

Wonderful! 333: Chicken Milkshakes

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[theme music, "Money Won't Pay (feat. Augustus)" by Bo En plays]

Rachel: Hi, this is Rachel McElroy.

Griffin: Hi, this is Griffin McElroy.

Rachel: And this is Wonderful!

Griffin: This is a show, a podcast show, where we talk about things we like, that's good, we're into. It usually is about one half an hour, including advertisements. Sometimes we don't do those.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: It is not family-friendly. And that's mostly my fault. I do cuss.

Rachel: You do the swears.

Griffin: I do cuss on this show. Sometimes.

Rachel: Sometimes we make—

Griffin: It would be so easy to make this show family-friendly.

Rachel: I know.

Griffin: I would literally only need to stop doing—

Rachel: Stop the swears.

Griffin: Two or three cuss words per episode.

Rachel: Well, and we make some suggestive comments occasionally.

Griffin: Mostly about one another.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Exclusively about one another, actually.

Rachel: [chuckles] Yeah, no, I can't think of a time where—

Griffin: That would be harder to curtail.

Rachel: I brought a topic where I was like, "Oh, this dude is so hot."

Griffin: Yeah, "Check out his balls."

Rachel: [laughs] Yeah, don't do that.

Griffin: No. And just like that, this episode—

Rachel: Yeah, now—

Griffin: Off the list.

Rachel: Now you have to turn it off.

Griffin: Focus on the Family has a lot to say about this podcast. But we don't care about that, we care about you at home and telling you things we like, that's good, we're in to.

Rachel: With swears.

Griffin: With cussing, sometimes. *Bastard*.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: There's a scene in the movie, Signs, the M. Night Shyamalan movie, Signs.

Rachel: Yeah?

Griffin: Where they go to this pharmacy and—this is not my small wonder. And the pharmacist is like this teen girl and she's trying to confess to Mel Gibson's character about the cusses she's done. And the way she says the word 'bastard' has like really stuck with me.

Rachel: [chuckles] Okay.

Griffin: Like, *bastard*.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: It's also very Corky from Waiting for Guffman.

Rachel: Oh, yeah. [chuckles]

Griffin: It's just a good, powerful word.

Rachel: I think, yeah, I mean, that word is actually—

Griffin: "You bastard people!"

Rachel: Yeah. [chuckles]

Griffin: Yeah, it's fuckin' cool. Do you have a small wonder for me?

Rachel: Well, you tell me that actually made me think of a small wonder.

Griffin: Okay?

Rachel: Because you had me watch that movie relatively early in our relationship and—

Griffin: Waiting for Guffman?

Rachel: No, Sings.

Griffin: Oh, yeah.

Rachel: I had seen Waiting for Guffman, thank you.

Griffin: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Rachel: But it reminded me of that time period in our relationship where you were like, "I'm gonna show you the things that I like."

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: "Because you really have to know this."

Griffin: We have been together for so long though, that like I don't even necessarily hold that film in such high regard these days. Like that is how long—the arc of our relationship is so long that like I have—there's things that I probably introduced you to that I will not necessarily—

Rachel: Yeah, no, I remember you were like, "Oh, you gotta watch Signs." And then we watched it and I was like, eh. [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah, I mean, I saw it when I was in high school with my mom. And I remember being just like so like, "Oh my god, everything does happen for a reason! The aliens hate the water!"

Rachel: Oh...

Griffin: Anyway, my small wonder, I can't believe you didn't yonk this, is a new show on Netflix. A reality television program from Japan. It is called The Boyfriend. It is... the extent to which it is Terrace House vibes is difficult to quantify. It's extremely Terrace House vibes. So much so that one of the panelists from Terrace House, Tokui, who was removed from the show after some like fraud scandals popped up that we thought like he's out of the game forever. He's one of the panelists on this show. And is about, at this point, seven young men living in a house together, falling in love, going on dates. Running a coffee shop.

Rachel: [chuckles] Yeah.

Griffin: For some reason. We're two episodes in, and holy shit it is hitting the mark for me.

Rachel: The way it is filmed is very Terrace House. The panel is very Terrace House. Like, everything about it feels so similar. It felt like we'd been given a real gift.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: Because we knew there wasn't going to be more Terrace House and we were like, "Oh, man, like that was a really—show we really liked." And then The Boyfriend showed up and we were like, "Oh my god."

