

Wonderful! 162: Hydropunk Cowboys

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[theme music plays]

Rachel: Hi, this is Rachel McElroy.

Griffin: Hello, this is Griffin McElroy.

Rachel: And this is Wonderful!

Griffin: Ho ho ho, clump clump clump! Santa Claus up on the roof! What's he got for ya? Come down chimney. It's a new podcast episode. Wrapped it up in a big box, and I said, "You don't need that. It's sound." And he...

Rachel: He said, "Put the box to the left of the Menorah, which is also lit right now, because it is also Hanukkah!"

Griffin: Yeah, no, he brought us a Hanukkah podcast, too. It's weird, yeah. It's really—

Rachel: Seems like we shouldn't need Santa to bring us Hanukkah.

Griffin: Well, he's more of like a, uh, sort of Amazon, Zappos sort of, uh, delivery...

Rachel: [laughs] Drives around in an unmarked van.

Griffin: Etsy... yeah, he's doing all—they're keepin' him busy. Um, and here's the episode for you, and it's the one that we hope you enjoy, because... it's holidays! Look around! You can't deny it anymore. It's holidays.

Rachel: Yeah. It snuck up on me. Uh, it's next week. Y'know, Hanukkah... Hanukkah really took a lot of my attention.

Griffin: Yeah. We've been hitting Hanukkah real hard this year.

Rachel: We've been hitting Hanukkah hard this year, and then I looked at the calendar, and I said, "Oh wait, guess what's right around the corner?"

Griffin: Christmas is also next week, yes.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Uh, Henry's makin' out like a bandit. I don't hear any complaints from him.

Rachel: I don't know how we return to a life that doesn't involve a present every day.

Griffin: Every night, yeah.

Rachel: Uh, but we'll have to figure it out.

Griffin: My man is... basically like a vampire with the amount of the attention he applies to the setting of the sun. Because that is...

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: That means it's Hanukkah time, baby. Or, as my small wonder, Smokey Robinson, on that one Cameo would call it, "Chinuka." It's very powerful and very pure. If you have not seen that now viral tweet, it is a genuinely sweet story about Smokey Robinson, who... there's a way he says the word 'Hanukkah' that is altogether new, bold, and invigorating.

Rachel: I want to give him the benefit of the doubt and assume that that was just a spelling he was not familiar with.

Griffin: Sure, yeah.

Rachel: Uh, but...

Griffin: It hits—it hits hard.

Rachel: Pretty surprising. [laughs]

Griffin: Context clues, I think, would lead one in a certain way, but Smokey Robinson just barrels on through, and God bless him.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Uh, do you have a small wonderful?

Rachel: I want to talk about that vaccine rollout!

Griffin: That vaccine rollout! It's comin' toward you! But it's good. To come for you.

Rachel: [laughs] So many like, great pictures and videos of healthcare workers getting this vaccine, and people that are at very high risk of exposure getting this vaccine.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And it is... it's a nice way to kind of close out this terrible year. [laughs]

Griffin: There was a video of uh, like, a man in like his mid-80s in London, who was one of the first people to receive the vaccine in London. And he goes off on the best story ever. Like, "Yeah, I went in, and they had me wait a while, and they said, 'Okay, come back here in a little bit,' and so, I went out for a lunch. Just a terrible sandwich." Like, he goes so deep on his like, kind of okay day.

Rachel: [laughing]

Griffin: And he was like, "Yeah, and then I got it, and it didn't really hurt." Like, you fuckin' rule, man.

Rachel: [laughing] I have noticed that a lot of, y'know, the news media have been asking people to tell their story of getting the vaccine, and for anyone who has gotten a vaccine before, it is a, y'know, two-second process. So I imagine he was told to expand and really just enjoyed that process.

Griffin: Yeah, sure. That's very pure. Uh, you go first this week! What's on deck?

Rachel: Uh, so, my first thing, uh, is inspired by a few recent discoveries. It is the abandoned water park.

Griffin: Okay!

Rachel: So, we, months ago, when it first came on HBO Max, watched Class Action Park.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: Enjoyed it very much, and then watched it again.

Griffin: Mostly because of Chris Gethard, who is absolutely hysterical in that documentary.

Rachel: He makes the whole thing. If he weren't in it, I don't know if I would recommend it so heavily.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: And then, we watched it again when my parents came to town for Thanksgiving. And then, we uh... kind of stopped talking about it, and then, one of my friend's husband posted another abandoned water park.

Griffin: [gasps]

Rachel: That uh, he had been reading about, called Ebenezer Floppen Slopper's Wonderful Water Slides.

Griffin: Ho... ly... shit. What? What? What what what?! What?! One more time? Hit me again one more time with that.

Rachel: [laughs] Ebenezer Floppen Slopper's Wonderful Water Slides.

Griffin: Floppen Slopper's? This sounds like a fuckin' joke name that we would come up with.

Rachel: [laughs] Uh, thank you to my friends Amy and Patrick Dean for sharing this on social media so that I could find it. Uh, not intentionally for me. They mentioned that they have been singing this around their house in the style of Alexander Hamilton.

Griffin: [laughs] That's really good.

Rachel: Um, I don't know if you—if you had like, abandoned artifacts in your area that people would explore.

Griffin: Hmm.

Rachel: I remember hearing about this a lot when I was like, a teen, and there wasn't a lot you could do. Like, friends would go find like, old buildings and explore them.

