

The Adventure Zone: Balance – The Stolen Century: Chapter Five

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Griffin: Previously on The Adventure Zone.

Travis: My background is that of a carpenter.

Griffin: Oh?

Travis: Who has become a folk hero.

Griffin: You built a tight chair once.

Travis: Yeah.

Griffin: You built a chair once and the whole village came around.

Travis: I built an army out of wood.

Griffin: Uh-huh. You are seeing a memory and you know that you are seeing it from the perspective of the Voidfish. You're inside a cave, it feels like home. And you know that because there's other Voidfish here too.

Barry: I don't wanna be— I don't wanna embarrass myself in front of— And like for example, just like... For example, like... Lup.

Taako: We've lost a lot. There's a lot more we might lose. But the one thing we do have is the thing that people in love rarely ever have enough of. And it's time.

Griffin: So, Chancellor Marlow takes you to the Legato Conservatory. And when the light clears, the sheet music's gone. And so is the song. There's another flash from the cave and we see everyone, in all the kingdoms and conservatories in this whole world, even the beings living in the other planes of reality, they all hear this song too now.

Marlow: Well, that's the Light of Creation. Any questions?

Griffin (intro): We're almost caught up. Do you understand yet? It's imperative you pay attention. This isn't just some story. It's The Adventure Zone!

[“The Unexplained” by Mort Garson plays]

Griffin: So, it's immediately after that musical presentation, here at the stage, in front of the cave. And the seven of you have talked a little bit with Chancellor Marlow about what you— what you just saw. About this phenomenon that Chancellor Marlow claimed to be the—

Travis: Now hold on, Griffin. Hold on. Don't jump ahead.

Griffin: Okay?

Travis: We're at a reception, right. Recital.

Griffin: Yeah?

Travis: We're kind of like— Are there apps? Is it like the... Are the beer and the wine free?

Griffin: So, there are—

Clint: Tapas? I love tapas.

Griffin: There's tapas. There are a lot of finger sandwiches and a... like a... There's probably lemonade. Nobody's really getting into it though, because you get the impression that this type of ceremony happens a lot. And like, if folks snack— If folks yummied down on these sandwiches and lemonade every time they came here, it would probably be bad for the— probably be bad for the you know, digestion. But there's plenty if you wanna—

Clint: Well, that doesn't keep us from doing it though, right?

Griffin: Yeah you snack— you snack down.

Clint: [eating sounds]

Travis: I take a whole tray of finger sandwiches and I'm listening intently. I don't need my teeth to listen, you know what I mean?

Griffin: Sure. So, Chancellor Marlow explains about this phenomenon that you heard her call the Light of Creation earlier. And so, the first thing you learn about this cave is that nobody can go into it. It's not just like a hard and fast rule for all of the conservatories, all of which are sort of built around this mountain, sort of with their own caves leading into it.

So, it's not just the law of the land. Like, when you try to walk in, there's a flash of light and suddenly you are walking out, just the way that you came. There are rumors though, of a Forte Conservatory student who made their way into the school— the cave's entrance— their school's entrance into the mountain, after having their song selected by the light.

So, after conversing with Marlow and with each other, and sort of relating to her the dire importance of your mission, she offers a suggestion. You spend this year training at the Legato Conservatory and you submit a work to the mountain, to what she and everyone else calls the Light of Creation.

And if it's accepted, you might be able to gain access inside. So, that is the set up for this cycle. And... what do you work on this year? What craft do you work on? What work do you submit to the cave?

Travis: Well, okay. So, this is my question. Does it have to be music?

Griffin: No, it doesn't have to be music. Marlow explains like these— the conservatory has specialties in like all of these different forms and all of these different... like, artistic mediums. There are sculptors and painters, and dancers. And... there are, you know, wood carvers and there are singers. And writers—

Travis: Wood carvers?

Griffin: Yeah. Like, you know, sculptors of all kinds of different mediums.

Travis: So, wood, like carving wood with like knives and... blades, weapons. Yeah?

Griffin: Yeah. Well, I mean, they have special knives and... They don't use like a big— They don't use like, a big scimitar or whatever. But I guess there are sharp instruments used.

Travis: That immediately interests Magnus.

Griffin: Because it's a thing you can do with weapons?

Travis: Yup.

Griffin: Okay.

Travis: At first—

Griffin: Yeah, sure.

Travis: ... He has not learned the artistry of carving, Griffin. So, it just seems violent to him, right? And so, that's interesting.

Griffin: Okay.

Travis: You know?

Griffin: We'll do yours first then, while Taako and Merle—

Travis: It was either gonna be that or drumming. [chuckles]

Griffin: [laughs] That would also be very good. We'll do yours first while Taako and Merle sort of think of their mediums. So yeah, I guess you get matched up with a wood carver who is also like just a very gruff and...

Has a very violent approach to art. And just gives you like a big log every day to just— And I think when you start out, the professor, whose name is Professor Christoph— Christoph Kovacs on Twitter, thank you Christoph— is just like:

Christoph: Yes, Magnus. Attack the wood. Show it your fury until beauty comes out of that big, sweet, round log.

Travis: And I wanna be straight up, it's terrible at first.

Griffin: Oh, no, yeah. I mean, how do you get to Carnegie Hall?

Travis: I don't know.

Clint: Take a left at Fourth Street.

Griffin: Magnus make a... Since I— The way you've set this up, it sounds like your art on this wood is sort of an... It starts off with just sort of attacking. So, I guess make a body roll... plus body. Body roll sounds like a sick dance move.

Travis: Well, Griffin, I'll be honest with you. It wasn't great. And here's why, here's my justification. I think that attacking the wood does not prove to actually be—

Griffin: Oh I see.

Travis: ... Magnus's forte. So, I wanted him—I'm glad he failed at it.

Griffin: Okay?

Travis: Because I would actually rather transition to working with a teacher who's like, "No, no, no, no, no. Clearly, attacking the wood is not your strength. It is finding within the wood the thing that it wants to be."

Justin: Mm-hmm!

Griffin: Okay, then you... [chuckles] You have a different professor and I have to get another name from Twitter.

