee myself. Let me... let's go up on deck. What do you say?

Thomas: Very well, sir. Might I suggest... you get dressed, sir?

Argo: Ooh! Gosh. [laughs] Yes, of course. Can't go out in me small clothes, can I? [laughs] Oh Thomas, you put up with so much from your wacky old captain! Yeah, let me, uh... let me get some, uh... here's some clothes here. I'll just—

Thomas: I'll be waitin' outside, sir.

Argo: Yes! Okay, good, yeah. 'Cause... yeah. This is—I'm awkward. Sorry, Thomas. Yeah. Go ahead, I'll be right up.

Travis: On the deck, your crew awaits. But not just your crew – the Mariah is flanked by three ships on either side.

Argo: Let's take a look at that flag. Fly the—Thomas! Fly the colors!

Travis: You see your flag begin to raise and fly proudly in the breeze. A black background with a white design. The design shows a giant squid breaking a ship in two to drag it into the depths. Standing on the deck, you can now see that the Mariah has been significantly upgraded. She has armor plating, reinforced masts, and her weaponry has been improved. The deck is bristling with cannons. Each cannon is engraved with lightning down the barrels.

You also see before you your quarry. The ship is dwarfed by your fleet. The crew, such as it is, stands on the deck. Clearly, they are terrified, but still defiant. Your first mate turns to you expectantly with a small smile.

Thomas: The cannons are armed, sir. Just give the word, Kraken.

Travis: And the scene freezes.

Voice: Oh, the things that could be...

Travis: You hear behind you.

Clint: Um... I turn around.

Travis: You turn to see a nine-foot-tall person making their way towards you. Their skin is opalescent, and their eyes are pure white. They are dressed in stunningly perfect pirate garb. It is beautifully made, and intimidating to look at. Their body is all curves, and moves like flowing water. They are mesmerizing.

Clint: Um... it—and nobody else is moving?

Travis: Correct.

Argo: Um... so... are you like a... pirate... ghost? Or something?

Figure: I had hoped that Fitzroy would have talked about me, but it is a pleasure to meet you, Argonaut Keene. I am Chaos.

Argo: Uh—oh. I guess... I was gonna say it's an honor, but since I'm not really sure what the hell's going on here, I'll reserve judgment on whether it's an honor. I guess you're responsible for this, um... little vignette that I'm in the middle of?

Chaos: Oh, indeed. Indeed I am. I hope you enjoy it. And let me say, Argonaut... the honor is all mine. To be in the presence of Admiral Argonaut "The Kraken" Keene... it's truly, truly incredible.

Argo: Okay, so... this is either like, a dream, or... a vision of the future? Um... or... a possible future? Yeah, I'm willing to play along. Why don't you tell me what in the hell is going on?

Chaos: Well, you are correct on all counts. This is a dream. But... it is also a vision of a possible future. A future that could be yours. A future with everything you want. Control of the Mariah, dominance of the seas, and of course...

Travis: And they smile.

Chaos: Your vengeance.

Argo: Um... my vengeance... on whom?

Chaos: The man who murdered your mother. How do you think you came to control the Mariah?

Argo: How—alright. I'm gonna ask... this is a dumb question, but I'm good at that. What—how do you know... about my... quest for vengeance? That sounds so colorful. How do you know—how do you know—who do you think it is I'm trying to get revenge on?

Chaos: Well, I think that you have sought to work with a man named The Commodore. I think that your mother was murdered while on the ship, The Mariah. And so, I think that your mother was murdered by a man named... The Commodore. Stop me if I'm wrong.

Argo: No... you're not wrong.

Chaos: And so, I am able to put together, that if you desire to be close to The Commodore, that can mean only one thing, Argonaut.

Argo: That I want to kill him.

Chaos: Yes. And with my help, that can be achieved.

Argo: How do you know this, Chaos?

Chaos: I listen.

Argo: I don't know who you're listening to, because I haven't shared this with anybody. Nobody... nobody knows about this. I haven't even told my friends this.

