

## Wonderful! 341: The Graphics of Boogerman

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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:** Welcome to Wonderful! It's a show where we talk about things we like, that's good, that we are into. It is a podcast we do every week on Wednesdays. We don't record it on Wednesdays. This is complicated for some people. A lot of people think that what we do is live to tape.

**Rachel:** Uh-huh.

**Griffin:** It is not, we are—we do this thing ahead of time.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** And sometimes we make called shots.

**Rachel:** Uh-huh.

**Griffin:** That end up being like totally off base.

**Rachel:** I'm gonna say, it's Wednesday and it's raining.

**Griffin:** Whoa, that's cool.

**Rachel:** [titters]

**Griffin:** It's Wednesday and everyone is racing to theaters to see the Borderlands movie. They say, "Kevin Hart can't do me bad." That's what everybody's saying.

**Rachel:** Uh-huh.

**Griffin:** There's a news story that came out and said Kevin Hart can't do you bad, go see Borderlands movie. So a lot of people—do you know about Borderlands movie? I assume you don't. It's a video game movie.

**Rachel:** Yeah, I've heard of Borderlands, the game.

**Griffin:** You have?

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** That's cool.

**Rachel:** I mean, I absorb a lot, you know, just being around.

**Griffin:** Around me?

**Rachel:** Yeah. [titters] Primarily.

**Griffin:** Yeah, sometimes when I'm just like walking around the house, I will just say the name of video game franchises, just sort of apropos of nothing. When you have a gamer mind like myself, sometimes you just walk around the house and you'll just shout things—

**Rachel:** Borderlands!

**Griffin:** I'll just be like, "Borderlands!" It just comes out, it just—

**Rachel:** So, it's a movie, and Kevin Hart is in it.

**Griffin:** Yes.

**Rachel:** Is there anything else I need to know?

**Griffin:** Cate Blanchett is also in it.

**Rachel:** Whoa?

**Griffin:** Yeah. Why? I don't freaking know.

**Rachel:** Is Kevin Hart, is he playing a dramatic character in a dramatic role?

**Griffin:** No, but I do love that when you heard Cate Blanchett's in the film, you assume—

**Rachel:** Not known for comedies.

**Griffin:** No, not—

**Rachel:** But Kevin Hart is in fact known for comedies.

**Griffin:** Kevin Hart is known for comedies. We've been waiting for these two to get on the silver screen together.

**Rachel:** I know, I thought this was going to be like his serious turn.

**Griffin:** We were going to do this for Besties, we were going to like watch Borderlands. Because it's already out, it's already available to stream at home. In home theaters, on your DVD player.

**Rachel:** [chuckles]

**Griffin:** And I'm flying to Portland today, it's a five-and-a-half-hour long flight. And I was like—

**Rachel:** Oh, was it on the plane?

**Griffin:** And I—well, no, but it's on my iPad. And my finger was like hovering over the 'do you want to spend \$22 to own this movie that you'll watch once to take a big dump on your podcast?'

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** And I couldn't do it. Couldn't do it.

**Rachel:** Wow?

**Griffin:** I didn't have it in me to do it. I think I'm growing as a person, a father, a man.

**Rachel:** Yeah! I mean, I think about the number of times that you have probably bought the Kevin James film.

**Griffin:** Paul Blart: Mall Cop 2?

**Rachel:** Yes.

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Rachel:** I think you have bought that multiple times.

**Griffin:** Well, I bought it on—I rented it for the first few years at Redbox. I would go to the Redbox in front of the Walgreens.

**Rachel:** Yeah! Oh my god.

**Griffin:** And I would hit that, and then I would return it late, so there would be some fees I would accrue there. And then I bought it on DVD. And then I realized I don't want to dig out a DVD player once a year in order to watch this film. So then I bought it on digital. Yeah, so I owned that film a few times over.

**Rachel:** [chuckles]

**Griffin:** I'm a major shareholder in the Bartverse.

**Rachel:** Do you get like earnings reports?

**Griffin:** I do. I get earnings reports from the Sony Entertainment Corporation.

**Rachel:** Uh-huh. Specific to Kevin James?

**Griffin:** Specific only to Kevin James and his body of work. And it's a banner year. It's been a good year for Hitch. Don't know why. We talk about Hitch a lot on this show. Do you have a small wonder?

**Rachel:** Oh, man. I guess saying that small son is being a real champ about school.

**Griffin:** Yeah, small son has started school—well, daycare, which is like school.

**Rachel:** I mean, here's the thing. Like preschool for children at age three exists.

**Griffin:** Right.

**Rachel:** We just don't have one in our area.

**Griffin:** That's true.

**Rachel:** A lot of schools do.

**Griffin:** That's true.

**Rachel:** So we picked a school that does start at like two years, I think?

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Rachel:** Anyway, first day, little nervous, but like no tears. And then today, he just marched in.