[sound of dice thrown]

Travis: Mm-hm?

Griffin: Professor Bower. Johnathan Bower, thank you, on Twitter. Who's like:

Bower: You know what you need to try? You know what you need to try, Magnus? Magnus, you know what it's time to try? A little bit of tenderness.

Magnus: Oh, okay. Well, I got an 11. Is that tender enough?

Bower: That's extremely tender.

Griffin: What's the first thing you carve that you really like?

Travis: It's a duck, baby. Natch.

Griffin: [chuckles] A big— A duck, a handheld duck? What's the...

Travis: Listen, it's a slightly clumsy duck sized duck. You know, a little— Listen, a little knobby. And there's like you know, a couple of spots where you can see like a drop of blood that's soaked into the wood. You know, where like I nicked myself doing it. But within it, it's like somebody took a lot of time and care to do this thing that they were not inherently good at.

Griffin: Mm-hmm?

Travis: And so, in and of itself, its imperfection is what makes it beautiful.

Griffin: You get an A on your duck. Very tender. And Professor Bower asks if your— if this is what you want to submit to the cave after your year of study.

Travis: I will tell you right now, Magnus has never been prouder of anything than he is of this duck.

Griffin: Okay. Take plus two experience for learning this sort of essential trade craft to the Magnus backstory. Taako and Merle, do either of you have a medium that you want to sort of develop some mastery in during the year?

Merle: I wanna become proficient in the dance.

Griffin: What style of dance? There's so much dance.

Merle: Interpretive. Interpretive jazz dancing. Where you tell the story with both body and hands.

Griffin: There's two— There's a professor for jazz dancing and there's a professor for interpretive dancing. And—

Travis: [chuckles] They are two completely different art forms.

Griffin: It's two completely different art forms and they don't really... They don't really get along. And so, after like a few sessions of like both of them trying to train you, I think they just kind of leave you to yourself. [chuckles]

So, after you've learned some of the basic steps of both crafts, I think it's just up to you to sort of look within and find the interpretive jazz inside yourself and sort of bring that out into the world.

Clint: The jazz in Merle.

Griffin: How do you... Hm... I think this would also be a body roll too, because it's like dance. Like, it's very physical.

Travis: You do do body rolls in dance, Griffin—

Griffin: You do do a body roll.

Clint: All right, body roll.

[sound of dice thrown]

Clint: 10!

Griffin: Holy shit! Body's not like your thing? That's very good.

Clint: Yeah!

Griffin: I think after a while, you are sort of brought on as an adjunct professor to this new type of dance.

Travis: [laughs]

Clint: Oh?

Griffin: At Legato— At the Legato Conservatory. And I think—

Clint: [chuckles] Yeah!

Griffin: ... I think those two professors, at the end of the movie of Merle Presents Save the Last Dance, they get together and sort of realize the error of their ways. And all of a sudden, people from the other conservatories start flocking to this one.

They start transferring to this school, just to learn this interpretive jazz dance that's just sweeping the nation, that people are getting so excited about. Can you describe the dance? And I think you just would submit, like, a step chart. What does the dance look like that you submit to the cave?

Clint: The first— The first thing that happens is you have your feet completely right next to each other. And then, you shift your feet so they're at like a 90-degree angle.

Griffin: That—[chuckles]

Clint: And then you do a lot of scissor steps.

Griffin: Okay?

Clint: Now here's the thing, you do scissor steps with your feet, front, back, front, back, front, back. But with your arms, you go scissors in the air, up and down, up and down, up and down.

Griffin: Okay.

Travis: What about the hands, man? What do you do with the hands?

Clint: Well, the hands are alternating. And this is where the interpretive comes in. We are using the hands as almost like signals. Like creatively, you're making shapes.

Griffin: Okay.

Clint: Like if you were making shadows without light.

Griffin: So, what are you interpreting? What sort of motif or idea, or emotion? I'm watching you do this awesome scissor dance. What do I feel?

Clint: Pity? [chuckles]

Travis: [laughs] Well...

Clint: No, it's very moving. Because you can see, what I'm trying to get at is man's injustices—

Griffin: Woah.

Clint: ... Against other mans.

Griffin: Okay.

Clint: And that's— This is— Because you can see this poor figure trying to... Well, to touch God.

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: Oh? So, it's the... Is perhaps the name of the dance God Touch?

Clint: It's actually called a Pan-Demonium. Pan-Demonium.

Griffin: Fuck that's good.

Clint: Yeah.

Griffin: Take two experience, just for the name.

Clint: Oh? Cool.

Griffin: Taako, what are you working on?

Justin: Mm-hm. My art is the subtle art of aphorisms.

Griffin: I don't know what that means. Is that where you touch the bumps on people's heads to like read the future?

Justin: No. Like little sayings— That's phrenology, I think. Little sayings that contain a lot of truth and sound very wise. And that's my art form. But what Taako is doing is really just recycling ones that exist in his reality and probably not this one, and crediting them to himself. 'Cause he figured that would be an easy thing to do for a year.

Griffin: [laughs] This is— This is Hurley writing Empire Strikes Back on Lost like—

Justin: Exactly, right. Exactly.

Griffin: You have— You have a Poor Richard's Almanack and you're like, "Mm-hmm, don't mind if I do. Thank you, Ben."

Justin: Yeah, yeah. So, that's his jam. He just like goes in, day one, and is like:

Taako: How many cares one loses when one decides not to be something, but to be someone.

Justin: Which he knows is a quote by Coco Chanel. But he just like spits it.

Griffin: Yeah.

Justin: No hesitation.

Clint: Oh, yeah.

Justin: And everyone's like—

Griffin: Well, fantasy Coco Chanel. If such a being could ever truly exist.

Justin: Fantasy Coco Chanel, exactly.

Clint: It's spelled K-O-K-O.

Griffin: [chuckles] Okay. I think there's probably like a philosophy class in this school that you sort of come into and just start dropping all these fuck'n bombs. And the philosophy professor is just really annoyed by it, I think, at first. Until they realize like, "Wow, Taako. This guy might be onto some shit, actually."

Justin: Yeah.