Chaos: Oh, I didn't hear you say that you wanted to kill The Commodore. I heard you say a hundred different things, and I paid attention. I put them together. I concluded, Argonaut. This is not about what I know. It is about what you want. We are not at odds, Argonaut Keene. You do not seek

vengeance because of some blood thirst. You do not wish to sail The Mariah because of evil intentions. I want you... to have what you want. How... how could that be wrong?

Argo: ... Okay. Look, since I was about... I don't know... 11 or 12 years old, this has been my goal. The Commodore betrayed me mother. And yeah, you're right, that led to her death. And you're right, that means he murdered her. And I have wanted nothin' but revenge on... on the man. Yes, you're right. That's why I went to the school. That's why I was studyin' to be, y'know, a sidekick. Anything to get close to him so I could... could snuff him out. So I could—so I could murder him.

But... I'm... I'm not sure I'm the same... Genasi that I was when I started all this. The... I've kind of... [sighs] I've kind of seen a bigger world, and I'm... I'm wonderin' if maybe... maybe there are more important things I'm supposed to—to do than just... kill somebody.

Chaos: What about keeping other people's parents safe?

Travis: And Chaos gestures towards the boat that you are pursuing. And they say...

Chaos: Those seditionists down there, those rebels... they murdered city guards to escape. One of those guards had a son that was the same age you were when your mother was taken. What about him? What about all the other countless orphans left by violence, that with your power, with your means, you could stop? What about them?

Argo: Okay. Listen, I'm not a philosopher, and I'm not very deep, and... right now, I really am not sure what it is you're asking me, so... can you... can you call the question? Can you tell me what it is? Are you showing me this so I can change my ways? Are you showing me this—I want to know what it is you want me to do! What am I—what's the demand, here?

Chaos: I am showing you this because this is what you could have, if you and the Thundermen – specifically, Fitzroy – just relax and let loose and enjoy yourselves. I'm not saying that you must perpetrate great evil, or go

on rampages. But to get what you seek... to reach your full potential... you have to be willing to let loose sometimes.

Argo: Alright. A little off topic, but I gotta know. You showed me that... that Fitzroy is... a king? Or somebody... pretty high up. That's the royal seal. What about Firbolg?

Chaos: The Firbolg, if all goes according to plan, is where he wants to be, too. He's happy. You all can reach your goals.

Argo: If we... do... what?

Chaos: Simply do what needs to be done.

Argo: [laughs nervously] Alright. Um... okay. I'm not—I'm gonna admit. I'm not sure what's goin' on. I'm—I gotta admit. I've got about a bajillion questions. But let me ask you this – why do you care? What does it matter to you whether I decide A in my life, or B in my life, or column C? What is it—what do you care? How does it impact you?

Chaos: You have influence on Fitzroy.

Argo: Ah. I see. No I don't. Okay. I tell you what – I'll certainly think about what you said. Am I gonna remember this when I go back?

Chaos: Do you want to?

Argo: Do I want to go back?

Chaos: Do you want to remember?

Argo: Yeah. I think I do.

Chaos: Then all you have to do is give the order.

Travis: And the scene begins again. The first mate is still waiting for you.

Argo: Uh... hand me my spy glass. Quickly, man! Hand me my spy glass!

Thomas: Very well, sir.

Travis: And hands you your spy glass.

Argo: Alright. Uh, hold off just for a moment. I'm gonna make sure that we're doin' this right. Um...

Clint: And then I turn the spy glass on the people on board the ship. And... I'm gonna make a perception check.

Travis: Okay.

Clint: That is a 13 plus... two. 15.

Travis: What are you trying to perceive exactly?

Clint: I want to see who's on the ship. I want to see who's primarily on this ship that they are—that these seditionists are.

Travis: It is the people that you have been sent to destroy. You were given sketches of their faces, as described by the survivors of their escape. And you can confirm with certainty that these are the rebels.

Clint: Do I recognize any of them?

Travis: No.

Argo: Okay, Thomas. Um...

Clint: Is their ship moving?

Travis: At this point, they are facing a 180 degree barrier of ships. Uh, they are attempting to turn, but it's moving slowly. They are going against the wind at this point.

Argo: Um... fire a shot off their bow. Over their bow. Give 'em a warning.

