

## **The Adventure Zone: Balance — Story and Song — Finale, Part Two**

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**Griffin:** Previously on The Adventure Zone:

So, yeah, Magnus. Actually, the Royal Bear does want to spend some time with you. He has like, taken a particular fondness with you.

**Travis:** Sick.

**Griffin:** And I think you spend a few months training with it.

The moment you eat this meal, a bond is created. Imagine a long thread with one end tied around you and another tied around a person or a moment. And you feel it now, because there's so much power in it, Taako.

Your magic comes from Pan, and Pan's gone. Pan's not with you, Pan's not connected to you anymore. So, your tap— like, the source for your magic that you tap is now gone. And until further notice, Merle is completely disconnected from his divine source.

**Lup:** Now, Lucretia, I need you to please stop conjuring up that barrier, all right? 'Cause it's gonna be the end of the world.

**Lucretia:** I can't— there's nothing you can say that's gonna make me stop this. I'm gonna save us all, I promise.

**Griffin:** Lucretia's bubble goes completely opaque. And then suddenly, Lucretia's gone.

And miles away to the north, the south, the east and the west, you see them. The four judges. Towering 20 stories tall.

**Lup:** I think I know how we can get some reinforcements and turn this whole thing around.

**Griffin:** And she floats backwards and plummets off the side of the Bureau, diving towards Phandalin below.

**Taako:** I've got magic powers.

**Justin:** And then I jump off and cast Levitate on myself.

**Magnus:** Was that supposed to be a big reveal?

**Griffin:** And you don't seem to be standing in any kind of discernible room, rather, in every direction there are just, rippling walls of the same black opal material that makes up the Hunger. And suddenly, there's John. But now he's torn and cracked. He pulls out the chair on his side of the table and he says:

**John:** Hi, Merle. Got a minute?

**Griffin:** The lights inside of Fisher's bell begin swirling. This bright blue light surrounds his tendrils and starts coursing out of his body entirely. And the baby Voidfish, seeing this, it starts to change too. Its entire body is surrounded in bright green light. And then we see the blue stream of light, followed by the green, emerging from the Bureau's headquarters. Spreading ever outwards to the world and worlds outside.

**Griffin (intro):** Did you see them? Did you see the lights above? It's time to play your part in The Adventure Zone!

["Déjà Vu" by Mort Garson plays]

**Griffin:** We see Neverwinter besieged and burning. The citizens of this, the largest city in the world, take shelter in homes, shops and taverns, as an enemy they cannot see tears their town apart. Flames roar unchecked through the financial district. We see Lord Artemis Sterling, still exhausted from his trip through Wonderland, in his estate overlooking the whole of Neverwinter. Several advisors are barking panicked commands to their young leader. Sterling grits his teeth in disbelief of the day he's having.

We see Neverwinter's Blue Lake district, home to Chaos Stadium, where Battle Fest competitors come to spar for fame and riches. But today, Chaos

Stadium is a makeshift fortress against the apocalypse. A match had just ended when the Hunger arrived, and now fighter and spectator alike are trapped inside the stadium lobby, where they work frantically to board up the doors and windows inside. Klarg is there, still in his Moonbeam outfit. And he's with his entire Bugbear family who he reconnected with after your last encounter. This was their first time in Neverwinter. Klarg was nervous about their first visit. None of them expected this.

Graham, the Juicy Wizard, is there. He's wearing a recently purchased T-shirt promoting his friend and favorite fighter, Jess the Beheader. And Jess is there too, leading the civilians and barricading the front door, which is rattling furiously as the shadows outside pound against it. And though it's loud outside, it's quiet in here. Nobody's yelling or crying. It's almost as if everyone thinks they could simply hide from the apocalypse.

But the silence is broken with a chorus of gasps, as a stream of green light, and then a stream of blue, passes through the room. As the green light passes through them, their minds are instantly filled with an impossible story. It's a story about seven travelers who leave their home and fight bravely for a century against the darkness, against the same menace that is attacking them now. It's a story about the hardships those seven faced those 100 years. About the deaths they bravely endured as they worked to understand their foe.

They know everything that Lucretia wrote in her journal, the journal the younger Voidfish consumed and is now broadcasting to the world. Those words, her words, are passing through them now. And through the cracks in the walls, they realize they can finally see the forces assaulting their city. And for a moment, they're afraid.

And then the blue light touches them. And they all hear a song.

[“Voidfish (Plural)” by Rachel Rose Mitchell plays]

**Griffin:** And the fear is gone. The people in the room look at one another wordlessly as if to ask, “Did you hear... Did we all just hear...” And then there's a pound, and another pound at the door. And their eyes turn as one to the battle waiting for them outside. And they look at one another again,

no words, just an acknowledgement. It's time to stop hiding. They move with purpose now, and courage, and conviction, as every single person in this room gathers chairs, torches, broken bottles, and any other makeshift weapons they can get their hands on. In seconds, they arrange themselves into fighting units with tactical precision. The Bugbears step to the front of the pack, Jess nods at Graham, Graham smiles and grips his staff, and the doors smash apart. And the world starts fighting back.

[music plays]

**Griffin:** Magnus, you're in the Voidfish's chambers, only, the Voidfish are both gone. They filled this chamber with that light that passed through the walls and dispersed through reality. And though you never saw that phenomenon first hand back at The Conservatory, this feeling is familiar. You know that the world knows now. Knows everything that was in Lucretia's journals. And you're shaken from that realization by a loud rumble back up on the surface of the Moon Base—

**Travis:** Wait, are— Wait, are Fisher and Junior okay?

**Griffin:** They're just— they're just gone. After sort of spreading their messages throughout the world, they are not here anymore.

**Travis:** Are they okay?

**Griffin:** Maybe we'll find out later in the finale.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Griffin:** There's a loud rumble back on the surface of the base, and you hear— even though, like, you are sort of deep inside the base, you can hear the sound of a battle happening back upstairs.

**Travis:** Okay, I use my teleportation magic to get back up there.

**Griffin:** You use the elevator, did you say? 'Cause the Skype call broke up.

**Travis:** Yes.

**Griffin:** All right, you hop back up in the elevator.

**Travis:** [sings tune of "Girl from Ipanema"]

**Griffin:** And as this battle is raging, like the walls of the elevator car are shaking a bit, making that light and music flicker a little bit. But it reaches back up to the top of the base, and you come out of this dome. And you see Carey, Killian, and Noelle putting the finishing touches on a handful of shadows. And they're making short work of them, they're just executing these practiced trio attacks flawlessly. And after finishing them off, Carey runs up to you, Magnus, and says:

**Carey:** What's up, space man?

**Magnus:** Nothing much, lizard.

**Carey:** I'm still working out the details of what I just sort of experienced, but I can't believe I've been buddies with an alien this whole time.

**Magnus:** Maybe you're the alien and I'm the regular person.

**Carey:** No, that's not how it went.

**Justin:** [chuckles]

**Magnus:** Eh... It's hard to say. Did you see the Voidfish, one big, one little, come by here?

**Carey:** No, I didn't see anything. I just sort of... I just sort of heard `em.

**Magnus:** Okay. Well, keep an eye out. And if you see `em, let me know. I think they're gonna pop back up in the finale.

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Magnus, something falls from the sky.

**Travis:** I catch it.

**Griffin:** You don't.

**Travis:** Oh...

**Griffin:** Because it's pretty big. It—

**Travis:** I'm very strong?

**Griffin:** No, it lands in the center of the grassy quad up here, on the surface, and just sort of smack dab in the middle of all these domes in the Bureau headquarters. It's a sphere, and it's made of the same shimmering black material that the rest of the Hunger is made out of. It's about 10 feet in diameter, which is why you couldn't catch it.

And it's now floating in the air. And three figures spring forth from the sphere, and you recognize them quickly. There's the shape of an enormous owl, a wolf and a bear. It's the Royal Beasts from all the way back in the animal planet. Only they're different now, their forms are entirely comprised of that black material, but they're still twice your size. And they are moving towards you with ferocity.

And the owl spreads its wings and dives towards Team Sweet Flips, who narrowly avoid being torn apart by the owl's sharp talons. And then the owl rears back and soars upwards, and Carey, Killian and Noelle prepare themselves to engage this airborne foe. The wolf, the wolf looks at you, Magnus, and then grins, and then turns invisible. And that leaves just the Power Bear, who is staring you down, Magnus. And just panting, and raking its razor-sharp claws against the ground. What do you do?

**Travis:** Is this one of those circumstances where like, there's a really clever answer, or is it like, "Fight that bear?"

**Griffin:** I don't think there's a clever answer here, I think you're gonna end up fighting the bear.

**Clint:** Fight the bear.

**Travis:** I think I'm gonna fight that bear!

**Griffin:** Roll an attack roll.

**Travis:** Well, okay, it's weird because normally you would make me do initiative. And so, now I'm scared.

**Griffin:** I don't think I'm gonna make you guys do initiative this episode.

[sound of dice thrown]

**Travis:** Well, that's not great.

**Griffin:** What'd you get?

**Travis:** 14 total.

**Griffin:** Okay, what we see is— And what were you attacking with?

**Travis:** Uh, Chance Lance.

**Griffin:** All right, you charge forward with the lance held out in front of you, as the bear sort of drops to all fours and charges at you. And both of you sort of jump up in the air to strike the other one. And as your attacks hit, the scene changes.

["The Meaning of Strength" by Griffin McElroy plays]

**Griffin:** And we see a wooden, open-air pavilion. Where you are training, Magnus, as a quiet rainstorm drizzles outside. And standing across from you is the Royal Bear, who despite the fact that it's your first day of training with him, he looks exasperated already.

Also sitting in this space, just barely under the roof's coverage from the storm, is a chimpanzee, who is leaning lazily up against one of these four tall logs that are sort of holding the roof up in this pavilion. And you are back in a flashback in the animal kingdom, the first cycle you came to after leaving

your home world on the Starblaster. And this bear growls at you in a language that you only just learned and says:

**Royal Bear:** Before we get started, I'm gonna warn you. I have no intention of easing up on you.

**Magnus:** Right back at you, big guy.

**Griffin:** He kind— he sighs. And he says:

**Royal Bear:** If at any point you require aid, just shout for chimpanzee, got it?

**Magnus:** Like a safe word or..

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** The chimpanzee laughs at that from the corner, and the bear sighs again.

**Magnus:** Our safe word is chimpanzee.

**Griffin:** And the chimpanzee kind of winks at you.

**Travis:** I wink back.

**Griffin:** The bear says:

**Royal Bear:** Alright, let's start here. You said you wanted to get stronger, right?

**Magnus:** Yes.

**Royal Bear:** What do you think strength is, Magnus?

**Travis:** I stare at him for a second and then I just flex.

**Griffin:** They both laugh at that, they both laugh at your flexing. And he says:

**Royal Bear:** You think that being physically more powerful is strength. Is that what you think, Magnus?

**Magnus:** No. Literally, I think flexing is strength.

**Griffin:** He shakes his head and he looks even more exasperated than before. And then he charges at you. And like, in an instant you are just like— your ass is on the ground. And you also got the— you got the sensation that like, he was still holding back in a way. And he says:

**Royal Bear:** Physical power is nothing, Magnus. I'm more powerful than you. The rhino is more powerful than me, the whale's more powerful than the rhino, the ocean's more powerful than the whale. There's always something more powerful than you, Magnus. That is incorrect.

