

The Adventure Zone: Graduation – Ep. 23, Between a Rock and a Hell Place

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Gary: Heyyy, it's me, Gary! Previously, on The Adventure Zone: Graduation...

[theme music plays]

Gary: The Thundermen were called before a tribunal of The Unbroken Chain. It, originally, was to determine their worthiness as potential members. But very quickly, it turned into a trial for The Commodore. The Commodore, by the way, is Argo's mortal enemy, and also the person Argo blames for his mother's death.

The Thundermen challenged him, and he quickly melted down, and threatened to attack the whole Unbroken Chain before Fitzroy froze him. At which point, he muttered some kind of command word, and that's when Gray the demon prince appeared.

[theme music plays]

Travis: So, first, when—here at the start, I want to answer a question that ended the last episode. And Griffin, you asked... what door did Gray step through? And the answer is not the door to the cavern that you are in; but rather, a door that seemed to be ripped open in the fabric of space.

Griffin: I figured it was one of them space doors.

Travis: Yes. Now, he stepped through, and now he is here. Uh, and it seemed to have closed behind him, but it is very reminiscent of the tear that the xorn fell through.

Griffin: Oh! Okay. Man, haven't thought about that xorn in a grip.

[eerie music plays]

Travis: And Gray says...

Gray: This is... frustrating, if I'm being honest. If I'm being honest, this has put me in a real pickle, gentlemen. [smacks lips and sighs] I mean, honestly, I'm at a loss here. Because on the one hand... [sighs] The Commodore revealing that we are in league with each other is a whole thing that's gonna make... y'know, what's the point of having a mole when everyone's like, "That's the mole." Right?

But at the same time... I do need—I do need him. For like, the whole war thing.

Fitzroy: Well I mean, you can't blame us because you picked a crappy mole. Like, it's not our fault that your mole stinks. Y'know?

Argo: And it's never a good idea to pick at a mole, really. And truly.

Gray: Gross. I mean, you guys were the ones who pressed the issue. Come on. Take a little—

Fitzroy: We *barely* pressed—it took *nothing* for this dude to fall over. It was—it was—Gray, it was literally nothing. You picked a bad mole.

Gray: You could've just been cool, y'know what I mean? Like... ugh. So what do I do, right? I can't kill you. [sighs]

Argo: Kill him? I mean, I'm just sayin'.

Fitzroy: Or us. I'm confu—yeah.

Gray: Well no, I need him. Right? He's like, a good, like, naval officer, and I'm planning a war. Come on, I can't—

Fitzroy: Oh, wait a minute!

Argo: Hadn't even thought of that.

Fitzroy: There's gonna be water fighting too, in our war?!

Gray: Eh... probably.

Fitzroy: Guys, did you know—did you know there was gonna be wa—I don't know anything about water fighting!

Argo: I had hoped. I mean, because of my naval background. Y'know, I was thinking... oh, I hope there's a water battle! Hope there's a water battle! Y'know.

Fitzroy: Firbolg, can you turn into like, an orca whale?

Argo: [gasps]

Fitzroy: I feel like my wheels are spinning now.

Firbolg: I have not seen this. I must see the animal. Here is a list of animals I have seen.

Fitzroy: Let's see. Ooh, short. Weirdly short list.

Firbolg: Uhh...

Argo: There's no aardvarks on here.

Firbolg: Uhh... dog. Did I do dog? I've seen cat. I have seen a Gary. Is not animal.

Fitzroy: He's party animal.

Gray: Can we pick this back up in—

Fitzroy: Sorry, Gray. Yes. Sorry, sorry.

Gray: Sorry. Few minutes? This is also tricky—

Firbolg: Does anyone have a picture of the orca whale?

Fitzroy: I'll draw you a very convincing one. Gray, we are so sorry. Go ahead.

Gray: It's just that like, also now... [sighs] The Unbroken Chain... like, knows. That like, conclusively, I—it's a thing...

Argo: Wait, you know about The Unbroken Chain? Oh, I guess The Commodore told you.

Gray: I have a mole, Ar—yes.

Fitzroy: The Commodore sent—yeah.

Gray: Keep up, Argo. And now, like...

Argo: Right, sorry.

Gray: I have... ugh. He was gonna do a whole thing where he like, called you guys liars, and like, convinced them not to help you, and you fuckin' blew that up...

Fitzroy: Language.

Gray: [sighs] Sorry. I'm just a little PO'ed right now. Yes.

Argo: Sure. I have a suggestion. Why don't you... quit? Y'know, like, surrender to us? And...

Gray: Well...

Argo: Give up your—

Gray: You know that's not... that's not gonna—that's nothing. That's nothing. Why don't you quit, huh? How about that?

Argo: Well, yeah, I mean, you're the one who's got the problem. Why should I quit?

Justin: Who is—so—sorry. Who's hearing this conversation?

Travis: Uh, well, you would imagine everyone. Uh, but you have not checked in on the other members.

Griffin: I mean, what is their reaction to the—I don't know that anybody else in this room knows who this... this being is.

Justin: But The Commodore does. Right?

Travis: Yes.

Justin: Okay.

Travis: Uh, everyone is fairly, like, I would say, taken aback, but also like, taking it in. Right? They have been around powerful despites before. They have dealt with threats before. They are not new to, uh, y'know, body language-wise, like, picking up a threat has just entered the room. They see the way that you three are interacting. The way that you have reacted. They're just coming off of like, The Commodore having some kind of big explosion and threatening them, so... everyone is, uh, I would say, coiled like a spring.

Griffin: `Kay.

Firbolg: I... have a suggestion. Make them forget.

Gray: Hm.

Firbolg: There is a way. The Unbroken Chain said that if we failed this test, then... we would be... um. Our memories of them would be erased. So, someone... has the ability to do this.

Fitzroy: I—I can't help but disagree with my friend here. And maybe we should have a sidebar conversation before we start offering up our memories to the demon prince.

Firbolg: Not ours.

Argo: Ohh.

Firbolg: We know the situation.

Argo: Ohhh.

Firbolg: The memories of the others. Things will go back to how they were before.

Fitzroy: I... would love it if they would be on our team in vanquishing the demon prince.

Firbolg: This will not... happen. And if I... understand... this struggle becoming public... is not what we agreed to with Gray. He could smash us now, if he wishes.

