

Shmanners 218: Animal Crossing

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Jesse: Hey, folks. It's Jesse, the founder of Max Fun. Since we postponed our annual MaxFunDrive in mid-March, we have gotten a lot of questions about if and when we'd be rescheduling it. And honestly, we've been asking ourselves the same thing.

Well, now, we have an answer for you. The 2020 MaxFunDrive will start on July 13th. That's coming up soon. We decided to have the Drive now, because it's always brought a lot of joy and excitement to our community, and certainly to us. And to be totally honest, it's also the main source of income for some of our hosts.

Like pretty much everything right now, this year's Drive is gonna be a little different. We'll still be bringing you very special episodes, fun community activities, premium thank you gifts, but we also know it's a weird time, and for some folks, a really difficult one.

Some people are in a position to become new or upgrading members. Others can't right now, and that is okay. We'll have ways for you to support Max Fun at every level, including some ways that won't cost you anything.

We're also gonna run the Drive for four weeks instead of two. We didn't think it was a good time to be rushing anybody, and uh, having a longer Drive lets us be a little more low-key in our Drive pitch. It also gives us more time to do fun stuff, like the weekly live streams we'll be putting on for charity throughout the Drive.

Most importantly, we want the 2020 MaxFunDrive to highlight all the ways we support each other and our communities. We also want to show how grateful we are to you for making all the work that we do possible.

Stay safe. We'll see you July 13th for the MaxFunDrive.

Travis: [Animal Crossing-esque gibberish]

Teresa: [Animal Crossing-esque gibberish]

Travis: [Animal Crossing-esque gibberish]

Teresa: [Animal Crossing-esque gibberish]

[theme music plays]

Travis: Hello, internet! I'm your husband host, Travis McElroy.

Teresa: And I'm your wife host, Teresa McElroy.

Travis: And you're listening to Shmanners!

Teresa: It's extraordinary etiquette...

Travis: ... for ordinary occasions. Hello, my dove. How are you?

Teresa: Hello, dear. I've been better...

Travis: Yeahhh...

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Baby Dot has just been looking to party at like, four o'clock in the morning.

Teresa: Uh, last night, it was two o'clock in the morning.

Travis: Two o'clock, yeah. Two o'clock to four o'clock.

Teresa: Two to five.

Travis: In there. She just loves to party, y'know what I mean? And her partying comes in the middle of the night.

Teresa: Yeah. This happened with Bebe, too.

Travis: Well, and this just happened. It was completely mind blowing. Right in the middle of this recording, Bebe is watching TV in the living room while we record, and we just hear tiny footsteps. She runs in, sat a first aid kit down just inside my office, and went back down to keep watching TV. I have no idea what's happening. Everything is, uh, topsy-turvy chaos. Hello.

Teresa: Hello.

Travis: So this week, we are talking... this may, at first blush...

Teresa: Do you think that the listeners enjoy this little, um, uh, window? This peep into our lives?

Travis: Y'know what? I don't know.

Teresa: [laughs] I don't either.

Travis: But it's all I know now.

Teresa: That's true.

Travis: At first blush, this may seem a weird topic. We're talking about Animal Crossing. And this may seem like a weird, like, "Why are they talking about a video game?"

But I think that the thing that makes Animal Crossing kind of fit into our purview is like... it has so much to do, not only with cultural impact, but there's a lot of etiquette to it. Because it is a very social game.

Teresa: Would you call it an RPG, though? That's roleplaying game.

Travis: No. It actually has, uh... I'm trying to remember the actual name of it. It is a life sim, I think it is called. Life simulator. Because in a roleplaying game, y'know, you're creating a character, and you're kind of building that character based on your decisions, and it's a lot like D&D, or Final Fantasy, if you're talking about video games, where the decisions you make help shape who that character is, right?

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: In a life simulator, uh, you are more playing yourself, to some degree. So whether we're talking about like, Second Life, or Animal Crossing, or something like that.

Teresa: Or The Sims?

Travis: Uh, yeah. I mean, there's a lot of—

Teresa: Well, you're kind of playing the omnipotent, like, creator with The Sims.

Travis: There's a lot of blurred lines between a lot of these genres that we're talking about, because like, I think to a certain degree, you could potentially... like, not a massive multiplayer online. But like, I could see the blurring of like, life sim, RPG, and MMO. Of like, that's kind of where animal crossing sits. So let's—

Teresa: So let's—okay. I don't know a lot of video games. I know the big ones, though. Warcraft.

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: That is... World of Warcraft. That's an MMO RPG.

Travis: Correct.

Teresa: Right?

Travis: Yes. A massive multiplayer online roleplaying game.

Teresa: Great. So this isn't that.

Travis: Well, it's not massive.

Teresa: Animal Crossing is not massive, 'cause you can only have eight people on your island at once, right?

Travis: So yeah. So, just to give us a starting off point, right? So we're not getting too into the weeds right here at the beginning. The basic concept of the current iteration of Animal Crossing, which is Animal Crossing, colon, New Horizons, is that you are building an island. Uh, populating it with other characters. And then...

Teresa: Non-playable characters.

Travis: Non-playable characters. And then, real life people can come visit your island, and you can go visit theirs. And that's like, the building blocks of it. So that's where like, the social aspect of it comes from.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: Let's talk about the history of it.

Teresa: You know I looove the history. I'm in it.

Travis: I know. This was submitted by... now, uh, once again, thank you so much. We could not have done this episode without Alex, our researcher.

Now, Alex has included the name Hannah, "Molly" in quotes, Ellen. So maybe Molly is a nickname? I'll have to look that up. Um, so, here is how it goes. Also, big thank you. A lot of this information comes from Jordan Allman's article, 'The Weird and Wonderful World of Animal Crossing' on Polygon.com. Polygon.com has a lot of McElroy DNA, so I'm a fan. [laughs]

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Okay, so! The game, Animal Crossing, as we know it... uh, this New Horizons is not the first one. There have been many iterations of it. The game—

Teresa: Wasn't it kind of like... it was like a farming game?

