

Wonderful! 30: Droney

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Rachel:

Hi, this is Rachel McElroy.

Griffin:

And hello, this is Griffin McElroy

Rachel:

And this is Wonderful!

Griffin:

Oh, it sure is, isn't it.

Rachel:

[laughs].

Griffin:

10 out of 10 this one. Welcome back to Wonderful! On this podcast, we talk about the things that we're into and the things that you're into. Things like popsicles, artificial grape flavoring, um, I'm just burning topics right now, so maybe I should stop.

I don't know why I'm doing this. I was gonna do artificial grape flavoring next week, and I don't care what form it takes, if it's purple, I'll yurple, which is my new catch phrase. And also you have to imagine that yurple means to eat and enjoy a food. So how are you?

Rachel:

[laughs] I'm good. I'm still riding that high of the Max Fun Drive.

Griffin:

Oh, I love that high. And when we say that, we mean it pretty literally, right? Every donation that we get, uh...

Rachel:

Oh, no.

Griffin:

... we chop it up.

Rachel:

Oh no.

Griffin:

And, uh, lick it. Lick it all up. And we just are just completely zonked at that point, uh...

Rachel:

Can I say something incredible about it?

Griffin:

Uh-huh.

Rachel:

Griffin told me this, um, and I am excited about it. Uh, we got more donors doing Wonderful than we did doing the hit Bachelor podcast, Rose Buddies.

Griffin:

Yeah, we were a little worried about that, but y'all came out and showed your support and got us completely fucking zonked out of our minds. And we just, we appreciate you so much and it means a lot. And thank you so much

for your support. And I guess, as a reward for that, we're gonna do a bang up episode for you this week. You got any small, you got any small wonders?

Rachel:

Whoo, uh, small wonders. No, I don't. [laughs]

Griffin:

This is like your third week of not having a small wonder. You gotta have something, what's good?

Rachel:

Um, what's good?

Griffin:

Um, maybe you could talk about the way that our son eats a banana.

Rachel:

Oh, that's a good one.

Griffin:

Yeah, you can have that one. I was gonna do that one, but I'll think of another one. I just don't want people to think like that you don't like, uh, aren't grateful for every little precious thing that happens in this sweet adventure we call life.

Rachel:

[laughs] Um, he, uh, was, uh, late eating solid foods, but one of the first foods that he would confidently bite was a banana.

Griffin:

But not the way that you'd expect.

Rachel:

And, uh, he likes, he, first he will not eat sliced banana. He wants to hold the whole banana in his hand. And then when he chomps down, he, uh, takes approximately a third of the banana in his mouth.

Griffin:

From the side typically, it is the most amazing thing to watch. Um, but I, you know, like father, like son

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

Um, I have a thing.

Rachel:

Okay.

Griffin:

And it's a gift that Rachel got me for my birthday, which was yesterday. Do you wanna tell 'em what you got me? And by the way, can you also explain whether or not you regret that you got me this or not?

Rachel:

[laughs] Uh, it is hard to buy things for Griffin, uh, because Griffin has taken a lot of ownership of getting the things he wants, uh, in the past few years. So I decided one thing he had casually mentioned that I had dismissed years ago was getting a drone. But, um, we have a new opportunity, uh, in our new neighborhood to really explore the space. And I thought this would be a fun present for him because you never get toys at this age. So I got...

Griffin:

Sure.

Rachel:

... him a drone. Uh, and it makes the loudest, most terrible noise I've ever heard, which I have a feeling Griffin is going to demonstrate for you right now.

Griffin:

And the way that we like to do it is, well, we take off.

Rachel:

[laughs].

Griffin:

Now what happened there little guy? Let's try again. Okay, so we take off.

Rachel:

[laughs].

Griffin:

Okay, a couple failed launches there, but we take off. [drone buzzing in the background] Oh God, it's so fucking close to me. How close do you think I'll let it get to my face? This could be, like, a fun game. Let's let him actually get on the microphone. [buzzing intensifies] [laughs] It's so close. Why am I doing this? Oh, what's that Droney? Droney says he likes hotdogs.

Rachel:

[laughs].

Griffin:

That's what he's grateful for this week. [buzzing continues]

Rachel:

Now can you, can you turn it off?

Griffin:

That was a hand landing or a handing where you stick out your hand and then Droney just comes right back.

Rachel:

So at, like, 10:30 last night, Griffin decided to try this out. Um, and I was immediate regretful, [laughs].

Griffin:

I don't see why you have to be so mean, Droney's right there.

Rachel:

I'm very excited for you to have this new toy.

Griffin:

Who goes first on this one?

Rachel:

I think it might be my turn.

Griffin:

Is it, let me think. There's an easy way to check this. Uh, actually it's my turn.

Rachel:

Oh, man. I feel like it's always your turn.

Griffin:

It explicitly wasn't. Last week it wasn't, [laughs].

Rachel:

Okay.

Griffin:

Um, okay. So my first thing this week is a video game and, uh, I don't usually talk a lot about games on this show, 'cause I know that it's like not your jam, but I recently had something that happened that kind of, like, made me appreciate this thing a whole lot more. And the game is Spelunky. I don't know if you remember that one. Me and uh...

Rachel:

Yeah, of course. You played a lot of that game.

Griffin:

I played it a lot. So Spelunky, if you have not played it, uh, is a game from a developer named Derek Yu, uh, and it first came out as a freeware game for PCs back, all the way back in 2008, which was a decade ago, Jesus Christ. Um, but it debuted as a downloadable game on Xbox 360 and then got poured to a bunch of other platforms. I played it a lot on Vita, it's out on PC too.

Um, and it's one of those like rare, like recent modern games that achieved classic status very, very, very quickly. Like there's a lot of people, common consensus is like this game is a classic, just as much as, you know, Sonic the Hedgehog or Tetris.

Um, and a lot of that is thanks to its kind of brilliant and very thoughtful design. It's a platformer like Mario, which is how you, uh, describe it to people sort of unfamiliar with the title, but it's blended with rogue-like elements.