Griffin: Can you break me off another piece? 'Cause I think you probably have a website open.

Justin: I don't, I just have these in my head.

Griffin: You have this Coco Chanel— You have this dope ass Coco Chanel quote?

Justin: It's a dope quote. I have a lot of quotes about being yourself that I just memorized to help keep me grounded.

Travis: They're all Coco Chanel. [chuckles]

Justin: Here's another Coco Chanel—[chuckles] "Be who you are and say what you feel. Because those who mind, don't matter. And those who matter don't mind." That's Dr. Seuss, right there.

Griffin: Fuck.

Justin: Now, it's Taako. Over here, in this joint, that's a Taako thing.

Clint: Wow.

Griffin: Roll a—

Clint: How about, “Here I sit all broken hearted—”

Justin: Don’t you dare.

Travis: Nope.

Clint: Okay.

Griffin: Don’t you dare do this. Roll, plus mind, I think.

[sound of dice thrown]

Justin: Okay. That is 11.

Griffin: Wow, all good rolls. Everybody’s kind of killing it at the conservatory.

Justin: I feel like I should be running this class.

Griffin: Yeah, I think you—

Justin: ‘Cause he’s just saying things other people say. And I’m coming up with my own dope shit.

Griffin: Well, kind of. I think—

Clint: [chuckles]

Griffin: I think you lead sort of an Order of the Phoenix style, like alt philosophy class, that’s all about just like being yourself and connecting with who you really are. And that definitely attracts a lot of the students here. ‘Cause this conservatory and all the conservatories are very competitive.

And so, there's people who come to see you and they're like, "You know what? Maybe I don't wanna do my art the way everybody else does it. Maybe I wanna be myself. Maybe I wanna explore the me that Taako says I can be." And—

Justin: Yeah, don't look for... Don't look to society to give you permission to be yourself. Think about that.

Clint: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: Was that someone else or did you... Was that off the dome?

Justin: Mm-hmm. Yeah, it's Steve Maraboli... This doesn't matter.

Griffin: So...

Taako: Where's your will to be weird?

Justin: Jim Morrison. But now, Taako.

Griffin: [laughs] Do you write these down in a book to submit to the mountain?

Justin: Yeah.

Griffin: Okay.

Clint: Oh, I think somebody writes them down for him?

Justin: I probably don't. Yeah, thank you, Dad. Of course, I don't do the scribing myself.

Griffin: Is the book—

Justin: It opens with, "Some people say you're going the wrong way, when it's simply a way of your own." Now that used to be Angelina Jolie, but now, it's Taako, that one.

Griffin: [chuckles] That's my favorite Taako quote. What's the book called?

Justin: Taako's... Taako—[laughs]

Griffin: [laughs]

Justin: Taako Time, a book of inspirational aphorisms for the independent soul.

Griffin: Oh, shit. That's good. Okay. Take plus two experience. Everybody gets plus two experience points.

Travis: Hey Griffin, I would like to retroactively add something.

Griffin: Okay, yes?

Travis: Just to prove to people that I haven't forgotten about it.

Griffin: Okay?

Travis: I carved that duck with my grandfather's knife that I claimed to have in the first episode of this very podcast!

Griffin: Okay. Yeah, sure. You still have that beautiful, that wonderful knife that you use for all your carving. Let's get to— It's close to the end of the year. You have about... you have a couple weeks left before you know the Hunger is going to arrive. And so, you all are scheduled for a submission, all seven of you.

And the ceremony is more or less identical to the one you went to at the beginning of the year. And you've probably been to a few of these, as you sort of got to know the other students here at the Conservatory and go to like, support them as they submit their works.

And this is like... This is really... It's a terrifying thing to do. Because it's not... More often than not, the mountain does not sort of rebroadcast whatever it is that you submit to it. So, every time that you work your ass off on this

thing that you are proud of and submit it to the mountain, there is no guarantee that it's going to be accepted.

And therefore, it's going to be sort of eliminated, completely. Eliminated even from your own mind, you won't remember what this thing is that you made.

So, you go to the ceremony and there's the same sandwiches and lemonade. And the seven of you take turns going up to stage, presenting your work. Which, for the three of you, must be a pretty fun sight. Magnus, what does yours look like? 'Cause you made a duck and you're—

Travis: Yeah, here's— I'll tell you, Griffin. Here's the thing, I've been sitting here, thinking about it. And I think that in the moment, when he finished the duck, I think Magnus was insanely proud of it. 'Cause it's something he worked at and took his time at, that he didn't normally do.

But I think that seeing people present these masterpieces, these beautiful songs or artworks that they've created, I think that he actually gets a little embarrassed—

Griffin: Mm-hmm?

Travis: ... About it. Because he's looking at this like, knobbly, you know, stained duck. And I actually think he's a little embarrassed that he was so proud of it.

Griffin: Oh, no. Professor Bower comes 'cause the professor— your professor always goes up there with you when you do— when you submit a work. And he puts his hand on your shoulder and he's like:

Bower: It's a real good duck. Just show 'em the duck, it's a good duck. I think they'll like it.

Travis: Actually making me feel a little bad for Magnus, but he presents it and whispers:

Magnus: It's not perfect, but it's the best I can do.

Griffin: I think there's an uncomfortable smattering of applause, just from people not really knowing how to respond to somebody being quite this self-effacing. There's a couple people though who are like, "Hey, great duck!" "Hey, great little mallard, buddy! Keep your chin up!" And Merle, I guess your presentation is—

Clint: Ah, ah, ah, Professor Merle.

Griffin: [chuckles] Professor Merle, what is your presentation to the audience?

Clint: I'm going to actually recreate my dance.

Griffin: Okay.

Clint: And I—

Griffin: Is there music to the dance?

Clint: I have actually the music in me. But it's kind of a [mouths rhythmic beat].

Griffin: Mm-hmm, my favorite jazz rhythm.

Clint: Yeah, 'unts, unts.' And... And I have added one little wrinkle. I've got my arms akimbo and my fingers are dangling down below. And with that, I am acting like tentacles.

Griffin: Okay?

Clint: And there's a lot of head gyrations, there's a lot of head rolls.