Gray: Oh yeah. Just to chime in, that is absolutely true. Chaos would be pissed. But I could. I could absolutely do that.

Argo: Hm.

Travis: Was Gray kind of British before?

Griffin: No one... is quite sure.

Travis: Okay.

Griffin: I think Gray was British in the way that Fitzroy is British, in that I've never done a British accent for him. I've just been kind of proper.

Travis: [laughs] 'Ello, 'ello! It's me, Gray the demon prince!

Clint: [laughs]

Travis: What's all this then? Apples and pears!

Fitzroy: Uh... Gray, listen. You challenged us to a war. Part of war—

Gray: Yes, I did. Yes.

Fitzroy: Part of war is organizing your forces. You're trying to do that. We're trying to do that. Right now, you are interfering in our war effort. And you can do that, in the same way that you could squash us like a bug right now. But you want a great war? And if you step in on our war efforts, including our attempts at subterfuge... then you're sullyng that. It will not be a true war. It will be orchestrated.

Argo: You did give us six months, right?

Fitzroy: Yeah!

Gray: That is an excellent point. And now, I'm British again.

Clint: [laughs]

Gray: You know, here's what I'm thinking. [pause] I... hm. I will... leave you... your troops. But... yes. I'm just gonna slow you down a bit. Now, before I act, I would like to say... up 'til now, it's been contentious between us. I recognize that. And y'know what? I will accept partial responsibility for this.

Fitzroy?

Fitzroy: Mm?

Gray: I'd like you to know... I am open... to accepting you... to team Gray.

Fitzroy: [sputters] Uhh...

Gray: I know! This was—listen. Things got heated. Things have been bad between us. But... before all this broke bad, before the coward decided to ruin everything... I was grooming you. Right? I was going—I was bringing you on... y'know, slowly, to team Gray. Warming you up. I was gonna have you be, y'know, like, one of mine. And then... Higglemas blew that to shit.

But... if you could see your way to it... y'know, I've been there for you. Up 'til now, I've helped you out. I've, y'know, contributed, and... I would still accept you onto my team.

Fitzroy: I... am already the member... of a team. And this team is awaiting... escort status confirmation from the treasury department. So, until we hear back from the secretary of state, um... I will have to decline. Thunderman rolls hard, rolls to—guys, hold on. Help me think of something cool to say, like, “Thundermen never say die!” Or something cool to say.

Argo: Um...

Firbolg: I have it. You'll be hearing from our legal team!

Fitzroy: That's good.

Argo: [inhales] Chills the blood, doesn't it?

Gray: Well. Fitzroy, I would caution you not to deny me lightly. You've gotten used to certain comforts, and I could take that away. Your beloved crepe machine in the cafeteria? I gave that, and I could take it away.

Griffin: [bursts into laughter]

Argo: [laughs]

Fitzroy: Yeah. Okay. Yes, that would be, um... it would be the worst thing that's ever happened to me in my entire life. So thank you for sparing me that punishment.

I don't think you know... what Chaos has made *me* capable of, Gray.

Gray: Ooh! Now that... that was a chilling—oooooh! Ooh! I got goose pimples! That gave me a bit of a buzz, a bit of a tingle!

Fitzroy: ... Okay. I'm glad I could do that for you? It wasn't a threat. It was merely an observation. Our power comes from the same source, Gray. You know nothing of what I'm capable of.

Gray: Now, I just want to make sure that, uh... Unbroken Chain, everyone in the back heard that, right? That one of your new members, if I'm not mistaken... his power comes from Chaos. So just let that simmer for a moment, now that we've reached that point in the conversation. Thank you so much for that, Fitzroy.

So now, I'm going to take The Commodore and go. Um, you all... take some time... because you will have... plenty of it!

Travis: And he begins stepping backwards, 'til he is standing next to The Commodore.

Justin: I am going to attack The Commodore with Ice Knife.

Clint: [chuckles]

Travis: I'm going to say... I'm trying to think of how to translate this to the fact that Gray is standing right next to him. Well, so, here's what I'll say. Do a sleight of hand check first, to see if you can cast it without Gray noticing.

Justin: Okay. Hell yeah! 18 plus two, 20!

Travis: Okay, yes. You can cast it without him noticing. So now, roll against The Commodore's AC, or whatever Ice Knife... the check is.

Justin: I'm gonna cast it as a third level spell.

Travis: Ooh!

Justin: 17 plus... ha! Plus seven.

Travis: Well, I mean, that definitely—that hits. For sure.

Justin: Uh, and then, that is a... let me just use the roller here, rather than try to pick around for a d10, 'cause who knows, right?

Griffin: Yeah.

Justin: Who even knows what that looks like. Uh, that is a, uh... six? And you have to make a dexterity... saving throw.

Travis: Well, he is currently frozen, so that's gonna be disadvantage for sure.

Justin: Wait. On the hit that the target takes 1d10 piercing damage. So that's a six. The shard then explodes. The target and each creature within five feet of it must succeed on a dexterity saving throw, or take 2d6 cold damage.

Travis: Okay, yeah. The Commodore fails for sure. But Gray rolled an 18, so I'm going to say that that... he succeeds.

Justin: Okay, so the damage is... seven from that. Um, and I think that... [mumbles] The cold damage increases by 1d6 for each level. So I need to roll two more d6.

Griffin: Whoa. Jesus Christ. Are we trying to kill The Commodore?

Justin: I—what the fuck do we have to lose? Honestly. We all know where we stand here. It's a cool at—oh my god, 11. That's fantastic. Fantastic. Okay, so that's uh... 18 points of damage. I cast an Ice Knife when no one's looking, and I chuck into The Commodore's... well, you tell me, depending on how many hit points he has. [laughs] Either it went into his butt, or into his eyeball.

Travis: I'm gonna say 18 points of damage, that's uh, fairly significant. I'm gonna say it uh, pierces—

Justin: And that is for the cold damage. That's just the cold damage. He also took... what was it? What did I say? Seven...

Travis: Six.

Justin: Six piercing damage.

Clint: [laughing]

Travis: 24 damage total. Uh, and I'm gonna say—

Justin: Fuck that guy.