Um, and that's a genre that is kind of common these days, but it wasn't when Spelunky first came out. Um, and it borrows its name from an old

freeware game called Rogue, which was this really complex, freeware, role playing game where every time you died, uh, you basically, you lost everything and you had to start over and the game was randomly generated every time you played. And so, uh, those two concepts are kind of integral to the Rogue-like genre.

And that's the basic gist of Spelunky, you're this explorer, um, who's going through a series of levels. You're finding treasure and power ups in these levels and the levels are different every time that you play. But when you die, you lose everything and you have to start completely over again. Um, and what makes Spelunky really clever is how every single object in the game including the player and all the enemies and all the, uh, the pickups and power ups that you can find and treasure that you can find, um, they all follow a specific set of rules that govern every interaction in the game.

And that's what makes it beatable, like, your progress resets when you die. Uh, and though the levels are gonna be different every time you play it, the rules are always the same. Um, your knowledge about how the world works is cumulative and your greatest asset in trying to find your way through. Um, and it lends itself to these wild chaotic situations born out of things of this world, just following its own rules.

So there's, here's an example, and it's like the most famous one, uh, that kind of outlines the brilliance of this game. There is a cave man enemy who has a boomerang that he throws at you and it knocks you back and it can knock you back into like a pit of spikes and then you're just, like, toast. Um, and when the caveman enemy doesn't have their boomerang, they go out looking for it. Uh, sometimes they will wander into one of the mini shops that populate this world, where you can exchange the treasure that you found for new items and power ups.

And one of the things they can sell in the shop is a boomerang. Uh, and so, uh, if the caveman walks into that shop and sees a boomerang on the store shelf, they'll pick it up and walk out with it, which then sets off a rule of the

shopkeeper, who, if you try to shoplift something from him, he pulls out a shotgun and tries to kill you.

And like, this is, uh, there is a famous, uh, scenario where, uh, a game developer named Tom Francis... Game developers fucking love this game because it's like the most game-game to ever game.

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

Uh, did this in a level with like six shopkeepers in it. And this caveman tried to steal a boomerang, accidentally, just following its own logic. And it set off every shopkeeper in the level who then, like, blew the level apart and killed everything in it.

And all of that happened just because of these, like, complex interlocking systems that exist inside the game. Um, and I find that so appealing, like, as a game design concept in every type of genre where, if you've been paying attention, you kind of know how the world works and it can work in really unexpected ways.

Rachel:

So is this a game you can win? Is there, like, an objective?

Griffin:

It is, yeah. There is a final level that you can beat. Uh, it is also, like, full of, like, secrets, um, that are not explicitly outlined at all, like, secret paths that you can follow to, like, reach a secret level, uh, and a secret bonus ending. Um, but most people don't do that because the game is extremely, extremely hard. You have like four hit points. There's tons of stuff that can kill you in one hit.

Rachel:

Yeah, and the fact that you have to start over and over and over again.

Griffin:

Yeah. It can be a little bit too much for people. There's some statistics that, uh, say that I think, uh, half of the players only make it past the first level and only, like, something like 6% of players actually ever beat the game, which is a pretty low...

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

... uh, statistic for something like this. Um, so it's a very tense and very punishing game, but learning how to, like, anticipate and exploit situations where these different mechanics are following these rules that you've learned are what make it so great.

And so like, I've always thought it was a classic, even from, like, the first time that I played it, but I haven't actually played it in a long time, but I recently fell back in love with it thanks to something that is really rare in the games industry.

And it's really why I wanted to talk about it. Um, I read a book written by the developer about his own game. Uh, it's part of a series called Boss Fight Books, which goes through, and they're basically like long form essays about different classic games.

Rachel:

Oh, interesting.

Griffin:

Um, usually written by, like, fans of those games. Uh, the Spelunky book was written by Derek Yu about how he developed his own game. And it was just fucking brilliant. I read it, uh, on a flight, uh, two flights actually. There and back to, uh, Dallas and Houston.

Um, and it was so fascinating to read about what makes games like rewarding for him and how he found this, like now very obvious mix of genres of taking the rogue-like genre, which can be like super complex and really, really uninviting, uh, and platforms which are by their nature, like, one of the most inviting popular genres ever and figuring out like how to blend those and how he wrote these rules, that govern these interactions in the game and how he reacted to seeing how players played his game and saw this community spring up around his game.

It even goes into, like, technical details of, like, how he figured out how to randomly generate these different levels. Uh, and some like tips on how he, like, actually finished the game, which is a really, really hard thing to do. There's a lot of game developers out there who, like, start doing their game and then they, maybe they realize like...

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

... oh, you know what, I know so much more now about my game. I'm just gonna start over and then they start over and then they never finish it.

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

Um, it's so fascinating. And the reason it really stood out to me is because game development in general is such a clandestine practice. Um, and a lot of

that is, uh, there's so many, so many reasons to that. And so I don't wanna sound, like, authoritative and be, like, it's because of this one thing, because there's a lot of things that contribute to it.

Um, it's a very technical process. And so like, I'm sure there's lots of developers who think, like, nobody gives a shit about, you know, how we actually made this thing. They just wanna play it. And that's probably right for a lot of folks. Um, also games are super expensive to make. And so it's a very...

Rachel:

yeah.

Griffin:

...risky gambit to make a game. And so maybe you don't want to let everybody know everything. There's this idea of hype wanting to build up hype. And in order to do that, you just, like, can't tell everybody everything all the time about your game. So, like, for all of these reasons, um, the people who make the games that we play largely, like, exist in the shadows. And I think that's a real shame. I think it leads to, like, a lot of disconnect, uh, in this industry between people who play games and the people who make them, um, there are... It's hard for folks who play a game and say, like, oh, that's my favorite game of all time to like, actually name, game developers. Like by name.

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

It's tricky because there's not like a ton of superstars because of all of this stuff. And also, like, nobody really knows how games get made.

Rachel:

Well, yeah. And there's such long projects too. Like sometimes somebody can devote years to something, uh, and nobody knows that they did.

Griffin:

Right. And so when you don't see the work that goes into the game, the decisions...

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

... why they made it, it can lead to like sort of, um, snap judgements and animosity about, like, "Well, why did you do this? Why are you killing the game?" When there are reasons behind it, it's just, like, nobody is... There are very few...