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: We're back.

Griffin: I also don't like pretend to have like a deep cultural understanding of like the experience of being a gay man in Japan.

Rachel: Mm-hm.

Griffin: I remember I watched... I'm not going to remember, some like documentary about like what that experience was like and how it was, you know, not the easiest thing. But that was like 15 years ago maybe that I watched it?

Rachel: [chuckles] Yeah.

Griffin: So like, who knows what the experience is now? It is wild to see this show come out of a, you know, a place that we—I don't think of as the most kind of... open and sort of socially sexually sort of liberated in that way.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I'm talking like completely out of my ass right now, which I maybe should stop. But it's very impressive and it really is just a fuckin' really good watch, y'all.

Rachel: And there definitely is a guy on the show who talks about how he is not out to his family yet.

Griffin: Sure, yeah.

Rachel: You know?

Rachel: So like, it clearly is not like a completely accepted issue.

Griffin: There's also a couple of the guys who identify as bisexual. And like when it cut back to the panel, I was like, are they—what's this conversation going to be like? But it was incredibly, I think, well-handled in talking about sort of the nuance and sort of like the challenging sort of politics of like what navigating that is like.

Rachel: One of the panelists is a gay man and drag performer, and he does a lot of work for the panel just being like, "Okay, so let me tell you—"

Griffin: He does a lot of the heavy lifting.

Rachel: [chuckles] "Let me tell you about what this is."

Griffin: But Tokui is also holding it the fuck down—

Rachel: Oh my gosh. For those of you who don't remember, so there were kind of two consistent funny guys on the panel. There was the one with the glasses, and the one without the glasses.

Griffin: I can't remember his name.

Rachel: I know. [titters] But Tokui is the one without the glasses, who was kind of in my head the leader of the panel.

Griffin: I think that is—Yama-chan.

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: I remember it was Yama something. Ryota Yamasato is his name.

Rachel: We're still—we haven't finished much of the series yet.

Griffin: We're only two episodes in, but like god dang, it's everything that I—when I saw the trailer I was like, wow, this could be the heir apparent to the Terrace House kingdom. And it seems like it's hitting that mark.

Rachel: They have like sweet, little gimmicks too, to like—to make the relationships progress in a way that I've really enjoyed.

Griffin: They write anonymous letters to one another and like—

Rachel: Yeah. And they like have them—people are given the option of like who they want to work with. And there's this big performance where they like indicate who they have chosen. And it just feels very like thoughtful.

Griffin: Like, also if you loved the like banal minutia of Terrace House, they have a set budget that's basically like 6000 yen a day. Which is you know, roughly 60 bucks or so a day, for the whole house, for everyone. And there's one dude who lives in the house who is a bodybuilder and go-go dancer, who drinks three gigantic boiled chicken milkshakes every day to like maintain his fuckin' macros or whatever. And he ends up spending most of the money in the house. And so they have to have like a house conversation like, "Hey, man. You can't spend half the money in the house on your chicken milkshakes." It's fuckin' wild. It's got it all, man. I'm so, so revitalized and energized by this program.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: You go first this week. And I cannot wait to get into it.

Rachel: Yeah, so our last episode, which we just happened to record earlier this week—

Griffin: Two days ago, I think. Or three days ago.

Rachel: Yeah. We got a little behind and now we're caught up. And we mentioned the television program, Utopia. And I was ready to go. Like next day, I like got on my computer like I'm figuring this out.

Griffin: Literally texting me the next morning like, "Hey, check this. Check this. Let's do Utopia. Check this."

Rachel: Yeah, and Griffin had the thought, and it's true, we're not a like reality review program anymore.

Griffin: Anymore, yeah.

Rachel: And so this is not the start of a new trend, but I just couldn't wait. And so my topic this week is Utopia.

Griffin: I'm so stoked. You did so much more digging and I guess sort of excavating. There's a lot about this show that I think I have forgotten. I remember most of the brass tacks and of course the theme song.

Rachel: That's what I think will be interesting about this. Because I found one full episode, I found episode two. There were only 12 episodes total. And I found episode two online.

Griffin: So fuckin' great.