Travis: Yeah. I'm gonna say that that is a uh... that cold damage, especially, I'm gonna give that kind of a um... a uh, like, frostbite kind of feel. Y'know, internally. It's gonna hit him in his... let's say left shoulder. And it's going to do some lasting damage. Y'know, he's still frozen, but maybe like a... "Mmm!" [laughs] Kind of escapes, and a single tear rolls down his face.

But Gray is significantly pissed about this.

Gray: Well. I was hoping it wouldn't get nasty, but here we are.

Travis: And Firbolg, I'm going to need you to make a fairly high dex save for me.

Justin: Okay. Wish you wouldn't tell me how high it needs to be. I feel like it throws off my dice trajectory.

Travis: I like to prepare you.

Justin: Uh, 16 plus... uhh, two. 18.

Travis: And you... as well as... uhh... Mosh, Ramos, and Crabtree... um... in the blink of an eye, uh, four onyx daggers fly across the room, and hit you all in the shoulder. And you're going to take six points of damage as well. And you feel a... buzz? A tingle? And then a numbness in your, uh, left arm.

Justin: Mm.

Travis: And you are poisoned.

Griffin: Heyyy...

Travis: And so, until that gets taken care of, your left arm is going to be, um... useless to you. And uh, that kind of numbness, you can feel it very slowly creeping, uh, further and further into your body.

Firbolg: You have all seen this! Let there be no doubt about what we face! If you had doubts before when we entered, let them be gone now! This is... war.

Gray: Ah. So, have some time to yourselves. Talk to them about it. Maybe see to those wounds? Eugh! And uh, yes. So, we'll check back in in a little while! Bye!

Travis: And he tears another rip in the fabric of space and time.

Griffin: Can we see anything? I'm very—I wanna know about this rip. So if I could bullet time it, for like, a second here, before he closes the rip... do we see through this rip?

Travis: Roll a perception check for me.

Griffin: It's not gonna be good. Actually, I've... uhh... three points in perception. Uh...

Clint: 14 plus two. 16.

Griffin: Uh, 13 plus three. 16. Weird.

Travis: Yeah. So uh, both of you are able to see beyond this, uh... what in, y'know, a sliver of space large enough for him and The Commodore to pass through, uh... a window into what you would describe as a nightmare.

Griffin: [laughs]

Travis: Um, that it is the angles are all wrong. The color palette hurts your head to look at. It is difficult to perceive.

Griffin: Does it look like our plane of existence?

Travis: Not at all.

Griffin: Fantastic. Okay.

Travis: Um, and as he and The Commodore disappear through the—

Clint: Argo throws a spidey tracer through the rift!

Travis: That is nothing.

Clint: Oh, okay.

Travis: The...

Griffin: [laughs] I thought that was an actual magic item that you had acquired at some point.

Travis: No, it's a thing Spider Man has, Griffin.

Griffin: Oh, I see, I see, I see.

Travis: It's a thing Spider Man does. And the tear in space closes behind Gray. But that's not all that closes. You see, every time you have gone to The Unbroken Chain headquarters, you have entered the blacksmith's. They've turned off the fire. You've crossed through the forge, and passed through a shimmering veil to enter the cavern. Except now, the shimmering veil is gone, and all that's left is a blank rock wall.

Griffin: So are we trapped?

Travis: Yes.

Griffin: Is everyone still in here with us?

Travis: Yep. And just a reminder, not only was the Firbolg hit, but so was Mosh, Ramos, and Crabtree.

Clint: Um... Argo does a, um, medicine check on the Firbolg.

Travis: Okay.

Clint: Is that a...

Travis: You gotta roll.

Clint: Okay.

Travis: Were you about to say, "Is that thing?"

Justin: [laughs]

Griffin: I mean, it is a thing.

Clint: 17 minus one. 16.

Travis: Um, so, you are able to stop the bleeding with that. And remove the onyx dagger without too much blood loss. But the poison is still an ongoing concern.

Clint: I give him the potion of poison resistance.

Travis: Well... it's a little too late for that.

Justin: [laughs]

Travis: Resistance, you need *before* the poisoning. Cure, you need after.

Clint: Okay...

Justin: But if anybody else tries to poison me, fuck them!

Travis: Yeah!

Griffin: No way, pal.

Justin: No way.

Fitzroy: Okay, so, um... who's in charge of... getting the door—let's start delegating. 'Cause we're boned. Can anyone get the door back open from this side, or are we buried in a sort of... is it a sepulchral sort of situation?

Travis: Uh, Jackle steps over and is looking at the wall with you, and says...

Jackle: [sighs] Unfortunately, the doorway was built by a member that is not here... with us currently, and has not attended a meeting in many, many years. Higglemas connected that, and no one here has the knowledge of how to reconnect the passage.

Fitzroy: I could take a swing at it.

Jackle: You know about transdimensional travel?

Fitzroy: No, but sometimes when I cast spells, funny stuff happens. So maybe we'll get very, very lucky.

Jackle: Sure.

Fitzroy: No, let's not waste time. Um...

Jackle: Yeah, you'd probably explode something and kill everybody.

Fitzroy: Yeah. It's not a good idea to do in a very enclosed space.

Argo: Marie, can you do something to help the poisoned party members?

Marie: Uh... I—I will attempt to slow it. But without my supplies, without potions, I can't just... cure poison. Let me see what I can do.

Travis: And uh... oh, that's a very good roll. Um, so, she is able to slow, uh, the poison, and she is able to get you, Firbolg, back on your feet. But it takes a lot of her magic just to get you to a point where your head is not swimming anymore, and uh, you are able to move steadily.

The other—she moves to work on Mosh and Ramos and Crabtree. You were just the first person she came to.

Fitzroy: Master Firbolg, I must say, of all of us that I expected to pop off, you were literally last on the list. I am surprised, but delighted by your... your chutzpah.

Firbolg: I... tired of the talking.

Argo: [laughs] You're a Firbolg of action.

Firbolg: This was calculated. There were a lot of powerful people in that room. And I thought it was a good time to do some brand building!

Clint: [laughing]

Fitzroy: Uh, I think you accomplished that goal swimmingly. Uh, is the—is the space cat...

Firbolg: Swimming. I won't be able to do this anymore. It's only just occurred to me.

Fitzroy: Well, I mean, we'll get ya—

Firbolg: With only one arm...

