

Wonderful! 343: Unstacked Moons

Published September 25, 2024

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

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

Rachel: Hi, this is Rachel McElroy.

Griffin: Hello, this is Griffin McElroy!

Rachel: And this is Wonderful!

Griffin: Welcome to Wonderful. It's a podcast where we talk about things we like, that's good, that we're into. I don't know much about astrology. But I really feel like my moons are starting to... stack up in a way that is beneficial for my futures and fortunes.

Rachel: So your moons have been unstacked?

Griffin: Wildly.

Rachel: And just now—

Griffin: Like a Jenga tower fell right the hell over.

Rachel: And now you feel like—

Griffin: But they're not quite in whatever the—there's like a real syzygy. Is that the word for when the planets align? I think so. It's such a cool word. Anyway, I feel it. Like Survivor's back on the air and hockey's about to start back up again. Like, do you know what I mean? Like, it feels like—the weather's about to get cooler and so long pants and long shorts are about to start happening again. Around the same time as hockey and survivor is on television. Do you know what I mean?

Rachel: So when survivor and hockey aren't on television, your stack is unstacked?

Griffin: I'm also, I've been touring like every—I've been traveling every couple weeks. That's about to slow down. Get that moon in there. That's IO. Stacked up.

Rachel: Although you are about to travel.

Griffin: Baby, this is what I'm saying. It's not syzygy yet. But we're getting close.

Rachel: *Okay.*

Griffin: Do you not feel it? It feels like you are not experiencing this lunar event.

Rachel: I... and we've talked about this a lot, I am not a superstitious person. Except when it comes to saying that things are on their way up.
[chuckles]

Griffin: Okay, so then I would say you're an extremely superstitious person.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: You're the only person I know actually in my life, and I don't have a lot of people who I'm in close contact with, certainly not on the level that we're at, you are an extremely superstitious person. In the event that like if I say like, oh, boy, the boys are sleeping good now.

Rachel: Yeah. [chuckles] Oh, god, how dare you?

Griffin: Like that fucking activates you on like a deep, core level.

Rachel: Yeah, I don't think this happened to me until we had children.

Griffin: You think the kids made you superstitious?

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I think you're right.

Rachel: I think that a lot about having young children is very, very hard. And a lot of what my life is, is thinking like, well, it's got to get easier, right? And then I found a lot of times that if I thought like, oh, things are really getting better, that was not true at all.

Griffin: No. Yeah.

Rachel: And then I started to get uncomfortable with even acknowledging it.

Griffin: Having kids is crazy, man. Because it's like most other stuff before that, you could kind of white knuckle and get under control. But this is one where, yeah, I understand. I think I walk a much better path now in terms of saying that good things are happening.

Rachel: [chuckles] Yeah.

Griffin: Because I know that it's not your favorite.

Rachel: I mean, our—yeah, our kids have been sick like three times in like the last two weeks.

Griffin: Yeah, it's been absolutely horrible.

Rachel: You know...

Griffin: But that's what I'm saying, the moons are like, they're not there now.

Rachel: But they're stacking.

Griffin: I want to be clear, it would be crazy for me to say the moons are in syzygy.

Rachel: Uh-huh. They're moving towards that.

Griffin: But they're trending, they're...

Rachel: They're sub stack.

Griffin: They're waxing, they're sub stack waxing. And I just, I don't know, I guess I'm the only one who's feeling this. But I'll check back with you I guess the next lunar cycle?

Rachel: Yeah, I don't know, the problem with this superstitious level that I operate at now is that I can never acknowledge anything good. So I've got to figure out—

Griffin: Maybe that's what astrology is for?

Rachel: Some kind of middle ground.

Griffin: I wish there was an astrology that was just about moon stuff. Not so much about birthdays and stars and planets, but just moon stuff. I like that.

Rachel: I mean, there is just moon stuff. Like—

Griffin: But can you, you know, read signs?

Rachel: And people always talk about how like, you know, like the moon is in retrograde or something, right?

Griffin: I think planets are the ones that go—

Rachel: Planets, moons—

Griffin: Again, we're showing our asses pretty hard, right now.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: Do you have any small wonders?

Rachel: Oh, man... hm...

Griffin: Hm...

Rachel: Hm... pumpkin...

Griffin: Mm-hm?

Rachel: Pumpkin?

Griffin: Yes? Yes, muffin?

