

The The Adventure Zone Zone: Steeplechase Wrap-Up!

Published November 2, 2023

[Listen here on mcelroy.family](https://mcelroy.family)

[Steeplechase theme song plays]

Griffin: [spoofs Steeplechase theme song]

Justin: [chuckles]

Clint: [spoofs Nano Father] Well, I am so happy.

Justin: Oh, wow.

Travis: Now, Justin, I'm not gonna make fun of your thing. I thought it was really good. I don't know why there being—

Justin: Oh, thanks. I'm glad you liked my thing that I did.

Travis: Yeah, I don't know why Griffin and dad are making fun of—

Clint: Your great solo project.

Justin: My great solo project. Hi, everybody. Welcome to The The Adventure Zone Zone. About Steeplechase, mainly, I guess. I don't know—

Griffin: I can't believe we've gone this long without doing one of these. It feels like...

Justin: Well, yeah, it's just been a weird... you know what, part of it was that weekly schedule that we had for a while.

Griffin: Ah, geez.

Justin: And then it was two weeks. And then it was one week again. It's just been a lot to keep up with.

Griffin: I don't know how people get together to play role-playing games on a weekly basis. I thought I was gonna die from all—

Justin: Yeah, how do you come up with so many frickin' ideas?

Griffin: It was real mazes and monsters, like I was losing myself in the—like it was getting hard to tell what was reality and what was—

Travis: At this point, I'm more beef than man.

Griffin: Yes.

Justin: But we're taking some of your questions and we're going to try to answer them to the best of our ability. Dad, you've got this handy question that's in front of you.

Griffin: I do. I do. Let's begin at the beginning.

Justin: What, does everybody have open hearts?

Travis: Okay, I do now, yeah.

Griffin: Hold on, let me do that. [exclaims] Ah! Okay, cool. Ready. Ow.

Travis: Don't touch it.

Clint: "I find the theme layers to be fascinating. And so, I was wondering, Justin, were there any layers you designed, but just didn't make the cut? Or maybe they transformed and became another layer? Clint, Travis, Griffin, if you had a layer each, what would the theme be?" And that's from Jess.

Justin: The one layer that I know of that we didn't do is... oh, I had a good name for it, but... it was Infinitum, is that what it was?

Griffin: Yes. I believe that's what it was.

Justin: Yes, that was the sci-fi layer.

Clint: Oh, yeah!

Justin: And that was that was the layer that we didn't quite get to. I just didn't have a place for it, I don't know. And I was also going for like more... more unique, I guess, settings. Stuff that we hadn't like done a lot of before. Like Ephemera, which is sort of subversion, I guess you'd say, of fantasy.

Griffin: A pastiche.

Justin: But yeah, that was the one that I had thought of that we did not—one of the ones I thought of that we didn't do. The Sidereal Age. That was the name of the faction in that one. We didn't really do factions, but I thought that was a cool name.

Griffin: That is a cool name.

Clint: Yeah.

Travis: I think there was also some talk early on about like something with dinosaurs, and we never really got to that either.

Justin: It kind of became the metamals.

Travis: Yeah.

Justin: Like that idea of like animatronic animals and bring them into it, that kind of became them.

Griffin: I would have enjoyed a like Halloween Horror Nights, Universal Studios, Hollywood vibe. A horror-themed layer. What was the—I really enjoyed that Goosebumps... Oh, god, what was the name of the Goosebumps horror theme park, where you would go down an infinite slide and die on it, and then there's a roller coaster you go on and you die on it.

Justin: [chuckles] I don't know?

Griffin: It sounds scary as hell though, right? The way I described it.

Travis: It's really scary, yeah. The Scream Park.

Griffin: No.

Travis: That wasn't it?

Griffin: No, that wasn't it.

Travis: I would've just done a layer that's just all one big stunt spectacular.

Griffin: Oh, yeah.

Travis: Like the entire layer is like the Waterworld and Indiana Jones and other stunt spectaculars that I'm sure exist. There was a—I think there was a Ghostbusters one, short-lived.

Griffin: I don't... I don't know. I have found myself realizing I don't know nearly as much about Disney and theme parks as I thought I knew doing this season. Because there's just a sort of infinite array of failures scattered across the landscape of all sorts of theme park creators.

Clint: And I had really thought about—at one point I thought, man, I hope he does like—[chuckles] like a martial arts movie from the '70s.

Justin: Yeah, that'd be cool.

Clint: Because that's good radio right there.

Justin: Sure, have the kicks and punches, yeah.

Clint: But I mean with all the like wire work and all the stuff that it had.

Griffin: There's a place in Kyoto called Toei Kyoto Studio Park, that is what you are describing, but in real life. That seems like it'd be incredible. If not, like well outside of our area of expertise to try and simulate in a podcast product.

Clint: "I remember when Steeplechase started, you guys mentioned your characters not being permanent. Did that change as the story progressed? What were your backup characters, if you had any?" That's from Jimmy. Can I go first?

Justin: Yeah, please.

Clint: Because this was a big part of my gameplay. I honestly was just kind of struggling with Emerich. And really early on, once we got into the—

Justin: Which is disconcerting this early if you happen to be the game master of said game.

Clint: I know, yeah. And so—especially when he dug himself in a hole with the judges and all that stuff. That's kind of why I—

Travis: I like how you phrased that, dad! 'When Emerich does himself into the hole.'

Clint: [chuckles] Well, the story just kind of took it that way. So, I—

Travis: Mm-hm, yeah, it's kind of Justin's fault too, you're right, yeah.

Clint: Very early on I started, you know, thinking about a replacement for him. And that's where the idea of Emeril came along Emerich in hard light. And I mean... I know that was a big reveal when we hit you guys with it, bit gosh, that had been percolating for so long. As a matter of fact, there were a couple of times where Justin would say, "No, not yet."

Griffin: Yeah.