**Griffin:** And then back in the present, we see you try to run your spear through the bear. And it just dodges completely out of the way and rakes both claws against your back, and sort of slams you to the ground.

[sound of dice thrown]

**Griffin:** And you take sixteen points of damage.

**Travis:** Ooh, boyzee.

**Griffin:** Let's move over to Taako.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** Taako, as you hover slowly to ground, you see Lup and Barry already down there. And Lup's at the edge of the circle of black glass where Phandalin once stood. And she's gingerly inspecting the surface of the glass with her spectral hands. She's actually laying down with her head, like laying sideways on the circle, inspecting it close up. And as you land, she floats over to you and she says:

**Lup:** Okay, here's my idea. You ready for this? It's a banger. It's a banger.

**Taako:** Drop it.

**Griffin:** She leans down and tries to grab a clump of grass up out of the ground, but her hand phases right through it. And she sighs and says—

**Taako:** Nice.

**Lup:** Okay, I forgot, listen—

**Taako:** If you focus enough, Patrick Swayze could—

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Taako:** ... Flip a pop can. Could you try focusing harder?

**Griffin:** She says:

**Lup:** That movie's just full of a lot of misinformation about sort of ghastly activity. Anyway, do you see how everything sort of starts to lose its color a bit when the Hunger shows up?

**Taako:** Mm-hm?

**Griffin:** And you have seen this like 100 times. Like, the Hunger shows up and the grass gets less green and the sky gets less blue and things start to fade a little bit. She says:

**Lup:** Do you know why that is?

**Taako:** Dramatic effect?

**Lup:** No. Well, yes. But it's because the Hunger cuts us off from the rest of the planar system. That's how it always wins. It divides the planes up and it weakens its prey, and then overpowers the Prime Material Plane. Just gobbles it up. Yum.

**Taako:** Delicious. Yeah, I got that.

**Griffin:** She says:

**Lup:** So, my idea is...

**Griffin:** And she motions over to the circle of black glass, and she says:

**Lup:** You're gonna open a door, Taako.

**Taako:** Okay. To what, from where?

**Griffin:** She says:

**Lup:** Remember what that nerd lord said? Back— The one whose lab we were in, last year? He was using the Philosopher's Stone to transmute circles of matter into different gemstones, which resonated with the other planes. And if we can do that to a circle this big, we can poke a hole in the barrier the Hunger put up, and get some fuck'n otherworldly reinforcements.

**Taako:** So, turn the... the blackened glass into a portal, sort of?

**Lup:** Yes, exactly. Now, sure, we don't have the Philosopher's Stone. But luckily for us, we do have the most talented transmutation wizard who ever lived.

**Taako:** Ah, please, you're too kind.

**Clint:** [chuckles]

**Griffin:** She says:

**Lup:** I'm talking about me, Taako.

**Taako:** Oh, oh okay. I thought you were more—

**Lup:** No, I'm joshing—

**Taako:** ... Evocation?

**Lup:** I'm joking. I'm talking about you.

**Taako:** That's fine. It was nice, it was half a nice moment, I half appreciate your effort.

**Griffin:** She says:

**Lup:** So... Do your thing. Do your stuff. Transmute that shit.

**Taako:** Okay.

**Griffin:** If you have any questions— I know it's been over like a year and a half since we did the Crystal Kingdom. But basically, what Lucas was doing was transmuting like circles of stuff into gemstones. Specific gemstones would correspond with the different planes. And so, Lup is asking you to do that. And so, I can run you through the planes, or you can tell me which one you wanna like open up a door to? Lup chimes in and says:

**Lup:** Really, it doesn't matter where you open up the portal to. I'm pretty sure that once you break the seal, the whole barrier between all the planes is gonna come down. But you know wherever it opens up to, we'll get some immediate help from. So, you should choose carefully.

**Taako:** No, I'm... I'm pretty sure where I wanna open the portal to.

**Lup:** Just out of curiosity, where are you opening it up to?

**Taako:** Oh, the Astral Plane.

**Griffin:** And Lup says:

**Lup:** Hell yeah! Get down on some Dead Men of Dunharrow shit. Sounds good, bro. Rip it.

**Travis:** [chuckles]

**Taako:** Do I have to transmute the glass itself?

**Lup:** Yeah, that's how it works.

**Taako:** Shit, into like a gemstone, right?

**Griffin:** Yeah, you actually remember the... the window that Lucas opened up, the one that like Legion climbed out of at the end, was a sapphire window. You remember that, Taako because of how good your memory is.

**Clint:** [Laughs]

**Justin:** So, I'm trying to look for a specific spell that...

**Griffin:** I don't think— I don't think you need to do that. I think like... I think you can just roll arcana, and we'll call it that. 'Cause I don't think there is a spell that is transmute and— this is— When you transmute things, Taako, it's like a block of wood or a table that you turn into meat. Like, you've never— this is a, I'm pretty sure like a half-mile wide circle of glass. This is a big fucking ask. And so, I'm not sure your traditional magic will cover it. So, I think just an arcana roll would be sufficient.

**Justin:** Okay.

**Taako:** Everybody step back. Snd I don't mean that in like the cool way people mean that, I mean like literally step back because I don't fuck'n know.

**Griffin:** They do. Well Lup floats backwards, but they both give you some space.

[sound of dice thrown]

**Justin:** 24.

**Griffin:** All right. Taako, you place your palms on the cool, smooth surface of the glass where Phandalin once stood. And you start to transmute it. And

as you do, a wave of energy travels across the circle like ripples on water. And the glass starts to change. And it feels like it's draining every ounce of magical energy out of you as it goes. And it extends 30, 40, 50, 100 feet. And then the ripple... slows. And it stops spreading, and you feel yourself just, empty. And the transmutation reverts. And you're left kneeling in front of the same black circle of glass, which is left unaltered.

**Travis:** Should've rolled a 25.

**Griffin:** With a roll that good, I am not going to... I had a system for taking spell slots, but I'm not going to do that with a roll that dope. And Barry and Lup look over at the circle, and Barry looks kind of disappointed, and Lup says:

**Lup:** I... I don't know what to tell you, Taako. You've got to—

**Griffin:** And she's cut off, as a tendril, and then another, and then a third, come crashing down from the heavens, landing several hundred feet away. And immediately hordes of shadows start pouring out of them and racing towards the three of you. And Barry draws his wand and Lup starts preparing a spell, and Barry says:

**Barry:** Lup, that's a lot of dudes.

**Griffin:** And, Lup says:

**Lup:** Taako, Barry and I got this. You got to keep trying, babe. I know you can do this.

**Taako:** I'll... I'll give it my best shot.

**Griffin:** And then she and Barry turn back towards the encroaching horde, and start firing volleys of fireballs and arcane bolts in their direction. And Lup yells:

**Lup:** You can do it Taako, do it!

**Justin:** I try again.

**Griffin:** Okay.

[sound of dice thrown]

**Justin:** 17.

**Griffin:** The same thing happens, you put your hands down on the glass. And this time, actually— and this is probably like... This is probably really frustrating, like, the circle of sapphire doesn't even extend out as far as it did last time. It makes it about half as far, about 50 feet away from you. And then it reverts and is pulled back into it. And you feel like you just ran a marathon. You feel so drained. And from behind you, you hear Barry shout as one of the shadows gets the better of him, raking a claw across his chest. And he stumbles backwards, still firing missiles into the crowd.

And Lup drops back from her position to give him coverage, but they're quickly overrun. And suddenly, there's a shape overhead. And it's blotting out what little light the sky above is still emitting. And all you can see is just this enormous circular silhouette. And then there's just a small flash of light from the center of that circle and a whistling that sounds like a bomb falling, and then a crash. And then you see it, where it landed. And where it crushed several shadows beneath its mass.

["The Elevator of Tomorrow" by Griffin McElroy plays]

**Griffin:** It's Upsy, your lifting friend.

**Travis:** [chuckles]

**Clint:** [chuckles]

**Griffin:** And the battle is still for a moment, as the shadows turn to face this strange and demented monster. And suddenly, large menacing arms and legs sprout out from Upsy, who grabs a shadow and just tears it in half, directly in front of its elevator doors. And those doors part, revealing Lucas, who's riding inside of Upsy in a makeshift mech cockpit.

**Taako:** My dude!

**Griffin:** And it's only been half a year since you last saw Lucas, but he looks older. He's got a surprisingly impressive beard now. And he smiles and he waves, and as he does, Upsy waves too. And then Upsy just starts ferociously tearing into these shadows. And Lup and Barry take that moment of distraction to free themselves and start fighting. And suddenly, the three of them are just fighting back-to-back, to back, providing you with another chance to try and transmute the circle once again. And when you turn to the circle, you feel something small drop and bounce off your foot.

**Justin:** I check the pouch, the pouch that was locked.

**Griffin:** You reach into your bag and retrieve the bag of necessity that Istus gave you so long ago. And when you look down at the ground you see, indeed, there is a golden— a small golden padlock, the shackle of which just popped open on the ground. And you retrieve the bag of necessity, and it is open.

**Justin:** Well, I... put my hand in it, I guess.

**Griffin:** You're killed instantly— No.

**Justin:** [chuckles] Then that's going to do it for the Adventure Zone, we hope you've enjoyed this rich tapestry we've woven. Sorry I boned it there at the end.

**Clint:** [chuckles]

**Griffin:** You reach in... Any guesses?

**Justin:** I could guess, but I'd just look like an idiot.

**Griffin:** You reach in and retrieve the only item inside. It is a small, old, compact mirror, with an ornate silver design on the outside. And as you pop it open, you see an emerald mirror within. It's the same compact— I don't know if you ever saw this— that I think Magnus retrieved from Lucas' lab,

that showed him another world, our world. And sure enough, as you look into that emerald mirror, you also see a scene from another world.

And you're inside of a small metal compartment that, upon further inspection, doesn't look too dissimilar from the stagecoach you used to use when you were a traveling chef. There's a small refrigerator and a stove and a sink, and a shelf lined with various cooking implements and serving trays. And there's a long service counter with a cash register. And there's also a laptop open on that counter, not that you've ever seen a laptop, Taako. And there's a colorful looking game open on that laptop that you don't really understand but that we, the audience, would recognize as just Overwatch.

And there's a metal door at the far end of this truck that's padlocked shut and you can hear something behind it, just pounding away, rocking the truck with each attack. And there's a large window in front of that counter that is covered with a heavy metal shutter, and there's a young man who is looking out of that shutter. It's a human that you'd estimate to be maybe 18. He's got braces, and he's wearing an apron. And he is panicked as he surveys the scene outside.

Through the gaps in that shutter, you can see a city street that's just swarmed with shadows. There's fire coming off an overturned car several dozen feet away. And behind that, you can make out what this kid is staring at. There's a horde of shadows that are just pounding away at the large double doors of a nearby high school. What do you do?