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I mean, pumpkin, yeah. I think we all, we should each at the beginning of the year be given a card that we print out that says 'pumpkin stuff' on it. And then on the podcast, if you're ever out of things to talk about, you can punch your pumpkin card. And it's I think one a year, and then you can kind of coast on it. Because pumpkin is always so good.

Rachel: I got this big box that has like three pumpkin bread mixes in it. Now, I am somebody who used to take like a can of pumpkin and like really—

Griffin: You used to really go wild for it.

Rachel: Really go for it. But now it's like, you know, just a mix, and I can put some eggs and oil in it. And that's great for me.

Griffin: Well, the also, the rate at which I and our two boys devour those pumpkin muffins.

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: I would feel guilty eating them that fast if you put more work into them.

Rachel: What's really, what's just like—it speaks to our level of courtesy in this house. I will make pumpkin muffins. If I make 12 of them, 11 of them are gone within 48 hours. And then one will just—

Griffin: Sit forever!

Rachel: Because everybody in the house is like, "Well, I don't want to have the last one." [chuckles]

Griffin: No, never. The problem with pumpkin muffin is it's always a good time for pumpkin muffin. Like, if I'm—there's a wide range of hunger experiences I could be having that could be like perfectly sated by a pumpkin muffin.

Rachel: Muffin is a really big food group in our house.

Griffin: It sure is!

Rachel: I think every day, at any time, one or both or all members of this family are consuming muffins. [titters]

Griffin: Well, it's just kind of perfect, right? Because it's like, who doesn't want to eat a sweet piece of bread about the size of their fist? All the time. Like, all the time.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I get it. It's kind of perfect.

Rachel: Uh-huh.

Griffin: I'm going to say I have some new glasses arriving today that I'm very, very, very excited for. It's a Warby Parker frame, I guess I can say. They're not sponsoring us this this week. Nor have they, I think, in a little bit. But I'm really looking forward to kind of a different style, a bit boxier, a bit taller of a frame. I love new glasses day. We are about as far away from each other on the spectrum of sort of like glasses investment and excitement, I feel like. In that you get like one pair every three to four years.

Rachel: I don't really need to see them to operate in the world. My glasses are more for like if I'm in front of a computer for a long time.

Griffin: Sure.

Rachel: If I'm driving at night. Like if there's a situation where my eyes could potentially get tired, then I need glasses. But like when I'm out in the world, I don't. So like for me, it's not really a priority.

Griffin: Sure.

Rachel: Because I would say like half of every day I'm not wearing them.

Griffin: It's just, I look forward to it so much. Because it's like a new facial feature. It's like a you get a new nose. You have a new mouth now. Like there's something wildly different on your face. That's cool.

Rachel: Well this is like, and we've talked about this, this was really transformative for you, when you became a glasses guy.

Griffin: Yeah, serving real Ryan Phillippe realness in high school.

Rachel: [chuckles] What does that mean to you?

Griffin: Cruel Intentions, Ryan Phillippe.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Do I need to be more specific than Cruel Intentions, Ryan Phillippe?

Rachel: How are you serving that?

Griffin: Close your eyes. Imagine—

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: Close your eyes. Imagine Ryan Phillippe in the movie Cruel Intentions.

Rachel: Did he wear glasses?

Griffin: Jesus... Jesus pleasus.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: He... I think he did.

Rachel: [laughs] Oh? Interesting.

Griffin: I have this vision of like preppy, freakin' sort of snobby Ryan Phillippe. [chuckles] Show me pictures of Ryan Phillippe from the movie Cruel Intentions.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: I started to type it out and it was taking way too long. Oh, shit, maybe he doesn't have glasses in this movie.

Rachel: I think there might be a scene.

Griffin: Oh-uh-uh-uh!

Rachel: There's like a scene, yeah, where—so that was you?

Griffin: I mean, kind of. I'm not massaging my stepsister, I think was the plot of that movie. But, yeah, you know? That's something we all aspire to.

Rachel: So... just to back up. So you, in high school, when you got glasses, you began serving Ryan Phillippe?

Griffin: Yeah, I tried to.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: I tried to. I mean, I couldn't... I wasn't a strong lad. And so there were only—there's a certain subset of large-headed, glasses-wearing scrawny boys that one can aspire to. And for me, it was Ryan Phillippe in Cruel Intentions.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: So cool.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: That movie kind of sucks, actually, now that I think about it.

Rachel: I will say, for all women of my age with my coloring, Tina Fey was the glasses icon for a very long time.

Griffin: Sure, sure, sure. Yeah, I think I can see that. I remember your first pair that you got—

Rachel: My first pair was very Tina inspired. And then I got a second pair. And then I stopped.

