

The Adventure Zone Royale: Episode 27

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Griffin: Previously on TAZ Royale:

Osham: You had a question?

Rictus: Oh, yeah, two things, one, piece of feedback to kind of mirror Lorovith, that trial was really fucked up.

Hellgrammite: I could... have a conversation with you, even if it's just a mental one, to ask you these questions.

Griffin: Set does not register what you are saying to him at all.

Lorovith: Will you—will you soon be getting to the part where you have a plan for undermining the infinitely powerful beings?

Clint: He casts Leomund's Tiny Hut.

Lorovith: The only way forward is to prepare for the ascension of the god king Doober.

[The Adventure Zone Royale theme music plays]

Griffin: Hi, everybody! Welcome back to TAZ Royale, our battle royale winner take all season of The Adventure Zone. Last time we were between trials, after the arduous Trial of Necromancy, in which we lost Burger Man and Formaggio Bucatini and The Spider, and another one of 'em.

Travis: All of 'em.

Griffin: And Tommy Falcon. Oh, gosh—

Justin: I hope somewhere up there Burger Man and Formaggio Bucatini are making some sort of crazy fusion meal, that's perfect for an Applebee's menu.

Griffin: [laughs] That's actually the—when you die in this world, you do go to Applebee's. So, that's—that is canon. Also, the eight remaining Aspirants conspire to talk about their intentions for the remainder of the conclave. And also, Lorovith went to the library and learned maybe he's kind of a books guy? Learning all about illusions, one of the two remaining trials.

Lorovith: Late revelation.

Griffin: That leaves us with Rictus and Hellgrammite, with a little bit of free time before we get to the atelier, and the magic drafting part of this sort of mid-trial break. Hellgrammite, can we start with you?

Clint: I believe that Hellgrammite wants to find out more about his echo mite queen.

Griffin: Okay?

Clint: Arani.

Griffin: How would you like to pursue that information?

Clint: Well, I rim—I just remembered that the last time when he went back and looked at the secret markings that were scratched in the ground... I would like him to try to sneak back there and visit that again. Because there was some kind—I think he was able to—he feels like he could psychically connect again.

Griffin: Okay. Cool! I like that. So, you're just going to the—to your little spot in the woods by the Crystalarium, where you were sort of—

Clint: Right.

Griffin: Okay, cool. There's nothing impeding you from doing that. You make your way to where you found this message from yourself, that you could not remember in the woods, when you sort of started to learn a little bit about what was—what was going on with these insects that had spoken to you sort of psychically. You make your way there. The message is quite

faded at this point, it's been quite a few days, and there's been a bit of action all around the island. And so it's tough to quite make out the message, but it is still there. And yeah, what are you—how are you trying to make contact, if that's your sort of plan here?

Clint: I think that using the... using that telepathy that goes between all those of his race—

Griffin: Okay.

Clint: I think he's going to try to use it even... just to try to re-establish contact with them.

Griffin: Okay. Sort of just sending out a general broadcast in the direction of—okay.

Clint: He's got a lot of questions that need to be answered.

Griffin: And what do you say?

Justin: Hey, can you guys imagine if all the races on Earth could communicate telepathically? I think it might go a little something like this—

Travis: This aga—

Clint: [laughs]

Travis: Justin, we don't have time for—

Griffin: Let him cook! Let him cook!

Justin: Let's go alphabetical. Australians, hold on... [chuckles]

Griffin: [chuckles]

Justin: Bad start.

Clint: [chuckles]

Griffin: Okay, so what message—

Clint: "I don't really like shrimp. Oh, no!"

Justin: [chuckles]

Griffin: What message are you broadcasting—

Justin: Only Dad has the guts—

Griffin: Former radio drive time DJ Clint McElroy will absolutely go to the fucking mat.

Travis: Also, in Dad's mind, Australian telepathy doesn't have an accent, which I really appreciate.

Griffin: It's all for our benefit. [chuckles]

Travis: All, like what is that, that transatlantic, you know, that just like standard newscaster kind of—

Justin: The spelling friendly among you will notice that I skipped the entirety of Africa. You are very welcome. I think the past five minutes have gone so much better.

Clint: [chuckles]

Griffin: Dad, what message is Hellgrammite sort of sending out?

Clint: He's going to try to contact the dust mites. And especially the dust—

Griffin: Echo mites. [chuckles]

Clint: Huh? The echo mites. [chuckles] Dust mites are a different race altogether. He's gonna try to reach—

Justin: I think if the dust mites could all talk to each other, it might go a little something like this—

Griffin: [laughs]

Clint: [laughs] Clint: "I hate shrimp!"

Justin: "Oh, and I hate shrimp." [chuckles]

Clint: [chuckles]

Justin: "Eleven on the couch and I hate shrimp." [chuckles]

Clint: Akari was—called him her mate, her consort, her king. And I think he really wants to know what's going on with that.

Griffin: Fully understandable, okay. All right, go ahead and send out your message. If you could do it in character.

Clint: Okay.

Hellgrammite: Is this... test one, webbing and tubing. Webbing and tubing. Hello? This is Hellgrammite, reaching out through the ether, looking for Akari. Akari, it's me, your groom. The one that you prophesied your husband to be. Are you there? Can you hear me?

Griffin: Give me a perception check, please.

[sound of dice thrown]

Clint: Okay, that would be a nat 20.

Griffin: Amazing! That's a very—that's—did you guys know that's the biggest number you can get?

Travis: Yeah, it's the biggest number there is.

Justin: Sometimes I feel like I don't want—I feel like 20 perception is kind of a curse though, right? Sometimes you don't want to see everything that clearly—

Griffin: Yeah, you realize—

Travis: Yeah! Superman never tells you that, but he's like, "Ah, I accidentally saw their bones, gross."

Clint: It would be like if everybody was connected through telepathy. I mean—

Griffin: The 20 gets—we're not doing that bit again. The 20 gets you, one, you realize the shirt you're wearing, it is not flattering to your sort of figure. And—

Clint: [laughs] That's what I was rolling for.

Griffin: No! It's just with a 20, like you do realize—

Clint: Sure, yeah.