I'm not saying nobody, there's lots of developers who, uh, particularly indie developers, I think it's easy for them because they're sort of playing by their own rules so they can put out like a, uh, commentary track to *Gone Home*, for instance, which I found really interesting as you're playing through *Gone Home*, which was this really cool adventure game where you just walk around a house and find these diaries, but you can like collect these little cassette tapes that like tell you what the game developers were thinking, why they made it.

It's a rare and, like, really cool insight into this brilliant game. One of the best games like ever, uh, especially the last decade. Uh, and I don't know, I just found it so fascinating to get to, like, read into this thing, 'cause it's such a rare opportunity. Um...

Rachel:

So you said this is part of, like, a series of books?

Griffin:

It is part of a series of books, yeah. And a lot of them are, uh, folks doing, uh, interviews with, like, the developers. Um, Alexa, who used to work at Polygon did one on Kingdom Hearts, um, just for an example. So...

Rachel:

Mm-hmm.

Griffin:

... but this is, I think the only one of a developer talking about their own game.

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

Um, and, like, hearing their history and their insight and, like, what it's actually like to make a game. Like, I'm so fascinated by that shit and I was very grateful for, like, the opportunity to get to read about, like, not only an interesting story, but, like, an interesting story behind, like, one of my favorite games.

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

Um, so if you're interested in this stuff at all, it's a really good, quick read. I enjoyed it.

Rachel:

Cool.

Griffin:

What's your first thing?

Rachel:

Uh, my first thing is a return to the poetry corner!

Griffin:

Oh, we need to song for the poetry corner, don't we?

Rachel:

We do.

Griffin:

Have we talked about this before and failed?

Rachel:

No.

Griffin:

I could play one on the piano really quick.

Rachel:

I would like that actually.

Griffin:

Move it Droney. [plays scat jazz on piano, reminiscent of the Rugrats theme]

Rachel:

[laughs]. No, no. No, that's, [laughs], it's kind of already something though, is the problem I think.

Griffin:

No, 'cause my, they use, like, a xylophone and that one was the jazz scat voice.

Rachel:

Oh, okay.

Griffin:

Yeah, so it's a new song. Uh, they use a xylophone mostly, but I use the jazz scat.

Rachel:

[laughs].

Griffin:

Uh, what's the poem?

Rachel:

Uh, so the poet is Adrienne Rich, uh, who is a poet that I read a lot of, uh, right after I finished college. Uh, she's a poet, SAS and, uh, activist for women, uh, specifically, uh, for lesbian women later in her life.

Uh, she has written over, uh, 20 collections of poems. Uh, she actually passed away in 2012. Um, and her first collection came out right after she finished college. Uh she's a famous activist. Uh, and actually in 1997 she refused to accept a National Medal of Arts, uh, because she was protesting, uh, a vote by House Speaker Newt Gingrich to end funding for the NEA.

Uh, and she had this great quote about that. She said, "I could not accept such an award from President Clinton or this white house because the very meaning of art is, I understand, that is incompatible with the cynical politics of this administration. Art means nothing if it simply decorates the dinner table of the power which holds it hostage."

Griffin:

Wow.

Rachel:

Isn't that good?

Griffin:

Is this what that one episode of West Wing is based on? Do you remember that? Where I think it was...

Rachel:

Oh.

Griffin:

... Laura Dern was playing somebody who, like, Toby...

Rachel:

Maybe!

Griffin:

... loved her poetry and wanted to name her Poet Laureate but she refused to...

Rachel:

The timing works out 'cause it was '97.

Griffin:

Yeah.

Rachel:

Interesting.

Griffin:

Poll ripped from the Headlines.

Rachel:

Uh, she also, um, in her later years wrote a book specifically, uh, regarding the need for women to unite. Uh, it's the book, uh, On Lies, Secrets and Silence. And in the book she said "Women have often felt insane when cleaving to the truth of our experience, our future depends on the sanity of each of us. And we have a profound stake beyond the personal and the project of describing our reality as candidly and fully as we can to each other."

Uh, yeah, so she just, she became a powerful figure beyond her writing and her writing is prolific too. I mean, the fact that she started publishing immediately after college is impressive.

Griffin:

20 collections is a lot.

Rachel:

It's actually 25 total.

Griffin:

Jesus, please us.

Rachel:

Yeah. So the poem that I brought...

Griffin:

But where a lot of, 'em, like, short though, like cheat poems?

Rachel:

I mean, probably, you know how poems are.

Griffin:

Like, Apple Snapple. That's one whole page in my book, think about...

Rachel:

Like seven sentences on a page and it's like, I'm done.

Griffin:

I could do way shorter than that. Dog, log. Next poem.

Rachel:

Well, what would you call it though? Here's the thing, the title is what's important.

Griffin:

Yeah. I think I'd call it, um, thoughts on the log dog.

Rachel:

Now see, you go to give it like gravity.

Griffin:

Serious thoughts about the log dog.

Rachel:

[laughs] There you go.

Griffin:

Sad thoughts about the log dog.

Rachel:

On a rainy day.

Griffin:

On a rainy dark day.

Rachel:

[laughs].

Griffin:

Now it's too long, though.

Rachel:

[laughs].

Griffin:

What if I just call it sorrow?

Rachel:

There you go. See, this is the secret behind every high school poet.

Griffin:

Mm-hmm.

Rachel:

[laughs] Uh, so the poem I'm bringing is called, For the Dead, it's from the book Diving into the Wreck, which she won a national book award for. Uh, Diving into the Wreck is one of the books that I really loved when I first started reading her work.

Griffin:

Sorry. Is it just called the National Book Award?

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

They couldn't think of, like, a better name, like, yeah.

Rachel:

Well, I mean, it's assigned to like a specific book, you know?

Griffin:

I know, but it's a...

Rachel:

And it seems pretty straightforward to me.

Griffin:

When you win the Super Bowl they don't say like you won the National Football Award.

Rachel:

[laughs].

Griffin:

There's a name for that trophy. And I don't know what it is [laughs]. Is it a Stanley cup, right? If they called the Stanley cup the good hockey trophy, do you know what I mean?