Clint: And what happened was, I kind of fell in love with Emerich all over again.

Justin: Travis, you desperately wanted to die, too?

Travis: Well, yeah. So, what ended up happening was I had this guy who his main function was like punching people and wrestling people and, you

know, kind of be in the muscle. But we weren't really—that ended up not being like the vibe of our group so much. And it also made me think like he was the one who was kind of—especially after his trauma where he had gone soft, like he didn't really want to be doing it anymore. He was only doing it to like protect Emerich and... oh my god, I've already blanked.

Clint: Montrose.

Travis: Montrose, thank you. And so, I was ready for him to like basically turn himself in to take the heat off of them. But I think that the thing that ends up happening, that—and we talk about this I think every time we do a The The Adventure Zone Zone. I think if this had been a home game, right, that we were just doing for fun, we probably would have swapped out characters constantly.

But doing it as like a narrative storytelling gameplay thing as a like—for an audience, the thing is, we were very—after talking with Justin about it, we didn't want to just be like, "Oh, sure, we'll just scrap this character because you want to play it—" Like we wanted it to be narratively—you know, if it came up, it made sense. And it just ended up not getting to that point. But I was ready.

I was going to do like an 18 year old, like kind of spider connected everybody, who had like grown up in the Buttercream. And coming from a long line of like Buttercream, you know, baddens. Called Smudge Jenkins.

Clint: [chuckles]

Travis: And he did not end up manifesting. I think I might have mentioned him in passing because I wanted him to exist if I ended up needing him. But it didn't come up. Like, I was ready. If the moment had ever called for it, like they got caught, these rolls went so bad. The thing that needs to happen here someone needs to turn themselves in. Like, it would have happened, right. Or if it was like, oh my god, someone has to take a big hit that they're not going to survive, like it would have happened. It just never came up and we didn't want to just do it to do it.

Clint: Ditto, how about you know?

Griffin: Nope! I loved Montrose. I loved playing him every second of it. And I never ever wanted to switch.

Clint: [chuckles]

Griffin: Yeah, no, I did not want to do that. I really, really, *really* enjoyed that character. Playing him and being that role in a big world of crime. And I wouldn't have changed a thing, man.

Travis: Conrad said that they love the show. Thank you, Conrad. And Conrad is wondering, do we still play outside of work? I assume you mean like role-playing games and stuff. Not like do you do fun things.

Griffin: Do we go play ball in the park.

Travis: Yeah. I mean, sure. I throw axes and do duck pin bowling and, you know, all that. But no, I don't.

Griffin: I don't think any of us do.

Travis: Well, yeah, so I end up playing a lot of like—I guest on people's like one shots or go to conventions and do stuff there.

Griffin: That's work.

Travis: Right. It's like all of that gets—kind of scratches that itch. I also, at this point, like I don't really know anyone in town. I have like three friends in Cincinnati that are interested in playing tabletop games. And they all are like theater people whose schedules are so busy, we couldn't possibly work it out. I look forward to when Bebe and Dot are a little bit older. I think that they will be like way into it.

Griffin: Oh, for sure.

Travis: And we'll be able to do some like gaming together. But right now, it's a little too much work to be fun.

Griffin: I would love to, I just don't... I mean, my life is so not conducive to regularly scheduled recreation. It's just not... I would get so paranoid if I had like a standing D&D game night or something with folks here in D.C. that I would just get interrupted literally every time.

Because you know, one of my kids didn't go to sleep or were sick or et cetera, et cetera. Which honestly, like I don't—I think does have the benefit for us of like, I'm always pretty excited to record TAZ with you guys. Because I really look forward to you know, playing games with you all.

Clint: So Juice, how about you?

Justin: Nah, I don't really... we do so much sort of like creative work that normally in my free time, if it's just for me, it's not normally a creative exercise. Just because I like to save the juice.

Griffin: Yeah.

Justin: Creativity is finite, and if you use it all up, you're out of it.

Travis: What? Oh, no.

Clint: Oh my god, don't tell me that.

Griffin: If you look under your right—

Travis: Dad, it's gone, you're fine.

Griffin: If you look under your right armpit, you'll see a sort of spherical meter. That is your creativity.

Travis: That's what that is!

Griffin: Yes, and—

Justin: Charge it back up by listening to our content.

Clint: Oh my god, mine's in negative numbers.

Justin: Well, can I suggest any of our many great podcasts?

Clint: I'll have to listen to them.

Justin: Yeah, check 'em out.

Clint: I'm going to combine two of these, because they're both similar. One from Sierra one from Andrew. "Does Griffin still create the background and ambience music? Of course, Justin is the mastermind behind Dream it to Now, but I'm curious about Griffin's approach to working on the soundtrack for your TAZ campaigns." And then Andrew asks, "What was the inspiration for the theme music for Steeplechase? It puts me in mind of the Punch-Out games, as if it was the theme for Beef's arm wrestling game.

Justin: Can I mention—let me talk Dream it to Now real quick.

Griffin: Yeah.

Justin: Because that was actually Eric Nier. You can find him on SoundCloud or Bandcamp. He's been—

Travis: Lifelong friend of the family!

Justin: Yeah, he's been my friend like my entire life. My oldest friend. And he is—he did the music for the Charlieverse episodes. He's done some work for Things I Bought at Sheetz. And he did Dream it to Now based on just the couple of notes that I sang in the actual show, when—and mainly it was based on the music that Disney uses at the firework shows like Enchantment and the far superior Happily Ever After.

If you listen—if you go to Spotify and listen to like Happily Ever After, you will 100% get the thematic illusions because it is very much in that vein. I also asked Eric—if you haven't listened to the full version on his Bandcamp, you should. I asked him to make the lyrics as generic as possible. And I think he achieved it brilliantly.