**Justin:** Can he hear me?

**Griffin:** You don't know.

**Taako:** Hey, hey kid!

**Griffin:** The young man falls down from where he's looking at the shutter, his knees just buckle as he's startled. And he shuffles backwards away from where you're looking into this scene. And he's just screaming.

**Taako:** I know, I know. Listen... [chuckles] Okay...

**Griffin:** He says:

**Young Man:** What are you— what are you doing in my frying pan?!

**Taako:** Okay, I'm in your frying pan. Okay, that's where... okay. Wow, Genji main, huh? Wow. Oof, okay...

**Griffin:** [laughs] As he says that, you realize that sure enough, your perspective in this scene is from a rack of pots and pans that is hanging on the wall of this truck. He says:

**Young Man:** How are you doing— What's going on?!

**Taako:** I don't know why you can help me, but I'm trying to fix what's happening. My name... My name is Taako and I'm a wizard— God, I know that sounds stupid to you, huh? I'm a wizard, my name is Taako. And I am pretty well fucked right now. I am trying to do something that honestly, I can't do. And I don't know how you can help me, but there's some way in which I am fairly certain you can, because a goddess told me so. I know, it's a lot to take in.

**Griffin:** He... He stands up and he says:

**Young Man:** Wait a minute, I know who you are.

**Griffin:** He says:

**Young Man:** You're... you're Taako from TV. I heard your story.

**Griffin:** And he says:

**Young Man:** I'm Joaquin. I'm... I'm not even supposed to be here today, Taako, I'm filling in for my shithead brother. I don't know what I can do to help you, but... I'll try anything.

**Griffin:** And this young man stands up, and as he does, you can finally sort of see the front of the apron he's wearing. It's emblazoned with a logo that

says South Beach Tacos. And the print on this apron is unique. The whole apron is covered in a design that looks like flames.

[Parley by Griffin McElroy plays]

**Griffin:** Merle, you are in this black space, standing in front of a black marble table with two high-backed chairs. And on that table is a chess set. The walls and floors and ceiling of this space, it's just all Hunger. And sitting in a chair on his side of the table is John, who, again, looks... not great. His body is sort of covered in these colorful rifts, kind of like the stuff you see all over. And John says:

**John:** What happened to your eye, Merle? [chuckles] Gods, what happened to your arm?

**Merle:** Well, I was just gonna say, what happened to your complexion?

**Griffin:** He says:

**John:** I guess we both look a little worse for wear right now, huh?

**Griffin:** And he motions—

**Merle:** Oh, I don't know, I kind of like how I look. You look like... oh, god. Like puke.

**Griffin:** He laughs and he motions to the chair on the other side of the table from him and says:

**John:** Will you sit?

**Merle:** Yeah. Yeah, sure. If I can reach it. [grunts] Ah-ah!

**Griffin:** You sit down. It's actually surprisingly comfortable for a black marble chair. And he says:

**John:** I want to apologize in advance for being out of conversational practice. The last conversation that we had was the last conversation that I had all together. So... it's good to see you again.

**Merle:** Well, thanks, John! How long ago was that conversation?

Griffin: He says... You know, I don't actually know the answer to that question. You had that last conversation, we had it on the podcast, where John kind of laid out how he got to be the way he is and then you said, "Fuck this," and stopped like going to meet him. I don't know if that was close to the end of the century or if it wasn't. I'll leave that up to you. Was that closer to the end of your 100 years, or was there like a break between when you stopped—

**Clint:** I kind of thought it was like three quarters of the way in.

**Griffin:** Okay, yeah. I sort of figured that was the case. So, yeah. It's probably been about 30 years, then. Including the decade where you were in this world. And he explains that to you and he says:

**John:** I've got to know, Merle, how'd you pull it off? How did you... How did you hide it from me for so long?

**Merle:** Hide what, Johnny boy?

**John:** The Light. Merle, please don't do that. The Light of Creation.

**Merle:** Ah—

**John:** I couldn't find it for over a decade, Merle. It was a bad situation. How did you— how did you manage to hide it for that long?

**Merle:** We were just really tricky, really cunning. And I... Oh hell, John, I don't know.

**John:** [chuckles]

**Merle:** I don't know what the hell we did. I barely remember where I went to the bathroom last, I don't know what we did with the Light.

**Griffin:** He kind of senses that you're being a little coy. And his smile fades a little bit and he says:

**John:** Merle, you should know, I'm not really in charge here anymore. When the Hunger stopped being fed, its priorities changed. It's not a sentient being looking for ascension anymore, looking to surpass existence and the rules that govern it. It's... it's just hungry. The purpose that brought my world together and turned it into this, it... it doesn't care about that purpose anymore, Merle. It just wants to consume.

And it's not going to keep me around for much longer, Merle. I failed it for over a decade. It's not just gonna let that pass. I... I don't want you to keep any secrets from me, Merle. I just— I didn't bring you here to pump you for information, I genuinely just brought you here because I needed to... say goodbye to someone. I just— I genuinely just want to chat.

**Merle:** Is that what's going on with these rifts in your face? This boss of yours is messing you up like that?

**Griffin:** He says:

**John:** Indirectly, I suppose, yes.

**Merle:** Well, let me help you! Well, wait, I... when I had magic, I could've helped you. But you know... I don't have magic anymore.

**Griffin:** He smiles and he says:

**John:** That's very kind of you, old friend. I... I'm glad to hear you say that, actually. You... I didn't know how this meeting was gonna go. You know the rules of Parley. I brought you here. And so, I suppose you could have killed me if you wanted to.

**Griffin:** And as he says that, bright white eyes appear all over the walls and floor and ceiling. And they're all like staring furiously down at John. And he clams up for a second and he says:

**John:** I guess that they would prefer that you didn't kill me. Can we just talk? Can you tell me a story about your life, Merle? Tell me anything. Maybe we can play another game?

**Griffin:** And the chess pieces move into the starting position. He says:

**John:** Just tell me anything about the last decade, Merle. We have so much to catch up on.

**Merle:** Well, okay. I'll do that. Who goes first?

**Griffin:** He takes a white piece and a black piece in his hand and offers them to you.

**Clint:** Okay. I'll take... the white piece.

**Griffin:** And he says:

**John:** You go first. Tell me something about your life, Merle.

**Merle:** All right, John, I'll tell you something. I got a couple of kids.

**Griffin:** He laughs and he says:

**John:** You, Merle, have kids?

**Merle:** I got kids! [chuckles] I do! I got kids.

**Griffin:** He's like laughing about that as you sort of take your first couple of moves, and he takes a couple of moves. And really quickly, he's adopting like a really strange strategy. He's just trying to get his king out of the back line as quickly as possible, and moving it into the fray. And you've played chess with him a couple dozen times, and like, this is... this not great chess

strategy. And you've never like seen him fuck up this bad before. And he says:

**John:** How old are they? That sounds wonderful.

**Merle:** Mavis and Mookie, girl and boy. Mavis is... you know, teenage-ish.

**Griffin:** [laughs]

**Merle:** And Mookie is younger-er than that. I'm not real good yet at the, you know, dad thing. But you know, I'm learning. I'm getting better about it.

**Griffin:** He says:

**John:** I'm not worried about you, Merle. You'll get there.

**Griffin:** And as he says that—

**Merle:** Maybe not!

**Griffin:** As he says that, he moves the king to capture one of your pawns, and as he does, you see these faint threads of light come off of the king and ensnare the pawn, and it pulls it into its mass. It pulls this pawn into the king piece. And as the pawn's form disappears into the king, those threads remain, now just bound around the king piece. And as this peculiar scene unfolds, John is just staring at you intensely, Merle.

Magnus, you see... you see the Royal Owl swoop down, and right as Killian is about to intercept it with a crossbow bolt, the Owl's eyes flash, and suddenly she's under its control. And she turns her bow towards you, Magnus, and just as she's about to fire, Noelle wraps her metallic arms around her from behind and restrains her. And Carey just leaps onto the Owl's back, just stabbing it as it starts to take flight again. And then the Bear is in front of you again Magnus, and it looks like it's about to charge you.

**Travis:** Okay.

[sound of dice thrown]

**Travis:** Okay... 29.

**Griffin:** Jesus Christ. Okay.

**Travis:** I rolled a 17, plus 10, and with the bear mask, plus 2.

**Griffin:** Yeah, that's a good roll. Okay, you... Chance Lance again?

**Travis:** No. I am going to grapple.

**Griffin:** Oh shit, all right. Alright—

**Travis:** And I'm gonna attempt, Judo-style, to use its momentum against it and throw it.

**Griffin:** Okay. You... I think the Bear sees you doing this. And although this bear is in like furious, nonsensical monster mode, you see, just faintly, you see it retract its claws, as if to say like, "Alright, motherfucker. Let's wrestle." And it charges toward you and I think your shoulders just slam together. And as you collide, we see another flashback.

And it's the same scene, the Bear is picking you up off the ground of the pavilion. And you dust yourself off, and the Chimpanzee's just kind of laughing in the corner. And the Bear says:

**Royal Bear:** Let's try again, Magnus. What do you think strength is?

**Magnus:** Strength is... being stronger than your opponent. Strength is... being strong enough.

**Royal Bear:** Strong enough to do what?

**Magnus:** Win. Survive. I don't know!

**Griffin:** He picks— he picks you up, Magnus. And just kind of throws you to the ground. And he says:

**Royal Bear:** You're telling me what it is to be strong, that's not what strength is. Why do you want to be strong, Magnus?

**Magnus:** So I don't have to lose anyone.

**Griffin:** He says:

**Royal Bear:** You want to protect your friends, is that right?

**Magnus:** They're not strong enough. I have to be.

**Griffin:** You see the Bear smirk. And he starts to walk toward the Chimpanzee with his claws drawn. What do you do?

**Travis:** I jump on its back.

**Griffin:** You jump on its back, and he just effortlessly like reaches up and digs its claws— digs his claws, like, into you, and just tosses you away. And then you see the Bear start to swat down at the Chimpanzee and just stops like an inch away from hitting it. And he says:

**Royal Bear:** You need strength to protect someone. That's right, Magnus. But the desire to protect is not strength itself. You're incorrect again.

**Griffin:** And then we're back in the real world, and you just hoist this bear up, you definitely get the better of it. What do you do with it?

**Travis:** I just want to pin it. I want to pin it and hold it.

**Griffin:** Okay. Yeah, you definitely have it pinned down to the ground and you are holding it. And it's snapping at you with its jaws. But you have it in a position where you can— you can easily finish it off. And if you don't, it is going to keep coming at you.

**Travis:** I scream in its ear:

**Magnus:** Chimpanzee! Chimpanzee!

**Griffin:** [chuckles] Nothing.

**Travis:** Huh?

**Griffin:** It doesn't work. And actually, as you lower your head down, it gets a—

[sound of dice thrown]

**Griffin:** Its claw— That wasn't very bad, like I said— Take 6 damage, as it sort of bites the side of your face and leaves you with a nasty scratch.

**Travis:** I don't wanna hurt it. I don't wanna kill it. It's my mentor, it's my teacher!

**Griffin:** Whatever that was, whatever your mentor and teacher was, is nowhere to be found inside of this bear. This thing is... It's gone completely feral and is just hell bent on destruction.

