

Wonderful! 224: Call Me Griddlebone

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[theme music plays]

Rachel: Hi, this is Rachel McElroy.

Griffin: Hi, Rachel McElroy. I'm Griffin McElroy.

Rachel: And this is a show we do called *Wonderful!*

Griffin: Yeah. We're— we blew it already. I did not even mean to, like, do it different. It was like, when you said—

Rachel: [simultaneously] I thought you were trying it.

Griffin: No. When you said your name I was like, "Well, I don't want to be rude."

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: "I'm gonna acknowledge that—" anyway, this is a show—

Rachel: You— you've done a lot of podcasting today, I would say.

Griffin: I have done a lot of podcasting this week. And next week. I'm already— I'm already exhausted from the podcasting I'm going to be doing next week.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: This is a show where we talk about things we like, things that are good, things that we're into. And, um, I'm into this beautiful weather.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I'm into— not as into the visible cloud of allergens that is sort of just, like, surrounding our neighborhood like Pig Pen dirt.

Rachel: You know when I take Gus for a walk in the stroller, the wheels now are entirely covered in pollen.

Griffin: It's— it's genuinely wild, folks. It's genuinely— and, like, whatever. We made the decision to live here. That was our choice.

Rachel: [simultaneously] True, true.

Griffin: And our truth. But Christ alive, I had no idea that it was just gonna be... just a— just a ashy sort of light lime green coating.

Rachel: Just year round. Just year round.

Griffin: Every day of our lives.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: But that's not wonderful, is it? Do you have any small wonders?

Rachel: [laughs] Um... I— you know what? I'm gonna say your Griddlebone shirt.

Griffin: Do you want to give the backstory on that?

Rachel: Yeah. So, uh, back when Griffin and I didn't have children, we used to occasionally go to different breweries around town, and there was one called Austin Beer Works, and we went there a few times. And they had a beer called Griddlebone. And Griffin bought the shirt...

Griffin: Well, I talked about how great it would be if that could become my new— 'cause it starts with Gri, if it could become, like, my new cool nickname.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And so I tried to get it started. Like, "Hey, everyone. Call me Griddlebone." And so I bought the Griddlebone shirt.

Rachel: I will say, our one friend Eric was really bought in to that.

Griffin: He was, but it didn't really stick with any of our friends. But, um, yes.

Rachel: But any time Griffin wears that shirt it reminds me of a simpler time.

Griffin: Me too. I like this shirt too.

Rachel: When we were like, "I have so much free mental energy that I'm gonna try to come up with a nickname." [laughs quietly]

Griffin: Do not remember the beer at all. What— does it even say what— oh, it's an IP... India Pale Lager. I don't know what that means. But, uh, I remember enjoying it.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Uh, I'm gonna say... I mean, there's a restaurant here in town called Modern Market. I don't know if it's a chain or not, but it's one of just a few restaurants I can think of where I can order something new every time that we go there, and it's almost always, like, spectacular! And that makes me— I'm getting really into— they have, like, a blueberry pesto sandwich that is my new jam, with a nice cup of tomato basil bisque. It hits me so right now.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: And it's, like, not what I usually order. I just, like, tried it and I was like, "Oh, well, this is my new favorite!" So.

Rachel: Uh-huh.

Griffin: Shout out to Modern Market.

Rachel: We have never actually set foot inside that restaurant.

Griffin: No, God. No, no, no. But they bring the food to your house. That's how modern they are! That's how modern this market is! I think you go first this week.

Rachel: I do!

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: I'm excited about this.

Griffin: Oh, me too.

Rachel: Um, this is another one— you know, last time we recorded we did Jock Jams and I, like, gave you a little audio clue?

Griffin: Yeah, sure.

Rachel: Um, and so I want to do that again with this one, and I think you'll get it right away.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: [humming]

Griffin: The more you know?

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Okay!

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: This is good. This is gonna take me down a real trip down memory lane.

Rachel: I'm really glad you got that, because I felt like I was a little pitchy and I was gonna be embarrassed if you were like "Oh, no, that's not right." [laughs]

Griffin: No, honey. I got— I got you. You got there.

Rachel: Um... public service announcements are a thing that seemed like they were really blowing up when we were kids, like late 80's, early 90's.

Griffin: Blowing up in which— I guess I don't really have much context as to...

Rachel: I just don't know if it's a thing— I guess I don't know if it's a thing of the now. But I know, like, when you used to turn on television— maybe it was because we were watching more kids' programming.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: There would be a lot of these things. And, um, *The More You Know*, when we were watching it, became this thing that was, like, your favorite television superstars and, like, movie actors would do them.

Griffin: Was it an NBC exclusive feature?

Rachel: It was.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: It was. And so, like— it's funny, 'cause it started as this way of getting out information to the public that was just kind of, like, good to know information. Uh, and then it kind of became a, "Oh, and by the way, it's the entire cast of *Seinfeld*." Or, "Look—"

Griffin: Yeah. And they're like, "[Jerry Seinfeld impression] Don't eat batteries!"