**Griffin:** Threw the backpack on and just was like deuces, yeah.

**Rachel:** Just marched in, yeah. Even the teacher that was fetching him was surprised. Just looked at it as like, wow, okay, I guess he's all business.  
[chuckles]

**Griffin:** Yeah. But the face that she made also communicated like, "You two must be truly stellar parents."

**Rachel:** [laughs] Was that how you interpreted that?

**Griffin:** Her face was like, "What are you two doing at home that he is like this chill with going to school?"

**Rachel:** [chuckles]

**Griffin:** I would say big son has, I would assume, to be a sort of normal reaction to school. Which is a sort of like, "Ah, man."

**Rachel:** Yeah, he protests it. But not in a like way that is particularly convincing. It's more of a halfhearted like, "Wish I was doing anything else." And it's like, well, yeah, I get that.

**Griffin:** I get that too. For my small wonder—I'm going to reserve doing a big wonder on this once we have finished it. There's a new Korean reality competition show that has taken over this household by storm. It's on Netflix, of course. It's called The Influencer. And it is a show that gamifies influencer culture and the influencer industry in ways that I think are straight up genius. And gross. But that's sort of part and parcel with the whole thing.

**Rachel:** It's kind of set up like Physical 100, in that there is an absurd number of contestants to start.

**Griffin:** I think 77.

**Rachel:** Yeah. And they all kind of know each other. There's a lot of looking around the room and being like, "Oh, wow, he's here." And then they winnow it down very quickly.

**Griffin:** Very, very quickly, yes. The first episode is a bit of a challenge, I would say, to get through, as they introduce all 77 of these influencers.

**Rachel:** Here's the thing, I think if we were residents of Korea, we would be very excited.

**Griffin:** Sure.

**Rachel:** But most of the time, in fact I would say 99% of the time, you don't know who any of these people are.

**Griffin:** I swear on a stack of bibles, one of the dudes was on Physical 100. Because Physical 100 also had some like fitness influencers on it.

**Rachel:** True.

**Griffin:** Anyway, 77 influencers, it's like a battle royale. One person's gonna win the whole thing. They play five games to like winnow down the field to figure out who's the best influencer. And each game sort of makes a game out of different aspects of being an influencer. So, the first one is about like attracting attention from your fellow influencers. There's one that's about like taking a photo that will attract like eyes. Like that will—

**Rachel:** Yeah, there's one about streaming. It's really interesting to see all these people who are like experts in their particular discipline, but are not familiar with the other ones.

**Griffin:** Right, which is... we are so tangentially kind of like part of this world, right? And so like, it is very interesting to me when someone is like, "Yeah, you know, I do a lot of Instagram reels, but I don't know how to just like post a picture of myself." And so like I always just kind of assume if you do one of these things, you have to do all of these things. All that said, I am fucking loving it.

**Rachel:** Well, and they're learning a lot from each other, which is what's interesting.

**Griffin:** Right.

**Rachel:** Like the episode we're watching, there are these very public rounds where people see like what is successful and what isn't, and then they go back and they all try to adopt each other's like techniques.

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Rachel:** It's fun.

**Griffin:** It's really, really, really good TV. Like Siren: Survive the Island and Physical 100 and Devil's Plan, like it's just like super high touch, super high concept reality shows, executed at a really, really high level. And it is, man, it's just fuckin', it is non-stop! It's non-stop, these good-ass reality shows coming out of South Korea. You go first this week.

**Rachel:** I do.

**Griffin:** Let's hear what you got. I know what you've got, actually. And I'm very, very curious how you are going to turn this into a full segment.

**Rachel:** [laughs] So, this idea was partially inspired by Stop Podcasting Yourself. On their bonus feed, they've been doing Canadian commercials.

**Griffin:** Okay?

**Rachel:** Just like classic commercials they grew up with that only existed in Canada.

**Griffin:** Okay? What's the vibe like? Like what sort of sets it apart? Is like Gretzky in a lot of them? Or—

**Rachel:** [chuckles] There are references to hockey. It's mainly what you would expect, it's just like very wholesome, enthusiastic ads for things.

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Rachel:** Like bringing it to a level of intensity that seems surprising.