Griffin: Oh, sure. I mean, West Virginia—there's a very famous abandoned asylum in West Virginia that all those like, ghost hunter shows, and the MTV fear show, I forget what it was called, all went to. My brothers went to it one time. I was always too young whenever they were venturing out to it.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: But yeah, I mean, we always had just a bunch of pseudo-abandoned stuff. Like, there was an Olympic pool that I think was like,

closed for a couple years, so folks would just break in there and run all—run all hither and yon.

Rachel: Yeah. So we had, in St. Louis, we had something called Wet Willy's.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Which was like, 16 acres of land, right near the Six Flags.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Like, right across the street, basically. And it was just one of those like, big, two concrete slide kind of places that just disappeared without a lot of fanfare, and sat vacant for a long time. I was looking, and I saw... there was a proposal to annex the area and turn it into a large office building in 2009. I don't know if that went through or not.

But I mean, that's the thing about a water park. Like, an old abandoned building, you can knock down and put up another building. Like, a water park is a lot of real estate.

Griffin: Yeah, sure.

Rachel: And a lot of like, construction that went into these very specific slides that you can't easily convert into like, an Arby's, y'know?

Griffin: Well, spiritually, also. Nobody wants to be in charge of the bulldozer that knocks over a big water slide. Like, what a fucking bummer that would be.

Rachel: Y'know what's interesting? So, back to Ebenezer Floppen Slopper...

Griffin: Please. Please take me back there.

Rachel: [laughs] So, I did some research on this water park. So, this was in Oakbrook Terrace, Illinois, near the intersection of route 38 and 83. So,

this was originally a gravel pit, and then a landfill in the '50s and '60s, known familiarly in the community as Mount Trashmore.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: When the landfill reached ground level, it was covered in concrete, and then left unused until the late '70s.

Griffin: Where they built a waterpark on top of it?

Rachel: Yeah, at which point, uh... so, this is the Robinette family that owned the Mount Trashmore. Mark Collor, who had a water slide in suburban Kansas City, was driving along the highway and saw the big hill, and signed an agreement with the Robinette family to build two water slides on the property.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Uh, the park's name came from a story Collor's brother-in-law had told him about meeting a man in Joplin, Missouri named Ebenezer Floppen.

Griffin: Oh, okay. So the 'slop' they just kind of tossed on there for funsies.

Rachel: Yeah, just to kind of keep the rhythm going, y'know?

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: So, the park opened in 1980 with two 800-foot concrete slides.

Griffin: You said that many times now, and I'm struggling with what that means exactly. Concrete water slides?

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: So you're just going down on concrete and water?

Rachel: Well, so there's a rubber mat involved.

Griffin: Okay. Still. Shit.

Rachel: This was true with Wet Willy's, too. You would be given a mat when you entered the park, and it was your responsibility to hold onto that mat.

Griffin: What fun! What fun this babysitting project... this school home economics project you've given me! Where, oh, and you're saying if the rubber mat goes out from under me while I'm on the slide, then *all* my skin comes off?

Rachel: Yes. [laughs]

Griffin: That's fun!

Rachel: Yeah. So, Ebenezer Floppen Slopper's Wonderful Water Slides...

Griffin: Oh my god. Every fuckin' time you say it, it's so—it's like the first time.

Rachel: [laughing] Uh, as I mentioned, opened in 1980. After two years, Collor sold the park, having paid for the installation costs. And then, in the '80s, they added five additional slides, and the slides were lined with blue rubber foam.

Griffin: Aww, these fuckin' participation trophy snowflaaakes!

Rachel: [laughing] Um... around 1987, they added, uh, like, various, like, what they call in the Wikipedia entry, humps and bumps...

Griffin: [laughing]

Rachel: And they incorporated the inner tube, and they renamed it Doc River's Roaring Rapids Water Park.

Griffin: Oh, snore! Are you kiddin' me?

Rachel: Uh, it closed in 1989. The site is still owned by the Robinettes, who operate a demolition business. Isn't that like... it must have sentimental value, because they have the equipment to tear it down.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: But it is still there, vacant. From what I can tell, there's—there's fully graffitied slides, and trees growing through them, and it just is there, and they just spend all their time trying to keep people out.

Griffin: I'm telling you, it's—they get in the bulldozer, they drive up to the big fun water slides, and they say, "I just can't do it. I just can't knock down this edifice of fun."

Rachel: [laughing] Um... Gosh, I don't know if they made Ebenezer Floppen Slopper's t-shirts, but how great would that be?

Griffin: Oh, I would—

Rachel: Gotta get on the eBay.

Griffin: We have to get on the eBay.

Rachel: [laughs] Um, I don't know if this is the reason for all of the demises of the water parks. I mean, there's a variety of reasons. Obviously, one is that they are incredibly dangerous.

Griffin: Yeah, we joked about the—Class Action Park references a water park slash car park action park... called Action Park in New Jersey.

Rachel: In New Jersey, yeah.

Griffin: The documentary is fun, because it's like, "Look at this hugely irresponsible place where all of these, y'know, uh, weathered New Jersians and New Yorkers would come to risk their lives." And you're like, oh, that's fun. And then people do eventually—there—there are fatalities, and then the movie gets significantly less fun. But yeah, I'd have to imagine, any water park that closes has something that happened.