Justin: You're so aware.

Griffin: Kind of realize a lot of stuff.

Clint: Gotcha.

Griffin: You broadcast this message out. You do not get an immediate response. Instead, you just kind of notice a rustling of some brush, some leaves by your feet. And when you look down, you see like a small sort of dirt trail, sort of winding around near you. And in the smallest, slightest voice, you hear a voice say:

Akari: Hellgrammite, it is imperative we only speak through these means, and not out loud. Do you understand?

Hellgrammite: Yes, I understand.

Akari: Make yourself busy, as if you are going on a peaceful hike through the woods.

Hellgrammite: Oh, yes. Let's see... water jug... I've got some granola... Yeah, go ahead. I'm doing that. I'm going through all those actions like a mime, like an insect mime.

Akari: Okay, great. No, don't

Travis: Just checking your pockets? Is it like patting yourself—mm-hm, yes. Okay.

Clint: Well, after the realization about the ugly shirt—

Justin: It's weird that Hellgrammite doesn't get punched square in the jaw more. [chuckles] He's just begging for it constantly.

Griffin: I think it's only happened once this whole season.

Justin: Yeah.

Griffin: By Scorpo. You start to sort of like busy yourself as if you are kind of just here on a nice little nature walk. She says:

Akari: Keeping up the performance, we may speak but briefly. I am not sure how secure we are, even in these ancestral channels of discussion. What... how are you, Hellgrammite?

Hellgrammite: Oh, actually, I'm pretty dang good. Things are going according to my plan. I feel very confident. And I just...there are just—I don't like gaps in the story. I want to try to figure out—I like to know where I'm going, where I'm coming from. So, I want to talk to you. Are you from my future? Or my past? Or my current?

Akari: I... I am... the past, I am the first. I am the origin. I am your present. I am this moment in which we speak. And I am the future forevermore. And

you are mine. All, Hellgrammite, I swear to you, will be revealed, when you claim victory in this conclave.

Hellgrammite: Okay. Well, that really pulls things into crystal clarity.

Clint: [chuckles]

Hellgrammite: Sure! Okay. So, I am gonna win, right? I mean, if you're in the future, you know that I won, right?

Akari: I was speaking somewhat poetically.

Hellgrammite: Oh.

Akari: You see a little antenna pop out of the dirt mound kind of at your feet, and kind of brush against the heel of your—of your boot, before the insect submerges once more.

Akari: The future is not ordained. You must prove yourself. And I know that you can.

Hellgrammite: Oh... I have—I have a lot of confidence in myself.

Justin: [titters]

Akari: As you should.

Hellgrammite: As you may have known. But...

Travis: Another bug crawls up. "Are you sure? I'm just—sorry, man. Like—"

Griffin: "That shirt! It looks so—"

Travis: "Not a good fit on you, bro."

Hellgrammite: Outside the shirt—yeah, besides the shirt?

Travis: "Okay, back to work."

Hellgrammite: I have—I have great confidence in myself. Is there anything you can tell me that will aid me in the next upcoming trial?

Akari: The next trial that you face is... it is ever changing. Every conclave, every group of 64 Aspirants that have made their way here as we select a new member of the Octave, have faced a different trial. I wish I knew more, but the member of the Octave administering the trial is infuriatingly secretive. Ours is not a harmonious rule. It is impossible that eight minds wielding as much power as we wield could possibly all agree on how the world should be shaped and how this conclave should be run. I cannot help you with the trial, but if the time comes and you do require my aid, I can help you defeat your fellow Aspirants to claim victory.

Hellgrammite: Is there like a secret word or a ring I rub, or anything like that, that would summon you to help me? Or... is this just—

Akari: I

Hellgrammite: Kind of a... ring doorbell kind of thing, you always see what's going on.

Akari: Nothing happens on this island that escapes our sight.

Hellgrammite: Right.

Akari: If you find yourself in need, I will be there. That is the oath that I make to you, my betrothed.

Hellgrammite: Yeah! Yeah. And yet, you're also my child? And my...

Akari: Wait—

Travis: Huh?

Akari: Hold on. What?

Travis: "Hey! Just—hey, it's me again. I don't mean to— I don't remember that coming up at all."

Hellgrammite: Look, what's your—what's your—

Travis: "Back to work." [sings a tune]

Hellgrammite: Gosh... kibitzers, everywhere I go.

Akari: Sorry, that's David.

Hellgrammite: David. Yes.

Akari: He's always like this.

Hellgrammite: Well, I mean, he seems pleasant enough. So, okay, so, when I need you, I will call, and you'll be there for me. But you can't like give me any tips, you know, like insider—

Akari: You must not call. You must not broadcast that you and I are communicating, or else all will be lost.

Justin: [chuckles]

Hellgrammite: Yes, get to the "or else." What will be la—every—all wi—if I ask—

Lorovith: Excuse me, sorry, Lorovith Gonjuban Dreamwanderer. I do have the name, so I get to pop in pretty much whatever I want.

Clint: [chuckles]

Lorovith: I wanted to say, are you sure he's the right bug? I mean, I don't know what you're cooking here, but I—it ca—he ca—you have to be able to do better than this cat here—

David: Hey, boss! Dave again. Have you met Scorpo?! Scorpo seems like a real catch!

Lorovith: Scorpo is okay! Scorpo doesn't turn every conversation into a goddamn conversation with the Nintendo gameplay counselor's hotline, you know? He's a decent—

Griffin: [guffaws]

Lorovith: A decent human...

Clint: [laughs]

Lorovith: ... can have a non-transactional conversation with another entity that doesn't devolve into begging for tips like he's fervently clinking a magnifying glass in the mid '80s.

Justin: [chuckles]

Hellgrammite: These guys, they're always bustin' my chai-tin. I love these guys.

Lorovith: It's chitin. I'm going back to bed.

Justin: [chuckles]

Griffin: [laughs]

Hellgrammite: Chitin, thank you.

David: Yeah! I gotta get back to work too! [sings a tune]

Hellgrammite: David and Lorovith, ladies and gentlemen! We'll be right back.

