

The Adventure Zone Balance: The Eleventh Hour, Chapter Eight

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Griffin: Previously, on *The Adventure Zone*:

Director: You've been able to withstand the thrall of each of the relics that you've faced so far, and that is commendable. But there... there's no power and no treasure more seductive than that which the Temporal Chalice presents. It will tempt you in ways that you have never been tempted before, and I have no way to aid you except to warn you that the power to fix your mistakes is a power that is nearly impossible to resist.

June: But I truly believe that together, we can fix the wrongs of the past, and we can make this world better in the process. I just want you to hear me out, and then I'll release the girl, and then I'll go with you in peace.

Merle: So you're the cup?

Announcer: Let me do some quick calculations. According to my math, there's a 0% chance the boys don't wang this one up! It's *The Adventure Zone*!

[theme music plays]

[piano music plays]

Griffin: Merle, hey.

Merle: Hey!

Griffin: It's just the two of us. Um, you don't have to use your character voice. You can just talk to me like Clint, for now.

Clint: Okay.

Griffin: Um, so Merle, you are standing in a space that feels kind of similar to the white space that you've found yourself in so many times whenever the loop resets. But as you look around, it dawns on you that Taako and Magnus aren't here anymore. It's just you, and standing immediately in front of you is June, who is holding the Temporal Chalice. And already, she actually looks a bit more

vital than when you spoke to her just moments ago. Instead of this, like, um, you know, 90-year-old woman, she looks like she's in her 60's or so.

Clint: Nice, yeah!

Griffin: [through laughter] Okay?

Clint: Okay!

Griffin: Alright. Um, she is deep in concentration, and you realize it's because she is scanning through your memories. And those memories are being represented in a very real way, everywhere around you. It's almost like you're standing kind of in the holodeck, if you will. And your life is flashing before your eyes as June kind of goes through your memories, and you find yourselves in all of these different scenes as she rewinds the span of your life. So you see, like, the past few loops as she's scanning slowly at first, and then you see your entrance, your cannonball entrance into Refuge, and then you see your time in Lucas's laboratory. And she slows down a bit there and she nods. And then she rewinds a bit faster, and you're in Rockport, and then you're in Phandalin, and you're in the years preceding Phandalin and preceding the adventure that has been covered in this show. Um, and this brings us to our first of a few questions that I want to ask all of you guys to kind of flesh out your characters a little bit. And that is, um... how did Merle come to be an adventurer? I wanna get into, like, how he became a man of the cloth a little bit later. But, like, how did you decide to sort of, um, become an adventurer? Is this, like, your first real quest? Were you a— a priest of fortune before that? Like, how did Merle get into this adventuring life?

Clint: No, this was not— this was not the first, no. Um, really had a terrible home life. He was in a loveless marriage.

Griffin: Oh, interesting!

Clint: Yeah. I mean, it was ugly.

Griffin: What was his husband or wife's name?

Clint: Uh, Hecuba. It was Hecuba.

Griffin: Okay.

Clint: It was, uh— you know, dwarves' marriages are usually arranged marriages, you know, because we're really into this whole, you know, keeping the gene pool, you know, dwarf pure.

Griffin: Sure, sure, sure. Were you sort of secluded mountain dwarves or like hill— hill dwarves? More like, you know, civilized, human-like—

Clint: We were— no. We were beach dwarves. We lived on the beach.

Griffin: [laughs]

Clint: We had a— we had a— you would call it a cottage, but to us it was home.

Griffin: Alright. That is unconventional, but so are so many things.

Clint: Yeah. And here I came up with this great beach property, and it still wasn't enough.

Griffin: How did this loveless marriage to Hecuba result in you becoming an adventurer?

Clint: I, uh— I ran down to the— the dwarf store, I said "I'm goin' out for smokes." She said, "What do I care?" And she said it just like that. "[whiny voice] And get my lotto tickets!" She said that.

Griffin: Okay.

Clint: So...

Griffin: Is—is Merle still legally married?

Clint: [sighs heavily] With my religious pull—

Griffin: [holding back laughter] Sure.

Clint: —in my mind, I had it annulled.

Griffin: But not on paper.

Clint: Legally, Hecuba is still floatin' around out there.

Griffin: Okay, this is interesting.

Clint: Uh, because if she ever found me she would cut me... whew!

Griffin: Okay, so you're kind of a man on— you're kind of a dwarf on—

Clint: Dwarf on the run. I'm a running dwarf.

Griffin: On— a little bit, okay.

Clint: Yeah.

Griffin: Alright, interesting. So yeah, then while June is scanning past Phandalin, past sort of your meeting the other boys, she sort of finds a few years of your nomadic lifestyle. She scans to your humble but cozy beach cottage that you shared with Hecuba. She rewinds even further to— oh, you're there on your arranged wedding day, and it was a pretty horrible event, I'm imagining.

Clint: Oh God, it was terrible. The catering was horrible.

Griffin: Yeah, sure.

Clint: Ugh! The deviled eggs went bad.

Griffin: Uh, and so you rewind past that. And, um, she's scanning a bit faster now. And these memories, this holodeck chamber of memories that you are standing in, sometimes the picture gets a little bit blurrier, where your memories falter a bit. Some bits that, like, you just can't remember at all are just complete static, right?

Clint: Okay.

Griffin: Um, and as she rewinds past your wedding day and a few of the years before that, she actually hits a point where there's a *lot* of static. Like a really, really long unbroken period that June is just scanning through, more and more quickly. And she's frowning, and she seems like she's unsure whether this error or on your side or hers, but there's, like, a long span of time that's just not there. But then all of a sudden, your memories do pop back into view as she rewinds

beyond that static, and you see yourself as a younger man, and you see the time where you first sort of joined the cloth. Which brings me to my next question. How did you—

Clint: Dwarf, by the way. Dwarf, not man. Dwarf.

Griffin: Oh, sorry. Dwarf, a young dwarf. And you joined the cloth. That leads me to my next question, which is, um, how did you convert to becoming a follower of Pan?

Clint: Um, well, my Dad was a, uh, a Pannite.

Griffin: Interesting, okay.

Clint: Yeah. And always— I mean, it was, wow. Every Sunday morning, every Sunday night, every Wednesday night, goin' to Pan service, goin' to Pan service.

Griffin: Sure.

Clint: You know, and—

Griffin: I've always kind of envisioned Pan followers and, like, druids being— I mean, they're basically the same thing— just kind of being... buds and, like, living in, like, a hippie commune or something like that?

Clint: Yeah. Yeah, that's exactly what it was. All the nature crap and, you know, "[mockingly] Ohh, the trees, animals, birds!" Ugh, God! And, you know.

Griffin: So you didn't like— you didn't like growing up in the commune.

Clint: Well, no. I mean, I had to go. And, you know, I didn't wanna get grounded. Um, so yeah, I went along, and I went to, you know, every summer Pan camp. You know, um, I'll go along on the Pan retreats. But it was really— really forced down my throat. I didn't— I didn't dig it. I— but I had to— you know, you had to. It's your old man! You gotta act like, you know, you wanna be there.

Griffin: Sure. So it seems like Merle is strong in his faith in Pan now. Was there something that happened that sort of awoke that in him, or has it always been

sort of just, like, second nature? Like it's just sort of a thing that he does without feeling especially strongly about it?