**Travis:** Ugh...

**Magnus:** I'm sorry.

**Travis:** And I— And I stab it.

**Griffin:** Okay. You stab it. And you know how to stab it pretty good, because of the life that you've lived. And the Bear starts to fade, and as it does... as it does, its face relaxes just for a moment. And you see gratitude in the fading light of his eyes. And then he blows away, turned to ash. And for just a moment, there is quiet. And then you're back on the ground, with this horrible pain in your shoulder.

[sound of dice thrown]

**Griffin:** Take 21 points of damage.

**Travis:** Hoo boyzee.

**Griffin:** As you feel the Royal Wolf pounce on top of you, invisible no longer. And he's got his full weight on your back. It's like a car is parked on you Magnus, and he's just tearing into you. And then you flash back to one of your final training sequences with the Bear. And you... you run at him, and he throws you to the ground with a force that lets you know that despite his warning, he's been holding back until now.

And he's leaning his full weight until your back, just pinning you to the ground in a similar manner that the Wolf is doing now. And you hear a pop, in this flashback as your shoulder dislocates. And he's yelling now, he says:

**Royal Bear:** Magnus! What is strength?! What is the first thing I told you when you came in here?!

**Magnus:** [moans in pain]... Ask for help.

**Griffin:** He leans in again and you hear another pop. And you don't even know where that came from, but it hurt like hell.

**Magnus:** Chimpanzee!

**Griffin:** There's a blur overhead, and the sound of an anguished grunt. And from your perspective, you can see that corner and the Chimpanzee is no longer there, he's standing over you. And he's helping you up and he holds your arm and pops it back into joint. And you see the Bear lift himself up several feet away. And the Chimpanzee is laughing because the Bear seems to be stretching out a sore arm also. And the Bear speaks and says:

**Royal Bear:** Strength is a tool, Magnus. It's a commodity. You can spend it, and spend it, but everyone's got some, and lots of folks are gonna have more than you. But if you ask for it, Magnus, other folks' strength can become your own. That is what strength is, Magnus. Who gives you strength, how willing are you to ask for it? Pride and glory are the enemies of true strength, Magnus.

**Griffin:** And he puts a paw on your shoulder and he says:

**Royal Bear:** In every warrior's life there comes a moment where they are overpowered by a superior fighter.

**Griffin:** And then he lets you go and he wraps an arm around the Chimpanzee and he says:

[“The Meaning of Strength” plays]

**Royal Bear:** But you keep friends nearby. And you ask for help when you need it, Magnus. And you won't just be strong. You'll be unbeatable.

**Griffin:** And you're back in real time. And this wolf is on you just biting away. What do you do?

**Magnus:** Help!

**Griffin:** You hear a sound like the shattering of all the glass in the world, as the wall of the Hangar Dome in front of you explodes. And through that enormous hole in the wall, you see a Bureau of Balance transportation sphere fly through the air and collide with the Wolf, who flies with a surprised yelp up and off the side of the moonbase. And you see Avi peek out from behind the cannon inside of the hangar, and he quickly runs down the stairs and jumps through the hole in the wall and helps you to your feet. He says:

**Avi:** Are you— Are you okay, Magnus?

**Magnus:** Avi, that was sick. That was amazing.

**Griffin:** The two of you walk over to the edge of the moonbase where the Wolf just flew off. And Avi's kind of like seeing to your shoulder, but he takes a beat, and he looks over the edge and he says:

**Avi:** Do you wanna say it or should I?

**Magnus:** No, you take it.

**Griffin:** He says:

**Avi:** No dogs on the moon.

[music fades]

**Griffin:** Taako, Joaquin is standing in front of you inside of the South Beach Tacos food truck and just asked what you want him to do to help.

**Taako:** Okay, Joaquin, what's... what's your last name, Joaquin?

**Joaquin:** Torrero?

**Taako:** Okay, Joaquin Torrero. That... That is what name you will be known by. But for the rest of time immemorial, the world, our world, maybe your world, who knows, will know you as the man wreathed in flames. I know it sounds cool, and it is. One time, the oldest lady I've ever seen in real life—

**Griffin:** [laughs]

**Taako:** ... Told me that you were gonna save my proverbial bacon.

**Justin:** I tap on the thing to see if it's just a... if I can get anything through it, or if it's just a communication thing.

**Griffin:** No, you can't seem to pass through it or pass anything through it. It's just a communication device. And he says:

**Joaquin:** Taako, I don't know what I can... I can do from here. I can cook you up a meal, if I could send it back through. I don't know if I could... you know, cook something that would give, you know, a fuck'n magic power or whatever.

**Taako:** Okay. I got a hunch. My whole life has been really long. And throughout it, I've been led to something. And I used to think it was to create something. And now I think it's to find you. I... This is gonna sound weird, considering my name. But I don't know what a taco is. I've gotten hints— I mean basically, if you were to call them taco prophecies? That's a crazy thing to say out loud, but I just said it. So, here we are, I guess. I'm

talking through a frying pan, try to keep up, Joaquin. But I... I think it's been leading me to you. To this.

**Griffin:** He says:

**Joaquin:** You want me to show you how to cook a taco, Taako?

**Taako:** Joaquin, I'll take one taco, with extra destiny.

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** He laughs, and he says:

**Joaquin:** Yeah, fuck it, I'm gonna teach Taako how to make a taco.

**Griffin:** And he races to action and he's starts pulling ingredients out of the fridge, and igniting the stove and heating up a pan. And for a second, he actually reaches for the pan you're speaking to him from, and then thinks better of it and grabs one from next to you.

**Taako:** Thank you very much for that.

**Griffin:** And he says:

**Joaquin:** It's a shame that you're not near a kitchen right now. You could sort of do it alongside me, like a demonstration or something.

**Taako:** Yeah, I'm gonna let myself be seen being taught how to cook anything, nice try.

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Taako, you hear a sound like fabric tearing. And on the ground, the bag of necessity swells up and tears apart as your stagecoach emerges from within it. And it looks beautiful, just like the day you started your tour, with a freshly painted sign hanging over the window, proudly proclaiming; "Sizzle It Up With Taako."

**Taako:** All right, one mo' `gain!

**Justin:** I climb in there and look for the— I start getting my cooking shit together, whatever Joaquin's got out, I'm following his lead.

**Griffin:** Yeah, as you race inside, you find the interior of your coach spotless with all of the cutlery and cookware you brought with you on the road. And on the counter, in front of the stage, you see bowls containing ingredients, some of which are familiar to you. There's a tray of fresh ground beef and some tomatoes, and some small ramekins with various spices, and some you've never seen before. And the stovetop is on and there's a pan already heating. And Joaquin says from the mirror:

**Joaquin:** You ready?

**Taako:** Let's do it.

**Joaquin:** So, we're gonna make some picadillo tacos. First off, you wanna dice up the potatoes, and toss `em in a pan with a generous splash of olive oil, just get `em nice and crispy.

**Taako:** Okay, got it, cookin'.

**Griffin:** You work through these various steps. And as you're working, you can see through the large window, like sort of your presentation area outside, and you can see Lucas, Lup and Barry still blasting away at the crowd. Only, they're moving in like super slow motion. Time is passing much slower outside of your stagecoach than it is inside, giving you time to prepare this meal. And you finish that step, and Joaquin says:

**Joaquin:** Okay so, set those aside. And now you're gonna wanna start your sauce. Well, I guess first off actually, let's get the ground beef going and... do you have cumin?

**Taako:** Yeah, I got cumin, who do you think I am?

**Griffin:** He's like:

**Joaquin:** All right toss that, some salt and pepper in there and just brown it. And drain some of the fat when you're done. Not all of it, you still want a tablespoon in there or so, all right?

**Taako:** Yeah, got it.

**Griffin:** And together, you and Joaquin, a world apart, cook this meal together. And the smell is just remarkable. You dice up the freshest garlic and onion you've ever smelled and toss it in the pan. And you follow Joaquin's instructions as he sort of walks you through blending some tomatoes and peppers into this delicious, spicy sauce that you re-incorporate back into the meat and potatoes. And it's simmering for a while and there's not much else to do for a bit, and so Joaquin takes a beat, and then asks:

**Joaquin:** Taako, I... I know how this next part goes. We... We all do, from the stories. This is the end of the world, isn't it?

**Taako:** You know, maybe.

**Clint:** [chuckles]

**Taako:** It's hard to say, it's unclear. I'm—

**Griffin:** He says:

**Joaquin:** I don't take a lot of comfort in that, if I'm being honest.

**Taako:** Well, I mean, I'm a magical elf in a frying pan, what do you want from me? I'm trying, man. I'm kind of doing my best over here, it's untread ground for me too. But I'll say this, if anybody has a shot at stopping it, it's us. As hard as that may be to believe.

**Griffin:** A timer goes off, and Joaquin takes out a couple of tortillas and starts heating them in another pan and you do the same. And then you both add the picadillo to the tortillas. And there it is. Your inexplicable delicious namesake, on a plate in front of you. And Joaquin picks up one of his tacos and he says:

**Joaquin:** I feel like we should toast or something.

**Taako:** So, a toast?

**Joaquin:** No, it's a taco. It's a little food joke.

**Taako:** Very little. So, I don't know how you found tacos. This is my first. And I'm gonna try real hard to make it not my last. So, no matter what happens, you... Just know that you did your part, okay Joaquin?

**Griffin:** And he says:

**Joaquin:** Well, I... I hope it helps.

**Griffin:** And he sort of raises up his taco to you in like a cheers motion. And then we see the two of you, in unison, raising your tacos up to your open mouths. And then the scene changes. And inside the celestial plane, we see Istus.

[“The Temple of Istus” by Griffin McElroy plays]

**Griffin:** And she's working tirelessly, still weaving this massive colorful tapestry hanging on the wall. And she's clutching a needle tied to one final bright red thread. And as she pushes it through her work, she takes a step back, and she pauses. And finally beholds the shape of her divine artistry. And she smiles, and she says:

**Istus:** Huh? Didn't see that one coming.

**Griffin:** And she rears backwards and pulls the thread taut. And at the same time, across two universes, two food trucks explode.

[“Wonderland Round 3” by Griffin McElroy plays]

**Griffin:** Joaquin stands unharmed among the wreckage of the South Beach Tacos food truck, his body surrounded with crackling red electricity, his hair standing slightly on end. And for a moment, the shadows nearby are stunned and then pounce as one toward him. And he's so calm. And he says:

**Joaquin:** No.

**Griffin:** And at his command, the shadows are torn apart by the power surrounding him. And he points a finger towards another, nearby crowd of shadows who are working to topple a city bus and it rips through them, sending a storm of ash flying as it arcs. And Joaquin starts walking confidently away from the wreckage. A massive shadow, 10 times Joaquin's size, swipes a fist toward him. And Joaquin catches it in the air. And the enormous figure is filled with red light and it screams as it disintegrates.