Griffin: No, we're still here.

Hellgrammite: Oh.

Justin: [chortles]

Akari: Hellgrammite, are you under the impression that all of your fellow Aspirants are in secret communication with the members of the Octave who are administering these trials? Ours is—ours is a forbidden romance, Hellgrammite.

Justin: [laughs]

Hellgrammite: Yes, on so many levels.

Akari: It's what makes it so exciting. But—

Hellgrammite: Wait a minute! Are you telling me that the others are in contact with one of the Octave as well?

Akari: No, I'm—no, I'm—

Hellgrammite: Is it like a sponsorship kind of thing?

Akari: I know you are confused.

Justin: [chuckles]

Akari: I do, I... I can show you a glimpse.

Hellgrammite: Yeah! Yeah, I think that might be—yeah.

Lorovith: are we sure it won't confuse him more?

Justin: [chuckles]

Hellgrammite: Will you leave?!

Lorovith: Sorry!

Griffin: This vision, this ghost jedi vision of Lorovith that is existing in your mind.

Clint: [chuckles]

Griffin: Give me a wisdom saving throw, please.

Clint: Wisdom saving throw... that I can do.

[sound of dice thrown]

Clint: How about 13?

Griffin: 13, okay. Through this thrieken telepathic channel, you feel a sudden sort of surge. And it is—it is as if a whole crowd of people are now speaking to you sort of simultaneously. It is impossible to kind of parse everything that they are saying. And the din of this chorus of people just kind of overwhelms your senses. And in just this brief instant, you are—you are somewhere else. You are floating, weightless, in a space that is similar to the world that you were just currently floating above on the the Island of the Octave Ziggurat.

But as you look around and you sort of get a feel for how much of this world you can actually see, you realize that there is no blight that has swallowed up the planet. There is no giant sort of swirling wall of fog surrounding just a small kind of radius of The Fold that the, you know, the world had not destroyed. This is—this is an unblemished version of the—of the world that was destroyed by magical wars, you know, so many generations ago. Give me a—give me a perception check, please.

[sound of dice thrown]

Clint: Oh, boy, a six.

Griffin: Six. As you look around this world, the fact that it, you know, is in relatively pristine shape is obvious. The giant fog tornado is not—is not present. The Fold is not there, everything is just kind of dramatically less apocalyptic than the world you were just standing in. With a six on the perception check, you do get a sense for the fact that there is—there is something strange about this world. And it is that it seems to be fractured.

Not with, you know, actual physical rifts in the ground, but it just kind of seems like different parts of the world, different sort of biomes are squished together in a way that is like really unnatural. There is a section where the ocean meets the land, and just kind of stops without shoreline, and immediately jumps into the planes. It is unnatural how this world is kind of put together. As you also sort of look over the horizon, over the sort of curvature of this land, you also realize that this world is actually a bit small.

You got a pretty good sense for what the planet you live on looks like when you went up in the tower into space, after the Trial of Transfiguration and had your fit. You get a sense that the world that you are being shown right now is not the world that you—that you live in, but a different sort of realm entirely. And just as quickly, that moment ends, and the voice of Akari returns to your mind. She says:

Akari: This is the future that I and I alone am building, that I am depending on you to shepherd into existence. You are the one who will help me, and together we will create a world of our own design. I need you to prove yourself to me. I need you to win this conclave.

Hellgrammite: Yes, yes.

Akari: And I will help you wherever I can, but the rest is up to you, Hellgrammite. I would not ask you these things if I did not know with certainty in my heart that you were capable of doing them.

Hellgrammite: Akari, let me say, I pledge myself to accomplish this task for you. I will, to the end of my abilities, strive to win this contest. And I will help to pave the way to this future that you have envisioned. Okay, so if you take that as point number one. But I followed that up with, so, what do I get? You know, what's in—you know, I'm me—I'm happy to do it! Out of my love for you, my commitment to our people. But what's going to be the dig? What am I going to get out of it? Besides the love and the appreciation.

Griffin: Hellgrammite, as you leave this sort of reverie and the little insect that—the echo mite you've been talking to sort of burrowed around underground. It starts to sort of trail off back toward the—back toward the

Crystalarium. And you hear the voice of Akari in your mind through this striking telepathy say:

Akari: Remember, my love, secrecy is paramount. The Octave cannot know about our arrangement. No one can know about our arrangement, or all will be lost. Do you understand?

Hellgrammite: Oh, oke—all right. What about—and not even my two buddies? My really close friends?

Akari: There is no way in which you could reveal this information to anyone else without the Octave learning about it. Even our meeting like this is...

Hellgrammite: You know, I—okay.

Akari: Wait, hold on, Hellgrammite, wait.

Hellgrammite: Yeah?

[pause]

Hellgrammite: Hello?

Griffin: And there's no response.

Hellgrammite: Akari?

Griffin: You look down at this trail of dirt in the ground and see the echo mite that has been sort of burrowing around sort of climbs up, out of the soil, and does a little lap, a little look around. And just starts sort of idly traipsing off back toward the Crystalarium, sort of ignoring you entirely. And you do not feel that connection anymore.

Hellgrammite: Oh... This is a weird relationship. Hope I'm not getting catfished! Okay...

Griffin: [chuckles]

[theme music plays]

[ad reads]

Griffin: Rictus! How would you like to spend your day off between the trials?

Travis: The first thing I'd like to do is find Doober.

Griffin: Okay. That's easy enough. Doober lives in one of the sort of big residences. Most of the remaining Aspirants at this point have kind of moved on up to these like gold-tier lodgings, and his is the one that, you know, a constant sort of thick, rolling layer of fog is sort of pouring out of.

Travis: I knock on the door.

Griffin: Okay. After a few moments, it opens. And the diminutive frame of Doober Sweetleaf is standing there. He says:

Doober Sweetleaf: Oh? Hello, Rictus. Please, come in—come inside!

Rictus: Oh, no, I just wanted to stop by real quick. I wanted to give you first these.

Travis: And I hand him over the tokens that I received for spells.

Griffin: Oh? Okay.

Doober Sweetleaf: Thank you, Rictus, but you should hang on to these.