Fitzroy: We'll get you patched up.

Firbolg: I will not swim again.

Argo: Hey, now, come on. What kind of talk—

Firbolg: Cool waters shall not grace my skin! I am landborne!

Fitzroy: Um...

Clint: [laughing]

Griffin: Is the rift—the space cat? The see-through cat?

Travis: The dimensionally traveling cat? Yes.

Griffin: It's still here?

Travis: The dimensionally traveling kitty cat is still there.

Clint: I named him Schrodinger.

Travis: Did you?

Griffin: That's a cute name.

Clint: Yeah. I thought that was kind of cute.

Fitzroy: Um... is there anything you... hey. Sweet? Sweet sweet?

Schrodinger: Mrow?

Fitzroy: Um... I'm good to animals. I want you to meet my spectral... crab. His name is Snippers.

Snippers: [crab noises]

Schrodinger: Mrow?

Fitzroy: Snippers, will you vouch—

Snippers: [crab noises]

Schrodinger: Mrow!

Clint: Travis' greatest vocal challenge!

Snippers: [crab noises]

Schrodinger: Mrow mrow, mrow mrow mrow mrow!

Snippers: [crab noises]

Fitzroy: So... so, Snippers—

Travis: They start kissing.

Fitzroy: Whoa!

Travis: No! No. Nooo.

Fitzroy: Um... Snippers, if you could just tell the cat, like... discern if the cat can... jump—use his dimension-leaping magic to get us all out of this room. I'm saying this out loud, and it sounds pretty silly, actually.

Travis: And y'know, it's difficult to tell on a crab's face, but the impression you get is, "I'll try..." [laughs] "Ugh... ooh. Alright, man..."

Griffin: [laughs] Pulls out a cigarette. Takes his coat off.

Travis: "Alright, let's see. Ugh, there's a lot of language barriers here, my man! I gotta translate from human to crab to kitty and back. If only there was someone here who could talk to animals!"

Fitzroy: Well... we're letting him rest.

Argo: I'll take a shot at it. Meow meow meow... meow.

Travis: You kiss your mother with that mouth?! Um. Sorry. With that meowth. So... um, through, I will say, through communication between your psychic link with Snippers, and uh, the Firbolg still having that, uh, the connection... the speak with animals on... the cat gets the general impression and says...

Schrodinger: Fish jerky?

Fitzroy: You who—um... are you, uh... Argo, you holdin'?

Argo: Uh, yeah. Oh, sure. I never go to a meeting without fish jerky. This would be... let's see... ooh, tilapia!

Griffin: I hope everybody else in the room is looking at us like, "What the fuck are you guys doing?"

Travis: They are. They're all like, tending to their wounded friends and like, looking for passages out, and like, every so often, they just keep looking over like, "They've lost—oh, no. They've lost it."

Fitzroy: This is how Thunderman does it! Does business!

Argo: Ooh, I got carp! You want carp or tilapia?

Schrodinger: Tilapia!

Argo: Ohh. I can't say no to you.

Schrodinger: Mrow!

Travis: So the cat eats the jerky... disappears.

Fitzroy: Mission accomplished!

Argo: I destroyed the cat.

Fitzroy: Yeah. How old was that jerky, my man?

Argo: Well, I mean, who can tell with jerky, right?

Travis: And Jackle comes over and says...

Jackle: Um... some of the other members have expressed concern. What... in the sweet holy hell... are you doing with the kitty?

Fitzroy: Uh, here—I'll be honest. Here's where I'm at. First of all, you invented the perfect dungeon trap, and then we all got caught in it, so I don't really see how any of this is our fault. But secondly—

Jackle: It's supposed to be like a panic—we're miles away from the school. If we ever, like... it's a panic room!

Fitzroy: No, it's great. It's awesome, because I feel very panicked right now. So well done. Um, but also, the kitty cat can um... teleport? Oh man. It does sound pretty goofy, huh?

Jackle: Yes. If I'm being honest, I'm a bird person. I'm a bird man. And a teleporting cat does sound pretty—

Travis: And then, the cat reappears!

Schrodinger: Mrow!

Travis: And uh, around his neck, there is a uh... a little mirror hung, like a little mirror on a chain, about two or three inches wide.

Griffin: Um, I... we pick it up?

Higglemas: Uh, hello—is it—Fitzroy? Fitzroy, it's Hig.

Fitzroy: Hig... Higglemas... Wigenstaff?

Higglemas: Yes? Do you know—

Fitzroy: I've literally never called—I've never called you Hig. I've never heard anyone call you Hig.

Higglemas: Oh, they used to call me Hig when I was younger, and now I'm younger again, and it feels... Higglemas. It's Higglemas.

Fitzroy: Okay. Hey. What's up? Hey!

Higglemas: You're, um... well, I guess I could ask you the—you're trapped in the cave, right?

Fitzroy: Yeah. Any way you could come and just pop the door for us and let us out? We have some very poisoned party members in here.

Higglemas: Well... um... [sighs] This is kind of like a... like a good news, bad news... good news, bad news situation. So bad news – I can't open it. Good news – I can tell you how to open it! Bad news... you'll have to... move through a hell dimension. Good news, not that far!

Fitzroy: That's a lot of news, Higglemas.

Higglemas: Yeah. Um... [sighs] So basically, it's not just a portal. It's a tunnel? Um, and so, you have to kind of open up both ends. Of the tunnel.

Fitzroy: [sighs] Right. Um... hell dimension. Is that something me and my comrades are gonna be able to... survive? Or...

Higglemas: Um, it depends on how fast and quiet you can move! But not far! Like I said, not far. Like 100 yards to get—

Fitzroy: That's wicked far! That's super wicked far when you're talking about a hell dimension!

Higglemas: Uh, I did say it was bad news.

Fitzroy: Alright.

Griffin: Uh, is everyone else hearing this in the room?

Travis: Yes.

Argo: Well, I don't—we don't have much choice, do we?

Fitzroy: It's that, or some of us die very quickly from poison, and then the rest of us eat them. Hell—I'm team hell dimension.

Higglemas: Well, you wouldn't want to eat someone if they'd been poisoned.

Fitzroy: I know. That was the realization that pushed me over to team hell dimension.

Higglemas: Oh. Well that says a lot about you, and... okay. Okay. It's fairly straightforward.

