Podcast #97: Meeting Your Shadow Self And Other Excitements

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## Intro [00:00:00]

[funky intro music]

Quinns: Hallo everybody, and welcome to the very 97th episode of the Shut Up & Sit Down podcast, this year live from the UK Games Expo! Give yourself a round of applause, everybody!

[round of applause and cheers]

Quinns: How lovely! My name’s Quintin Smith. I’m joined by my co-host, Matt Lees…

Matt: Hello!

Quinns: This is a podcast about board game [sic] and also, this year, three hundred and fifty lovely board gamers who are gonna listen to us talking about board games.

Matt: Yeah. It’s a fantastic number of people here, thank you so much for coming.

Quinns: And queueing. Goodness!

Matt: Yeah.

Quinns: Goodness.

Matt: Goodness.

Quinns: Goodness. We have some excellent board games, and also -- oh I should hype my book -- an *unbelievably* good feature.

Matt: A secret feature which has nothing to do with the book that you didn’t see.

[Quinns and audience laughing]

Quinns: Honestly, we often like to prepare fun features for the end of our live show.

Matt: He’s got a good thing. It’s good.

Quinns: I’m so, so excited. It’s gonna be better than the time [speaking quickly] that Matt made fun of a popular board game’s writing and sabotaged our relationships with the publisher forever. So!

Matt: Yeah, it’s gonna be- Yeah.

[audience laughing]

Quinns: But first off, we’re gonna talk about some board games, including -- but perhaps not limited to -- Stay Cool, Power Rangers: Heroes of the Grid, Welcome to Dino World, Letter Jam, and the world’s first boxed- Well, sort of, kind of, the world’s first not boxed megagame, Vampire: The Masquerade - Blood Feud. You may notice I’ve hedged slightly there. More on that later. So!

## Stay Cool [00:01:39]

Quinns: Should we start by talking a little bit about Stay Cool?

Matt: Stay Cool.

Quinns: So, there’s two things you should know about this. First off, it’s by Scorpion Masque, who make Decrypto, unbelievably good party game if you’ve played that. The other thing you should know: I booked this as the very first thing we would play at the UK Games Expo.

Matt: Yeah! You always do this! You’re just reckless.

Quinns: I think the term is, I just wanted to mess with everybody on our team.

Matt: Yeah, you’re an imp. It’s the same way that you booked us into a haunted house for one convention, and then booked us into a house that I eventually worked out might be owned by like, neo-nazi bikers?

Quinns [remembering] : Oh yeah!

Matt: Yeah, just because you were like, “This place looks crazy! This will mess with everyone.” [laughing]

Quinns: In my defense, right, when you look at the pictures of an AirBnB and it looks like a haunted house, like an Addams family house that’s falling apart and it’s all leaning-

Matt: You don’t book it.

Quinns: Well, no! [audience laughing] You *do* book it, but what I didn’t realize is, it’s not just a spooky house by itself, because when we actually arrived at the actual house, it’s just one spooky house in a big neighborhood of houses that are falling apart. Very different vibe. [audience laughing]

Matt: I’m not hamming it up when I say it was exactly like being in Fallout 3. [Quinns and audience laughing]

Quinns: Okay, so Stay Cool. The reason this is funny I booked it as the first game is it’s a party game with a very simple concept. What players do is they take turns to have a go.

Matt [laughing]: It’s good to try, isn’t it?

Quinns: Well you’re gonna try. You’re not gonna do enormously well, unless you’re our friend Clark. More on him later. What you do in Stay Cool is, first off, you’ve got a bunch of little children’s building blocks in front of you that all have different letters on. Some have consonants, some have vowels. The player to your left is going to be asking you questions, super easy, like, “What noise does a cat make when it’s happy?” And then you have to spell that with the cubes! Lovely stuff. When you’ve spelt out a word, they move on to the next question. Great. The player to your right is also asking you questions that you have to answer vocally. But easy things, like, you know, “Recite the last five letters of the alphabet backwards.” And you have to do these things simultaneously, because your score in two minutes is how many questions you’ve got right on both sides *multiplied* together. Mmm. But the reason that Stay Cool was sooo funny, and the reason we just couldn’t tear ourselves away from the booth is, this game is engineered on a scientific level to make you look like a doofus.

[Matt and audience laughing]

Matt: Yeah, I thought I’d done really well, and then we scored up my points, and it was like, “Four!”

Quinns: Out of twenty five!

Matt: Yeah.

Quinns: So these are questions- Mainly- Some of the stuff is tricky, like, oh, Clark, we’ve got one for Clark. Clark, how many wings does a spider have?

Audience member (possibly Clark): Eight.

Quinns and Matt: Eight!

Matt: Eight. Yeah.

Quinns: There you go. That was fun.

