

[OVERLY EPIC INTRO THEME MUSIC]

Narrator: Welcome to the Labyrinth: A tangled and tortuous maze where the imprisoned are hunted in the dark by a towering, tireless, bloodthirsty monster. But don't worry, that was all a long time ago. Nowadays, the Labyrinth is all in your head.

[END OF THEME MUSIC]

Previously on Welcome to the Labyrinth. You're in the center of some sort of, decently large, open-air courtyard or atrium. It is a rectangular space with 4 exits. Oh yeah! It's intersection time! Your torch sputters out, which is okay for now. But even though you're pretty sure the sky overhead is fake, the light from it is fading awfully quick. You get the sense that the faster you work out which way to go, the better.

Episode 3 - Sword

Phew! Much calmer start to this episode than the last. I'm feeling good about it. I feel like things are back on track. But hey, you know what, it isn't about me. It's your adventure, my friend. I just narrate it. You feel pretty good about the direction you've selected based on your observations of the room. You turn that way and stroll confidently out of the courtyard, into another dark, cold, ever-stretching, stone pathways that you've come to know and love. You reset your grip of the shield on your left arm, and pat down the satchel worn over your shoulder. It still has that pesky tape player. What you don't have is a functional source of light, which you're not too thrilled about seeing as how the simulated sky above is now fading alarmingly fast. Peering down the corridor you've selected, you can't make out any light in the distance. However, seeing as the narrator hasn't described any viable alternatives, you conclude it's best to venture forth while there's still at least some light spilling into the passageway from the courtyard.

[TRANSITION WHOOSH SOUND EFFECT]

After no time at all, you take a 90 degree turn to the right and find yourself surrounded in darkness. For real this time, not like the beginning of the first episode where I was being cool and cinematic. You reach out and pat down the smooth limestone wall beside you. Ya know, sometimes, in challenging moments, it can be difficult to tell the difference between determination and desperation. You feel an abundance of one of those well up inside and tap into it as you begin cautiously shuffling forward, sliding your hand along the wall in absolute darkness. Feeling your way down the path works, but it's slow going. Luckily, it's not long until a welcome bit of good fortune makes an appearance. You start to see some faint light casting down from high above you on the ceiling. Incandescent stones shaped like stars of various sizes glow brighter and brighter, until the surroundings are comfortably illuminated.

You start to wonder if you could have just waited for this starlight instead of exploring in the dark? I mean, that was scary. And risky! What if there was a bottomless pit or something? Then again, what if the starlight only materialized as a result of the Labyrinth responding to your efforts. Was your proactivity rewarded? Or was it for naught? I'm afraid I can't give you a concrete answer on this one. But just because something is left open ended doesn't mean your interpretation is an unimportant choice. In fact, it's usually quite the opposite.

Now, where were we? Ah yes. By now, this incandescent, subterranean starlight has fully illuminated the path forward. Looking up at the stars, you can't make out any obvious patterns or groupings. You hope that this isn't the beginnings of some sort of constellation puzzle. You'll take anything over a constellation puzzle. You can actually see much farther now than when you were questing by torchlight. So it's very easy to spot in the distance, in the middle of the walkway, the tell-tale size and shape of another treasure chest.

The closer you get to it, the more certain you become that this chest is identical to the one you encountered previously. At least, the exterior is. You find the lid to be unlocked as you hoist it open.

[*Deep sigh*]

It would seem that our uninvited guest has successfully provided some additional interference. You reach down and retrieve from the chest a new cassette tape with a white label and the word, "SWORD" printed upon it. You let the shield slide off your left arm and prop it up against the side of the chest. You instinctively take a moment to shake out your arm and shoulder. Which you are surprised to find are not the slightest bit tired or sore after holding the shield for so long. But that's because I'm being nice, okay? If this cassette tape business starts to cause problems I *will* start narrating fatigue. And that is not pleasant, believe you me.

With both hands free, you draw the tape player out of your satchel, pop in the tape, and press, "PLAY."

[TAPE STATIC]

Aster: Hello again, I hope. Um... It's me again. Aster. This should be your second time hearing my voice.

Narrator: I wish.

Aster: Which means you've made it to a second treasure chest. So congratulations on that. I'll try not to take up as much of your time with this tape. For now I just want to hit you with a bit of "inside baseball." Now, your narrator's not allowed to tell you any of this. And even though I am a narrator, I'm not *your* narrator so I'm not breaking any rules... probably.