Clint: Well, the thing is, when things are going good it's easy to be a, you know, a Pannist. Uh, you know, 'cause it's— oh, yeah. "Oh, wow, this is good! Yeah!" I got away, you know. "Ohh, yeah, living my life!" And then, you know, all of a sudden I was in the middle of it. And it's easy to be a Pannist when life is good, because, you know, let's face it. If you're gonna worship a nature god and everything around you trees and rocks and animals and shit, I mean, it's— it's— what else are you gonna think? It's not like, you know, I was walking through cities or any of that kind of stuff. So it's... and when you're, you know—

Griffin: So this reli— I think this is super duper interesting, because it seems like this— you following Pan was inherited and not so much came as, like, a moment of divine inspiration.

Clint: Oh, no, no, no, no. Lord, no. It was a good way to meet girls. To be honest with you.

Griffin: [amused] Okay.

Clint: [crosstalk] In the Pan choir and, you know.

Griffin: Sure, sure, with their pan flutes. It sort of paints the rest of the adventure that's happened in, like, a really interesting light of... you're not this super hardcore devout dude as much as you are, like, kind of still exploring.

Clint: Well, yeah!

Griffin: What it means to be a Pannist.

Clint: Well, I tried to switch to, you know, Isthmasism, but...

Griffin: Sure.

Clint: [through laughter] My damn finger fell off!

Griffin: Okay. Yeah, then you rewind your time sort of growing up as a moody 20-something and a moody teen in this commune. And you sort of hit the end of the track, and June, um, fast forwards back through that early adulthood period,

back through that long, long, long static. And fast forwards back into the past year. And in fact you know exactly the day that she stops at, because this— this projection stops, and you find yourself in the middle of a familiar and disturbing scene. And I should point out at this point that what you're seeing here is in third person, for lack of a better term. Like, you see yourself. Um, you are sort of standing there, ghost of Christmas past style, alongside June and the Chalice as you look at this scene. And she— June finally speaks up after scanning through your life for a really long time. And she says, um...

June: You've lived a fairly charmed life, Merle Highchurch. And we currently stand at the exact moment of your worst and most fixable mistake.

Griffin: And you realize you're standing in Lucas's lab during the Crystal Kingdom arc, and you see yourself in your null suit, and you look dumbstruck. You're kind of facing yourself. And across the room is Noel and Taako and Magnus, who are chipping away at a frozen door. And floating immediately in front of you is a crystal shard, which has emerged from a rift in space time. And you realize when you see that crystal— you look at yourself. You look at the projected version of yourself. You've still got both your arms. And you hear the voice of Pan, which you know to be the false voice of Pan, and it's beseeching you to grab the crystal and save your friends. And this scene is just frozen in front of you. And she says, uh...

[piano music plays in the background]

June: You shouldn't have grabbed that crystal, Merle.

Merle: No shit! [snorts]

June: If you claim me, Merle, and you use me, you can stop yourself from grabbing it. You can be whole again, Merle. That is my offer to you.

[piano music plays]

Griffin: Um, so Taako, you are with June and the Temporal Chalice in the white space, and I've kind of described what the scene is, so our radio audience didn't have to listen to it a second time. But you're in this white space, and you are sort of scanning through the memories of your life. Um, and at first the scan is kind of going back day by day, and then week by week, and then month by month, and you're seeing sort of recent history play out all around you. So, like, you're

standing in the Crystal Kingdom lab, in the cosmoscope. You're looking into the different planar mirrors. And then all of a sudden you're standing in front of a cherry blossom tree in the middle of Goldcliff and your arm is on Magnus's shoulder. And then you rewind a bit faster and you're taking a job in a tavern in Phandalin.

And you're just sort of scrolling back through the history of your life, and where the memories are a little less memorable, things get a little bit blurrier. When it's things that you've just kind of forgotten, there's just static. Um, and while June is scrolling back through your life and through the years preceding the adventure that this podcast has sort of contained, she hits a long, long, long period of static that she seems to just sort of look around kind of quizzically during, and she's just, like, fast forwarding— or I should say rewinding faster and faster and faster. And then once she gets past this long static, the picture returns, and you find yourself standing in your early adulthood and adolescence. Um, and this brings me to my first question of, like, stuff I wanna dive into with Taako. And that is, how did Taako first get into magic? Because you've talked about how it was sort of a modifier for your cooking. So I guess I should also ask how, like, that came— how cooking came to be an interest of Taako's as well. Like, what the relationship is between those two, what he got into first, how he got into them.

Justin: Taako had been on his own for quite some time. He, uh— from the time he was about 12 years old on, he had had to sort of fend for himself. And the way he would sort of make his living was by traveling, you know, with troupes, sometimes performers, sometimes mercenaries, whatever, different groups of people. Anybody who was traveling, because he never felt like he had any one place that he specifically belonged. Um, he didn't have any marketable skills. He did not fight. He did not— he was not—

Griffin: He didn't fly, he didn't grow.

Justin: Didn't fly, didn't grow. [laughs quietly] Uh, didn't have a lot of marketable skills, so the way that he sort of learned to, uh, make himself useful was he would serve as, like, the— the chef of the crew. So that would be the role that he would play, and that would be sort of how he paid his way, um, with these traveling crews. And, you know, the fact that he's so hesitant to get into danger is just sort of instinct from those days when he didn't have anybody sort of watching his back, so he had to kind of fend for himself.

Griffin: Okay. Um, and how did, like— how did magic get into it? Like, was there a— was there... did he have some sort of teacher of the culinary arts? Did he go to cooking school? Did he go to— like, where did Taako— that's how Taako, like, started cooking. Where did he get, like—

Justin: It was when the, uh— when he started doing the cooking show, when that opportunity came up. And he would go from town to town, keeping with that traveling spirit. He would, you know, go town to town. He had his own sort of production going, but he noticed that the audiences were flagging. Um, and so he was looking for some way to sort of, like, make— elevate his cooking and make it seem like something really special, so he started sort of messing with magic, but he obviously had no concrete training in it.

Griffin: Sure.

Justin: And that's how things sort of broke bad.

Griffin: Is he self taught? Both in magic and cooking? Did he go to any sort of cooking school or magic school or anything like that?

Justin: He learned— he did not— he learned cooking from an aunt of his that he was very close to, and she taught him cooking. The magic he just picked out of whatever books and stuff he stumbled on— when you're on the road like that, you know, you pick up little things here and there. He had traveled with wizards a couple of times and learned very small things, but he basically knew just enough to be dangerous, uh, when we got started.

Griffin: Okay, interesting. Alright. So... alright. So, while June is sort of scrolling through your early adulthood... she got past this long period of static where you just couldn't see anything, right? She's going through this period where you're traveling with these different caravans and making yourself useful while cooking. And while, like, those days were probably hard, those were probably really difficult days of, you know, just scraping by and doing everything in your power to, like, stay on board these caravans where you had any, you know, small amount of safety that you could grasp onto— while you're looking through these memories and, like, seeing yourself inside of a— a caravan and doing some cooking in there, there is something about the memory that's, like, a little bit off. Like there's something— it's almost like there are parts of it that are a little bit staticky, like as you look around you can't see the whole picture. And when June sees that, sees this distortion of this memory, she kind of sighs, um, and then

fast forwards back through your life, back through that long period of static, um, and into the years preceding this adventure. Somewhere within, like, uh, I wanna say about... I forget the timeline that we established in an earlier episode. I think it was six years ago, uh, before this— the current episode that we're on now.