Rachel: So, I watched episode two to kind of refresh myself. But yeah, then I also read a lot of articles and like who the cast was. I also found an interview with the host.

Griffin: The host, who, if memory serves, had the vibe of like a science or perhaps kink YouTuber.

Rachel: Yeah. [laughs]

Griffin: Like there was something like undeniably—like he was just sort of an I think bald, mustachioed man.

Rachel: Uh-huh, exactly. Glasses.

Griffin: Glasses, maybe in like his late 30s. Who had sort of a vibe about him.

Rachel: His name is Dan Piraro, and he is apparently the creator of the subversive comic strip, Bizarro. And prior to his performance as host on Utopia, he had no television experience.

Griffin: And that certainly came through.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Which isn't to say he did a bad job, but it was just like a, whoa, I've never seen one of 'em like this do it before.

Rachel: So, Utopia. Now, if you google Utopia, there's like a movie and there also is versions of this show that happened in other countries. Because this actually didn't start in the US.

Griffin: Yes. It died in the US.

Rachel: Yeah. Well, and somebody may have gotten a little overeager. Because what happened was, Utopia debuted in the Netherlands in January. And that same year, in the fall, the US launched their own version.

Griffin: Okay, cool.

Rachel: So, the season hadn't even finished when they started having these conversations. But it was a huge hit in the Netherlands, and so US Fox jumped on it.

Griffin: This is so funny and so—such a like, I don't know, weird condemnation of the country of America. Where like a show about like let's restart society and form a bubble sort of nation, where we will be self-sufficient.

Rachel: I haven't even released that's what the show is about yet.

Griffin: Oh, right. Sorry.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: The fact that worked in the Netherlands, and then in America it was an absolute garbage fire, is I think telling in a sort of broader cultural context.

Rachel: So, Utopia debuted in the Netherlands in January, it was the network's highest-rated unscripted premiere in six years. And continued its winning streak as the number 1 series for 10 consecutive nights. So, it was just like a huge smash. And so, Fox jumped on the rights to it so they could, you know, greenlight it here. This executive, who was new to Fox and was very eager, jumped on top of it partially because of the creator of Utopia, John de Mol, who had also created Big Brother and The Voice.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: So everybody's like, "This guy is a genius. He's got a new show. It's doing really well. Let's jump on top of it." Utopia, I will say in the Netherlands, took place in the forest. It was not as like manicured an experience as the one here in the US.

Griffin: Okay, that's interesting.

Rachel: And apparently, John de Mol and the executive at Fox came to a lot of disagreements about Fox's approach. In a way that suggests that people were not happy about the show going from minute one, which explains maybe why they canceled it. [chuckles]

Griffin: Dude, so fucking much. So, so, so much.

Rachel: It made it two months and then they canceled it. It was supposed to be a full calendar year. [titters]

Griffin: And wasn't it the most expensive reality show ever made?

Rachel: \$50 million.

Griffin: That's... for 12 episodes of television, you are not—

Rachel: And that's not including the like tech piece they did later.

Griffin: Oh my god, oh my god.

Rachel: Okay, okay. So, it was filmed on a ranch in Santa Clarita, California. And the purpose of the show was to take individuals from out in the world, bring them to this ranch and have them start a new society. And so, they were given like a barn and some animals and access to like water. And it was their responsibility to like set up electricity and find a way to earn an income and build additional buildings. And it's a really interesting concept. And I think we were both really hooked by that in the beginning.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: Because it was—

Griffin: We also love ambitious, like disaster television shows sometimes. Of like, I'm—we are both so deeply interested in like how these shows get made. And the audacity of this program was sort of undeniable.

Rachel: So, part of the 50 million came from the fact that they built out the compound so that there were microphones and cameras all over. So there were no camera crews.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: So the people on the like space could really exist as if they were in isolation.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: Which of course added to the like huge price tag. And then the idea was that they will be filmed 24/7 and that the show would air twice a week. And you would—and if you wanted to, and this is something I did later in the series, you could pay to get access to like a 24/7 stream on the internet.

Griffin: Which, if memory serves—

Rachel: Was \$5 a month.

Griffin: Was also pretty gnarly, because it was like fully-uncensored, 24/7 access to these actual people who are living on this ranch.

