

The Adventure Zone: Ethersea – Episode 22

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Griffin: Previously on The Adventure Zone Ethersea:

[“The Adventure Zone: Ethersea Theme” music plays]

Clint: The ancient bathysphere washes up onshore.

Travis: [gasps]

Clint: And inside, they find a comatose Finneas Cawl.

Justin: Yes!

Clint: And an unidentified body. They have obviously been struggling.

...Along the bottom of the bathysphere, they discover that it has a very mysterious kind of phytoplankton, in the water.

...Finneas has decided that he’s gonna time-share, with the other souls. He renames himself Ampersand Five.

Justin: “Disease spreads through your community...” The people call it the sallow.

Griffin: All of the people who recover from the sallow begin to grow fish-like features?

...As it gets deep down into this crack in the hull of the ship, something comes loose. A spore. And it drifts closer to the heart of Founders’ Wake.

[Ethersea theme music plays out]

Griffin: Devo and Amber.

Travis: That’s me!

Griffin: I need both of you guys to make a constitution saving throw.

Travis: Aw, man.

Griffin: Welcome back everybody, happy new year—

Travis: We just...

Justin: Wait, you're not even gonna talk about the wizard who threw his seeds in the trash?

Travis: Come on!

Griffin: Um...

Justin: Why did you develop that storyline, if you weren't gonna return to the wizard who threw his seeds in the trash!?

Travis: That—

Griffin: I'm going to be—

Travis: I'm so bought in!

Griffin: That's actually part of the ARG that we're telling, through, uh, Nokia. If you have the Nokia phone, download the special...

Justin: [wheezes]

Griffin: From the Fonzo—

Clint: Download "Dream of a Better Tomorrow!"

Griffin: From the— from the Funzo store. On the Nokia phone. Uh. Yeah, go ahead and make a constitution saving throw for me please.

[sound of dice rolling]

Travis: Yes, I rolled a two plus one. A three.

Griffin: For Christ's sake. Uh.

Travis: You made me do it!

Griffin: Amber.

Justin: That is gonna be a... [singing] constitution saving throw... [sound of dice rolling] Uh, we got a... 11. Plus two. A 13.

Travis: That's ten better than me.

Griffin: Alright, I need both— I need both of you to roll a d8, please.

Travis: Aw man, Griffin.

Clint: Zoox rolled a 19!

Griffin: Zoox, you're fine, baby.

Justin: A date...

Clint: Oh.

Griffin: Zoox, you're aces. You don't have to—

Clint: I wasted a 19...

Travis: I rolled a three, again.

Justin: My date's a five.

Griffin: Uh... a five for Amber, and what's that—

Travis: I only date tens.

Clint: [snorts]

Griffin: A three, a three for Devo?

Travis: Yes.

Griffin: Okay. Thanks, guys.

Travis: What— [sighs]

Justin: Oh man, I hate when he does this. [laughs]

Clint: [sighs]

Travis: Me too.

Griffin: Alright. Um—

Travis: Here's what people don't know: he does this all the time. Not just during the show—

Justin: Yeah. Christmas...

Travis: When we see him at, like, anything, he's like, "Roll a d20."

Griffin: [snarky laugh]

Travis: [mumbling]

Justin: [imitates Griffin's mischievous laugh]

Travis: And we're like, "What is it?" And he's like, [mumbles noncommittally]

Griffin: [mumbles noncommittally]

Justin: [mumbles, imitates Griffin] "This is just my sneaky fixin's..."

Clint: [imitating mischievous Griffin] "I need to see your latest MRI... Ohhh, I see!"

Justin: Then he hops up the chimney? [laughs]

Travis: Yeah—

Griffin: [laughs]

Clint: [laughs]

Travis: And it takes him a long time to get up it.

Justin: [laughing] Yeah, it's—

Travis: And he when he makes it, some terrible noises—

Justin: [laughing] Yeah, it's not whimsical, it's horrid.

Travis: Yeah, [laughs] it's... there's a lot of squelching, which I don't fully understand?

Justin: [laughs] Yes, he has to— he has to piss himself to get the liquid out of his body, to fit up it?

Travis: Yeah.

Justin: It's terrible!

Travis: It's for the last two inches.

Justin: It's terrible. My kids love it, though. [laughs]

Travis: Yeah, kids love it.

Griffin: Yeah, the kids go crazy for it—

Justin: It's not Arbor Day unless Griffin has pissed himself up the chimney—
[laughs]

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: Holy shit. It is so funny that you said that, Justin.

Justin: But— is it?

Travis: Yeah—

Justin: Thank you—

Griffin: It is— it is a—

Justin: It was a horrid joke, so... [laughs]

Griffin: It's honestly very strange. Because in the city of Founders' Wake, it is... just a few days away from Harbor Day. And—

Justin: [laughs]

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: And Harbor Day is the day where the Arc Fleet comes to dock with Founders' Wake. It's a very, very, you know, important day, for both of your civilizations. And it's been some time, since the last Harbor Day. It's hard to sort of stay in contact with the fleet way out in the ocean, so it's not like it comes on a set... a set day, or anything, but they got in contact, y'know, a month or so ago, and now both cities are just sort of like, ramping up, for this celebration. And in anticipation for Harbor Day, the streets are empty. The city workers are busy cleaning all of the districts, and engineers are cycling the air and water filtration systems, and most folks are... you know. Staying at home, not congregating in the communal areas.

And appropriately enough, the three of you are now sitting in the sort of testament of the friendship between these two civilizations. You are sitting in... the Ballast. The ship, that the Arc Fleet gave to Founders' Wake to serve as sort of the, y'know, foothold, for their city. To be specific, you all are sitting immediately outside of the bridge, of the Ballast ship. And the bridge is... a pretty important place for Founders' Wake. It is where the Ballast, the body, the government, of the city, meets.