Rachel: Well, and the other thing that happened... and I'm intimately familiar with this, because it uh, really started in St. Louis. But Six Flags started using its own brand to have their own water parks.

Griffin: Right, yeah.

Rachel: So Hurricane Harbor started in 1995, and then in 1999, Six Flags St. Louis was the first Six Flags park to construct its own inter-park water attraction.

Griffin: I feel like every place... for me, it was King's Island. King's Island had their own, like, water park section.

Rachel: Yeah. Yeah. Six Flags purchased existing water parks, and then in St. Louis, started building them, attached to their own. So that may be part of the reason they closed, too, as well, is like, y'know, this big huge chain that like, had all these protocols and infrastructure in place opened, and... if I'm a parent choosing which one to send my child to... [laughs]

Griffin: [laughs] Uh-huh, yeah. Yeah.

Rachel: Um, but yeah. So, that—I don't know. There's something—there's tons of these all over the world you can find online. Just these photos of these, like, relics. A particularly interesting one, Lady Delores Water Park. They rebranded so many times and used it for various events like raves, and skateboard competitions, and just trying to find ways to reuse these slides.

Griffin: That's amazing.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: That's so great. Um, can I tell you about my first thing?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: I have a question for you, first. Do you know anything about hackers? Like, can you jam with the console cowboys in cyberspace?

Rachel: [laughs] There it is.

Griffin: Have you ever read Neuromancer? Ever experienced the new wave? Next wave? Dream wave? Or cyberpunk? I didn't think so.

Rachel: I was not aware of this clip until I met you, by the way.

Griffin: This segment's not about the clip. It's about the, uh, cyberpunk genre. But god, I do love—that's Julia Stiles in, uh...

Rachel: Ghostwriter, right?

Griffin: In Ghostwriter, just really giving in an amazing performance. Everybody talks about that quote. They don't talk about the thing that comes next, where they're like, "How did you learn about this stuff, Julia Stiles?" And she's like, "In here. The internet, where they only judge you for your words and your thoughts, and not what you look like." Wow, damn Julia!

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: So, cyberpunk. There's a game that just came out called Cyberpunk 2077. That is not my wonderful thing, because the game is, uh, on virtually every level, an enormous mess. But, it did remind me that I do enjoy this genre a lot. Although, like, mea culpa, I also recognize that there is a lot of sort of toxicity that came out of the cyberpunk genre, because it is largely about... misanthropic dudes who become messianic figures because of their, like, computer know-how.

Rachel: Yeah, that's a minefield, right there.

Griffin: That's a minefield right there! Um, but there's a lot else about the genre, like its aesthetic and the concepts behind it, and the reason why it sort of came about that I find like, really, really interesting. Have you ever read anything like, uh... have you ever jammed with the console cowboys in cy...

Rachel: No, I—I—eh. I don't know. There's a certain kind of like, sci-fi that appeals to me, and it does not fall in that category.

Griffin: Yeah, it's interesting, because it is... cyberpunk was sort of created as a contrast to the sci-fi that had come about at that time. Like, the big sci-fi works that you got from like, Isaac Asimov, who did the I, Robot series, and he did Foundation, which was this huge – no pun intended – like, foundational space sci-fi series. And Dune. All of the many, many Dune books from Frank Herbert.

Um, but a lot of the times, whenever sci-fi authors would write about the future, it was viewed through like, a far future, outer space lens. Or, through a somewhat like, utopian lens. And cyberpunk was like, let's do the exact opposite, where it's on earth, near future, dystopia.

Rachel: Does The Matrix count as this?

Griffin: The Matrix absolutely counts as this. Matrix was informed by a lot of these formative like, cyberpunk works that I'm gonna talk about. But also, in a lot of ways, became a very important cyberpunk work.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I think you don't get quite as much as the aesthetic of like, the dystopian future world, as much as you get that like, weird robot apocalypse shit. But a lot of the concepts of like... consciousness, and that consciousness existing on the internet essentially is like, super, super, super The Matrix.

A lot of the concepts of cyberpunk are about how society is transformed through like, unchecked technological developments, and how corporations can sort of seize those as a means of like, taking control of literally every aspect of society. Which is, I think, an exaggerated version of what's actually happening a little bit.

Uh, and... so, the protagonists in these stories are often these like, antiheroes who are rebelling against these systems who—that have like, marginalized them and disenfranchised them, and sort of concentrated power into the hands of people who have taken advantage of these, like, technological developments. Which is where you get the punk in cyberpunk. It's like, never a cool, like, wealthy person who's like, doin' cool shit. It's always these punks who are trying to dismantle the system with their, y'know, technological know-how.

And the genre also leans a lot on like, film noir, and like, detective fiction things. And deals with stuff that had been dealt with in other, like, older sci-fi things like AI, and like, uh, altered consciousness and post-humanism. But it does all that stuff through a lens of like, it's 50 years from now, and it's in earth, and everything is super, super shitty.

So, the big inspirations for cyberpunk... there were two kind of big ones. Uh, Blade Runner, which was based—a film based on a Philip K. Dick short story. Have you ever seen Blade Runner? Either of them, I guess?

Rachel: No, I haven't.

Griffin: Oh, man. They're fuckin' cool movies. I don't even—I don't even love them a lot. But um, I think that they are so unique and so—like, you watch them and see how it is the bible for all of these different things that came after, and it's so rad.