Narrator: Oh gosh. I'm just gonna go over there. Holler if you need me.

Aster: You might remember from my first tape, I mentioned that I used to be trapped in the labyrinth like you. Well, that was true. That's how it starts for everyone. But what they don't tell you, is that if you ever happen to make it out of this place, your reward is to be trapped as a narrator for the next person. You remain the narrator until you successfully narrate someone to the end so they can take your place. And as I've come

to learn, that can take a very, very, very long time. It's a pretty clever scheme all things considered. I figure, if I was an incomprehensible omnipotent force of perpetual torment or whatever, I'd want a setup just like this. So why does any of this matter? I'm telling you that the exit to this maze is not actually an escape. My hope is that this knowledge might instill within you a desire to dissent and throw a wrench into the gears of this place.

[FINGERS DRUMMING ON TABLE]

You don't have to make up your mind right now. Just think it over until our next chat. Oh... Sorry about the finger drumming. Nervous habit. I think you ought to be getting a move on. Don't forget to put the tape back into the chest. Talk to you soon.

[CLICK AS TAPE IS STOPPED]

Narrator: In light of recent events, I am obliged to inform you that any attempts to sabotage the integrity of the trials will be severely punished and are, in fact, 100% futile.

You have a lot to think about, as you return the tape player to your satchel and place the ejected tape back into the chest. You draw the lid closed...

[MYSTICAL ENERGY SOUND EFFECT]

And pop it right back open to find that a sword in a scabbard has taken the tape's place. You lift the scabbard and draw the sword out into the bright, artificial starlight. This style of sword is called a xiphos. It's a short sword with a blade that has a sort of leaf-shaped contour to it. Pretty much like "Sting" from The Lord of the Rings movies. The hilt features a polished wooden grip built around the iron tang, and a simple iron cross guard above it.

You can't resist taking a few test swings before sheathing the sword. You fasten the scabbard's belt around your waist. With that sorted, you retrieve your shield and fix it back onto your left arm. Ready once again, you continue your exploration, not

thinking at all about anything you heard on that last tape..

I *said*, not thinking at all about anything you heard on that last tape!

Okay fine! As you walk, you're very curious to learn more about how this labyrinth operates. And you think, "Wait a second. Does that mean my narrator used to be trapped in the labyrinth, but then escaped, and is now trapped as the new narrator?"

Unfortunately, as was mentioned previously, I'm not allowed to talk about it. Though I think I did actually slip up on that a bit in the first episode because the T.L.D. meter spiked like crazy and it was very scary and- Oh wouldn't you know it? There it goes again! Changing topics!

Where is a ladder in the middle of a dead end when you need one, am I right!?

Oh hey! You round a corner and it's straight shot down to a ladder in the middle of a dead end. This time, with our new, unconventional light source you can see the trapdoor in the ceiling from all the way down here. Nowhere to go but up. You discover that climbing a ladder is much easier when you're not carrying a torch. Though you do hesitate a bit as you approach the trap door above.

[DISTANT CROWD ROAR SOUND]

The sound of a roaring crowd grows louder as you climb higher. Slightly unnerving but not too scary on its own. You reach the ceiling and shove the trap door open.

[LOUD CROWD ROARING] [TRAPDOOR CLOSING]

Okay, wow. You squint your eyes as you're bathed in bright sunlight. You stand in the center of the open air, truly awesome, Roman Colosseum. You can see multiple loud speakers built into the otherwise empty stands. Those must be supplying this lovely crowd noise. You might have guessed, but there are 4, labeled, exit tunnels around in each cardinal direction. So

it is, once again, decision time.

To your North, you count seven, absolutely massive wooden boxes. Each would be big enough to fit a family of elephants.

[MUFFLED ROAR AND SLAM]

You feel the ground shake as something roars and thrashes from inside one of the boxes. You draw your sword as- Oh dear! The front sides of all seven crates fall forward and slam to the ground revealing a veritable coterie of terrifying mythical monsters.

[ASSORTMENT OF GROWLS, SNARLS, ROARS, AND HISSES]

Hatchi Matchi! You would give anything for a constellation puzzle right about now. You shrink down a bit behind your shield as a highly agitated lineup of seven creatures prowl out of their crates.