**Griffin:** That's great.



**Rachel:** So I started thinking like, I wonder what I can find out. And I've done '90s commercials before.

**Griffin:** Sure.

**Rachel:** But the commercial I want to talk about today is actually not from the '90s. It's from 2009.

**Griffin:** Okay?

**Rachel:** And it is the famous coming home ad that Folgers did around the holiday season.

**Griffin:** Yes, so much ink I feel like has been spilled on online blogs, specifically about this.

**Rachel:** Yes! This is what I was not aware of.

**Griffin:** Yes.

**Rachel:** So, if you do not recognize it from the title, that's not surprising. Let me give you a quick rundown. It is based on a classic commercial that came out in 1987, called Peter Comes Home For Christmas. Where a brother comes home to his little sister, who is very young, and they kind of meet together in the house, and they brew coffee to wake everybody up. And that's kind of the whole thrust of it.

**Griffin:** Yes. It's more of a solo mish from Peter. Very Peter-focused, this original commercial. And then it's—

**Rachel:** Yeah, and then like a girl who looks maybe like three or four comes out, and she's very excited, and she's the first one awake. And they all wake the family up.

**Griffin:** And the mom and dad like look over the banister from the second floor and see Peter like in front of the Christmas tree. And she's like, [spoofs British accent] "Peter!" She might not have an accent like that.

**Rachel:** [chuckles]

**Griffin:** But like the level of excitement that she has makes me think like what's Peter been do—like has there been a wedge in this family? Because it looks like she hasn't seen Peter in years.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** It's like those videos where like soldier dads come home from the big war and the kids are like, "Oh, dang!"

**Rachel:** So in 2009, Folgers tried to kind of recapture that energy. So again, a brother coming home, his sister meets him. And she is much older this time around.

**Griffin:** Yes.

**Rachel:** And the suggestion of the commercial is that he has been in the Peace Corps, doing some kind of work in West Africa. And he has not been home for a while.

**Griffin:** I don't think I've ever picked up on that particular element.

**Rachel:** I've found out a lot about this reading the lore.

**Griffin:** [titters] Okay?

**Rachel:** Like specifically, there is a GQ article that came out in 2019, that is an oral history of this commercial.

**Griffin:** I read that article, and yes, it's...

**Rachel:** [chuckles]

**Griffin:** It certainly proposes some theories about it that I don't necessarily agree with, but it's fascinating to see how the mind can spin.

**Rachel:** So, well, the oral history speaks specifically with the people involved in creating the commercial.

**Griffin:** Okay, okay, that's interesting.

**Rachel:** So you get like their intent. You also get people's theories, but you get specifically like the director and the executive producer. Anyway, so he is home, he has not seen his sister in a while. They go into the kitchen, he gives her a gift. She says—[chuckles]

**Griffin:** You're skipping like a lot of pretty good stuff I feel like, including the opening of the commercial. Where he opens the—she opens the door to the house, he's got his bags. And he like takes a second, like a double take, and he's like, "Well, I must have the wrong house. I don't recognize you." And then she just goes, "Sister?"

**Rachel:** [chortles]

**Griffin:** Which is the most profoundly strange way of—"Sister?!"

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** "I am sister!"

**Rachel:** Here's the thing, I was going to give the whole plot.

**Griffin:** Oh, okay, I see, I see.

**Rachel:** Before I got into the details.

**Griffin:** Okay, I see.

**Rachel:** So, he gives her a gift. She says, "You're my present this year." And then they—the camera pans back and forth between the two of them.

**Griffin:** A long time.

**Rachel:** Yeah. And there's—the exchange of looks is not particularly familial, let's say. [chuckles]

**Griffin:** It's... there...

**Rachel:** There is like, there are overtones, there's like some tension in the like kind of like this white-hot romance.

**Griffin:** And it's not, this is not—I don't think that this is—

**Rachel:** None of this was intended.

**Griffin:** I don't think it was intended. I also don't think that this is some gross flight of fancy that my wife or the rest of the internet is kind of engaging in. The way that the thing is shot is very much soft focus, face close up like—hm. Like—

**Rachel:** Yes.

**Griffin:** Traditional romantic filmography, I would say.

**Rachel:** Because if you—I'm debating whether or not we have Rachel like play the audio from like the last five seconds of it.

**Griffin:** I think that's fine. I think we can play a little bit of it.

**Rachel:** Because I want to—I want to emphasize, if we can play the clip, that there is nothing in the delivery that feels particularly sexual.

**Griffin:** The actors—I don't think the actors necessarily are doing anything untoward, or anything that is like outside of what they probably received on the script. It is entirely cinematographic.

**Rachel:** [chuckles]

**Griffin:** The romantification of this of this relationship.

**Rachel:** Okay, can we play the clip?

**Griffin:** Yes.

[clip plays]

**Brother:** I brought you something from far away.

**Sister:** [titters] Really? Oh...

**Brother:** [titters] What are you doing?

**Sister:** You're my present this year.

[clip ends]

**Rachel:** Okay, so this commercial came out in 2009. The two actors in it are Matthew Allen, who went on to be in Castle Rock and 13 Reasons Why.