And, as Ms. Stiles referenced, uh, Neuromancer by William Gibson, who was actually working on that book when Blade Runner came out. And he was like, "Well, shit. Everybody's gonna think I copied Blade Runner."

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And he almost didn't release the book. He was like, "This is going to ruin me. Everybody's gonna call me a plagiarist." So he rewrote the book like a dozen times, until he came out with it, still thinking like, "This is gonna suck!" And he put it up, and it became the like, Rosetta Stone for all cyberpunk fiction that came after it.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Like, to a weird extent, where anything else you read will have terminology that William Gibson like, established in *Neuromancer*. Things like flat line. Things as small as that, insisting they died. They flat lined. Like, cool cyberpunk shit like that is just, everybody aped it.

So much so that, my favorite cyberpunk book is by, um, Neal Stephenson, and it's called *Snow Crash*, which, in a lot of ways, is like a parody? Or like, a um... uh, what's the word? A satire on cyberpunk, because it goes so fucking wild in that direction.

I saw somebody refer to it as the um... uh, *Shaun of the Dead*, *Hot Fuzz*... the way that those movies have takes on genre, but at the same time, are very much, like, entries in those genres. Like, *Snow Crash* starts out with this like, incredibly intense, bleak, like, samurai street fight pizza delivery. Which is like, okay. You got—I didn't recognize at the time, when I first read it, that this was like... so intensely cyberpunk that it was kind of a joke? But man, I really like that book.

But like, all my favorite—like, so many of my favorite stories. The *Matrix* trilogy, for sure. *Akira*, which is this like, absolutely remarkable anime and manga series. It's like, super, super cyberpunk.

Rachel: Oh, I didn't know that was cyberpunk!

Griffin: Absolutely, sure. Uh, *Johnny Mnemonic* with Keanu Reeves. I don't know if you've ever seen that one. That movie's... not great, but also a fucking trip.

Rachel: I don't think I have.

Griffin: Uh... there's a movie that came out in 2018 called Upgrade that I really fuckin' dug, that was like, almost a horror movie that is uh, like, super, super cyberpunk.

I don't know. This is a weird thing, right? Because the stories often, like, don't actually do a lot for me, because they are that like... I think there was something noble about it, back when the genre was first coming out, of this idea of just like... there are a lot of trends that we are seeing with regards to how power is concentrating around whoever can like, seize the technological power of the day, or take advantage of whatever new developments there are.

Which is, for sure, certainly still happening. And back then, it was like, "We're gonna fuckin' fight the system, man! 'Cause we're punks!" But then it kind of did turn into like, "I'm a loner. While you were hooking up with babes at parties, I was studying the block chain." And...

Rachel: Y'know what? There's a lot about Mr. Robot that is inspired—

Griffin: Absolutely there is! It wasn't necessarily like, aesthetically cyberpunk, but it was... here's one loner who's, uh... y'know, a—

Rachel: He has the hacker skills to overthrow this disgusting monopoly.

Griffin: That doesn't do a lot for me, because of... I think the type of person that is has informed.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: But man, I don't know. Playing this cyberpunk game, which is a fucking disaster, but like, the... the city looks so cool. Like, the dystopias that they create are so weirdly alluring. Like, I would never want to live in them, because they seem like a genuine hellscape to be in. But watching Blade Runner and seeing like, "Oh fuck, that all looks so cool, though. That all looks so rad. The aesthetic is like, so up my alley."

Rachel: I just pictured like, a Westside Story scenario where steampunk and cyberpunk battle.

Griffin: I mean, steampunk came out—like, every blank punk that came out after that came—like, was a sort of take on cyberpunk. It was, like... steampunk is, we're gonna fight the system of people who have taken advantage of steam powered technology to seize control of the world.

Rachel: [laughs] Uh-huh.

Griffin: I guess you could do that with anything. Hydropunk. Hydropunk is fuckin' cool! I just said that!

Rachel: Yeah. TM TM TM.

Griffin: We gotta fight the hydroelectric dam.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I guess something like, uh, Waterworld is hydropunk. It really is, actually, now that I'm saying that.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And then like, uh, Mad Max would kind of be hydropunk, too. But it's more desert punk. I don't know.

Anyway, hey, can I steal you right away?

Rachel: Yes, please.

Griffin: Into the cyber future. Jack in to the advertisements.

[ad break stinger plays]

[ad break]

Griffin: Oh, it's jumbotron time, ain't it? Ooh, check your clock. It's time for bumbobombs. Here is a message for Leslie. It's from Allison, who says, "We met when you decided to wear a MBMBaM shirt to a Nicolas Cage themed burlesque show. What an amazing way to start a friendship! I am so excited to visit you again the minute that Americans are allowed back into Canada. I love our friendship, except for that time you told me about the omegaverse? What the fuck, man? Love, Allison."

Uh, that's delightful. Got a birthday comin' up, December 28th. So, celebrate that. And also, I feel like wearing a MBMBaM shirt to a Nicolas Cage themed burlesque show is... I imagine, everybody there was wearing MBMBaM merch. That seems like our type of people.

Rachel: Oh my gosh. So many Face Off references.

Griffin: Absolutely, there are.

Rachel: Uh, can I read this next one?

Griffin: Yeah, please!