Justin: Okay.

Griffin: Uh, at the fateful final episode of Sizzle It Up with Taako. And here she stops fast forwarding and the scene stops, and you see— you see the town of Glamour Springs. Um, and you see your stagecoach, and it's been kind of deployed. Like, the— the— there's a little window where you are doing all of your cooking. The stagecoach is nice and big and it's got all the cooking instruments you could possibly need. There's, like, a little oven in there that sort of pops out of the back of the stagecoach for ventilation. There's a stove top where you're doing some stuff. There's a big long counter for prep and where you do all your magic. Um, and the first question I wanna ask about this scene is, how many people were in attendance at this final show in the town of Glamour Springs?

Justin: Uh, I have... I may have given— the only thing that's fucking me up, Griff, is I don't— I don't remember if I've given these details before.

Griffin: I don't think you have, if you have, that's fine. Like, listeners, you'll have to forgive us. We've been doing this podcast over the course of two years, so if we go against canon, whatever. But I don't know that we've ever talked about your past—

Justin: Pretend I'm like a new ar— a new writer taking over on the Taako story.

Griffin: Sure. But not only that. Like, we've done such a bad job of diving into our characters' backstories. I see no reason why we can't sort of more firmly establish them now. So how many people were in attendance at this show?

Justin: There were 40.

Griffin: 40 people, okay. Just sort of a mix of— of folks?

Justin: Uh, there's always a few sort of— a few teens that had nothing better to do. Usually the older people in the village were usually the biggest audience. A lot of, you know, housewives and househusbands that looked after the home and

were looking to elevate their cooking for their special someone. And there was always, you know, a few lookyloos that just were looking for a free show.

Griffin: And free food. Like, I'm imagining Glamour Springs as being kind of a frontier town, and I think the people there really love you. Like, you've probably been through here a couple times.

Justin: Yeah.

Griffin: Um, and 40 is probably a pretty big crowd. And so, uh, like, you got a decent sized turnout here. And I think a lot of people maybe just show up for the free samples, because it's— they're one of the better off frontier towns but, I mean, there's still a lot of poverty. And so a lot of people just are like, "Oh, hey, free food, and also a great show."

What's the show like? What's Sizzle It Up like?

Justin: Um, it— it's a lot of talking, honestly. As the years went on there was a lot more sort of bloviating. Um, Taako does a lot of things to show off his cooking prowess, like he'll pour— like, he'll say this recipe calls for, like, a teaspoon of Worcestershire, and then he'll pour some Worcestershire on his hand and he'll be like, "You know, a lot of people say—"

Taako: You know, a lot of people wonder how I can do that and be so inaccurate, but look!

Justin: And then he'll pour some Worcestershire on his hand and then pour it into a teaspoon, it's, like, exact.

Griffin: [wheezes] That's really gross, though!

Justin: It's so gross.

Griffin: You just poured Worcestershire on your hand!

Justin: That's not for the food. No, the hand Worcestershire— I mean, his hands are clean! Like, that's how chefs work! Come on.

Griffin: I guess so. No, I don't think chefs pour liquid ingredients into their hands before they add them to the—

Justin: Well yeah, but like, if they're making meatballs or something they'll use their hands.

Griffin: Okay, fair.

Justin: He worked with clean hands. He's not a savage.

Griffin: Uh... so... I wanna ask another question. Um, and this is something we've definitely never talked about. Was this a one-man operation? Was it just you in a traveling stagecoach, or did you have help with Sizzle It Up, or was it just you?

Justin: No, I had a— a driver who— well, sort of a driver/stage manager.

Griffin: Like a roadie.

Justin: Roadie.

Griffin: What was their name?

Justin: Um... I gotta remember.

Griffin: [laughs]

Justin: Their name. 'Cause I knew 'em— it was weird. I knew 'em, like, the back of my... hand... Sazed.

Griffin: Sazed.

Justin: Yes. S-A-Z-E-D, Sazed.

Griffin: Sazed. Uh, is Sazed— what is Sazed?

Justin: Sazed is— he was a— a— sort of my right-hand man.

Griffin: Okay.

Justin: He thought I hung the moon, and you know, he learned some of the cooking from me, but mainly was just sort of there. He was sort of a combination of bodyguard and, uh... yeah. He— he was like my— my right-hand guy.

Griffin: Okay. So you've been traveling with Sazed for a long time, performing Sizzle It Up for varying size crowds. Obviously you played the Underdark, that was probably a weird show, but that's where Ren sort of first encountered you. Um, you've traveled all around the land, both playing bigger shows in towns like, you know, big citadels like Neverwinter, and then these smaller sort of villages on the frontier. Um, and your relationship with Sazed has been pretty well. You've been teaching them how to— you've been teaching 'em how to cook, and he in turn has done a good job, you know, keeping the trains running on time.

But your show's been growing in popularity, and it's grown a lot, actually, in the last year. And Sazed has wanted a little bit more responsibility, and a little bit more sort of featured placement? Um, Sazed has asked to do, like, a— a spot on the show. In the last couple months or so, Sazed comes to you before each show and is like, "So you think I could, uh... you think I could do my stuff on this one? Just, like, a little— a little spot?"

Taako: I mean, I'll let you do... you can get the mise en place together and stuff. You know, measure things out in the little cups. It makes everything run smoothly. That's fine.

Griffin: Okay. While they're getting the mise en place together during those shows, though... and I think it probably only happened a couple times... they would, like, turn around and hand you the thing and then, like, dish out a little catchphrase to the audience, like shop some stuff out, like test it out.

Justin: Yeah, yeah. They're kind of floating— trying to build their brand. I get that.

Griffin: They're trying to build their brand. And then, like, I think after a couple shows Sazed says, like, "Look. Listen. I've... I've really enjoyed working with you, and I think what would be great is if we could cohost this thing. Just, like, shared credit, put— your name's up on the stagecoach and it looks awesome. But what do you think about Sizzle It Up with Taako and Sazed? Just, like, shared credit, 50/50 split and, you know, we share the workload and share the— share the glory, you know? And we just... what do you think?"

Taako: Well... that is so groovy. I love that. It trips off the tongue, you know. But, um... [blows raspberry] I got a little these t-shirts that already say Sizzle It Up with Taako, and—

Sazed: I can get new t-shirts! I can get— I printed those t-shirts for you, so I can print out new t-shirts.

Taako: That's bad business, Sazed! I would love to help you out, but it's just bad business! Sizzle It Up with Taako is the brand! I mean, we'd have to throw all these in the— in the junk pile, and you can't write on 'em. There's not enough puffy paint in the world for all these t-shirts to add Sazed on there. Sorry, it's mainly a merch thing. A license and merch— and the brand. You know, I've got the logo painted on the side of the, uh, wagon already. So I don't know, I have my brand established. I just don't think it jives.

Griffin: Sazed's like...

Sazed: Okay. Alright. I get it. I get it. Okay.

Griffin: Uh, and...