And Joaquin smiles, and he makes a finger gun and closes one eye, and he aims it at six nearby shadows, one at a time. And then he pulls the trigger, and six individual bolts fire out from his hand, destroying his targets. And then we see a dark hallway, suddenly illuminated as the doors to that high school are blasted open, revealing a quiet city street outside. And Joaquin is there, still filled with this power. And he sees the terrified faces of the students and teachers inside, and he says:

**Joaquin:** Everything's gonna be okay! I've got magic powers!

**Justin:** [chuckles]

**Griffin:** Taako, you're standing over the rubble of your own stagecoach, right in front of the circle of black glass, and you're filled with that same power. And you hear your sister behind you shout:

**Lup:** Holy shit! Are you okay?

**Taako:** Yeah, I'm pretty fucking great! I'm gonna turn this glass into the blue one!

[sound of dice thrown]

**Justin:** That is a...

**Griffin:** Oh, you don't need to roll for that, son.

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Justin:** Ah, hell yeah!

**Griffin:** As you touch the black glass, you feel that power just discharge out of you. It shoots out of your hand. And there's no ripple, there's no slow conversion of the glass, it's just sapphire. And as it changes, it's almost like you threw open the doors of a wind tunnel. Your hat is knocked off and thrown several dozen feet backwards, landing in grass that has already started regaining its color. And shades of blue peek out of the sky above.

And all across this world, heat becomes hotter and water becomes wetter, and light becomes lighter and shadows become darker. In the sky above, streaks of divine light race through the sky as the planes are reconnected at last. And from the sapphire window, something starts to take shape. Large figures are rising up and out of the ground.

And after a moment, they take their place. And in front of you is Phandalin. The buildings that rose up from the ground are made of this white spectral light. And actually, on the outskirts of the circle, the fragments of buildings connect with their year-old ruined counterparts that survived at the very edge of the gauntlet's fire. And kneeling, at the center of town, is Kravitz.

Merle, you're still playing this chess game. And it's still weird. And John says:

**John:** So, what's it like being a dad?

**Griffin:** And he takes another piece with his king as he says that, and that scene replays. It consumes the bishop he takes, and another thread of light appears and is tied around the king piece.

**Merle:** Ah, it's... it's pretty great, John. There's something that is so... indescribable about being part of bringing a new life into the world. It's... It really is something you can't describe to anybody else. But to be responsible for a new consciousness, a new soul, and then, you know, to help that consciousness and that soul become what it's supposed to become? Ah, it's... it's the best. I didn't realize it for a real long time. Wasn't really good

at it. But once I realized that this was like this tremendous gift that I got twice, ah! Loved it!

**Griffin:** He says:

**John:** You know, I thought for a while about having some kids of my own, but...

**Merle:** Well, why didn't ya?

**John:** Well, the whole...

**Griffin:** And he looks down, and he says:

**John:** I had other priorities.

**Griffin:** And he takes another piece with the king. And he takes another pawn, and it's pulled inside the king, and another thread of light is tied around the king. And every time he does this, Merle, he's just like... you can see him just like barely nodding his head and looking down at the piece, and then back at you, and then back at the piece as he does it. He says:

**John:** I guess I've got like a billion kids, if you want to think about the Hunger that way. [chuckles]

**Griffin:** And he takes another piece. And as he takes a piece this time, and actually mentions the Hunger by name, those eyes appear again. And they are now just watching the two of you and your game very, very, very closely.

**Merle:** Well, John, you wanna share a little bit about yourself with me? Tell me a little story about yourself? I mean, that's what friends do, they exchange stories. I exchanged a story about my kids. You know, you haven't really told me much about what you did before you were... you know, a world-crushing avatar for a gigantic evil force. You know, what did you do for a living?

**John:** Well, I was a motivational speaker, Merle.

**Merle:** Right.

**Griffin:** Merle, he is fucking staring at you, and he says:

**John:** I told people what they needed to hear.

**Griffin:** And as he says that, one of your pieces moves of its own volition and approaches John's king. It's a knight. And as the knight moves towards the king, the piece actually animates, and there's a mounted rider on a horse. And this rider raises a sword and rakes it across the king, and cuts all of those glowing threads that are surrounding the king. And suddenly, John's king explodes, and all of the pieces that it had consumed come flying out of it and go scattering across the table. And when that happens, the room around you screams.

And those eyes start burning and they're squinting with rage. And suddenly, hands attached to these long arms appear from the walls and the floor. And John stands up from his chair with a start, but he's too late. These hands are just tearing at him. And those rifts all over his body start to expand. And a group of arms reach up and grab his legs and start to pull him down into the floor. And... he's screaming, and he's reaching for you, Merle. What do you do?

**Clint:** I wrap my arms around him. I grab— I run to him, I grab him, throw my arms around his chest, lock my hands behind his back, and try to pull him out.

**Griffin:** All right. You... you wrap your arms around John and... unintentional or no, are giving him this embrace as you try to pull him up and out of the ground as these hands keep pulling him. But the hands just have him, there's so many, they're so strong. And his waist is in the ground and his stomach and chest. And he's trying to keep himself out with his arms, but there are arms grabbing his arms and pulling those down into the ground. And just before he disappears, his eyes meet yours. And he's inches from you, Merle, and you hear him whisper:

**John:** Break the bonds, Merle. Break—

**Griffin:** And then he's gone. And the eyes all around the room turn towards you. And the table and chairs are gone.

**Merle:** [nervously] Hey. Hey, guys!

**Griffin:** And now, the hands are grabbing at you, Merle. And as they grasp you, you feel them burning your skin through your clothes. And they're pulling you down slowly and painfully into the floor. And then, you feel something you haven't felt all day, Merle. You feel the presence of your god. What do you do?

[“Pan” by Griffin McElroy plays]

**Clint:** [chuckles] Okay. I say:

**Merle:** It's about freakin' time!

**Clint:** And I cast Zone of Truth.

**Griffin:** The—

**Travis:** To what end? [laughs]

**Griffin:** No, this is amazing. You cast Zone of Truth. And you've cast this spell before, and it's like... it's like a spotlight appears above you and like shines down, and then sort of expands out several feet, and encompasses some folks, and then they don't lie. That's what usually happens when you cast Zone of Truth. When you cast it this time, the light shines down, and as it bursts through the ceiling of this room, you can see The Hunger burned away.

And it is surrounding you in this column of perfect holy light. And as it hits you, The Hunger that is grabbing at you from the floor burns away. And the circle expands and expands. And as it does, it is the most powerful holy spell you have ever cast. And it just— it peels this darkness off the walls and floor, and you see it disintegrating into ash. And the walls are just screaming and these eyes wink closed and disappear.

And then, the room is just light. And you see in front of you from the ground as you sort of start to pick yourself up from where you were being pulled down, you see two hooved, furry legs. And a round, hairy potbelly, and a warm, horned face with kind eyes and a bushy beard and wild hair. And you are standing in front of a deity you have worshipped your entire life, Merle. And he's smiling and helping you to your feet. And for all of his divine glory, Pan, in this moment, looks meek and apologetic. And he says:

**Pan:** Hi, Merle.

**Merle:** Hey, boss. What's... where you been? What's, uh, I mean, I'm not pissed or anything. But where... what's been going on? Why haven't you been helping me out? Why haven't you been there for me?

**Griffin:** He says:

**Pan:** Merle, I... I tell the trees when to shed their leaves, and I make every piece of fruit taste the way that it tastes. And I taught every blade of grass in the ground where to grow. Did you really think I had forgotten about you?

**Merle:** Yeah...

**Griffin:** He laughs and he says:

**Pan:** [chuckles] I was trapped in the Celestial Plane, Merle, along with every other god. And I am so sorry. I'm so sorry that... I wasn't strong enough to find a way out on my own.

**Merle:** Ah well, yeah, make me feel guilty now.

**Justin:** [chuckles]

**Griffin:** He smiles, he says—

**Merle:** Sorry...

**Griffin:** He says:

**Pan:** That's not my intention either. I just... I want you to understand where I was because I don't want you to think I had forsaken you, Merle.

**Merle:** Hey, I can live with that. Like I said, I'm still alive. My buddies are, I think, still alive. So... I got my magic back? I mean is this a temporary thing? I mean... is this for real?

**Griffin:** He places a hand on your shoulder. And as he does so, you see the scene starting to like fade, this Parley space that was created is like fading out. And even Pan himself is starting to sort of fade out as you leave this space. And he says:

**Pan:** Merle, I'm back and with you for good. And I... Merle, I heard your story! And I need you to know something.

**Griffin:** And he fades a little bit more, but you can still feel his warm hand on your shoulder. And he says:

**Pan:** You're not from this world. And so, technically speaking, that means I'm not your Pan.

**Griffin:** And he's almost gone now. And he says:

**Pan:** But you will always be my Merle.

[theme music plays]

[ad break]

**Griffin:** Got a few personal messages here. This one is for Christian and Ari. And it's from Johnathan and Heather who say, "Congrats on the current state of your relationship. Since we don't know when this message will run and you don't know exactly when you'll be hearing even more bad jokes about the third ring, maybe you're married, maybe you're still engaged. Regardless, we wish you the very best. Together and individually."

Congratulations— I'm gonna go ahead and say congratulations Christian and Ari, because we were so backed up on Jumbotron messages right now, there

is a 0% chance that whatever wedding was supposed to happen has not happened yet. So, congrats on your nuptials and sorry for being such fuck ups over here.

Here's another message for Karmen, from The Tapes and Cressida. And it's from Barney and Finra who say, "Thanks so much for fixing/building our fantasy cottage so we could move into Neverwinter. How you did it with only a skeleton arm and sacred flame, we'll never know." Man, that's some... that's some fuck'n rehab addicts shit. Like, "We're gonna take this skeleton arm and turn it into a complete house." That is some— this old, decrepit, skeletal house. I would watch that HD TV show for sure.

[ad read]

["Besieged" by Griffin McElroy plays]

**Griffin:** We see Goldcliff, and its skyscrapers and gold-capped roofs look muted without the desert sun's light. Goldcliff is a vacation destination, and so when The Hunger arrived, it caught sunbathers and loungers and partiers completely unaware. We seem them all now, scattering, running through the cramped city streets from their invisible foes. They're ushered like cattle deeper into the city where the local militia shepherds survivors into the sturdy, towering walls of the Goldcliff Trust. Last year, it survived being assaulted by supernatural vines. Surely, it could stand up to this.

And in the crowd, we see three familiar faces. Vacationing in Goldcliff when The Hunger attacked, were the beach dwarf Hecuba and her two children, Mavis and Mookie. They're caught in the stampede, just trying to keep up. Hecuba's holding Mookie's hand, he's so small. And they're so close to the doors of the Trust, and someone runs full-sprint into Mavis. Her glasses come flying off and are instantly destroyed by 100 panicked footfalls. And when Hecuba and Mookie reach the Trust, Hecuba realizes with horror that her daughter is gone. And she shouts and yells, but is pulled inside by the militia who begin to close the large metal doors of the Trust as the city's last few survivors are pulled inside.