Travis: Well, yeah. It's always kind of been a farming simulator to some degree. Because you might be thinking of Stardew Valley, which is a farming game.

Teresa: Ahh, yes. Yes.

Travis: Um, that shares—has a lot of similarities with, um... with Animal Crossing, but I think Animal Crossing focuses way more on the social than Stardew Valley does.

Teresa: Okay. Please continue.

Travis: Uh, the first Animal Crossing game appeared in Japan in April of 2001. But at that point, it was called Animal Forest, and debuted on the Nintendo 64, which is one of my top three favorite consoles ever.

Let me just say, this is a good point to reference this – there is going to be a lot of what I would call 'opinion' throughout this, as we discuss like, whether this Animal Crossing game worked or didn't work, and y'know, how popular it was. This is just kind of, uh, like I said, opinion and not fact. So if you're listening to this, and you're like, "What? I thought New Leaf was great!" Or whatever. Totally cool. You're allowed to think that. We're just talking about the overall arcing opinion of it.

So, the thing that makes Animal Crossing unique and makes it work is, that it has a real time clock. And what that means is, pretty much like what it sounds like. As you're playing, time is passing in the game at the same speed that it is passing in real life.

Teresa: What about when you're not playing?

Travis: Same. So like, if I pick up the game, and it is nine AM where I am, it is nine AM in my game. And if I set down the game at ten AM and pick it back up at noon, it is noon in the game. Right?

Teresa: Okay, but what about... so like... if—do—does the island—does the thing...

Travis: Does time continue to pass if I'm not on it?

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Yes. Yes it does.

Teresa: Oh! Okay.

Travis: And this is what allows the game to feel, I think, feel unique in the way it does, right? Because what this does for the game is, it makes it not about beating it. Right? This is not like, "Well, I'm gonna sit down and play nonstop for 12 hours and beat the game." This game is all about – and here's another Nintendo, or like, video game industry term – loops. Right?

And so, what that means is, the loop of activities you do, of like, uh... every day in Animal Crossing, you do this thing. Right? Because it resets every day. And then you check back in the next day to do that same loop again. Right? And instead of—

Teresa: So like, shake your fruit trees.

Travis: Right. Harvesting fruit, watering flowers, these things that you can do every day, but not like, "Well, I'm going to do this whole cycle of something as fast as I can." Things are on a schedule, right?

Teresa: Okay. Okay.

Travis: And so, um, Animal Forest didn't make it to America in—at least, not in the form it was there, because the Nintendo 64 here in America didn't have the disc drive that was introduced for the Japanese version, that allowed for the real time clock. Right?

And like I was talking about, this, uh—the real time clock allowed you, not only to do things like plant, y'know, plant flowers, and then the next day, they were buds, and the next day, they were fully grown.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: It also allowed for things like developing relationships with the AI non-playable characters, where they'd say like, "Oh, good to see you again!" Or like, "I haven't seen you in a couple days!" Right? So they would actually reference things that had really, like, happened or passed.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: Or like, "I wanted to say thank you for that thing you did!" Right? Like, it actually was happening sequentially. And more than that, it allowed for the game to do things like recognize when it was an actual real-world holiday, and have different things happen.

Teresa: Ah, yes! I remember while you were playing this spring, there was egg day.

Travis: And there was also like, y'know, cherry blossom petals blowing through the air at one point in spring, and like... yeah, exactly. These holidays happen. These time of year, like, having like—the leaves will turn, y'know, autumn brown and stuff. And like, there will be snow on the ground during winter and stuff like that.

Teresa: So does it know where you're playing? 'Cause like—

Travis: Well, on your Switch, you set—well, I mean, whatever your system is, you have a...

Teresa: You set it. Because, in Australia, they have a totally different, like, the seasons are opposite. Yeah.

Travis: Right. And that's a whole thing I could talk about forever, about the system they have set up of like, fish and bugs that are only there for certain

months, even, and then like, it's different in the different hemispheres, whether you're in the northern hemisphere or the southern hemisphere. It's a very cool game.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And so, then, to get back to the timeline, in uh, late December of 2001, Animal Forest was renamed Animal Crossing and arrived in North America in late 2002, and in Europe in 2004, and now had like, western holidays incorporated into the game and everything. And it came out for the GameCube. And it was a hit.

Teresa: Oh, the cube.

Travis: The GameCube, yes.

Teresa: You McElroys have a love affair with the cube. The GameCube, don't you?

Travis: Yeah, we have many. I'm pretty sure that we have, at some point, owned every system that has come out, like, since the Atari, I'm pretty sure. Including like, Sega CD.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: So... the game has not changed that much in the 20 years. There's been different—don't get me wrong, there's wildly different aspects of it. But the basic conceit of like, you arrive in a place, you purchase like, a house from Tom Nook, who I'll talk about later. And then, you interact with your environment to pay off that house, and to kind of shape the world around you.

Teresa: Alright.

Travis: We have seen a lot of the same, like, things about it. But that original, that 2001 Animal Forest slash Animal Crossing, it didn't have the

same kind of magic, I think, that later iterations do. And I think that that was because it lacked the social aspect, right?

Teresa: Okay, so it wasn't always a, uh, buddy game.

Travis: Yeah. Not only like, with real life people, but also like, with non-playable characters, too.

Teresa: Oh, okay.

Travis: There just wasn't as much interaction of it, and like, there was kind of a... almost like a wacky waving arm inflatable tube man that like, hung out outside your house, that you did a lot of the like, go between interact—like, you would give him stuff to send to your neighbors, instead of having a direct interaction, and that kind of stuff.

Teresa: Ohh.

Travis: And so, it didn't feel... the same. It was still lovely, but I don't think it felt as immersive as the later games.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: And so, enter Katsuya Eguchi. And I apologize, there's going to be a lot of Japanese names throughout this episode, and I'm gonna do my best.

Uh, so, we have Eguchi to thank for Animal Crossing's, like, love in our hearts, where it lives. Katsuya was just 21 years old when he moved to Nintendo's Kyoto offices to work on the game, and Kyoto is far away from his childhood home. And so, this pilgrimage across the country meant that he had to like, say goodbye to everyone he had known.