Travis: That is what you intend to say. But what you hear yourself say is... "Sink them." Lightning erupts from the mouths of your cannons. Electricity and shrapnel rip through the hull of the little ship, and the dream fades.

[somber music plays]

[calm music plays]

Travis: Firbolg, you wake up to the sound of nature. Not distant through your window as you have been forced to become accustomed to in your time at the school – the sounds are all around you. Your fingertips brush the bed of moss beneath you as you open your eyes and take in your surroundings.

You appear to be in the first chamber of a small series of caves. You can see four or five other natural chambers further back, and outside the mouth of the cave, there is a small waterfall and a flowing stream. Everywhere you look, there is life. Creatures ranging in size from beetles and butterflies, to a deer wander the area, completely at peace.

Morning sun streams between the leaves of a lush forest, striking the flora and fauna in dramatic and beautiful patterns. But all of that beauty and majesty is nothing compared to the thing that makes your heart swell and your mouth go dry. Everywhere you look, there are Firbolgs. And not just any Firbolgs – this is your clan.

You are as still as stone. Afraid that if you so much as move, the spell will be broken, and it will all go away. Your reverie is interrupted as three other Firbolgs exit your cave. The first is slightly shorter than you. She smiles at you warmly and briefly squeezes your hand. The other two are young. You'd guess maybe eight and six. They are far more subdued than any human child, but by Firbolg standards, they are wildly rambunctious.

The Firbolg holding your hand gives you a wry look and says...

Female Firbolg: I am taking the children gathering. Wish me luck.

Travis: One more squeeze of your hand, and they head off.

Something in the stream catches your eye. It takes you a moment to realize that it is your reflection. You look older. Your hair is longer, your face is lined. But more than anything, the difference is in your eyes. They are deeper, and much of the brightness that was once there is gone.

Justin: This seems good, Trav. I'm into it. I mean, I'm glad I'm out of the school, I guess. The Firbolg is pleased to finally be done with that part of his life. That chapter of his life. He's already begun forgetting the names of those he cared about at the school. Uh, just—just happy to be home. Happy to be back. Beyond happy. Happy is not the word for it. It's like, um... a part of him was missing, so sort of deep and permanent, that he feels like twice as many people as he does before. Like, um... a chunk of him has been restored that he didn't even realize was missing.

Travis: As you take into account everything that you are feeling as you are taking it all in, some memories come back to you. You're not sure where they—they're your memories, but they feel like they are being drawn from a different source. You remember that The Thunder King made this forest a protected sanctuary for your clan, in exchange for them agreeing to take you back. And they agreed to forgive your crimes, as long as you never betrayed the code again.

And at first, this was not hard. You fell back into your life with the clan, and you pushed down everything you learned about economics and accounting... and then your children came. You saw them struggle through dry seasons and harsh winters, and you made the difficult decision to repeat your greatest crime. You began, once more, to hoard food. Not a lot – just enough to survive. Just enough for your children to survive. And you made sure to share your surplus with anyone else going through tough times, as long as it didn't threaten your family's wellbeing.

All of this comes flooding back to you, painfully at times, as you see another Firbolg approaching you. And you recognize him. He was there on the night of your exile. He approaches, handing out a woven basket. He says...

Other Firbolg: I wanted to return this. And I wanted to thank you for the berries. My son was so hungry... where did you find the berries?

Firbolg: They are... [sighs]

Travis: And you feel a moment of panic here, worried that anything you say is going to reveal your crime. And before your eyes, the scene freezes. Birds hang in midair. Drops of water hover just above the surface of the stream. And behind you, from within the cave, you hear a voice say...

Voice: You could always just... lie.

Travis: You turn to see a nine-foot-tall person moving towards you. They are solidly built, broad-shouldered and wide-hipped. Their skin is opalescent, and their eyes are all white, and they move towards you with the unstoppable purpose of a landslide.

Chaos: Hello, Master Firbolg. It is a pleasure to finally meet you.

Firbolg: Who are you?

Chaos: My name is Chaos.

Firbolg: Mmm... well, that's easy to remember.

Chaos: I had hoped that Fitzroy would have told you about me. Still, nonetheless, a pleasure. If you'll forgive me, I... [sighs] I hate to start this way, but I have been dying to ask you a question.