Taako: Do you get it? Because I don't wanna keep having this conversation.

Sazed: No, it's locked in. Definitely, I got it, Taako.

Taako: Excellent!

Griffin: And Sazed's kind of dejected, and goes back to cleaning up the stagecoach after a particularly rambunctious show that you did. So I think Sazed's kind of moody over the next couple months. Um, not as talkative between shows. And this brings us to the final show at Glamour Springs. What are you cooking?

Justin: Meatballs.

Griffin: Always meatballs.

Justin: My famous meatballs.

Griffin: Okay. Well—

Justin: No, wait. No. I can't cook meatballs because that has ground—

Griffin: That's a little taco-like, yeah.

Justin: It's ground beef in them, and that would not be great. Uh, I am making my 30 garlic clove chicken.

Griffin: That's a lot of garlic cloves!

Justin: You know, you would think so—

Griffin: Okay. [laughs quietly]

Justin: —but you cook it so long that you really— you lose a lot of the, like— the most pungence and the most heat, but you definitely get that flavor deep down in. It's a long cook. It's a long cook.

Griffin: Um, and you— I shouldn't doubt you, 'cause I bet Taako remembers this, like, recipe like the back of his hand, like over the next, you know— until today, probably every day Taako thinks about this recipe and thinks about the measurements and thinks about what they could've possibly screwed up so very, very badly.

So you're doing this flashy production, you're making your 30 garlic clove chicken, which, like all of your productions, is sort of a combination of— an equal measure of advanced cooking techniques and transmutation magic. And I think some of the latter is probably, like, unnecessary, like transmuting sugar into salt when you had a big tub of salt just, like, right there.

Justin: Yes, absolutely. Like, taking the skin off the chicken, and then transmuting the chicken into chicken with skin on it. Like, just pointless.

Griffin: Just pointless shit.

Justin: Pointless magic.

Griffin: Um, and so you finish the meal, and the audience has been rapt this whole time. And you go to offer samples, and the audience starts to walk towards your stagecoach, and time freezes. And you remember what happens next. Um...

everybody dies who eats that chicken. You're lucky that you didn't eat the chicken to taste it, which is weird, because normally you would sample the food while you're cooking it, which I think could be leveraged as evidence against you. Um, for whatever repercussions you faced for this... this— this horrible event that happens. Um... and that's the last time that Sizzle It Up with Taako ever— ever takes place. But it hasn't happened yet in this scene. Time has been frozen. And June sort of grabs you by the wrist, still holding the cup in her other hand, and she says...

June: Come with me.

Griffin: And she walks you behind the stagecoach, to another smaller wagon that you towed alongside the stagecoach and used for storage. It's also where Sazed hung out most of the time. And she— you sort of pass through the wall of that smaller wagon. Sitting inside on a small crate, and sort of looking extremely nervous, like gripping his hair and staring intently down at the floor, is Sazed. And they're holding a bottle. And there's an apothecary's note scrawled on its lid, and you can see that this was a bottle full of arsenic. And June says...

June: Well, I guess this must come as some small relief, right? Like, all this time you thought your transmutation, your reckless magic is what killed the town of Glamour Springs. In actuality it was, you know, plain old jealousy. But still, all those people died.

Griffin: And then she snaps her fingers, and you're back at the stage, and you see yourself about to hand out these samples.

June: The people of this town died all the same, and you fed them their death.

Griffin: And before I pose this question to you, what was the aftermath to this? Like, how are you not in prison right now? Did you escape? Were you tried? Were you... what happened?

Justin: We ran. As soon as the first person got sick I knew what was up. I thought I knew what had happened. Um, I thought I'd confused— I used to use the elderberry garnish, and I thought I had confused elderberries for— that I had transmuted them, basically, into deadly nightshade, because the berries look very familiar, and I wouldn't have noticed. That's what I always assumed, 'cause anything else I would've seen. But we ran as soon as the first person got sick. I

told Sazed to get in the driver's seat and we just drove. We drove for two days straight before we stopped to look back.

Griffin: And I think at the first chance that he got, like the first settlement you got to after that...

Justin: He abandoned me, absolutely, yeah. I assumed 'cause he didn't wanna be associated with somebody who could do something like that.

Griffin: But in actuality... it's— it was something else. But we're not there yet. We're still at the wagon. You're still about to hand out these samples. She says...

June: This is the worst thing that ever happened, Taako, in your life. And you can fix it. If you claim me, none of this ever happened. Glamour Springs lives.

Griffin: Although not everybody in Glamour Springs died, right? Like, it wasn't a town of 40. But still, that's a big, big chunk of people.

[piano music plays in the background]

June: And you can keep doing your cooking show, and you won't have this... you won't have this horrible black mark on what is otherwise a heroic legacy. Take me, Taako. Take the cup, and you can fix it all.

[piano music plays]

Griffin: Uh, and finally we come to Magnus! Magnus, you're— you're in this same white space with June and the Temporal Chalice, and June is scanning back through your own memories. Um, and you're sort of seeing them appear in the white space around you. Um, and she starts out kind of scanning slowly, and picks up the pace a little bit faster, so you see recent events like Roswell's sort of rapid expansion in the bank that just happened. Um and then she rewinds a bit faster and you're standing in the core of Lucas's lab, facing off against Legion. And then she rewinds a bit faster and you're using railsplitter to chop Trent the Treant in half in the lobby of the Goldcliff Trust.

Travis: I don't remember any of this.

Griffin: Oh, it's definitely real. And then you're diving out of a glass walkway to attack an ogre in the test of initiation. And then you're— you're in the years

preceding the adventure, which June is watching intently and kind of taking mental notes as she goes. Um, and then she rewinds a bit faster through the years preceding this adventure, and then she hits this long period of static. That, like— you've seen it kind of pop up a couple times, where your memories are actually a little bit blurry. They become literally blurry around you, and you can't quite see them quite as well. Um, and things that you've just forgotten are— they just disappear, and are sort of this static. And she hits this huge, huge period of static. Um, and while she's rewinding quickly through it she says, um...

June: What... what happened to you guys? You're all missing... time. Like, a lot of time.

Magnus: Where— where are— where would this— what period is that?

Griffin: This is about— this would be about, um... about 12 years before the adventure started, or about 12 years before where we are now. Somewhere in that time frame. She's rewinding and there's just, like, a lot of static. Like a lot of it. And she says...

June: I guess it's not really... [sighs] important to what we're doing here. It's just, like... it's weird, man.

Griffin: And then she gets past the static, and you see your sort of early adult life, and then she rewinds back into your adolescence. And this brings us to our first question that I want to ask you to kind of flesh out Magnus, which is how did Magnus become a rough boy? Like, do you remember when you first became kind of a— a burly man? Was there, like, a first time that you ever protected somebody, maybe, and sort of led you down the career path that you ended up on? Not the carpentry path necessarily, but just sort of the nature of Magnus's—

Travis: Oh, into the— into the hero thing?

Griffin: Yeah. Into being, like— not a hero, but just, like, a protector of people.

Travis: I mean, there was a big event. Is that what you're talking about in the Magnus backstory?

Griffin: No, I think before that. When you're, like, a kid.