Griffin: Yeah!

Clint: And just because I am Professor Merle, a couple of the pelvic thrusts.

Justin: Mm-hmm!

Griffin: I don't see what that has to do with being a teacher?

Clint: Well, it's the sensuality. Because this is a very sensual dance. The interpretive jazz dancing is very sensual, very physical. It's like belly dancing.

Griffin: Yeah, the way you've described it, it sounds very sensual.

Clint: And I just am in a— At one point, I am so caught up in the dance, I completely lose myself. And I finish up whirling like a Dervish and just going mad, becoming one with the universe. And then collapse in a sweaty, dwarfy heap.

Griffin: Um, the audience applauds hornily.

Travis: [laughs]

Clint: [laughs]

Justin: [laughs]

Griffin: Davenport gets up on the stage and sings a beautiful tenor opera solo that goes on for like 18 minutes, but you are enraptured the entire time. He's got a— he's got a lovely, beautiful little voice that sort of echoes down the valley that these presentations take place in.

Clint: [sings]

Griffin: And Lucretia gets up and presents a painting that she made. She does a painting of this, like, famous city market square. Like this public space that was a really sort of beautiful fixture of the town that the IPRE headquarters was in, in your home. And it's been 50 years but like, you all remember this little space.

And it's just sort of like a still life scene of all these people congregating in this public square and it's a... She was a very talented painter before this

year and she's only gotten better. Taako, what is your.. What does your presentation of your aphorism book look like?

Justin: I walk up to a pedestal. I drop my book on the pedestal and say:

Taako: You're all very welcome.

Justin: And then I walk off the stage.

Clint: Yeah.

Griffin: All of the students who've like attended your outdoor sermons, I guess, are like, very enthused. Like, "Yeah that's how he does it. That's how he does it!"

Taako: Yeah I'll— I'll leave you with these two thoughts that I just—I'm coming up with two for you right now, hold on.

Clint: [laughs]

Taako: Nothing makes one feel so strong as a call for help.

Clint: Ah...

Justin: Do they like that one?

Clint: That's good. That's good.

Justin: That's one of the popes. I don't remember which one.

Clint: One more, one more. He's got another one.

Taako: Mm-hmm. And finally, folks, as you expressed your gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them.

Clint: [gasps]

Justin: JFK. Now Taako. Used to be JFK, now it's Taako.

Griffin: A dude in the audience stands up and he's like, "I've got to change some shit about me!" And he immediately like, walks off.

Clint: [chuckles]

Taako: You got it.

Griffin: You hear him shouting down the valley like:

Reggie: This is a new day for me, Reggie. It's time for a new Reggie. Bye everybody, bye old life!

Taako: Don't forget to review me on Goodreads!

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: You all go up and you do your presentations. And immediately, you go and you submit your works to the mountain. Taako, your book of aphorisms is quickly absorbed by the light. And then, all of a sudden, all of your aphorisms are immediately implanted in everybody's minds. Which may not be great. [chuckles] 'Cause I don't know that anybody's gonna purchase this collection.

Justin: Damn.

Griffin: Now that they've memorized all of it. The same happens for Lucretia and Barry. Merle, there's a flash. And your dance, you don't remember the steps anymore. The step chart disappears and you don't remember anything about how you do the dance.

And then like there's a real long pause. As if the mountain is really thinking about it, having some sort of internal argument about whether or not they want to implant this vision of this very sensual dwarf dance into everybody's—

Clint: This like that moment right before Tom Bergeron announces who won Dancing with the Stars, isn't it? [in announcer voice] "And the winner is..." [mouths drum roll] Please, please, please...

Griffin: And it flashes and everybody does in fact see your form doing that dance.

Clint: Yeah!

Griffin: Magnus, you submit your duck up to the pedestal. And there is a flash, and it is taken. And then, very quickly there is like a very faint flash from the mountain. But it seems to still get the job done because everybody immediately remembers this great duck that you made. For whatever reason, the mountain really, really was enthusiastic about your duck and rebroadcasts it. And—

Travis: Magnus starts crying.

Griffin: Aw. The last two people to go up on stage—

Justin: So does Taako, if that's all we have to do. Fine, yeah.

Clint: [laughs]

Justin: Taako does too, a lot. It's really—

Clint: Merle cries. Merle cries even more.

Justin: Yeah, when Merle cry— And Taako cries more 'cause Merle's crying. [spoof sobs]

Clint: [spoof sobs]

Taako: [through sobs] This is profound.

Merle: [through sobs] Oh, I'm so happy!

Griffin: [laughs] The last two people to present their work to the audience and to the mountain is Barry and Lup. And you haven't seen them much this cycle. They've been spending a lot of time together. Specifically, working on this work that they are going to present to everybody.

And it's not uncommon for them to go off like this. Like, they are... At this point, very close collaborators on a lot of the things that they do. Most of the time, in studying different parts of the worlds that you're in. But this time, they got together to... to work on this very, very specific craft.

And as they approach the stage and sit down— Taako, you can't remember the last time you saw Lup nervous, but she is. Barry's always nervous and he's in rare form here. But Lup also seems kind of anxious about this performance.

And she walks up and she picks up a violin. And Barry sits down at a big grand piano. And they play a duet. And in watching them play this composition, you realize, really for the first time, just how profoundly Barry and Lup's relationship has changed.

Time is different for the seven of you than it has been for anyone else who ever lived. During your 100 year journey, you don't age, thanks to whatever forces keep putting you back together at the beginning of each year.

Your minds stay sharp. You learn skills and languages and new proficiencies. You become remarkably capable adventurers during your voyage on the Starblaster. But it's not just your minds that develop. Across this ageless century, something less quantifiable develops too.

Our capacity for love increases with each person we cross paths with throughout our lives and with each moment we spend with those people. But too often we neglect that part of ourselves in favor of others. And by the time we realize just how important it is, we find ourselves with fewer folks around to practice with.

But the seven of you have something that nobody else ever had. Time. All the time in the world. Time enough to grow indescribably close. Time enough to learn how to care for each other. How to allow yourselves to be

cared for. And in the case of Barry and Lup, time enough to fall deeply and truly in love.