And so, this led directly to this focus, uh, when he was working on Animal Crossing, of the importance of spending time with your community.

Teresa: Okay, which is why you need to check in with everybody in your town.

Travis: Right. And not just in your town, but like, invite others over, this connection between, really fostering that neighborhood feeling, even outside your own—the only, like, boundaries of your space.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: And so, the game was this like, very low-key, y'know, like, play it when you feel like it. [laughs] And so like, y'know, the developers were very nervous before the launch of like... are people gonna want to play this game, or is it gonna be boring? But, like, even before the like, Animal Crossing: New Horizons, which has been incredibly popular, it had sold well over 30 million copies. Like, throughout Animal Crossing iterations, well over 30 million copies.

And then, uh, Animal Crossing: New Horizons sold like another 14 million already.

Teresa: Whoa!

Travis: So it has been very popular. Um, and so, once again, the games have not really changed that wildly. A lot of like, set dressing has changed. A lot of elements have changed. But they're very, very similar, and one of the biggest changes didn't even come from the game itself, but on the console you were playing it with. So instead of being the Nintendo 64 or the GameCube, which were tied to a TV, they started putting them on the 3DS and other mobile games.

Well, at the time, I guess it was just the Nintendo DS. But it was mobile. It was handheld. You could take it with you. And so, it made it a lot easier for these loops, where it's like, oh, I have to remember to check in, y'know, in the morning, 'cause there will be something that happens in the morning and the afternoon, 'cause something happens in the afternoon.

And instead of having to be at home, you could play with it if you were on the train to work, or a kid in the back seat on the way to school. Y'know

what I mean? Like, it provided a lot more flexibility in how you could play it.

And so, for a lot of people, many American gamers at least, this, uh... it was called Animal Crossing: Wild World, for the Nintendo DS, became like, their entry point for the game.

It also had increased villager AI, so the interactions became even more personal and nuanced, and you felt even more connection to it, and it added in stuff like, that we now consider, y'know, like, essential to the game, the slingshot and the watering can, and gave you even more ways to earn bells. Which is Animal Crossing money, to pay off your mortgage.

Teresa: Okay. I understand that the bells are the money analog. But what about the turnips?

Travis: Okay. We'll talk about—

Teresa: Are we—we'll talk about it?

Travis: We'll talk about that. Yeah.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: 'Cause the short answer is, the stock market. Okay. So, this was also—Wild World also introduced the ability to visit other people's islands. Or, at this point, it wasn't islands, but other people's, y'know, villages. Which, up until that point, had just been like, "Look at my game screen!" Right? But this was actually like, via Wi-Fi, you could go like, see their town.

Teresa: Oh, so even before that, you couldn't do it with like, a LAN party?

Travis: No.

Teresa: Ohh.

Travis: Um, and so, that, I think, once again, changed the game. Um, and so...

Teresa: I wonder if the kids understand—know what a LAN party is.

Travis: Eh, I don't know, who knows.

Teresa: You had to actually like, hook up your computers.

Travis: Yeah. It's not important. Connect it with cables. It was a thing.

Um, and so then, when the Nintendo Wii came out in 2008, Animal Crossing released a new one that is not... so beloved... called City Folk. Animal Crossing: City Folk. [laughs] Um... and it allowed you access to like, a larger city, and like, more shops, and... y'know, it just didn't really... grab people the same way. I think—

Teresa: It sounds a little less charming.

Travis: Yeah. I think it focused too much on like, other stuff. Like, here's an auction house where players can put things up for sale, and then, other people come... and it's like, okay, great, but that is less interaction. That's more—there's a barrier there. It's not face to face, and like, you're creating more economy, and there's like... it's less about the face to face. Um, and so, City Folk did not...

Teresa: Maybe that's the next one. Animal Crossing: Face to Face.

Travis: Yes. Face to face.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: But, what City Folk did, is because like, I think that was kind of their first big misstep that kind of got pushback... it made Nintendo realize that they needed to be a lot more careful with the Animal Crossing brand. They needed to take it more seriously. They needed to work harder to develop that kind of interconnectivity of personalities, and make people feel more connected to it.

Now, it still sold. Um, and it introduced distributed items. City Folk did. And distributed items was like, um... y'know, like you said, right? For egg day this year in Animal Crossing: New Horizons, you got like, here's some egg stuff. Right? That you were just given.

Teresa: Like an egg chair.

Travis: Right. Items—seasonal specific items, right? That you were given to kind of make it feel more like it was part of the deal. So then, five years later, in 2013, Nintendo released Animal Crossing: New Leaf. Now, this game was huge. Right? Everybody loved it.

Now, I will say, to give insight... aside from Animal Crossing: New Horizons, New Leaf was the only game I played. And I was instantly bored by it.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: It just wasn't my style of game, and where I was at in my life, I did not have the time for a life sim. And—

Teresa: I'm trying to think... where was I in 2013?

Travis: We—I was working at CSC, like, 100-hour weeks.

Teresa: Ah, yes. Yeah.

Travis: And I just did not have time to play the game.

Teresa: So then, at that point, I had three jobs.

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: And you had one job that had enough time for three. [laughs]

Travis: Yes. And so, there's a lot more to the game where like, you could build new structures, and added a lot more to the village life. Um, and y'know, extra responsibilities and all this stuff.

It also offered like, deeper ways of like, you... there was like, a club that you could go to to listen to music by KK Slider, who I'll talk about in a bit.

Teresa: Ooh!

Travis: And like, there was a place called the dream suite, where you could share patterns and visit friends. And like, it is... it was wildly popular. Cannot stress enough.

And this is also where they introduced another wildly popular character named Isabelle. Now, Isabelle has been called, quote, "the most important Shih Tzu in video game history." Uh, she is incredibly beloved, stylish, helpful. She, like, is in your town and will answer questions. Help you in the new Animal Crossing: New Horizons, like, make a flag for your village, and give you—

Teresa: What's her animal look?

Travis: She's a Shih Tzu. She's the dog in the beginning.