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

It's, like, but just a little bit, you know what I mean? Just a little bit of a, just to get back to me. Book folks.

Rachel:

[laughs] Yeah, Griffin's a hit generator as evidenced by dog log [laughs].

Griffin:

Get her, Droney. Droney go.

Rachel:

Uh, can I read this poem for you?

Griffin:

Please, yes.

Rachel:

Okay. So it's called For the Dead.

"I dreamed I called you on the telephone / to say: Be kinder to yourself / but you were sick and would not answer / The waste of my love goes on this way / trying to save you from yourself / I have always wondered about the left-over / energy, the way water goes rushing down a hill / long after the rains have stopped / or the fire you want to go to bed from / but cannot leave, burning-down but not burnt-down / the red coals more extreme, more curious / in their flashing and dying / than you wish they were / sitting long after midnight."

Griffin:

That's a sad poem though.

Rachel:

It's a little bit of a sad poem, yeah.

Griffin:

Well, and that made me feel feelings that poetry has only started to make me feel.

Rachel:

[laughs].

Griffin:

And this one did a sad one to me.

Rachel:

I there's something about Adrienne Rich's poems that just always kind of pull me in like very elegant, uh, and precise. Um, and I mean, you know, I'm not usually one to analyze poems, but this one's pretty clear by the title. That it's this idea that after somebody is gone, you still have all of this weight within you.

Griffin:

Yeah.

Rachel:

Uh, and I love the way that she describes it, the way water rushes down a hill long after it rains and the coals are still burning after you wanna go to bed. Uh, I just, I found that really powerful and I just, it's not necessarily, like, my favorite poem by her. Uh, but I felt like it was really emblematic of kind of the powerful way she's able to get at specific ideas.

Griffin:

Yeah, it was, it was, uh, it made me think of that one time that we were trying to go to bed, but we had a fire pit going in the backyard, but the fire wouldn't go out. And I realized it's because we used only starter logs.

Rachel:

[laughs].

Griffin:

So we closed it up anyway and then our neighbors called us the following morning to say we'd left the fire...

Rachel:

It's still smoking.

Griffin:

... burning the whole night.

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

And that's what it's like.

Rachel:

Yeah, [laughs]. [piano plays scat jazz] This has been the poetry corner.

Griffin:

No, you got to say that before, now I got to play it again.

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

[scat jazz piano song plays again]

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

It's really good, right?

Rachel:

It's very good.

Griffin:

That voice. Hey...

Rachel:

Let see, now we have to do another song.

Griffin:

Oh yeah. Hey, can I steal you away? [plays another scat jazz song on piano]

Rachel:

[laughs] Wow, that was really good.

Griffin:

[laughs] That was garbage!

[ad break]

Rachel: This message is for Rachel.

Griffin:

Oh!

Rachel:

And it is from Matt.

Griffin:

Okay. Do you know a Matt?

Rachel:

I mean, everybody knows a Matt.

Griffin:

That's true. Is it, um, Matt [mumbles]?

Rachel:

[laughs].

Griffin:

Yeah, it's a fun...

Rachel:

Oh, and it's a nice little call...

Griffin:

Yeah, it's a fun, we call back to the other...

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

The other one.

Rachel:

Uh, [laughs], the message says "Hi, Rachel. I can't wait to marry you soon..."

Griffin:

Hey, wait a minute! Huh? No!

Rachel:

"... and be just happy as Griffin is with his Rachel."

Griffin:

[laughs].

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

I thought this is another jumbotron trying to marry you thing.

Rachel:

"Uh, maybe we'll start a rival podcast..."

Griffin:

Wait a minute!

Rachel:

"... called Enjoyable." [laughs]

Griffin:

"Hey, dang it! What the heck, dude?"

Rachel:

This is a rollercoaster of emotions. "Anyways, love you more than anything..."

Griffin:

Okay.

Rachel:

"And so excited to spend the rest of my life with you."

Griffin:

All right.

Rachel:

"I think you're cute!"

Griffin:

Okay. Yeah, that one took me some places. That one was like the sad poem, it affected me emotionally.

Rachel:

[laughs].

Griffin:

Do you, should I play the poetry? Was that a poem? Should I play the poetry corner slam for that one?

Rachel:

I mean, Griffin, what is a poem?

Griffin:

Good point. [piano notes play]

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

It's, like, I'm far away from the piano. That's as far as I could reach.

Rachel:

[laughs] Uh, this next message is for Alan, it is from Taylor. "Despite my continuing journey into the blasted hellscape of Eastern Washington, you remain the best friend I could ever hope to have. I am a better human

because you are in my life. My son will be a better human because you are in his life. Thank you for everything, here's to many years to come."

Griffin:

That is a lovely message. And I had no idea that Eastern Washington was, uh, so challenging. What do you think is going on over there? Probably the Twilight vampires.

Rachel:

Well, and, you know, the cold.

Griffin:

Yeah.

Rachel:

Cold weather.

Griffin:

Yeah, you get all chilly and you go out to buy a coat at the Burlington Coat Factory. Do you want me to take the computer?

Rachel:

It's so heavy.

Griffin:

[laughs]

[Max Fun promo]

Oliver:

How's it going everyone? I'm Oliver Wang.

Morgan:

And I'm Morgan Rhodes. We have a brand new show on the Maximum Fun network that we'd love to share with you. It's called Heat Rocks.

Oliver:

Morgan, we should probably explain what a heat rock is.

Morgan:

It is a banger, a fire track, true fire.

Oliver:

Right, dope album. Each episode, we will bring on a special guest to join us, to talk about one of their heat rocks. It might be a musician.

Morgan:

A writer.

Oliver:

Maybe a scholar.

Morgan:

I mean, I would have been happy to just talk to you about your heat rocks, but this is a different show, so.

Oliver:

Yeah, I think people might enjoy hearing maybe the guests instead

Morgan:

To do that, you'll have to go to maximumfun.org. So if you wanna talk about hot music, you should check us out.

Oliver:

Heat Rocks.

[ad break ends]

Griffin:

I am so excited to tell you about my second thing.

Rachel:

Okay.

Griffin:

I've wanted to try to find the right way to frame this for a while. And now, I'm just excited to tell you about it. I wanna tell you about Commander John Young's space adventures.