Travis: Um... there was a time in which I think probably the first thing Magnus can remember as far as, like, being a protector was seeing some bullies picking on a mongrel dog. And, you know, pulling its tail, throwing rocks at it, and he stood between the bullies and the dog. And, I mean, they outnumbered him three to one. The dog was able to get away, but he got beaten up pretty bad.

Griffin: Oh no!

Travis: But he protected the dog, and the dog was able to, you know, run away and get away into the woods.

Griffin: Did Magnus get his ass kicked?

Travis: Oh, so bad. So bad.

Griffin: Okay.

Travis: I mean, he was, like, 10, and all the boys were, like, 13 to 14 around him.

Griffin: Did Magnus ever see the dog again, or...?

Travis: No. I mean, it was too afraid of humans at that point. He never saw the dog again, but he knew it was the right thing to do. And so after that he started, you know, toughening up and... he didn't— he didn't like seeing someone weaker than him get hurt. I'm gonna choke up through this whole thing, by the way.

Griffin: No, yeah, we're gonna get—

Travis: I'm deeply connected to Magnus and all of his backstory.

Griffin: We're gonna have some big emotions. Travis, by the way, did a really great Q&A session on Twitter the other day talking about some Magnus story stuff that was really good. Um, so she sees that scene and she goes...

June: Aww, that's really sweet.

Griffin: And keeps rewinding, and sort of hits the end of the tape, and then fast forwards really quickly past that scene, past, you know, the rest of your early adolescence, past the long period of static, and then into the years preceding

your— your adventure. Um, and this scene that we're gonna stop at is about, um... uh, it's about five or six years before the adventure began. And you're standing— you know where you're standing. You're standing in a building that housed basically the happiest years of your life. You are standing in your woodworking shop. You're in the Hammer and Tongs, the pride of the craftsman corridor in the town of Raven's Roost.

By the way, I'm repurposing a lot of backstory stuff that Travis has actually— that you wrote before we— did you write it before we even started playing?

Travis: Uh, yeah, I think I wrote it before we recorded episode one.

Griffin: [through laughter] It's a shame that it's taken 48 fucking episodes to get here, but here we are.

Um, and you see yourself. You're watching the scene in third person. Your sideburns are a couple inches shorter and better kempt than your current facial hair configuration, but you see yourself. You're polishing a beautiful black oak rocking chair that you fondly remember to this day. It's a beautiful chair, beautiful grain this wood. And sitting at a desk behind you, poring over some order forms with a reading glass, is your mentor, the Tongs to your Hammer. What was his name?

Travis: Oh, shit. Did I give him a name? Because I can't remember now.

Griffin: Nope.

Travis: Okay. Steven Waxman.

Griffin: Okay. Steven Waxman. Steve? Just Steven.

Travis: Steven. I named my fish after him.

Griffin: That's very, very sweet. Um, he is an older man. Can you think of any other sort of descriptors for Steve?

Travis: Uh, he has a small— you know, it was well tended-to so it healed well, but a small kind of C-shaped crescent scar next to his right eye. Um, you know, a little goatee, kind of scraggly like it wasn't fully grown out, but he wears it well. I wouldn't say portly but, you know, he's up there in years, but underneath you can

tell there's tons of muscle. He's got kind of like a blacksmith build to him. Like you look at him you're like, "Yeah, that's a dude who could, like, swing a hammer. That's a guy who could, like, carry some logs. That's a guy who could do some work."

Griffin: So he's sort of a general craftsman then, it sounds like. Um, who took you into his shop, and you showed such a, like, proficiency for carpentry while serving as an apprentice to him that he took you on as a partner and sort of built this brand around you.

Travis: I mean, more than anything he was really more of a dad. I mean, let's be—

Griffin: Yeah, sure.

Travis: Like, partner? Yes. But like, taught Magnus everything he knew—

Griffin: Father— father figure.

Travis: Father figure, yeah.

Griffin: Um, and your shop has been especially busy in the past few months, as have a lot of shops here in the craftsman corridor of Raven's Roost. Um, which you named it, now I'm envisioning it as a town that is named Raven's Roost because it's literally built on these natural rock formations, like almost like stone— stone pillars somewhere with these long, really sturdy bridges that I think the craftsmen of the city are— it's like their pride and joy that they built connecting the different columns of— of— that hold Raven's Roost aloft in the sky.

Travis: And each of the columns is pretty much designated for different things.

Griffin: Yeah, it's like there's the crafts—

Travis: Yeah.

Griffin: The craftsmen corridor, the more of a residential district, yeah. So, um, the craftsmen corridor, like, all the shops have been so busy since the blockade broke and the mad governor Kalen was ousted. And we've touched on this a little bit before. Um, you know all about that rebellion against the mad governor Kalen, because you at one point kind of led it. And I'm wondering if you can sort of give

me sort of a brief summary of, like, why governor Kalen was such a shithead, how you became involved with that rebellion, and how you became its leader.

Travis: Well, I mean, it's— it's an old story I think that most people are familiar with the convention of, you know, the despot who everybody kind of, like, just accepts for a while is the way that they are, but then their desire for power and the lack of limitations and their perceived lack of limitations starts to grow to a point where you can no longer stand it. And you know, for Magnus it wasn't about power or glory. It was his duty. It was just a thing that needed to happen.

Griffin: To put a nice little bow on it, he was a big fuckin' bully.

Travis: Yeah. He was just— he was a bully, and he was picking on the weak, and Magnus just can't stand that. Um, and so he did what he needed to do because he needed to do it. Um, and then it was all done. He was happy to return to a quiet life. It was all that he ever wanted. He didn't want to be a hero, it wasn't his desire.

Griffin: Shit. It's fuckin' so easy to draw a line from point A to point B here of how just of the way that, like, your character— the build, the in-game... mechanics of Magnus. Like, I could see Magnus sort of forming this rebellion of other sort of craftsmen, right? 'Cause soldiers would be on Kalen's side, I imagine.

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: Using his fucking rustic hospitality! Like, using his folksy charm.

Travis: Yeah, we're talking like basically the way that America fought the British in the Revolution. You know, fighting from the trees and—

Griffin: On a smaller scale. I mean, we're talking about a city, but like a big city, a decent-sized city. Okay.

Travis: And we also had the height advantage. You know, Raven's Roost, we have the lay of the land, we know the areas, and we were able to drive him back.

Griffin: So you... you deposed the governor. Um, but the mad governor Kalen lived. How did that happen? Did he escape? Did you grant clemency to Kalen and

then they— they disappeared? Because no matter what happened, we've sort of established that this guy's still out there somewhere, so you didn't kill him.

Travis: Basically what happened was— I mean, it reached a point where the victory— like, it was clear who had won and his forces stood down. And, you know, it wasn't— we weren't doing it because we wanted to kill everybody. We were doing it because we wanted to defend the country. So, like, once the battle was won, the fight was over, and we thought that that was it, you know? Like, he had clearly lost. Like, his forces were— you know, were demolished, and his base was weakened.

Griffin: You routed him.

Travis: Yeah.

Griffin: Yeah. Okay.

Travis: And so we were like, okay, we proved our point. We made it clear. You know, everything's done now. That was it.