Teresa: Oh! Okay.

Travis: Like, after she joins your island, every day when you start the game for the first time, she'll come on and tell you like, announcements for the day.

Teresa: Okay. When you said Shih Tzu, I thought that that was another, like, video game term that I just didn't know. [laughs]

Travis: No! No, it's like a dog.

Teresa: [laughing]

Travis: Um, she's—

Teresa: That is a kind I am aware of. Okay. Got it. [laughing]

Travis: She's so popular, in fact, that she appears as a playable fighter character in Super Smash Brothers: Ultimate. Um, and so, then, between 2013 and 2020... y'know what? I'm gonna tell you more about this, but first, how about a thank you note for our sponsors?

Teresa: Let's go!

[theme music plays]

Travis: Sometimes in this mixed up world of ours, it can be almost impossible to decide what you want to have for dinner. So let me recommend to you Hello Fresh. You get fresh, pre-measured ingredients and mouth-watering, seasonal recipes delivered right to your door with Hello Fresh, America's number one meal kit.

There's something for everyone, including low calorie, vegetarian, and family friendly recipes every week. Hello Fresh's pre-portioned ingredients mean there's less prep for you and less food waste. Hello Fresh donated over 2.5 million meals to charity in 2019, and this year, is stepping up their food donations amid the coronavirus crisis.

It's great. I love the recipes. It's new stuff all the time. They're flavorful, they're incredible, and even Bebe likes them. So if you want to try them out, go to HelloFresh.com/80Shmanners and use code '80Shmanners' to get a total of \$80 off, including free shipping on your first box.

Additional restrictions apply. Please visit HelloFresh.com for more details. That's HelloFresh.com/80Shmanners.

I want to tell you about Bad Songwriter Podcast. You can listen to it wherever podcasts are found, and you can find them on Instagram @BadSongwriter.

Think of Bad Songwriter Podcast as a cross between Song Exploder and Mortified. Each episode features a different song writer who brings a few of their worst and most embarrassing old recordings for us to listen to and laugh about. We use that as a way to talk about the songwriting process, and each guest's music backstory and growth.

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[music plays]

Brea: Readers have a lot of problems.

Mallory: How do you juggle your holds at the library?

Brea: How do you decide what to read next?

Mallory: What do you do when you find out an author you love is a huge trash baby?

Brea: I'm Brea Grant.

Mallory: And I'm Mallory O'Mara.

Brea: And we're the hosts of Reading Glasses.

Mallory: We're here to solve all your reader problems, and along the way, help you figure out...

Brea: ... your reader wheelhouse.

Mallory: Which are the things that will absolutely make you pick up a book. Our listener favorites tend to be magic and a woman on a journey.

Brea: And also birds for some reason?

Mallory: Your reader doghouse...

Brea: Yeah, that's the things that'll make you avoid a book.

Mallory: Ugh, love triangles stress me out so much. Reading Glasses.

Brea: Every Thursday on MaximumFun.org.

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Mission Control: Rocket ship one, this is mission control. Come in.

Rocket Ship: This is rocket ship one. Go ahead.

Mission Control: Rocket ship, what's your status on MaxFunDrive? Shouldn't we have seen it by now?

Rocket Ship: Sorry about that, mission control. Turns out, I miscalculated. Current projected ETA for MaxFunDrive is... July 13th... but it looks different. It'll be for... four weeks, so it's longer than expected. But all readings point to... low key?

Mission Control: Oh, that'll be good. But can you verify that there are still special gifts for new and upgrading monthly members?

Rocket Ship: Verified. Sweet gifts for new and upgrading members, plus amazing new episodes, and even special weekly live streams for charity.

Mission Control: Copy that. Rocket ship, can you confirm ETA for MaxFunDrive?

Rocket Ship: Mmm, 90% probability of MaxFunDrive from July 13th to August 7th.

Mission Control: Did you say 90%?

Rocket Ship: There were a couple of decimal places, and I might have carried a zero wrong—

Mission Control: I'm just gonna pencil in July 13th to August 7th. Mission control out.

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Travis: So, we're still, uh, in a window of time between 2013 and 2020. And that's when New Leaf came out, and then, Animal Crossing: New Horizons. So in that seven year period, there were spinoffs. And I call them spinoffs, because they were not full versions of the game. They were like, we're gonna narrow down and focus on like, this one aspect, so you have something to play with. They were like, games for your phone.

Teresa: Like mini games?

Travis: Yeah, sort of, right? So for example, one of the games, the ones that I think of the spinoff was probably most, uh, popular, was called Happy Home Designer. And it was just, like... island residents telling you how they want their home interior decorated, and you would do that, right? So it didn't have any of the like, planting stuff, or fruit, shops, like, building your house... any of that. It was just like, the decoration part of it.

Teresa: Hmm.

Travis: And so, it was popular, but it was not like... a whole thing. They also, during this time, introduced Amiibo integration into New Leaf. Okay. So...

Teresa: And that's not a type of dog.

Travis: That is not a type of dog. This is a thing that, even if you know about video games, is like kind of one more step niche than that. So...

Teresa: Than dogs?

Travis: Than dogs.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Than Nintendogs. No, so, Nintendo introduced this thing, uh, called Amiibos. And basically, they're like, little figurines of characters, or in some cases, like, objects from video games. Right? But they also integrated with the Wii, where you could like, set them on the Wii, and it would like, read a chip that was in the Amiibo. And then, it would give you items in the game, or characters in the game, or bonuses or whatever. Right?

Teresa: Ohh.

Travis: So the thing that Nintendo has always excelled at is accessorizing their games. Right? Accessorizing their consoles, giving you stuff to put with the thing, right? And so, this was like, their thing. And y'know what? I think for the people who loved it, they loved it. I never got into it, but I also never really got that far into the Wii. And so...

Teresa: I feel like it was about this point where like... I became aware of one of those games with that, where it was like, the two little figures, and you had two, like, you could make them Street Fighter each other in the game, or they were...

Travis: Yes. I mean, that sounds like a thing. [laughs] There's something in there that sounds like a real thing that existed.