[group chuckle]

Griffin: That's it, two pairs of glasses your whole life.

Rachel: I am potentially on my way to my third pair. I like to go get glasses every four to six years. And now that's probably not how you're supposed to do it.

Griffin: No.

Rachel: In fact, I know pretty confidently you're supposed to go every year.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: But I'm... busy. [titters]

Griffin: Sure! Busy bumping into walls and...

Rachel: [chuckles] Getting headaches.

Griffin: Tripping... just magooing all over the city.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: You go first this week!

Rachel: I do.

Griffin: What do you want to talk about this week?

Rachel: Oh, I hope it's enough of a topic.

Griffin: Love to hear that! Great start.

Rachel: [laughs] I wanted to talk about the cool S.

Griffin: You're gonna have to say that again.

Rachel: I want to talk about *the cool S*.

Griffin: The cool S?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: [chuckles] Okay. Are you talking about the thing that everyone learns to draw in middle school with the six lines and—

Rachel: That I am.

Griffin: Oh, fuck yeah, baby. Let's talk all day about the cool S. I have to imagine that you would have dug up an actual name for this thing in your research—no, I know what the cool S is, clearly.

Rachel: Okay, I just wanted to confirm.

Griffin: But is that really what it's called, the cool S?

Rachel: If you do a search for it, there is actually a Wikipedia entry called 'cool S.' [titters]

Griffin: [guffaws] That freakin' rules, man.

Rachel: The cool S consists of 14 line segments.

Griffin: Wow, that sounds like a lot more than I would have assumed was in the cool S.

Rachel: Yeah. There's like a step-by-step. Well, see, what you're probably thinking of is the original six.

Griffin: Okay, so, yes, that's true.

Rachel: There's three stacked on three, and then you connect the lines in a way so as to make a, what looks kind of like a number eight, but is very much—

Griffin: Sort of a figure eight, where the back line folds behind the front line, right?

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: So it looks like sort of a cool S.

Rachel: Kind of a cool S.

Griffin: I guarantee, people may be hearing this and not know what we're talking about, I guarantee you at some point you've seen the cool S.

Rachel: Yeah, yeah, I... this is something that I learned as a kid. I can't pinpoint like the first time I learned to draw the cool S, but like—

Griffin: It looks so cool still! To this day, it looks so cool.

Rachel: Do you think if you—well, I know that you can, because you did it in sidewalk chalk recently.

Griffin: Yeah. So when I am given a piece of sidewalk chalk or a marker or something to draw, I have two things I can do.

Rachel: You have a dog.

Griffin: I have a dog face. And I got cool S.

Rachel: Cool S.

Griffin: I didn't learn anything else. I don't know anything else.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: I remember you could turn the word boy to look like a boy's face. And then there's one where like you could turn 15, I think the number 15, you can connect some of that to make it look like a Homer Simpson.

Rachel: Oh. [chortles] I did not learn these.

Griffin: Yeah, man, they got all kinds. I don't remember the Homer Simpson one, though. I just remember cool S and dog face.

Rachel: So if I had to sit down right now, I don't know if I could draw a cool S.

Griffin: Bullshit! You could totally draw it.

Rachel: Even looking at this—so here's the thing, right, you're saying that. I'm looking at the diagram right now, so this isn't really a fair quiz. Are you gonna do it?

Griffin: Do you want me to do it?

Rachel: Well, I'm saying I'm looking at a diagram right now. So it's a little bit cheating.

Griffin: Okay, I'll try. Cool S, so you get the two rows of three lines.

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: I know you connect the... you do some bottom and top triangle work.

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: And then you go zoop, zoop. Oh, I made it backwards! I made a cool sort of two.

Rachel: [chuckles] Here's the thing, right, if you think too much about it—

Griffin: Shit, I fucked it right up.

Rachel: The reason I know that I can't, is that I saw your cool S in sidewalk chalk and I thought, I'm gonna give that one a whirl. And I couldn't.

Griffin: That's what is—that's like a cool two.

Rachel: Yeah, you're backwards.

Griffin: But I messed it—I messed it up, babe.

Rachel: I think the way they describe it in the step-by-step guide in the Wikipedia entry is, the middle step—so you draw your six lines.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And then you take the first two lines at the top and you connect them to the second two lines at the bottom. So you've got all the diagonals.

Griffin: Okay!

Rachel: And then once you have that, that's when you make the triangles. And then...