Rachel:

I don't know any of these things.

Griffin:

Good, good, good. Then prepare yourself and prepare yourself at home.

Rachel:

Is this a real thing?

Griffin:

Yes. John Young was an astronaut who actually just passed away this passed January and during his career with NASA accomplished a great deal. He was part of the new nine, which was, like, the second batch of, uh, astronauts after the first, like, seven astronauts who would start going on missions, um, alongside, like, the new nine included Neil Armstrong, for instance, uh, and Jim Lovell who was the commander on Apollo 13, which went... That one went a little bit weird.

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

Um, he flew on Gemini 3, where he went on the first man flight of the Gemini spacecraft. He was the commander of Gemini 10. Um, he flew around the moon on Apollo 10. He was the backup commander for Apollo 13, just barely missed the bullet on that one.

Uh, and he became the ninth human being to walk on the moon on the Apollo 16 mission before being named the chief of the space shuttle program where he did a couple more flights on the space shuttle. So his contributions to our space program are enormous. And I do not want to undercut them here because, like, being an astronaut is a very dangerous job. You're putting...

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

... your life on the line...

Rachel:

For sure.

Griffin:

... and you're putting your life on the line in pursuit of, like, this spirit of exploration, which is, it's heroic, plain and simple. And I find, I genuinely, unironically think that is so admirable. And John Young also did two of the funniest things I've ever heard of in my entire life. And that's what I'd like to focus on today, [laughs].

Again, great astronauts. So many contributions, hero missions, two of the funniest fucking things I've ever heard of. Um, the first was on his first mission into space on Gemini 3. Uh, it was a two man mission. He was on it with, uh, Gus Grissom who was another member of the new nine.

And it was, uh, just a six hour mission up in space. The first couple Gemini missions were, like, preparing for Gemini 3 where they'd actually start going in space and start doing, uh, experiments. So they would be up there for six hours, had a bunch of experiments they were supposed to conduct.

Uh, one of the experiments was to test out this new kind of dehydrated food that other astronauts on future missions could...

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

... eat. Um, it would make sort of longer missions for instance, to the moon, a possibility. This is one of the more important missions they had to conduct on this.

Rachel:

Like astronaut ice cream you get in museum gift shops!

Griffin:

Yes. Uh, and you know, actual, like, food-food that you could rehydrate and...

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

... and eat up there. This was a big part of the six hour mission. They had a lot to accomplish in a relatively narrow window of time as they were one of the first few Americans in space. They had to test out this dehydrated food. John Young had some other lunch plans.

I'd like to read for you the, uh, transcript of a conversation between John and Gus Grissom. This is all real, I swear to God. Uh...

Grissom: What is it?

Young: Corned beef sandwich.

Grissom: Where did that come from?

Young: I brought it with me. Let's see how it tastes. Smells, doesn't it?

Grissom: Yes, it's breaking up. I'm going to stick it in my pocket.

Young: Is it? It was a thought anyways.

Grissom: Yep.

Young: Not a very good one.

Grissom: Pretty good though. If it would just hold together.

Young: Want some chicken leg?

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

Where did he get the chicken leg?

Rachel:

There're, like, infinite number of checks they have to go through in, like, different barriers in order to get on the shuttle. And then somehow he snuck in...

Griffin:

Yes, he had snuck a corny beef...

Rachel:

That's a good life.

Griffin:

... sandwich on board shortly before launch, which, like, you put on the suit and, like, you're walking down the catwalk to the, to the spaceship. And you're like, oh shit, hold on, I forgot something. Let me go back into my, uh, locker real quick. Nobody else come with me.

Rachel:

[laughs].

Griffin:

Where do you put it? How does it not get destroyed by the fucking g-forces as you are launched into...

Rachel:

I love...

Griffin:

... outer space?

Rachel:

I love the story behind it. Possibly that a loved one made that sandwich for him and said here, in case you get hungry, he thought, that's a good suggestion.

Griffin:

I like it even better. I like it even better if he made it for himself because he wanted to eat a space sandwich.

Rachel:

[laughs].

Griffin:

Um, so obviously it was a problem, right? Because crumbs could get in the machinery...

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

... and caused chaos on board a space flight. Um, and that was part of the reason why he was formally reprimanded by NASA and by Congress, upon his return to the planet.

Rachel:

Oh, my gosh.

Griffin:

Um, all because they had, like, sunk millions of dollars into this astronaut dehydrated food. And then my dude brought his own food into space. It is so good.

Rachel:

Was, like, would you eat this dehydrated food? "Well, actually I'm not hungry."

Griffin:

"I'm not hungry. I, uh, I'm all full up for some reason."

"Your breath stinks like corned beef."

"Yeah, that's weird."

Rachel:

[laughs].

Griffin:

Um, so sadly Gus Grissom, uh, died in a pre-launch test of the Apollo 1, but he has a memorial museum in Mitchell, Indiana. And one of the exhibits is a corned beef sandwich embedded in acrylic just to remind people...

Rachel:

Oh, that's nice.

Griffin:

...this very thing happen. So that's very good. John Young's zero G goofs did not stop there though, because during a moon walk on the Apollo 16 mission, where again, he was the ninth human being...

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

... to ever walk on the fucking moon. Uh, Young was reporting back to NASA about his status during a moonwalk. Um, and every recording that... I love listening to, like, moonwalk recordings, because it's, like, you can hear,

obviously the most famous one is, you know, one small step for, uh, man and giant leap for mankind. That's probably not how it goes, but...

Rachel:

This is very similar to that I think.

Griffin:

But that's like momentous, right? Because you...

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

...you got to nail that. I'm the first person to step foot on the moon. It's, but then, like, you listen to these more informal conversations and it's a lot of astronauts freaking the fuck out because they're walking on the moon and a lot of mission control just like freaking the out...

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

... because we're walking on the moon and it doesn't matter which mission it is. It's, like, wild that you're walking on the moon. And so there's probably, there's probably lots of recordings of John Young during this mission.

I think he had three different, um, uh, moon walks during this mission being, you know, reverent like that, right? Uh, getting to take these rarefied steps on lunar soil, but there also exists a recording of John Young saying the funniest shit anyone's ever said on the moon ever. And I'd like to just sort of play this dialogue between him and, uh, Houston Mission Control right now.