Teresa: There's something in there. [laughs]

Travis: But what it did with this Amiibo integration is now, like, three plus years after the game came out, it was another thing to say like, hey, maybe you haven't checked in in a while. Here's some new items to add to the game from like, other popular games. Right? Here's a Splatoon Amiibo that,

if you use with the game, you now have like, Splatoon themed furniture in your game. Right?

So, the thing that – and we've already seen this with Animal Crossing: New Horizons over and over again – another thing that Nintendo does very well is to constantly give you new things to keep coming back to Animal Crossing. So it's not a game you beat. It's like a game you play and play and play and play and play.

Teresa: It's a game you live.

Travis: It is a game you live! Yes! Yes! Yes. Okay. So...

Teresa: Oh, should we TM that?

Travis: TM TM TM. Um, so, then, 2020 brings Animal Crossing: New Horizons. So, I will talk about the like, actual game itself. But there's an episode of, uh, The Besties, which is a podcast that Justin and Griffin McElroy, as well as Russ Frushtick and Chris Plante do, where they talk about video games. It's on Spotify, and I highly recommend it. It's one of my favorite podcasts.

Teresa: It is explicit, though.

Travis: It is explicit. Um, but they do a whole episode on Animal Crossing: New Horizons. And Justin posits, and I concur, that Animal Crossing: New Horizons may be one of, if not the most important video games of all time. And his explanation of this is that... Animal Crossing: New Horizons came out March 20th, 2020. Which, for me, uh, was less than a week after full-blown self-isolation quarantine began.

And so, it immediately saw a huge surge in popularity. It also was the first Animal Crossing that you could like, download directly to your system without having to go and like, buy the, y'know, buy the... and I mean, full-fledged game, because the mobile games, of course, you could do this. But like, without having to go buy a cartridge or anything. Just download it directly, right? So you could instantly be playing the game.

Teresa: I mean, it was like—it was just like streaming media.

Travis: Right. Exactly. And I think that... we were feeling, at that point, and still are, this isolation from everyone. And so, to be able to say like, "Come visit my island and we'll hang out and have a phone call and talk about it while we're like, running around, and I can show you what I've been working on." Like, to some degree, filled in a percentage of the like, "I wish I could have friends over." Right?

Teresa: Yeah!

Travis: "I wish I could go over to my friend's house." And more than that, Justin also points out that in *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*, you feel an immense amount of control of the world around you, right?

You're making the design choices not only for your house, but the exterior of your house, and the island, and other people's houses, and like... it came at a time where I think everyone was feeling a lot of loss of control. And so I think, psychologically, it did a lot for people. That the game came out when it did.

So, let's talk about the actual game, *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*.

Teresa: Let me give you my non-player... well, I played—

Travis: You played a little bit!

Teresa: I played a little bit. My take of watching you play a game.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Okay. So... this—and this is one of your favorite things.

Travis: I do. I love when you describe video games.

Teresa: I did this with *Bioshock... Infinite*?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Yeah. Anyway. So, what it is is... you move to an island, and Tom Nook is the landlord, and the council person. He's in charge. He's in charge of the island. You move there, and he says, "Okay, you want a house? You gotta get—you gotta learn how to make stuff. You gotta get stuff and give it to me. And once you get enough stuff, I'll give you a house."

Travis: Mm-hmm. So far, so good.

Teresa: And then... so far, so good. And you can like, go fishing and get fruit and bugs and stuff to get more stuff, to make more stuff, and there's just... stuff and stuff. And then, you can build a mu—Tom Nook gives you a museum to put more stuff in, and then you can make a bigger house, and you can store more stuff, and then you can sell stuff, and you can buy stuff, and there's just so much... stuff.

And then, once you've gotten enough stuff – but you never get enough stuff – you have to make more room on your island for more stuff, so you can become like a... construction person? And you just get more stuff.

Travis: The way—okay, the more you describe it, the more it sounds like a person, like, having a break. Having a breakdown.

Teresa: [laughs] This—but, okay. And that's just your track, right? Because there are other things that live on the island. And you get stuff for them, and do more stuff, and then, you can have other people come over and trade stuff, and you can make stuff together.

Travis: Okay. That's pretty good. I feel like you missed a few of the nuanced points.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Okay, so here's what it is. And you hit a lot of the big points.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: Okay. So you—you are given a tent by Tom Nook that you then have to pay off the mortgage on, and as you pay off the mortgage, you can then upgrade it to a bigger house, until you reach the biggest size of house.

Teresa: 'Cause he's the island landlord.

Travis: Landlord, yeah. Um, so, a lot of the game comes into design. Right? Um, like, how you design the inside of your house. You have different rooms that you can put different things into. How you design your island. Where you plant trees. Where you plant flowers. But also, where you put up like, uh, different decorations.

You can craft things, which is new for Animal Crossing: New Horizons. Um, there's shops that you build that have different stuff in them every day. So basically, the game rewards you for checking in multiple times.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: The shops have different stuff in them every day. There are different times of day that you catch different kinds of fish. Your fruit takes three days to grow on the tree. Uh, a tree takes three days to grow. Plants take three days to blossom. You have to water your flowers every day if you want them to grow new flowers. Stuff like that, right?

So another thing from Besties... they called it Chores: The Game.

Teresa: Uh-huh. Okay. Yeah.

Travis: Which is not far off, but it's very satisfying. And it all has this wonderfully cute aesthetic, and like, there is like, no conflict on the island.

Teresa: There's... there's—sometimes, the other people on the island are cranky.

Travis: Yeah, sometimes they're cranky, or you might get chased by a spider or stung by a wasp. And that's about as bad as it gets. And even then, you get stung by a wasp? You just kind of wake up somewhere else and you're fine.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Um, and so, it's a very peaceful game. Um, and—

Teresa: And you generally look pretty peaceful, except when you're terraforming, and you press the button to shovel instead of build.

Travis: Yeah. Yeah, that is frustrating. Um, so...

Teresa: [laughs] Or you let go of a fish.