Griffin: I feel like I'm missing something. I feel like something's wrong with my cool S.

Rachel: Hold on, let me look at it.

Griffin: It looks fucked up.

Rachel: Eh... No, I think that's right.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: I mean, it's not quite as like narrow. Yours is a little chunkier.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Maybe that's what it is.

Griffin: Don't be mean to my cool S.

Rachel: There's nothing—

Griffin: Be nicer to my cool—

Rachel: There's nothing wrong with a chonky S. [titters]

Griffin: Trying to freakin' shame my thick S.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: That never works.

Rachel: So, I thought of this like last week. And I thought, I'm just gonna google 'cool S' and see what I can find.

Griffin: And your instincts were right, it sounds like. That's what it's called.

Rachel: Yeah, I mean, there is literally an article. What's fun about it is that the origins are very unknown. And I kind of love that about like the stuff from when we were kids, before there was like internet.

Griffin: Yeah!

Rachel: And like everybody it seemed like simultaneously—

Griffin: Figured out cool S.

Rachel: Was learning how to draw this cool S without like, you know, like any prodding.

Griffin: Yeah!

Rachel: On a global scale.

Griffin: I mean, it's school folklore, almost, right? I feel like—

Rachel: It wasn't like George HW Bush like had a campaign platform that was like Cool S.

Griffin: "Let me get the cool S going."

Rachel: Like, there was no global push for cool S. And yet, we all were.

Griffin: There was no mechanism through which to distribute information about the cool S. You would just see it on a chalkboard one day and be like, "Damn, that S is cool as hell. How do I get me one of those?"

Rachel: "I like that cool S." Apparently like you can find early cases of it as far back as the '70s.

Griffin: Okay? So sort of like cool S and Ziggy were sort of like strange bedfellows.

Rachel: Kilroy?

Griffin: Kilroy. That's the guy with the thing. I get Kilroy and Ziggy confused so much.

Rachel: Similar contours.

Griffin: Kilroy was the little guy with the nose and the fingers poking up over the edge, yeah.

Rachel: Uh-huh.

Griffin: Cool.

Rachel: So there's a book called Faith of Graffiti, which is photographs that were done by Jon Narr. It came out in 1974, and that symbol appears.

Griffin: Appears in it, okay.

Rachel: Numerous times in the '70s.

Griffin: Okay, cool.

Rachel: There's all these like ideas as to where it came from. Some people thought it was like a Superman S.

Griffin: No way.

Rachel: Which can't be confirmed.

Griffin: I can unconfirm. It's definitely not a Superman S. That is not what Superman's shit looks like.

Rachel: And then, do you remember Stüssy?

Griffin: Stüssy, yes!

Rachel: It was like a surf company that was real popular in the like '90s. And everyone's like, "Oh, it's Stüssy." It's not. There's no connection to Stüssy whatsoever.

Griffin: Wasn't there one called like Ocean Pacific? Or something like... or maybe it was—no, yeah, I think it was Ocean Pacific and Stüssy, I feel like were the two big brands. You saw a lot of definitely, definitely not surf kids living in Huntington, West Virginia wearing.

Rachel: [chuckles] No access to an ocean immediately.

Griffin: No.

Rachel: Okay, so, what was interesting is that there was perhaps unsurprisingly, a Vice article that came out in 2016. Where the author of that article tried to track down and like actually reached out to like people connected to these things. So reached out to like a comics library in Burbank, California, and they confirm there's no like, all Superman, no old shield, nothing.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Like no Superman logo looks like that. You can reach out to Stüssy, which has been around since 1985.

Griffin: Where'd Stüssy get it?

Rachel: It's not the cool S.

Griffin: It's not?

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Oh, okay.

Rachel: They don't use that S.

Griffin: Oh, okay, I thought they did.

Rachel: And then Suzuki was another speculation. [chuckles]

Griffin: Yeah, I don't think Suzuki rocks that way. They're closer, though, if I'm remembering the Suzuki logo correct. Well, now I have to google it.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: This fuckin' segment, baby, has sent me down some real rabbit—well—

Rachel: [laughs] I was really worried this segment would be seven minutes. But with all this Googling, I feel like we're really—

Griffin: Okay, the Suzuki logo, I can't—I don't know why I know what the Suzuki logo looks like. But it's fuckin' close, man.

Rachel: Yeah, it's similar.

Griffin: It's close.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: If it had that back, the behind line, now we're talking for the cool S.