Mavis is running through the streets now, but without her glasses, her vision is impaired. She turns through an alley and then another, and she knows

she's just getting more and more lost. It shouldn't have taken this long to get to the bank. And she hears monsters all around and she just keeps running. And she runs into one of these invisible beasts and she is knocked to the ground, and she starts crawling backwards on all fours. And she's startled as she crawls into a shallow pool of water, and she keeps crawling. And they're all around her now.

And then her back is up against a tree, in the middle of this pool, in the middle of this town. And she hears them everywhere, preparing to attack. And then the green light, followed by the blue, passes through Goldcliff. And with blurry eyes, she sees a shadow holding a jagged, deadly blade aloft, and it swings down, and Mavis closes her eyes. And she hears... ka-chunk!

[“Discovery And Recovery” by Griffin McElroy plays]

**Griffin:** And when she looks up, she sees a pair of hands holding the blade. Hands made of gnarled branches and bark, and the shadow tries to pull away, and a second pair of hands emerge from the tree, and crush the shadow in a powerful bear hug. And Mavis, still frightened, backs away from the tree, and she sees two figures, one small, one taller and lean, emerge from the tree.

And the taller form springs to action. A long branch extends from her hand and suddenly she's dueling with two shadows, beating them into submission. And the smaller form wades through the water to Mavis, and as she approaches, she comes into view. Mavis had read about dryads, but she never expected to meet one in her lifetime. Now she could say she had met two.

**Griffin:** And Hurley leans down, her smiling face beaming beneath a canopy of cherry blossoms, and she says:

**Hurley:** You're safe now.

**Griffin:** And then she looks at Sloane, and she says:

**Hurley:** We're all safe now.

["Voidfish (Plural)" plays]

**Griffin:** Magnus.

**Travis:** Yes?

**Griffin:** Carey, Killian, and Noelle have dispatched the Royal Owl, and—

**Magnus:** How many licks did it take?

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Carey looks over at you and goes:

**Carey:** Three! Three stabs to the center of the owl!

**Griffin:** And, for a moment, everything is quiet. But soon, everyone joins you and Avi where you are, kind of at the edge of the moonbase, to observe what's in the distance. Because one of the Judges to the south is getting a little too close for comfort. And it is clambering across the Still-Water Sea, which, to scale, it looks like just a puddle that this Judge is being merely inconvenienced by. And you behold its form with terror. Because if it reaches the city, like the nearby Rockport, it is going to just lay it flat. And Killian says:

**Carey:** Fuck...

**Magnus:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** And you hear Noelle say:

**Noelle:** Holy crap.

**Magnus:** Yeah, that too.

**Griffin:** She says:

**Noelle:** No, no, no!

**Griffin:** And she points just slightly west on the horizon, and you see another surprising shape. It's Lucas's laboratory, which you explored last Candlenights during The Crystal Kingdom. And you see Noelle move to action, you see this small satellite dish pop out of her shoulder. And she sort of waves it toward the lab, and she says:

**Noelle:** Well, there's Lucas's lab, but... he's not on board, it's empty.

**Magnus:** Then who's steering it?

**Griffin:** She says:

**Noelle:** It must be on autopilot.

**Griffin:** She says:

**Noelle:** Oh...

**Magnus:** Oh?

**Griffin:** She steps towards the edge and she turns towards everybody and she says:

**Noelle:** I've got to go.

**Magnus:** Noelle?

**Noelle:** I can— I can stop that big bastard, but I... I got to go.

**Griffin:** And Killian and Carey look like confused and worried as Noelle says that. And she laughs, and turns to you, Magnus, and says:

**Noelle:** Hey, that was the deal, right? Kravitz said I could stay 'til I did what needed to get done. And it... [chuckles] It looks like this needs to get done.

**Griffin:** And she lumbers over to Killian and Carey, and Carey's just fighting back tears. And Noelle wraps her long, metal arms around both of them and she says:

**Noelle:** Thank you girls. Thanks for... thanks for giving me a home.

**Griffin:** And she sees Carey starting to tear up and she says:

**Noelle:** Well don't do that now, I... I died once before and it's... it's not so bad. I promise, I'm gonna see you two again.

**Griffin:** And she comes over to you Magnus and she says:

**Noelle:** Magnus. Thanks for not ripping my arms off, Magnus.

**Travis:** [chuckles]

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** And she gives you a big hug, and she says:

**Noelle:** And thanks for... thanks for helping me get a second chance.

**Magnus:** No one deserved it more than you. Thank you.

**Griffin:** And she takes a step back from all of you and she says:

**Noelle:** If any of you ever see Lucas again... apologize for this next part.

**Griffin:** And Noelle Redcheek stirs one last time inside of the hug-sized robot that has served as her shell these past few months. And she looks at her friends through her borrowed eyes and grips her fists tight, and she turns back towards Lucas's lab, and she says:

**Noelle:** Hero time.

[“A Far Friendlier Robot” by Griffin McElroy plays]

**Griffin:** And her robotic form collapses as her spirit's light fades from that shell, and suddenly you see Lucas's lab illuminated in that same light. And it pitches slowly at first, but it rapidly gains momentum and arcs like a bullet into the Judge. And as they collide, the horizon is immersed in a light too brilliant to look directly at. And seconds later the sound of the explosion follows. And when the light clears, you see flaming streaks of debris plummeting into the Still-Water Sea below, and you see the Judge's monolithic body lying motionless in the water, its form slowly turning into ash that floats lazily over the sea's surface. Up, and out of sight.

[music fades]

**Griffin:** Taako, Kravitz stands up in front of you. And he says— I guess in his non-affected accent, he says:

**Kravitz:** How... how did you do that?

**Justin:** I run over and I'm already kissing him. This is ridiculous. We've been apart for too long, this is stupid.

**Griffin:** You approach him really quick and as he sees you about to kiss him, he puts his hands up over his mouth, and phew, phew, phew, and he's blowing and he's like:

**Kravitz:** Hold on, I... I wanna... I wanna warm up my face. I don't want it to be cold and weird.

**Griffin:** And then he starts kissing you.

**Clint:** I thought he was checking for bad breath. [laughs]

**Justin:** No.

**Griffin:** And then he starts kissing you. And it's so nice.

**Justin:** I pull away.

**Taako:** Okay, forget about how I... Short story short— long story short, it was— I was rad, natch. How do you still look this good? You've been locked in like mud or tar or something in the Astral Plane, you look fantastic!

**Griffin:** He says:

**Kravitz:** It's a lot of work to look this good.

**Griffin:** He's... He is overjoyed. He says:

**Kravitz:** I... Taako, I was trying to get out to get a message to you. I thought— I thought you were gone. I thought everything was gone.

**Taako:** Well, you're not that far off. But you're right, there has been a terrible loss that you should know about.

**Justin:** And I drop the camouflage spell that I've been maintaining.

**Griffin:** Oh, God...

**Taako:** So, I just wanted to be honest. I'm— I didn't wanna catfish you or anything.

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Taako:** This is Taako today. I had a bad run in while I was saving the world again, and this is what I really look like. And I just wanted you to know that in case that changes anything for you, personally. I thought you should know, now.

**Griffin:** He says:

**Kravitz:** Taako, I... was crazy about you, before some weird light told me a story about your 100 year journey through existence, where you were fighting for a century to save the world.

**Griffin:** He says:

**Kravitz:** I love you, Taako, and at this point, I think that everyone in reality is going to love you after hearing your story, and... nothing's gonna change that.

**Taako:** That was actually a test, your face is a skull half the time.

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Taako:** So, I just wanted to make sure we— Yeah, no fucking kidding. Okay, anyway.

**Griffin:** He says— From behind you, you hear an explosion, and you see a light in the distance. And you hear Lucas say:

**Lucas:** My lab...

**Travis:** [laughs]

**Taako:** Now, let's be considerate, he probably did a lot of good math on there.

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** And Lup says:

**Lup:** We've got a bigger problem here.

**Griffin:** And as you look over at what Lup's looking at, there is a Judge towering over you, just a few footfalls away from crushing your party. And Lup looks backs at you and she says:

**Lup:** I don't know how to kill that!

**Griffin:** And Kravitz steps forward in front of you, Taako, and he says:

**Kravitz:** Well, I think I know some folks who can help.

**Griffin:** And he turns to you, Taako, and he says:

**Kravitz:** You remember those wayward souls I've been imprisoning? Well, I'm giving them some time off for good behavior.

[“Legion (Or: A Pile of Ghosts)” by Griffin McElroy plays]

**Griffin:** And the Judge raises an open hand in the air and starts to swat it down on top of you, Taako. And as it does so, a massive, silvery, spectral hand emerges from the sapphire window and intercepts it in mid-air. And that hand, you can see, is comprised of hundreds of swirling, individual souls. As is the rest of the body of Legion, which pulls itself up and out of the mirror and roars with a thousand voices. And it pushes the Judge, sending it several 100 feet backwards. And then it dives towards it, sending these two massive figures rolling and wrestling far away from your party. And Kravitz says:

**Kravitz:** I need to keep an eye on them, Taako, and I need to shepherd this world's dead but it's... it's so fuck'n good to see your face again. When I was over there, I just, I thought about you constantly.

**Taako:** I mean me too pretty much, except the world's ending. So, kind of like half and half, but still, free thought time was definitely devoted your way. We will hook up after this, no doubt. Let's go ahead and save... everybody, pretty much, and then we'll move on to that. Does that sound good to you?

**Griffin:** And he leans forward and kisses you on the forehead, and then he pulls back. And as he pulls back—

**Taako:** Oh, wait, shit! One thing before you go. This is my sister.

**Griffin:** Um, Lup walks over and she says:

**Lup:** What's up, Ghost Rider?

[“Legion (Or: A Pile of Ghosts)” plays]

**Griffin:** And Barry walks over and kind of awkwardly waves too. And he was like mid-transformation into his like skeletal form, his face turns into a skull, and he's got this long, black robe. And his scythe appears in his hand, and he looks at Lup and also kind of awkwardly waves, and then he comes over to you and says:

**Kravitz:** You know we're gonna have to talk about the fact that your sister's a lich, right?

**Taako:** Yeah, I assumed.

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** And he steps backwards and says:

**Kravitz:** Let's figure it out after we save the world.

**Taako:** Deal.

**Griffin:** And he flies off.

[music concludes]

**Griffin:** Merle, you are back—

**Clint:** Merle's just walking around, lifting his eyepatch so these beams are coming out of it and blasting stuff, and he's saying:

**Merle:** Truth beams! Truth beams!

**Griffin:** No, actually you're lying in some mud on the side of a straight dirt road. And that is where you sort of awaken after being in the Parley space. And this dirt road, it's cutting through a forest of these sparse pine trees. And as you stand and sort of get your bearings, you see the Bureau headquarters still floating in the sky several miles down the road. And in the opposite direction away from the Bureau, a horseless wagon, almost like the battlewagons you saw in Goldcliff, is racing towards you, and it's leaving a horde of shadows completely in its dust. And it rolls to a stop directly in

front of you, and the heavy wooden door on its side swings open and you hear a voice say:

**Cassidy:** Hop aboard, lil' gerblin!

**Griffin:** And there's Cassidy, and she's wearing a poorly-tailored suit, and she's reaching a hand out toward you.

**Justin:** [chuckles]

**Merle:** You're not gonna hit me with a shovel, are you?

**Cassidy:** I put that chapter of my life behind me, I'm the mayor now!

**Travis:** [laughs and spoofs Cassidy] "I'm clean and sober!"

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Merle:** Well, Sister Sue, let's get rolling!