[Tense high music begins]

You three have been brought here, fairly forcefully, I would add, and you have not been told why. And... this ship, the Ballast in general, is like, not like the rest of the parts of the city, because it is Southern Archipelago construction. It was made away from the rest of the shoreline community, which had its own sort of aesthetic. This is more like... curvy, curvy metal and wood. And less, like, clay and Kodite and stuff. And... I don't know if any of you all have ever been here before. It would be like, you know, being called in front of Congress or something. Um. But! You all are in this hallway outside of the bridge, and the doors to the bridge slide open, and out walks... Brother Seldom. And he looks at the three of you, sort of solemnly, and gestures you into the bridge.

Devo: Uh, are we in trouble?

Griffin: He... locks eyes with you, and nods very gently. And then he mouths, "No oratory."

Travis: Devo nods.

Griffin: And you all walk into the bridge. The bridge was, like, a bridge at one point, of a functional ship, only now the sort of command centers on this bridge have been turned into different chairs for the Ballasters, the highest seat of government to, y'know, sit in. And you all are standing in an open area below all of them, like a, a tier below all of them, sort of facing their judgement. And there are six chairs total. And looking around the room, like— you guys actually see a lot of familiar faces here.

[Intense music plays]

There's Kodeira, the Ballaster of Defense, who Amber, you recently spoke to. The Hand of Guidance is here, Devo, the Ballaster of Preservation. You all see the very hate-able face of Aloysius Supreme, the recently seated Ballaster of Commerce. You see Declan Cern. Who is... sort of reclusive. And very nose-to-the-grindstone sort of guy. He is the Ballaster of Transit, sort

of responsible for... being sort of the dockmaster of the Gills, making sure that things come and go from the city safely, and nothing gets lost. Um—

Travis: Is that the— is that the oldest Cern? Is it the Cern dad?

Griffin: Oh yeah, this is the Cern patriarch. This guy is... this guy is in his, probably late 70's?

Travis: Hm. Okay.

Griffin: But he looks— he looks even, he looks even older than that. There's an empty seat for what's called the Ballaster of the Voice, which is sort of a... sort of like the popular... vote seat for this organization, that is there just solely to represent the people's interests—

Clint: The House of Commons.

Griffin: Yeah, sort of. And it's— that seat is—

Travis: The Vox Popular.

Griffin: Well, we already have a... don't we have a bad guy team that is kind of like... uh... that? Anyway—

Travis: Yeah.

Griffin: That seat is empty, it was vacated when the last Ballaster of the Voice left in disgrace. And finally, there is the seat for the Ballaster of Logistics. And as you all make your way in, a door on that higher tier opens up, and in walks the High Ballaster Hermine.

[Music shifts and calms]

Who walks to her seat, and sits down, looks at the other Ballasters gathered around, and puts on a pair of glasses, and starts going over papers on her desk. You see, Devo, um... Brother Seldom has taken a seat, on the same sort of level as you all. And he is just... staring at you— make an arcana check for me.

Travis: Me?

Griffin: Yeah. Just to see if you can kinda pick up what's going on.

Travis: [sound of dice rolling] Uh, six plus five, an 11.

Griffin: Um. He is... he is looking at you... and he is concentrating a spell, as he's looking at you.

Travis: He is—

Griffin: You don't feel anything, like you don't feel like you are under a spell right now. But he is, he is definitely doing something. And... Hermine just like, looks at these papers for what seems like an eternity, and then she looks up at the three of you. She points at you, Amber, and she says,

Hermine: Alright, well, I know you. And... I've never met a Brinarr I didn't like. And... who are you?

[Music slowly fades out]

Griffin: She points at you, Devo.

Devo: Oh. Um. My name is Devo la Main?

Hermine: Devo, okay. So you're Devo, you're Zoox, Amber. Got it.

Travis: Oh, I just to— just to clarify, Griffin, currently my Glamor Weave is a very—

Griffin: Oh, thank you, yes, oh God, every episode we gotta make sure we know what the Glamor Weave looks like.

Travis: Yeah. It's a very, uh... respectful...

Griffin: Mmhmm?

Travis: I'm going to say, gray.

Griffin: Yeah.

Travis: A light gray. A very classy, respectable light gray.

Griffin: Okay. Alright, she's got you dressed under the table. High Ballaster Hermine is wearing like, the dopest— like a Supreme Court Justice robe, like everybody else in the room is wearing, but she's got accessories for days, and is like... fucking working it. Um. She looks at the three of you, and says,

Hermine: And okay. So Zoox, Amber... okay. Um. Yeah, let's not waste time. What the fuck happened on your last mission? I know all the stuff, like you guys are contractors, we can cut a lot of this out, because frankly the time... we don't have... it's of the essence. And, um... yeah. It's... no reason to keep secrets, we've already talked to your boss, we've talked to the Brokerage, a lot of people are in a lot of trouble, and we're just kind of figuring out where that all needs to land, so. Last mission. Let's start with, um, Captain? Amber?

Amber: Captain Amber, I still am not used to it. Uh.

Zoox: Mmm.

Amber: Hello, your highness.

Hermine: Nope.

Amber: Uh, title blessings on you and yours, and all of you—

Hermine: Okay—

Amber: Uh, luminous, um... folks gathered here, on this industrious occasion.

Griffin: Kodeira, like, puts her head in her hands.

Amber: Verily. Um. We—

Griffin: Aloysius is eating it the fuck up.

Amber: Verily, uh, we... [snorts] I don't know on this one, y'all. It got a little out of hand. Um. We were trying to do something real simple, and kind of... chill, keppa? And it just got— there— there were other people that were doing... different... bad things. Worse things than us, really. But we are very sorry for any inconvenience that was caused. We are but humble... mariners, just trying to fuckin' get by, you know.

Hermine: Okay. Uh—

Amber: Verily. What? Verily. Eh? Um...

Devo: [whispering] Bow.

Hermine: Yes. We're more of a—

Amber: A... men. Amen.

Devo: Do a bow. Do a bow!

Amber: Amen. Amen.

Zoox: [whispering] Say gadzooks!

Griffin: [laughs] When you say amen, the Hand of Guidance nods, like, "Yes. That's— yes. That is correct."

Travis: Eugh.

Griffin: Um.

Amber: I'm gonna throw up.

Hermine: No, don't do that. Don't do that. Please don't do that.