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: [hums *The More You Know* theme]

Rachel: Uh, and so it seemed a little— a little less pure when it started to be like, "Oh, hey. You know our show, *ER*? Well, they don't want you to smoke." [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah, right. "*ER*. You know, on Thursdays at 8 o' clock?"

Rachel: [laughs] Uh, so *More You Know* has been around for over 30 years. It's still in existence.

Griffin: They still do it?

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: Is that the Wilmer Valder— the only thing I can think of like this Wilmer Valderrama.

Rachel: No, that's what—

Griffin: —I think that's for, like, the National Kidney Institute or something like that.

Rachel: Yeah, no, that Wilmer Valderrama thing made me think of this, actually.

Griffin: Okay, okay.

Rachel: Because I was watching that thinking of like, "You know what I remember?" Um, but if you go to the NBC website, like, you can see a lot of their more recent ones. They've done a lot lately on, like, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Uh, so it's a little more topical than when they started. So... *More You Know* started as a public service announcement, and public service announcements became a thing in the 1940's. It was the War Advertising Council, and it was just kind of telling you about war efforts.

Griffin: Cool!

Rachel: You know, so, like, "Save your scrap metal" or whatever. Uh—

Griffin: That's wild that they needed that.

Rachel: [laughs] I know, right?

Griffin: Like, throwing my Pepsi cans in the right— like, in a big truck that drives around town. That's like, we need to make these into bullets. And I'm thinking, like, "[slurping noise] Enjoy, soldiers!"

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: "You're welcome. We're all chipping in."

Rachel: Yeah, that's crazy to think about.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Uh, so when the war ended, um, that specific war— I mean, war hasn't ended as a whole, unfortunately— uh, it became the Ad Council. Uh, and it was aligned with mandates from the FCC to balance special interest with objective information.

So, in the 60's for example, when they used to advertise smoking, like cigarettes, for example—

Griffin: Yeah, I know. I know of them.

Rachel: [laughs] I realize they weren't just like, "Hey, try smoking!" It was like, no, these specific brands. Um, they would have to show a PSA on the dangers of smoking for every three cigarette spots.

Griffin: Okay?

Rachel: So— and apparently that was helpful, because the number of smokers did start to decline, and then in 1971 the FCC banned smoking cigarette advertisements altogether.

Griffin: In '71?

Rachel: Yeah, I didn't realize that.

Griffin: How very progressive, 1971!

Rachel: I didn't realize that. 'Cause, you know, you still saw them, like, in magazines, you know?

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: But, um...

Griffin: I definitely saw Mr. Joe Campbell and some of his great works.

Rachel: Yeah, I know!

Griffin: That must've just been magazine advertisements.

Rachel: Yeah. It definitely was on, like, billboards and stuff.

Griffin: Yeah. I don't know what magazines I would be reading. I don't think they had smoking advertisements in, like, *Nintendo Power* or *Disney Adventure Magazine*.

Rachel: Uh, okay. So, the 80's PSA efforts started to focus more on, like, you know, just general health and safety advertisements. Uh, and that is when "The more you know" came about. NBC's Vice President was approached by several nonprofit educational groups to see if the network might want to raise awareness for specifically the teacher shortage.

Griffin: Oh— when was this?

Rachel: This was in the 1980's. I did not know there was a teacher shortage in the 1980's, but there was.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Maybe because the baby boomers all had school age kids, and there were just a lot more kids?

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: I don't know. But that was kind of how it started. So if you look online now at some of the, like, historic ones, it's all about teachers, including one by Mr. Scott Bakula.

Griffin: That's interesting.

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: I'm still kind of thinking about the 80's teacher shortage. Were we also paying teachers, like, eight buttons and a fresh green apple for every week of work like we do now?

Rachel: [laughs] Yeah.

Griffin: Okay. That might have something to do with it.

Rachel: It's probably— it's probably seven buttons back then.

Griffin: Yeah, right? Well, when you count in inflation that's like 14 buttons.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: They should pay teachers more. It seems like we wouldn't have to keep getting Scott Bakula to keep doing teachers PSAs if we would pay them, I don't know, 11 buttons? At minimum?

Rachel: Yeah. I mean, that's— that's two shirts I would think, right there.

Griffin: Yeah, right? [laughs]

Rachel: [laughs] Uh, originally the idea was that it wasn't gonna be, like, a talking head kind of thing. But the network kind of focused on this, like, celebrity idea, and kind of ran with that. Uh, so it start— late 80's, it started with, like, *Miami Vice* stars, and Tom Brocaw stars.

Griffin: How'd you say his name?!

Rachel: Tom Brocaw stars. [laughs]

Griffin: I'm Tom Brocawstars.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I like that. I'm trying to imagine what that character would be.

Rachel: [sighs] I think he'd sound a little [crosstalk].

Griffin: A little [crosstalk].

Rachel: I don't have that. Uh, and *LA Law* stars too.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Which, you know, at that time period...

Griffin: I guess was hot. I never watched a single one of those shows.

Rachel: Super hot. Uh, and then they paired the creator of those with a graphic designer who came up with the shooting star at the end that, like, fits nicely into the "More," the M in the "More."