Barry felt it first. During a particularly challenging year, Lup caught him crying. And she softly and sincerely consoled him. And just for a moment, the professional wall between them came down. And something shone through.

Lup wasn't far behind. Her moment of realization was a bit more innocuous. During that cycle with the robots, Barry helped repair the small frame of a vessel housing a particularly rambunctious spirit. And it kept shocking him and laughing. And Lup laughed too, and she knew.

This new love, it wasn't their focus during the journey. Barry worked tirelessly to understand each world you traveled to. To understand the Hunger and figure out a way to defeat it. Lup grew furiously in arcane power, studying the mystical secrets of the planes, hoping to master whatever spell would break your team out of their desperate retreat.

But there were moments between those studies, meals shared in secret, just the two of them, under the guise of their work. Sightseeing trips for two across these doomed worlds. And that love grew and it grew, until it reached the point that all great loves grow toward. The point of... inevitability.

Looking back, this performance is where that love that Barry and Lup cultivated quietly and cautiously, over the last half century, truly bloomed. There was romance in every measure and longing in every note. And after the performance, they take each other's hands high in the air.

And they swoop down for this over the top bow, just laughing at the drama of it all. And the audience cheers. And Barry and Lup laugh, and they don't let each other's hands go. And then they stop laughing. And they don't let each other's hands go. And they keep not letting go. And Lup says:

Lup: Barry, do you wanna go talk somewhere for a while?

Griffin: And Barry says:

Barry: Yeah!

Griffin: And Lup goes and puts their sheet music up on the pedestal, and there's a flash of light from the cave. And the beautiful duet they just played is gone from your minds. And seconds later, there's a second flash. And the song returns, and there's a roar of applause from the audience.

And Barry and Lup's professor is searching for them in the crowd, just hoping to congratulate them. But they're already gone, running back up the valley to the Conservatory, hand in hand.

Travis: Magnus leans down to Merle.

Magnus: I'm really glad I didn't go last.

Justin: [chuckles]

Merle: It's Professor Merle!

Justin: [laughs]

[music plays]

[ad break]

Griffin: Got a Jumbotron message for Josh, Ethan, Megan and Joslyn. And it's from David, who says, "Josh, Ethan and Megan, when Joslyn started school, I had no idea that three of her classmates would become my best friends. But I'm lucky you did. Happy graduation.

Joslyn, you handled grad school with poise and grace that is stunning, and have grown into a good, good counselor. I'm so proud of you. Now, on to the next adventure... zone." Please don't start another thing called Adventure Zone. Please!

There's apparently like 100 kids play places and go kart and mini golf facilities that either we stole their IP or they stole— I'm confused about what the order was, but we don't need any more competition. But thank you very

much David and Joslyn and Megan and Ethan and Josh! Congratulations on graduating, people who graduated.

Here's a message for Kiwi and Mary and it's from Mary and Kiwi who say, "Remember that time at Homer's wedding when we realized we were listening to the same episode of MBMBaM? Even though Kiwi was listening to them chronologically and Mary was listening reverse chronologically?"

That's how we know we were fated to be besties. Much love and many lulz." That's some serendipity ass shit right there and I feel it. It means something. I don't know what it means but my astrological sign points to good.

[ad read]

[music plays]

Griffin: So after the submission ceremony, the crowd of students and patrons has cleared out. It's a few hours later.

Justin: I do wanna just echo what I'm sure the audience is thinking right now. And that's, I'm really disappointed that I don't get to hear my brother do a romance scene with himself.

Griffin: Yeah.

Travis: [laughs]

Clint: [laughs]

Justin: [chuckles] I was— I was really hoping you—

Clint: [spoofing Lup "Your skin is really smooth!"
[spoofing Barry] "Thanks. Yours is too."

Justin: [spoofing Lup "I love you more!"
[spoofing Barry] "No, I love you more!"

Travis: It would basically— it would be the audio equivalent of wrapping your arms around yourself to make it look like you're making out with someone.

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: So, it's after the ceremony and it's just the seven of you, with Chancellor Marlow, in front of the cave. And all of your works have been accepted. And so, she gestures you toward the cave.

And one by one, you all approach the entrance and walk inside. And one by one, you are all rebuffed by the light's flashing. And after this, Davenport gets kind of frantic and he says:

Davenport: Well... Well, great. Now what? The world's boned in like 10 days, unless we can get in there. Lup, can you just blow it up?

Griffin: And Lup is like:

Lup: Can I blow up... a mountain? I mean, yeah. But let's—

Clint: [chuckles]

Lup: Let's save that for last resort, okay?

Griffin: And Marlow's like:

Marlow: I'm gonna have to firmly request that you don't blow up our sacred mountain.

Griffin: And so, the eight of you sort of retire and sort of strategize on how to get into this mountain, since this thing that you've been working towards this whole year just didn't work. And you have a nice meal. The food at the conservatory is like really... it's actually really good. It's like...

For dinner, you have this like rich duck stew with roasted corn. And everybody gets a full belly. And after sort of a fruitless meeting, everybody

goes to sleep. Everybody except Magnus. Magnus, you can't sleep. What do you do when you can't sleep?

Travis: You know, I imagine it's kind of a... a calisthenics thing, you know? Like start moving around, start walking.

Griffin: Okay.

Travis: I imagine he's probably a... like, can't sleep, work out, run, jog kind of person.

Griffin: All right, yeah. Okay, that's great. You do a— You're doing a jog around sort of the conservatory campus. You're the only one up, it's about 1:00 AM. And you run and you run. And you run to the gate and the gate's open, and there's a guard.

The nightshift guard kind of nods to you as you run through the gate and down the valley. It's a nice sort of hiking path, down the valley down to where the submission area is. When you get to the submission area, it's sort of a partially moonlit night.

There's clouds in the sky. So, you can't see especially well. But when you get close to the cave, you see a bright light in front of the cave, outside of the cave. And this light is moving around. And as you get closer and sort of approach cautiously, you see what looks like a... some sort of jellyfish?