Amber: Okay.

Hermine: There's like a grate— the floor has grating on it—

Amber: If I don't—

Hermine: And when you do that, it gets in it, and it's terrible.

Amber: Just please tell me if I don't bow enough.

Hermine: Alright. Um. Yeah. We don't even really have time for pleasantries. At any point... did any of you... take something... Did someone give you something to bring into the city? Did you— were you asked to smuggle? To maybe make a few Lux on the side? Any, any, anything along those lines? Anyone?

Devo: You mean besides the mission, which was to go and get something and bring it back, you mean besides this?

Hermine: Yes, besides the... the... yeah. Besides that.

Devo: Ummm. No?

Amber: No?

Zoox: No?

Amber: I don't think so.

Zoox: No, doesn't... ring any bells.

Amber: I had a real whoop-tushie stick, that was— it shocked people, but I had to use it as a key, in what still seems a little convenient...

Hermine: Um. Pilot. Devo, you— you driving? Right?

Devo: Uh. Yes? Does one drive a submarine? Or pilot it?

Hermine: We're still looking for the right verb. Um. Did you— did you... [sighs] Did you go through anything weird? Was there any sort of weird patch, where you looked around where you were going, and saying, like, "this seems weird."

Devo: I mean, yes—

Zoox: Everything we go through—

Hermine: Anything out of the ordinary?

Zoox: —Is weird.

Devo: Yes. There was a period where a giant robo-octopus grabbed us?

Hermine: Shit.

Devo: And pulled us through this, uh, dark cloud of ink? And then, uh, we later had to fight said robo-octopus. This was—

Hermine: Yeah.

Devo: Admittedly weird. Um... uh...

Hermine: But did he put anything on your ship, that—

Devo: I feel like there is an answer that you are looking for? And I would happily give it—

Amber: Can I be honest, this is exhausting. I'm so scared and freaked out. Can you do us a favor— like, we'll tell you whatever, I'll tell you whatever, I don't care. Just don't behead me.

Devo: [quietly] I don't think they can do this. Can they do this?

Amber: [loudly] They can do whatever they want! Read a book!

Devo: I've read many books.

Amber: Read different books.

Devo: Well, I don't know where to get different books.

Amber: [mumbling] Get some... something that's gonna give you the straight shit.

Devo: [grumbles]

Griffin: She hands... a photograph down to Brother Seldom, who walks it up to the three of you, to investigate. And it is an image of the bottom of the Coriolis, where there are some... some scrapes. Some pretty serious, I would say, um... sort of surface level damage, to the ship.

Devo: What did you do to our ship?

Hermine: ...Yeah. Yeah. That's right. I'm the Ballaster of Logistics for the city, and sometimes I have, like, really long stretches of free time on my hands, where I like to go down to the Gills and steal ships—

Devo: Mm.

Hermine: And like to drive them around—

Amber: Okay. Alright.

Hermine: And get big scrapes and scratches on them.

Amber: Okay.

Devo: Uh, huddle up? Sorry— Amber, Zoox, huddle up? [whispering] I think this is sarcasm.

Hermine: Yeah.

Devo: I don't think she's really done this.

Amber: Yeah.

Devo: Just making sure we are on the same page? Okay. Um—

Griffin: Aloysius Supreme clears his throat and says,

Aloysius Supreme: Actually, these three do like to make a habit of, during their free time, going down to the Gills and stealing ships, and damaging them on joyrides.

Devo: Counterpoint— counterpoint: one time is not a habit. You would not call this a habit, right, if I... [stutters] One time.

Aloysius Supreme: [smugly] The defense rests.

Devo: Wait, are we on trial?

Zoox: What?

Aloysius Supreme: The— the—

Amber: I told you motherfucker!

Aloysius Supreme: Sustain— um. Sustained.

Griffin: And he sits down.

Devo: Ok— okay.

Griffin: And everybody looks at him and shakes his head, like, “No, man.”

Devo: On the way to the mission, uh, there was some, um, minor contact with... something. Y’know, a rock or something. But... it’s not the first time, [laughs] honestly, we have had... Y’know, I’m still learning. It’s only our, what, third mission? So. I’m... a... okay pilot.

Griffin: She—

Zoox: Let's be honest. Our insurance premium is... ohh... out of this world. I mean... it's... [laughs] it's pretty big...

Griffin: She... looks down at Brother Seldom. And she says,

Hermine: Uh, what's the word? We on the level?

Griffin: And Brother Seldom stops casting whatever spell he was casting, and looks up, and nods. And she says,

Hermine: Okay. Um...

Devo: You sly dog.

Hermine: The three of you, I believe, because I'm... I'm a trusting sort. It's a flaw of mine. Um... Unintentionally, brought something into the city, that is... not safe. And now we are having to deal with it in a manner that is... We got it all under control but it's, it is, you know, it's... making our day a little bit more hectic than we wanted it to be. With Harbor Day coming up, and everything. You know, we want the gears to be turning smooth. Um. And, uh, just trying to get to the bottom of it. And it seems like you three are a bit clueless about it. And that's fine—

Amber: I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to— like, we didn't mean to do it, obviously. Um.

Hermine: No, that's—

Amber: I'm so sorry.

Hermine: That's what I'm saying, I'm trying to establish fault. Seems like you guys didn't do it intentionally. That's fine. We have more important stuff to move on to now, then. We'll get—we have your black box, we're gonna get a team out and follow your route to see if they can find out what happened. Uh, with the ship. Your ship is of course, going to remain impounded, and—

Devo: Uh— excuse me?

Hermine: Your contracting license will be... revoked indefinitely, until the end of our investigation—

Devo: Ohhh, no, no, no, this— noo...

Zoox: Noo... aww...

Amber: Fair.

Devo: No!

Amber: Fair,

Devo: Mmm! No!

Amber: No, you got us. You got us clean.

Zoox: Amber!

Devo: No, this is not fair. If I may? Uh, your majesty? Um...

Hermine: No.

Amber: It's "your highness."

Devo: [sighs] Dammit. Your highness. Your... Ballasteriness. As you have said, this was an accident, this was not intentional. So why are... why are we being punished?