Travis: And he passes onto you the very magical, complicated language that you need to say to open up the portal and the hand movements. You get it. Y'know what I mean? Like, I could try to communicate it to the audience, but it's sooo... like, cool looking. Very, like, Doctor Strange level, y'know what I mean, cool stuff.

Griffin: Ohh. Yes.

Travis: You get it.

Clint: The crimson bands of Cyttorak!

Travis: Exactly. Y'know what? Dad could do it better than I could. Y'know what I mean?

Griffin: Sure.

Travis: Now, uh... so, now you know how to open it on your end. What kind of preparation are you going to do?

Fitzroy: I mean, who's runnin' through this thing? 'Cause I imagine, one of us might be the quietest. But also, if something bad happens in that 100 yard stretch, it would probably be better to have safety in numbers. But like, Master Firbolg? You even feel up to this?

Firbolg: I will be fine.

Fitzroy: Okay.

Argo: Uh, is this something... alright. Here's a suggestion. How about if I go through first, use my amazing rogue stalking and sneaking skills...

Firbolg: This plan is bad.

Argo: Go to the—

Firbolg: This plan is already bad.

Argo: Go the 100 yards, open up the portal, and then everybody just run like crazy across the 100 yards?

Fitzroy: Yeah, and then only some of us will be picked up by sort of flying demons, and taken to their lava bed.

Argo: Well, I didn't say it was a flawless plan.

Fitzroy: Yeah. Yes. Um... I mean, I can turn invisible. So I'm good.

Argo: You can turn other people invisible too though, can't ya?

Fitzroy: I can. But it'll take me like... how many people are in the room? It'll take me like, three or four days. [laughs]

Travis: Well, so, looking around the room, Mosh, Ramos, and Crabtree are still very much not up to traveling. Um, Marie needs to stay with them, as she is tending to their wounds. So that leaves you with Jackle, Sabour the turtle, and Dakota.

Griffin: I mean, everyone's going to have to go through this tunnel, right? If there's no way—

Travis: Well, but once you open up both ends, it will become a portal once more.

Griffin: Oh, it—okay.

Fitzroy: Alright. Um...

Argo: Then we three are the only ones that really need to go, right?

Fitzroy: Jackle, I mean... you're pretty sneaky.

Jackle: Aye, I can travel with you boys if you want to. You don't need to do this on your own.

Fitzroy: Okay. Then that's three. I can turn all four of us invisible. Uhh... it's gonna tap me, basically, for the day, on everything else. So no more... no more spells from this guy, once I do that. But I can do it.

Jackle: You don't need to worry about me.

Fitzroy: But it's an even number. A nice even number.

Jackle: Is that how magic works?

Fitzroy: Well no, but I can do it two people at a time.

Jackle: Oh, I see.

Fitzroy: So I may as well make you invisible. Don't be proud, just because you're the sneakiest bird in the world.

Jackle: No, I was just trying to—I was trying to save your spell slots!

Fitzroy: No no no. It's all good. It's all good.

Jackle: Aye.

Argo: What are those?

Jackle: Spell slots? You needn't worry about it, boy. It's something only the Kenku have.

Argo: Ah, okay.

Fitzroy: Um, okay! I mean, that ought to do it, right?

Jackle: Yeah.

Fitzroy: You don't sound very sure.

Jackle: Well, I've never traveled in a hell dimension before, so... it's kind of new.

Fitzroy: `Kay.

Argo: Do you still have the mirror thing, to talk to Higglemas?

Fitzroy: I accidentally—it's so funny you said that. I did drop it. [laughs] And it broke. And I feel like a real dumb dumb about it.

Argo: Mm.

Fitzroy: Um, no, yeah, I do still have it.

Argo: Ask him what we're gonna see. What could possibly attack us in there?

Higglemas: Um... do you really wanna know?

Argo: Yeah!

Higglemas: Do you know anything about pit fiends?

Fitzroy: We do, actually!

Argo: Oh, the one—yeah! Oh yeah.

Higglemas: Yeah, there's a lot of those down there. Um... hell hounds. There's a lot of those.

Argo: Mm.

Higglemas: Um... you're also gonna have... some like, psychic issues, if I'm being honest, that you're gonna need to kind of deal with. So moving quickly is like, a really... it's a good call. If—yeah.

Fitzroy: Okay! I'm very scared! Let's go!

Travis: And you speak the incantation, and perform the correct hand gestures, and the portal opens before you... and you are looking directly into a nightmare.

[spooky music plays]

[ad break]

[spooky music plays]

Travis: You set foot into a hell dimension. And the air—

Argo: Hot. Boy, it's hot.

Travis: —is painful. No, not hot – but *burning*. It's like a chemical burn, where all you feel is uncomfortable. Everything... it hurts and itches and burns in a way that could never be relieved. And it's amazing how quickly you become accustomed to it. Not that you don't notice it anymore, but more that you accept that this is a pain and a discomfort that you will always feel.

Firbolg: We have made a mistake and ended up at the DMV!

Clint: [laughs]

Fitzroy: Classic.

Travis: Rock and debris float in the air—

Firbolg: Dungeon master... vehicle...

Travis: Oh, I get it.

Clint: [laughs]

Firbolg: ... store.

Travis: Rocks and debris float in the air in a mockery of physics. Corners and angles connect in a perversion in geometry that could not be measured by mortal minds. The colors are difficult for your eyes to perceive, and trying to focus on any one thing for too long causes a headache like you have never experienced.

I want all three of you to make a wisdom saving throw.

Griffin: Oh... you sure not a constitu—ooh! 19! 19 flat.

Clint: Ten minus one. That's a nine.

Justin: The kid... has... a... oh man. Natural 20.

Travis: Ooh! You feel great. So uh, Fitzroy and the Firbolg, this discomfort... it begins to creep in, but you are able to push past, and remember the purpose of this visit, what you need to do, and how quickly you need to move. But uh, Argo, you are overwhelmed by this discomfort. And it creeps not only through your skin, but into your mind as well. And all you want to do is curl into a ball on the ground and try to block it all out.

Clint: Hm.

Argo: Hey... oh crap. Ohh...

Firbolg: You must keep moving.