Griffin: And for three months, three very successful, very happy months for you, that seemed to be the case. Like, nobody even talked about this fucking guy anymore. It was like you so completely routed him that, like, his very legacy was gone. Um, so, like— so fruitful and happy was the city of Raven's Roost because of what you did. Um, and so it's been three months, things have calmed down. Your shop is super busy. Your renown as a carpenter has grown, because I think it probably got pretty conflated with folk hero Magnus Burnside that people were like, "Well, that dude fuckin' saved our town, so I've gotta get a coffee table from him."

Travis: Yeah. I mean, and also the coffee tables are damn fine.

Griffin: No, they're really, really good. That's the other thing, like, you're fucking super good at carpentry. And in fact, today you are submitting this beautiful black oak rocking chair at the Continental Craftsman Showcase, which is an interdisciplinary competition held in Neverwinter, which is about a ten day's ride from Raven's Roost. And with this chair, like, it's a shoe-in. You're gonna win the woodworking small projects category pretty handily.

Travis: Well, if I— and Magnus is very excited 'cause, like, this is his chance to earn the title Master Carpenter. You know what I mean? Like, up till now everyone has known, but it hasn't been official. But, like, with this award it's pretty cemented, you know?

Griffin: And as you're working on this chair, Steven is just, like, blown away. He, like, looks up occasionally from the desk like... uh, give me a carpentry term that you would use for a chair. Like, he compliments something about the chair. What is it?

Travis: He compliments, uh, the spindles. He compliments— you know, he just compliments how all the joints are formed and fastened.

Griffin: Yeah. And then I think he says...

Steven: That's— the chair smells good! How did you do that?

Magnus: Uh— well, uh, I worked in a lavender polish before the final lacquer to give it a nice kind of aromatic— when you're trying to put a baby to sleep, you want it to be pleasant for all the senses. Uh, rocking a child, singing to the child, and also a pleasant lavender smell.

Griffin: You're describing the smell of your chair to your— your teacher. And it's the afternoon of your departure to the— to this, um, Continental Craftsman Showcase. Uh, and just as you put the finishing touches on this chair, the bell hanging over the entryway into the Hammer and Tongs rings, and enter Julia.

[happy music plays in the background]

Griffin: And can you tell me, like— tell me about Julia. Like, Julia is— you've talked about— or I don't know if you've talked about, but in your backstory she is the daughter of Steven, and the two of you are married, or just together? Or what's—

Travis: Yes, we are married, very recently. Um, shortly after—

Griffin: You wanted to wait until after the rebel— okay.

Travis: Yeah, shortly after the rebellion. Uh, we got married in a gazebo that Magnus built himself. Um—

Griffin: Jesus, dude.

Travis: And she's the most beautiful woman Magnus has ever seen. And Griffin, let me ask, too. As all this is playing back, is present day Magnus watching this in third person?

Griffin: Oh yeah. But in third person, not first person. You are not this Magnus making this chair, looking at your wife as she comes in. You are third person.

Travis: I just want to make— like, when Magnus sees Julia, present day Magnus, it just wrecks him. It is a gut punch.

Griffin: June, holding the cup, doesn't, like, make a move to help you out. She is watching the scene intently, kind of curious to see what happens next.

So she walks in and, um, she plops down a few orders on the desk that Steven's working on. Like a lot of orders. Um, like so much so that they were kind of cumbersome for her to carry into the room. And she plops down in the rocking chair and is sort of, um, admiring your handiwork. And she says, um...

Julia: This chair smells like grandmas.

Travis: [laughs]

Griffin: Kind of, like, also making fun of you. Like, kind of antagonizing you kind of playfully. Um, the two of you just have like, a regular conversation.

[music ends]

Griffin: Like it's not— this scene is not— It is memorable to you now, but in the moment, like, you weren't thinking "I'm going to remember everything about this moment" while it was happening, 'cause that's just the way that things go sometimes. And she motions you towards the door, and outside on the street she has readied a cart for your departure, and you— you give Steven a hearty handshake and you give Julia a hug and kiss goodbye. Do you remember the last thing you said?

Travis: I said "I love you, Jules."

Griffin: And you sling this chair carefully— it's wrapped— but you put the chair over your back and you put your hand on the doorknob. And the scene freezes. And finally June talks. And she says...

June: Two days after your departure, Kalen returned to Raven's Roost. And operating from a mindset of "If I can't have this city, nobody can," he bombs the support column for the craftsmen corridor. And 76 people died, Julia and your mentor included. The Hammer and Tongs is quite literally shattered. And after the two ten days it takes to get to Neverwinter and back, most of the town's just kind of evacuated, sort of afraid of similar attacks on their columns. And today, Raven's Roost is just a ghost town.

Magnus, you earned this happy ending. You worked so hard for it. It should've been yours! But it hasn't happened yet.

[piano music plays in the background]

Not here, not yet, not now. If you claim me, you can still stop Kalen. You can save Julia, you can save Steven, you can save Raven's Roost. You can save this life that you earned. Take me, and we can do it together.

[music plays]

Griffin: Hey, everybody! This is Griffin McElroy, your dungeon master, your best friend, and your secondhand news. Thanks for listening to episode 48 of *The Adventure Zone*. We are— the next episode of *The Adventure Zone*'s gonna be the final episode of the Eleventh Hour arc. This is our penultimate— is that right? Postul— penultimate, I think— episode. And I am really, really proud of how this arc turned out, and really proud of my boys for how they played it. Um, and I hope you've enjoyed it.

We're gonna be moving on to a new arc soon, and probably into the endgame really soon. So, um, I'm very excited about that. I talked about that a bit I think maybe in the last episode and people got worried that we were gonna end the podcast. We defo have plans to keep this podcast going after this campaign ends that we have talked about, and there's some really exciting stuff that each of us has pitched. So the end of this campaign is not gonna be the end of the podcast. Please don't worry about that. This podcast is too much fun and way too rewarding, and the listeners are way too cool for us to just bail on it. So, um,

yeah. That's kind of a short brief on the future of the show, and nothing but good stuff in store.

I want to thank everybody who's been tweeting about the show using the #TheZoneCast hashtag. If you do that, you may end up as a character in an arc, and we're about to start up a new one soon. Uh, so roundabout now over the next month or so is probably the time— well, not over the next month or so, 'cause I'm gonna be traveling and shooting a TV show in Huntington with my brothers, making a MBMBAM show. Uh, but soonish I will be picking names for the next arc, so get in those tweets. We also just really appreciate you spreading the word about the show. We don't pay to advertise, so word of mouth is the only way that we have of spreading the show. So if you really like the show, you can really help us out just by telling a friend, even if they're not a big D&D person. Just tell 'em, "Hey, I got this cool podcast I listen to." Maybe burn 'em a CD or just send 'em a link. We really really appreciate it.

[ad break]

Griffin: Got a personal message here for Leon, and it's from... I wanna make sure I read this correctly... Yes, it does in fact say Hosehead. Which says:

"Hello, Leon! I am paying 10,000 pennies to have Griffin command you to stop trolling me by saying Taako dies or kills someone every two weeks. I hate you, but not really. Thanks for telling me about this amazing podcast! Heart, your sister." Who is... apparently named Hosehead.

You know, that's a really funny goof. [whispers] Until it actually happens! [normal volume] Uh-oh! Uh, thanks for listening, and Hosehead, I guess I hereby command you stop— stop doing that.