Hermine: You're not being punished.

Devo: Oh?

Hermine: But— if there's an answer to what is going on, on your ship, then we're gonna find it. And that's the most important thing going on, in... the whole world, right now.

Devo: Can I say one other important thing?

Hermine: Okay, go.

Devo: Have you ever shopped at Nermal's Pile? It is great, I think you are a person with good taste. I...

Clint: [laughs and claps]

Devo: I appreciate your accessories. And I just wanted to know if you— It is where young beautiful people like me like to shop.

Griffin: [giggles]

Devo: You should check out Nermal's Pile.

Griffin: [laughing] Make a persuasion check.

Clint: [laughs]

Justin: Why— why is this— I'm sorry, I'm missing a beat here. Why is this happening?

Travis: Oh—

Griffin: Oh, because Devo is a brand ambassador for Nermal's Pile.

Clint: Yeah!

Justin: Oh, right! [laughing] Okay! This is gonna be a recurring thing!

Griffin: Holy fucking shit!

Travis: I got a 25.

Clint: [yelling] Wow! [laughs]

Travis: A 16 plus nine.

Clint: [cackles]

Griffin: She looks at you, and when you start in on this—

Justin: [laughs]

Griffin: She looks furious, like, “I, motherfucker, I just told you that time is the most important resource in our hands right now.”

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: But then she looks at your `fit, and she’s like, “Dammit.”

Justin: [laughs] It’s a good `fit!

Clint: [laughs]

Hermine: [quietly] It’s a good fucking `fit.

Griffin: She, like, you see her brow wrinkle, and furrow, and you see her sigh, and she says,

Hermine: I’m going to reach out to you later, privately, and we’re gonna have a talk about this exact thing. Because the `fit is tight. And it looks—

Devo: Thank you.

Hermine: And it looks really good.

Devo: Thank you.

Hermine: Dammit!

Devo: Watch this, watch this!

Travis: And I... change my glamor weave to like, gold. With like, silver lightning bolts running through it.

Amber: This is miserable. I'm in hell. Please tell us when you're gonna behead us, so I can get my affairs in order.

[Tense music plays]

Griffin: Um. Kodeira stands, and walks over and whispers something to High Ballaster Hermine. And sits back down. And she then looks over at the Hand of Guidance, who nods, and then she looks over at Aloysius Supreme, who shakes his head "no" violently, but she kinda shrugs that off. She says,

Hermine: Okay. The three of you have people on this council who vouch for you. And for that reason, I'm willing you let you inside on this. Because frankly, this thing's about to break in a big way, no matter what. And so whether you find out now, or you find out... [chuckles] whenever the time runs out, doesn't necessarily matter.

Travis: Wait, Griffin? Real quick?

Griffin: Yeah.

[Music fades out]

Travis: I— what— what is the Hand of Guidance doing, after she vouches for us? I think Devo would like, be fully like trying to read her face.

Griffin: She looks worried. Like, as worried as everyone else here. You, obviously you guys have never been here before, you don't know what the vibe of a usual Ballast meeting is like. But this one's like... this one is very, very tense.

Travis: Okay.

Griffin: She is not like, paying you special mind, or anything like that.

Travis: Okay.

Griffin: She... stands up. And takes a breath, takes a beat, picks up the papers—

Travis: I like how you just said “breath,” Griffin.

Griffin: Thanks. [exaggerated diphthong vowel sound] Breath. [normal voice] And she says,

Hermine: Ah, let’s— let’s walk.

Griffin: And just like, takes off, walks down the stairs from the tier she’s on, right past you, out of the bridge.

Travis: Oh, Devo follows. He loves a walk and talk.

Griffin: Okay. Um. The rest of you going too?

Justin: Yes.

[Ambient echoing soundscape]

Griffin: Okay. You all walk through the Ballast. It is... it is empty, here, in the rest of this, y’know, gigantic ship, that makes up this level of the city. And you all make your way to the Crystal Ascension, which is similarly like— usually you gotta wait a little bit for your spot on the Ascension. Like, it’s huge, but. Uh. It’s, it is... a ghost town right now. And you all step inside and start traveling downward. And she looks at you, Amber, and she says,

Hermine: Do you remember the sallow?

Amber: Oh, god. Yeah. Um. I haven’t thought about that in forever. Uh. Yeah, that was rough. [pause] Carly got it, if I remember correctly. Um. It was a rough patch. She pulled through, but, um... yeah, it was tough for a while.

Griffin: She looks over at you, Devo and Zoox, and looks back at Amber, and she says,

Hermine: Tell... tell your friends. You were... probably a little older than I was, I bet you can paint a clearer picture.

Amber: This is gonna sound weird. It was weird. But, umm... it would make you kind of... fishy? I guess? Would be... you know, like fish type... things...

Devo: Like suspicious?

Amber: Like— no. Oh, [laughs] yeah. No, like, um... kinda scaly, and like physically, you know? You'd look like a... start to look like a fish. Sorta like, y'know. Limpiditis. Um...

Travis: Are there still fish people about, Griffin? In—

Griffin: Oh, for sure!

Travis: Yeah, this—

Griffin: There's not a ton, but there are people who caught the sallow and survived, on the surface, who are still alive down here in the city. Um... yeah.

Amber: There were some people... Joshy was one of 'em, I think, though he might have just been trying to sell something. Some people thought that it was... like a blessing. That was preparing us for a life underwater. Like... they were rushing evolution, you know what I mean?

Devo: So this was the disease that gave people fish-like features, yes?

Amber: Um. I mean, again, like... yeah. Kinda. I mean, it affected different people different ways. Some people just got a little scaly. Some people... you know, died. Um. Couple kinda had, like, the beginnings of gills? But it was more like, uh... cosmetic gills, you know, nobody was...

Devo: Okay...

Amber: Was breathing water.

Devo: And what caused this?

Amber: Yeah, I don't know. We were real focused on... the... end of the world?

Devo: So... okay.

Hermine: Now we know.