Rachel: Part of the theory about it being filmed in Santa Clarita, California and not in a forest was that they were really encouraging nudity. [snickers]

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: They really wanted a mild climate, lot of sun, in which people would get nude as fast as possible.

Griffin: And if memory serves, there were quite a few people on the show who were fully down for that.

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Like completely down with that life.

Rachel: Yeah, so the show was cast in a very... challenging way.

Griffin: Mm-hm.

Rachel: Part of the biggest problem is that, you know how every reality show has one or two contestants that you can tell were brought on to be divisive?

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Or to start stuff. That was like 90% of the people on Utopia. [titters] So, let me tell you a little bit about the cast, let's see what you remember. So, there was Andrea, who was a vegan chef.

Griffin: Yes. I remember Andrea.

Rachel: Bella, who was a survivalist. She was the one with the chickens.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Do you remember? She had very strong feelings about the chickens. She wanted to build a chicken tractor so that the chickens could—

Griffin: Fertilize the—

Rachel: Yeah, like till the soil. And everyone's like, "We haven't even planted all the seeds yet," and she—

Griffin: She got really into the chicken tractor idea.

Rachel: [chuckles] Yeah, yeah.

Griffin: Got very one—

Rachel: There is a point also later in the show, it's actually the same episode now that I think about it, where they are drinking tap water. Bella has concerns about fluoride in the water and wants to invest in a filtration system as soon as possible. Everyone's like, "We are not spending our money that way."

Griffin: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Rachel: So, she kind of isolate herself pretty quickly. There is Dave, who had spent time in prison, and reminded people about this a lot.

Griffin: I remember Dave, yes.

Rachel: Especially when it came to the purchasing of food. So, there is a point when they finally get the electricity going, so they can make a call to have food delivered. And everybody's being thoughtful about like, "We should, you know, get staples that don't cost much." And he feels very strongly that he should have access to food similar to the food that was in the commissary at the prison he was at. And so, he really hits home, he just

wants ramen. He wants Vienna sausages. And he gets very upset when they start talking about things like brown rice and radishes and quinoa.

Griffin: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Rachel: It leads to this huge dispute where he starts like destroying some of the existing canned goods that they already have. There's a lot of conflict coming from him. And part of the reason that is happening is another contestant by the name of Red—

Griffin: Oh, Red!

Rachel: From Kentucky, very thick southern accent, has experience as a handyman, a farmer, a moonshiner, a home builder and a natural medicine man. And he and Dave start a separate faction. Do you remember this?

Griffin: I do.

Rachel: The Utopia State of Freedom. So, they get so upset about the way that their society is spending their money on food that they do not want to eat or have access to, that they decide to do a splinter group. And they pull money from the safe so they can buy their own groceries.

Griffin: It's like the third season of Battlestar Galactica.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: Where it's like you—there's not enough of you humans to fight against each other, or the Cylons are going to absolutely annihilate you.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Very much that that vibe.

Rachel: So, they do a grocery order, they get Oreos, they get hamburgers. Like, they make their choice. And then they invite everybody to a nice little cookout.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: So they're like—but they're trying to get people to join their group. There is also Hex, they always call her Hex the Huntress.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: She is—

Griffin: Jesus Christ, I have not thought about this show in years. And I remember every—

Rachel: Uh-huh. She is one of the people that gets nude pretty early on.

Griffin: Yeah, yeah.

Rachel: There is a preacher there, who always gets very upset about the nudity.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: There is Dedeker, do you remember her? I just remember that name. Like, you can't forget that name.

Griffin: I remember the name Dedeker.

Rachel: Yes. She was the one who was all about polyamory.

Griffin: Okay, yes. Okay, yes.

Rachel: And then there is the couple. So, there's Bree, who is 20 years old. And she gets in a relationship with Chris, who is 25. And they spend a lot of time discussing where they can go have sex. [titters]

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: Because there are cameras everywhere.

Griffin: Everywhere, all over.

Rachel: And they have a very physical relationship, you can tell that it is very like driven by lust.

Griffin: A lot of lake stuff, if memory serves.

Rachel: [chuckles] The problem is that Bree keeps saying stuff, "So like what even are we? How do you want to define our relationship?" And it's very clear like Chris just wants to bone.