**Griffin:** Oh, shit?

**Rachel:** He's like, he's like a real like working actor. Although he says he still gets recognized for the Folgers commercial. [chuckles]

**Griffin:** That's fucking great.

**Rachel:** He was 30 at the time.

**Griffin:** Okay?

**Rachel:** Maybe—well, if this came out in 2009, maybe he was 29. I don't know how long it takes to shoot and put a commercial up. And then Catherine Combs, who plays a little sister, is 19.

**Griffin:** Okay.

**Rachel:** So this I think is part of the problem. First time, very clearly younger. This one, the premise is that she has grown up while he has been gone.

**Griffin:** Yes, right.

**Rachel:** So they have to make her a teenager. But I think they shot a little too high.

**Griffin:** 19 is a strange age to be like, "Wow, you got so big."  
"I'm 19."

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Like you can't even say like, "You missed a growth spurt." Like, I'm—have you been in the Peace Corps for nine years? Like, how—what's the length of the absence here?

**Rachel:** So this actress, Catherine Combs, is actually still working. She does kind of like one episode runs here and there on different things. She's been on NCIS: New Orleans.

**Griffin:** Amazing.

**Rachel:** She was on an episode of Fosse/Verdon, The Deuce.

**Griffin:** Wow! Holy shit, okay! These are—

**Rachel:** The Mentalist. But like one episode.

**Griffin:** That's great! That's, oh, god, if I—if that could be my fucking career? What a dream that would be.

**Rachel:** I know. It looks like she does like one or two things a year. But you know, pretty like high profile things.

**Griffin:** Yeah, man. Fosse/Verdon won like all the Emmys, if memory serves.

**Rachel:** Yeah, yeah. And some like work in the theater. So like all that to say, like she is—

**Griffin:** These are pro—these are two pros.

**Rachel:** These are talented actors. I will say she declined to be interviewed for the GQ piece. [titters]

**Griffin:** Don't blame her.

**Rachel:** But Matthew Allen did not, and so he talks a little bit about his experience. The oral history is very wholesome, and that is kind of what I love about it, is that everybody there is legitimately surprised at what happened. So the reaction from the people that actually made the commercial is just like total surprise.

The story—the writer is Doug Pippin, who is apparently this like famous creative director at Saatchi & Saatchi. Which is like an advertising firm that has been around forever. And it was based on a personal story where his son had been in the Peace Corps and had come home for Christmas. And everyone was like, "Oh, this is such a like heartwarming, beautiful story."

**Griffin:** Yes.

**Rachel:** And so they all kind of were building the idea around that. And obviously kind of basing it off of the original commercial—

**Griffin:** Yeah, absolutely.

**Rachel:** In 1987. And then they talk about how like during the casting, they didn't put them together, the brother and sister, they did it separately. But they were both like standouts from their like 200 people that they saw for this commercial. And Matthew Allen, who was in it, was very surprised. Because he very much like saw the whole experience as like a brother-sister thing. He hasn't spoken to the actress since.

And he said this was like his first big break, this was like his first big thing that he did. And he said it's still, as I mentioned, the job that he gets recognized for most. And everybody involved in the commercial talks about how like amazing he was and how great she was to work with. But yeah,

obviously people are still talking about the white-hot energy behind the two of them. [chuckles]

**Griffin:** I think this is an interesting case, because it is the... the commercial is more like charged than the sum of its parts.

**Rachel:** Yeah, so some—GQ interviewed some of the people that have written fan fiction about this commercial, and—

**Griffin:** That's fucking wild!

**Rachel:** [chortles]

**Griffin:** That's fucking wild to me.

**Rachel:** There is a site called Yuletide, which is a fan fiction exchange for small and rare fandoms whose reveal happens on December 25<sup>th</sup>.

**Griffin:** Okay.

**Rachel:** So it's like basically a community set up for things like this.

**Griffin:** All right, yeah, I can see the crossover appeal.

**Rachel:** But one of the writers for one of these stories said, "There is a Hallmark movie sappiness to it, where you are sort of expecting bad acting and milquetoast dialog. Then you see these two attractive actors that have an oddly palpable chemistry, even though they are playing siblings."

**Griffin:** Yeah!

**Rachel:** So that's what you're kind of talking about, like the disconnect—

**Griffin:** No one wanted it to be that way.

**Rachel:** [laughs]



**Griffin:** But it was presented in a way—it's almost a Pavlovian response. Where it's like, I've seen things shot this way, with this vibe, with attractive actors in it. And it usually ends up with them kissing on the mouth.

