

*[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, 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]*

Episode 2 - Shield

Previously on Welcome to the Labyrinth. You wake up to find yourself surrounded by darkne-

*[MINOTAUR ROAR AND FOOTSTEPS]*

Oh shoot, that's right. Um, okay. No time for the recap I guess! Let's see, I'm sure it's in this manual somewhere...

*[PAGES FLIPPING]*

Melpomene... Menelaus... Midas... Minotaur! Here we go. Oh... well this can't be good. So, in my manual, under "minotaur" it just says "RUN" in all-caps... Three exclamation points.

*[HEAVY FOOTSTEPS GETTING CLOSER]*

Having considered all the clues, you make a decision on which of the four exits to take. You ditch your dwindling torch and grab a fresh one off the wall before darting through the doorway.

You keep your speed as the hallway turns to the left... and then to the right... and left again. You wonder if you've covered enough distance to slow down and catch your breath.

*[MINOTAUR SOUNDS FADE IN THE DISTANCE]*

Okay. Phew! It sounds like that thing is getting further away. It's not long before you can't hear it at all. Maybe it chose to go a different direction out of the workshop room. You feel

reasonably confident in the door you chose and continue along this route at a less frantic pace.

[*TIME PASSING TRANSITION SOUND EFFECT*]

For the last, however long it's been, things have returned to normal. Not to say that progressing blindly through twists and turns of a larger than life, dark, scary, cold, stone labyrinth is normal. But at least you don't seem to be in immediate danger. So, ya know, that's pretty good.

Oh, hey, what's this now? Up ahead, the farthest reach of your torch light begins to stretch over some sort of rectangular mass set right in the middle of the hallway. You approach cautiously. The object begins to shimmer as torch light reflects off of metallic embellishments around its edges. Closer now, you can make out the distinct shape and splendor of a truly textbook treasure chest. Wooden body adorned with intricate gold metal work. You give it a sharp kick and then jump backwards. Maybe you're worried about mimics or something? I mean hey, I get it, you can never be too careful about mimics. But in this case, we seem to be dealing with "the good" kind of treasure chest. You reach out with one hand to try the lid. Hey, it's actually unlocked! You lift the lid and give it a shove to flip it all the way open.

It seems empty at first. But as you lean over, you see a small object at the very bottom. Reaching down into the chest, it grows giant teeth and chomps your arm clean off! HA! Just kidding. Sorry, I couldn't help myself. My narrator pulled the same prank on me and I recall being *quite* annoyed. But here, now, sitting in the booth, I totally get it. Way too good to pass up.

Alright, let's see what's actually in this thing. You reach in and scoop up a small plastic rectangular capsule, roughly the size of a cassette tape. Oh, that's because it *is* a cassette tape. It's black with a white label that has the word SHIELD printed on it.

Considering how your narrator doesn't fully understand why there is a cassette tape in the treasure chest, you graciously decide to leave it behind and not think about it. What? That's not what you intend to do? Okay fine. Wishful narrating I guess.

You spot a conveniently placed sconce on the wall beside the chest and stash your torch there to free up both hands. You withdraw the tape player from your satchel, open the cassette deck, pop in the tape, and press the play button.

*[BUTTON PRESS]*

*[TAPE STATIC]*

**Aster, female voice, strong and witty, but tired:** \*Eh-hem\*. Check, one, two. Check, one, two. Alright, here we go. If anyone's listening to this, you're likely trapped inside this labyrinth like I was. So I guess, sorry about that, for starters.

**Narrator:** This can't be happening.

**Aster:** My name is Aster. Umm, truthfully, I'm not exactly sure what my name is. My narrator never mentioned it. I've had plenty of time to mull it over though and I think "Aster" has a nice ring to it, don't you? It's nice to have a name. Any-hoo. It's starting to look like my time here might never come to an end, so I wanted to take a crack at this tape recording scheme I cooked up a few adventurers ago.

If all goes well, you will retrieve this tape from inside of a treasure chest. That treasure chest is supposed to have a shield in it. But I think I should be able to bend the rules a bit. I mean, it's a long-shot, don't get me wrong. But hey, if it doesn't work, no one will ever hear this. So no one will ever know how colossally stupid I am... or was... In either case, there's no turning back now. This place doesn't exactly appreciate defiance.