And it's hovering in the air and it is sort of using its tentacles to sort of push itself around in the air, floating around. And you think it sees you, because when you sort of come into the clearing, it hums like this high-pitched note. And doesn't seem to run away from you or be scared of you as you get closer.

Travis: Magnus hesitates.

Griffin: Okay. It—

Clint: So does Travis.

Griffin: It starts to move into the cave, kind of slowly. Still kind of like swimming in the air.

Travis: I would... I move forward towards it, kind of hand up in like a "Wait, wait, wait!" Kind of gesture. You know, hand out.

Griffin: Yeah. The light disappears and goes into the cave. And you stand there for like a second. And then it re-emerges and kind of like hums at you again. And then starts to again slowly move back into the cave.

Travis: Magnus rushes in.

Griffin: Okay. You... You enter into the cave. And you tried this earlier in the day and were like, immediately turned around by the mountain. But as you enter the cavern's mouth tonight, there's no flash of light. You walk deeper and deeper into the belly of this mountain.

It's getting a little bit colder, you're probably wearing some like, short jogging gear. And so, you move into the belly of this mountain for what feels like 10 minutes. And you're just squeezing through a few tight passageways. And your path is illuminated by this creature, this glowing jellyfish-like creature, as it moves deeper and deeper, and leads into the central chamber of this cave system. And it's... it's fucking massive. You see like... You see other sort of... caverns leading out of it, in all directions.

And you assume like, "Oh this is... This is what connects to all of these different conservatories, all around this continent." This chamber is mostly dark, but there are these twinkling multi-colored crystals all over, that cast these dancing lights all across the room.

And you're still following this jellyfish that's sort of playfully leading you inside. But as soon as you leave this chamber, there are a bunch of other creatures, like the one you've been following, that sort of float towards you.

And they're larger. They're larger than the one you've been following. And you don't know much about them, but you sense sort of a defensiveness about them. But you see this smaller creature kind of hum at them, almost as if it's saying like, "Nah, he's cool."

And after some communal humming between all of them, then the larger creatures float off. And so, you follow this little baby jellyfish into a nook in the side of the chamber. And it shows you this collection of odds and ends.

There's a pile of those multi-colored rocks that are glowing and they are sort of casting a kaleidoscopic shower of light all around this little nook. And there's a row of glass bottles that are neatly organized by size. There's a bed of moss that you assume is where this creature lays its head at, or I guess its jelly cap, at night.

Justin: That's the technical term, jelly cap.

Griffin: I think so. I'm not a jellyfish-ologist. Next to that bed is your carved wooden duck. And it hovers over to it and it kind of like wraps its tendrils around it kind of gleefully, and rolls around in this bed with your duck. And it sings a little song. And then, it floats back towards you. And then, floats backs to the duck and hums at you.

Magnus: I made that... I made that duck!

Griffin: It hums at you in even higher pitched like, happier little song. And sort of hands— It floats over and picks up the duck and hands it to you. And then it takes it away from you again and sets it down on the bed.

Travis: Okay. I sit down on the bed with it, with the duck.

Griffin: It makes... It takes some of the moss off the bed and it roughly shapes it into the shape of another duck, next the wooden duck. And like points at it, and then points to you.

Magnus: Do you want me to make another one?

Griffin: It's saying like, "Yes, yes, yes!" It sings like this, really really like joyous refrain in this humming voice that you've heard. It wants more ducks.

Magnus: I don't have any wood with me.

Griffin: The light inside of it starts to dim a little bit and it looks kind of sad.

Magnus: But I... I can make you more. I can bring you more back?

Griffin: With that, the light sort of picks up and again and it does a little dance, and sings its happy song.

Justin: It's called a bell, a jellyfish head.

Griffin: Oh? I'm gonna stick with jelly cap, it's better.

Justin: Okay...

Travis: Jelly cap sounds like a euphemism for condom by the way, but go on.

Griffin: So, you have this sort of like, as best you can, conversation with this jellyfish, this glowing jellyfish creature. And you get the sense that it wants you to bring it more ducks. And so, you promise to make more. And you spend a little more time in here.

Clint: 'Send more ducks!' [laughs]

Griffin: And as you sort of walk around the central chamber, Magnus, you have sort of an upsetting realization. The Light of Creation isn't in here. The Light of Creation isn't like... It maybe was never in this mountain at all.

What you put together is just by a pretty unfortunate coincidence this phenomenon, that these fish seem to be able to create where they delete these works of art from the world and then rebroadcast them to the world at their pleasure... It just happens to be a phenomenon that the people of this world called the Light of Creation.

And when you make that realization, it hits you like a sack of bricks. Because you've got now nine days, and that's probably not gonna be enough time for you all to find what you need to find to save this world. Do you come back with more ducks?

Travis: Of course!

Griffin: I know we just jumped from sort of a high stakes thing to sort of a much lower stakes thing.

Travis: I would... Here's what I would say, Griffin. I come back with more ducks, but I would definitely have a conversation with Barry about this.

Griffin: Yeah, I think he—

Travis: Maybe just one on one at first with Barry, as like kind of our science officer? Of like:

Magnus: Hey. So like, here's what— here's what happened. It's not there, Barry.

Griffin: Barry says:

Barry: Well, shit. That sucks!

Griffin: He's like in a great mood. He's like really— he's like— For the rest of this cycle, he's just really... You tell him like, "We're not gonna be able to save this world." And he's like:

Barry: Ah, shit. Okay. Well... I'm really sorry to hear that. I mean, I'll go— I'll do a few laps around the world, see if I can't figure something else out. But... Hey, Lup, you wanna come help me find the Light of Creation? It wasn't in the mountain.

Griffin: And Lup's like, "Hell yeah!" And the two of them like, take off in the Starblaster and try to do some last-minute reconnaissance to find the Light. Do you bring any more ducks?

Travis: I do bring more ducks. Of course, I bring more ducks.

Griffin: How many ducks are you able to bring to it, that first night back?

Travis: Let's see, in 24 hours, I think I could carve three ducks.

Griffin: Okay.

Justin: Did he tell... Did he tell us? Or just Barry?

Travis: Okay, fine. I told them. I was just being difficult.