Griffin: Reality TV girlfriend.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: There are other people, there's a guy who was engaged. Now, I can't remember the circumstances of this. There's a guy named Rob, who comes to the show engaged and then marries his fiancée while the show is being filmed. Do you remember this?

Griffin: Vaguely?

Rachel: They're like out in a field and the preacher marries them. So, she like comes to visit him and then they decided to get married at Utpoia.

Griffin: No, I do remember that the preacher I think like twists their ankle and then has to go to a real Earth hospital, and it's like a big—

Rachel: Oh, I forgot about that!

Griffin: I don't know if that's the exact injury, but like they have to go to the hospital. And then there's all this conversation about like, "Well, are they allowed to come back in? Because that's very explicitly not our society. We have popped the bubble I think at that point."

Rachel: What I have been reading you, by the way, is from an Entertainment Weekly article they did when the show launched. And what is delightful about it is they had everybody like really represent their character. So like, the attorney for example is in a like three piece suit. Hex the Huntress is actually holding a bow in her photo. And then the pastor looking very much like a pastor. And then Dedeker—

Griffin: Dedeker's just naked.

Rachel: Who's polyamorous, and so for them—

Griffin: That just means—

Rachel: Fox was like, let's—

Griffin: Naked lady, yeah.

Rachel: A naked lady. [chuckles] Yeah, so—

Griffin: 2014, right? This show was on 10 years ago?

Rachel: Yeah, 2014.

Griffin: Okay, so some depictions of these, let's call them archetypes, do not hold up too much scrutiny.

Rachel: No, no, no. And that is another problem with the show. I mean, there's obviously tons of problems with this show. But they, the—you know, it was Fox, who at the time, and for decades before, really tried to capitalize on salacious content.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: You know? And so, that is what they were trying to create with this show. When meanwhile, the premise itself was enough.

Griffin: Really good.

Rachel: But it ran from September 7th to October 31st.

Griffin: I remember was the last episode was the Halloween special.

Rachel: [giggles] Yes!

Griffin: And the host was dressed up, I can't remember, the host was like wearing something wild. I can't remember. But it was like, "Happy Halloween! Canceled! End of show!" After that Halloween special.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: I also remember that they let people in to their bubble—

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: They let people come into their little commune so that they could like sell them like friendship bracelets and eggs so that they could buy their Vienna sausages.

Rachel: They tried a lot of things at the end, because viewership was way lower than they were expecting. And it was happening like in real time.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: So, they were trying desperately towards the end. And that's— apparently, there was no plan to kick people off the show.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: But that was a way they were trying to engage viewership. So, people could get online and suggest who they wanted to be removed from the show.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: Which I guess they thought would pick up traction, but did not. It did not help.

Griffin: Tragic. I think that in the long history of American adaptations of reality television shows, Utopia deserves a like monumental like footnote. Of like, this is the one time where they tried something and the sort of immoral decisions made by the network hosting the show, and also just kind of the enormous cultural differences between the two countries that created these shows, was too big of a burden to possibly overcome. It's so fascinating.

Rachel: I will just say, the host that we mentioned earlier in this interview with TV Guide magazine, talks about how they toned down his look for camera. [titters]

Griffin: That's incredible.

Rachel: But that he still felt very strongly about the moustache wax. And he said that he even softened the mustache for his performance.

Griffin: What the fuck does that mean?! You softened your moustache for the performance?

Rachel: [chuckles] Yeah, he, Dan Piraro, met executive producer Jon Kroll at Comic Con. And when it came time to cast the host, apparently Kroll was like, "You know, that guy had a really good voice."

Griffin: Cool.

Rachel: [chuckles] So, no television experience.

Griffin: Love it.

Rachel: Every point of this, they had a path to choose. And they consistently chose the wrong one. But I stand by the concept.

Griffin: Yeah. I don't even know that I would do that. But it was fascinating, 10 years ago, especially, to have something like this on our TV. Can I steal you away?

Rachel: Yes.

[theme music plays]

Ify: Since 2017, Maximum Film has had the same slogan.

Alonso: The podcast that's not just a bunch of straight, white guys.

Drea: Ooh, we've learned something over the years! Some people out there really do not like that slogan.

Ify: Listen, we love straight, white guys.

Drea: Well, some of them.

Alonso: But if there's one thing we can't change, it's who we are.