**Griffin:** She grabs your wrist and pulls you onboard and slams the door of this wagon shut behind you, and you kind of reel as the wagon kicks back into high gear, tearing down the road towards the headquarters. And inside this wagon, you see so many familiar faces from the town of Refuge. Ren is here, and she's clutching her magic rod and looking backward out a small window at the shadows chasing the wagon. And Paloma's sitting on a cushion on the floor, peering deeply into a small crystal.

And through the front window, you can see Luca and Redmond driving the wagon. And Luca sees you hop aboard and waves. And sitting opposite the door you just came in is June. And perched on her shoulder is a small, red bird, that you recognize as Roswell, who chirps happily as you enter the car. And as you enter and the door shuts, Roswell flitters over to your shoulder. And everyone greets you warmly, and Cassidy says:

**Cassidy:** What the heck are you doing, lying on a dirt road in the middle of the apocalypse?!

**Merle:** I have back issues.

**Griffin:** [chuckles]

**Merle:** No, I just... I don't know, I... You know, hooked back up with my god. And you know, it was... it was kind of tiring. But we can talk about this later. Are you here to help us save the world?

**Griffin:** June says:

**June:** Well, Paloma brought us here actually. She said she had a feeling that she'd be seeing you today. She has something that she wanted you to see.

**Griffin:** And Paloma motions you towards another cushion next to hers on the floor, and gestures for you to sit. And she says— God, I gotta conjure up my fuck'n Björk voice again, hold up.

**Paloma:** Merle, I wanted you to see something. This.

**Griffin:** And she holds the crystal up and she says:

**Paloma:** This is my last prophecy, Merle. All the other prophecies, they showed me the end of the world. But this one...

**Griffin:** And she takes your hand and sort of like stretches out your fingers and puts the crystal in your hands and says:

**Paloma:** This one hasn't shown me anything. Maybe it just doesn't work, but maybe... maybe there's another way that all this can end. Can you keep it safe for me please?

**Merle:** You got it. Consider it done.

**Griffin:** And Roswell says:

**Roswell:** We heard about your story, Merle, all of us. It's unbelievable. We owe you such a huge debt for what you did in Refuge. But we have to ask more of you now. I know you can stop this, Merle. I don't know how but—

**Griffin:** And Roswell's interrupted as the wagon screeches to a halt, and you hear Luca shout:

**Luca:** Holy shit!

**Griffin:** And Cassidy just reflexively like springs out of the door of the wagon and Ren follows. And you hear them exclaim also from outside, "Holy shit!"

**Clint:** [laughs] I take this crystal, and I put it in my—

**Travis:** Butt.

**Clint:** ... You know those little watch pockets—

**Griffin:** Hold on, Travis did say butt.

**Justin:** Okay, not your butt, not your butt.

**Griffin:** Let's challenge that real quick.

**Clint:** It would be safe there.

**Griffin:** You put it—

**Clint:** So, I put it in my butt and I walk awkwardly to the exit of the stage.

**Travis:** He poops it.

**Griffin:** All right, you really put in your pocket, please don't make that canonical. And you hop out of the coach. And you see a few 100 feet in front of you, straddling the road, and staring downward, is one of the Judges. And as it sees you, Merle, it starts walking in your direction. And Ren looks panicked and Cassidy takes a step backward. And from your shoulder, you hear Roswell say:

**Roswell:** Well, that's a big boy.

**Griffin:** And it flitters down to the ground and turns to face you, Merle, and it says:

**Roswell:** Well, I may not be an elemental anymore, but I can still talk to the Earth.

**Griffin:** And it turns to face this giant and says:

**Roswell:** And we've got friends down there.

**Griffin:** And Roswell chirps out a song. And you feel the earth beneath your feet tremble. And to the west you hear a terrible crash, and then another. And as you look in that direction, you see pine trees being ripped out of the ground and tossed effortlessly into the air. And you see the earth buckling and moving, as a fissure forms, and races toward the road. And then you hear a deafening roar, and then the ground explodes. And there's the purple worm.

[“The Purple Worm” by Griffin McElroy plays]

And it's sailing through the air with surprising grace. And it rams the Judge like a train, and both go rolling into the forest on the opposite side of the road. And the worm is just coiling around the Judge, just taking huge bites out of it, and burning it with fire. And the Judge is taking shots at the worm too, but you can see that it's clearly overwhelmed as the two of them go wrestling deeper and deeper into the woods and out of sight. And in the distance in the woods you hear the purple worm roar. And Roswell says:

**Roswell:** It says thanks for reuniting it with its kids.

**Griffin:** And then there's another roar and Roswell says:

**Roswell:** And, it says...you're even.

[music concludes]

**Griffin:** The three of you have regrouped onboard the Bureau of Balance headquarters. Magnus, first you saw Taako, Lup, and Barry flying up over the edge, magically.

**Magnus:** So, what did you guys do?

**Clint:** [chuckles]

**Griffin:** And quickly following him you see Lucas in his Upsy mech. And he slams down and sees you. And Lup says:

**Lup:** Oh, no big deal, Taako just... summoned all the energy in our reality to come help us fight.

**Magnus:** Mm-hm. I fought a bear. When I say it like that, it doesn't... it doesn't sound as good, does it?

**Griffin:** Barry says:

**Barry:** Was it a big bear?

**Magnus:** Oh, it was— yeah! Big and evil. And there was a wolf, too. So like... [mouths explosion sound] You know?

**Griffin:** And Avi says:

**Avi:** I did the wolf.

**Magnus:** Shut up.

**Travis:** [chuckles]

**Griffin:** And Lucas walks over in the mech and actually hops out of the cockpit and runs over because he sees Noelle's robot body on the ground. And Carey and Killian are there, and the three of them take a moment to mourn their friend. And then moments later, there's Merle on the Zoom Broom and he flies up and over the edge of the Moonbase.

**Merle:** Hey, what'd you guys do?

**Griffin:** [chuckles]

**Magnus:** I fought a bear.

**Merle:** Big one?

**Magnus:** Yeah!

**Merle:** Ah, cool. What'd you do, pointy hat?

**Taako:** Saw my boyfriend.

**Merle:** Oh, you're kidding?

**Taako:** Yeah, it was dope.

**Merle:** I like that guy.

**Taako:** He's a good dude.

**Magnus:** What'd you do Merle?

**Merle:** Laid down in a road.

**Magnus:** [chuckles] Really? That's it?

**Merle:** Watched a big worm. Oh, I got my magic powers back.

**Magnus:** Ah, nice!

**Merle:** Yeah, Pan showed up.

**Magnus:** Ooh.

**Taako:** Nice.

**Merle:** We're good again, no we're good.

**Griffin:** Yeah, I met god, no big deal. So, the three of you regroup for a moment, and then Angus and Davenport come sprinting out of the main dome. And Angus looks relieved to see everyone. And then he actually points at Lucas and says:

**Angus:** I thought he died.

**Magnus:** No. That was a clever ruse.

**Griffin:** And Davenport is kind of winded and he says:

**Davenport:** Okay, we looked all over but there's just no sign of Lucretia. Lup, Barry, did you all find the Starblaster?

**Griffin:** And Lup says:

**Lup:** Oh... I may have forgotten that we were supposed to be doing that.

**Griffin:** But Lucas pipes up and sort of stands up and says:

**Lucas:** Are you all talking about Lucretia's spaceship?

**Magnus:** It's kind of all of ours.

**Merle:** It's kind of— yeah, it's like a timeshare more.

**Taako:** Yeah.

**Magnus:** We're all on— we're all on the registration.

**Merle:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** He says:

**Lucas:** Well, I know where that is. Lucretia had me and my mom build a hangar for it right here in the Bureau HQ.

**Griffin:** And he walks over to a tree in a corner of the grassy quad in the middle of the Bureau and he puts his hand on the side of the tree as high up as he can reach. And he drags his palm downward. And nothing happens, and he pulls his hand back, and he frowns and he says:

**Lucas:** I just got a splinter.

**Griffin:** And then he shakes his head and he walks over to a different tree and repeats the gesture. And suddenly a gap appears, running down the length of the lawn. And this gap spreads further and further apart, and you hear the sound of pistons and servos stirring to life. And then, there it is. It's a bit dusty and it's still got some of the battle damage from your century abroad, but the Starblaster is here.

And the bond engine in the back of the ship activates, and it starts humming and slowly rotating, almost... almost like it senses your presence, the ship extends a metallic gangplank that lowers down to the ground, ready to receive you. And Davenport's looking off the edge of the headquarters just sort of surveying the horizon. And he walks over to where you're all standing and he says:

**Davenport:** It looks like you all have done some good work out there, but the facts haven't changed. The Hunger's gonna keep attacking this world until it's destroyed. We... we've got to go.

**Magnus:** Not yet.

**Griffin:** When you— when you said 'not yet', Magnus, somebody else said it at the same time. And there's a flash of light and there's Lucretia. And she's standing in front of the gangplank and she's still surrounded by her barrier. And she's still channeling the light of creation into her staff, and she says:

**Lucretia:** Not yet. Please, please, please, I'm begging you all. We've been through so much, we've given up so much to make this work. I am begging you, please let me do this, please let me put up the barrier.

**Magnus:** There has to be— Lucretia, there has to be another way.

**Griffin:** Barry says:

**Barry:** Lucretia, if that spell goes off, you're gonna sever every bond this world's got. This plane would be doomed.

**Griffin:** And he turns towards everyone else and he says:

**Barry:** We've got two choices, gang. We stay and Lucretia's barrier cuts this world off from the rest of existence, or we run. And we try again next cycle. That's it. Two choices, it's time to decide.

**Taako:** There's a third option.

**Griffin:** As you say that, Taako, the crystal in Merle's pocket actually floats up out of his pocket—

**Travis:** Woah!

**Griffin:** And it's glowing. And it shatters, and suddenly the area you're all standing in is filled with a thick white fog. And inside that fog, you all see visions of a bright future. Taako, you see yourself cooking up a feast in a fancy kitchen. And Lup is sitting there, back in her body. And the two of you are laughing about a joke that you can't quite hear. And Magnus, you're sitting under a tree at a park, and you're watching Angus throw a frisbee to a big golden retriever. And Merle, you see the ocean, and you see yourself splash up out of it, and you're holding Mookie under one of your arms.

And Mavis is watching and laughing from the beach, and you just pick Mookie up and launch him into the water as he cackles the whole way. And Carey and Killian are in this big cabin on a mountainside, curled up on a couch, both reading the same book. And Lucretia's there, and she's overseeing a crew of workers who are building this massive library in the heart of a thriving rebuilt Neverwinter. And Lucretia's on the verge of tears as she sees this and she says:

**Lucretia:** What is this? What does this mean?

**Magnus:** I would like that one— yes, that one?

**Taako:** That seems—

**Magnus:** This one we just saw? I would like this please.

**Merle:** It means there is a happy ending if we get to it.

**Taako:** We could close ourselves off and we could run. There's a third option, though. Lucretia, your spell, could it keep the Hunger bound? Could it... cut the Hunger off?