Griffin: Most of the music on this season was actually sourced by Rachel, our editor. I did a couple of tracks, I think early on. I had the realization when we were doing Ethersea, it was right before we had Gus. And I was like, I'm not going to have any time. I'm going to just record like a dozen songs. And then that'll be the music for the season. Which I did not have time to do for Steeplechase.

And it is so much easier to do that stuff ahead of time than it is to do it like week to week, like I used to. So yeah, I only did a couple of songs. But the theme song I was really proud of. I did make that. It was very much inspired by Lupin the Third. Specifically the theme to the movie that came out, the animated film. Which I don't know if you guys saw, absolutely slaps ass.

Travis: Oh, yeah.

Griffin: Which is, you know, very jazzy. Very...

Justin: There's a lot of Cowboy Bebop DNA in there.

Travis: Yeah, there's Cowboy Bebop.

Griffin: There's some Cowboy Bebop DNA in there. And then—

Clint: No Jonny Quest? I really thought—

Griffin: No—

Justin: Oh, I could totally see that. I don't know if that was in Griffin's head—

Griffin: Yeah, no, it was not a direct inspiration. But you know, that that theme song does whip ass, and is always kind of kicking around in there. I really liked—it kind of came together when—I like weird instruments in like jazzy stuff. And so, when I messed around putting the sitar in there, it gave it kind of like a bit of a fantasy vibe.

And so, yeah, that—I would love to be able to make more music like that. But it's really far outside of like the type of music that I know and know how

to make. And it's hard to do like jazzy, orchestral stuff in a DAW if you don't really know what you're doing, which I don't, so... But yeah, that was what went into that.

Travis: Now, I have a question here from Matthew that I'm also curious about. Like I'm way into world building and the methods people use to do it. And Matthew wants to know, Justin, "The world of Steeplechase felt really unique and well thought out. Did you have any specific method for world building? And if you did, what did it look like?"

Justin: Oh, man. Method for worldbuilding... I think it's all very like—I mean, a lot—it's weird. It's this combination of like background and active creation. So like background creation is a lot of stuff I was doing where I'm just like looking at original sources. Like watching, looking through like original print materials, videos from like the '80s and '70s of people at theme parks. Watching basically all of Defunctland.

It was probably the biggest like inspiration I think, in terms of like the stuff that informed the creation of the show. That part is weird because it's like you're just pumping your brain full of junk. And seeing what it like—does the old rock tumbler bit and seeing if it spits out any gems. And those will—those came to me like at weird times. I would just be like in the shower like, oh shit, the barristers, that would be cool. And I'd go and write it down. Some of it was like I would have one single idea, like Ephemera was just—I just thought it would be so funny to have a Balance theme restaurant, that I kind of did all the other stuff based around it.

Travis: [chuckles]

Justin: Because I thought it would be so stupid.

Griffin: And you were right.

Justin: And I was right. And I mean, that's the main thing, it was—I had text documents on each of the layers where if ideas came to me about those layers, I would pop that text document open and just drop it in there. And honestly, that was sort of an exterior brain for me. I would have it open

while we were recording and if I needed an idea or needed a concept, I had a whole bunch of 'em there that I could pull from.

And that was the more active part, and that was usually closer to recording. The thing about world building with *Blades in the Dark*, and the sort of third most important tier of this, is that I could not do too much ahead of time. I really couldn't. I couldn't—if I got too firm with my plans, I was sort of going against the main edict of John Harper with *Blades in the Dark*. Which is just like give your players agency and let them be the heroes. So, a lot of what I was creating is more in terms of like an obstacle course, you know?

Griffin: Yeah.

Justin: And letting them figure out and color in a whole lot of those connections and the specificity of the world. It's very much a collaborative thing.

Clint: Well, here's a follow up, then.

Justin: Okay.

Clint: From Katie, "I really enjoyed *Steeplechase*. The game system and setting were exactly what I didn't realize I needed. My question is, *Blades in the Dark* feels like it is geared toward individual heists rather than a larger narrative. Was there a challenge as a GM, bringing it together for a more cohesive overarching story? And for everyone else, was there any aspect of the system that challenged you as you were playing?"

And let me tack on a part of the question from Jennifer before, because I think that also addresses it. "What was it like playing in a game system with the ability to use flashbacks?"

Griffin: Fuckin' great.

Travis: Yeah.

Griffin: That was the best part of the whole game for me.

Justin: That was really the—reading about flashbacks is really when I was like, oh, this is it. Like this system for us. This will be perfect.

Griffin: In a way like, it's—can I talk about the flashbacks thing? Because I—

Justin: Yeah, please. Yeah, do that first.

Griffin: I think it is the most brilliant part about Blades in the Dark. I think Blades in the Dark has a lot going for it. I think the way that it handles like action rolls is great. I think that the way that it sort of like allows you to manage a crime syndicate as a small business is like really fascinating. The ability to just make shit up as you go through flashbacks is kind of perfect for us.

Because all of a sudden like we don't have to go into every job knowing exactly what we're going to do. Which is basically how we approach every situation on this show, regardless of the game that we're playing. I did find at times that it was a... like a paralyzing amount of freedom. Like when you are able to—when you have the leverage to, you know, through this system, like make almost anything true at any point, as long as it sort of fits the laws of this world.

I would find myself like going large spans of time not doing it because of—because there was not like, you know, it's not like I'm picking stuff off a list. It is like coming up with shit whole cloth.

Justin: It's kind of like in Super Friends, when Superman would regularly forget some of his powers.

Griffin: Yes. [chuckles]

Justin: Because it was narratively convenient. And sometimes I'd remember like, guys, you can just say whatever the fuck you want. And they would forget for many episodes. Like, oh, good. I don't have to worry about that. That's excellent.

Travis: I will say like with this—I love this system. But it takes a little getting used to at the beginning to not do actual like planning, right. Because I think that you want to, like when you're finding out about the job and everything, like you want to ask questions, you want to discuss it. You want to be like, oh, we could do this, and this and this.