Argo: Ah... look, this is good. I'm good right here. You all go ahead. I just need to... haaahh... puke, or catch my breath, or something.

Fitzroy: Uh, no, just hold onto—hold onto my belt loop.

Argo: Let's—no—I—

Fitzroy: The back belt loop.

Argo: Look, I'm—this is—no. Oh, fudge cake... oh, no. This... just gotta... ohh. Oh, god. This is the worst. Oh...

Griffin: Uh, yeah. I mean, us splitting up is not a good idea, I imagine, in the hell dimension. So like, let's make a chain, and put—how does uh, how does Jackle look?

Travis: He's looking good. He has dealt with discomfort and depression many times in his life.

Griffin: Fantastic. [laughs]

Travis: This is no new field for him.

Griffin: Okay.

Fitzroy: Um, alright, seriously. Let's go. I don't want to stay in this hell dimension.

Justin: What's the—and where does this empty out at?

Travis: So, basically, about a hundred yards ahead. It's uneven ground. There are lots of rocks and rock formations and everything, but you see, about a hundred yards, the rock formation that Hig has described to you,

that looks kind of like a curling, two-sided claw, forming almost a complete circle, that this is where you want to form that second opening.

Griffin: Okay. Are we invisible? Did I do my invisibility thing?

Travis: Yes.

Griffin: Okay.

Travis: If you tell me you did, I believe you.

Griffin: Okay. I already marked down all the... the many, many spell slots that it required.

Travis: Then I guess the answer is yes.

Griffin: Uh, yeah, okay.

Fitzroy: Seriously, Master Firbolg. You're quite big. Can you make sure that Argo doesn't fall behind?

Justin: Uh, yes. And I will tie, um... I probably can't pick him up. Can I pick him up?

Travis: Do a strength check for me.

Justin: How much—yeah. That's not necessarily my strong suit, but I am a big boy.

Travis: You are a big boy.

Justin: I'm a big boy, but my strength is not great. Um, 14 plus... um, two. 16.

Travis: Yeah, you're able to pick him up. You're moving a little slower. So that is definitely going to uh, wear down any, uh, like, athletics checks, hypothetically, that you might need to make.

Justin: [laughs] Yeah.

Travis: But you are now carrying—

Justin: Just to give a stat, for example, that it might impact... just one of those...

Travis: Just hypothetically, if that were to come up. Y'know what I mean? Uh, perhaps your speed is decreased. But you are now carrying your friend.

Argo: Thank you, Firbolg. Thank you. I might've pooped my pants a little. I'm sorry.

Fitzroy: That is like, the third time.

Travis: And I also just now, as dungeon master, want to tell you guys – that has nothing to do with whatever is going on in the hell dimension. I don't know why Dad—

Griffin: Oh, okay, fantastic.

Argo: Well, when you get psychic damage, let's see if you shit your pants!

Travis: I mean, you probably won't. It's not really connected. I don't—I don't know why—

Griffin: Moving on in the hell dimension.

Travis: Um, so you now have two paths ahead of you. One is going to travel over higher ground, and it will, uh, leave you more exposed, hypothetically. But you are invisible, so that will help. Um, but it looks to be a little more even of a pathway. Then, there is another one that gives a little

more cover with smaller rock formations. But, it is going to be a little bit more difficult to traverse.

Griffin: I mean, we're invisible.

Justin: Yeah. The easier path, probably.

Griffin: The easier path would be great because of how invisible we are. Oh wait, no! Oh my god, no!

Justin: [laughs]

Griffin: I just realized. I just realized—Griffin just realized something... that I don't know if Sir Fitzroy Thunderman Maplecourt, with his minus one intelligence modifier, would remember? Uh, no, he would remember this. Oh yeah! Hey guys? I turn the invisibility spell off.

Fitzroy: Uh, Pit Fiends can see through illusions.

Travis: Okay. Whoo!

Clint: Ugh.

Travis: I was about to have to break and just tell you. 'Cause I felt so bad.

Griffin: Just fucking kill us. Yeah.

Fitzroy: Um, so, yeah. Uhh... that was a... I literally wasted all the magic I had in the—I have one very, very small spell left in me, and that's it. So I've really screwed us. So uh, we are now officially sneaking, uh, again. Immediately, starting now.

Travis: So... which pathway are you going to do?

Justin: Maybe the safer path. The hard, safe path seems...

Griffin: The hard path that's not gonna just put a spotlight on us.

Travis: Okay! Um, so, everyone, go ahead and make a stealth check for me.

Justin: 13 plus... two. 15.

Travis: `Kay.

Clint: 14 plus 10. 24.

Griffin: [sings] So you had a bad day! You got a crit fail!

Travis: [laughs] Oh boy!

Justin: [laughs]

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: [singing] You rolled a big one, and you fucked it all up!

Travis: Okay.

Griffin: [singing] Your family is dead! They're killed by devils!

Justin: [laughing] [singing] Thought you had a magic cloak, but it was a lie!

Travis: Well, alright.

Clint: [laughing]

Justin: Come under my cloak, he said. Have some laughs.

Travis: Okay. Um... in the distance, you—

Fitzroy: [yells] Time to sneak! I'm going to begin sneaking in three... two... one!

Travis: You are in the middle of this uneven pathway, trying to sneak your way through, and Fitzroy... you step on some uneven stones, and they give out beneath you. And you land heavily, uh, with whatever metal is on your body, be it armor, be it weapons, making quite a loud clanging noise. And it's hard for you not to make a loud 'oof' sound.

And when you stand up, you also see that you are bleeding slightly. So go ahead and take... it's three damage. It's not bad. It's a little cut on your arm. But you hear in the distance, not too far off, the howl of hell hounds.

Fitzroy: Uh, run.

Travis: So, I now need you all to make athletics checks!

Justin: Wait a minute! You swore!

Griffin: [laughs]

Justin: You swore this wouldn't be a factor!

Travis: And Firbolg, you have got disadvantage.

Justin: Won't even need it.

Griffin: Wow, I really screwed everyone over here except me, 'cause I'm quite good at athletics. I rolled a 15 plus six. 21.

Justin: Uh, that's a ten plus five. Uhh... 15? And... my second roll is a 12 plus five, 17. So, 15.

Travis: Argo, you don't have to roll, 'cause he's carrying you.