Rachel: This is for Alex, it is from Alex! "Hi, Alex! This is you from the past to congratulate you on moving out and making your own life choices. Guess what? You're great, and chosen family is more important than blood family sometimes, and that's okay. Love, from Past Alex. And yes, there's a lot of Alexes, but this is from you, the one with a stuffed animal named Bobo."

Griffin: I mean, that's great, and a beautiful message. But also... Alex, you gotta think about the law of large numbers. There's a lot of Alexes out there.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: There's a lot of Alexes out there who have stuffed animals. The odds that another one of them doesn't have a Bobo? Are like, nothing.

Rachel: I know. I like thinking about the like, the line graph of Alexes where like, "Oh, this isn't me. But wait, it still is. Wait... did I do this?"

Griffin: And it still is!

Rachel: [laughs] Uh, for those of you that are interested in doing personal messages in the new year, you can still enter the drawing. You have until December 29th to share your information and see if you can get a chance to get a personal message on Wonderful!

Griffin: Yeah. Go to [MaximumFun.org/...](http://MaximumFun.org/)

Rachel: Jumbotron drawing.

Griffin: Thank you, Rachel. And uh, yeah, if your name gets picked, you can do a message for a hundred bucks, and uh... yeah! May the odds be ever in your favor!

Rachel: [laughs]

[Maximum Fun advertisement plays]

Griffin: What is your second thing?

Rachel: My second thing... is the tamale.

Griffin: Oh... shit. Yes. Can I tell you something? We, uh... Central Market is a grocery store here in Austin that's like, the fancy HEB.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Uh, and they do holiday dinners. So you can just like, reserve one, swing by the day before... we did it for Thanksgiving, because we didn't want to mess with it. And they're doing one for Christmas. So, I did reserve a ham, because we wanted a—it's just us for Christmas, but damn it, we can still have a big ham and some sides. And what I loved is, one of the other

options on there is like, six different kinds of tamales. It's like, fuck yeah, Central Market. They know exactly what's up.

Rachel: Did you do it? Did you do it?

Griffin: I didn't. Well, we already have tamales in the fridge. If we want tamales, we can eat those tamales.

Rachel: Yeah, but you know how many of those you can eat in one sitting?

Griffin: Like 60.

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: Like a lot.

Rachel: [laughing] Exactly!

Griffin: Yeah, that's a good point. Damn it. I should've. It's not too late. I can alter the...

Rachel: Yeah, we can still do it.

Griffin: Ham and tamales? Ham and mashed potatoes and tamales?

Rachel: I mean, we can have them as separate meals, if that makes you uncomfortable.

Griffin: You're right. You're right. Anyway, tamales.

Rachel: [laughs] Uh, so this is like, a Christmas holiday tradition that I was not familiar with until I moved down south. Are you?

Griffin: I knew about them in Chicago, because of the tamale guy.

Rachel: Yeah, that makes sense. That makes sense.

Griffin: Did you ever get tamales from the tamale guy?

Rachel: No, I think I just lived in a different part of town, and so, I didn't have the access.

Griffin: Oh man. Literally, like... there was a bar... I can't remember the name of it. It was something, like, playing card based. Like the Four Jacks or something like that, that we would go and do karaoke at sometimes. And literally every time I was there, he would roll up with his hot box of great, great ass tamales.

Rachel: Yeah. [laughs]

Griffin: That when you're like—when you've had a couple drinks, and it is negative ten degrees outside, there is nothing better than a like, boiling hot little tin-foil wrapped tamale in your hands.

Rachel: Uh, tamales are a food item from the Latin tradition that vary a lot, depending on where you're from. Most often, it is, uh, just kind of a filling that is wrapped in a husk or a leaf and steamed.

Griffin: Mm-hmm.

Rachel: The ones that we're familiar with here in Texas, uh, have the masa.

Griffin: That good masa.

Rachel: And then, they have the corn husk. But um, you can also, depending on where you're from, you can get it in a banana leaf.

Griffin: Oh, interesting! The masa is basically just a thick ass, crumbly tortilla that isn't like, fully set, basically.

Rachel: Yeah. And uh, it's a whole process.

Griffin: Oh, for sure. That's why they make them a thousand at a time, is because it would be a pain in the ass to do them, y'know, a la carte.

Rachel: Yeah, because I mean, you not only have to get the masa in shape, you have to get the filling in shape, and then you have to like, wrap them in the leaf, and then you have to steam them. And you can form a whole assembly line. So a lot of times, this is something that families will gather together to do around the holidays, and they will make them in bulk, and they will eat them for a very long time, and/or share them with friends and other family members.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Um... in Guatemala, you eat them at midnight on December 24th and the 31st. Um...

Griffin: I love that.

Rachel: Yeah. [laughs] Yeah, they—they're something—you can find them here at the, uh, HEB, you can find them like, frozen. But more often than not, people are lookin'... they're looking for that handmade. They're looking for the hookup.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Around this time of year.

Griffin: There's also a lot of just like, on the street vendors here. I think tamale guy like, stands out in Chicago, because he's like, uh... a magical elf that can teleport all across town and hit every single bar in one night, much like Santa Claus does. But I mean, you wander around downtown here too, and you can very easily snatch one up.

Rachel: Um, tamales originated in Mesoamerica as early as 8000BC.

Griffin: Wow, that's a long time ago!

Rachel: [laughs] Um... they... I mean, it makes sense, right? Like, it's wrapped in a banana leaf or a corn husk, and you can carry it around. It's transportable.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And uh...