But like, that really goes against the spirit of the game. You're supposed to start like in the middle of it and kind of like go from there to make it feel more like what would be in a heist movie or something. And to kind of find the right balance of, well, we do need to know like where we are when it starts or whatever. But we can't coordinate a game plan too much.

Like I think that is a... I think that's maybe where like the learning curve of it is. If you're coming out of other like game systems where you want to have a plan in place that you're executing, versus you're executing something and building the plan as you go.

Clint: That took a while to kind of lock on to. But I think once we did, you're right, it completely changed the way we played the game. Because I think, you know, oh, what's the plan? We gotta have a plan. But this game is not built that way. And I think two of the things that we had to really kind of adjust to, that I think we—well, I'll ask you if you guys think we did. But I think that once we locked into the flashbacks, I think that changed it. And remembering that we are bad guys, we're criminals. We're not heroes.

Griffin: Yeah.

Clint: And you know, that was one of our stated desires. We didn't want—we wanted to play criminals. And not necessarily, you know, get—and it's tough to play that. But I think once we got into that, I think we stuck with it pretty well, don't you think?

Travis: Yeah, we're not really good at being negative, bad people. Like we're—I think we're good at a little bit of a lovable rogue. Who's like, "Ah, yeah, I'm gonna steal your money. But I'm gonna knock you unconscious and carefully sit you in this chair and put a blanket on your lap so that you get a good night's sleep while you're unconscious." Right. Like there are

times where I think Beef would be like, "I'm gonna kill that guy." And we're all like, wait, no, don't do that. Don't do this.

Justin: Well, yeah, I mean, it's tough. If you're putting someone at the center of a story, they are going to be the hero of it. Almost without fail, in all narrative stuff. Like, they're the one you're following, right. So, their actions have to be somewhat justified because they're the ones moving the action forward.

So, it is hard to make someone like—they cannot be the antagonist of the story if we're going to follow them. I think it was more like finding opportunities to not—to go outside of convention and to not necessarily like follow the rules all the time. I will say, just to your point about it seeming more set up for individual heists. That's definitely like a big focus. I will say that part of that is my own... The sort of parts of that game that I did not figure out a good way of incorporating.

Griffin: Yeah.

Justin: So like in *Blades in the Dark*, there's supposed to be—and we talked about it a couple of times, these like—this idea of like gang tiers and your lair. L-A-I-R, lair. And the territory you control and all this turf. Because *Blades in the Dark* is set up around a specific fictional city.

Travis: Yeah. And like the factions within that city and how they feel about you, how you feel about them, do they work with you. All this stuff.

Justin: Right, the problem that I ran into was I wanted to keep the story moving geographically from like layer to layer. And we [set up??] pretty early, there's not a lot of crossover. So, if you go to Ephemera and piss off a bunch of people in Ephemera, if you go to another layer, it's probably not going to have much of an effect. And that was what I was up against.

So, a lot of the aspects of that game I was forced to kind of leave by the roadside because I couldn't figure out ways of organically using them. I wish, in hindsight, that I had just skipped them altogether, instead of making like halfhearted attempts at building a layer and having factions and stuff like that.

Griffin: I will say, though, that I feel like we captured the spirit of that a lot in like—I don't know, I enjoyed like having a focus for us being like increasing our foothold in the Buttercream and in Ustaben as like the big sort of narrative hook for us. Like I found that very, very cool and a like—a good carrot to always kind of have in front of our characters.

Travis: And I felt that. Like I mean, we weren't necessarily doing it concretely. But I think by the time we reached, you know, the last couple of episodes, it definitely felt like we were more connected to the Buttercream and you know, the in between layers in that world a lot more. And I think we saw that in the final monologue of like winking at that and hinting at that. Which by the way, Jennifer mentions the closing monologue from Krystal and how it tied a lovely bow. That was I think a really—

Justin: A lot of yada-yada-ing the praise. Like the praise parts we should not yada-yada. We should just—

Travis: I'm saying. No, this is what I said! The closing monologue from Krystal, especially tied a lovely bow on the themes of this season. And frankly, Autumn did an amazing job as Krystal with a K.

Griffin: Yes.

Travis: And Slice stepping in when Krystal was out.

Justin: Yeah, those are our friends, Slice Hicks and Autumn Hicks. Autumn is a really talented voiceover actor. As is Slice. Slice is an actor as well. But we've known them, again, 20 years probably.

Travis: Yeah, Justin went to college with Slice and I went to high school with Autumn. And then Slice and Autumn got married because Huntington's not that big of a town. And here we are.

Justin: And they probably loved each other.

Travis: Oh, yeah, that's probably it, too.

Justin: But I will say we all—[chuckles] very quick sidebar before I hear the question. We all got really into watching like Disney videos, like the four of us. Me and Syd and—well, mainly me and Slice and Autumn. Syd likes them, too, but—so, there's like a lot of these vloggers doing Disney stuff and they watch them as well.

And there's one who's sort of like the—probably the most prominent name, AJ. And Autumn had this like killer AJ impression that she would do. And that is like the birth of Krystal with a K. Because I heard that I was like, oh, shit. That should be like the intro of the thing. So, if you go watch Disney Food Blog videos, you will hear like the voice print for that.

[theme music plays]

[ad reads]

[theme music plays]

Travis: "Griffin, is Montrose really just a regular Steeplechase worker who turned to crime? What did he do to get kicked out of his last crime gang? And Justin, was there ever a chance that you would have let Montrose actually be Kenchal's dad?" That's from Jenny.

Griffin: I mean, Justin wouldn't get a choice in that. If I wanted to be Kenchal's dad, I'd be Kenchal's dad. That's how roleplaying games work, I think.

Travis: Is that it?

Justin: No.

Griffin: No, that's not right. Yeah, I mean, yes, Montrose was a regular Steeplechase worker who turned to crime. I had temptations from time to time to like make Montrose something else. Like make Montrose have some sort of like—

Justin: Give him that Emperor Palpatine's grandson glow up?