After you were exiled for hoarding food... did you ever consider what you had done... to be wrong? You were, after all, correct. Food needs to be saved from time to time. Resources are not always available, and you tried to

explain that to the other Firbolgs, and they wouldn't listen. So I have to know... did you feel that what you had done was wrong?

Firbolg: [sighs] ... The code was... not for me to judge. It was not... my... choice to interpret.

Chaos: But your—you're thinking. That's thought. That's logic. Did you ever feel like you were wrong?

Firbolg: No.

Chaos: That's what I thought. Sometimes, we have to do the wrong thing for the right reasons. I completely agree. How do you like your life here? What your life could be?

Firbolg: [pause] I am... made whole. But... I think this shall not last.

Chaos: It could. This could be. This is not just a dream, Master Firbolg. This is a possible future for you. You and the other Thundermen could build this future for yourselves.

Firbolg: I... cannot change them. I cannot... fix... their hearts. Fix... the code. I... used to think... I could change. But... it runs too deep.

Chaos: Anything can be changed, Master Firbolg. Already, since you have been back in this clan, your generosity has been noticed. Your leadership has been noticed. You are different now than when you were exiled. You are well along the path of leading this clan. And once that happens, you could improve the lives of everyone around you with your ideas. Not just your family – everyone in this clan. Everyone in every Firbolg clan could be made better because of you changing things.

Firbolg: Mm... [laughs] This appeal is... not well targeted at my demographic.

Chaos: I see.

Firbolg: *Blod ettin er blod kong.* The blood of the runt is the blood of a king. I do not wish power. I do not wish control. I wish to save berries for those who have none.

Chaos: You misunderstand. I am not saying power for power's sake, or control for control's sake. I know that that is not what you desire. I am saying... you will have the opportunity to not only save berries, but save the Firbolg race. Without change, the world will change around them. And soon, they will find themselves without enough resources, without enough food to feed their young.

The Firbolg are not long for this world. This very land that you find yourself in was threatened, and it is only because of the power your friend, Fitzroy, gained, that it is protected and their homes were saved. Power can give us the opportunity to protect those we love.

Firbolg: [sighs] ... A very long time ago, we were... among giants. We were... mm. Ah, like others. Then we come to the woods. We build a life, and one would fall, another take the place, ah? Well... this – us, Firbolg – we are... this code. If I begin to change, to suit myself, then... what are we? What... am I?

Chaos: I had hoped, Master Firbolg, to show you what could be. And now, I fear I must also show you what might be.

Travis: And you see them wave their hand, and the scene before you – this tranquil forest clearing, full of your clan, full of your family – changes. The ground is scorched and scarred. The trees around you, most of them are gone, but those that remain are black husks. There are bones littering the ground as armies of demons and devils and fiends move throughout the grounds.

The cave behind you is full of Firbolg bones.

Chaos: This is what might be if there isn't... if you and the other Thundermen don't do what needs to be done. You will lose the war. You will lose your home. And you will lose your clan.

Firbolg: This... ah... [pause] [quietly] I do not wish to see this. I am done seeing this, ah? I would ask if this is... illusion, that this is trick, please... I do not wish to see it.

Chaos: It is not an illusion. It is not a trick. It is a possibility. But, we can return to brighter futures.

Travis: And they wave their hand again, and the tranquil scene comes back once more. The Firbolg who is returning your basket and asking you questions still stands before you. You can just see your family in the distance, heading off to gather.

Chaos: So... I hope you understand that... there is a lot at stake here. And I'm not telling you anything you don't already know. You, Fitzroy, Argo... you need to be willing to do what needs to be done. Don't get caught up in code... right... wrong. Follow your gut. Follow your heart. How are you going to answer this Firbolg's questions about where these berries come from? Honestly, and lose everything you've built? Or... will you lie?

Travis: The scene resumes, and chaos fades. And you see this other Firbolg, still looking at you, waiting for an answer.

Firbolg: I... [pause] ... saved them. Through the year, I... saved them, so that we will not starve.