Rictus: No, I'm good! I think I'm set with what I have. I don't need 'em. But I also wanted to give you a piece of advice, if you're open to it?

Doober Sweetleaf: Yes, of course. Are you sure you don't want to come inside? We could—

Rictus: No, no, no, no, I have somewhere I need to be. But... I—like Hellgrammite and Lorovith, I don't think either one of them are like bad. I

don't think they're evil. But they can be... quite dense. Like parentheses comp—

Clint: [laughs]

Rictus: Like complimentary.

Justin: I should have taken my—

Rictus: So like—

Justin: Headphones off for this. He wouldn't be saying this—

Rictus: Just keep that—

Justin: If he knew I could hear it.

Rictus: Keep that in mind. And my advice is like, you're a grown man. And if you want people to stop treating you like a child—I don't think you need like a guardian anymore. I think you just need to kind of make some decisions on your own and take responsibility for your own safety. You know what I mean?

Griffin: Give me an insight check, please, Rictus.

[sound of dice thrown]

Travis: That's a 19.

Justin: Now, Travis, do one on me.

Griffin: On Justin—

Travis: I don't even need to—

Justin: Do one on my—

Travis: You're clicking your tongue and shaking your head.

Griffin: He's tut-tutting and shaking.

Clint: [chuckles]

[sound of dice thrown]

Travis: I got a 17 on Justin.

Justin: Travis, with an eight, or a seven or a six, or a five or a four, or even a three, I think you could tell I'm very disappointed in how you've talked about my character.

Clint: [laughs]

Travis: You don't think Lorovith can be a little dense sometimes? I said he wasn't evil—

Justin: I'm sorry, I'm not—I'm sorry, Travis, I'm not in the room with—

Griffin: Yeah.

Justin: We're just having this conversation, I'm not aware of it.

Griffin: Respect the dramatic irony, please, Travis. We've talked about this.

Justin: I'm trying to reduce the amount of table talk. [chuckles]

Clint: [chuckles]

Griffin: You can tell that Doober Sweetleaf is a bit shaken by what you said, but also that it is maybe not his first time sort of having this thought. He said:

Doober Sweetleaf: I know, sir, I'm... I know that I conduct myself in a manner that is slightly more childish than everyone else here. It is just the manner of... how I was—how I was raised and where I grew up. I—

Rictus: Oh, believe me, if anyone understands like being kind of, you know, pigeonholed in by how you were raised and where you grew up, I get it.

Doober Sweetleaf: Did you mean what you said, and do you think the others did too, that I should be the one who wins the conclave?

Rictus: I do, but I also think it doesn't really matter what I think and what the others think, because when it comes down to it, the person who's got to win is you. And then you'll have a bunch of responsibility, and you'll be the one making choices and making decisions. And if you go into it looking to the other seven members of the Octave to tell you what to do, then it's all pointless.

Doober Sweetleaf: You're right. When I received the invitation to come and participate in the conclave, I know that refusal is not really an option, but Randolph convinced me that I needed to go. I told him time and time again, I don't want the powers of a god. I just want—I just want my simple life. But the point he made is that this power, the power of the Octave, should not fall into the wrong hands. And that by claiming that power, I can prevent that from happening. But you're right, if I become a member of the Octave, the responsibility placed on my shoulders will be great. And I have not spent much time thinking about what that looks like. I... thank you, Rictus. I needed to hear this. Where are you going?

Rictus: Oh, I just have a quick errand I want to try. Good luck, Mr. Sweetleaf.

Travis: And he holds out his hand to shake hands.

Griffin: He returns it.

Justin: There's a squeaking on the fire pole that Lorovith put into Doober's house. *Squeak!*

Doober Sweetleaf: Oh, sorry, Lorovith is awake—

Lorovith: Who are you speaking with?

Doober Sweetleaf: Rictus—

Lorovith: Who was here—who was here, Doober?

Doober Sweetleaf: Yeah, Rictus—

Lorovith: I came down the fire pole as quick as I could! Are you okay?

Doober Sweetleaf: Yes, Rictus came. He needed a plug.

Griffin: And Doober puts a—

Lorovith: A butt plug! How dare he?!

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: Doober puts a small baggie of his Sweetleaf—

Lorovith: Is this drugs?!

Doober Sweetleaf: Yes.

Clint: Good!

Lorovith: Okay, then! As long as it's not sex stuff.

Clint: [chuckles]

Doober Sweetleaf: Okay. He was just leaving.

Rictus: Thank you for—

Lorovith: Fine!

Rictus: The drugs.

Clint: [laughs]

Doober Sweetleaf: You're welcome. Enjoy those drugs you asked me for.

Rictus: I definitely will.

Travis: And Rictus heads to the Crystalarium.

Griffin: Okay.

Lorovith: Doober, polish the pole! I've scuffed it all to hell!

Justin: [chuckles]

Griffin: [chuckles]

Rictus: I thought you said no sex stuff?

Lorovith: [yells out]

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: Lorovith, Doober seems a bit off. Doober seems... like this conversation was maybe not about drugs. And—

Travis: Suspicious.

Griffin: He seems a bit suspicious.

Justin: Yeah.

Travis: Not drugs?

Justin: It's pretty—

Travis: Huh.

Justin: Important to me—like, it's pretty import—like... Lorovith can't engage with Doober as a person, because I think that what he is thinking—like, it's too—like... Lorovith locked into a role a long time ago, and Doober's

emotional state I don't think is something that Lorovith is necessarily clocking. You know what I mean?

Griffin: Okay.

Justin: Like I don't think he has—he has not paid attention to Doober thus far, and Doober's emotional state, right?

Griffin: Right.

Justin: And I just, I...

Griffin: That's the benchmark of a great dad, dude. Like we're all—we're all—

Justin: He's trying.

Clint: God, I wish I could have achieved that.

Justin: Yeah.

Griffin: Yeah.

Justin: Someday. Yeah, that's—I mean, I notice, and maybe that's the—maybe that's a kind of impetus. Maybe I'm like, okay, well, whatever's going on here, I'm gonna—I'm gonna maybe shadow from the—from the shadows. Trying to—trying to keep an eye out. Shadow Rictus.