**Griffin:** When you say that, Lucretia's like whole posture changes. She kind of leans back, and for a second you see the spell stop being channeled into her staff. And she says:

**Lucretia:** Huh...

**Griffin:** And Barry says:

**Barry:** Huh...

**Griffin:** And Lup says:

**Lup:** Huh...

**Taako:** Listen, all that thing wants on Earth, the thing it wants more than anything else, we have been basically trolling it for 100 years. The only thing it wants, is to pick us up and absorb us into itself. And I don't know about you all, but Taako's good out here.

**Clint:** [chuckles]

**Griffin:** Lucretia says:

**Lucretia:** That would work.

**Griffin:** And she says:

**Lucretia:** But I would have to be... I would have to be on the plane that I'm casting the spell over in order to do it. We would have to get up there, into the Hunger.

**Merle:** If only we had a ship that moved from plane to plane!

**Griffin:** And Davenport—

**Magnus:** What he said.

**Griffin:** Davenport smiles and walks over to the Starblaster. And he says:

**Davenport:** I can get us up there. I know I can.

**Griffin:** And he put his hand on the side of Starblaster, up against the hull, and he says:

**Davenport:** You up for one last flight, old buddy?

**Griffin:** And he boards the ship.

**Travis:** [spoofs being the ship] "Yes I am, Davenport."

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Justin:** Shit, it's been sentient the whole time? Fuck!

**Clint:** "Yes, Wilbur."

**Justin:** [laughing] We never thought to talk to it in 100 years.

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** And Lucretia brings down her barrier. And she says:

**Lucretia:** I'm so sorry. I... I was so... myopic. I worked so hard on this plan, I gave up. I had blinders on, and I don't expect you all to forgive me but some—

**Travis:** I run over and hug her.

**Griffin:** She is just— she just starts weeping. And she says to you Magnus:

**Lucretia:** I'll find a way to make it up, I promise.

**Magnus:** It's okay.

**Clint:** Merle goes over to hug her but realize that he would— his face would be right at butt level and that would not be good.

**Travis:** I pick Merle up so we can all hug her.

**Clint:** Ah, that's good.

**Taako:** Yeah, let me know how that works out.

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Travis:** I look at Taako and I give him like a:

**Magnus:** Hmph, come on.

**Taako:** Absolute— don't try to manufacture my character growth. No way. Absolutely not.

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Lup starts to... she floats over and kind of puts her spectral forehead up against Lup's for a second, and she pulls back and she says:

**Lup:** Lucretia, dear, I've already forgotten about the whole thing. Oh— Sorry, bad choice of words.

**Griffin:** And she laughs, and Lucretia just like bursts out laughing. And the two of them like embrace, even though like Lup is intangible. And Lucretia boards the ship. And then a wind picks up. And you hear the sound of roaring coming from all around you. And those pillars, those tendrils of darkness that are reaching down from the sky... In unison, all around the world, they start to move, dragging themselves through the sky like pitch black tornadoes.

And they narrowly miss the moonbase as they all move and come to a halt, dozens of them, just behind the last remaining judge. And shadows start pouring out of them, thousands, tens of thousands. And the judge is now leading this massive army of shadows in one final, furious assault on Neverwinter. And Lup stops halfway up the gangplank and she sees this scene and she turns backward, facing Barry and they both nod. And Lup says:

**Lup:** I think Barry and I are going to stay behind. I know that sounds shitty, but listen. The five of you are about to go save the world. And we need to make sure there's still a world for you to come back to, okay?

**Magnus:** Do you need any help?

**Griffin:** She looks at Barry and you can kind of see like a smile inside of her spectral form. And Barry says:

**Barry:** Nah, I think we got this handled.

**Taako:** Am I... I'm not going to lose you again.

**Griffin:** She says:

**Lup:** Never. Never again, bud.

**Griffin:** And floats over and hugs you and says:

**Lup:** Please don't die.

**Taako:** I'd say the same to you, but that ship done sailed, 'ey?

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** And she laughs and floats down to the rest of the team here on the base and she says:

**Lup:** Barry, Killian, Carey, Angus, Nerd Lord, you're all with me.

**Griffin:** And Lucas says:

**Lucas:** Am I Nerd Lord?

**Griffin:** And Angus says:

**Angus:** Um, yeah, I think she was talking about you, sir.

**Griffin:** And their party, all—

**Magnus:** Wait, hold on, wait!

**Travis:** I walk over to Angus. I reach into my pocket. I pull out my grandfather's knife. I hand it to him and say:

**Magnus:** This has always brought me good luck. Be safe. Bring it back to me, okay?

**Griffin:** He takes it and just jumps up and gives you a big hug.

**Magnus:** All right, okay. Be cool. Come on.

**Griffin:** And he says:

**Angus:** I won't let you down, sir.

**Clint:** And then Merle walks over to Barry and says:

**Merle:** I'm sorry I thought you were a douchebag.

**Griffin:** He shrugs and he says:

**Barry:** We were all in a pretty dark place.

**Merle:** Yeah, but I wasn't a douchebag. I thought you were and I apologize for that. I'm really sorry.

**Griffin:** He gives you a thumbs up and he says:

**Barry:** Can I go... fight evil now?

**Merle:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's good. We're good.

**Barry:** Okay, okay.

**Justin:** And then Taako walks over to Angus.

**Taako:** Hey, cool knife. You know he has a sword that's on fire, right? So, just before you get too excited, he did just give you a knife. I just want you to remember who's your dude? Who's your dude?

**Griffin:** He runs over and he just grabs on to you, and also gives you a big, weepy hug.

**Travis:** And then Magnus goes over to Carey.

**Griffin:** [laughs]

**Magnus:** Hey, BFF. I got you this necklace.

**Travis:** And it's one of those hearts. And half of it says best friends— It says, "Best friends forever." But split with you know, BE and ST on one side... FRI, and you know that thing? And I give her half and I say:

**Magnus:** You stay safe out there. And then we'll have, you know, sandwiches after this. Celebratory sandwiches.

**Justin:** And then I walk back over to Angus and I flip him my plastic sheriff's badge and I say:

**Taako:** You're the sheriff of magic now, Angus.

**Griffin:** Anybody else got one?

**Clint:** And then Merle walks over to Angus and says:

**Griffin:** [laughs]

**Merle:** I've always loved that badge. Can I have it, kid?

**Travis:** And Angus walks over to Merle and he says, "Here, sir. I think you wanted this."

**Angus:** Sure, Merle, anything you need to save the world.

**Griffin:** And he hands you the badge.

**Merle:** Thanks, thanks.

**Griffin:** And you hear Davenport say:

**Davenport:** We got to fucking go!

**Magnus:** One more! Almost done!

**Travis:** Magnus walks over to Lup and says:

**Magnus:** We never hung out enough, I felt. Don't get me wrong, I like you and I think we get along fine. But we... I just felt like we could have spent more time hanging out—

**Griffin:** She says:

**Lup:** No, totally. Let's save the world. Let's save the world then 420 blaze it. Can we go?

**Magnus:** Hell yeah.

**Clint:** And then Merle—[chuckles]

**Justin:** God... The end.

**Clint:** ... Gets on the ship.

**Griffin:** And everyone else does too. And you see the rest of your party as they walk away, walk into the hangar and start mounting up. And the five of you head on to the ship. And Lucretia and Davenport go into the helm that is sort of up on that main deck and they seal the doors. And you see Lucretia start channeling her spell again. And from inside you, Taako, Merle and Magnus, you hear Davenport say:

**Davenport:** Everyone ready?

**Magnus:** Wait, I want to tell Killian one last thing.

**Clint:** [laughs]

**Taako:** Go!

[“Besieged” plays]

**Griffin:** We see three empty spheres from the Bureau of Balance’s transit cannons laying in a field outside Neverwinter. And then the camera pans up and we see this world’s final protectors amassed at the city’s gates. Lup, Barry, Carey, Killian, Angus and Lucas stand at the forefront of this army, and they’re surveying this fighting force’s unconventional makeup. The survivors of Neverwinter stand armed and at the ready with Klarg and his family and the whole Battlefest crew preparing for the attack.

At the center of the crowd is the wagon housing the citizens of Refuge. Ren and Cassidy are perched on top of the wagon, the former armed with her rod, the latter with a crate of industrial-strength blasting caps. A dust storm rages in from the west, and emerging from it is a fleet of battlewagon

racers, with Hurley and Sloane's car leading the pack. They brake-slide in perfect unison to the flanks of the army and start revving their engines. Near the back of the crowd, a squad of Tom Bodetts from Rockport are in the rear battalion, carrying chains and hammers and wrenches and any number of other industrial tools.

Weaving through that crowd are the Hogsbottom Three: Tanzer, Lucian, and Scales, who are carousing and leading the Toms in a battle hymn, getting the whole unit psyched up for the battle at hand. And Lup takes a hard look at this army and then walks toward them, pacing over to the right side of the crowd. And she goes up to a young woman holding a broomstick handle that she's crafted into a spear. And she borrows it, and she jabs it into the ground and begins walking across the front line of this army. And she starts to speak. And as she does, the crowd falls silent.

["Voidfish (Plural)" plays]

**Lup:** You all know the story now, right? You know what this thing is capable of? I know you're scared. This—

**Griffin:** And she motions to the army of shadows approaching them.

**Lup:** This is scary. But we can do this. And you're going to come away from this fight with some kickass stories about this day. Those things over there, for a century, we have watched them take what they want to take, consume the worlds that they want to consume.

**Griffin:** And she finishes drawing her line in the ground in front of the gates of Neverwinter, and she tosses the spear back to the young woman, and she points downward and says:

**Lup:** That stops here.

**Griffin:** And immediately the crowd is cheering, and there are murmurs of people talking about their story, about what Lup and Barry and the rest of you did during your century-long journey. And Lup steps back to the front of the crowd and faces the Hunger as it descends upon them. And she turns to Barry and she says:

**Lup:** Hear that, babe?

**Griffin:** And her hands catch fire, and she says:

**Lup:** We're legends.

**Griffin:** And high above, we see the Starblaster streaking through the sky, up and away from the moonbase, flying for the first time into, not away from, the storm. And as its occupants brace themselves for the final battle ahead, they are surrounded by the Voidfish's light, and their hearts are stirred by the familiar music they suddenly hear.

See, there's magic in a bard's song. They call it Inspiration, and it tells the listener what they need to hear right when they need to hear it. And right now, you hear it too. The message in the music heard round the world. You hear Johann's voice, telling you:

**Johann:** You're going to have to fight. And... you're gonna win!

[music plays]

**Griffin (outro):** You hear it now too, don't you? The song is now yours, just as the story has always been yours. And with this final piece, your understanding of these impossible events is complete. Like I said before, you're ready now. Darkness surrounds you, but be not afraid. After all, you're going to win. We know that much. But that is the limit of my knowledge. You're all caught up now. Whatever happens next, well... we'll just have to find out together.

[music concludes]

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