I got another message here for Connor and it's from Hannah who says:

"Connor! Griffin and I wanted to say happy belated birthday, and we love you!"

It's true, Connor.

"You're my best friend, the love of my life, and the only one I would ever agree to be player two with. Thank you for everything you do for me, and I hope your day is amazing as you are. Love Hannah. Ps: you're too cute to poot."

I agree with everything in this message, Connor. I want you— Hannah and I actually got together. This was a collabo project, and I'm really proud of how it turned out.

Um, I wanna thank to Max Fun Network for letting us be a part of it. We just got back from doing a live show at Max Fun Con East in the Poconos, and it was super fun. The show went well. We had lots of surprises, at least two surprises during the show that turned out being, really, really fun. You will get to hear that episode when we post it this winter after Travis and I have our babies and we need some stuff to fill up the feed. I think we'll have, like, three or so episodes that will be kind of, like, holiday break specials. That will be going up at our regular intervals, and I'm really, really excited for those to go up. I'm especially super excited about the Boston show. I keep thinking about the fact that, like, most of y'all haven't heard it yet. It is maybe one of my favorite episodes ever, so look forward to that. If you like our show, you can find all the shows we do at mcelroyshows.com. We do, like, a gaggle of podcasts and video projects, and you can find our Twitter and our PO boxes and stuff there. I'll plug mine: it's PO Box 66639 Austin, Texas, 78766. If you've ever wanted to send us something, then that's my PO Box. That's how you get in touch with me.

Also, I just wanna remind you one more time to go to theadventurezine.com and check out The Adventure Zine. The crowdfunding page that's happening there. You all have been completely amazing. You've raised \$95,000 at the time that I'm recording this, and it'll probably be even higher, maybe over 100,000 by the time the episode goes up. And those crowdfunding efforts are going to create a fanart book of *The Adventure Zone*, and the profits for the books are gonna go to Facing Hunger, which is a hunger relief charity in our hometown of Huntington, West Virginia. It is such a cool cause, and everybody who's chipped in is so great. Um, thanks again to Megan and Carrie for organizing this project and spearheading it, and to all the artists for putting together an incredible book, and for everybody who's donated! If you wanna lock down a copy of the book, make sure that you go to theadventurezine.com and secure a copy now, and donate to a really great cause.

One last thing. Like I mentioned before, we are going to be shooting our TV show for My Brother, My Brother, and Me in Huntington all month, basically. Um, and that shouldn't affect things, although we're gonna have to record an episode all together while we're in town, and it may go up late. We're gonna try really, really hard to stay on schedule and get it up on the 22nd, but we don't really know what our— how much shooting we're gonna be doing around then, how much

time it's all gonna be taking up, so if we miss our targeted date of the 22nd by a day or two, I hope you will forgive us. Um, but I will try really hard to keep the trains running on time. So, that being said, the next episode should be up on September 22nd, and we will talk to you then. Bye!

[music plays]

Griffin: The three of you are back in the— the Davy Lamp saloon version of the white space with sort of the shadowy figures occupying the bar. Um, and sitting in front of you is June, who by this point I think just looks like a little girl again. Like she has reverted almost completely back to the age that she was when she first got trapped in the bubble. Um, and June says to all three of you...

June: I need to lay out the rules for you, 'cause I feel like that's only fair. If you take the Sha— I keep saying Shalice. If you take the Chalice, there are three rules that you have to follow. The first is that you cannot walk the path that you walked in this timeline. Specifically there's gonna be no joining the Bureau of Balance. 'Cause the further you stay away from creating a paradox, the easier your new timeline is gonna be to maintain.

And the second rule is that you forfeit your place in this timeline completely. There is no coming back if you take the Chalice and cross over.

And the third rule is the hardest rule, and it's the reason I've never successfully been able to change the past like this before. I'm gonna create a new timeline for you, but you have to sustain it. And all that entails is that every single thing that happens in this new world we create, good and bad, you have to want it to happen, or else the timeline won't hold, and you'll be lost.

Griffin: Um, and with that... she, uh, picks up the Temporal Chalice and places it in the middle of the table that all of you are sitting at.

[pause]

Magnus: Oh...

Justin: What's in it?

Griffin: [laughs quietly] Magic.

Clint: Beer.

Griffin: No, there is— there is nothing in it. Um, it is just a very magic chalice that will let you fulfill the offer that June made to you.

Magnus: Taako, Merle. I— I assume that we all kind of just had similar but different experiences. Uh...

Merle: I had an apostrophe.

Justin: [snorts]

Magnus: Yeah, I thought that might be the case. Of things that we might be able to change, if we were to pick up this cup.

Taako: Yeah.

Magnus: Merle, same deal?

Merle: You wanna talk about it?

Magnus: Not really. Um, soon. Soon. I'll tell you all about it when this is done. But... I know my answer.

Taako: I have a question. Um, are we, like— can just one of us take it, or...

June: Only one of you. Only one of you can take it.

Taako: Okay. Okay. Okay.

Merle: Might've included that in the rules. I'm just sayin'.

Taako: Yeah, next time you do this—[snorts]

June: Um, whenever— whoever takes it is going to rewrite this timeline completely, and that's a trip only one person gets to make.

Magnus: I'm ready to give my answer, but I don't... listen, boys. I know what my offer was, and I can only assume that yours was as powerful. So I'm not gonna judge either one of you for whatever you say. Um... but my offer— the

ability to go back and change that thing... it was everything I've wanted for a really long time. And it would mean, like, that I wouldn't be there to help people who really needed help, and save many, many, many lives, and I don't care, because it's what I want. But it's not what Julia would want. And I'm gonna have to pass.

Taako: Okay. So, that's a pass.

Clint: [muffled laughter]

Taako: From you. Um... so would you say— so we have two options. Is this correct?

June: Yeah. It's a yes or no answer.

Merle: I know how I'm gonna vote.

Taako: How are you voting?

Merle: I'm not a big one for regrets. I figure you'd make your best choices with the information at hand, and you live with the consequences. That's kind of a Merle pearl to throw out to everybody. So I'm gonna say thanks, but no thanks, little strange girl with a... shalice.

June: Taako?

Taako: Hmm. I mean, here's the thing for me. [wheezes] here's where I'm at. The vision revealed to me was chill as hell. Here's how it shook out for Taako, and we can get into this a bit more if you guys want, but as it turns out, remember the thing that I've spent so long feeling kind of bad about? Not super bad but, like, pretty darn bad?

Travis: Yeah.

Taako: Get this? Not my fault! Like, I have nothing to change! I didn't do anything wrong! This is— it was a very chill vision for me. I'm feeling, like, amazing, and I feel no obligation to go back and change anything. 'Cause it was, like, best pos— I'm in the best possible timeline for Taako, personally. Just from my vantage point, it is very good for Taako.

June: So...

Magnus: So it kind of sounds like it's a no all around, cup lady.

June: I would be lying if I said I wasn't disappointed. I... I'm... I'm sorry. I have to make one more offer.

Griffin: And she stands up from the table that you're sitting at and grabs the cup, and suddenly the table disappears, and the bar disappears in, like, a wisp of smoke.

Magnus: Aww, I just put in an order for chicken wings.