Griffin: Okay. You then, as Rictus takes off, sensing that something maybe was a bit more serious, you poke out after him. And Rictus, as you make your way to the Crystallarium, you encounter Hellgrammite leaving the woods nearby. And I think the three of you are—you know, get to the same place roughly around the same time. Are you sneaking behind Lorovith?

[sound of dice thrown]

Griffin: I see a dice going. Yeah, that's a three stealth check. Lorovith is just kind of stumbling, trumbling behind you. He steps in two buckets—

Justin: Every few minutes he goes, "Shhh!" To nobody in particular.
[chuckles]

Griffin: [chuckles]

Clint: "I'm hunting wabbits!"

Griffin: Yeah, the three of you, you encounter Hellgrammite, and Lorovith is just kind of walking behind you. I think this stealth check was pretty bad.

Clint: Okay.

Griffin: And you all sort of regroup here in front of the Crystallarium.

Hellgrammite: Hey, Rictus. Hey, Lorovith.

Lorovith: Whoa.

Hellgrammite: Hi!

Rictus: Lorovith! How long have you been there?

Lorovith: The entire time.

Rictus: [hushed] Hellgrammite, I knew he was there. I'm trying to make him feel good.

Hellgrammite: Oh, good.

Lorovith: Thanks for preserving my ego.

Hellgrammite: Oh—

Lorovith: Bugman, what are you doing here?

Hellgrammite: Oh! I was just kind of up there, you know, thinking. Trying to consider, you know, what a—

Rictus: What a twist.

Hellgrammite: Yes. Well, I'm deep. I just think, fellas, that...

Lorovith: I would have thought both of us too dense for something like that.

Griffin: [chuckles]

Hellgrammite: Well, yeah. You know, as one of the two stupid ones.

Lorovith: The dense brother.

Rictus: Nobody said stupid.

Lorovith: Tweedledee and Tweedledumbass.

Hellgrammite: Yeah, that's—

Rictus: Okay.

Hellgrammite: That's us. No! I just, I needed some quiet reflection because I get the feeling that something big's going on. Something's gonna happen, and I think we're at a... we're at the precipice. And I just wanted to—

Lorovith: I feel like we've reached a fair agreement that we must push Doober to the front of the crowd, yes?

Hellgrammite: Right! Yeah! Doober, front of the crowd. I'm all with that.

Rictus: As we all agreed.

Justin: Insight check.

Hellgrammite: Absolutely.

[pause]

Clint: Who, me?

Justin: I'm doing an—

Griffin: No.

Justin: Insight check on you.

[sound of dice thrown]

Justin: 14 plus one, 15.

Griffin: Dad, I need you to roll a D20, and then I guess let me know privately if it's a deception or not.

Clint: Okay, hold on.

Justin: If you're gonna dangle these little things in front of me, man, I'm taking you dead seriously—

Clint: No, I know! I know.

Justin: With this character voice. [chuckles]

[sound of dice thrown]

Griffin: 20. You don't have to say shit, Dad. Either way is fine.

Justin: [chortles] See? Now we're playing Dungeons and Dragons!

Griffin: Yeah, you d—you can't—you can't quite tell, Lorovith. It seems like he's being on the level, but—

Lorovith: Right. Good. Good enough.

Rictus: I'm actually glad you both are here. I'm gonna do something. Just finish an errand. And if there's traffic, I need you guys to maybe help me make up some time.

Lorovith: Hellgrammite?

Hellgrammite: Hm?

Lorovith: Do you understand? Even I, at this point, am starting to get the faintest glimmering. The light from Rictus' star is starting to reach my dim, dim planet. I think he might be hinting about some sort of *code*? I can't be sure, though.

Griffin: [laughs]

Hellgrammite: Perhaps—

Lorovith: Oh! My temples are aching from the computations!

Hellgrammite: There's no way that I could possibly comprehend his genius.

Justin: [chuckles]

Hellgrammite: On a level so high above me, it's like the stratosphere!

Rictus: Listen! This is Rictus speaking here. Hypothetically, maybe by the end of the necromantic trial, Doober thought you both were pieces of shit. And I was trying to maybe give you a little wiggle room. But that's fine.

Hellgrammite: I'm merely a simple country—

Lorovith: Country lawyer!

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: [guffaws]

Hellgrammite: I don't know nothing about those kind of deep subjects.

Lorovith: So, what sort of traffic should we be anticipating? Is it...

Hellgrammite: Rough stuff?

Rictus: Yeah, it might slow me down by like eight minutes.

Hellgrammite: Yeah.

Lorovith: Yes... Ah, okay.

Hellgrammite: Now you're talking in terms we can understand. Time.

Rictus: So, you know, for those eight, I just might need a little help.

Lorovith: [sighs] Hoo...

Hellgrammite: And this is all towards getting Doober crowned, correct?

Rictus: Yeah.

Lorovith: Are you going to do your errand right now?

Rictus: Yeah.

Hellgrammite: I'm your huckleberry.

Rictus: Just if it—if you're able to help.

Hellgrammite: Yeah!

Rictus: No pressure.

Hellgrammite: Come on... Lorovith, come on! He's our buddy!

Lorovith: Yes, you're right, Bugman.

Justin: And I shove him to the ground.

Clint: [titters]

Travis: Bugman?

Justin: Yeah, I shove Hellgrammite to the ground. Forcefully. Enough to hurt.

Hellgrammite: Thank you! Good. This is great. Why was—

Griffin: Your-

Hellgrammite: Why did you shove me to the ground?

Griffin: Your grimoire lights up—

Rictus: I appreciate this.

Travis: And Rictus takes off running for the door of the Crystalarium.

Griffin: The—

Lorovith: I'm tired of it, Bugman! I can handle no more!

Hellgrammite: What did I do? What did I do?

Justin: *Zhuzh!*

Hellgrammite: Oh! Why did you hit me?

Justin: It was—

Hellgrammite: You hit me in the proboscis!

Justin: That was fake. It was a threat.