**Rachel:** And this—[laughs] This goes back to the way it was filmed. So the director, Ray Dillman, talks about like how he kind of ran the whole commercial from start to finish. And one thing I found curious was that he said, quote, "I've had a handful of spots I've directed over the years be parodied. It's a razor's edge doing this type of work. I don't know why you would take yourself seriously with that stuff. It's just funny stuff." So this idea that he continues to bring this kind of surprising energy and people continue to parody it, makes me think—[laughs]

**Griffin:** Well, baby, we are doing a podcast 15 years after the creation of this commercial, where we are talking at length about it for about 15 minutes now. I would say that this man is exceptionally good at his job.

**Rachel:** I think the pivot points are just the camera shots at the end.

**Griffin:** It's just the—just the—

**Rachel:** The sister thing is weird. The fact that he opens the door and she just—[chuckles]

**Griffin:** And hasn't seen—"Sister!"

**Rachel:** "Sister." [chuckles] The suggestions was she would be like, "I'm your sister." Like kind of in like a silly like, "We're playing a game right now."

**Griffin:** But that energy is really hard to tap into when you're 19 years old, right? Like—

**Rachel:** Yeah, that's true.

**Griffin:** That's why—where have you been?! How did you miss—how did—I look so—

**Rachel:** [chuckles] "Sister?"

**Griffin:** "I'm 19 years old, I look—"

**Rachel:** Well, he's been in the Peace Corps?

**Griffin:** For how long? That I look so fundamentally different?

**Rachel:** [chuckles] I don't know. And so yeah, there's the sister moment, which is weird. But I think ultimately the strangeness comes from after she says, "You are my present." The camera goes back and forth between the two of them.

**Griffin:** Like four times.

**Rachel:** And nothing is said.

**Griffin:** Nothing said.

**Rachel:** And then it ends.

**Griffin:** But a lot is said.

**Rachel:** [chuckles]

**Griffin:** Yeah, it's a wild ride. This commercial is a wild, wild ride. I don't think they've made one quite like it did. Did... I think, I don't know if it was SNL or like Funny or Die or somebody did a parody of it.

**Rachel:** There have been a lot of parodies of it. BuzzFeed has done something about it, The Daily Dot. Know Your Meme has featured it, Up Rocks posted a list about it. It's incredible, the response to it. I will say, from—at least from this article that came out in 2019, the commercial has been retired as of 2012.

**Griffin:** Well, yeah.

**Rachel:** So, but you can find it anywhere.

**Griffin:** God, if they busted it out though again, can you imagine?

**Rachel:** [chuckles]

**Griffin:** People will be—people would be like blowing up their group text like, "It's back!"

**Rachel:** I know! It would be like when you're at a club and they play the song and everyone gets super hype, like people will be running around their houses—

**Griffin:** Just losing it.

**Rachel:** Like, "It's the Folgers commercial!" [chuckles]

**Griffin:** [in a silly voice] "It's the Folgers commercial—this weird—it's the Folgers commercial!"

**Rachel:** [chuckles]

**Griffin:** Can I steal you away?

**Rachel:** Yes.

[theme music plays]

[ad break]

**Griffin:** I'm excited to talk to you about my segment. Even though I don't think it is one that you are particularly well-versed in. I would love to talk to you about the Sega Dreamcast. The Sega Dreamcast, the last of the Sega video game consoles. And I'm excited to—I'm hoping I can hook you with this segment. Because while my family was very much a Nintendo household, you very much grew up team Sega.

**Rachel:** When did the Dreamcast come out?

**Griffin:** The Dreamcast came out in the United States, I'll never forget this, on September 9<sup>th</sup>, 1999. It was 9-9-99, and it cost \$199.

**Rachel:** Oh, that's fun.

**Griffin:** It was a very, very, very clever sort of—

**Rachel:** Yeah, I was out of my gamer phase by that point, so I don't even think I knew anybody with a Sega Dreamcast.

**Griffin:** A lot of people didn't know anybody with a Sega Dreamcast.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Which is part of the problem.

**Rachel:** If like at that time, like computer gaming was a big thing.

**Griffin:** Yes.

**Rachel:** And also, what was like Grand Theft Auto on?

**Griffin:** Grand Theft Auto was on, I mean, it launched on PlayStation 1.

**Rachel:** Yeah, the PlayStation. I think that was kind of the big thing. I knew people who had PlayStations.

**Griffin:** Yes, of course. But you were team Sega. I remember having a conversation with you about how your dad, when the Super Nintendo and the Sega Genesis came out, your dad did a lot of like consumer reports like research and was like, "Well, the Sega Genesis has the 32X chip in it, and so the graphics of Boogerman are—"

**Rachel:** [laughs] I mean, I think the idea is that those things were a lot of money.

**Griffin:** Sure.

**Rachel:** And you wanted to feel like you purchased the best option that was available to you.

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Rachel:** And he was like, "The graphics on Sega are much better than Nintendo," which is true!