Houston Mission Control:

Okay. And I sure think it's paying off. You guys do an outstanding job.

John:

I got the farts again. I got 'em again, Charlie. I mean, I haven't eaten this much citrus fruit in 20 years. And I'll tell you one thing, in another 12 fucking days, I ain't never eating any more. I put 'em up over there, right up in there, they ain't there? Oh, shit.

Houston Mission Control:

Orion, Houston.

John:

Yes, sir.

Houston Mission Control:

Okay, uh, John you, we have a hot mic.

John:

How long have we had that?

Rachel:

[laughs].

Griffin:

So if you had trouble making that out, uh, on the Apollo 15 mission, the astronauts were having cardiac irregularities due to a lack of potassium. So on Apollo 16, the mission that, uh, John Young was commander on and did the moon walks on, all the astronauts drank a ton of this nutrient enriched orange juice. And apparently it gave John Young, super bad farts.

Rachel:

[laughs].

Griffin:

Uh, and he let Houston know about it. Uh...

Rachel:

[laughs].

Griffin:

... what is amazing about this conversation is because it's NASA, all of it was publicly broadcast. All of it was publicly available. All of the transcripts of their...

Rachel:

[laughs] Oh my gosh.

Griffin:

...dialogue had to be sent out to everyone. Earth heard John Young say, "I got the farts again, Charlie and this mission's up and, when this, in 12 more fucking days, I'm never gonna eat, you know, any more citrus fruit I could tell you that much. And then he says, "Oh, shit. Uh, Earth heard that, all of Earth heard that."

Uh, Mary Roach actually wrote a book called Packing for Mars, uh, where she mentions that the conversation was broadcast to the world at large and caused the governor of Florida to clarify that oranges don't give you gas, like, he wanted to get ahead of that.

Uh, it was this special nutrient enriched juice that was the culprit. I don't know if I believe that or not. I don't think oranges give me gas, but...

Rachel:

You think there's a big orange juice cover up?

Griffin:

Yeah. This was like a PR disaster for the Orange State. Um, and NASA, in their official records actually that they put out, they changed the word farts to gas and they cut out fucking entirely, uh, which is a real shame because it's a great part of the equation. And, like, this stuff's really funny to me, right? Like, the juxtaposition of being in the most buck wild, most, uh, impossible to reach scenario imaginable, and also talking about the bad farts that you have and how you're never gonna eat anymore fucking citrus ever again.

Rachel:

Well it's the kind of history you want, right? Like when you're studying like these great moments, uh, in our nation, you kind of want these little humanizing elements.

Griffin:

That's exactly it, right. I think that this moment is, and I'm, I swear to God, I'm being honest here is so relatable and so beautiful because I feel like the concept of actually being on the moon is the most abstract... I will never do it. I will never walk on the moon. And so, uh, and I was obviously not alive when we were first, like, doing the moon walks.

And so it was, it was not, like, a super relatable thing for me. And so in some small way, when I was younger, like I was not really into space, it was hard to feel invested in space exploration and the accomplishments of, like, our dangerous journey into the stars. But here was a dude who drank too much juice and farted up a storm and then walked on the lunar surface...

Rachel:

Yeah, right? [laughs].

Griffin:

... within the span of the same hour. And like, I've done two of those things before. It's, like, so, it's so incredible to me. And it's so humanizing. And for that reason, like, I feel like I don't, I don't know how John Young felt about like his legacy, that like a lot of people talked about the sandwich story or his farts, but I genuinely think it humanized this sort of unrelatable process so much...

Rachel:

Of course.

Griffin:

... in a way that, like, made John Young accomplish a lot more than just his flight record would indicate.

Rachel:

And a great spokesman for Gas-X.

Griffin:

A great spokesman for Gas-X, terrible spokesman for Tropicana orange juice.

Rachel:

[laughs] Okay. So this week I am bringing another, uh, nostalgic food item. And I think that's largely because we are in the phase of introducing new foods to our son. So I don't want my brand necessarily to be children's food, but here I am.

Griffin:

[laughs].

Rachel:

Here I am. Here we are.

Griffin:

Yeah, go ahead.

Rachel:

Uh, I'm bringing chicken nuggets this week.

Griffin:

[laughs] Okay. Yeah, I mean, I love these little guys. It does feel a little bit like we are not even a year into this show and we are quickly working through the whole Wendy's menu. Um...

Rachel:

[laughs].

Griffin:

... so like, we'll do, like, chili and then Frosties the next week. Um, no chicken nuggets are, uh, a righteous food and I'm excited to...

Rachel:

So when I was a kid, I didn't eat hamburgers, like, at all. Like I didn't have a hamburger until I was 14. Uh, chicken nuggets were my go-to.

Griffin:

Uh, whenever we went to McDonald's, I would get a plain hamburger and I would throw the bun away and I would just eat the beef Patty up till like seven years old.

Rachel:

Interesting.

Griffin:

Yeah. I was basically like a junkyard dog.

Rachel:

[laughs] Well, that became a popular diet when Atkins came out, so there you go.

Griffin:

Yeah. I actually saw Dr. Atkins at the McDonald's and he saw me do it. He stole it from me!

Rachel:

Oh, no.

Griffin:

That idea thief. I'm gonna sue his butt. He passed away, didn't he?

Rachel:

Yeah, I'm pretty sure he's not alive.

Griffin:

Yeah, he definitely is not with us.

Rachel:

Okay. So you don't think about this stuff, but the chicken nugget was actually invented and it was invented in the 1950s by Robert C. Baker, a food science professor at Cornell.

Griffin:

I do wanna say, I do think about this stuff a lot.

Rachel:

Oh, I don't think about, like, the invention of a food item, I guess.

Griffin:

I mean, uh, Christina Tosi does the crack, uh, crack pie, right? Is that an invention or is it just a new recipe? Is a new recipe, an invention or is it?

Rachel:

Yeah, wow.

Griffin:

You know, Guy Fieri invents the, um, big boy buffalo bombs. Is that an invention or is it just a new recipe? That it, I mean, it can be...