Griffin: The doors open, and she leads you all into the Cradle. Which is... sort of the heart of the... systems, that power the city. Like the filtration systems, the, like, you know, food... storage and preparation and management. Like, everything that makes sure that people have what they need to survive, all of the... infrastructure, like important life-preserving infrastructure of the city, is here in the Cradle. And... there's a... it's almost like a subway station? Like there are gates here, leading into a larger... y'know, chamber, with doors and hallways branching out in different directions. There are guards here, but as soon as they see Hermine, they stand to the side and let you all pass. And Hermine says,

Hermine: Yeah, Amber was spot on, pretty much everything. It was a disease that gave people fish-like features. And some people thought it was a blessing to prepare us for life under the sea. It is back. And... we know a little bit more about it, this time, for reasons that are not so great. Uh. It's definitely... it's definitely an intentional, um, thing. Someone made it, to change us. And— whether we like it or not. And your ship was the thing that brought it into our city. Found some traces of it, on the underside. And... thank goodness you all did not do this on purpose, or else you would be in... turbo-jail.

Travis: [snorts]

Griffin: And she walks you all through, like, a super, super large door that requires a key, that she carries inside her shirt, to open. And she walks you all inside. And she says,

Hermine: [echoing slightly] We... managed to catch it. And by "we" I mean... the phytoplankton.

Griffin: You all are in a dark room right now, like a warehouse. Like, her words are now echoing throughout this warehouse. She says,

Hermine: [echoing] And the phytoplankton... managed to catch this big wave, before it could hit the city again. And... for that, we owe them, we owe them a lot. But... unfortunately... we are... not really gonna have a chance to pay back that kindness any time soon.

Griffin: And a light flips on. And then another, and another, in a line, leading away from this catwalk that you all are now standing on in this warehouse. And as they go, they illuminate this cavernous room, with these huge, like five-story tall glass tanks filled with water. Empty tanks filled with water. As the lights illuminate, you can see them clearly. There's one, and then another, and then another, and then there's four of these empty tanks. And then finally, a fifth one illuminates in the back of the room, and inside of that one, you can see one of the phytoplankton. And it is... bonkers looking. It is a... y'know, imagine like a multiple-celled organism that has been blown up, with magic, to be the size of a house. It has, like, y'know, all these weird frills that are wiggling around. It has— you can see its... Golgi bodies, and shit, inside of it, just kind of—

Travis: Mmhmm.

Justin: Not the Golgi bodies!

Travis: Aw, man.

Griffin: I'm trying to remember my— the— my— eighth grade—

Travis: You can see the mitochondria!

Griffin: The mitochondria.

Travis: Aww, no!

Griffin: Uh... you can see... yeah, you can see—

Travis: Is there RNA in there? I think?

Justin: [laughs] Maybe! There's no way of knowing. [laughs]

Travis: Nobody knows.

Griffin: You can see its weird, like, cell structure... stuff in there. But it is gigantic. Um. And, oh hey, Zoox, make one of your nature checks.

Clint: Doo doo doo... [sound of dice rolling] That would be a 19 plus three, 22!

Griffin: Ooh, that's very good. It's in a lot of pain.

Travis: Aw, bummer.

Griffin: It's... it's doing poorly. Um. And so these lights—

Travis: Is it that— is it the cytoplasm, do you think? Or maybe like a ribosome? Or...

Griffin: Its cytoplasm has a... has a booboo on it.

Travis: Is its nucleus... okay?

Griffin: We're gonna get in so much shit for this episode.

Justin: Now Travis is reading the internet.

Griffin: Yeah.

Clint: Aw, yeah.

Justin: So we must stop.

Griffin: We can move on.

Clint: Yeah. [laughs]

Travis: No, all that was off the top of my head.

Griffin: Tell me about its smooth endoplasmic reticulum, Travis.

Travis: It's sexy as fuck!

Griffin: Yeah. It...

Clint: [wheezes]

Griffin: It is... it is in pain, Zoox, you can tell that. And then a band of lights around the room, around the floor, illuminate, and now you can see the floor of this room. And you can see... four other... of these phytoplankton, these enormous phytoplankton on the ground. And their bodies are twisted, and... wrong. They have parts of their bodies that should not belong there, evolved parts of bodies. They have tails, and tentacles, and fins, and... all of these things in places where they don't belong, sort of just... twisted into this indescribable mass. You're not sure where one of these things ends and another one begins, but you can see that they are laying on the ground, lifeless. And there are teams of people wearing vapor suits, covering their bodies, trying to... study them. And—

Clint: So they're not emerg— they're not in water?

Griffin: No, they are on the ground dead. And... you look up at the Ballaster Hermine, and she says,

Hermine: So, yeah.

Amber: Are we... [sighs] So are they infecting people?

Hermine: Those four aren't doing much of anything right now. Besides making a smell, that is... pretty unpleasant, I think we can all agree.

Amber: Are there— are there others?

Hermine: Are there others... of the magic phytoplankton that came from the bottom of the sea...

Amber: Hey, are you in trouble right now? Are things going well?

Hermine: Yep. Yeah, things are going great. I'm sorry, this is—

Amber: I have given you all the respect in the world for your position, but now that it's clear I'm not gonna be 'headed, I'm gonna need you to cheese it with the attitude, okay?

Devo: Yes, maybe flip the switch from snarky to sincere, so that we can understand the situation and attempt to help?

Hermine: Okay. Here's the situation. We had a system that helped everybody in our city to breathe, and provide everybody in our city with potable water for twenty-five years. And it was built on the backs of five enormous phytoplankton, that the Parish blew up to make them very very big, and very very efficient. And in doing so, prevented them from being able to reproduce. So, nope, these are the only five. In existence... that—

Devo: Here.

Hermine: That are in our city.

Devo: Yes.

Hermine: And now we're working with one. Who is trying to hold back the sallow, singlehandedly, while also providing air and water into our city. And it is only a matter of time before it is unable to do so.

Devo: Okay. So... uh... just, obvious answer... go get more of these phytoplankton from wherever they came from originally? And then have the church blow them up again. End of problem.