Travis: Yeah, or I let—ugh. Then... ooogh. Ooh, my dander. How it's up. And there's a lot more—like, a lot more people can visit your island. Like, people have been having – and this is not a joke – like Animal Crossing weddings. Right? Where like, they will host the wedding on their island. Like, real ones. Not just like, for fun. Like, in this time of isolation, being able to do that. There's concerts.

Teresa: I thought you could only have eight people on your island, though.

Travis: Yeah, I mean, it's not a big wedding. But it's bigger than they were able to have in like, March or April otherwise.

Teresa: I guess that's true.

Travis: So let's talk about some of the characters. Talked about Isabelle. Another—there's lots of NPCs, island residents, that appear on different islands. There's tons of them. Like, 400 of them.

Teresa: Oh wow!

Travis: Right? Of different iterations of people who can live in the houses. But there are some that are like... everybody had that come standard, right? You have Isabelle, which we talked about. There is also KK Slider, who is a guitar-playing dog, who is a famous musician, who, early in the game—

Teresa: Oh! He has been giving concerts in front of your town hall.

Travis: Correct. Um, early in the game, you're trying to like, make your island fancy enough that he wants to come visit and play there. And also, like, you get all these different kinds of like, songs in all different styles by him that you can play on different, like, musical playing devices across your island.

And then there's also Tom Nook.

Teresa: Mm-hmm, he's the landlord.

Travis: Yes. So, here's the thing about Thomas Nook. [laughs]

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Um, Tom Nook gets a bad rep. Now, early days, he was a little bit gruffer in some of the earlier games than he is now. But people often like, talk about him being like, money hungry, and like... y'know, uh, tight-fisted landlord or whatever. But here's the thing... one, you get this mortgage with like, no interest. And the terms are kind of like, pay it back when you can. [laughs]

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Like, it's not—it's maybe the loosest kind of mortgage there is. Is it super expensive? Yeah. But like... and does he ask you to maybe do some things for him, like help him build houses for other people, and you have to pay to build the houses for other people? Yeah. But... you don't *have* to, like... it's not costing you anything in real life.

I think that's another thing that is really, really amazing about Animal Crossing, by the way, is in a lot of games where there's stuff like... you can get new designs, or like, look at this cool shirt, a lot of that is called like, in-game purchases or DLC that you have to pay for, like, real world money for.

Teresa: Oh!

Travis: Yeah. Where it's like, oh, you want this new cool shirt? Cool! It's five dollars. Right? Where...

Teresa: Oh, okay. So not just like an expansion, where you just—you buy the extra game.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: That comes with the game.

Travis: Sometimes it's like, "Oh, you want this themed outfit to make you look like Santa Claus? Cool, that's ten bucks." Right? And in Animal Crossing, you harvest fruit and sell it to get that. Like, it costs you no... there is no in-game purchases.

Teresa: All it costs you is time.

Travis: Time! Which you're playing anyways. It's fun. And so, Tom Nook, uh, isn't like a loan shark or anything. He's very nice. Now, here's the thing – he's often called a raccoon here in the North American... the North American area? I don't know. [laughs]

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Uh, but actually, he is a tanuki. Tanuki is a Japanese creature. In traditional Japanese folklore, tanukis are strongly associated with wealth, because metal smiths used tanuki pelts to soften their hammer when they were working with gold.

Teresa: Mmm.

Travis: So like, you'll see a lot of like, shops have like, tanukis in front of them for like, y'know, to symbolize good business. And so if you see Tom Nook... tanuki...

Teresa: Ah!

Travis: Like, it's connected there. Um, so, also, tanukis are tricksters. Not evil, but mischievous. Like, there are several legends that feature them, um, changing form to play practical jokes on humans. Most notably, turning leaves into gold, spending them, and then they turn back into leaves.

Teresa: Aww!

Travis: Which is interesting, because in the game, the items you get are leaves. Like, you pick up leaves, and then they turn into items.

Teresa: [gasp] Yeah!

Travis: Yeah. Um, but he's not like, the bad guy, y'know? He's just there running the island.

Teresa: Is there... a bad guy?

Travis: No. I mean, maybe capitalism. [laughs]

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: If you want to look at it that way. Um, so, that's kind of giving you an idea of the game. If it at all sounds up your alley, and you already have a Switch, I highly recommend you check it out. Like, it's fun to play, but more than that, like, I went... and like I said, I did not get hooked by New Leaf like I did with this one, where like, I could not put it down.

And not just because the loops are fun. The fishing is fun, exploring is fun, going to other people's islands is fun... the interior design, and like, restyling things, and like—you get a new, like, decoration, and then you redesign

everything around that one piece. That, to me, is some of the most like, satisfying, like, gameplay of a video game I've ever played.

But let's talk about...

Teresa: It feels like setting up your dollhouse.

Travis: Yeah, very much so! I mean, this is—it feels like setting up my GI Joes, and My Little Pony, and toys used to feel like when I was a kid, of like, “Oh, I got a new toy! Now they're in space!” Y'know?

Teresa: Yeah. And like, I remember, I played a lot with Barbies. And I was never really into like, the roleplaying as the Barbie, but I loved like... my Barbie is having a dinner party! And then I would spend hours setting up like, setting a table with all the tiny Barbie stuff.

Travis: Absolutely. Um, so, let's talk about some etiquette. And I'll explain a little bit more, 'cause I know I haven't explained the turnips yet.

Y'know what? I'm gonna explain turnips right now.

Teresa: Okay. Do turnips.

Travis: So, basically, the way turnips work is, it is a system called... a-hem-hem-hem... the *stalk* market.

Teresa: Ahh!

Travis: S-T-A-L-K. Basically what it is, on Sundays, you can buy turnips from somebody who comes and visits your island, and they are at a set price, somewhere between like, 90 and 100 bells. Which, once again, is money.

So uh, say it's like, “I'm selling turnips for 92 bells a turnip.” Right? So you say, “Okay, great. I'll take 100.” So now you have just spent... nine thousand bells on these turnips. Right? 90 times 100. 92—whatever. 9,200.