Travis: ... is what you mean to say. But what you hear yourself say, beyond your control, is, "I found a small bush north of the uneven path." And he nods and walks away. And as you fade from the dream, you realize that, as future you lied, you felt no discomfort. Not even a hint. And you hear a whispered voice say... "Practice makes perfect."

And the dream is gone.

[music plays]

[advertisements play]

[eerie music plays]

Travis: Fitzroy, your half trance ends, and your surroundings come into focus. You're looking up at the canopy of your four-post bed, admiring the golden bed curtains. They are interesting in two distinct ways. First, you're pretty sure that there is actual gold woven into the material. And second, when you began your night of rest, you were not in a four-post canopy bed.

You raise your head from the most comfortable pillow you have ever known, and survey your unfamiliar surroundings.

Griffin: Is my sleep number correct on this mystery bed?

Travis: It's dead on. Dead on correct.

Griffin: Oh my god! And that num—

Travis: It is the most comfortable bed ever.

Griffin: That number is, of course – and this is a test, to see if it really is.

Travis: 69.

Griffin: Yes, thank you very much. Nice nice nice.

Travis: Okay. The room you find yourself in is luscious. You would guess that any single piece of furniture is worth more money than you have ever had added altogether. You do not recognize any of it, but you still feel completely at home here. Every decorating and furnishing choice is the one you would make, given the options and the means to do so.

Griffin: Have I been kidnapped, or is this the most delicious dream? I can't—using the word delicious and luscious to describe things that aren't, like, chocolate cake makes me hugely uncomfortable.

Travis: Well, some things can be like, the chocolate cake of couches. Y'know? The chocolate cake of curtains.

Griffin: Okay, fine. Alright, I'll give that to you.

Travis: Uh, it's unclear to you. I mean, it's definitely not a room you've been in before, as far as you know. But like, you're not bound in any way. There's nothing threatening around. And it feels real.

Griffin: Okay... let me ask this – because of the weird way I sleep, I feel like my dreams have a particular flavor that we've talked about before. Am I getting that flavor off this experience right now?

Travis: This is a different flavor than that.

Griffin: Whoa, damn. Okay.

Travis: Yeah.

Griffin: Um... I guess I call out?

Fitzroy: Hello? Um... hello? Is anyone there? Um... thanks for... the dope bed? I'm afraid I don't remember where I am or how I got here... hello?

Travis: Uh, nobody answers.

Griffin: I yell louder.

Fitzroy: Hellooo? Can you—hello? Is there a wealthy sort of bedtime benefactor under the thrall of my voice?

Travis: And the door slowly opens, and an attendant enters and says...

Attendant: My liege, is there something you need? Breakfast, or a drink, perhaps?

Fitzroy: I mean, I have a lot of questions about sort of that sentence that you just said. But I would like to kind of ride this out for a little bit before I kind of pop the proverbial bubble. So yes, I demand you bring me... eggy toast, buttered exactly the way I like it.

Attendant: Of course.

Fitzroy: And with the sweetest grapefruits, with a brûlée top on—and you know daddy’s gonna get crepes.

Attendant: Of course.

Fitzroy: And you know this. So bring me all of those, and if it’s not brûléed to my specifications or buttered on the specific side that I like, heads *will* roll.

Attendant: Of course. Your standard breakfast, sire.

Travis: And he departs.

Fitzroy: I mean, again, like, this is bad. Clearly what has happened here is not like—it’s not real, or good, or whatever. But... I mean, I’m—I’m just gonna kind of see how it goes for a bit, ‘cause it’s pretty... tight as all hell, if I’m being honest.

Travis: Uh, do a perception check for me.

Griffin: I don’t want to!

Travis: Okay.

Griffin: I don’t—I don’t want to know... why this is wrong! I just want to be here. If this is the last scene that Fitzroy is ever in, and he sort of retires to this sort of fragment of his mind, and doesn’t participate in the rest of the adventure, that is okay by me.

Travis: Then you should take it all in, and maybe look around the room.

Griffin: Alright, fine. I rolled a 12 plus, uhh... rrratatata... three. 15.

Travis: There is a letter sitting on what you assume to be your desk. Uh, when you pick it up, it reads, "Fitz, my darling. Just another reminder that my skeletal armies are yours to command, just as soon as you accept my proposal. A girl doesn't like to be kept waiting. Yours, The Lich Queen, R.M."