Griffin: She... she looks pretty sullen when you say that. And she says,

Hermine: If... if Finn was... [laughs humorlessly] corporeal and could somehow remember his trip to the bottom of the ocean, that would be easy. But. Um. Sss... have you all met Finneas?

Zoox: Cawl?

Hermine: Yeah.

Amber: I heard about him.

Devo: Yes, I've heard about him as well. Um.

Zoox: I think I... I think I have.

Hermine: Um. He's not the most, sort of... cogent dude around. Um... So he's not especially useful in remembering where he found these guys. They came up with his comatose body, in a bathysphere, from who knows where. And, I mean, he knew where, I suppose, at one point. And now he doesn't. So, um.

Devo: Mmm, well, he cannot remember—

Zoox: What is condition?

Hermine: His condition is that he's a spirit, who lives in a little... um, ball, attached to a Brinarr.

Devo: To be clear: he knows, he just cannot remember. This is different.

Hermine: That's a super metaphysical way of thinking about it, and I like it.

Devo: Oh. If I may, and you may not know this, but... my friend Zoox here simply cannot stop going into people's minds.

Amber: Yeah. It's a little disconcerting, actually.

Zoox: [scoffs] For you two! [laughs] I mean, it's really bad for me!

Devo: Yes, he has done this with a turtle, and a clam, uh, and probably other things— oh, the bleached thing, he did that...

Amber: Oh god, yeah. That was troubling.

Devo: So just let him go in to this Finneas person's mind. Find where he went. And then we will pop over there, we will grab it, and then phhbtt. Make it big. Problem solved. Eh?

Amber: Maybe we can shrink down and go inside his mind too.

Devo: I—

Amber: To help.

Devo: Is it a... I don't think it's a shrinking... thing... Is it?

Amber: I've shrunk before.

Devo: You've shrunk before? Oh, yes, you did—

Amber: We all did, remember? It was wild!

Devo: Yes, yes, this is true.

Amber: Yeah. Would that work? Or is— does it only work with like... do you do humans?

Devo: Or Brinarr. I mean, this is a...

Amber: Yeah, right, good point.

Clint: Griffin, I have forgotten which Brinarr Finneas is in.

Griffin: Ampersand Five.

Clint: Was in Ampersand, right, okay.

Griffin: Yeah. He is not— if you’ve met him, you would know that he is not necessarily totally congealed with Ampersand Five. He is like, a... attaché. He—

Clint: Right. Okay.

Griffin: He exists in this little, like, lantern, basically, that Ampersand Five carries with him, that is attached to him.

Zoox: It may not be as easy as you all think. I... Listen. This is one of the first Brinarr ever created. Ampersand Five. Okay? And... and... Finneas is not really... connected? He’s physically connected, but he had— he never really soul-bonded with Ampersand Five. So it may be kind of tough to reach— I mean, I want to try! I certainly want to give it the old gungho. But it may not be as easy as you guys think. I... Where is Ampersand Five these days?

Griffin: High Ballaster Hermine smirks, and then she looks down on the floor. And down there, sure enough, you see a Brinarr among all of the people in the vapor suits. And this Brinarr is not wearing a vapor suit at all. It is also not like any other Brinarr you’ve seen before. They are tall, and very slender, almost stick-bug-like. And they are comprised of very warm colors, a lot of red and pink and orange. And they have attached to them, a... a hose. Sort of coming out of their left shoulder. And it travels down the length of their arm and is attached to what appears to be a lantern at the end. And as they sort of wave this lantern around all of these dead phytoplankton, it flashes, and from it you can hear a voice. That you can’t quite make out what it’s saying from here.

Zoox: We need to speak to Ampersand Five.

Griffin: She... whistles. And Ampersand Five looks up and nods, and starts to head your way.

[Ominous music plays out]

[Advertisement break]

[Low music fades in]

Griffin: You all have been brought to basically a break room here in the Cradle which is essentially like, its own huge cafeteria. But again, like... it is empty. There's like a couple tables with a couple people eating as fast as they possibly can so that they can get back to... trying to save the city, essentially. And... this tall, easily like seven and a half foot tall... Brinarr comes and bends down to sit next to you. And they nod at you, Zoxx, and then look at the rest of the table, and then they just slam this lantern down on top of the table. And... the lantern flashes, and says,

Finneas: Zoxx Anthellae! You son of a gun. Great to— great to see you again!

Zoxx: Uh. Equally great to see you, Ampersand Five. I've— I'm— [laughs nervously] I'm a fan. Uh. Huge fan.

Griffin: The Brinarr looks kind of uncomfortable when you say that. And... the lantern flashes and says,

Finneas: You can... you can address me as Finneas, if it makes things... less confusing? We've come to sort of an arrangement.

Zoxx: Oh. Finneas Cawl? This... am I speaking to Finneas Cawl?

Clint: And he gets down real close to the lantern and he starts tapping on it.

Zoxx: Hello? Finneas? Hello?

Griffin: Uh, Ampersand Five, the Brinarr, leans down to meet you face to face, and says,

Ampersand Five: That won't be necessary.

Zoxx: Oh.

Ampersand Five: We never really... um... He was not an Einarr spirit. We never really meshed in the way that... you know. *We* do. So you can just address him as Finneas. It's okay.

Zoox: Finneas. Um. My friends and I have... [clears throat] Obviously... without meaning to, brought some kind of contraband into the city, and... and as you— I think you can see that all this is... is... kind of... our fault? We'd like to make up for our mistakes, and we would like to go, um, go get some more of the phytoplankton, to bring back up, and... and help. Where— where would that be exactly? Your phytoplankton farm?

Griffin: [laughs] He... the lantern does nothing. The lantern is dormant for a second, and then it flashes, and... you hear Finneas say,

Finneas: Hey, Amp, would you point me at Hermine please?

Griffin: And then the lantern flashes again and says,

Finneas: Are you... are you goofing? With this shit?

Griffin: And she shakes her head no. And Ampersand puts the lantern back down on the table and says,

Finneas: Listen. Listen. Folks, I want to help out, obviously I do. Wanna save the city. Get another notch in the old hero belt. But, um... I cannot remember. Because, um... memory is typically stored in the brain. And I don't have one of those.