Rachel:

I guess it depends whether it's duplicated, whether everybody takes that and makes their own thing.

Griffin:

Yes.

Rachel:

Like whether it's able to be customized.

Griffin:

Dippin' Dots were a fucking invention and I don't care what anybody says.

Rachel:

Yeah? [laughs].

Griffin:

This is the ice cream of the future.

Rachel:

Uh, so the bite size piece of chicken coated in batter, and then deep fried was called the chicken crispy by Baker and his associates. Uh, Dr. Baker's innovations made it possible to form chicken nuggets in any shape. [laughs].

Griffin:

Okay.

Rachel:

Um...

Griffin:

Should we talk about like, sort of the stigma of the nugget of just, like...

Rachel:

Yeah. So this is why it was kind of embarrassing for me to bring this because, uh, nuggets are wildly known to not have, uh, a lot of nutritional value and potentially not a lot of chicken [laughs].

Griffin:

Yes, and sort of have been made out of a... But here's the thing, I feel like these days that's kind of not true as much, and I'm not saying that it's, like, uh, I'm not saying that it's completely false and that chicken nuggets are, like, the healthiest food in the world, but I see a lot of like getting shared of pink goo being, like, expressed...

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

... out of a Play-Doh machine. Um, and it's actually not.

Rachel:

Yeah, there's a lot of information out there about the reforms that have been made to the nugget industry, uh, to address issues like that.

Griffin:

I don't know why this is a hill we're deciding to die on. I don't think we need to take some big, bold stance on nugget, uh, integrity.

Rachel:

Uh, so the McDonald's version of chicken nuggets, which is how I was introduced, uh, was created on commission by Tyson Foods in 1979. And the product was sold beginning 1980. So...

Griffin:

In 79, they were definitely up to some shit. I think we can all agree that there was definitely some sort of...

Rachel:

But it's interesting to know that, like, nuggets just came on the scene a little bit before we did, which is why they were like...

Griffin:

And I'm glad

Rachel:

... wildly popular. I know, can you imagine living in a nugget free world?

Griffin:

Yeah, 1975. "I'm not actually feeling a burger right now, can I get some small chicken pieces?"

"We don't have those. What are you talking about?"

Rachel:

Uh, so here's where the fun starts. [laughs]

Griffin:

[laughs] Wonderful, here's where the fun starts.

Rachel:

There is a record, a world record for eating the most chicken nuggets in three minutes.

Griffin:

Oh, my God.

Rachel:

It's held by Thomas Wellborn.

Griffin:

Can I guess?

Rachel:

I want you to guess approximately how many.

Griffin:

In three minutes?

Rachel:

Yes.

Griffin:

48.

Rachel:

You're so close. It's 42.

Griffin:

Oh!

Rachel:

Uh...

Griffin:

You know, he could have gotten the last six down, if he just...

Rachel:

This is why I thought it was interesting since nuggets are so irregularly shaped, they have 746 grams or approximately 42 chicken nuggets.

Griffin:

Okay.

Rachel:

I guess just for those at home that wanna attempt this, like maybe they...

Griffin:

Oh, oh, oh, oh, legally, we can't say that. Don't attempt this at home. Please don't attempt this at home.

Rachel:

Please don't.

Griffin:

When I did the fucking Totino's MBMBaM where I try...

Rachel:

Oh, yeah.

Griffin:

... to eat a pizza roll every minute, I, like, started to get really panicky that it was gonna be the end of the show.

Rachel:

[laughs].

Griffin:

Because we had a lot of people telling us that they were doing it at home and I was gonna be responsible for, uh, oh, they're good rolls folks, but don't hurt yourself with them.

Rachel:

Uh, okay. Now there's also a record for the largest recorded chicken nugget.

Griffin:

[laughs] Is it a fucking tender? Like at what point?

Rachel:

I don't know. What is the differentiator?

Griffin:

What is, what was the size?

Rachel:

Do you wanna guess?

Griffin:

I mean, it loses the classification, I think at a certain point, it crosses over into tender territory.

Rachel:

51.1 pounds.

Griffin:

That is not a, that's not even a fucking tender at that point!

Rachel:

[laughs] Uh, and 3.25 feet long and two feet wide. It was created by Empire Kosher and unveiled at Kosherfest in Secaucus, New Jersey on October 29th, 2013.

Griffin:

Okay, I'm getting a little ill.

Rachel:

[laughs].

Griffin:

First off, there's no way that cooked through properly.

Rachel:

[laughs].

Griffin:

No way. 0% chance that cooked through.

Rachel:

They don't say, like, how many chickens were used to...

Griffin:

That is also...

Rachel:

... it's very disturbing.

Griffin:

... quantifying that number is...

Rachel:

... disturbing to think about.

Griffin:

... the worst thing I've ever thought about in my life. Also, it is tough to get the crust to meat spread on a regular chicken nugget just perfectly right.

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

And that one you're talking about what, a centimeter of that good crust and then fucking two and a half feet of- of just pure chicken meat?

Rachel:

Yeah, that's it's not great to think about.

Griffin:

I will never eat another chicken nugget because of this. This is the first wonderful we've ever done where we were, like, let's celebrate this thing before we...

Rachel:

And then ruin it.

Griffin:

... never, ever, ever eat it again. I mean, we would be remiss if we did not also talk about the dips.

Rachel:

Oh, the dips. See, I was, uh, when I first started, this is...

Griffin:

Don't tell me you did nude...

Rachel:

Yes.

Griffin:

... nude nugs, no!

Rachel:

This is very much like the French fry conversation. I was not a big fan of dipping sauces when I was younger. As I got older, I appreciated the honey mustard, naturally.

Griffin:

Gotta have my dips.

Rachel:

But when I was younger, I would eat a French fry plain. I would eat a hotdog plain. I would eat a...

Griffin:

A what? A what? Oh, oh, plain, [laughs].

Rachel:

Hotdog plain.

Griffin:

Everyone, [laughs].

Rachel:

What, did you think it was a plane made out of hotdogs?

Griffin:

[laughs].

Rachel:

'Cause I love that.

Griffin:

Listen, the Wienermobile is a thing of the past. This is Oscar Meyers' hotdog plane.