Rachel: So the author of the Vice article reached out to a professor in language and media at Middlesex University in London. And was like, "Hey, what's the story here?" And he said, ultimately, it's just fun to draw. And that kids probably started doing it because it's kind of like a Möbius strip. And you know, it like connects to itself and it's like fun to—

Griffin: Sort of non-Euclidean S.

Rachel: Uh-huh. It's got like an Escher quality.

Griffin: Sure!

Rachel: It can't be drawn continuously, but it does have a perpetual flow, is what he said. And that, yeah, it was just like a piece of like child lore. Like there's no like—

Griffin: I love that shit, man.

Rachel: Particular origin. What was funny is that after that 2016 article came out, there was a guy from Australia who was moving to New York who literally read that article and decided to trademark the cool S.

Griffin: The cool S?!

Rachel: Yeah. So in 2020, Vice did another article on Mark May, who read this original article and was like, "Let me see if there's a trademark." And what was funny is that a college student in Boston had trademarked it, and the student was studying healthcare and was about to use the S as a logo on a line of soft clothing to be worn by people with sensitive skin. But Mark was like, "Hey, how about I give you a certain amount of money?" And the kid was like, "Sure." And then he got it from this—

Griffin: What's he doing with the cool—is he going school to school across this country of ours like, "You owe me \$4!"

Rachel: [chuckles] No, so, he gets interviewed specifically like, are you going to be like—

Griffin: Doing something with cool S?

Rachel: Yeah, like going after people. No, his idea, he's been approaching artists on Etsy. He's trying to run a shop where he sells cool S merchandise.

Griffin: I'm fuckin' back on board, man.

Rachel: He says he has no plans to like go against people punitively for using the cool S. It's more like he—he more says he like, he wants to maintain it. He says, quote, "I wanted to trademark the symbol to preserve it. Over the past 100 years, this symbol has permeated itself into almost everyone's lives, irrespective of race, religion, upbringing or beliefs. I just consider myself the caretaker of the now heritage listed S." Okay, I wanted to show you his Instagram account.

Griffin: Oh, this gonna be good.

Rachel: His Instagram account is The S Thing.

Griffin: The S Thing?

Rachel: The S Thing.

Griffin: I bet that's confusing to look at.

Rachel: He seems focused on tattoos, largely.

Griffin: Okay?

Rachel: Just different S tattoos. There's one I thought you would like.

Griffin: [titters] Okay?

Rachel: Which is just a Shrek.

Griffin: That's Shrek. It's a cool S with Shrek ears, and it's green. That's good.

Rachel: Cool S with Shrek ears. There's also somebody who got a tattoo of the step-by-step instructions on how to make the cool S. [titters]

Griffin: That would have been helpful about five minutes ago.

Rachel: [chuckles] One with a cool S, just spelling 'slay.'

Griffin: That one looks homemade in a way that I actually kind of like.

Rachel: He also has like a shop. So I mentioned that he was—

Griffin: But the S in the word 'shop' looks like so tight also.

Rachel: [chuckles] He's trying to merchandise. So we've got some S key rings, there's some like kind of nostalgia-driven—

Griffin: This is not a sponsored post—

Rachel: Shirts.

Griffin: Folks at home.

Rachel: [chortles]

Griffin: Rachel is just really enthusiastic about the... sort of the platonic ideal cool S.

Rachel: Yeah, I just, there's these—and it is, it's like pieces of like child folklore. Like these things that like—I've talked about foursquare before, like one of our very earliest episode—

Griffin: I did floor is lava, and it was very much the same thing of like, yeah, no one—kids just started doing it, man!

Rachel: And there's just these very specific rules that somehow like travel the country. And the cool S is very much that thing.

Griffin: Yeah!

Rachel: Of like, obviously you didn't learn it in school. I wasn't googling cool S, you know.

Griffin: it's funny, because despite the amount of journalistic shoe leather that has gone into figuring out where the cool S came from, I feel like there's still a missing link. I feel like there's still a piece of the story—the err cool S.

Rachel: Yeah, I think, I mean, I think some of it is probably, there's probably some graffiti origins, based on what I saw. And then, you know, obviously that is harder to pin down.

Griffin: Sure.

Rachel: Because largely, you can't attribute a lot of it to particular people.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: But yeah, I don't know. I just—

Griffin: I love cool S.

Rachel: I thought our listeners, the portion of them that are closest to our age, would be really excited to hear about what the cool S has been up to.

Griffin: Yeah. That's awesome. Can I steal you away?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Okay.