Griffin: Some sort of thing like that, right. Because you got a character in a mask, you think like, well, that's an opportunity for some sort of big twist. But the more I got to live with Montrose, the less I wanted to do that. The less I wanted there to be some big gimmick. And instead wanted him to just be a dude who, you know, used to glean basically any enjoyment he got out of his life from going to places like Steeplechase. Who then finds, you know, some sort of emotional connection with the thrill of crime. And realizing that he is very good at that.

And so, when I played that card in the I guess penultimate episode, where I told Kenchal I was his dad, I don't think there was actually a part of me that really thought that was going to be true. I just really, really, *really* liked the symmetry of pulling that—what was a pretty offhand joke that came out of our first heist, again at the at the midnight hour.

Justin: Yeah, and that is exactly why, that symmetry is exactly why I would've let it lie if he had wanted to. It would have taken some work... It's the weird gray space when you're doing like an actual play story. It's like, it is collaborative. And even if it's not something I could think about, unless I had explicitly, you know, ruled it out, I mean, I'm open to it. I'm open to any ideas, no matter how they might like complicate stuff.

So, if he had been very committed to it, especially because he had done it several times before, I think that you had set the groundwork for it. But it's also like, you had also set the groundwork for that being a lie. Like, how could somebody fall for it again?

Griffin: Right, yeah! What I loved about Montrose is that it kind of—he like allowed me to correct or just go a different way from this thing that I feel like we all have this temptation to do when we're doing TAZ. Which is to have some big secret, to have some big mystery from our character's past that we get to play and have that be like a big bomb that gets dropped. And that's very good and we've certainly like explored that so much in the past.

But I also find myself like getting... wishing that there was more sort of like character development on screen, and like character moments that happen on screen.

Justin: Mm-hm.

Griffin: And for Montrose, like that's what I wanted. Like I just wanted his story to be in Steeplechase. And I really, I don't know, I really liked his trajectory going from like an aspiring small-time crook to like someone who becomes very confident in his ability to, you know, silver tongue his way out of any situation. So yeah, I avoided that urge at all costs.

Travis: I think that's very interesting because Brent asked the next question, "We didn't see too much from backstories beyond a few mentions. Is there anything you wanted to share or anything you would have liked to explore?" From Brent. And I do think that's interesting because I think we all—I can't remember there's like an active discussion we had or just something we ended up doing.

Or it might be like Justin's—Justin tends to let the development happen for his characters on screen as well. And if there's backstory stuff, it comes up in the moment. And so I think that in Steeplechase, all three of the PCs had backstories, had things in mind. But we didn't like use them to just—if we didn't like plumb them for drama, you know what I mean? Like, I had a whole thing for Beef, where basically—and I can't remember how in detail I went, when it did come up. But that he had been this like, you know, all-time great arm wrestler.

But he also had a gambling addiction. And it ended up that he would like gamble on his own matches. And he got caught like fixing the fight and got like blackmailed by this guy and they all got caught. And he got banned from it for life. And like it was this, you know, sordid kind of like criminal past in that way that he was now kind of finding a second chance at fame and infamy or whatever, in Steeplechase.

And it's like, okay, cool. I know that. I know all of that. I know like that he is not a big, dumb brute. That he is a smart guy. He just, you know, he—people see a size and he gets treated like he's dumb. And it's fine. That's for me to know and use and playing in the character. And we just didn't really shoehorn backstory moments in.

Griffin: But see, I would push back against that. Because I feel like I did talk about Montrose's like weird relationship with park history.

Travis: Yeah. It came up!

Griffin: And I feel like you did talk about Beef's, you know, lost fame. And talked about Emerich's, you know, going from being a beloved imagineer to what he is now. Like, I feel like that stuff did come up in just playing. Even if we didn't like do full-on flashback moments of like what happened in our distant past.

Travis: Yeah, I think that's it. It's not that it didn't come up and it's not that it wasn't there. It's more like, there wasn't a scene where it's like, "And Beef's old promoter shows up at Steeplechase to try to get one more gambling score from—" Or whatever. Like, we were still playing moving forward. You know, we weren't like, "And here's a dream sequence of young Emeril—or Emerich, dreaming to be a—" whatever.

Griffin: Boy, that got confusing, didn't it?

Travis: I know, god bless.

Justin: Yeah, man.

Travis: It was just there in our stories when it was appropriate to bring it up.

Griffin: Is there anything you wanted to say about Emerich?

Clint: He didn't really go the way I thought he was going to go. I really... I always knew he was going to be kind of odd. But I really thought he was going to be the go-to brain guy. [chuckles] And very obviously, and very early on, it became apparent that he would be a brain guy, but just more of a theory guy instead of a tech guy.

Travis: Well, it had a very Doc Brown kind of feel to it for me.

Clint: Yeah, I think that was in there, too. I had really kind of imagined a cross between Tesla and Vincent Price and I—and Vincent Price was kind of a constant touchstone for me in the character.

Griffin: Mm-hm, yeah.

Clint: But it was just only when I really kind of embraced how odd he was and weird he was. And that you guys—we formed kind of a relationship between us all that was kind of just accepting how weird he was. [chuckles]

Griffin: Well, there was like this kind of reverence that Beef and Montrose had for Emerich's like ability, that I feel like had an interesting dynamic in like us excusing that. And just being like, well, that's the cost of genius, I suppose.

Justin: Also, Emerich creates an interesting power imbalance, I think. And I think *Blades in the Dark* is really good about that. Like, if you get right down to it, Beef is good at hitting and Montrose is good at talking and Emerich is the Green Lantern. So, it's like—it is a little bit imbalanced in that sense, in a way that is narratively effective, I think.

Clint: And I think we backed off of it a little bit, too. The Green Lantern thing.