Ify: I'm Ify. A comedian who was on strike last year in two different unions.

Drea: I'm Drea! I've been a producer and film festival programmer for decades.

Alonso: And I'm Alonso, a film critic who literally wrote the book on queer Hollywood.

Ify: You can listen to us talk movies and the movie biz every week on Maximum Film.

Alonso: We may not be straight white guys, but we love movies. And we know what we're talking about.

Drea: Listen to Maximum Film! On Maximum Fun, or wherever you listen to podcasts.

[break]

Mallory: Oh darling, why don't you accept my love?

Brea: My dear, even though you are a Duke, I could never love you. You... You... borrowed a book for me and never returned it!

Mallory: [gasps] Save yourself from this terrible fate by listening to Reading Glasses.

Brea: We'll help you get those borrowed books back and solve all your other reader problems.

Mallory: Reading Glasses, every Thursday on Maximum Fun.

[break]

Griffin: My thing this week I don't think is anything that is going to hit home for you. But I do wonder if there is something sort of similar that you have experience with in your life. I want to talk about a magazine, a gaming magazine from my youth, called Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine, or OPM. We were, the McElroy family, subscribed to no fewer than five video game magazines when I was growing up.

Rachel: [chuckles] Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

Griffin: There was GamePro, Nintendo Power, of course, Electronic—

Rachel: My grandpa—

Griffin: Gaming Monthly.

Rachel: My grandma used to get PC Gamer.

Griffin: PC Gamer, we got that for a little bit. Game Informer. But the one I always looked forward to the most was OPM, Official PlayStation Magazine. A monthly magazine, it covered all sorts of news about PlayStation 1 and 2 and 3 and the PlayStation portable.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: And as part of the Ziff Davis media empire, which like ran a billion magazines, and a lot of them were sort of based around games or like digital media and stuff like that. OPM entered publication in October of 1997, nearly two years after the U.S. launch of the PlayStation 1. And it ran until

2007. This was back in the days where like a magazine could run for 10 years. And that was a thing that was possible for a magazine to achieve. It is vitally important for you folks listening at home, who maybe this is an alien experience for, to understand that this was like largely pre-ubiquitous internet.

Rachel: Yeah. So, if you wanted like tips, this was where you had to go.

Griffin: Well, for me, it was less tips, right? For me, it was like if you wanted to know things about the games that were coming out. And I did.

Rachel: Oh.

Griffin: Like always. Magazines were more or less like your only way to find out what was coming. It was fairly easy to stay abreast of what Nintendo was up to, because they have always followed the same model. The same model that they have now, which is like a few huge tentpole releases that are advertised out the wazoo. And like you know, you go to Babbage's at the mall and they've got standees and posters and you know, they're pushing pre-orders on you. But the PlayStation, there was a ton of games that came out for the PlayStation. And a lot of them were localized from Japan with no fanfare whatsoever.

Rachel: Oh?

Griffin: So like, in order to find out what was coming out and have like a really good view of the landscape of like all—of this whole ecosystem of games coming up for this, you know, top of the line gaming console, like OPM and other magazines like it were like what you use. And I used to just tear through issues of this magazine. We had a pile of gaming magazines basically by every toilet in our house.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Which was two toilets, now that I'm thinking about it. And I would just tear through them. Like especially the previews, right, because I always wanted to know—I can still remember bylines. There was Thierry 'Scooter' Nguyen, who did like—I think was the previews editor maybe? Like, I can

remember that byline out of the top of my head just because I read so many pieces written by them. And you would read about these big games that are coming out later this year and I would just be chomping at the bit to play them. The best thing about OPM is you didn't have to wait sometimes to play those games, because every issue of OPM came with a demo disc.

Rachel: Whoa!

Griffin: It was the first gaming magazine to include demo discs for the PlayStation 1, and then later on the PlayStation 2. It would include a disc featuring a selection of trailers and playable demos of upcoming—

Rachel: That's so smart.

Griffin: PlayStation games. And like popular PlayStation games that were, you know, sort of had achieved classics status at some point. You would toss the disc into your PlayStation, it would show this kick-ass 3D CG animation of—like peak late '90s, early aughts like animation of like, you know, a big explosion and a dragon made out of like eight polygons.

Rachel: [chuckles] Uh-huh.