Griffin: Oh, I've never even thought about—

Rachel: No, it's the W. It's the W.

Griffin: Oh, okay.

Rachel: It fits into the W at the end.

Griffin: That makes more sense, 'cause it shoot—

Rachel: Shoots and lands.

Griffin: —it would shoot all the way. It wouldn't stop.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Right at the end.

Rachel: And then the theme, the little, like, melody, was created by the same person who did the *Dateline* theme.

Griffin: How does the *Dateline* theme go? I don't know that one.

Rachel: I don't— I haven't watched *Dateline* in so long.

Griffin: You haven't watched it in so long that you don't remember the theme?

Rachel: I don't.

Griffin: Okay. I thought you were gonna say it was the same person who came up with the NBC, like, [hums NBC theme] but that was from, like, 1901 or some shit.

Rachel: No, but this was a two-time Emmy Award Winner, so...

Griffin: Okay. I mean, they knew their— that's a good four note little...

Rachel: They knew their— they knew their bums.

Griffin: ... little run they got there.

Rachel: Their bops and their bums. Okay, so 1996 is kind of the year where you saw, like, the cast of *FRIENDS* and the cast of *ER*, uh, and they would come in and they'd have to deliver something in, like, 25 seconds, and then the last five seconds were for the star graphic.

Griffin: You gotta save—

Rachel: [laughs] And the melody.

Griffin: You gotta save time for the star graphic. Sure, you could use it for more lifesaving information, but that star graphic is so good.

Rachel: Um, if you look— there's an IMDB just about *The More You Know*, and you can see, like, everybody that's ever done it.

Griffin: Who's, like, the wildest one on there?

Rachel: I was trying to find one that seemed especially wild to me. Um, but it's kind of all the usual...

Griffin: The usual suspects? I guess they wouldn't just throw those around to any ol' sitcom bit player.

Rachel: Yeah. I mean, I will say, the one with, um... there's a couple that are really kind of stand-out. There's a Julie Louis-Dreyfus one where she talks about how you shouldn't let kids drop out, because if you do they'll start stealing cars. [laughs] And that one's— that one's a little intense.

Griffin: Is that delivered in a sort of jokey— a jokey way?

Rachel: No! No, it's like "Why should you be concerned about kids dropping out of high school? Well, because when they're out on the street, you know, they'll—"

Griffin: They'll steal your fuckin' car right out from under your nose. That's fun. And wild. And not— it doesn't sound right to me.

Rachel: No, it doesn't. Uh, and then there's one with Sean Hayes where he puts a cigarette in his ear and he's like, "Looks pretty stupid, right?"

Griffin: I remember this one! I remember this one!

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: And then he puts it in his mouth. He's like, "This is even stupider, fuckin' kill you."

Rachel: [laughs] Exactly.

Griffin: But then he light it up and he takes a big long drag and he's like, "[inhales deeply] Sure, it looks and feels so cool, but it's so stupid."

Rachel: Um, there was also— and I didn't remember this until I was reading about, but there was also one specifically for kids called "One to Grow On."

Griffin: Yeah, I remember that!

Rachel: Uh, and there's a video you can see of, like, a young Jason Bateman in 1987.

Griffin: Damn, he *would* be a young Jason Bateman.

Rachel: Doing a—[laughs] a "One to Grow On." well, it was back in his *Silver... Spoons?*

Griffin: I don't know.

Rachel: Family... what was... [laughs]

Griffin: I don't know much about Jason Bateman pre-*Arrested Development*, but I do know that we've mentioned two of the hosts of *SmartLess* in the last two minutes, and if you do say the third, that we will conjure them, sort of Beetlejuice style.

Rachel: [laughs] Yeah, he was on *Silver Spoons*. Sorry, I had the check that.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Um, and so yeah, those were specific to kids. So it was like, Mr. T and Michael J. Fox talking about, like, finishing your homework, and Jason Bateman's was like, "Don't play your music too loud on public transportation." [laughs]

Griffin: That's actually great for me, Jason. I do actually appreciate that.

Rachel: Um, I thought it would be, like, really fun to share, like, one of these on the show. But I will say, a lot of them, particularly in the 90's, were pretty intense?

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: There were a lot focused on, like, sexual assault and domestic violence, and I was like "Well, that's not... that's not really something I want to share on the show."

Griffin: No, that just made me think of Jennifer Love-Hewitt's anti-drug spot where she talked about, like, e— "This is brain— this is your brain on drugs."

Rachel: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Griffin: "And this is your family on drugs, and this is your dog on drugs!" And she, like, fucks up her whole kitchen. I don't think she says "This is your dog on drugs."

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: [wheeze-laughs]

Rachel: [through laughter] That would be great, though. It's a real problem.

Griffin: [squeaks] Yeah.

Rachel: Uh, so— and it's hard to say if these are, like...

Griffin: Effective at all?

Rachel: Yeah. But I will say... so, when I was reading about this it said, "In 1995, after a series of *The More You Know* spots on domestic violence, calls to the domestic violence hotline went from 228 calls daily to quadruple that amount."