Fitzroy: Wonder who that could beee. JK, it's Rainer. Um, hey, this is gettin' pretty weird.

Griffin: I write back. I get out a pen, like a quill and paper, and I start to write like...

Fitzroy: Uh, "Dearest Rainer, this is a weird dream. And this—this vibe between us, um, I was not sort of... keyed into. Um, and—"

Griffin: But then I realize like, I'm writing a dream letter. I don't know how dream postal delivery works, and I give up on the whole sort of enterprise.

Can I open a window?

Travis: Of course.

Griffin: What the fuck's outside?

Travis: A beautiful view. A luscious garden. You are in a—

Griffin: Stop calling things—stop calling things luscious!

Travis: They're luscious! You are in a tower of a castle, and uh, y'know, the surrounding... what about opulent? Does opulent work? An opulent garden?

Griffin: Yeah, I think it—well, not in the terms of a garden, specifically. Like, the castle itself?

Travis: A verdant garden?

Griffin: Thank you, yes. Unpack those fuckin' adjectives, Travvy.

Travis: Um, you also, as you are searching the room, you find a closet full of cloaks. And they are the finest cloaks you have ever seen. Any one of them could be the cover cloak of an issue of Boy Cloaks magazine.

Griffin: Let me ask you, are these big boy cloaks? I forgot to address this in the final ep—in the last episode we just recorded. I forgot that I did grow eight inches, so I need some six foot four boy cloaks.

Travis: They are perfectly tailored, and they fit you. And while you are going through the closet, the mirror on the back of the closet door catches your attention. And you see yourself for the first time, and your body is lean, well-defined muscle, and you are older. Maybe ten, or 15 years, and you look like you have been through the fires of hell, and come through like forged steel.

Griffin: Fuck yeah. How the—what am I—

Travis: Your bare chest is covered—

Griffin: My bare chest? Fuck yeah!

Travis: Your bare chest is covered in brands, similar to the one that saved your life in the centaur camp, and a quick count shows you 15. And you find yourself wondering why so many people would want to curse you. But that's not the most noticeable difference.

At first, you think your arms are covered with tattoos of crackling lightning. But on closer inspection, you see that it is actual lightning flickering just below your skin, just waiting to be released, and you are absolutely seething with power.

Griffin: Oh boy. Um... is that—is this like anything I have ever seen with my sort of like, rage powers before? I don't think so, right?

Travis: No, this is—this is something you, and you're willing to bet, most people have never seen.

Griffin: Okay, well, this is just a dream, so... I wanna just sort of spin the wheels on it to just like, turn towards my bed and just like, blast it with a spell?

Travis: Before you can even finish the thought, a bolt of the most powerful blue lightning you've ever seen shoots forth from your hand, and the bed is obliterated.

Fitzroy: Bring me another bed!

Travis: There's a knock on the door, and a different voice this time says...

Voice: Uh, my liege.

Fitzroy: Yes, Gravel Deepvoice? Sir Deepvoice? What is it?

Gravel Deepvoice: We've taken one of the insurgency strongholds, sire. We have one of their leaders captive, and he awaits your judgment in the throne room.

Fitzroy: I will fly over there with my flying powers, because anything is possible when you use your imagination.

Travis: You do attempt to fly, but it does not happen.

Griffin: Well this is a shit dream! This dream has sort of, uh... there's no consistency to the rules of this dream. Alright, fine. I walk like a fuckin' idiot.

Travis: Are you going to dress?

Griffin: No. I want everyone to see my fuckin' incredible pecs and brands and lightning skin.

Travis: You enter the throne room, naked from the waist up. And as you enter, you hear a herald's voice ring out.

Voice: His Royal Highness, The Thunder King and Lightning Lord, Fitzroy Maplecourt, The Storm Bringer!

Travis: And your guards and attendants bow as you enter, and your throne awaits.

Fitzroy: How's it goin'? Hey. Hey, how's it goin'? How's your mother? How's it goin'? Hey, could you say that thing again that you just said? It was the single coolest sort of run-on sentence I've ever heard in my life. Just one more time?

