

Summary: The Adventure Zone: Ethersea — Prologue

Published on July 1st, 2021

[Listen on TheMcElroy.family](#)

Griffin: What follows is a summary of the events of The Adventure Zone: Ethersea's prologue, a five-episode series in which we built the world of our new campaign while playing Avery Alder's world building roleplaying game, The Quiet Year. I'll cover the major events, concepts, and characters generated in those episodes. Everything you need to know before we get the season started in earnest.

If this synopsis piques your curiosity, I encourage you to listen to the prologue episodes to hear how this particular narrative sausage got made. For now, let's get started.

[music plays]

Griffin: The people of this world once walked side-by-side with the gods that they worshipped. Those gods were called Vestiges, and they ruled over mortalkind with arcane powers that they protected covetously from their subjects.

One Vestige, named Benevolence, shared the secrets of his magic with his mortal followers, effectively usurping his kin. The recipients of this arcane gift founded the prosperous theocratic kingdom of Hominine, which conquered the realm, wiping out nearly all the Vestiges that stood in its way.

After decades of conflict, three other kingdoms remained alongside Hominine when the dust had settled. To the north, the inhabitants of the Delmer Wilds utilized the region's plentiful resources to become a highly industrialized powerhouse.

To the east, the Einarr Plateau offered safe haven to the followers of the few other surviving Vestiges, who shared their wisdom with their followers; not as gods, but as collaborators.

And across the sea, the free-spirited mariners of the Southern Archipelago built a life free from the mainland's ceaseless strife. Though these four kingdoms would eventually settle into an uneasy peace, it would be short-lived.

The magic granted to mortalkind by the Vestige, Benevolence, carried with it a material cost. An exchange of reagents that the world's warring magic users often neglected to pay. When that happens, a volatile exhaust is produced. This ether would irradiate the land, sea, and sky.

An arcane storm of unimaginable size and power took form over the ocean, threatening the realm's people with absolute extinction. And so, the four domains began to seek ways to take shelter from the storm. And while they toiled, a voice, seemingly emanating from the sea itself, called out to people from all corners of the realm. It offered an invitation.

When kingdoms fall, the sea provides. A home for all, beneath the tides.

Hundreds of travelers from each of the four kingdoms followed this voice to an unassuming cove in the foothills of the Einarr Plateau. Over the following year, this community would grow, explore, endure, and of course, work to create this undersea haven promised to them by divine invitation.

Resources were scarce in those early days, but over time, the community would find ways to fulfill the countless needs of their undersea migration. Rapidly reproducing filler fish and ether-cleansed seaweed flakes would become staples of their diet. Mutated phytoplankton provided a means for filtering air and water.

A universal magical reagent called prestige was discovered in salt, refined from Ethersea water. Building materials were limited to driftwood, clay, and salt glass; though, gatherers found limited pockets of arcane ore, which they'd later discover to be fragments of an ancient Vestige named Koda, whose body was hurled from the Einarr Plateau and shattered on the rocks below.

From this ore, they would build a fearsome battleship that they named... for some reason... The Biggest Baby, whose pilots, called chaperones, shared a psychic link with the Kodite built into their vessel.

In the months that followed, a handful of intrepid individuals took on leadership roles in the community. The Boyar Hermine, a royal from the Delmer Wilds, led efforts to break ground beneath the waters. The cartographer, Fineas Caul, lended her his expertise, finding a promising build site offshore, near a strange coral-encrusted spiral staircase.

A Hominine scholar named Brother Seldom founded a schoolhouse for the community's young, and began broadcasting lessons via tone wheel, a radio-like arcane instrument.

Ol'Joshy, also known as Uncle Joshy, or sometimes Ol'Uncle Joshy, was a charlatan who opened a school for advanced psychic warfare against blink sharks. The threat of those vicious teleporting sharks was very real; though, Joshy's psychic abilities were almost certainly not, which is perhaps why he eventually turned to bathysphere residential design, once the school's revenues dried up.

Relics of the surface world's past were collected and catalogued by The Curator. Though, what merited preservation was a constant subject of debate among the community.

Similarly contentious was the presence of the Benevolent Parish, a separatist chapter of the church that used its arcane power to aid the community, empowering the phytoplankton that would make life undersea possible, and building hard light constructs, such as vapor suits, which made extravehicular exploration and construction a reality.

As the shore side community worked to evade the apocalypse, so too did the kingdoms they left behind. The inhabitants of the Delmer Wilds sought shelter from the storm by moving their sprawling citadels into the very mountains upon which they were built.

The mariners of the Southern Archipelago constructed a fleet of submersible arks to travel the deep, staying one step ahead of the Ethersea's innumerable dangers.