Griffin: Wow.

Rachel: So you have to think it's related.

Griffin: Oh yeah, sure.

Rachel: I mean, you can't 100% say for sure. Um, the network earned a Public and Community Service Emmy, which was not anything I knew existed. Uh— [laughs]

Griffin: Sure, that's the Emmy that I, uh... that I won, for *Peace on the Playground*.

Rachel: [laughs] Oh.

Griffin: And by "I" I mean mostly Chuck Minsker, yeah. But no.

Rachel: Oh, a little kid size Emmy?

Griffin: A little tiny Emmy, yeah.

Rachel: A little— a little Emmy?

Griffin: I got some tokens, I think, to Billy Bob's Wonderland for my part in *Peace on the Playground*.

Rachel: Uh, and this has also been parodied a lot. I don't know if you remember when *The Office* was doing this, just to kind of basically promote the show *The Office*—

Griffin: [simultaneously] *The Office*.

Rachel: Yeah. They had, like—

Griffin: Nothing wrong with that.

Rachel: They had actors in character from *The Office* just talking about nonsense just to, like— like, "Okay, we got accused of this with Seinfeld and friends, so let's just full-on do it."

Griffin: Yeah, sure.

Rachel: And yeah. I don't— I don't know. I was watching a lot of these. Uh, I was watching one with, like, LL Cool J. Uh, it's just— it's incredible how many people have done this? Um, and how many of them you can find on YouTube. [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah, I don't doubt that.

Rachel: [laughs] Um, so I would encourage you all to check it out. I mean, it's everybody from, like, Farrah Fawcett, to, like... Zach Braff.

Griffin: Zach Braff got in there, huh?

Rachel: Uh-huh. Christina Applegate. Tatiana Ali. Uh... Lisa Gibbons. [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah, man.

Rachel: Kelsey Grammar. Kelsey Grammar's is one— Tony Danza did one too, just about, like, "Talk to your kids." [laughs] Tony Danza's was like, "In the car, turn the radio down."

Griffin: Talk to your kids.

Rachel: "Talk to your kids."

Griffin: "Or else they'll drop out of school and steal that car that you're driving right now you're supposed to be talking to 'em in."

Hey, can I steal you away?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Got a couple of Grandpa Rons here, and this first one is for Tiana, and it's from husband, who says:

"Lovernin! Lover... nin. Lovernin! You're wonderful to me. I've loved working from home together for the last year, and I'm so lucky that you're [Borat voice] my wife! I love you. PS: Tiana, in case you couldn't tell, this is for you."

Um, we do say the names of the people at the top of the message.

Rachel: And I will also say that the copy made clear that "my wife" was supposed to be said that way.

Griffin: Oh, I didn't even need the copy to tell—

Rachel: That was not a Griffin choice.

Griffin: I didn't even need the copy to tell me that.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: It was spelled phonetically, in the Borat sense.

Rachel: So I guess in the future if people are doing Jumbotrons and they don't want you to say "my wife... "

Griffin: That's what you should put down.

Rachel: They should put a note. Like, "Griffin, don't do the voice."

Griffin: Please. Please, please, please.

Rachel: Do you want me to read the next one?

Griffin: Uh-huh.

Rachel: This message is for Chloe, Meg, Ben, Lia, and Ken, and it is from Lucas.

"To my dear TTRPG friends who introduced me to the McElroys and TAZ, I love you all. You're so wonderful. And my darling husband, Ken, you're the best thing to ever happen to me, and I'm so happy you found your enby truth. Try to find the wonderful things in this crumbling world. Love to you and our perfect cat boys, Kravitz and Taako."

Griffin: So, you see, TTRPG— I know you're probably wondering—

Rachel: Tabletop role-playing game?

Griffin: —it stands for totally, totally...

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: ... really... perfect Griffin.

Rachel: [laughs] So are you... saying that Lucas has... totally, totally, really perfect Griffin friends?

Griffin: Yeah, and it's obviously some sort of grammatical error that they have made in the message, because that is what that stands for, and I don't appreciate you saying I'm lying!

Rachel: [laughs quietly] I just wanted to be recognized for my ability to put that acronym together.

Griffin: I recognize it.

Rachel: Thank you.

Griffin: Hmm, that's the sound of my recognizing. [makes buzzer noise]

Rachel: [laughs]

[music plays]

Speaker One: Max Fun Drive is just around the corner.

Speaker Two: [echoing] 2022.

Speaker One: Starting April 25th, it's the best time of the year to support your favorite shows by becoming a Max Fun member, or upgrading your membership.

Speaker Two: [echoing] In just two weeks.

Speaker One: We've got some great episodes, and amazing thank you gifts in store. And who knows? Maybe a few surprises.

Speaker Two: [echoing] Don't forget bonus content!

Speaker One: So make sure to tune in, starting Monday, April 25th, to get all the juicy details on what each show has in store.

Speaker Two: [echoing] Actually, wait. What are the details anyway? Why are they juicy? [fading away] That's kind of a strange adjective to describe details...