Justin: [laughs]

Amber: Alright, well, how are you talking, then?

Finneas: Uh, wow, that's a... that's gonna really blow your freaking mind, man.

Amber: I'm waiting.

Finneas: Magic stuff.

Devo: Okay.

Amber: Ohhhh, okay.

Devo: Well, speaking of magic stuff, so what's going to happen is that Zoox is going to go into whatever, uh, this personality... magicky brain thing that you do have is. And find the memory of where you got this phytoplankton from. And then we will go get it. And I said this with confidence, even though it is an absolutely bonkers thing to say.

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: Make a persuasion check, Devo. Whenever you say, y'know, whenever you pitch that, Ampersand Five does not look comfortable.

Clint: Wow!

Travis: That is an 18 plus nine. A 27.

Clint: [flabbergasted] 27!

Griffin: Um. The lantern flashes, and Finneas says,

Finneas: Yeah! Alright. Cool. More, more magic stuff. Get in there. Poke around.

Justin: [laughs]

Finneas: You might see some stuff that'll... put some hair on your coral. Um. Which is— which would be pretty weird. But, um, you know.

Devo: Not the weirdest thing that was—

Finneas: No, not at all.

Devo: Yes.

Finneas: Um, yeah. I'm— I think that's a killer idea.

Griffin: And Ampersand Five says,

Ampersand Five: Uhhhhmm... I guess if it's, uh... if it'll help, help the city. Um. Yeah. Uh... okay. Is it dangerous?

Devo: Uhh... Zoox?

Zoox: Um... it's...

Amber: It's not *not* dangerous.

Zoox: It's— [laughs] It's a little weird. Um. Can I talk to my friends just for a second? Can I have a conference real quick? Thank you. [quietly] Okay.

Griffin: [laughs] Ampersand Five turns the lantern around 180 degrees.

Zoox: I think we ought to have a safe word? So that if I get sucked in, and can't get back out, like with the clam?

Devo: Mmhmm.

Zoox: There's something you guys can... uh...

Amber: Like what do you want me to do? Sweep in, dunk a bucket of water on you or what?

Zoox: I think—

Devo: This would do nothing, you love the water—

Zoox: It would refresh me.

Devo: Oh, this is a good idea! What if you soaked in a bath? While you are doing it? Would this help?

Zoox: Oh. I don't know.

Amber: That's a good idea.

Devo: We put both of you in the bath together? Mm?

Amber: Yeah!

Zoox: Ohh! That might help—

Amber: Spicy. Yeah.

Zoox: Um. Okay!

Amber: Conductive, right?

Zoox: Good! See? You two! [laughs affectionately]

Devo: Now— before—

Amber: Hurry up, though, I'm— I— this place gives me the fuckin... creepos. I need to get out and get going, you know?

Devo: And before you thank us, we—

Griffin: It is weird, Amber, you've got a bit of a headache going on. And Devo, you've got a bit of a sore throat.

Devo: Oh no.

Clint: Okay. I... Zoox turns around and says,

Zoox: Bring hither a... two tubs of water!

Devo: Who are you talking to?

Zoox: I... [mumbling] I don't...?

Hermine: I know you're not talking to me.

Griffin: Hermine says.

Zoox: No. Um. [calling out] Could somebody please get a big, big tub of water? Or could we get into one of the tubes? Would that be okay?

Griffin: Uh, Ampersand—

Zoox: I don't know why I'm talking like this!

Griffin: Uh, Ampersand Five gestures to the side of the room, where there are a bunch of showers and tubs for Brinarr to recharge in.

Clint: Okay.

Griffin: 'Cause it's a cafeteria and that's sorta their... how they... how they get full up too.

Zoox: Alright. You wanna get in the shower with me?

Ampersand Five: Nn... [sighs]

Zoox: Thanks! Come on!

Ampersand Five: [sighs, reluctant] Yeah. Okay.

Griffin: It's like a hot tub sitch— let's say it's like a hot spring situation. Like there is a communal—

Clint: [laughing] Okay.

Griffin: There is— this is not weird. There is communal sort of— bathing and stuff—

Justin: This is not weird.

Travis: No!

Clint: No!

Travis: It's only weird if you make it.

Justin: Hey, big ups to whoever's very specific fetish is being served by this.

Griffin: Yeah.

Clint: [laughs]

Justin: This segment—

Travis: [reverently] "I love when human shaped coral soaks together."

Griffin: Alright, you get in one of these hot springs with Ampersand Five, whose knees are sticking out of the water, they are so ill-fitted for this particular tub. They're holding the lantern above the water, and they say— Ampersand Five says,

Ampersand Five: Uh... I'm not actually sure if I can get this wet?

Justin: Hmm.

Griffin: They start to submerge it, and Finneas Cawl yells,

Finneas: Ow! Oww! Ow! No, I'm just playing, go ahead.

Griffin: And they submerge the lantern into the water.

Devo: Ah, this is funny. Yes. Good joke.

Clint: Okay, so Zoox reaches up with one coral-y frond-y hand. And puts it up next to Ampersand's... I should probably... No, no. Up to the lantern.

Griffin: Okay.

Clint: Puts it on the lantern. And says,

[Soft wistful music begins playing softly]

Zoox: My mind to your mind.

Travis: Mmhmm.

Zoox: My thoughts to your thoughts.

Travis: And then we were sued.

Griffin: [giggles] For the fifteenth time, in TAZ history.

Clint: And... he starts... like, Dr. Strange, going through some of the weird astral planes—

Travis: Oh, we got sued twice! By two different people!

Clint: Find Zoox in—

Griffin: [laughing] In one sentence! Awesome!

Travis: Wow!

Griffin: Um.

Clint: He starts going through this weird... scene, like, the inside of Finneas's...

Griffin: Yeah.

Clint: Mind. Not brain.

Griffin: Yeah, as you touch the lantern, everybody else in the room sees you, like, having this fucking journey. And like, just cruising through the cosmos in your own sort of like— on your own fuckin' shit, just surfing your own wave. And... Ampersand Five looks at you and says,

Ampersand Five: Um. When is it— when does it— when does it actually... start, for us?