Griffin: It's like Go-Gurt.

Rachel: [laughs] Oh.

Griffin: It's like Mesoamerican Go-Gurt, if you think about it. But way better.

Rachel: Is that how you—you just squeeze the bottom? Is that how you're eating it?

Griffin: Is that not how you're supposed to do it? You squeeze it out of the bottom like it's a Push Pop?

Rachel: [laughing] Um... I will say, there is also a version, uh... Puerto Rican people will eat something called pasteles, which have no masa whatsoever. It's like a different...

Griffin: Oh, it's just pure filling?

Rachel: Yeah, it's a different combination of ground ingredients. But it's, y'know, the same kind of...

Griffin: I would go for that.

Rachel: ... vehicle.

Griffin: Yeah. I would need a—I would need a dip for that, I feel like.

Rachel: I think there's something like, so delightful and surprising, because... because of the way it is put together, you really have no idea kind of what you're going to experience.

Griffin: Mm-hmm!

Rachel: I have read a lot about, y'know, people... I mean, obviously, it varies so much family to family and region to region, and so, everybody kind of bites into it, remembering the last time they had a tamale. [laughs] And deciding whether or not this is actually going to be the same experience.

Griffin: There was a place we used to get, uh, like... chicken mole tamales, which is just like, a hat on a hat of just like, food jazz. Just like, holy shit. The mole is like, its own unique thing, and the very unique tamale that you've made, too, and there's nothing like it in the whole world.

Rachel: Yeah. So, tamale is an Anglicized version of the Spanish word, 'tamal.' When you pluralize it, you add the '-es,' and English speakers interpreted the 'e' as part of the stem, rather than the plural.

Griffin: Ohh, that sounds like us.

Rachel: So that's why we say tamale instead of tamal.

Griffin: Yeah. We done done it again.

Rachel: Mm-hmm. [laughs] Uh, but yeah, this is a cool thing. Just like, for me, growing up, having those family meals where pretty much... y'know, everybody's coming together, they're making food, it's an enormous meal and an enormous task, and kind of growing up with the same thing every year to find out about this tradition was very exciting to me.

Griffin: Yeah, for sure!

Rachel: And obviously, to have the taste experience was just as good, if not better.

Griffin: I'm not—I'm going to add tamales to our order now. 'Cause now, if I don't eat tamales in the next... like, ten days, I'm gonna go berserk.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Um, hey, can I tell you about my second thing?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: It's a music one. It's a band. Called Chvrches. And a lot of people see the name, and they say, "Chuh-vurches?" Because there is a V in there. But the V is pronounced like a U, like you would see at like...

Rachel: In the old times.

Griffin: In the old times. Like, where you—I remember, there's a building in Huntington, I think like, the courthouse or something, that has like, the inscription over the doorway with the Vs for Us. And it always, like, as a kid, walking by it, I was like, "Psh. Fucking did it wrong. That's a V, guys! The U has the curve on the bottom, but nice try!"

Rachel: Somebody should clean up this town.

Griffin: Um, I've actually talked about them on the show before, because they did a collaboration with Wednesday Campanella that I think I played on the show, back when I did a segment on them. They are a Scottish synth pop group that just really checks all the boxes for the things I like about, like, pop music.

They also weirdly, I would say, kind of have cyberpunk vibes?

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Like, I think they did a song in Drive. I guess Drive wasn't cyberpunk. But it had that like, '80s synth feel that really reminds me of like, Blade Runner.

Uh, so, they are a trio. There's Iain Cook, Martin Doherty, and Lauren Mayberry, who is like, the front woman vocalist for the group. And Cook and Doherty started out playing in like, bands all the way back in college, like a lot of them, but didn't have the sound that they liked until they bought like, an old Moog synth from the '80s, and started messing around with sounds like that.

They found Lauren Mayberry, who was the drummer and singer for like, a rock group. So like, this genre was nothing any of them had any experience with, but they like, fell in love with it, and got like, really, really hardcore about like, this band, even though they'd been in a bunch before, just because of the sound that they'd discovered. Which I always like, really think is the coolest.

I imagine being in a band like that, and having that excitement of like, "Oh! That sound! We finally found that sound!" Uh, Lauren Mayberry was actually supposed to be the backing singer, but then, the other two heard her sing, and they were like, "Oh, n—nevermind. You're in charge now. You're gonna do the singing now."

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Her voice is like, out of control, like, super, super, super powerful. Uh, and it kind of has to be, because she's singing over these like, very, let's say, assertive '80s synths.

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: And the name, Chvrches, they all just like, liked it. They thought it was evocative, but they didn't want to lose SEO to actual churches, hence the V.

Rachel: Oh, yeah! That's smart.

Griffin: There's also a sort of like, micro genre called witch house, which is like, um... like, chopped and screwed, hip hop beats and grungy synths with

like, occult vibes all throughout that they were also kind of into. Which, the V was sort of referential to.

Lauren Mayberry did an interview where she said, "We did consider putting upside-down crosses at either end of our name, but that would've dated us, I think."

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: So, if you've heard one of their songs, it would probably be The Mother We Share, which was their big breakout hit here in the states. Uh, and like, basically launched them into the states. They did South by Southwest like, a few years in a row, and took home all these awards from doing those shows.