[music and ad end]

[music plays]

John: Look, it's a rough world out there, especially lately. I get it. So let's take care of our minds as best we can. I'm John Moe, host of *Depresh Mode with John Moe*. Every week, I talk with comedians, actors, writers, musicians, doctors, therapists, and everyday folks about the obstacles that our world and our brains throw in front of us. Depression, anxiety, traumatic stress, all those mental health challenges that are way more common and more treatable than you might think.

Speaker 2: The first time I went to therapy I was so ashamed, and I was like, "I can't believe I gotta go to thera—like, I thought I could be a man, and Humphrey Bogart was never in therapy!" And my dad said, "Yeah, but he smoked a carton of cigarettes a day."

John: Give your mind a break, give yourself a break, and join me for *Depresh Mode with John Moe*.

[music and ad end]

Griffin: I had you in mind when I chose my subject.

Rachel: Oh, really?

Griffin: 'Cause I think you're gonna get excited about it.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: I'm gonna talk about a little friend with pointy blue stuff on called Sonic the Hedgehog.

Rachel: Oh, yay!

Griffin: We went and saw *Sonic the Hedgehog 2*, me and Henry did. And aside from an— we'd call it an unpleasant Alamo Draft House dining experience...

Rachel: Ooh, put 'em on blast.

Griffin: Get it fucking together, Alamo Draft House! This is, like, the second or third time that they have just lost...

Rachel: Specifically the order for our child.

Griffin: For kids' movies, yeah! So, like, it sucks when you take— the whole with Draft House is you go and they have food and drinks. This is, like, I think the th— I can think of three times that they've just, like, not brought the food. Which is like, I am not a particularly fussy customer, but when it's like, "Oh, that's, like, the lunch I had planned for our five-year-old, and he's complaining about how hungry he is." Not great.

The film? Lot of fun. Had a good time with it. And it just made me feel very grateful— you know I'm a Mario man, myself.

Rachel: Yeah, so you didn't really explain to the listener why I would be excited about Sonic.

Griffin: Rachel... Rachel does what Nintendo'n't, is essentially my point.

Rachel: [laughs] We were a SEGA Genesis family.

Griffin: Yeah, and I love the reason why, because it's very, like... it really identifies your father.

Rachel: I feel like we've talked about— yeah, we've talked about this on the show before, but my family does a lot of, like, review reading and comparison shopping.

Griffin: [distantly] Yeah.

Rachel: And the suggestion— and it was true at the time— was that SEGA had better graphics than Nintendo, so if we were going to invest in a game system we should do the one that really—

Griffin: Had eight games that came out on it. Yeah, I agree. It was a solid choice—

Rachel: [simultaneously] [through laughter] Gives you your money's worth.

Griffin: —I think, all around.

Rachel: Hey, you know, those eight games?

Griffin: They were pretty okay.

Rachel: Beautiful. Beautiful.

Griffin: Yeah, man. Who needs all of the hit JRPGs of the Super Nintendo era that informed all games?

Rachel: I will say, though, I would go over to my friends' houses, and my skills were completely useless.

Griffin: Oh, sure.

Rachel: Like, not only a totally different game, totally different controller. Like, it was very confusing to me.

Griffin: Yeah. The Genesis controller was a weird— it looked like a croissant with, like, three too many buttons on it? Anyway, uh, Sonic the Hedgehog, though, I like— I am glad he exists. I'm very glad for it.

Rachel: Yeah. It was only— it was the only real game series that I, like, really played a lot.

Griffin: Yeah. Um, so Sonic the Hedgehog the character was designed by a Japanese artist Naoto Ohshima. Uh, and the first games were headed up by a programmer named Yuji Naka, who has gone on to sort of develop a lot of sort of big— big games. He was, I think, the President of Sonic Team, which was sort of

the organization within SEGA that was responsible for Sonic the Hedgehog, uh, I think for just a little bit, though.

So, basically in the early 90's, if you're not familiar with, like, the console wars, SEGA just could not break into, like, the home console market, particularly in America. Um, because they had, like, a bunch of arcade games that were huge, especially in Japan, right? And so for the Genesis, that console was strong enough for them to port those arcade games to the Genesis.

And so, like, that was most of the heat that they had, which was not enough to compete with...

Rachel: Oh. I never knew that.

Griffin: Which— it was not enough to compete with, like, *Mario* and *Zelda* and *Metroid* and, like, all these huge things. And not only that, it was also— if you were, like, a third party developer who had, you know, the budget to develop a game, you weren't gonna develop it for the SEGA Genesis which had, like, a microscopic market share of the home console audience. You would just sort of by default make it for Super Nintendo. So in order to change that, like, SEGA had to take a chunk out of Nintendo's, like, stronghold on the market.

Uh, their first attempt to do that was with sports. So they, like, actually teamed up with major sports organizations and athletes to, like, have the defining sports games for different sports, right?

Rachel: Yeahhh.

Griffin: So the NH— hockey specifically, like—

Rachel: That was— we had NHL 96.