Griffin: Give me an attack roll, Lorovith.

Justin: At the ground. I'm seriously, I'm not trying to hit him at the—well, is it for the initial—

Griffin: Oh, well then give me a perfo—give me a performance check then, please.

Justin: Okay.

[sound of dice thrown]

Justin: That's good. I have a zero in that, and I'm very good—

Griffin: Ooh! That was close. Wow.

Justin: 15. [chuckles] Yeah, the edge of that die was really...

Griffin: All right. You start putting on a show. You guys start going at it WWE style. I mean, it sounds—

Hellgrammite: *Okay!* All right—

Griffin: [laughs] Sorry—

Hellgrammite: [yells out] Now I get it!

Griffin: Give me—also give me a performance check, please, Hellgrammite.

Clint: [chuckles]

[sound of dice thrown]

Clint: That's an 18! [chuckles]

Griffin: Okay, you're, yeah, you're getting your ass kicked, dude.

Hellgrammite!

Griffin: It's going very, very well.

Hellgrammite: Snap it to a Slim Jim!

Griffin: Your grimoire lights up right away, Lorovith, and Chris appears, a little floating sort of white eye. And this voice says:

Chris: Lorovith, it seems like you've forgotten yourself, forgotten the rules. Please cease these—this assault at once!

Hellgrammite: Out of nowhere! Out of nowhere!

Lorovith: It wasn't out of nowhere, Bugman. I've been putting up with your shenanigans for so long now.

Hellgrammite: I have not shenaniganed you! I've just, I have tried to be your friend! I have tried everything! I've invited you over! I've offered up to loan you books—

Lorovith: Chris, you will be on my side, Chris. He's been stealing snacks.

Hellgrammite: Now, Chris, you know me. You're always there at my side on my—on my wrist.

Lorovith: He's torn into the commissary and taken extra snacks!

Hellgrammite: I have—

Lorovith: Some of the good ones, too!

Griffin: he's—

Lorovith: That just got dropped off!

Hellgrammite: Those were out of the trash can! People didn't want those anymore! I just picked up what was left. You know me and larva.

Justin: Why would you—[chuckles]

Travis: Wait—

Justin: Dad jumped to the—

Travis: Is that part true?

Justin: Most decrepit defense possible. [chuckles]

Griffin: Grossest imaginable.

Justin: [laughs] It's good. It's always in character. Okay, so that's enough. So you get it. [chuckles] That's—

Griffin: Yeah, sure, sure, sure! Okay.

Justin: Okay. [chuckles]

Griffin: Yeah, no, this is—this—

Justin: And some of that bullshit for a while. [chuckles]

Griffin: You, because you are not dealing like a ton of damage, no actual sort of repercussions are being kind of dealt to you. But this brawl has definitely attracted the attention of the sort of... artificial mind that has been speaking to you all through your—through your grimoires. And that definitely opens the door for Rictus, as you approach the Crystallarium. I'm not sure if you have gotten this close before, but as others have, they have been sort of warded off by a warning message from Chris. So convincing is both of their performances, I will tell you that that has not happened for you yet as you approach the sort of stairs leading up to the—to the platform, where this great sort of amethyst—

Justin: As it fades away, you hear Lorovith say:

Lorovith: No, I'm telling you, he's hitting himself! Hellgrammite, stop hitting yourself!

Justin: [chuckles]

Hellgrammite: I—ow!

Clint: [chuckles]

Griffin: What are you doing, Rictus?

Travis: When I reach the platform, what do I see?

Griffin: You can see—basically what you can see from the ground, the Crystallarium is a fairly large building. There's two sort of wings of the building, these great purple amethyst pyramids on either side, flanking sort of a larger central crystal, a bit brighter in hue. There doesn't appear to be any kind of like obvious door, and the crystal appears to be somewhat transparent. But you know that there's gotta be something inside of this building, you shouldn't be able to just see all the way through it. That is what you see.

Travis: So, the crystal itself, just so I understand, I'm picturing it, the crystal itself that I see, the large crystal, isn't the thing. There's something inside of it that's the thing?

Griffin: Yes.

Travis: But I can see... I'm gonna... ah, this is gonna draw a lot of attention. I'm gonna thunder—

Clint: We'll step up—we'll step up our—

Travis: I'm gonna Thunderstep into it.

Griffin: Holy shit! Okay. That's a loud—that is maybe the loudest—

Justin: We're acting so good, though.

Griffin: Imaginable way of doing it.

Justin: We're really acting good.

Hellgrammite: He gave me a purple nurple! Somebody help!

Griffin: Oh, the acting is really, really good, though. Okay, because the acting is so good, you're not gonna get fucking busted right away.

Travis: I'll have a second?

Griffin: You'll have a second.

Travis: Okay.

Griffin: Maybe, when you—when you do get inside. You are also technically Thunderstepping into something you can see, right? But not quite knowing exactly what is on the inside of it.

Travis: All I need is a second.

Griffin: Okay, read to me exactly what sort of Thunderstep does, so I know exactly how to deal with this.

Travis: Thunderstep, you teleport yourself to an unoccupied space you can see within range. Immediately after you disappear, thunderous boom sounds and each creature within 10 feet of the space you left make a constitution saving throw. The thunder can be heard up to 300 feet away.

Griffin: Awesome. You take a deep breath, and looking the—sort of the central structure of the Crystallarium, you close your eyes, and you emit a sonic boom, and vanish from the platform. You disappear with a sonic boom that pushes away the nearby tree line. Hellgrammite, where you and Lorovith are fighting on the ground, you are temporarily almost deafened by this sound. And you see the little eye in your grimoire momentarily start to turn over to face the Crystallarium. If you want to help out further in this situation, some escalation would be—would be wise, of your—of your combat performance.

Justin: All right... Oh, I have—I have a good one... Color Spray.

Griffin: Okay?

Justin: When you need a distraction that looks like you're really fighting somebody a lot, but you don't want to do a lot of damage, Color Spray. They can't even get mad about Color Spray.

Griffin: Yeah, Color Spray is like—

Justin: If they get mad about it, they're the jer—[chuckles] they're the jerks.