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: And then sort of that same holodeck effect starts happening to all three of you. And it's going back to a memory that all three of you share, and the scene starts to sort of put itself together, and you're standing in a— in a grassy plain. And there are a couple bodies—

Magnus: And we can see a motorcade coming up over a hill.

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: [laughs] Yeah, there's a— uh, no. There's a few bodies on the ground, and there are a couple of burned out wagons. And, um, there is one wagon that has fared a little bit better that has a cage in the back of it. And inside of that cage is Kurz, the orc boy. And you realize, you're back at the very beginning of your adventure. Gundren Rockseeker has claimed the Phoenix Fire Gauntlet and is blazing a path towards Phandalin at this very moment. Killian is with you, and you've just taken care of these slavers, who took over this— who burned down this orc caravan and imprisoned Kurz, the orc boy who you freed and ended up shooting Gundren and setting him off, destroying Phandalin. But you haven't let Kurz out yet. And you're standing in front of the cage, and June says...

June: This is the last offer I have to make. It's the last thing I can think of that the three of you could fix. You free Kurz, in an act of vengeance, sets off a series of events that destroys Phandalin. You can stop this from happening if you just don't let him out of the cage. It's my last offer, and will any of you reconsider?

Taako: Uh...

Magnus: Um...

Taako: Well, this one's tougher, right?

Magnus: 'Cause this was— this was our fault. [laughs quietly]

Taako: This was our bad, 100%.

Magnus: Hands down, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Merle: Sorry!

Magnus: Kinda hard to... to shift the blame on this one.

Merle: But we didn't know. We had the best intentions.

Magnus: We could shift it onto Kurz. Like, eff that dude, right?

Taako: Sure.

Magnus: Yeah.

Taako: Kurz... I mean, we wrote the check and Kurz cashed it.

Magnus: Yeah, that's true.

Merle: You know, blowing up Phandalin was kind of our signature move, though.

Taako: Right, it was a very explosive beginning.

Merle: Yeah, I mean—

Taako: Really elevated the—

Magnus: It did kind of establish a pattern.

Taako: Elevated the drama.

Merle: Hmm...

Griffin: She says, um...

June: It sounds like it was kind of a— maybe a cool moment for you. Let me just show you something really quick.

Griffin: And then she—

Magnus: No, no, no.

Griffin: —walks you— you don't walk. You're just all of a sudden inside of the big tavern in Phandalin, and you see Gundren in this tavern, and he's— the scene is frozen, and he's got these, like, uh, whips of flame coming off of him. And then all of a sudden you're in the storeroom of this tavern in Phandalin, you see some people, like, huddled for— hiding in fear from Gundren. And you see a halfling woman with red hair, who is— she's holding a barrel of— of booze from Redcheek Farms, and you realize it's Noelle.

Justin: Ergh...

Magnus: Yeah, but at the same time, can you show us Rockport if we didn't stop the train? Can you show us the world if we didn't stop the pink tourmaline from taking over?

Merle: Ooh-hoo-hoo!

Magnus: Can you show us all of that?

June: This is the only offer I can make to you.

Magnus: Yeah, but like, the— you're showing us the one thing we can change, and not the stuff that we did change. That's a—

Clint: Is Barry Bluejeans one of the people huddled in there with us?

Griffin: Uh, Barry Bluejeans is actually out in the bar trying to calm Gundren down.

Merle: That's so Barry.

Griffin: But you see Barry Bluejeans's Tom Arnold lookin'-ass, in his blue— in his blue, blue denim pants before he was incinerated.

Taako: Is there any reason to think that... is there any reason to think that we wouldn't do all that other stuff if we saved Phandalin?

Magnus: Well, yeah! She— she said the rules. We gotta stay away from the Bureau of Balance. We'd never know about all that stuff. The voidfish would knock us out. Like, wouldn't be able to join the Bureau. We would have to stay away from everything. We forfeit our place in the timeline. We'd save these people, but we wouldn't save any of the others.

Taako: Yeah, but certainly they have some competent people they could send, right?

Magnus: Apparently not! We were the first people to bring any item in.

Merle: You know, fellas... I know this is big and I know there's been a lot of death and destruction and other crap. But you know, we've had some laughs. We've had some good times. Crashing trains and getting arms chopped off and, you know, poisoning a lot of folks. And I'd hate to lose the good times that we had. I'm still not tempted.

Magnus: Yeah, I'm gonna have to pass as well.

Merle: I'm still happy with the Merle life.

Magnus: Like Merle said, you know, I've spent a lot of time living my life in regret, and I don't do that anymore. We gotta keep moving forwards towards good, not looking back at the bad.

Taako: Listen. [laughs quietly] If I wasn't gonna use this to clean up a mess that was half my fault, I'm certainly not gonna use it to clean up a mess that's one third my fault at best! Um... plus I can't say as I was... much better off before. I mean, we've certainly helped some people. There's some people that've been, let's call it unhelped.

Clint: [laughs]

Taako: We've certainly along the way, we've unhelped some folks. Uh...

Magnus: And you know what? Noelle ended up with a new shiny robot body. So, like—

Taako: An unkillable robot. I think that's an upgrade.

Magnus: Yeah, it could— that could be significantly worse, really.

Taako: Barry stings.

Magnus: Yeah, the Barry one hurts. If we can get him into a robot eventually down the line, that would be super cool.

Taako: They can't hear us, right? I mean, we're just, like, spectral.

Griffin: Um, no, but June can hear you, and she looks really glum. Um, because she, like, is starting to realize that you not only are not gonna take this offer, but that, like, you are— you are so unswayed by the offer that it doesn't seem like you're taking it seriously. And she says, like...

June: Okay. Well, I did my best.

Magnus: I have one question.

June: What?

Magnus: If we pass on this, what happens to June?

June: I told you. If you— I just wanted to give you my offer, and if you listened, I'd let her go. And I'll let her go, because you've listened to my offer and you have abstained. And since you're apparently so okay with living with the consequences of your actions, then I guess... well, I guess I'll leave you with this.

[piano music plays in the background]

Griffin: And June and the cup disappear, and time starts to start back up again. But it's moving painfully slowly. And you watch as a wall of fire consumes the stockroom of this tavern, and everything and everyone inside of it. And then the scene changes, and you're standing in the home of a young couple, and you see a

man cooking a stew in the kitchen and his partner, she's reading a book in bed. And the wave of fire consumes this home as well.

Clint: [laughs quietly] God!

Griffin: And then you see a woman playing with her dog in a garden, and you see a kind-looking blacksmith cleaning his shop after closing, and you see a young hedge wizard practicing his spells. And you see all of these scenes of Phandalin's citizens, which maybe out of spite the Chalice is forcing you to witness all of their destruction. And then you're standing at the epicenter, right in front of Gundren's blackened bones, his arm with the gauntlet on it held up to the sky in the center of this roaring, expanding pillar of fire, and you are forced to watch Phandalin's end as you didn't see it before, and it is absolute, and vicious, and quick, as it reduces the city to a perfect circle of black glass.

And you're back at the top of Shaft B, and you see June in front of you, and she's young again, and she falls to her hands and knees, and the cup rolls away from her and falls off the platform, and bounces once with a heavy clunk, and lands perfectly at your feet.

[chord]

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