Griffin: NHL 96 was a fucking great game. I think that's the one that they play on, uh, *Swingers*? The one where they—

Rachel: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Griffin: Yeah. It was so great. It was so— I didn't give a shit about hockey, and I played so much NHL 96.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Um, but it didn't change the fact that, like— it wasn't enough for SEGA to, like, have a decent share of the market, so, uh, what SEGA basically did was hold open tryouts for their in-house and, like, other outside developers to come up with something that would be hot enough, something that used the power of the SEGA Genesis, the raw graphical power—

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: —uh, to— to, like, become a big hit, become what they call in the games industry a killer app, right? That you just have to— you have to get the console so you can play that one game, right?

Rachel: Yeah, yeah.

Griffin: Um, and so, uh, this very small team got together and showed a proof of concept demo of a little character, who was originally a rabbit with prehensile ears who could turn into a ball and roll through tubes. And they were like, "Yep! Yep, yep, yep, yep, yep. That's it. Let's do it. The rabbit with prehensile ears who can roll through tubes. Let's do it."

Rachel: So was the idea that the rabbit would pick up stuff with the ears? Like—

Griffin: Or it would swing in the air, right?

Rachel: Ohh, that makes more sense.

Griffin: But for whatever reason, all I could find is that that mechanic of a rabbit with prehensile ears was difficult to accomplish on the SEGA Genesis, [laughs] so I don't know what that means, necessarily.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: So instead they focused on the rolling in a ball. And then they were like, "Well, what animals can turn into balls?" And that is— that is where the hedgehog came out of. Uh, his original name was Mr. Needlemouse, which is very powerful. It has big, uh, Yoshi T. Munch— uh, what is it? Munchakoopa's— Yoshisaur T. Munchakoopas is Yoshi's first name.

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Uh, I very much enjoy that. So, do you know why Sonic is blue?

Rachel: No.

Griffin: Literally just because the SEGA logo was blue. It's the same cobalt blue of the SEGA logo. Uh, the red and white shoes, later Ohshima would attribute that to the cover of *Bad*, the Michael Jackson 1986 album. And, like, he's not wearing red and white shoes. It's just like, that was the color palette. It was like a white album with MJ on it, and then in red spray point it says "Bad". And he was like, "I saw that."

There's all kinds of wild connections between Michael Jackson and the Sonic, like, franchise? Which all kind of originates from SEGA made a Michael Jackson game... I think called *Moonwalker*? Anyway, I'm spiraling right now. But...

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Uh, and then, like, there was a lot of sort of 90's inspiration here. I found a few things that were attributed to an interview that I couldn't actually find with Ohshima, that apparently there was, like, this attempt to capture this cool American vibe. That's where you get the Michael Jackson and just sort of the general attitude, which was apparently inspired by Bill Clinton's can-do attitude?

Rachel: This is weird. [laughs]

Griffin: Apparently in, like, his—

Rachel: It feels like a weird Mad Lib. [laughs]

Griffin: It does, kind of. In his, like, 1992 Presidential bid it was like, "Let's do— let's do it. Let's get it done."

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: [laughs] And that inspired sort of his— I don't know. It seems like a stretch to me, but apparently it has been authenticated. Um, so that's how they came up with, like, Sonic the Hedgehog and, you know, the game based around this very simple, like, rolling thing. And then they were like, "Let's make it go

really fucking fast, to make it stand apart from Mario," Who's, you know, I would say a normal speeded man.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Uh, and... they still weren't sure how the game was going to be received by, like, young American gamers. So the CEO of SEGA of America arranged for the game to be packed in with the Genesis, right?

Rachel: Yeahhh.

Griffin: So then it wasn't like, "Oh, I have to buy this SEGA Genesis so I can buy *Sonic*." It was like, "Oh, everybody's playing *Sonic*, and I can get it too when I buy this model of the SEGA Genesis."

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: So, like, when we got a SEGA Genesis, it was with the *Sonic the Hedgehog* pack-in. And you play it and you're like, "Oh shit, this does actually look really good! And feels totally different." And that was enough to literally skyrocket SEGA's market share. That one move, it, like, changed the face—because then Nintendo changed pretty dramatically too to, like, counter that. And then Nintendo had its own weird, like, Attitude era, uh, that wasn't all good. But, like, the competition between the two of them is, like, the stuff of legends. They've written so many books and movies and TV shows about SEGA vs Nintendo in the 90's.

Rachel: Well, it's just interesting. Like, it's kind of the way movie studios I feel like still work. Where it's like, "Oh, you've got— you've got this kind of disaster movie? What's our disaster movie gonna be?" It's like, "You've got a man in overalls? What's our man in overalls?" [laughs]

Griffin: But this is even— this is, I would argue, even bigger than that, right? Because this is like, you know, Apple. This is like Apple showing up to challenge, like, Microsoft's death grip on the PC usage. And then as a result, everybody going like, "Oh, shit! Like, this is a thing everybody has." Like, more consoles were in more homes, and there were more homes that had multiple game consoles, and so people got very used to the idea of this being a thing that you had in your house. And then all of a sudden, like, Sony rolls up and is like, "Yep, ours has a disk. Check ours—" like, and then—

Rachel: Yeah. I guess the idea that we had to choose between a Nintendo and a SEGA maybe wasn't— like, it wasn't a true, like... [laughs]

Griffin: It wasn't a true binary. I mean, these things were fucking expensive.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Those consoles cost about as much as consoles cost today, not counting inflation. Like, when you count inflation the consoles and the games were profoundly expensive. So, like, I get it. Uh, I think we got our SEGA pretty long after the Genesis came out from our Nonny one Christmas, which was totally dope.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Um, like we weren't even expecting it, and then, like, the last present we opened up on some Christmas, like 1997 or something like that was just like, "Oh, shit! Thanks, Nonny! Damn!"