[theme music plays]

[ad break]

Griffin: Are you ready for this? Are you ready for this? You ready?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Wi-Fi. How's that hit you?

Rachel: Ooh.

Griffin: How's that treat you? It's all over the dang place pretty much. We're using it literally right now. And if you're not on the go, dear listener, you might be using it too. It's your quiet everywhere friend that puts the world in your pocket. And that's just wild to think about.

Rachel: You heard of this thing?

Griffin: You heard of this thing called Wi-Fi?

Rachel: I remember, I don't know if you had this experience, but I remember still being like, I need to find a coffee shop to—that will specifically sell me Wi-Fi and/or give it to me with purchase. So that I can do my—

Griffin: Like not really understanding what—

Rachel: My internet work.

Griffin: What Wi-Fi was maybe a little bit?

Rachel: No. And honestly, I mean, if you ask me now, I would just say it's the thing that lets me get on the internet. I don't—

Griffin: It's peak—

Rachel: I don't know more than that.

Griffin: It's peak Katie—you've seen the clip of Katie Couric from like the Today Show in some episode, maybe like mid '90s, late '90s. Where she was like, "Do you know about internet? Is internet, that's the one with email, right?" Like—

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I feel like, yeah, when I think about Wi-Fi, I feel like that is how I sound. I read a lot about Wi-Fi, and how it works.

Rachel: Do you feel like you can talk about it?

Griffin: I feel like I can talk about it.

Rachel: Okay, that's more than me.

Griffin: I think I can talk about it. I mean, the easy way to talk about it is, I travel a lot. When I'm at an airport or at a hotel or at a venue, and I get on Wi-Fi, the amount of instant relief I feel is embarrassing, honestly, to admit.

Rachel: It's the first thing I like think about when I get in a hotel room.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: Of just like—

Griffin: Well, let me get up on the Wi-Fi.

Rachel: Where do I find this information?

Griffin: Yeah. But there's a whole like history to it that that is, honestly, I think pretty interesting. But to describe like what Wi-Fi is. So, internet comes into your house, or whatever building you're in, goes into a router. That router has an antenna on it, that it distributes data through radio waves to other devices in your house. Every device that you have that can use Wi-Fi also has an antenna. So it can send and receive to the router, which is like connected to the internet—

Rachel: Before, you would have to like put a cord in there.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: You'd like have to attach your device physically to this router.

Griffin: Yes. So when we had a—like we had like a family computer growing up. And if we wanted to do internet stuff, usually playing EverQuest, we had to sit down and, you know, jack in to the computer. Which was pretty close to our phone like landline, because like that's what we had to plug the computer—it was pretty fucked up. That's the basics, right? It's radio waves sent and received through little antenna in your phone or laptop, but especially from your router. So, all of this is able to happen because every machine that uses Wi-Fi is built with a uniform set of hardware standards using set radio frequencies.

And all of this standard makes using the internet through Wi-Fi possible, because everything is speaking the same language, is the easiest way to think about it. The radio waves, the frequencies that they submit at, basically everything kind of works the same way. And that's the only way that Wi-Fi works. Because if you know, this company had a different type of antenna that transmitted at different frequencies, all of a sudden it doesn't work with that router, and this thing doesn't work with that thing.

So, Wi-Fi is that. Wi-Fi is the rules. Wi-Fi is the protocol that every device, the standard that every device that you know, uses wireless connectivity

follows. Because otherwise, if everything was built different ways, which is—there is a part of the history where that was the case, just, it defeats the whole purpose of Wi-Fi, right? So that standard, that technical standard for networking, is called I-E-E-E, I triple E, 802.11. Sounds pretty cool.

Rachel: Mm-hm.

Griffin: That stands for the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers. Which has like a group in it that sets that standard. And that group is designated 802. So, IEEE 802.11. I guess it's the 11th version of it? I lost interest in it from that point on. I started to get—once you get into the I triple E, it's like they stop using words and start using numbers. As soon as internet technical stuff starts using numbers I'm like, no freaking way, man.

Rachel: Internet Explorer, Explorer, Explorer.

Griffin: Internet Explorer, Explore, Explore, version 802. So like, basically, Wi-Fi is only possible because every device transmits on the same frequencies using uniform rules and hardware specifications. And that standard is what Wi-Fi is. A brief history, in 1985, the FCC opened up what's called the ISM band.