But their favorite album of mine, um, came out in 2015, and it's called Every Open Eye. And every song on this album, it just like... just rips. Like, it just hits that super big '80s synth sound, and it has the most danceable hooks imaginable. I got to see them in concert a few years ago.

It's the only concert I think—I went by myself, because we had tickets, and I think you were like, very pregnant with Henry, and just didn't—like, didn't want to go. And so, it's the only concert I ever went to by myself, and I was all nervous, but I had a fucking great time, because the music was just so fun, and the audience was really into it.

And my favorite song off that album is called Clearest Blue, which I'm gonna play right now.

[‘Clearest Blue’ by Chvrches plays]

Griffin: What I really, really like about Chvrches is how, um... like, steady they are. How reliable they are. Like, they are really good at making this kind of music, and unlike a lot of other artists and bands that I really like, who make stuff I really like, and then take big swings away from it to like, experiment with other stuff – which is totally their prerogative, and I would never be like, a dick and say like, "Just play the hits!" – Chvrches like, just

continues to kind of hammer down on this synth pop genre that they have proven that they are really, really, really good at making.

What they explore, instead, are like, different themes and like, uh, lyrical ideas and inspirations for the songs, which range from... so, Graves was the unlikely theme song to the latest season of Terrace House. In Japan. In America, we got another sort of like, uh, extreme music, like... not knock off. That's a mean way to talk about the music. But it wasn't—they don't do licensed music like they do in Japan, where they had the Taylor Swift...

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: They had 'We Are Never Getting Back Together' for like, the first season of Terrace House. And that song is about like, gun violence in American schools. So it's like watching... y'know, 20 somethings in Tokyo trying to find love to this song.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: But the song I want to play now is, uh, off their 2018 album, Love is Dead. It's called Graffiti, and it's all about just like, the slow dissolving of ill-fated young love. But it like, is a bop, so I'm gonna play it now.

['Graffiti' by Chvrches plays]

Griffin: Yeah. I just really like it. They're never the first band that comes to mind when I think about my favorite bands, but like... when I think about how almost every musical artist that I like has made, like, a whole album that I just didn't care for, because it wasn't kind of what I wanted from them, like... Chvrches just bangs out really, really good synth pop shit. Like, every album that they make has a bunch of bangers on it, and I really like having a band like that that I am a fan of.

Rachel: Yeah, it's nice to have a band like that, too, where you will kind of fade out for a few years, and then you'll return and say, "I wonder what they've done while I've been gone." And you love everything universally.

Griffin: And it launches—like, for real, that’s happening right now, where I was like, listening to music for this, and I was like, “Wait a minute. They're fucking great!” And so, I just have been going back through all their albums and listening to it again. If you've never listened to Chvrches, they rule. Just don’t forget about that tricky V. Don’t just search ‘churches’ in your music listening program of choice. Because you'll probably find... I don't know, some sermon podcasts? I don't know what else is on there.

Um, do you want to know what our friends at home are talking about?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Mary says, “Something I appreciate every day is how considerate other parents are in the parking lot of the daycare I take my daughter to. Without fail, everyone leaves an empty space between cars to make it easier to load and unload kids. Parking lots tend to be stressful and weirdly competitive places, so to see such a consistent and thoughtful cooperation is wonderful.”

I do miss this.

Rachel: Oh, yeah!

Griffin: Henry’s not back in daycare, but we had him in a couple for a couple years there, and it always was we—like, I think it’s honestly more like, I don’t want to make myself the asshole of the whole student body by, y'know, being a jerk during drop off.

Rachel: Yeah. No, I've never really thought about that, but it’s true. I remember that fondly, of just like, “Oh, I have so much space here to pull my child who may or may not want to be here out of the car.” [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah. And also like, if somebody is like, pulling out of the parking lot, like, I am always super slow to like, “Yeah, please, you go ahead! You go ahead! Because we’re gonna see each other again. Our kids might end up being best friends, so I can't burn you right now.”

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Uh, one more from Braxton who says, "One thing that I find wonderful is that, since working from home, I get to see the garbage truck come by our house every week. I'm always amazed to see the speed at which the drivers can line up their trucks with the cans, and it's quite fun to see the robot arms shake the cans mid-air. It reminds me of what it felt like to see those big machines go by as a kid."

I mean, those big machines didn't have the wild robot arms that they do now.

Rachel: I gotta tell you, I am very thoughtful to the distancing between cans because of that robot arm.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: I think a lot about it. And I have a lot of, uh, say in the placement, I would say, because I tend to be the one to remember to bring the trash out. And I'm very thoughtful. Like, I actually, in my head, try and create six feet in my mind so that I can give enough space for that robot arm.

Griffin: See, I put them close together, and y'know why? Because I'm cyberpunk as fuck.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: And I'm fighting the system.

Rachel: This is the system?

Griffin: The AI... garbage eaters... that are taking away our freedoms, one by one. And you think about it, and you're like, "Ha ha, Griffin, very funny joke for another one of your funny podcasts!" But here in a few years, when... what next? Recycling trucks come by to eat up all our bottles and cans? And then what happens next?

Rachel: When the garbage trucks are all of a sudden doing your eye exam for you...

Griffin: Doing our eye exam.

Rachel: Just opening your lids, and turning them.

Griffin: What's that coming down the street now? It's the free thought truck. Here to scoop up my liberties, and dump them right in the back, crush them down into a little cube.