Voice: [clears throat] His Royal Highness, The Thunder King and Lightning Lord.

Fitzroy: Love it. Redundant.

Voice: Fitzroy Maplecourt, The Storm Bringer!

Fitzroy: Ooh, golly neds, that's good stuff. Okay, thanks.

Travis: As you settle into your throne, you see before you a prisoner. His feet and hands are bound and chained to an iron ring in the ground. His shackles hold him in a kneeling position before you. A guard who, from his uniform, you'd guess is a higher rank than the rest reads his crimes.

Guard: The prisoner before you spread seditious material, undermining The Storm Bringer's restoration efforts. He plotted with the rebels to assassinate the king with curses and poisons on multiple occasions, and above all else, this monster led the raid on the village of Hunter's Rest where scores of the king's guard and their families were killed.

Travis: And the prisoner shouts...

Prisoner: Only after those same guards slaughtered the towns—

Travis: And the guard interrupts.

Guard: Rebels all. Storm Bringer, nothing is left except the enacting of your justice.

Travis: And he bows before you, and the scene freezes. And you hear from behind you...

Voice: Time to bring the thunder, wouldn't you say?

Travis: And Chaos steps up to your right.

Fitzroy: Hiii Chaoos.

Chaos: Hello again, Fitzroy.

Travis: And Chaos looks different from the last time you saw them. Their eyes and skin are the same, but their features are more angular. They move to circle the prisoner like a prowling jungle cat. Their movements are electrifying, and everything about their body broadcasts threat.

Griffin: Uh, towards me?

Travis: Nope, towards the prisoner.

Griffin: Oh, okay.

Fitzroy: Um, say, Chaos. What's goin' on here? Is this a dream, or a sort of flash forward, or a premonition, or a... can you fill me in?

Chaos: It is those things, yes. This is what the future—

Fitzroy: That was—those were different things. Don't be a—don't be a ding-dong about it.

Chaos: Well, this is a dream about what the future could be.

Fitzroy: Cool.

Chaos: If you play your cards right.

Fitzroy: Oh, this is the good ending?

Chaos: This is the right ending for you.

Fitzroy: Oh. I mean, I look amazing. And I have all of these sort of, um, ostentatious qualifiers and honorifics, most of which involving sort of, um, thunder and storms and stuff like that. I'm very into that. Uh, apparently been cursed a few dozen times. Not great. Um... and... I guess I'm—am I gonna have to execute this... this poor gentleman?

Chaos: This murderer?

Fitzroy: I mean... yeah, but that's—y'know, two wrongs don't necessarily make a right. I'm not necessarily in support of corporal punishment.

Chaos: You are the king of the majority of Nua, at this point.

Fitzroy: Ooh! God, that feels good.

Chaos: You have been unifying her lands underneath your banner. And this monster seeks to undo that, and re-enter the civil war that ravaged this world.

Fitzroy: Did I miss this civil war, or...

Chaos: You won this civil war.

Fitzroy: Alright... who were the combatants?

Chaos: The rebels of Nua, the ones who refused to unify. Refused to honor your power. But the world is peaceful, now. War has ended. The restoration has begun. It is better now than it ever has been, unifying under one banner. Yours.

Fitzroy: That's—I mean, you know that's great stuff. And you know that I'm absolutely, badababababa, lovin' it. But Chaos, I gotta say, it does seem a little uncharacteristic for you to be in support of unity and peace and cohesion. Wouldn't you say?

Chaos: I don't see why. I oppose order. There can be chaos in peace. There can be chaos in unity. It's the structure, the order, the... [sighs] Restriction that I don't care for.

Fitzroy: I gotta say, Chaos, for an agent of, well, literal chaos, who doesn't care much for restriction... you sure seem to be in support of lots of folks telling me what to do with my power. [laughs] And my time, and energy and everything.

Chaos: Oh, not at all! At this point, Fitzroy, you are in charge. No one tells The Storm Bringer what to do.

Fitzroy: Okay.

Chaos: Right now, the bed you destroyed on a whim is being replaced without word or command. When you return to your chambers, a new four-poster bed with woven gold bed curtains will be there. Because you wanted to. No one stops you from doing anything. This is you, unrestricted. This is Fitzroy Maplecourt, unrestrained, and it can all be yours.