Clint: They're the jerks. [laughs]

Griffin: Okay, you emit—

Justin: "You like colors?"

Griffin: A flashing array of colored light that shoots out of your hand. Roll a 6D10... Unless, you know what? This is performance. I assume you're just going to take it on the chin, Hellgrammite, unless you want to resist this? Or you can just choose to fail.

Justin: Wait, why all the damage?

Griffin: No, there is no damage. That's how you determine how many hit points of creatures the spell can affect.

Justin: Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh. No, I just have a—oh, it's—I just have a constitution saving throw.

Clint: No, let's do it, because I think it would be more distracting if he reacts to it.

Griffin: All right, go ahead and make a constitution saving throw, please, Hellgrammite.

Clint: Okay, constitution saving throw is going to be a...

[sound of dice thrown]

Clint: 21.

Griffin: Okay, yeah, you blast this spray of lights in Hellgrammite's direction, blasting him right in the face. But Hellgrammite, you know to sort of shut your eyes when you see this one coming. You've seen it utilized before.

Clint: And the only effect is it makes my shirt uglier.

Griffin: [chuckles] Yeah, exactly.

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: You are able to defend, but this sort of escalation has definitely taken the attention back onto the brawl between the two of you. Rictus, you... it takes you just a moment for your eyes to adjust, as you suddenly appear inside of an enormous crystalline sort of chamber. Looking around, you can tell, first of all, that there is some enchantment present here, that has sort of fucked around with space in general.

It is larger in this building than its crystalline exterior would sort of suggest. The room in which you are standing appears to be moving with sort of almost industrial efficiency. There are thousands of small crystal shards, small spell stones like the ones slotted into your grimoires, that are arranged in these sort of long racks, these long rows.

Some of them appear to be kind of moving around voluntarily, sort of how you've seen them emerge from the grimoires of your defeated fellow Aspirants. That is—that is sort of what is immediately visible in this room. It is very dark in here. There is not a ton of sort of natural light. But from where you are standing, where you have Thunderstepped in, this is kind of what you can see.

Travis: I do have dark vision, Griffin.

Griffin: You do have dark vision? Okay.

Travis: Yeah.

Griffin: Give me a perception check then, please.

[sound of dice thrown]

Travis: 15.

Griffin: Okay. With a 15, you are able to make out more of your surroundings. At the rear end of this chamber, sort of behind all of these long racks and all of these sort of shuffling crystals that are moving around the room, you see one large sort of central mass here. It is—it is reflecting what kind of meager light is shining in through the exterior of the building.

And it appears to be—it appears to be quite large, about 20 feet tall, nearly as wide. You can just kind of make out a silhouette of it. It appears to be somewhat jagged around its edges. With a 15, you can tell that there is some sort of mass, some crystalline mass at the very end of this chamber. Looming around it, you see some sort of rough framework, but you are not quite able to really determine the meaning of it or what that structure is sort of doing.

Travis: Is it giving off any magical vibe?

Griffin: Oh, holy shit, man. Give me an arcana check, please.

[sound of dice thrown]

Travis: 15.

Griffin: It's overwhelming. There is so much—you know enough to know that these stones that are moving around here are these sort of like crystallized spells that you all have been slotting in. So there's like... it is impossible to kind of filter out the signal from the noise in this room, even with a 15 arcana check. In order to sort of glean more information than that, you will need to move inward. However, you also, with the arcana check that you have rolled, you can feel yourself sort of getting like... Pinged. Like

someone out there is sort of aware that another kind of magical presence has entered the room.

Travis: Rictus closes his eyes and thinks, "I seek an audience with Death." And casts Time Stop.

Griffin: Okay. Are you casting it with your spell slots, or are you going to be rolling to determine? You would have full spell slots. It is the next day after the trial. You will have had a long rest. Or do you want to hold on to those spell slots and risk it for the biscuit?

Travis: Remind me if I roll, what's the outcome?

Griffin: You could get stuck.

Travis: And how many spell slots would I need to burn?

Griffin: Nine—

Justin: Up your own butt.

Griffin: Total.

Justin: I said up my—up your own butt right after you said it, but my mic was muted. [chuckles] So I had to unmute and then say it again, and the timing wasn't as good.

Clint: [chuckles]

Justin: But like...

Griffin: I was confused as to how it fit in. I'm glad you said that—

Justin: Rachel! In po—[chuckles] Rachel, you can just—

Travis: I'm gonna burn—

Justin: In post. [chuckles]

Travis: I'm gonna burn the spell slots. I have 11.

Justin: A lot of burns today. [chuckles] A lot of burns going around.

Griffin: Awesome. Use all but two of those, please. You can decide how you sort of spend the slots to reach—to reach the required nine. And as you feel yourself sort of become noticed, you cast Time Stop. And you see this silvery dome of light extend outward from you, and as it does so through the sort of semi-transparent barrier that it forms, you can see the world beyond begin to slow almost to a complete halt.

The sort of swarms of crystals that were moving around of their own volition, seemingly sorting and arranging themselves around the room, grind to a halt. And for a moment, it is silent inside of this bubble. And then there is a wisp of smoke, from which you see a swatch of black fabric sort of expand outward and outward, until you see this figure of Death standing before you.

Travis: Rictus kneels before it.

Death: Oh, okay. Yeah. That's—that's—don't get me wrong, Rictus, that's an improvement—

Rictus: Great Death—

Death: Where are we?

Rictus: I'm ready to complete the task that you have laid before me. We're in the Crystallarium. Death, I've come... to sever whatever it is that is keeping you separate from this world.

Death: You.... That... That was your takeaway from our last conversation?

Rictus: Yeah?

Death: What...

Rictus: Yes, Death.

Death: Rictus...

Rictus: The... crystal?

Death: Yeah, no, I... Rictus, clearly something is happening in here that is influencing my domain, my ability to affect the world of The Fold. But did you bring anyone with you? Where are the others? Where's Lorovith and Hellgrammite and the others?

Rictus: Well, I mean, I didn't want to risk anyone else. I was going to come in—

Death: Rictus!