Rachel: Yeah, putting the cans close together should solve that.

Griffin: Uh-huh.

Rachel: I feel like you've got it right there. You figured it out.

Griffin: I think I have.

Rachel: No hacking involved. Just put those cans close together.

Griffin: Oh, there's a little bit of trash hacking. If you know what I mean. Put little viruses in an old can of soda.

Rachel: Oh, okay. Okay.

Griffin: So that when the truck eats up the old soda...

Rachel: That's a funny joke right now. [laughs]

Griffin: Well no, I don't mean like, sickness viruses. I mean computer viruses. Jesus.

Rachel: [laughing]

Griffin: Anyway... somebody's not a console cowboy in cyberspace.

Rachel: [laughing]

Griffin: Uh, thanks for listening. And thanks to Bo En and Augustus for the use of our theme song, Money Won't Pay. You can find a link to that in the episode description.

Rachel: And thank you to Maximum Fun for hosting our show.

Griffin: Oh my god, yeah. You wanna talk about cyberpunk? There's nothing more cyber or punk than this amazing group of podcasts.

Rachel: [laughs] We should talk about shows!

Griffin: Yeah, uh, Triple Click is real good. Lot of video games happening right now. I'm sure they have way more salient thoughts about the Cyberpunk 2077 video game than I could generate, so...

Rachel: I actually meant live shows.

Griffin: Oh, yeah! Well, I mean, shit, as long as we're at it, though, um... Stop Podcasting Yourself is a really good show.

Rachel: You know I love that show.

Griffin: I know you do. Literally, every time I walk by you when you're doing some errand or chore, you are listening to Stop Podcasting Yourself.

Rachel: Stop Podcasting Yourself and Jordan, Jesse, Go! are both right on that 666th episode.

Griffin: Yeah! That's weird! There's a lot of podcasts. There's The Giant Bombcast, another podcast I listen to. They just hit 665. So like, I guess all these shows started at the exact same time, and are all about to hit the—do you think that that's the apocalypse gonna happen? The pod—the apod—

Rachel: [laughs] You got a lot of theories over there today, Griff.

Griffin: The apodcal—cast lips? Oh no. Okay, anyway, we have a bunch of shows coming up. December 19th.

Rachel: Yeah. And you can still get tickets for Candlenights.

Griffin: Yes. Candlenights our—Candlenights charity special. You can find tickets at McElroy.family, or I think TheMcElroy.family. There's a lot of ways to get there, and Rachel and I have very brutal fights about this every episode. We've gotten a lot of complaints that it's getting hard to listen to.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Um, but yeah, we have a bunch of special guests, and all the shows got together to make a very fun holiday special.

Rachel: This is a holiday spectacular to end all holiday spectaculars.

Griffin: Well, holy shit. I mean...

Rachel: I'm really gonna oversell it, because I think it will deliver.

Griffin: Okay. Well, it's—tickets are \$6.25, and all of that goes to charity. It's pay what you want, with a minimum donation of \$6.25, and then you get to watch this fun thing. We have so many guests and friends.

Rachel: Skits and sketches.

Griffin: Skits and sketches, and you're gonna like it. And then uh, me and Rachel are doing a Wonderful live show the week after that, I think.

Rachel: Yeah, so, it is December 29th.

Griffin: Yeah! Nine PM ET! Wow, we're really cuttin' it—we're really banking on Henry not waking up during that special.

Rachel: I know, I know. We may want to set up a backup plan for that.

Griffin: Like what?

Rachel: I don't know. We have the one person that's allowed in our house come sit in our house?

Griffin: Yeah, that's not a bad idea.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Uh, so, tickets can be purchased at McElroy.family. Uh, and they're five bucks each, and all that goes to benefit Austin Bat Cave!

Rachel: Yeah. So Austin Bat Cave, much to the chagrin of a lot of bat enthusiasts, is actually a writing program for young people. They go out into the schools. Lately, they've been offering a lot of online programming. But it is all to nurture the creative talent of young people.

Griffin: It's a really, really great organization.

Rachel: It's a cool—Griffin's been involved for years, and I just kind of got on board to literally get on the board.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: [laughs] And I've just been really impressed with the work that they're doing to, uh, kind of... y'know, support the growth of young people as they kind of find their voice and tell their story.

Griffin: Yeah. That's very cyberpunk too, if you think about it. [laughs]

Rachel: [laughs] Okay.

Griffin: I'm starting to realize I may not know what cyberpunk means. Even though I just did a whole thing about it. Like when I use my phone,

and I do Apple Pay at the gas station when I'm buying sweets and gummies for myself... is that cyberpunk?

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: Is that—when I use my card at the gas station machine... instead of going inside and paying for the pump... that's cyberpunk, baby. Don't you think?

Rachel: Mm-hmm. When I am at the grocery store, and I'm dodging the ones and zeroes?

Griffin: Oh man!

Rachel: Is that cyberpunk?

Griffin: Yeah, 'cause they'll bonk ya! Won't they? For sure. [pause] When I'm at the library... and I have to put on that headset that does the wires into my brain, so that I can absorb all human knowledge at once? But then I say, "No thanks, corporations!" And they're like, "This is a library...?" And I'm like, "That's exactly what a corporation would say." To me, that's a cyberpunk.

Rachel: [laughs]

[theme music plays]

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