Griffin: Because it is doing nothing. You touching this lantern is accomplishing... is accomplishing nothing. 'Cause it is sort of a metal construct that you're getting nothing out of.

Devo: Uh, maybe we should open the lantern?

Griffin: Finneas says,

Finneas: Hey, there's no secrets here. If we've got memories to show me, you can show Ampersand. Ampersand, you mind... being a conduit?

Griffin: And Ampersand Five shakes their head and holds out a hand.

Zoox: Okay.

Clint: Then Zoox reaches out that same frondy hand, kinda intertwines the quote-un-quote "fingers," and says,

Zoox: My hand to your hand.

Travis: Oh boy.

Justin: Okay.

Zoox: My palm to your palm.

Griffin: Make a... make a nature check.

Travis: Oh wait, hold on!

Devo: You've got this, Zoox. I believe in you.

Travis: And I give him bardic inspiration. [laughs]

Griffin: [laughing] Okay good, just in the nick— in the midnight hour!

Justin: Yeah.

Griffin: This was a good roll to do that on.

Clint: So... I mark one in inspiration... okay.

Travis: I have literally been staring at Bardic Inspiration this whole time, [laughing] not thinking to use it.

Griffin: Yeah. You need a, like, framed napkin that says "Bardic Inspiration," like Bartlett for President—

Travis: Yeah.

Griffin: On your desk.

Clint: Well that's 18...

Griffin: Oh my goodness. Wow!

Travis: Pretty good.

Clint: And... should I do it again?

Griffin: No—

Travis: I mean—

Griffin: Why— no, why would you do it again?

Travis: No, bardic inspiration, just a reminder, you add a d8, one d8. To a roll.

Clint: So... which I don't need to do now.

Travis: No. I think a 21—

Griffin: I mean, if you want to juice this roll. But a 21 is very good. Um. Okay—

Travis: You could juice it!

Griffin: It's—

Clint: Alright, I'm using it.

Griffin: Okay!

Clint: I'm gonna use it.

Griffin: Sure! Why not.

Travis: Roll a d8.

Clint: [sound of dice rolling] Five. That makes it 26!

Griffin: Wow. Okay. Wow. With a 26... wow. Okay. [takes a breath] It's easy. It's so easy. You've never done this with a Brinarr before, maybe that's why it's so easy, is because the physiology is so similar? But it is like... it's like you are remembering something. Only, the first thing that you are remembering is... the Einarr Plateau. And you are a shepherd. And you are herding some sheep, and your...

Travis: Now I assume you said "herding" and not "hurting."

Griffin: Right—

Travis: He's not just like sitting there like, [laughs meanly] and poking them in the eyeball or something, right?

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: Right. Uh. And your... your husband is... helping to sort of repair a fence, in this corral. And then the scene changes. And you're a little girl, who is hiding in the rain as one of her friends is stomping around in puddles and

looking for her. And then you are part of a convoy of wagons, moving from the cliffs deeper into the fields of the Plateau. And you bounce around all of these different sort of disconnected memories, and then each of them sort of reach this sudden end where now you are just in this plane of glimmering light.

And you feel all these memories, all of these sources of memory, start to sort of blend together, into one entity, that feels restless, and feels angry. And... is fighting this, this place that they are residing, and pushing against the boundaries of it. And you start to see shapes in the light, that you recognize, Zoox, as the Shepherding Pool, that you saw, you know, a few days ago, where Tessellation does their work.

But there's another voice in the room, that doesn't coalesce with the other ones. That you feel kind of like... disconcerted by. And then you are in that voice. And you feel pain. You feel a lot of pain. Because you are dead. You feel death. And it is— make a wisdom saving throw for me?

[sound of dice rolling]

Griffin: Oh yeah.

Clint: Six?

Griffin: Uh. I want you to take three points of psychic damage. You just bit off way more than you can chew, because you just felt death...?! [chuckles] Which is not, like, great. Um.

Clint: Right. Okay.

Griffin: And... you kind of work your way backwards, and you... hear voices. Voices that you can understand. Only you are, like, deeply unconscious. This is like, way, way, way, back of your mind stuff. And you hear panicked voices, casting a bunch of different spells all at once, trying to revive you. And then you go back further, and you are... on the floor... in a pool of water. And there's an unconscious body, or maybe dead, a few feet away from you. And you realize you are on the floor of the bathysphere, in like three inches of standing water. And... the door to the bathysphere

opens, and you hear Hermine, 25 years younger, gasping and running in and grabbing at you, and dragging you out of the bathysphere. And then you go back further. And you remember a struggle inside of the bathysphere, with this other person that you can't quite see.

And then you remember something else. You remember... a dark place. A quiet, dark place. And you remember pressure all around you, pushing down on you. You remember the feeling of it in your ears, almost unbearable, even though this quiet calm place is peaceful. Everything about it is almost pleasant, except for that pressure.

And there is a crack... in the sandy floor at your feet. And there are... there is heat coming up from that crack. And there are bubbles coming up from that crack. You remember it as a vent, on the ocean floor. You remember it as a sacred place. You remember it as: the origin of all life came from these vents. And you can remember a voice coming from that crack, from something... just below the surface. And then when you come to, Zoox...

[Music suddenly shifts and intensifies, grows scary]

You come to in a room that is different from the one that you began this, this connection in. Because there are alarms going off. And... you see people running out of the room, back toward their stations. And you see the Ballaster Hermine knelt down, beside your two friends.

And Devo looks up at you first. And he looks... in pain. And he's clutching at his chest. And as he looks up at you, you notice that emerging from underneath his chin... there are two small webbed fins now that connect his neck up to his jawline.

And then Amber meets your gaze, and the panic in her eyes is almost cartoonishly exaggerated. Because her eyes are different. They are slightly larger, with huge black pupils surrounded by a ring of silvery-blue. She's looking back at you with fish eyes.

And when you look around this room, and listen down the further reaches of the Cradle, you realize... what is happening to them is happening everywhere. The city of Founders' Wake... is transforming.

[Scary music plays out]

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