**Griffin:** It's like a kind of like pure hardware hype beast level of choosing how to spend your dollars that I really, really do admire about your father. So yeah, Sega made a few video game consoles, right? They had the Mega Drive, the Master System, the Genesis. Before the Dreamcast, they had what was called the Sega Saturn. Which was like their competitor to the Sony PlayStation. And it was a fuckin' huge flop. It was a disaster for them. Just like failure to launch, they had supply chain issues. There were never enough of them.

**Rachel:** Wow.

**Griffin:** And there were not a lot of games for it. They very famously did a thing that no one in the industry has ever done since, which is they announced the Sega Saturn, and then they said, "And it's on sale right now." Like they put it on sale—

**Rachel:** Wow!

**Griffin:** Right when they announced it, which ended up being a big fucking mistake. So the Dreamcast was like their Hail Mary. They put all of their eggs in the Sega Dreamcast basket. They put all their weight, all their resources into it, and just kind of hoped for the best. And it did not succeed. But it was so ambitious and so interesting that there is still like a great deal of affection for it today, you know, 25 years after.

We, on The Besties, we launched a Patreon where we do this bracket battle episode every month. And the most recent one we did was like what was the best piece of gaming hardware? And there was so much fighting for the Sega Dreamcast to make it, because it is just this weird time capsule of a system

that was just like a huge fuckin' swing for the fences that ultimately missed. But god, you gotta applaud the effort behind it.

**Rachel:** Can you give me an example of the games that like kind of premiered on it?

**Griffin:** Yeah, so, it had a really strong launch lineup. When it launched in the States, September 9<sup>th</sup>, 1999, it had 18 launch games, which is a pretty strong lineup. And they had some really heavy hitters in there. The sort of big star was Sonic Adventure, which was the first 3D Sonic game. It had like multiple playable characters and is like super-corny, doesn't hold up very well. But back then, like beat the shit out of like Super Mario 64 in terms of like what it looked like, how fast it ran, what it—just like how it performed.

It was like the kind of killer app for the game. But then there were like a ton of other really great games that maybe didn't set the world on fire back then. There was fighting games like Power Stone and Soul Calibur, which are still held in really high regard. There was a boxing game called Ready 2 Rumble Boxing. NFL 2K, which was like the rival—new rival football franchise to like go up against Madden.

It had like kind of a mixed bag. But then like throughout the consoles like lifespan, which was only a couple of years before they ended up discontinuing it, Sega put just so much stuff onto it. And it was stuff that wasn't coming out on other consoles. Which is why I think people like still hold the Dreamcast in such high regard, is because like the games that came out for it weren't coming out anywhere else.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** And so if you wanted to play those games, if you wanted to play Shenmue, which was this huge, ambitious, sprawling like kung fu epic revenge story, like you had to play it there.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** It was the same sort of like company that was making Sonic, and it was the '90s, and so there was like all of this like fuckin' edge and hipness

and coolness. And so you had games like Crazy Taxi, which was like this arcade taxi driving game with like this killer punk ska soundtrack. There was Jet Grind Radio, which was like a rollerblading graffiti game with like the fuckin' funkiest soundtrack.

**Rachel:** I have not heard of any of these.

**Griffin:** That's the thing, right? Is like it is... it's almost at this point kind of hipster shit. Like Tim Walz came out and was like, "I remember great days playing my Sega Dreamcast." And it fuckin' was this dog whistle for like people who were playing games at the time to be like, "Fuck yeah, man! Jet Grind Radio!" So it was the first of what is sort of considered the sixth generation of consoles, but it was the first one to come out. So this was sort of the Sega version of the PlayStation 2, or the original Xbox, or the Nintendo GameCube. But it was the first one out, and so it was the strongest console when it came out.

**Rachel:** Were the games like competitively priced? Or were they like—

**Griffin:** Yeah. I mean, in terms of like where other games were. The hardware was definitely competitively priced at 1.99.

**Rachel:** Yeah, I'm wondering then why it didn't take off?

**Griffin:** Well, there's a few—there's a few reasons for that. One is that they again kind of like ran into supply chain issues. It had a lot of like pretty complex sort of like hardware architecture that made it sort of tough to develop for. Very famously, EA, Electronic Arts, which you know, still is a big player in the space, but back then was like the biggest game publisher on the planet. They made Madden. They did not make any games for the Sega Dreamcast. They came out and said like it's too hard to make games for it.