Justin: Maybe I didn't—

Clint: Too bad. I rolled a 16 plus four. That'd be dirty 20.

Justin: You're very athletically being carried.

Travis: Uh, okay. So, Fitzroy, you are fleet-footedly moving across the stones. You are doing great. Jackle is right behind you. Firbolg, you are moving at a steady pace. You're not tripping over anything, but you're not moving nearly as quickly as Fitzroy is.

And the banging of hell hounds is getting louder and louder. Fitzroy, you reach the rock formation, and the Firbolg is still about 20 yards behind you. And from this higher vantage point, you are able to see about another 30 yards behind him, are the hell hounds. And I also want you to go ahead and make a perception check for me.

Griffin: Fuck. We're playing a lot of D&D. Uhh... that is a 17 plus three. 20.

Travis: So, off in the distance to your right, you see a shining onyx palace. Not too far away, but definitely not as close as everything is to you, y'know, the rock formation. The hell hounds, all of that. And you would hazard a guess that this is Gray's home.

In front of the main entrance, you see a portal. And this portal is far more defined and larger than the one you have come through, or the one you've seen Gray come through. And through it, you can see Nua. And with a 20, you are able to determine that it looks like the Godscar Chasm.

And in the middle of the portal, you can just make out a silhouette.

Griffin: Can I tell whose silhouette?

Travis: You cannot. And before you're able to dwell on this too much longer, the Firbolg reaches you, and hot on his heels, about maybe ten yards behind, are the hell hounds.

Griffin: Uh, continue run—keep running? Seems like a pretty good plan.

Clint: Did you open the other portal?

Griffin: Oh. Uh, I mean, am I close enough?

Travis: You—yes. You have reached the rock formation. You can open the portal.

Griffin: Yeah, I open the fucking portal.

Travis: Fitzroy, you scramble up the rock formation. You pass through the portal. And behind you is Jackle, moving deftly across the rocks and into the portal. You turn to see the Firbolg, struggling to mount the rocks with Argo over his shoulders. He's close – very close. You reach out a hand to help him, and the three of you stumble and land on the ground as a hell hound leaps through the portal, its jaws open, ready to strike. As a sword whistles through the air, lopping off the hell hound's head, and splattering you with ichor. A hand reaches down to help you from the floor.

Griffin: Whose hand?

Travis: Above you stands Hieronymous Wigenstaff. A little unsteady, but ready for battle.

[music plays]

Fitzroy: You really... threw us a bone there. And that's the first of what is going to be... a lot of dog-based jokes.

Hieronymous: Oh, I get it. I get it. Because I was a dog.

Justin: [laughs]

Clint: [laughs]

Hieronymous: Um...

Travis: And he hands you all some, y'know, canteens of water, and says...

Hieronymous: I know what traveling through the hell dimension can be like.

Fitzroy: Not great.

Firbolg: Unpleasant.

Argo: I pooped my pants a little.

Fitzroy: Yeah, this dude needs pants. Um, hey, we got some poisoned friends in there. Did you bring... some sort of, y'know, ointment?

Travis: Dakota comes out, uh, helping Crabtree. Marie is uh, with Mosh. And Sabour is with Ramos. And they make their way up towards Marie's headquarters, through her—to her office.

Griffin: I mean, we should definitely go there too, because...

Travis: And you all follow.

Griffin: Yeah. [laughs] Because uh, Master Firbolg has been also poisoned, and Argo just had a real bad trip.

Travis: So you all make your way to her office. She takes some time, and during which, everyone is fairly quiet, and lets her work. And when she's done, she looks exhausted. She has been working very hard, but everyone is stabilized. She has been able to make the poison reverse its course.

Griffin: [laughs] I go...

Fitzroy: [clears throat]

Griffin: And uh, just very subtly gesture to the one inch little scratch on my arm.

Fitzroy: [clears throat]

Travis: Uh, she puts a Band-Aid on it that has an animated character on it.

Griffin: Which character?

Travis: There's a Larry the Lime—she puts a Larry the Lime Band-Aid on it.

Griffin: Oh, fantastic.

Travis: And gives you a lollipop.

Fitzroy: Thank you.

Travis: And with you, Argo, it's a little more difficult. It takes a little more time, and involves magic. And so, you are definitely coming back around. The psychic damage is healing, but you are absolutely exhausted.

And once everyone is stabilized and taken care of...

Clint: Did I get a lollipop?

Travis: Well, do you want a lollipop? Were you a good boy?

Clint: I thought maybe something citrus flavored?

Travis: Were you a brave boy?

Clint: I was a very—no. [laughs] I kept poopin' my pants!

Travis: You did keep pooping your pants.

Clint: Firbolg had to carry me! I was very much a bad, not brave boy.

Travis: You get a consolation lollipop. It's actually bigger than the good boy lollipop.

Griffin: That's BS.

Travis: And it's lime flavored.

Argo: Mmm!

Travis: And so, everyone is now sitting as much in a circle as you can be while reclining in recovery beds and chairs and what not. And it's clear that they've all stuck around because things need to be discussed, but no one seems to know where to start.

Fitzroy: Uh... first thing's first. Master Firbolg, how are you feeling? How's your arm?

Firbolg: It... is... fine. Little tingly.

Argo: You feel up to a swim yet? Oh wait, I'm sorry. You have to wait one hour after being poisoned before you can swim.

Fitzroy: After being poisoned and traversing the hell dimension. They do say that.

Firbolg: I... this is the greatest shame. I have not learned to swim.

Fitzroy: Oh. Um... yeah, that's fine. It's not really a skill that you need, as long as you don't go near big bodies of water.

Firbolg: This is how I felt until the opportunity was removed from me!

Fitzroy: Sure.

Travis: Oh man. Next episode is just gonna be an hour long scene of Argo teaching the Firbolg how to swim.

Griffin: I would fuckin' watch it. Um...

Travis: And you will! You'll be in like, a beach chair, havin' a Mai-Tai.

Griffin: Uh, I make sure the door to the uh... hospital here is closed. And say...

Fitzroy: Yeah, so that's basically what we're dealing with. Um... I mean, we're learning on the ground, too. Sort of building the... proverbial wagon beneath us as it rolls. But um... yeah! Any questions?

Travis: And they all kind of look at one another, and Mosh turns and looks at you, Fitzroy, and says...