Which is basically like a range of radio frequencies, right? If you think about a radio can transmit at—anything capable of sending signals can transmit at any frequency. You know, this set of frequencies was under FCC control. Because it was, you know, that's just how they rocked. But they said in 1985, you can use this for commercial purposes now. You can use these radio frequencies. And those radio frequencies are what IEEE 802.11 uses, right?

So 1985, FCC opens it up and lots of different companies start dabbling in different sort of like wireless applications. One of the first ones was like having a wireless cashier thing at like a convenience store. That was like one of the first earliest proto-Wi-Fi applications. But like I said, as companies started to work on these wireless communications pieces of, you know, hardware, none of them talked.

None of them could communicate, because they were all built to different standards and different, you know, rules. So in 1997, the IEEE came up with

this 802.11 protocol. Basically saying like this is what everyone should use. Like, if you want this thing to work, if you want Wi-Fi as an idea to work, like everyone has to play by the same rules and follow the same rules. And so a bunch of companies like Nokia and Motorola and other sort of like big, big, big name players came together to say like, okay, let's do it. Like, let's all get together.

So in 1999, all of these different companies, all these different corporations who were making devices that they wanted to work sort of wirelessly over Wi-Fi, they came together and they formed a joint nonprofit called the Wireless Ethernet Compatibility Alliance. And basically, all these different companies, rival companies, were like, "Listen, like we're trying to knock each other out of the market, but like we all gotta follow the same rules or else Wi-Fi doesn't work," right?

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Like, "If we want this technology to be incorporated in any of our shit, we all have to play along. We all have to do—" They started this nonprofit to basically like standardize Wi-Fi. Like say like if you are a company making wireless products, you gotta follow this rule, because it's what all of us are using, right?

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And so, it worked. Like all these different companies joined up and they formed this nonprofit to make sure that everybody was following the same rules. So that wireless communication could work on these different devices. Then in 1989, they hired a marketing firm called Interbrand. And they're like, "Hey, this thing is called IEEE 802.11. That sucks. That's a shitty name and like no one's going to give a shit."

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: And so after a bunch of different testing and coming up with different names, it was this firm, Interbrand, that came up with the name Wi-Fi.

Rachel: Mm-hmm!

Griffin: Which like, the etymology is a little bit confusing. A lot of companies, as they started to make these devices, use the term 'wireless fidelity' sometimes.

Rachel: Oh?

Griffin: But like according to Interbrand, that's not really what it stands for. It's not like short for anything. It's just that Wi-Fi sounds like hi-fi. And hi-fi has connotations of like premium, crisp, fast, good. And so that is why they called it Wi-Fi. So just—after they came up with this name, Wi-Fi. Which then they started to tell people, you know, on a consumer basis like, "You gotta get this *Wi-Fi*." Like then all of a sudden it was just like a snowball and now everything uses Wi-Fi. The group changed their name to the Wi-Fi Alliance, which still exists. This massive group of corporations who are all making sure that their shit works together.

Rachel: They just get together and they like say, "Well, keep it up. See you next year." [titters]

Griffin: Do you want to guess which city Wi-Fi Alliance is based out of?

Rachel: Oh, I mean, somewhere in California, right?

Griffin: Boston, Texas.

Rachel: Oh? Huh.

Griffin: So I mean, that's just, that part of the history of Wi-Fi is just crazy to me. The idea—I don't know that it would happen nowadays, right? The idea that companies would say like, there's this thing. There's this thing that could be the future of like internet, you know, whatever. But it's only going to make sense, it's only going to work if we all come together and do it. And there's some differences, like have you heard of like five hertz versus like two point... I always forget, like 2.8 hertz. Like the router can transmit different sort of like signals, and some are faster.

So there's some differences, but mostly everybody's playing by the same rules. The idea that companies, rival companies of this scale could come together today and be like, listen, Apple and Android. Like we despise each other and Apple has this whole like stranglehold on iMessage that makes people feel like they can't—like it's so gnarly, the fight now, that it feels impossible that they would ever come together and be like, "But you know what? Let's do Wi-Fi. Let's get together and make Wi-Fi."

So, I remember going to a friend's house in like 2000, and they had an Apple AirPort. Which was one of the first like commercially available routers that basically only worked with like Apple devices that were able to connect. So Apple made a laptop, I forget the name of it, that was able to connect to Wi-Fi. And seeing my friend like surfing, like browsing the internet, not connected to anything, blew my—blew the brain out of the back of my skull. Like it was unbelievable. I couldn't understand what was going on, how it could be working.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And that was 24 years ago. So, I think I figured it out a little bit more by then. But the—

Rachel: I still don't understand, like sometimes if a lot of people are using it, it doesn't work well.