Griffin: And like heavy metal, industrial sort of aesthetic. And the wild thing about these demo discs is that the quality of the games presented was a total crapshoot, right? So, you'll get the magazine in the mail, read through it. It'll be like, "Oh, here's a preview of the new Squaresoft JRPG that's coming out. It's Chrono Cross coming out this summer. It's the summer of Square, it's going to be huge!"

Rachel: Uh-huh.

Griffin: And go play it! Because it's on this demo disc, you can go try it out. And the demos were always like custom-made, short slices of whatever the games, you know, previewed usually were. Sometimes what you got was a playable demo of 102 Dalmatians.

Rachel: [chuckles] Uh-huh.

Griffin: And then like six trailers for other shitty movie tie-in games.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: So like, you didn't know when you got the disc whether it was going to be like something—I remember we got one with this platformer I'd never heard of called Tomba. That was like so fucking good! I played that demo so much! And then like the next month, the disc that comes is like something completely awful.

Rachel: Well, I imagine it was hard to like have the content like every month, you know?

Griffin: Absolutely, it was. Yeah, and that's why eventually the quality of the discs, I would say, diminished over time. To the point where like the later issues, you will get maybe one demo and then a bunch of trailers. And the demo would be like, "This is Final Fantasy VIII, it came out three years ago. But if you still want to try it, we have a demo for it."

Rachel: Well, and I think a lot of what gets people to play a game is kind of the mystery of it. So, to put out a demo, you're kind of like already alienating some people potentially.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Who were like, "The demo sucked, I'm not buying the game."

Griffin: Yeah, absolutely. I think that's true. But I think it was absolutely worth it for like the good ones. But not only that, like for me, who did not have any money to spend on anything growing up, who's like new game acquisitions were based entirely around Christmas and like maybe one on my birthday.

And then after that, it was like whatever I could trade in at Babbage's for store credit to like—So, that like funneled down to the point where I had like one video game, basically. And for me, these discs were free, playable video games, because I didn't subscribe to this magazine, I think Justin did. Justin probably did most of these.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: These were free, playable video games. And that concept was so novel to me and so like exciting that I ended up playing everything *a lot*. So like, I found this YouTube channel that basically has uploaded playthroughs of every—

Rachel: Oh.

Griffin: Every demo disc from like the PS1 era, which is like something like 52 discs. And I just like picked one at random, and I was just hurled into this like a sinkhole of nostalgia. It was, what I looked at was disk 35. And I remembered this disk very fondly. It featured demos for Star Wars: Jedi Power Battles, Destruction Derby Raw, Walt Disney World: Racing Tour, and Play with the Teletubbies. All of which were horrible.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: They were so bad. But it also had a demo for the ninja assassination game, Tenchu 2, which fucking slapped ass. It was so, so good. It also had a trailer for Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX, and to round everything out, a PSA video from the Truth anti-smoking campaign.

Rachel: Oh my god!

Griffin: It's everything you need on one disk.

Rachel: I had no idea it was so many. When you were describing it, I was thinking like two or three. That is a lot of content.

Griffin: It's a lot of content.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And I remember playing all those games, and I remember looking at this like very kind of clunky-looking user interface that they'd put together

to like pick which game, and looking at Play with the Teletubbies and being like, "I fucking guess so, man, like—"

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: "I got nothing better to do. I don't have any new games. So, I guess I'll Play with the Teletubbies."

Rachel: "I don't have any real people to play with." [chortles]

Griffin: Yeah, sure. I think I was talking with Justin and Travis about this like a couple of weeks ago. And since then, watching these like compilations on YouTube has been like my little treat, my little nostalgic treat for myself. Because I really—

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I engaged with this stuff so deeply, because it was—to get little pieces of games for free, and to have like this you know, appetizer platter delivered every month was genuinely thrilling. And there were a few other magazines that did it. I think there was a Dreamcast magazine that had like a demo disc setup on it, too. And then once the PlayStation 2 came out, they did some PS2 demo discs. Some of which were like pretty great, also. But yeah, this is like an era that is so far gone, right? Because like, now, I don't need a magazine for gaming news. And I don't need physical media to play—

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: You know, demos of games for free. But like, I don't know, when I was just a lad, like that was the most exciting shit in the world for me. And it is not surprising at all that the path I then followed like started me off in the in the games press, you know, industry as soon as I possibly could.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And so like, yeah, that was a very special—

Rachel: That's very cool. Yeah, I—you talk about that and I remember that experience of going to Blockbuster.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And trying to rent a video game. And literally having no idea like how am I supposed to choose.