Mosh: What... can we do to help?

Fitzroy: Mm... I mean, we are figuring we enlist... ten friends, and then you enlist ten friends, and then...

Argo: It's a war pyramid.

Fitzroy: A sort of war pyramid, yes. Um, I've never planned a war effort before. None of us have. So um... does anyone know how to... do that?

Firbolg: Do a war?

Fitzroy: Do a war... good. Has anyone here ever won a war?

Mosh: Well... no.

Fitzroy: Cool and good and perfect and good.

Griffin: How long has it been since that night that... how long in the six months have we used?

Travis: Y'know, let's say a week.

Griffin: Okay, so not that long. Okay.

Travis: No no no. Still pretty fresh in it. Um, and Mosh and Jackle look at each other and go...

Mosh: I mean, we could... we could ask... yeah.

Jackle: I think that... maybe see if we can bring it in? Yeah? Okay. Uh...

Fitzroy: You're being very cryptic.

Jackle: Well... it's not a member of... of The Unbroken Chain. But... if it's plannin' a war you're doin'... you're gonna wanna talk to Az.

Argo: The great and powerful?

Griffin: That was unavoidable, Travis.

Justin: Yeah.

Argo: Yeah, you did lean into that one.

Jackle: No, the Warforged. Azamondelius.

Travis: And you know, Azamondelius is a professor here. A teacher here. It is a Warforged that teaches strategy, and that is for upper level heroes and villains, so you have not had a class with it up to this point.

Fitzroy: I mean, that sounds pretty radical. Do you think that...

Griffin: What were the pronouns? Was it 'it' for Azamondelius?

Travis: It.

Griffin: Okay. It pref—

Travis: In this—and I'm not saying this is true of all Warforged across all Dungeons & Dragons, but here in Nua, Warforged identify as 'it.'

Griffin: Okay.

Fitzroy: Uh, so... I mean, we could ask it for its help. Do you think it would... lend us... help? I mean...

Jackle: Uh... It can be difficult. Uh... it isn't always... hm. Easy to talk to. But... y'know, it's a good... it's a good Warforged. It does a good job. It's good at its job. Let's put it that way. If you can get it on your side, uh, it will be a huge help.

Argo: Could I bring up a question? And I been wonderin' this for quite a while. Is there any way possible that we can come up with some way to detect who is on Gray's side? 'Cause we already know... y'know, we knew that he had a, y'know, a mole. I assume he's got more moles. Is there any way to be able to tell if somebody is touched by a demon?

Jackle: What, you mean just some kind of magic spell that makes people tell the truth no matter what? What is this? That's bullshit!

Argo: No, that's crazy. There's no such thing. But I mean—

Jackle: No such thing! How would you magic someone into telling the truth? That's ridiculous.

Argo: Yeah, in some kind of zone or something. But no! That's impossible.

Jackle: All we have is our instincts and our insight, boy!

Argo: Crabtree, could you artifice something that, y'know, like a pair of sunglasses, and if we look through them, we could tell they were a monster?

Crabtree: Well, yeah. I mean, we could make some glasses that see through illusion, but... I don't think you're dealing with illusion, here. I think you're just dealing with, y'know...

Fitzroy: Bad people.

Crabtree: Corrupt individuals.

Fitzroy: Evil, yes. Um... ugh. We are... a secret... society. I can say we now, because I've been inducted. And uh...

Mosh: Well, we haven't done...

Travis: Mosh says...

Mosh: We haven't done...

Fitzroy: Mosh!

Mosh: I mean, you're in, yeah. I mean, you're—

Fitzroy: Always Mosh! Am I right, everyone?

Mosh: I'm just saying, it's not official.

Fitzroy: Always with Mosh!

Firbolg: This guy.

Fitzroy: Always. Um... I... I've been wrestling with something. And... I have... struggled to bring it up, because frankly, it is a fairly unheroic idea. [laughs] Uh, but hey! Technically speaking, I'm a villain. So... I don't... know

that I want to go to war. And I don't know about the rest of you, but... it's not out of fear for myself, but out of the necessary cost that war entails.

[music plays]

Fitzroy: By which I mean, dead people. Lots of them. Lots of people die on a battlefield. Like, that's not my—is that anyone's jam here? 'Cause it's super not mine.

Travis: Everyone, y'know, kind of is making eye contact with each other and shaking their head like, "No," as kind of a direct opposition to what The Unbroken Chain is kind of all about.

Fitzroy: Okay. Yes. I figured that that was the case. So... I mean... we can keep up the pretenses of planning a war to, y'know, snooker whatever other moles that Gray has at this facility. But... what would you all think about just kind of... rolling up on Gray while he's asleep, and like, stabbing him in the brain or something?

Argo: Oh! That is so rogue-y! Oh, I—yeah!! I'm down for that. Let's assassinate him.

Fitzroy: I just—it—that whole experience was quite bad. A lot of us got poisoned, and then, there was a fouling of pants, and I'm not gonna sort of name names. But...

Argo: Well, I could roll better. I could have a better wisdom roll.

Fitzroy: That is a problem we would for sure need to solve. But I'm pretty sure Gray showed us where, like, his house and everything is. So... I—it just seems like a better plan to me than, y'know, thousands of people dying on battlefields or whatever.

Travis: And Hieronymous says...

Hieronymous: I... I am on board... with this plan. If we could rid existence of Gray, we would be doing a service, no matter how we do it. But I'll tell

you this – if Gray catches wind of this plan, he will not wait six months. He will launch whatever attack he has ready, and he will not be going to war for sport, at that point. He will be going to war for blood.

Fitzroy: That was scary. [laughs]

Argo: That was intense!

Hieronymous: Do not underestimate Gray.

Fitzroy: No, I mean, he sneezed and nearly poisoned half of us to death, so I'm not underestimating Gray. But... it seems like we stand just as, y'know, good a chance of defeating him, uh, in my sort of suggested "sneak into his bedroom and stab him in the brain" plan than we do on the field of battle. Which will also prove much more costly. So... uh, I mean, everyone here can keep a secret right?

Firbolg: Ohh...

Fitzroy: Oh, god!

Firbolg: This is not ideal.

Argo: Oh...

Griffin: [laughing]

[theme music plays]

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