But enough about me! Let's talk about you, my brave and clever explorer friend... who definitely does exist. You exist, right? I mean, you must. Otherwise I'm just making tapes for nobody.

Which is pretty sad. So let's operate on the presumption that you do exist and wish to continue in that regard. Well hey! I like your style. Great to make your acquaintance.

Now, I can't give away the whole plan just yet. Wouldn't want you to do anything rash. Not yet at least. And your narrator will be listening to all of this. Hello Mr. or Mrs. Narrator. Please don't freak out.

**Narrator:** Who, me? No I'm- I'm cool.

**Aster:** By now they're most likely freaking out.

[Sound of pages flipping]

**Narrator:** Okay, you just wait till I find the page for this.

**Aster:** If you're trying to look up what to do about this in the manual, let me save you some time.

**Narrator:** Oh really!? Well, they'll have to forgive me if I don't trust an anonymous, disembodied voice. Especially that voice. You hear that, listener? Never take a disembodied voice at face value. That's what I always say. I mean, *my* voice you can trust. Cause we go way back.

**Aster:** We'll be going "off book" with these recordings. But here's why you shouldn't freak out. I need our adventurer friend here to continue exploring. So for the narrator, it'll be business as usual. Since the manual doesn't cover anything like this, it's not really insubordination if you just ignore it.

**Narrator:** I mean that's "shady-character" logic, right?. Not exactly a "trustworthy" way of thinking, from what I'm hearing.

**Aster:** Now back to you, my new friend. After overcoming a challenge in the labyrinth, you are granted a reward. That's what this treasure chest is all about. Since we established that you definitely exist and are hearing this, I must have succeeded in my attempt to... edit... these rewards. But here's the thing. Some of the upcoming challenges might require you to have the intended rewards at your disposal. So, before you carry on, put

this tape back in the treasure chest, close the lid, and open it back up. And you best be quick about it. Gotta watch out for those T.L.D's or that big 'ol scary minotaur will find you.

*[\*Aside to herself\*]* Gosh, what a weird thing to say.

*[\*Addressing the listener again\*]* Good luck on your next trial. And don't be too hard on your narrator. It's a tough gig. I'm glad I'm not in their shoes.

*[Tape recorder clicks and static stops]*

**Narrator:** You wait in silence. Eagerly anticipating the narrator's response to what seems to have been an unexpected and upsetting development. But a response never comes. The narrator has decided it would be best to avoid addressing the event. No matter how long you wait. The narrator is stalwart and unshakeable in this regard. He is, like, super professional, so yeah...

Oh, come on already! Just try the thing with the tape and closing the lid and all that! *[\*Takes a few deep breaths\*]* Sorry about that. This will come as a surprise to you, because of my totally calm and relaxed demeanor, but I actually am freaking out... a little... possibly more. If your progress doesn't continue within the tolerable levels of deviation outlined in the manual, it's- well, it's both our butts, to put it plainly. That's those T.L.D's that Aster-voice was talking about. Tolerable levels of deviation. So let's please get back on track.

But first, you carefully eject the tape from the cassette player. You take a second look at the white label across the front of the tape with the word SHIELD printed upon it. Gently, you return the tape to the bottom of the treasure chest and close the lid. A pulse of yellow light flares out from the perimeter of the lid then quickly recedes. You hoist the lid back open to see an actual, honest to goodness shield in the chest.

You heft it up to take a closer look. This is an aspis shield. It's circular, roughly a meter in diameter with a slightly domed curvature. The body is made of wood with a comfortable arm bar and handle to hold on the back. The front is covered in a thin

sheet of polished bronze. It's common for this sort of shield to have a decorative emblem painted on the front called a blazon. This shield's blazon depicts an ornate compass rose. With the shield equipped to your left forearm held parallel to the floor, the North point of the blazon compass points upwards. I do see here in the manual that this info won't be important for a while, but it says it's important to remember.

You pat down your satchell to make sure the tape player is secure, before retrieving your torch from the sconce. Feeling a bit more protected and a good deal more confused, you resume your journey.