Rictus: And des—and destroy the crystal. And you know, I know that this is the end for me, and I'm not coming back, and I'm ready.

Death: Rictus, I don't—

Rictus: As you—

Death: I can't make another bond like this with another person. This is taking everything just to appear before you right now. If you die, that's it.

Rictus: But you said—

Death: I didn't mean to tell you to go on a... a mission that was going to certainly lead to your demise, against the eight archwizards that control real—

Rictus: But you sa—

Death: No... That's not what I meant!

Rictus: But you said to de—you said to destroy the—because the thing is separating you! And I—so like I came here? And I gave my tokens to Doober and I was like, "Yeah, oh, I got an errand." And I was—I'm... *what?*

Death: You need to get out of here. Hopefully they haven't discovered you yet, but you need—you need to run. You need to leave as quickly as you possibly can.

Rictus: Okay, wait, but before... I'm right, right? Like this is the thing—this crystal's doing something, right? That is like fucking it up?

Griffin: Death, in a sort of resigned kind of way, turns around to face this sort of massive—

Justin: In a very Griffin McElroy style fashion.

Clint: [chuckles]

Griffin: [chuckles] A very Griffin—a patented Griffin resigned side. Turns to face this jagged crystal sort of silhouette at the rear of the room, still a bit too dark for you to really make out any detail about it, but you see him consider it for just a moment. And he turns back to face you and says:

Death: There they are...

Griffin: And I need you to make a wisdom saving throw, please.

Travis: Okay. That's worked for me in the past. Let's see, as I buy time to open my—okay, wisdom saving throw!

[sound of dice thrown]

Travis: 18! 13 plus five, 18.

Griffin: You feel, and this is the first time this has happened since you have been using this kind of like time magic spell, you feel something in this outside world that appears to be frozen, trying to nullify the magic that you

are projecting right now. But with an 18 on your wisdom saving throw, you are able to kind of fend it off.

Death: What's wrong?

Rictus: Something... I thought it was frozen, but something's trying to stop the time bubble thing?

Death: Rictus, you need... you need to leave.

Rictus: Okay.

Death: You need to drop this bubble, and you need to get out of this room as quickly as you possibly can. Do you understand?

Rictus: Yeah. Hey, do you think Doober will give me back my tokens?

Death: That's up to Doober. I would not have done that if I were you.

Rictus: I didn't think—I didn't know! I...

Death: He seems like a great kid. You... I appreciate you trying to take initiative, I appreciate the humility. But I don't—I don't think this is the way. And you are my last shot. So please, save yourself.

Rictus: Well, shit. Okay...

Travis: Am I able to scoop up any crys—are there any crystals in arm's reach that I can grab?

Griffin: I'm gonna say—I'm gonna say no. From where you were, where you kind of like apparated into the room, you were not sort of in the—in the thick of it.

Travis: Okay... Then I'm gonna—I'm gonna Thunderstep back out, as I drop the bubble.

Griffin: Okay, trying to do it sort of simultaneously?

Travis: Yeah.

Griffin: Here? Okay. All right, you can't see sort of out through the transparent crystal that this structure is made out of, despite the fact that it's transparent. There doesn't appear to be anything beyond. And so you are sort of Thunderstepping again, into the unknown. But you do, you know, you do have a pretty good idea of what it looks like outside since you were just there, so you are able to do so fairly easily. You dispel the barrier around you.

As you do, you see the crystals in the room, just for a fraction of a second, sort of stop moving. And you see a swarm of them begin to hover in your direction. And then with a peal of thunder that reverberates throughout this room, you vanish. And Hellgrammite and Lorovith, from your pantomimed struggle here, you look up and hear another roar of thunder to see Rictus reappear on the dais in front of the Crystallarium.

Rictus: [yells out] Oh, there you guys are! I have been just teleporting all over looking for you. This fight is ridiculous. Ah, we need to—this was a misunderstanding. Come on... Pizza rolls on me. Pizza bagels on me!

Lorovith: Listen, before that, I must ask you, Rictus, Doober has grown incredibly powerful. I'm starting to grow afraid of the boy. Do you know what happened?

Rictus: Shit, I was hoping to catch him before I went to the store. Fuck.

Lorovith: He's starting to scare me a little bit. He's talking like some sort of little demigod.

Hellgrammite: Did he—did he get belted by gamma rays by any chance? I mean, is there a chance that happened?

Lorovith: He's fully yolked.

Hellgrammite: Ah....

Griffin: There is a roaring discordant horn, like a—like a cruise ship fog horn, rips through the air. And it is joined by these plumes of pitch-black smoke that begin to erupt from the sort of ring of doors, giant doors surrounding the Island of the Octave Ziggurat. In every direction that you look, you see now these columns, these pillars of black smoke, as this what sounds like alarm begins to ring.

And as that happens, the three of you realize that the other Aspirants have gathered here, sort of sensing the commotion. And as you gather, you all see the face of the Octave Osham, with the other seven members of the Octave flanking behind him, emerge from the Ziggurat and fly quickly in your direction. And Oshum looks at the scene, looks at you up on the dais, looks at the fight that you all were having in front of the building. And he takes a deep breath and he says:

Osham: I have an announcement. We understand the concerns you've all voiced about the brutal nature of these proceedings. You are not the first to voice them. But diabolical though they may be, they are ancient and tested means of ensuring that the powers of creation end up in only the most capable hands. These trials are executed carefully by ourselves, the stewards of this magic's presence in our world. And we, because of the insubordinate acts that all of you have executed during your time here... the results of this sacred process have been invalidated.

Griffin: He stares daggers at you, Rictus—

Travis: Rictus is busy looking at everyone else and shaking his head in disappointment.

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: Give me an—give me an insight check.

[sound of dice thrown]

Travis: 10.

Griffin: With a 10, I will tell you that you teleported and made a sound of thunder that could be heard from 300 feet away twice.

Travis: Uh-huh.

Griffin: And that he knows for fucking sure what just happened.

Travis: Mm. Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Griffin: He says:

Osham: As such... we will not commence with the final two trials. This conclave has been terminated.

[The Adventure Zone Royale theme music plays]

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