Travis: Well, yeah, we limited—we worked with the prism stuff and everything. And I think that made it more impactful when Emerich did do things. But I also think dad made a great choice to be like Emerich doesn't spend his time healing. Like he's so cerebral that he's not even thinking about like taking care of himself physically.

And so, it ended up being like, I—Beef was doing a lot of like mother henning for Emerich. Of like picking him up from time to time and carrying him places because he would be so injured. He couldn't make jumps and he couldn't like get out of situations. There was a lot of like, okay, cool, man, but your ankle is shattered and you haven't done anything about it like two heists. So I'll carry you up the stairs, I guess. And like it made it so that Emerich wasn't just this like all powerful god of creation.

Justin: Yeah.

Griffin: Dad, you gotta duck out soon. Are there any of these questions that you wanted to hit? Or something to say?

Clint: Well, I have two. I assume you're going to get to one of 'em, so I'm going to get to the other one because I have to know. From Maya, "What was everyone's favorite moment of the campaign? And can we get one last Doug sax solo for the road?"

Griffin: I'd really rather we didn't.

Travis: Yeah, that's—

Justin: [plays comedically bad saxophone]

Clint: [chuckles]

Justin: I bought this at the beginning of the show. And I thought it would be—I tried to learn how to play it because I thought wouldn't that be cool—

Griffin: Can you play any music on it? Can you do any song? Do you know Hot Cross Buns or—

Justin: What I just did is as far as I got it with the saxmonica, this instrument is called. And I thought it would be—it's just—the Facebook video that sold it to me said it's really easy to learn. And it's not easy enough, I'll say. So, that's why. And I just kept it within reach because it made me laugh one to do it. [chuckles]

Clint: My favorite moment was, because I'm a very self-centered person, my favorite moment was when we finally used Emeril. And the surprise that I think you guys had an inkling of, Montrose and Beef, I think you had an inkling of what was going on. But I still think that him quote/unquote 'dying' was kind of a surprise.

Griffin: Your fuckin' Fanatos, fuckin' Freudian death drive in role-playing games is that such that when you're like, "Okay, I throw myself into the goo and die." Part of me was just like, well, that's just dad. That's dad's instinct.

Travis: Yeah, dad has been talking about wanting to off Emerich for a while now, so...

Griffin: So let's just do it!

Clint: [chuckles]

Griffin: So yeah, no, that was a surprise for me.

Travis: I think my favorite... I liked so much of it overall, I think my favorite sequence was like the laundry truck chase.

Griffin: Yup! That was what I was gonna say. The entire Gutter City heist I think was my favorite.

Travis: Yeah, the Gutter City heist.

Griffin: The laundry truck chase was fuckin' great.

Travis: The moment that solidified like, oh, fuck, playing Beef is so fun for me, is that scene in the hotel where he comes down and there are like five security guards. And he just like takes them out one by one. And later dad would describe it as a naked Beef, which was not true at all. But like wrestling them in the chocolate fountain and shit. It was just really fun. And like all the rolls landed and like he was just knocking dudes unconscious left and right.

Griffin: That was great.

Justin: Clint, I know we have to dismiss you so you can go pick up my children from school. Any final thoughts?

Travis: I want dad to tell us about the next season!

Justin: Oh, dad, what's the next season?

Clint: Well, the next season will be TAZ Ootra Space. And... should I tell what we're doing?

Griffin: Yeah!

Justin: Yeah, man.

Clint: We're gonna be playing with the new Marvel multiverse role playing game. And it is going to be sort of a follow up to our babysitters that were into Journey into Mystery: War of the Realms, in Marvel Comics.

Justin: Collect that—you can get that as a graphic novel—

Travis: That's true.

Clint: You can get that as a graphic novel.

Justin: All five issues collected in one sleek volume.

Clint: So, very excited! And I'm going to GM it.

Travis: Dad's gonna GM it and we're gonna have a special guest Kate Welch and Gabe Hicks joining us to play as well. That's going to begin on November 30th.

Justin: Probably a shorter season. We're do something shorter. It'd be more of a... And then we've got more stuff after that. We've got so much crap—

Travis: We'll tell you all about it. Goodbye, dad!

Justin: You're embarrassed that you didn't even know about all this stuff.

Clint: Goodbye, guys. Hey, guys, I love Steeplechase and I can't wait for us to go back.

Griffin: Me too.

Justin: Thank you, dad. I hope we do soon.

Clint: Okay.

Justin: Next up, any other questions?

Travis: Yeah, I want to know, because Justin, you—for a long time, you were very adamant that you didn't want to do it. That you're like, "I don't want to run a game." And so, we have several questions of people wanting to know, for example, Haley wants to know, "What about GMing did you enjoy the most?"

Justin: Oh, sometimes the pieces would just like kind of click together. I really liked that feeling of like the... Probably the most satisfying thing is when you can see the end of an arc or a storyline or even a moment, and see how it all connects. And it's like a really cool—if you've done your homework and you've like done the legwork of trying to create a lot of different vines that you can swing to and different like ideas that you might use or you might not use.

Every once in a while, while you're doing it, they just kind of like sync up and give you the answer that is like narratively really cool and compelling. And I think that is probably the thing that I am like most—that I found the most satisfying.

Travis: Evan, and apparently a lot of other people, asked, "Would you ever consider doing a live show for Steeplechase?"

Justin: I think steeplechase would work great as a live theme.

Travis: I agree.

Griffin: Yup!

Justin: I think that it can be self-contained enough. It's action oriented, it would be... I think it would be a lot of fun. I think for flashbacks, we should make people stand up and go over and do the scene somewhere else, I think would be fun. [chuckles]

Travis: That'd be great.

Griffin: That would be cool.

Justin: But yeah, I think it would work great for a live show. And I'd like to see what Griffin would do for his costume. And I'd like to not wear a costume.

Travis: Okay, you would still wear a costume.