*[TRANSITIONAL SOUND EFFECT]*

You advance along the corridor for an amount of time. Up ahead, a dead end comes into view. Same as before, this dead end comes complete with a long wooden ladder leading straight up into darkness. The shield makes this climb a bit more awkward than the last but you manage. After a good minute of climbing, the stone ceiling above comes into view along with a wooden trap door set into it. You lower your head and push your shoulder up into the trap door. Much as the last, it swings up and over without much resistance.

*[WOODEN TRAP DOOR CREAKS OPEN THEN SHUT]*

*[LIGHT BREEZE AND SOME CHIRPING BIRDS]*

Daylight from the bright blue sky above hurts your eyes at first. You're in the center of some sort of, decently large, open-air courtyard or atrium. You're immersed in quite the collection of well manicured lawns, topiaries and marble sculptures. It is a rectangular space with 4 exits. Oh yeah, it's intersection time! There is one exit to the North, one East, one South and one West. Each exit is set into a large white marble wall and identified by its direction etched above it. In the corners of the courtyard, affixed high up on the walls are large loudspeakers that you suspect to be the source of those ambient bird chirps.

The rectangular courtyard is stretched further North and South.

Marble walkways divide the courtyard into 6 equal areas in a two by three grid. Two across and three up and down. Each of these areas feature lovely bits of gardening surrounding a large stone plinth that displays a unique and impressive marble sculpture. This gives you six different sculptures, each depicting a famous Muse of ancient Greece.

Oh man, there's so much good lore about the Muses. They were like, these inspirational symbols for art and music and stuff like that. They defeated the Sirens in what was, like, the world's first rap battle. And some scholars say that one of the muses was the mother of the sirens. How wild is that!? There's actually some debate about how many muses there even were. Some scholars said there were three, some said four, others said nine! And their names were also the subject of some scholarly disagreement.

Borysthenis, was a name according to one scholar,  
Erato, was a name according to two scholars.  
Apollonis, was a name according to one.  
Clio, according to three.  
Calliope, according to three and four  
Melpomene, according to two.

But let's get back to these statues, shall we? They aren't engraved or labeled at all, so you suspect a key detail must be that each statue depicts a Muse with a different musical instrument.

The statue in the Northwest area holds a mandolin.  
The statue in the Northeast area sits behind a marimba.  
The statue in the West area sits behind a piano.  
The statue in the East area holds a piccolo.  
The statue in the Southwest area holds drum sticks.  
And the statue in the Southeast area holds a trumpet.

I have one more interesting aspect to this courtyard left to narrate: Along the central marble walkway that runs West to East, not far from where you came up through the trap door, you look down to see a line of six stepping-stones of black marble that are raised slightly higher than the surrounding white

marble pathway. You step on one. It sinks down slightly and-

*[MUSIC BEGINS TO PLAY]*

Woah!

*[MUSIC STOPS]*

While stepping on the raised stone, music plays from the speakers in the room. When you take your foot off of the stone, the music stops. You decide to step on each of the buttons for a few seconds to see what happens. Starting with the stone furthest West and then working your way East, you hear this:

*[SONG VERSION ONE PLAYS: Marimba, Piano, Drum Sticks]*

*[SONG VERSION TWO PLAYS: Mandolin, Drum Sticks, Trumpet]*

*[SONG VERSION THREE PLAYS: Mandolin, Marimba, Piccolo, Drum Sticks]*

*[SONG VERSION ONE PLAYS: Marimba, Piano, Drum Sticks]*

*[SONG VERSION FOUR PLAYS: Mandolin, Piccolo]*

*[SONG VERSION FIVE PLAYS: Marimba, Piano, Piccolo, Drum Sticks]*

There's clearly *something up* with these six different music arrangements. *You can feel it*. 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. Oh, and I'm not going to keep saying this every time, but you should be able to find some account of this room's description in whatever those "show notes" are. So get crackin', I guess. I'm glad this time you seem to be in less peril. I got nervous when that Aster tape said some challenges might need you to have a shield. But I guess I was worried for nothing... You know what? I should stop narrating before I jinx it.

*[INSPIRING OUTRO MUSIC]*