Griffin: Sure.

Rachel: And it was like, "Okay, well, this cover art of the little cool spot logo, that looks like a fun game."

Griffin: God, that explains so much about your origin story.

Rachel: [chuckles] Uh-huh.

Griffin: Hey, do you wanna know what our friends at home are talking about?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Koren says, "Something I find wonderful is when you realize you're holding more pages in your left hand than your right when reading a book, meaning you're over halfway through. It's a small but wonderful feeling of accomplishment, especially if you weren't really keeping track of your progress."

Rachel: Oh, yeah. See, you know me, I still love—I still love a physical—

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: I love a physical book.

Griffin: I love seeing a high percentage in the corner of my Kindle Paperwhite.

Rachel: [chuckles] Same thing.

Griffin: Same thing. Jeremy says, "My small wonder is riding my bike with a freshly lubed chain. Sometimes it's enough to make it feel like you're riding a brand-new bike, it's fantastic."

Rachel: I need to find it—so, I bought some accoutrement to like, you know, service my E-bike.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And I have no idea how to use any of it. So, I need to find like a little—

Griffin: I think you just goop the—

Rachel: Video.

Griffin: I think you just goop the lube right on there.

Rachel: Yeah, I mean, in my head, it's like, well, do I just goop it? But I have a feeling—

Griffin: You put the goop in your hand and then you run the chain through your hand, and let it goop. It self-goops.

Rachel: Yeah. And then it's done, right?

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: I don't know. I'm gonna have to look it up.

Griffin: My bike is belt-driven.

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: And I think I just got put off and throw it in the dishwasher.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: And then it's good to go. Thank you so much for listening. Thank you to Bo En and Augustus for the use of our theme song, Money Won't Pay. You can find a link to that in the episode description. We have some merch over at mcelroymerch.com that you can go check out, including a new Find FunGalore poster.

10% of all merch proceeds this month go to the Palestine Children's Relief Fund. We also are doing some live shows later this week in Detroit and Cleveland. Come out and see us there if you live in those areas. We're doing MBMBaM and TAZ in Detroit, and then MBMBaM in Cleveland. And then we have a bunch more appearances coming up all over the country.

You can go to bit.ly/mcelroytours for all the information about that. And one last thing, if you're listening to this on release day, then yesterday, The Adventure Zone: The Suffering Game graphic novel, our sixth graphic novel adaptation, is now out.

If you are a fan of TAZ, if you have enjoyed these books, it would genuinely mean the world if you would go to a bookstore that you like and pick up a copy. We signed a bunch of book plates to include in some of them with specific dealers, and so maybe you'll get your hands on one of those. But it's genuinely a fantastic book and I am so proud of it. And I want everyone on Earth to read it because it's—I think it's really good.

Rachel: I will say, I have friends now who have children that are like middle school, high school age. And you know, the focus for them is to get their child to continue reading in the summer. And I have now had two separate friends who have had their teen really thoroughly enjoy Adventure Zone graphic novels.

Griffin: That's very, very, very cool.

Rachel: So, I feel like if you yourself are not interested in the graphic novel, but you have a teen that is, it works—

Griffin: A cool teen—

Rachel: A cool teen.

Griffin: Who's like fine with cussing.

Rachel: It has to be a cool teen fine with cussing.

Griffin: That's it. Thank you all so much for listening, we'll be back next week with another episode of Wonderful. And you can check out the demo disc that comes with this episode of Wonderful.

Rachel: [chuckles] Uh-huh.

Griffin: It's got 15 seconds of The Boyfriend on it. And there's—

Rachel: And then you can play as a boyfriend in the game.

Griffin: And there is a trailer for Quantum Leap and—

Rachel: [chuckles] There is a fan fiction story about what would have happened on Utopia had the show continued.

Griffin: Yes, and a Truth campaign video, but this time it's anti-vaping, because it's 2024.

Rachel: Yeah, yeah.

[theme music, "Money Won't Pay (feat. Augustus)" by Bo En plays]

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