So then, for the next six days, Monday through Saturday, the shops both on your island and on your friends' islands will buy the turnips back. But here's the thing – maybe it's for more money than you spent on them. So you spent—bought them for 92 bells a turnip, and they're buying them for 120 bells a turnip. Ah, profit increase!

But maybe they're buying them for way less than you spent. So you spent 92 bells a turnip, and they're only paying 50 bells a turnip. Oh no, huge loss. So you are like, waiting to see how the price changes, because it varies not just day to day, but in the morning versus the afternoon. You are contacting your friends and saying, "Hey, what are your turnips at? Can I come sell on your island?"

Even more than that, there are turnip exchanges that have been set up online where you can find these forums of someone saying, "Okay, I have 500 bells per turnip selling on my island. If you come, you just have to give me ten percent of whatever you sell."

Teresa: Hmm!

Travis: And so, it is once again, another way to increase the social aspect of it. Along those same lines, different islands sell different kinds of flowers. So your island might have native cosmos and roses, and somebody else has like, lilies and tulips. So you say, "Come to my island and buy these flowers here, and then I'll go to your island and buy those flowers there."

Teresa: Well, so... but what about like, the whole supply and demand thing? What if like... okay.

Travis: What if somebody buys up all your stuff on your island?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Well, there's only some things that are like that. So like, in the shop, there will be specialized items that there is only one of, and if you buy that one thing, it's, y'know, out of stock for the day. So that—

Teresa: But it regenerates over night?

Travis: With a different item. The items change day to day in your clothing shop and your item shop. So that is, um... that is number one, uh, like... so. Number one tip. When you visit other people's islands, make sure to check out the shops! They will have different stuff in their shop on their islands than you will. But... don't buy anything that there is a limited supply of until you have checked with the person to make sure that it is cool.

Along those same lines, another tip – if someone is coming to visit your island, set up clear boundaries with them. Say like, "Hey, if you need any fruit, cool, but please don't like, harvest the rocks or the flowers." And there's also—what's really great is, you can have someone come visit your island. But if they aren't like, best friends in your best friend list, they can't use tools on your island. So it's another way for you to limit what they're able to do, what impact they're able to have on your island.

Teresa: Oh. So they could shake your trees and get your fruit...

Travis: But not cut them down.

Teresa: But not cut them down.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: What about, um... what is the etiquette around like, talking to a person who comes to your island? Isn't—so like, there's an in-game messaging system.

Travis: Yes. So, there's an in-game messaging system, which is very slow. There is actually a Nintendo, like, link app that you can put on your phone to use to type out messages, or to do voice chat, which I highly recommend, 'cause it's a lot smoother process. But when you visit someone's island, say hi to them. Y'know, let them know when you get there, like, "Hey, thanks for having me!" And say bye when you leave.

Teresa: Are islands just open? Can you go to anybody's island, or...

Travis: Good question. Uh, you cannot go to someone's island unless you are Nintendo Switch friends with them. And you...

Teresa: Okay. So it's like having the contact in your phone. You can't talk to them unless you have the contact.

Travis: Right. And then, you, as the island owner, you can choose to set your island as open. So anyone who is in your friends list can come to your island if they decide to. Or, you can set it up with a Dodo code – 'cause dodos are the ones who fly the planes in Animal Crossing: New Horizons – and if you have a Dodo code, only someone with the Dodo code can come visit your island.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: So if that's like... hey, you wanted to come and buy on my island. That's cool. I don't really want—like, I don't have time to host a bunch of people here, so I'll send you this Dodo code, and then you can come, and that'll be it.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: Now, it is important – here's another tip – do not share friend codes and Dodo codes without permission with other people. So if it's like, oh, your friend Josh is like, "Hey, I have turnips to sell." And you're like, "Oh cool, Travis' island has them for, y'know, 500. Here's his Dodo code," without asking me? Not cool.

Teresa: Ahh, yeah.

Travis: Don't do that.

Teresa: It's like inviting someone over to not your house.

Travis: Exactly. Um, because there are ways that people can mess up your island, even if they're not friends with you. One of those – and this is... man,

this might sound nitpicky, but it's really important. Don't sprint through flowers. Walking through flowers is fine, but if you're holding the sprint button, as you run through, it'll tear the heads off the flowers.

Teresa: Ohh.

Travis: And then it'll take like, another three days for them to regrow. So that is not a cool thing to do.

Teresa: Oh, okay.

Travis: Um, don't leave and return multiple times in a short time span, unless you have communicated that with the person. Because every time you arrive or depart from the island, there's like a loading screen that interrupts everyone who's on the island.

Teresa: Oh!

Travis: So if you're like, jumping back and forth, it's a huge time suck.

Teresa: And maybe if you were in the middle of catching a butterfly...

Travis: Yes, right? It can be very frustrating. Um, water everyone's flowers, because a guest watering your flowers will increase the chances that they crossbreed. Which, if you plant different color of the same flowers close to each other, there are different combinations where they will grow new colors of flowers, and having guests water them increases the chances—

Teresa: As opposed to you watering them?

Travis: Yeah. I mean, it all stacks. So like, I water them, you water them, and two other people watering them, that has increased the chances exponentially that they will crossbreed.

Teresa: Ahh! Okay.

Travis: Um... so, uh, also, if you have duplicates of things, items, recipes to build items, clothes, anything like that... before you sell them for like, no money whatsoever, or before you sell them outright, check and see if your friends need `em. It might be an item that they've been searching for, and maybe you can trade. Um, y'know—

Teresa: Is it just like going to someone's house, where like, you leave the host a gift? Do you leave people—

Travis: I highly recommend that. If you're gonna go to someone's... like, especially if you're doing turnip sales, or you're going shopping or whatever, I try to bring something to leave. Um, some people prefer money. That's fine. Leave that. But most of the time, I try to leave like, "Oh, I have two hot dog costumes. I'll leave this hot dog costume for you." Right?

Teresa: Okay, okay.

Travis: But also like, there are... so like, every day, you can dig up three fossils, or four... some number of fossils. Uh, and eventually, as you fill up your museum with fossils, you'll start to get a lot of repeat fossils. See if any of your friends need them. They can be hard to come by.