Griffin: I wanna ask this one for Nick. It's getting into spoiler territory, so if you didn't finish Steeplechase, I—

Justin: What is—no, we should have said that up front, man. There's no quarter for you if you want to go behind the scenes before you even saw the curtain call. Come on.

Griffin: Question for Justin, "How far ahead did you know that the Nano Father was Carmine Denton? I think you have a particular skill for taking the in the moment improvised bits and using them to build stories and characters with real depth and gravity. Was that the case here? Or was this reveal planned from the beginning?" That's from Nick.

Travis: I would take it one step further in that question, Justin, how—like Nano Father used—I feel like you started doing that voice at the beginning as a joke. Was that something you were like this is somebody in the thing from the beginning? Or is it a joke that you did that became somebody?

Justin: You know, guys, anybody can be a creator. And I'm living evidence of that. That Nano Father—okay. Nano Father started because I was extremely uncomfortable DMing. And I felt stupid trying to be like, "Now, let me enter—step into my world." You know, and I felt like so fucking dumb about it. And even though I've done the work, like I've—it still felt very awkward and uncomfortable.

So the original like Nano Father thing was like me trying to tamp down my genuine anxiety and discomfort by making the most like, you know, tale weaver, step into the loop. All that shit about like weaving an incredible narrative, right. So having—so that was how that voice kind of got started and it kept going as like a running gag.

And I think it's the best thing about doing like a silly role-playing game, is that sometimes the things aren't jokes. It's like there already. It's there and it makes sense, right. Eventually, I knew... so, I knew that he was in the world earlier. I knew that he was like real and not just like a goof. I knew that I would bring him out. And I knew that he would be in the ruins of Old Kidadelphia.

I knew that—because that's like—I was already talking about the rust storms and stuff like that. Like I knew that he would be there. I don't exactly remember. Sometimes when you're making stuff that has this many moving parts, I don't know if this is your guys' experience, I don't necessarily note the moment of like ideation, I—it just—things appear true to me. Like they just seem to be—

Travis: It starts to feel like, oh, that's always been what it was.

Justin: Yes! Exactly. As much of a cop out as that sounds, it did kind of feel like, oh, yeah, yeah, he is Carmine Denton. That makes perfect sense.

Travis: Speaking of, Sarah wanted to know, "Please explain what the actual heck was going on with Krystal with a K. Her subplot was so deliciously unsettling. I want to know it all." I have a suspicion that was also like something that as it unfolded, you were like, oh, yeah, this makes perfect sense. And not necessarily something—an arc that you had planned from the beginning. But I might be wrong.

Justin: Krystal was useful at the beginning for bringing you back into the world. And I would obliquely remind you of like some story beats with Krystal, reinforcing the thing. And also, Krystal helped to make the world seem bigger because she was talking about things that we weren't seeing. Eventually—so that was like the use—I wanted to do the like 'previously on' in a real light lift kind of way.

And that was the way that I like kind of backed into it. Eventually, the tone of the show and the things that were happening made it important that we establish like a different tone for the intro. Because it didn't make sense for her to be all like happy, cheery, and then we're in some pretty dire stuff. So, that was part of it. The other—

Travis: It started to have a little bit of like Welcome to Night Vale kind of feel to me.

Justin: [chuckles] Yeah, of course, I love Night Vale. And that's definitely—like that idea of a voice outside the recording studio that we can't see, I think is a big—it's a very Night Vale thing. And I think that's definitely part of it. The other thing is that I didn't want Dentonic to—I needed a way to remind you that Dentonic was bad and had done bad things.

Because I really was not—and that you were bad, right. Like I didn't want it to be a—I didn't want those clear good and evil things to be there. And it was important for Krystal to show this other side of Dentonic, of like that the company is bad, but also that there are people who love it.

And that is the sort of thing that I was interested in with Krystal, so—and I also, it's nice, honestly... it's nice to have a character and a storyline that doesn't have to connect or be satisfying or make sense, because you're not getting all of it. You're just getting little bits of it. So it can be kind of abstract or just a tonal thing. Rather than a narrative that you're supposed to like follow.

Travis: I would say along those lines, one of the—it was such a—it's not like narratively important, but I really liked, as Beef, betting on who was going to end up being the CEO of Dentonic. And then like getting to influence that—much like Beef got in trouble with before. Of like, "I'm gonna put it in position where this guy becomes—"

And it worked out and it just made me really happy, Justin. Thank you for doing that. Thank you for letting me win that bet. And I don't think it'll make him rich, but it made me happy. Thank you for that. An anonymous, or maybe the hacker group Anonymous wants to know, "Can we peek behind the curtain a little bit about the Voiceatron 5000? Do you have a list of shownotes? A catalogue of accidents you worked on? Which was your favorite character to voice in the season?"

Justin: I mean, the Voiceatron 5000 is a real spreadsheet that I got real in my tabs here. [chuckles] It is compiled heroically by really one of the unsung heroes of the show. And I don't remember if it was just—Rachel, our

editor, has been absolutely instrumental in making this thing listable and good. And has been such a big help to me. Same for Jupiter.

Travis: Oh, yeah.

Justin: Who has gone through and like listened to all the episodes and he compiled like extensive documents with all this stuff, and also kept my shit straight—

Travis: The Ephemera lore!

Justin: Yeah, the Ephemera lore was created by Jupiter, who I just told him make up the—[chuckles]

Griffin: The most fantasy bullshit imaginable.

Justin: The most fantasy bullshit you can. And he did that with aplomb. So Rachel, our editor, actually like pulled together the Voiceatron list. And it is broken up into like the different layers. There are roughly probably 110 voices on here.

Travis: Whew!

Justin: And they're all—which you don't realize is a thing until you like go through all of it. And it's like, oh, shit, I did so many dumb voices. I'm sure a lot of them sound the same. That's really hard, man. That's a really hard job. I did not think about the practical nature of every layer would have a new cast of characters and they all need to sound like something.