The Einarr took shelter, too, but not in a manner anyone could've predicted. A zealous contingent of Einarr magic users would somehow reopen the doorway to the Vestigial realm from which the Vestiges first entered our world. The entire plateau would be pulled into that doorway, spiriting its inhabitants away from our world.

Though they'd forfeit their corporeal forms during this abduction, some Einarr spirits began manifesting among the shore side community. The greatest minds assembled there would devise a way to give them a second chance at life, building bodies from the local coral formations that could be inhabited. Though, the energy required for this process often required multiple spirits to amalgamate into a singular identity.

The first of these beings, now called Breinarr, was named Tessellation. They would serve as a shepherd to the Einarr spirits that would follow in their footsteps, returning to our world from the Vestigial realm.

The disappearance of the Einarr Plateau was the first of many hardships endured by the community during their final year on the surface. A group of headstrong gatherers took on the title of The Vanguard. They stole precious resources from the community and departed into the Ethersea to become the first of this society's founders.

Months later, they were found massacred at the bottom of the ocean. Though, the story behind their grisly end was never uncovered. During a mission to find The Vanguard, the cartographer, Fineas Caul, was betrayed and killed in action. His departed spirit was somehow recovered by his scientific fellows, called The Deep Thinkers, and placed in a Breinarr body alongside five other spirits, becoming the entity called Ampersand Five.

This resurrection was protested, both by the Parish and its ultra-orthodox offshoot, the Ordos Spiritus. Shortly after Fineas Caul's ill-fated mission, a disease called the sallow took hold of the community. Quick preventative

action kept losses to a minimum, but those who were afflicted began to grow subtle, fish-like features, most common among them being catfish whiskers.

The Council of Four, a ruling body with representatives from each of the four kingdoms, was overthrown, following the loss of the child of Declan Cern, the representative from Hominine. In the chaos that followed, the Boyar Hermine formed a new system of government – The Ballast, where representatives from the community’s various work forces and factions would come together to make the decisions that would shape the community.

But the greatest hardship would come on the community’s last day on the shore. The capital of Hominine, using impossible magic, and guided by enormous, flying whales, was lifted into the sky and passed into the storm, creating a tidal wave that forced the immediate and permanent evacuation of the shore side community.

In their fleet of bathysphere houses, the people would leave the beach they'd called home for the past year, taking residence in their new undersea dwelling – a city they would come to call Founders’ Wake.

[music plays]

Griffin: 25 years have passed since that evacuation, and in that time, Founders’ Wake has expanded dramatically. An enchanted tower that once connected the Einarr Plateau to the world below, called The Crystal Ascension, sank to the bottom of the Ethersea during the construction effort. It nestled against a sheer cliff face, and now serves as the spine for Founders’ Wake’s vertically stacked districts.

At the top of the Crystal Ascension sits The Ballast, the municipal hub and seat of government for the city. It was the first structure built below the waves, made from a repurposed ark, gifted to the community from the Southern Archipelago’s fleet.

Immediately below The Ballast sits The Conservatory, the first expansion built by the evacuees, which houses the Benevolent Parish and the Curator's many museums, parks, and menageries.

The city's largest district sits immediately below that, the Forecastle, where rows of thousands of bathysphere houses are arranged into ample residential quarters, built into a towering hall, resembling the bow of a great ship.

The Forecastle surrounds and protects another district, called The Cradle, named for a beloved shipyard constructed on the shore above. Within the safety of The Cradle, the city's essential utilities and life support systems are maintained.

At the base of The Forecastle, an unintended district took form. Within this deck, less scrupulous operators could find cover from The Ballast's watchful eye. And when one thinks of unscrupulous operators, one name came to mind. And so, this district earned the title of Joshy's Knuckle.

Atop the cliff, a sprawling industrial complex called The Gunnel was built, to give fisheries, farmers, and salvagers the space they needed to complete their vital work. Though, that work takes place in the shadow of a cloud of debris. Remnants of the world above that have long since been sundered by the storm.

Near the cliff's base, the coral spire continues to thrive, as the city's Deep Thinkers built a massive laboratory surrounding the structure. In this lab, far from the scrutiny of the Parish and the Ordos Spiritus, the city's brightest minds continue development of new technologies, while Tessellation continues the painstaking process of guiding the Einarr Spirits into their new coral frames.

And at the base of the Crystal Ascension, the city's newest district, called The Gills, hums with activity. Here, ships of all shapes and sizes are built and maintained alongside a sprawling network of docks, shipyards, and modern commercial facilities. One such building belongs to a group called

The Blue Span Brokerage, which facilitates the kind of undersea expeditions that might attract aspiring adventurers of a certain stripe.

And it is here, in the posh, bustling headquarters of the Blue Span Brokerage, that our story begins.

[music fades]

MaximumFun.org

Comedy and culture.

Artist owned.

Audience supported.