Behind the scenes there was some drama because they said, "We want to be the only people making sports games on the Dreamcast." And Sega was like, "No. We have lots of teams. We have a whole sports team. We want to make Virtua Tennis and all of these things." And so EA said like, "All right, well, we're just not going to make any games for your console." So if you

wanted to play the big EA games, you had to do it on Xbox or you had to do it on PlayStation 2. Which took a big sort of bite out of things.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** Also, in late 1999, Sony announced like what the PlayStation 2 was going to be, and that sort of captured everyone's attention. So then all of a sudden it was, you know, "I'm gonna hold off and wait for the PlayStation 2."

**Rachel:** So much of it is timing. Like I didn't really understand that before you started telling me more and more about these like big releases that happen, or used to happen at these conventions. But now I like totally get it, like—

**Griffin:** Yeah, man.

**Rachel:** If you want people to invest, you really have to like put it in the exact right place.

**Griffin:** Yeah. I mean, that's true of games, right? Like, just individual games. It's maybe less true now, but back in the day like if Activision announced like Call of Duty: Modern Warfare II is going to drop on November 15<sup>th</sup>, if you were the developer of a game that was coming out on November 15<sup>th</sup> you'd be like, "Okay, well, we're going to delay our game. Because we're not gonna fuckin' come out at the same time."

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** That was especially true of like consoles though, because you did not want to compete with—you didn't want to be anywhere near when the Sony PlayStation 2 launched around Christmas, because now parents are going out and buying their kids Christmas presents. They're not gonna buy fuckin' both of 'em.

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



**Griffin:** They're gonna buy the PlayStation 2, right? The PlayStation 2 was massive, completely ate up like all the market share.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** Because at the time, like Nintendo, Sony, Microsoft, like they had a stranglehold on the market. And if you were gonna buy a Sega console, you would look back and be like, well, the 32X didn't do so great, the Saturn didn't do so great. Do I really want to invest in this like ecosystem that may or may not like take off? But god dang it, they put their backs into the Dreamcast with like this huge marketing push. Like this *crazy* marketing push. It was everywhere; commercials and magazine ads and billboards.

They put out a bunch of games. And like what's kind of sad about it is like the Dreamcast really was ahead of its time. It was the first gaming console with an Ethernet port built into it, so you could play games online. Like it was the first console that you could play games online on it. Whether it was like NFL 2K or they released a game that I still adore called Phantasy Star Online. Which was the first like online RPG that you could play on a video game console. And I played *the shit* out of it.

**Rachel:** What was it?

**Griffin:** It was like a—Phantasy Star was like an old Sega role playing game series.

**Rachel:** Oh.

**Griffin:** So it's kind of like neo-futuristic, like you go around and you hunt monsters together.

**Rachel:** When I heard Phantasy Star Online, I thought it was like a weird American Idol kind of thing.

**Griffin:** No, they did have Space Channel 5, which was about sort of like a future pop star.

**Rachel:** Wow.

**Griffin:** It was like a rhythm game in space. But you could like, you could browse the web on the Dreamcast. Which is fucking crazy! Like that was pretty ahead of its time. Because I think it was running on like a Windows sort of offshoot. It was a really powerful system.

**Rachel:** So would you plug it like into your modem?

**Griffin:** Yeah! You would just run an Ethernet cable right into it, and you could play games online. Which was pretty ahead of its time. When the PS2 launched, it didn't have an Ethernet port. You had to buy like a special attachment that came out like two years later.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** It also had—the weirdest thing about the Dreamcast is it had a memory card, which was not so unique for game consoles. Like if you wanted to save your game, if you're playing Resident Evil 2 on the PlayStation, you needed a memory card that you could save your progress to. The Dreamcast memory card was called the Visual Memory Unit, and it plugged into the controller, and it had a screen on it. So you could see this little, tiny screen on your controller while you were playing, which would sometimes show like a fun little icon. If you were playing NFL 2K, you could pick your plays on the tiny screen so the person you're playing against can't tell if you're about to like do an onside kick or whatever. Which is pretty—

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** But then you could also pop it out and take it on the go. And there would be like little mini games you could play on this tiny, portable memory card.

**Rachel:** Wild.

**Griffin:** It was so ambitious. It was so ambitious. And it had this catalog of games that were really pretty great and weren't anywhere else. And then it just could not compete against like mostly Sony, but you know, also Microsoft and Nintendo to a certain extent. And so, it was discontinued in

2001. Sega managed to save itself by kind of like completely restructuring, getting out of the console market entirely and just making games. Publishing and developing games. Which they're still doing today. And they I think have a really interesting niche in the market today. Like they make really fuckin' great games.

**Rachel:** Where do you play them?

**Griffin:** Well, they make games—they're third party now, so they make games for PC and—

**Rachel:** Oh.

**Griffin:** You know, Xbox and PlayStation. And even Nintendo some, which like sort of seems outrageous through the lens of—through the lens of the '90s. So like, there's really nothing like the Dreamcast in all of gaming history where it's like, it was this super-fierce battlefield. And Sega did mostly everything right. Like in terms of like what you want for a good console launch, like they did actually a pretty kick ass job.