Fitzroy: Um... [pause] Out of curiosity... what has happened to my roommates?

Chaos: Argonaut Keene has become a force on the seas. He is the admiral of your navy. He is a privateer underneath your banner, stopping rebels and protecting trade routes.

You have given orders to create a sanctuary for the Firbolg's clan, and they welcomed Master Firbolg back on your orders. He has a family now. He is a member of his clan again.

It is everything both of them have wanted, because your power has allowed it.

Fitzroy: Yeah, I mean, that's all soundin' pretty good... um... I guess I have another question, if you don't mind, as long as we're just kind of shootin' the S. Y'know what I mean?

Chaos: Of course.

Fitzroy: It kind of feels like you're trying to ride two horses with one ass, if I'm being honest. If I may be a bit critical. Because, um... y'know Gray? The demon king?

Chaos: Yes.

Fitzroy: Seems like he wants to, uh, y'know, kill me. Slash everyone. And keep this kind of uh... remarkable, unified future from coming to be. And, according to him, he's got lots of sort of cool chaos powers, so... what's the score that—

Chaos: Gray... Gray is shortsighted. Gray thinks only of war. He asked for war, and that's what he will get. He doesn't see the cycle. The cycle of war and peace, and chaos and order. The ebb and flow. He doesn't see how it all moves. He doesn't see... the patterns in the chaos the way that I do. I need that war to bring you to your full potential. With my help, you will defeat Gray. You just need to let loose, Fitzroy. You need to let *me* loose.

Fitzroy: I mean, what's that entail, Chaos?

Chaos: Just... act. Act without restriction. Stop worrying about right and wrong and just do what needs to be done. You've already shown that you have an aptitude towards it. Your actions at the centaur camp made me so proud! You took what you wanted and you did what needed to be done! Continue on that path. Do what needs to be done. Simply act, and you will grow more and more powerful, and together, we will begin the cycle anew.

Fitzroy: [pause] I'll think about it.

Chaos: [sighs] Very well.

Fitzroy: But it's not a no!

Chaos: I see. Very well.

Fitzroy: I mean, you're givin' me vibes of just like, sort of, um... just sort of like, arch nemesis. I don't know to who? Um, and those vibes, y'know, like, not my particular... y'know, uh... not my particular bag, baby. But um... I mean, I—there's certain things that you are saying that make a lot of sense. So... I—I'll sleep on it. Sadly, on what will almost certainly be a disappointing bed, after this incredible future dream bed.

Chaos: Well, that leaves us with but one question, Fitzroy.

Fitzroy: Mm?

Chaos: What are you going to do with him?

Travis: And the scene remains frozen, but now, the prisoner unfreezes, with Chaos standing to his right. And he registers them, and is clearly shocked and terrified, and stares at you, waiting.

[pause]

Fitzroy: Oh, do you want me to like, blow him up with lightning magic? What's the—

Chaos: Yes. [laughs] Of course! Do what needs to be done.

Fitzroy: And I can do whatever I want?

Chaos: You are The Storm Bringer.

Fitzroy: Um... hm. This is tough.

Griffin: I walk up to him... and I... take one of his hands. And I just kind of... slap him on the back of the hand, and go...

Fitzroy: No! No! Bad! Don't do it again! Promise?

Prisoner: Uh... y-yes?

Fitzroy: No more assassinating. Okay?

Travis: And you hear Chaos sigh and say...

Chaos: You're no fun.

Fitzroy: I'm not done yet! 'Cause we're gonna have a cool party here, and you're not allowed to come. And there's gonna be—we're gonna have a big, long sandwich, and party cupcakes, and stuff like that. But naughty boys don't get to be a part of that. So don't do it again, okay?

Prisoner: O-okay?

Fitzroy: I'm sorry about hitting your hand.

Travis: And Chaos snaps their fingers, and you see the prisoner electrocute from the inside out.

Fitzroy: I didn't—well, okay.

Travis: They disappear, and the scene replays. And everyone in the room sees what you have done to the prisoner, and applauds. And the dream fades.

[eerie music plays]

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