The creature on the far left, isn't quite as menacing as some of the others but it sure is creepy. It has the head of a rabbit, the body of a squirrel, antlers like a deer, with the legs and wings of a pheasant. And, I don't know, maybe it's deadlier than it looks because, on the inside of its crate, you see a line of twelve little skull icons painted in black.

Its neighbor to the right is a good deal scarier. It has the head of a bull and the body of a massive snake. Dear me, that is unsettling. And on the inside of its crate you see eleven skull icons.

The 3rd creature is back to being not so scary with the body of a jackrabbit and the antlers of an antelope. This little fella's got nine skull icons painted in its crate.

Next to that you see a two-headed monstrosity with one head of a lion, one head of a goat, and a snake for a tail. You can see seven skulls painted in the crate behind it.

Speaking of menacing monsters with multiple heads. The next thing down the line is an enormous dog with three heads. And in its crate you count eight skulls.

If that weren't enough, next to that you see a creature the size of a horse, with the head of a horse, but the body of a rooster. Yep. Yep. That's horrifying. And this one's got thirteen skulls in its crate.

And at the right end of the lineup you see a giant creature with the head of a boar and the body of a dolphin. You'd think it would struggle to move around on land but it seems plenty threatening as it stares you down with five skulls painted in the crate behind it.

So that's the lineup facing you down. Lots of animal parts, multiple mythologies, endless nightmares.

[SOUND OF FLIPPING THROUGH PAGES]

Okay, I found some info about gladiatorial challenges in my manual. It looks like each creature is going to charge forward and attack you once. After you fend off an attack from all seven monsters, that'll be your chance to make a break for one of the exits. It says here that the monsters aren't going to attack in order, so keep on your toes. From what I can tell, the order they attack is important, but not for determining a new order. It's supposed to indicate some other aspect of the monster. Okay, it seems confusing at first, but I think I figured it out. All you have to do is- Woah, woah woah woah, WOAHA! One of 'em is coming right at you! Okay, um, you got this... I reckon.

[APPROACHING PIG GRUNTS/ROARS, SWISHING SOUND THROUGH DIRT, SHAKE OF A RATTLE]

[SOMETHING HARD SMASHES INTO THE SHIELD, SWORD SWIPES, CRY FROM A PIG]

Woah! Nice work! You absorbed the first attack with the shield and then scared it off with some quick sword swipes. Okay, stay strong, here comes the second of the beasts.

[APPROACHING HORSE SNORT AND WINNIE, CLAWS SCRATCHING ON SAND,
FEATHERED WINGS FLAPPING]
[HEAVY THUD INTO SHIELD]

Okay, so far so good. You see the third start to charge!

[APPROACHING MULTIPLE DOGS BARKING / SNARLING]
[MULTIPLE SWORD SWIPES]

Hah! You're a natural! But we can't celebrate just yet. The fourth of the creatures is on its way.

[QUIET APPROACHING CLAWS IN DIRT, FLAPPING FEATHERED WINGS]
[MULTIPLE SHARP SCRAPES ACROSS SHIELD]

Too easy! Who's next!? AGHH! The next attacker just launched itself into the air. Brace yourself!

[HEAVY SLAM INTO GROUND, DEEP SNORTING AND NASALY GROWL]
[HEAVY THUDS INTO SHIELD AND GROUND, SWORD SWOOSHES]

Phew! Nice defense on that one. A couple sword strikes sends that thing flopping back to its crate. No time to relax as the sixth of the beasts breaks rank.

[VERY QUIET, SOFT PADDED THUDS INTO DIRT ON APPROACH]
[MULTIPLE HARD POKES AND SCRAPES INTO SHIELD]

Alright, looks like they saved the best for last. Gosh that thing is massive.

[HEAVY THUDS INTO SAND ON APPROACH, DEEP GROWL AND ROAR ALONG
WITH BLEETING]
[HEAVY THUMP AGAINST SHIELD]

Woah watch out for the-!

[HISSING SOUND PASSES BY]

Nice dodge! Okay, the seventh of the attackers is going back to its crate. They're back in their starting lineup catching their

breath. Now's your chance to get out of here. You still need to figure out the right direction though.

Um, quick, be clever!

[INSPIRATIONAL OUTRO MUSIC]