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Um, but you know, it just— it just— Sonic took off from there. There was *Sonic 2*, *Sonic and Knuckles*, which had a— which was like a weird, Game Genie-esque pass through that you had to plug the *Sonic 2* cartridge into?

Rachel: Ohh, yeah. No, I never went that far. I just had 1 and 2.

Griffin: Uh, then you had of course *Doctor Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine*, *Sonic Pinball*, *Sonic 3D Blast*, *Sonic CD*, *Sonic Adventure*, *Sonic Adventure 2 Battle*, *Sonic Advance*, *Sonic Heroes*, *Shadow the Hedgehog*, *Sonic the Hedgehog 2006 Reboot*, *Sonic Unleashed*, *Sonic and SEGA All Stars Racing*, *Sonic Colors*, *Sonic Generations*, *Sonic Lost World*, *Sonic Boom*, *Sonic Mania*, and, like, a bunch of... he goes to the Olympics against Mario and a bunch of 'em.

Rachel: [simultaneously] I wanted to—[laughs]

Griffin: And all those games are equally great, and all of them did really good and were very good games.

Rachel: [laughs] I wanted to ask you about Shadow, because I don't really know. What is— what is the story with Shadow?

Griffin: Shadow the Hedgehog has black and red fur, and he's very angry, and he—

Rachel: I know what he looks like. But, like, what's his story?

Griffin: He has two guns.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: And so in his game you go around with— and it's like Sonic the Hedgehog if he had two guns.

Rachel: Are you being 100% serious?

Griffin: Yeah, he had two guns! Uh, one for each of his hands. And so he would run very fast and he would shoot his guns to, you know, hurt the robots or whatever. Um, the look you're giving me is the look that everybody gave SEGA.

Rachel: [laughs] Just the first game was like, "You roll up in a ball and you get rings, and then you have to bounce on things."

Griffin: You bonk on a piranha to make, like, a good fish come out. And in this one, Shadow the Hedgehog—

Rachel: Or to, like, free— oh! There was things if you, like, bounce on a robot it would, like, free a real animal in it, or something.

Griffin: Yeah, yeah, exactly, for sure. Um—

Rachel: This one is you— you shoot—

Griffin: He has gu— he shoots the guns at 'em. And maybe the animals inside make it, and maybe they don't. He lets God decide. Um, most of the later games— I would say around... after *Sonic Adventure 2*, which was on the Dreamcast, which was SEGA's last home console, which is, like, a very tight bookend on the SEGA, like, uh... SEGA was the wildest creator of home consoles ever. The wildest thing they ever did was the follow up to the Genesis was called

the SEGA Saturn, and that was their, like, "Oh, we have a fancy one that runs disks, too."

What they did was at E3 some year, I don't remember, they did their press conference, and they announced, "This is our new shit: the SEGA Saturn. [loudly] And it's on sale today!"

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: And everyone was like, "What?!" And then they sold, like, 17 of them.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Uh...

Rachel: [continues laughing]

Griffin: So wild. But, like, okay.

Rachel: You think they expected people to run out of the room? [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah, right? Uh, despite, like, how sort of lousy Sonic games got— and they've bounced back. They've been making some— it's been way more consistent lately.

Rachel: I don't even know they still had 'em!

Griffin: Yeah, sure! Uh, the one I was playing with Henry the other day, *Sonic Mania*, is, like, I think the most recent one. But they're making, like, an open world Sonic 3D platformer, which could be fun? The Kirby one's fun.

Rachel: Wow.

Griffin: Uh, but also, I mean, they went on to make several cartoons. There have been about— let me check— infinity comics of Sonic the Hedgehog, including one written by—

Rachel: [mumbles unintelligibly] by McElroys.

Griffin: [mumbling] The McElroy family.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Uh, Henry still asks about that all the time. He's like, "So why did Sonic need to learn how to drive?"

And I'm like, "[quietly] It's a jo— it was a joke... "

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: It's not part of lore. You don't have to— uh... but there's something like— I don't know. Henry loves this dude, and all of his colorful buddies, and...

Rachel: He's just, like— he's super fast.

Griffin: He's very fast, and he's edgy in a way that, like, you can talk about in front of your parents and they won't get worried about you.

Rachel: [laughs] That's fair.

Griffin: They won't get worried that you're gonna steal their car in the middle of the night.

Rachel: And he's not like— it's not like he's a big, muscly, intimidating thing, you know?

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Like, anybody could be Sonic.