Griffin: Taako—

Clint: Oh, Magnus...

Griffin: Taako and Merle, what do you— do you all do anything when you find this out?

Justin: Yeah, I call a meeting in the town.

Griffin: Okay?

Taako: Hi, everybody. I'm Taako. You know, from TV? And I—

Griffin: You have... Okay.

Justin: Sorry, go ahead?

Griffin: No, you just haven't been on TV yet. Is this just a thing you say about yourself?

Justin: Hmm...

Travis: It's aspirational.

Clint: It's an aphorism.

Justin: It's aspirational, exactly.

Taako: Hi, everybody. I'm Taako, from TV. And, uh, you're wanged. You're all pretty much, in a bad way, pretty badly. And there's good news and bad

news. The bad news, I've covered pretty exhaustively, with the fuckedness that you are. The good news is that you have a shot. There is a thing called the Light of Creation, that's not what you call it. But there's another thing that... It's like a big, bright, white—

Justin: I describe it for them.

Griffin: Okay.

Taako: It's a big, bright, white thing. And normally, we don't enlist people. But here's something I know about you all. You currently have the most inspirational shit mankind— and by mankind, I mean me— has ever written, in your heads, held simultaneously. You motherfuckers believe in yourselves probably more than any group that has ever been assembled in all of human history. Correct?

Clint: "Yeah, that's us!"

Travis: "Yeah, we feel great! We're number one! We're number one!"

Griffin: "We all sound like Frond on Bob's Burgers."

Taako: So, here's what we're gonna do. If you've got a horse, get it. The faster, the better. If you can take people with you, go. We're all gonna split up and find this fuckin' light. Because you people have some real unearned confidence that I'm gonna capitalize on in a major, major way. So, let's get out there, split up, talk to everybody, see if anybody's seen it. And... let's make a go of this together, huh? As a team.

Travis: [cheers] "Yeah!"

Griffin: Roll, plus heart, Taako.

Justin: 10!

Griffin: Okay, with a— So, I think what happens is... A lot of the students here at the Conservatory are like so... stressed about their work and their

craft. And also, the seven of you just rolled up from another reality and then like 100% of you got works submitted and accepted by the Voidfish.

And I think folks are feeling maybe even more competitive than normal. And so, a majority of the student body is like, 'Okay...' And then, they go back to practicing the harpsichord or whatever. Your students that you like met with under the tree, your die hard devotees, they're like,

"Whatever you say, Taako. Absolutely, we'll dedicate the— How long do we have? How long do we have?" And you sort of share some of the information with them. And they immediately— they are tireless. They do not sleep the next nine days, as they go around looking for the Light of Creation.

Clint: I do a beautiful moving interpretive dance, convincing my students to go with his students.

Griffin: Okay, all of your students come together. And—[chuckles] your two groups of students, the masters of dance and the masters of self, come together and form a search party, looking for the Light of Creation. Both of you take plus one bond. Just with like your students that have come together to try to help you out. And I guess help themselves out.

And they don't find the Light of Creation. What they do find is... One of the students, one of your students, Merle, brings back this glimmering, singing diamond that they found in one of the professors' rooms. And the professor's like—

Travis: Wait, woah. What?

Griffin: Yeah, the professor's like away and they went in their room and saw this bright, shining light. And they bring this to you, Merle. And they're like, "Is this it? Is this the Light of Creation?" And it's not, it's just this like singing diamond. What do you do?

Merle: Well, kids... This is not the Light of Creation. But it certainly would go a long way to accompanying me... when I dance!

Griffin: So, you take it?

Clint: Yeah.

Griffin: All right, take plus one asset.

Travis: [laughs]

Griffin: And Taako, your students bring you a...

Clint: An apple?

Travis: Ever-burning lamp that one of Kilvin's students made.

Griffin: Okay... One of them brings you a golden glowing apple that they brought from one of the workshops. And it's just like some student's work, that they made this like glowing, bright apple. But it looks like— it actually looks incredibly valuable. Like it was made with incredibly valuable materials. And they hand it to you and they say, "Is this it, Taako? Is this the Light of Creation?"

Taako: That's it.

Clint: [laughs]

Travis: [laughs]

Taako: Y'all got it in one. I'll take this with me for safe keeping. And as a reward, as your professor, I'm giving everyone the next eight days off.

Clint: [chuckles]

Taako: So, get out of town and just try to kick it. For eight— The next eight days, I don't want you to think about anything important. Get people you love around you, get out there, have the time of your fuckin' lives. Seriously, here, drinks are on me.

Justin: And I give 'em whatever coin I've accumulated in this Podunk reality.

Taako: And just have a great time out there, for eight days.

Griffin: Take plus one asset for this cool, golden apple. Y'all are really writing this down, right? I cannot stress how important these numbers are gonna be when we get to the end.

Justin: I have a chart right in front of me.

Griffin: Okay.

Travis: Along with the ducks, Ditto, I would like... I would like to take Lucretia with me, when I return to the cave.

Griffin: Yeah, she's really fuckin' curious about these fish. And I think this— Every time you go to the cave and bring back more ducks, this baby fish like meets you at the mouth of the cave and leads you in. And when it sees Lucretia come in with you, it kind of recoils a little bit and tries to hide.

Magnus: No, no, no! She's not only super nice, she also likes collecting. She collects too, just like you.

Griffin: And she shows... she shows this fish some of the drawings in her book. In her books, I guess. And the Voidfish warms up and kind of brushes up against her. And she kind of laughs. And sure enough, this baby fish leads you deeper and back into the cave.

And the first time Lucretia comes with you, those other fish, the bigger ones kind of come over to her. One of them, there's like a... There's like a pretty big pond in the center of this chamber, that these stalactites are just constantly dripping down into.

One of these fish just like splashes out of the pond, and splashes Lucretia in like a huge 'sit too close at Seaworld' wave. And she like turns her— she turns quick and tries to get her books away, but gets doused by this water. And she's like kind of horrified. She's like:

Lucretia: Oh, god... Oh, god! It's... It doesn't smell very good, Magnus. It got in my mouth. This is awful. Why do you keep coming—

Magnus: That was a mistake. That was a mistake. You gotta keep your mouth closed in situations like... Once you get splashed, trust me. What do you want, pink eye? You gotta close your eyes, cover your mouth. Come on. It's day one stuff.