Rachel:

[laughs].

Griffin:

Uh, we do direct flights between, uh, Columbus and Chicago. And, um, you can eat it.

Rachel:

Mm-hmm.

Griffin:

You can eat it from the outside, but don't do it while you're in the air.

Rachel:

It's almost what I got you instead of the drone.

Griffin:

Is a hotdog plane.

Rachel:

It was a hotdog plane

Griffin:

These days though you do like the dips.

Rachel:

Yes.

Griffin:

Yeah, okay.

Rachel:

Yeah. Well, part of it is my introduction to ketchup, which I was not comfortable with for a very long time.

Griffin:

I changed, I changed everything for you.

Rachel:

You really did.

Griffin:

So you like ketchup on your nuggs?

Rachel:

No, no. I'm just saying that, like, I'd had a negative opinion of ketchup and so I thought all dipping sauces were not ideal.

Griffin:

So what's the dip now for you?

Rachel:

I mean, I would say, uh, honey mustard, barbecue doesn't feel right to me.

Griffin:

No, no, no.

Rachel:

I mean, ranch is always a good one too.

Griffin:

Mm-hmm. There we go. I was a ranchy boy for sure. I would have, you know, what we did actually was popcorn shrimp more at my house. We'd do frozen popcorn shrimp and I'd dip those in a little bit of ranchy ranch, because nothing goes better than ranch dressing and seafood, but it was West Virginia and ranch is sort of, um, a main sort of food category for...

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

... or for me, at least it was so, oh, I smell this stinky weird milk sauce. And I will just dip anything in it, my toes.

Rachel:

So I, yeah, I appreciate all of you indulging me in the chicken nugget thing. I think whenever I go to the poetry corner, I feel like I need to step in the other direction.

Griffin:

You need to stink it up a little bit.

Rachel:

Yeah, [laughs].

Griffin:

With a nasty one.

Rachel:

[laughs].

Griffin:

Um, so do you wanna hear some things that our listeners at home have to say?

Rachel:

Yes.

Griffin:

Okay. They say the following, Melissa says, "I live in New England and I think it's wonderful when all traffic on a side street has to stop to let turkeys by. I always take a deep breath..."

Rachel:

Oh, my gosh.

Griffin:

"... I always take a deep breath and remember that life is better when you slow down." I think that's true and pure and beautiful. But if I was running late to like a movie or an appointment or something...

Rachel:

Yelling out your window, "Come on!"

Griffin:

Come on, turkeys.

Rachel:

[laughs].

Griffin:

I think mindfulness and thoughtfulness is so important, but, like, draft house won't let you in to the movie if you get there late. And so hey, turkeys, pick it up. Samantha says, "Something I find really wonderful is watching people who have headphones in, laugh or try to hold back laughter in response to what they're listening to. I feel like you get to see into this little bubble of happiness and it always makes me smile."

I swear, I'm not including this as, like, a self-referential, like, uh, because of our... I genuinely think this is great too. And I have a very fond memory of listening to, I think it was Super Ego on a long flight. And I was by myself and uh, these two women were sitting next to me and it was actually a really turbulent flight. It was, like, very...

Rachel:

Oh, yeah.

Griffin:

... scary. Like one of them was like kind of getting very upset in the turbulence.

Rachel:

Yeah. I think you told me about this.

Griffin:

Um, but I was listening to Super Ego to like just a really fucking funny bit and I was crying, laughing, trying not to hold it. And I looked over and realized that they were, like, having, enjoying watching me listen to this very funny podcast.

I love that shit. Oh, one more thing here from Tyler who says, "Something I think is wonderful is tiny libraries. They are cute little wooden houses filled with books that are scattered all over the residential areas of the city that I live in, Grand Rapids. You simply take a book and you leave another one in there. And I think they're really great for kids and look very cute." Yeah, we have some of those here in town, right?

Rachel:

Yeah. It's such a nice idea. Like, it really builds a sense of community.

Griffin:

Um, you wanted to thank some people for sending us some... [crosstalk]

Rachel:

Yeah, okay. Some of people sent us some great thoughtful things, uh, that I wanted to thank them for very quickly. Uh, we got some, uh, Vodka actually from Glenna, which, uh, was very exciting. Uh, Janelle sent us an actual, um, mascot from the Olympics.

Griffin:

Yeah.

Rachel:

And we talked about it that one week and then she went to the Olympics because, uh, she was in Korea and sent us a little curling, uh, stuffed animal. Um, we also got a enormous five pound bag of Starburst jelly beans from Amanda.

Griffin:

Fuck yeah, I've been tearing those down.

Rachel:

Which Griffin has been tearing down. We got a lovely little, uh, embroidered sampler that says, "it's easier to buy two Game Boys than it is to make one friend."

Griffin:

I did not realize that was gonna resonate with as many people as it did, but...

Rachel:

Uh, from Emily. Thank you, Emily. Uh, so yeah, so those are just some of the really nice things I wanted to make sure those people know that we received them.

Griffin:

Yeah, thank you all so much. And thanks to Maximum Fun for having us on the network. You can go to maximumfun.org/donate, but don't do that. That was the last couple weeks.

Rachel:

[laughs].

Griffin:

Just go to maximumfun.org and check out all the great shows there. You're gonna find something that you love. And if you wanna hear other podcasts that we do, you can go to mcelroyshows.com. Um, oh, and thanks to bo en and Augustus for the use of our theme song, Money Won't Pay. You can find a link to it in the episode description. I think that's it.

Rachel:

That's it.

Griffin:

You wanna take it away, Droney? Let me hit you with this, Droney Mitchell.

Rachel:

Oh, that's really good.

Griffin:

Oh, it's dead. Droney, what happened?

Rachel:

[laughs].

Griffin:

Droney, wake up!

Rachel:

It was on the whole time we were recording too.

Griffin:

No!

Rachel:

Yeah. Sorry about that, [laughs].

Griffin:

And you didn't say anything? [mumbles] ... Droney died?

[theme music plays]

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Uh, if you, [laughs], if you got a packet with like 300 seeds in it, what kind of plant would you choose the seeds to be? [laughs]

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