Um, let's see... don't, like, rearrange stuff on your friend's island. Don't take things. Don't do—like, without asking. I mean, even if somebody has like, an area set up where it's like, "Free stuff!" Right? At the very least, say like, "Is it cool if I look through your free stuff?" Or whatever. Like, be—be cool.

Also know that, if people are on your island, using your internet... if your system goes to sleep, it will disconnect them.

Teresa: Oh, okay!

Travis: So you need to be careful with that, that you're not like, booting people off with like, no notice.

Teresa: Which is—okay. That's why you made a sign that said "I'm not here."

Travis: Right.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: Yeah. I made a little sign. Someone was like, "I need to come visit." And I'm like, cool. I'm not here. And I'll just stand next to the sign that says "I'm not here."

Teresa: But you left your console on.

Travis: Correct.

Teresa: Logged in, so that other people could use it.

Travis: Yep.

Teresa: Okay, okay.

Travis: So that's just like, a few like, general tips. I mean, the number one thing is like, if someone comes to visit your island, make it clear, like... be sure to check out this, please do this, please do not mess with this.

Teresa: Yeah, set your boundaries. I like it.

Travis: And vice versa, right? Like, if you go to visit someone else's island, don't do anything major without asking. Like fishing, for example. Doesn't matter. Right? There is not a limited number. It's constantly respawning. You can fish all you want to. It does not affect the host's ability to fish.

But... harvesting fruit, if you harvest fruit, it will take three days for that fruit to regrow.

Teresa: Ohh!

Travis: And so, you don't know what they're waiting for, right? So like, anything that is... y'know, picking flowers. Chopping things down. This is a major one that is, I think, an easy like, first-timer mistake to make. In the game, if you eat fruit, it gives you like, super strength for like, one thing, right? So one fruit equals one time of super strength.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: So that might be digging up a fully-grown tree, and being able to replant it, right? But it is also... there are rocks on your island that you can hit with a shovel, or um... oh no, it's been too long—or an axe. And it will give you like, uh, different kinds of materials from it. But if you have super strength when you hit it, you'll smash the rock. And it will regrow the next day, but it may regrow in a different area, or y'know... it's not cool. Don't smash people's rocks on their island.

So make sure, before you do anything, you check to see if you uh, y'know, have some of that super strength going, so you don't smash someone else's rocks.

Teresa: Um, but you can't, like, seriously mess with someone's island because of the game parameters, right? You can't like, terraform their island.

Travis: No, you can't terraform, but you can like, dig up their stuff and like, make big holes. There's a—[laughs] This is where I did it to mess with Griffin.

Teresa: Oh, okay.

Travis: There was a fun, uh, video where Griffin did a walkthrough of his island, and Justin and I came over, and were like, digging up his trees while he tried to chase us around and like, fill in holes, and we were planting trees. It was... it was some brotherly shenanigans.

Teresa: But it was for the...

Travis: For the `gram.

Teresa: For the—[laughs]

Travis: For the `tube.

Teresa: For the likes.

Travis: So that's just some—some basics, y'know? Um, if you want to see my island on the McElroy YouTube channel, uh, I do—I have a tour or two of Cool Town on there, and Griffin has a couple tours of his island, Beantown, I believe it's called. Um, you can check those out. And check out all the other McElroy videos! Oh, we're in—we're in the outro!

Uh, so next week starts the MaxFunDrive. It's gonna be low presh, running for a month. If you can support, we appreciate it. If you can't, we totally understand. You'll get all the details next week, but know that the URL to become a member is MaximumFun.org/Join.

Teresa: And know that we're still gonna do some cool stuff for you.

Travis: Indeed we will. Uh, next week is also when The Adventure Zone graphic novel book three, *Petals to the Metal* comes out! It's very exciting. I can't wait for you all to read it! I think you're really gonna like it. You can order it at TheAdventureZoneComic.com, if you haven't already.

Teresa: We got a couple of advance copies, and Bebe is in love.

Travis: Yeah. Bebe like, takes it to bed with her. It's great.

Um, let's see... also—oh! This weekend, if you're listening to this on the 12th, July 12th, I'm going to be doing a live stream D&D session with me, Alex Boniello, Andrew Barth Feldman, Will Roland, Satine Phoenix, Matt Mercer, and Erika Ishii playing *Dungeons & Dragons* to raise money for a group called I Need Diverse Games.

We've already raised money through this event called Supporting Rolls for Actor's Fund and Feeding America. Uh, it's going to be super fun, on Twitch, check it out. I believe it's Twitch.tv/SupportingRolls.

Uh, also, on the 17th, we're doing a live stream event for the graphic novel release. We're gonna be doing a Q&A, and we're gonna be like, reading some of the pages. It's gonna be super fun. That's gonna be on the McElroy YouTube channel. [fake pants] That's so much.

Teresa: Ooh. We're workin'.

Travis: Too busy. Let's see, what else, Teresa? Who do we normally thank?

Teresa: We always thank Brent "Brental Floss" Black for writing our theme music, which is available as a ringtone where those are found. Also, thank you to Kayla M. Wasil for our Twitter thumbnail art. When we call for questions for our topics, that's where we ask for them, @ShmannersCast.

And then, also, thank you to Bruja Betty Pinup Photography for the background picture of our fan-run Facebook group. Join that group if you love to give and get excellent advice from other Shmanners Fanners. Haaa.

Travis: Yeah, I get it.

Teresa: That's the name of the group. Shmanners Fanners. Anyway. Um, also, please submit your topic requests to ShmannersCast@gmail.com! That's where we got this topic.

Travis: Yep! And I believe that's gonna do it for us, so join us—oh! Once again, I said it earlier, but I'll say it again. Thank you, Alex, our researcher. Wouldn't be able to do this without you. Also, your copy was very fun for this one. Thank you very much.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Alright, that's gonna do it for us! Join us again next week.

Teresa: No RSVP required.

Travis: You've been listening to Shmanners.

Teresa: Manners, Shmanners! Get it!

[theme music plays]

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