Griffin: And so, you hang out with Lucretia and the Voidfish. How many— Over the next like few days, how many ducks do you bring in?

Travis: Ah, man. I think I can max do three ducks a day.

Griffin: Okay.

Travis: But don't get me wrong, they're getting better. You know what I mean? There's definite duck improvement.

Griffin: Lucretia spends her time in this cavern with you. You spend it sort of hanging out and playing... playing ducks with the baby fish, while Lucretia like, illustrates some of these creatures, tries to understand their anatomy. Also, she—

Travis: Also, I don't wanna miss an opportunity, Ditto. I would also love to like petition the... the fish, the jellyfish. And see if they know anything about the Light of Creation. I mean, as long as we're looking for help... They've collected all this information and they know all of these things. I would love to try to convey to them what I'm looking for.

Griffin: Yeah. I mean, this conversation is just gonna be always, sort of by nature of the thing, like one sided. I don't think that they know how to tell you whether or not they know what you're— what you're talking about.

Travis: Gotcha.

Griffin: But you spend a lot of time with this creature, this baby fish, the smallest one, the one that always leads you into the cave. And you feel this

like— you feel a bond with it. Take plus two bond. For spending time here with Lucretia and spending time with this baby Voidfish. And—

Travis: Can I just address the elephant in the room, Griffin?

Griffin: Yeah?

Travis: I'm not leaving that fish behind.

Griffin: When the Hunger comes to this world, for the first time in a long time, the seven of you are surprised. It's early by a couple of days. And unlike its other appearances, where it kind of forms like a storm overhead and then touches down across the world erratically, it's just... boom. It's just immediately on top of you. You're having breakfast in the Conservatory lounge and then the sky turns black and the grass turns gray, and it's just there. It's like it knew where you were. And immediately, Davenport is like:

Davenport: Bug out, we're up in the air in two minutes.

Griffin: And fuck'n runs out of the room, towards the Starblaster. And other folks follow suit. Magnus what do you do?

Magnus: Lup, don't leave without me.

Travis: And I go.

Griffin: Lup says:

Lup: What... Why? We need to get— we need to— We gotta bounce! Look up. Look up, bud. It's the big H. It's time to roll.

Magnus: Do you remember with the robots? And you stopped us all from doing something terrible?

Lup: Yeah?

Magnus: I'm stopping you all. Don't leave without me.

Griffin: She pulls—

Travis: And I go, full sprint. Full sprint.

Griffin: All right. She pulls out a wand and... Barry pulls out a wand. And they turn to all of you and Lup's like:

Lup: Looks like we need to hold off the apocalypse for a few minutes and buy some time. Y'all down?

Taako: Hell yeah.

Merle: Yeah, we haven't fought shit in like a month.

Griffin: So, the scene is you, Magnus, rushing into the mouth of the cave while everyone else is just sort of standing on the Starblaster. Which is parked out on this lake, sort of adjacent to the valley there. Just sort of firing shots at everything approaching the ship. And firing shots at things sort of attacking the conservatory. Which, because of your efforts, is partially evacuated. Magnus, roll plus body.

[sound of dice thrown]

Travis: Hell yeah. That would be an 11.

Griffin: You make it into the cave so fast. And even though the fish isn't there to greet you at the mouth, you still make it in okay. And you reach the center of the chamber. And all of the big jellyfish that you've seen in here are all sort of submerged under the water of the pond. And the baby jellyfish is sort of floating above it, sort of like singing to them.

But they are not— they're not answering. And it seems kind of panicked, there's— The ground is starting to sort of shake beneath your feet and there are rocks sort of peeling off the walls. You see one of the entrances that leads to one of the other conservatories just collapse. Like, immediately adjacent to you.

Travis: I pull out a duck that I have with me.

Griffin: [chuckles] Okay?

Travis: That I was gonna give the fish later.

Griffin: Okay. It flies over to you and it sings a song, but you can tell it seems kind of nervous about all of its like family members or whatever not coming with. And you hear some— You hear Lucretia's voice shouting down the mouth of the cave that you just came through. And she's saying:

Lucretia: Magnus, we have to go! Get it or don't, but we... we've gotta go. Come on!

Travis: Can I see, are the other fishes around?

Griffin: They're like under— They're deep, deep underwater in this pond, in the middle of this massive cavern chamber.

Travis: I look down into the water and say:

Magnus: I'll protect it. I promise.

Travis: And I grab it and run.

Griffin: Okay, I'll use that body roll that you used earlier, because like this thing doesn't understand being grabbed. It doesn't know what you're doing. And it kind of fights you a little bit but you're just sort of—

Travis: I start humming.

Griffin: Okay, you're humming the song that you've hum a few times and it seems to calm it down. And you and Lucretia just sort of race. She's firing off shots too, at these shadows that are starting to full force sprint at you, as you make your way back to the ship. And she clears a path for you two— for you three to run back to the Starblaster and get onboard. And take off.

And Davenport like, just throws this thing, like a dart into the sky. Just the fastest acceleration that you've felt this thing give this whole time, as it

launches up into the sky. And as you're flying up and past the barrier, there's a moment of tension and anxiety where you don't know if this thing's gonna be there after you pass through the barrier between realities.

You've seen, you know, small animals or whatever stay and you've seen people disappear. But as you pass through that barrier, both you and Lucretia are just staring intently at the fish, just desperately hoping. And as your vision clears, you see it. And it's still floating in front of you. It's a little confused, obviously. But it's here and it's safe.

And it would stay safe for the rest of your journey across existence. The next year, you and Lucretia find a big glass tank. And she keeps it in her quarters. Her cabin was always bigger than yours. And you'd go to it from time to time. To sing it songs or give it carvings. Your repertoire expanded, but it still likes your ducks the best. It delighted in your company, Magnus. And it still does.

[Voidfish music plays]

["The Unexplained" by Mort Garson plays]

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