Travis: Well, eventually, you just started naming half of 'em Justin. So I think it was okay. I think you survived.

Justin: Justin, naming characters Justin is inspired by Go Away Green. That's a character—there's a color, a specific tone that Disney uses on walls to make it clear that you're not supposed to be looking there.

Travis: Oh? [chuckles]

Justin: That it's not part of the show. So, when you would get to a Justin McElroy—[chuckles]

Travis: We've reached the edge of the show!

Justin: That was the edge of what I had made up, so you had to go do something else. [chuckles]

Travis: Ah, okay. Excellent. Brilliant. Brilliant stuff. Devo was wondering if we would ever release the Ephemera lore doc that Jupiter made?

Justin: I'll ask Jupiter. I think Jupiter would definitely. I mean, I don't see why not. It is fucking hysterical. [laughs]

Travis: One last question here because apparently a lot of people, including Amanda, wanted to know what happened to Shookles?

Justin: Yeah, Shookles the cat. Yes... Shookles lived—

Griffin: Died in the battle.

Justin: Died in the battle. No, Shookles was with the kids in Old Kidadelphia. And so Shookles lived with them until they were—until all the kids were evacuated. And he went to the—he now lives in Ephemera. And he is owned by Dave Baulista.

Travis: Oh, excellent.

Justin: And he is very happy.

Travis: That's wonderful.

Justin: Yeah, I knew about that—

Travis: One last thing I wanted to say, I was sure there was more to the woodimals the entire—from their introduction, I kept—I don't know if Griffin felt the same way. I was like, one of these motherfuckers is gonna move. I was ready for it. I was so ready.

Griffin: I would have quit the show if they—

Travis: I was ready for that jump scare.

Griffin: I didn't like them at all. It was the worst. I really didn't like looking at those guys.

Justin: I thought about it a lot, but here's what I came up with. That feeling that you had is exactly the feeling that someone who is actually looking at them would have.

Travis: Yeah.

Justin: So, I liked the idea of having these animals that were very creepy and didn't do anything, but you were certain that they were going to do something. But they didn't do anything. They were just unnerving. That's it.

Travis: Creepy as shit. And the fact that they didn't come whole cloth out of your brain but rather existed in the real world haunts me to this very day.

Griffin: Sucks.

Justin: It's also, though, I'll say like... was useful in contrasting the metamals. To make it clear that I'm not just like tossing out sentience like Oprah with car keys. Like, it's a meaningful distinction.

Travis: So, that's all the questions. We've got stuff coming up along with TAZ Ootra Space. We're going to spend the next few weeks wrapping a bunch of content leading up to Ootra Space. So next week, on November 9th, we're dropping all three episodes of TAZ Imbalance. Which was a YouTube series that we did that was GMed by Aabria Iyengar. But it's going to be here in the podcast feed, the audio of it.

And then on November 16th, we're going into the vault and posting TAZ Hootenanny, or Hootenan Three, if you will. This is the first time we're going to try to release one of our virtual live shows. So, the audio and the energy are a little bit different. But you're gonna love it. I promise, you're gonna love it. And then on November 23rd, you'll get the Hootenanny show that we

did in New York Comic Con just a few weeks ago. Once again, featuring the amazing Aabria Iyengar.

And then on November 30th, we'll premiere TAZ Ootra Space. So, hopefully that's all clear. We're very excited about it.

Griffin: Taking a sort of miniseries approach with that, and maybe with the next few things. We've talked about started exploring more short form seasons. So, yeah.

Justin: Intriguing.

Travis: Justin, before we wrap up, any last thoughts?

Justin: No, thanks, everybody, for going on the ride with me. I don't read any feedback online—

Travis: Or take any feedback from his brothers or friends or anything either.

Justin: No, that's not true. The thing I said was true. But I really appreciate when people would let me know what they were thinking about it. And when I've heard from some people that they liked it, that was really—it made me really happy that people enjoyed it.

There's a lot of—I was very much... the questions that Steeplechase raises and the things that Steeplechase is about is something that I struggle with a lot, that I think about a lot. This idea of escapism versus reality and the value of that. And the value of what we do and all that stuff. So, the fact that other people were interested in it was very cool for me.

So, I very much enjoyed doing it. I will say this, if you are like me, if you're hesitant like I was, if you're hesitant about doing something like this—and it's good—this is probably good advice for any creative project, but certainly with this. I was thinking about this moment that we're in now, when we started. And thinking like, well, how the fuck do you come up with all this stuff? Like, it just seemed so big of a job to me. And what it turned out to be was like, you know, eating the elephant or a jet plane, you just start at the wheels. Or the hooves.

Griffin: Of the elephant?

Justin: Of the elephant.

Travis: I think it's feet.

Justin: And you just, you keep eating it. And you eat it for months, and eventually it's a whole podcast. [chuckles]

Travis: Yeah, that's how the saying goes.

Justin: If I did it, you can do it.

Griffin: I'm glad you did it. I think for anybody who plays RPGs, it's a good thing to do, is to run one. Just to see, one, learn what you're—

Justin: Oh, it will completely change—it will very much change the way I play. Absolutely.

Griffin: And I thought you did a killer job, I'm really glad that—

Travis: Same.

Justin: Thanks.

Griffin: I also feel like we have been able to have conversations now, all of us, about DMing that has been—

Travis: I mean, not that. We'll let him in eventually when he does like a long one. You know what I mean?

Griffin: Yeah, yeah.

Travis: He's done short ones, you know what I mean? Like, that's fine.

Griffin: Short ones are different.

Justin: Hey, thanks for listening. We really appreciate you.

Travis: And until next time...

Griffin: Bye!

Justin: Never know when to stop dreaming.

[Steeplechase theme song plays]

Maximum Fun.

A work-owned network...

Of artists-owned shows...

Supported directly by you.