Griffin: Yeah. I mean, if you think about—

Rachel: There's just like a finite number of bips and boops that you can—

Griffin: Well, it's less a finite number of bips and boops, and more like this range of frequencies that you are transmitting data to and from. Like your router has ways of kind of like shepherding people so that like you're not stacking on top of everyone. But I think that probably gets—I'm talking out of my ass now, but based on my rudimentary one hour of Googling, it seems like—I would imagine that like it gets harder to like traffic cop like all of those different like sending and receiving sort of signals. If a bunch of people are trying to use the same thing.

Anyway, that's Wi-Fi! I just thought it was cool. And I still think Wi-Fi is cool. And now I think I understand how it works a little bit. And so I'm going to take our router apart after we're done here, and I'm gonna boost it up! I've been thinking about some ways to boost our speeds a little bit.

Rachel: Yeah! Yeah.

Griffin: Cranking the—cranking the 'tena out. Just taking it out and putting it like up higher.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I don't see any reason—wrap some tinfoil around it so it can like really get fuckin' jamming?

Rachel: Maybe we all wear little antennas all the time?

Griffin: That's so good. I think there's episode of Pete & Pete that was about that. Do you want to know what our friends at home are talking about?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Katie says, "My small wonder is when you can still see the moon out during the day. It delights me so when I get to see the night sun hanging out in the crisp, blue morning air. As if to say, 'You will not dim my shine.'"

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I do like the night sun.

Rachel: That was a fun little peekaboo.

Griffin: I do like it!

Rachel: Like, hey, buddy!

Griffin: I feel like there's certain times of year where it like gets up there like wicked early.

Rachel: Uh-huh.

Griffin: Like it's like four o'clock and it's like, "Hey, here I come." Anna says, "My small wonder is a new juicy Expo marker. Every time I pop open a brand new one with a sharp nib and strong color intensity, I'm happy."

Rachel: Are those the dry erase ones?

Griffin: I think so, yes.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Yeah, I like that. I mean—

Rachel: That is satisfying.

Griffin: My Sharpie preferences are so much more defined than I ever thought they would be in my life, because of how much signing we do of things.

Rachel: Yeah, true.

Griffin: Like we sign posters before every show and we, whenever we put out a new book, we sign like a bunch of copies of it. So I gotta get me one of those nice, fat chisel tip, like broad Sharpie babies. I can't have that fine point shit anymore. I need that chisel tip. Do you have thoughts on this?

Rachel: I don't. I have absolutely no thoughts.

Griffin: That's okay. 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. Thank you to Maximum Fun for having us on the network. Go to maximumfun.org, check out all the great shows that they got popping over there. We got some new merch up in the merch store.

There's a TAZ 10th anniversary coin in there that's really great. And that's at mcelroymerch.com. And we have a few more live shows for MBMBaM and TAZ coming up in Phoenix and Denver and Indianapolis. And a couple other places. So, go to bit.ly/mcelroytours for more information, and to get tickets to those. It's gonna be a lot of fun! That's it. I feel pretty worn out. I just talked about Wi-Fi. I talked about like technical stuff like really hard for a long time.

Rachel: Are your moons still stacked? Or do they feel less stacked now?

Griffin: I will say, we had to stop in the middle of this recording so we could pick up our sons. [titters]

Rachel: Do you understand now?

Griffin: I get it now. I get it now.

Rachel: I get that me saying something does not influence the universe.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: But I do—there is a word called hubris.

Griffin: Yeah!

Rachel: And I do kind of believe—

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: Maybe it's a Wi-Fi thing, it just sits in the space.

Griffin: I think it's the moons. I think it's the moons.

Rachel: The moons.

Griffin: I think the moons, when you try to channel their power in the way that I did at the beginning of the podcast, they have a way of kind of like

pushing back against that and making your child sick. So that's why I think all medicine is fake.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: It's really just moon stuff going on.

Rachel: I can't explain though why when somebody like wears a particular shirt or turns their hat a particular way, they think it's going to impact a sports team. Like I don't believe that.

Griffin: No.

Rachel: But I also believe that saying a series of words can influence—

Griffin: Can make your child sick—

Rachel: The future. So clearly, there's no real winner.

Griffin: Well then let's maybe just observe each other in a moment of cautious, terrified silence.

Rachel: [chuckles]

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

Maximum Fun.

A work-owned network...

Of artists-owned shows...

Supported directly by you.