It was just so competitive, and the timing was just a little bit off. And there were just a few factors that weren't quite right. And so it sent them off in this direction where, ultimately, they never made another gaming console ever again. But there's still so much affection for the Dreamcast in like gamers who were playing games in the late '90s and early aughts.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** And in a different world, I think it could have cemented Sega's place as like a major, major player in like the hardware space. But instead, it's just kind of this weird time capsule of video games that I really, I really do love—

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** Do you want to know what our friends at home are talking about?

**Rachel:** Yes.

**Griffin:** Ellen says, "My small wonder is ice machines. I love chewing ice. Sorry, dentists. My wife has tried to find a small ice machine for our house, but tragically, our kitchen is very small. However, at my new job, there's an ice machine. It's so nice to go and grab a little crunch break."

**Rachel:** [chuckles] I'm curious how this person's office mates feel about the ice crunching.

**Griffin:** Yeah, I don't mind the—

**Rachel:** Maybe there's enough distance that it's not oppressive. Like if I had to sit directly—

**Griffin:** You think Ellen lets it fuckin' rip?

**Rachel:** [chortles]

**Griffin:** Just like puts two or three cubes at a time in there and just—  
[spoofs eating sounds]

**Rachel:** [laughs] Yeah, no, there's—I mean, this kind of thing wouldn't necessarily bother me, but I know some people, like the sound is a lot for them.

**Griffin:** Hm... I guess so, yeah.

**Rachel:** But you're right, it's probably not like an entire mouth full.  
[chuckles]

**Griffin:** I think Ellen is probably demure about it. Lauren says, "My small wonder submission is when you're able to time out all the pieces of public transportation perfectly during your commute. To get to work, I have to take a bus to the metro, then take one metro line to transfer to another metro line. So when the fates align and I don't have to wait more than a minute or two for any of those pieces of public transit, it makes my day feel a little bit more natural."

**Rachel:** Oh, that's nice. I'm a big train person these days.

**Griffin:** You are a train person.

**Rachel:** And you know what's interesting, is a lot of times when I'm going down the escalator, there will be people like full-speed running. And it will make me think like, do you know the schedule? Because for me, I just roll up and usually it's just like three or four minutes at most.

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Rachel:** But there are some people who are like dashing like—

**Griffin:** That's me. I feel like nowadays, like here in DC, Google Maps and Apple Maps are actually pretty accurate in terms of like if you say like, "How long does it take to get to here?" It'll be like, "There's a train coming in three minutes." And I'll be like, well, then I gotta fuckin' book it.

**Rachel:** [chuckles]

**Griffin:** When I was living in Chicago, and I lived out in Roscoe Village by one of the Brown Line stops on the L, it was, you know, elevated. So you could see the train going overhead.

**Rachel:** [laughs] Yeah.

**Griffin:** And I'd be like, oh, shit! And I would sprint like down the street, like trying to get there before—because that train does not run as often, I would say.

**Rachel:** I will say, I really appreciate that. I mean, I haven't done a lot of rush hour commuting in my day. But I will say that it seems like the trains run incredibly frequently whenever I'm trying to use them.

**Griffin:** Yeah, here in DC—yeah, it's—

**Rachel:** I've never had to wait more than like five minutes.

**Griffin:** Yeah, I don't think I have either. Keep it up, DC. Great trains. 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. And thank you to maximumfun.org for having us on the network. Go to maximumfun.org and check out all the great shows that they have over there. Got some live shows coming up in Orlando and Atlanta and a few other cities here, as we close out our sort of tour schedule for the rest of the year.

If you go to [bit.ly/mcelroytours](http://bit.ly/mcelroytours), you can find links and tickets and everything. And we got some new merch over at [mcelroymerch.com](http://mcelroymerch.com). Got a Munch Squad apron and a Grill Master of the Forbidden Meats apron from TAZ Dadlands. So, go check that all out. And that's going to do it for us. Thank you all so much for listening. Have a great—I hope as the fall, as we transition into this new season, I hope you can take a look at the changing seasons of your own life. The seasons of love. Why are you laughing at me?

**Rachel:** [chuckles] Because one of the intimate ways I know you is when the words are coming out of your mouth before you've really put time into—

**Griffin:** And it usually ends up with a Rent reference.

**Rachel:** Yeah. [chuckles]

**Griffin:** In there. Like it usually—

**Rachel:** That's right.

**Griffin:** For whatever reason, that's the easiest hole for me to kind of slot into.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

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

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