Griffin: And what's really fascinating about Sonic is that the character had a much bigger impact on, like, games and pop culture than the games did themselves, right? Because they didn't make a bunch of, like, hyperactive platformers, like those Sonic the He— go back and play *Sonic 1*, *2*, or *3*. They're v— they're really fucking fast! Like, they're so fast, and kind of hard to play, because they're very fast. And—

Rachel: Yeah, no, I never, like— I never, like, beat *Sonic*.

Griffin: Yeah, right? And so, like, there weren't other companies making games like that. It wasn't until, like, indie developers became kind of, like, empowered to make the kinds of games that they wanted to make that you started to see more sort of, like, *Sonic*-like games. But the character itself, like, I would say had a huge impact on 90's pop culture, in a manner that sort of, like, outgrew the games themselves, which I find just— I don't know. I find it really fascinating.

Rachel: Like, how?

Griffin: Like, how?

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I mean, how many kids with Sonic the Hedgehog, like, backpacks and shit like that— like, in the same way that *Space Jam* informed pop culture, right?

Rachel: Yeah, okay. Okay, I see what you're saying.

Griffin: Like, it's— it's— it—

Rachel: I was like, it's not like everybody went out and tried to get, like, a Sonic haircut. [laughs]

Griffin: Well, no, honey. Because that would be quite a bold decision. But the 90's had this, like... you know, the prevailing pop culture attitude was one of sort of, like, benign rebellion, for the most part.

Rachel: Yeah, I can see what you're saying.

Griffin: Which was sort of typified by just, like, being fucking cool.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Uh, and that is such a broad thing, and the way that it was defined was through these, like, zeitgeist things, like a *Space Jam*, like a Michael Jordan and the '96 Chicago Bulls in general, like Sonic the Hedgehog, like Bart Simpson.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And all of that shit, like, really typified that very, very, very specific era. Uh, which, you know, then the way that pop culture works, it went on to inform the next thing, and the next thing, and the next thing. Um, and I don't know. I think it's neat that this, like, Mr. Needlemouse rabbit with prehensile ears went on to, like, [dramatic tone] change the world.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: And make the— two of the only good video game movies that have ever existed, thank you very much.

Rachel: Yeah. I'm excited to see the second one.

Griffin: It's a lot of fun!

Rachel: I liked the first one.

Griffin: It's a hoot! Tails is great. They have a great— there's a great relationship. Idris Elba's Knuckles is [holding back laughter] a breakout performance, I would say.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Very, very good. Jim Carrey's a little much! I'll say it! I said it the first time around. This time, he did not turn that knob... downwards at all. But, uh, the—

Rachel: Are you saying that this movie is really gonna put Idris Elba on the map? [laughs quietly]

Griffin: I'm saying that you hear Idris Elba is going to be playing Knuckles in the Sonic movie, and there's probably a lot of people who think, like, "That's gonna be weird," when they should've thought "That's gonna be fucking delightful, 'cause he's gonna do such a good job, and it's really gonna bring the character to life."

I don't give a shit about Knuckles in general, right?

Rachel: Yeah, I— I feel like—

Griffin: Now I do, though.

Rachel: I feel like Knuckles showed up to complicate things, but everyone was like, "We didn't need that."

Griffin: We didn't need that. We just needed a third buddy for Sonic and Tails to pall around with. And that is eventually— you know, that is the direction that Knuckles follows eventually. But I don't know a whole lot more about Sonic lore, beyond my beloved contributions to it.

I want to thank Bo En and Augustus, though, for the use of our theme song, "Money Won't Pay." You can find a link to that in the episode description. And, uh, I want to thank you for listening to the show, and I hope you'll come out and see us in St. Louis, uh, next... week? Yes! Uh, when we're on tour. We're gonna be opening up for MBMBaM on Wednesday, April 20th in St. Louis.

Rachel: And if you can't come to the St. Louis show, you should still go to the Minneapolis show or the Kansas City show.

Griffin: Yep, yep.

Rachel: 'Cause those will also be good.

Griffin: And those are the next— the following three days. So, you can get tickets to all that at mcelroy.family. You can find, uh, a handy article at the top of the page with links to all of our tours. We're gonna be in, uh, I don't know, Salt Lake City, Portland, uh... why are those the only two at— San Diego, uh— now all the cities that I'm not— Boston, Mashantucket, a bunch of places. Go to mcelroy.family, check that all out.

Rachel: Did we thank Maximum Fun?

Griffin: Thank you Maximum Fun for having us on the network! We're having a lot of— we are having the maximum amount of fun around these parts, talking about Sonic the Hedgehog, and looking at each other lovingly.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Uh... that's— that's, uh, I think that's gonna do it for us. Until next time. Now do your Tom Brokawstar imp— impression, please. I just wanna hear what you think Tom Brokaw sounds like!

Rachel: [deep voice] Hmm, y— yesterday— ye— yesterday on—[laughs quietly]

Griffin: That's so— I don't even need any more. That was so good, babe.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: That was so good.

Rachel: Thank you.

[theme music plays]

[chord]

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