Matt: So there’s a lot of trick questions in there, just to throw you, because it’s the weird thing of like, you’re just fiddling with these letters trying to find… Because they’re basically just these big chunky dice, and each dice has different letters on it, and there are a couple of dice that are like- The white ones I think just have vowels on? So you’re like, “Right, okay, where’s an O? It’s gonna be on there somewhere.” But sometimes you’re just flipping around for ages, being like, “Where is a bloody W? I found eighteen M’s. Where’s the W?”

Quinns: Even the fact that the game is called Stay Cool, and you’ve seen your friends fail, means you’re kind of doomed. The very first thing that Matt did- The question was actually, “Spell out what noise does a cat make when it’s happy.” And Matt -- [epiphany] “Ah!” *chigga chigga chigga* -- spelled *meow*.

Matt: Yup.

[audience laughing]

Quinns: Also, it takes so long that when you get that wrong, it’s so dispiriting.

Matt: Yeah! They were like, “No, it’s not that noise.” I’m like, “[sad moan]. How many noises do these things make?”

[audience laughing]

Quinns: But the thing I really liked about it is- The questions you’re being asked are a mix of general knowledge that anyone could get, and arithmetic that anyone could get, and then personal opinions. And this is what’s great, because it turns out that when you ask your brain a few different questions from a few different angles, it completely locks up. Again, our friend Rob was asked, what was his favorite color? [Matt laughing] And froze for somewhere between five and eight seconds.

Matt: Yeah, he’s like, “Uhhhhh.” And I love the fact that the questions get increasingly harder as you go down. So initially you’re just playing with these blocks, looking for letters, and they’re asking like, “What do you get if you cross blue and yellow?” And you’re like, “Green.” Fine, and you keep doing this stuff, until eventually the questions get hard enough that- Because both people keep repeating the thing to you, you just get to a point where you’re like, “You gotta shut up! [Quinns laughing] I’m doing letter cubes now! You’ve just got to shut up with these questions!” Because you’re just like, “I can’t think about that level of things while I’m doing a children’s letter cube [Quinns laughing] four-letter word.”

Quinns: The way I’ve been selling it to people is, the last question I had on my card, that was really meant to throw me, was- This is so good. I’m like answering questions about like, “What are the first three letters of Azerbaijan? What’s nine plus seventeen?” And my last question was, “What was an aspect of your education in which you think your parents failed you?” [Matt and audience laughing] And I locked for about five, six seconds, and then started going, “Oh, well, look, the thing is about- [Matt laughing] Being middle class, it’s just like-” And then it was like, “Time!” And I’m... *euurggh!*

Matt: Your answer there I think was “root,” right? Like root mathematics, or something?

Quinns: Oh what, doing like squares or something?

Matt: I don’t know, I thought that’s what your answer was.

Quinns: Oh, math…? Oh no! Yeah, my dad tried to teach me maths, but he was old enough that he learned to do maths in a different way.

Matt: Okay, bad old maths.

Quinns: Bad maths, before they worked out…

Matt: How many miles in a hundred? [Quinns and audience laughing] I think the magic of this game -- and I don’t really know why this happens, it might just be accidental sorcery -- but it’s the fact that whenever you’re watching someone else do it, they look like a doofus. And you’re like, “You’re an idiot.” But whenever you’re doing it, you never feel like an idiot. Even when you’re doing really badly, and at the end they say, “Yeah, you got like four points.” I didn’t feel like I’d done badly, I felt like I’d done pretty well. [Quinns laughing] And actually, the thing is, because you’ve got two people barking things at you, you don’t feel like you’re stupid, you feel like everyone else is irritating? [audience laughing] But in a way which is really quite good, because everyone else is like, “You’re an idiot,” and you’re just like, “You guys are really- Can you just give me a chance to do this? Like, gaaaahhhh!” Which is great!

Quinns: Do you think Lisa will be annoyed if I mention that- Because it was kind of unfair. If you don’t know this one, then it’s kind of mean, but she was asked -- sorry -- “What’s heavier, a pound of feathers or a pound of lead?” And the answer was- She said, “A pound of lead.” And that’s, “No.” And then, “A pound of feathers!” “No.” And she was just like, “What?!”

Matt [talking over Quinns]: She went, “What?! What?!”

[audience laughing]

Matt: And it’s great. You kind of forget that, in England especially, that’s something that everyone learns that trick when they’re in school. And if you haven’t learned that one before, as an adult-

Quinns: You’re just doomed, yeah.

Matt: -you’re just like, “What?! What do you mean? This doesn't make sense.”

Quinns: To get mechanical for a minute, I think the reason it’s such a moreish party game is, you’re actually alternating between three things. Because answering the questions is fun and interesting, because the questions aren’t always testing. You get a lot of easy ones. Some *really* easy ones so you feel kind of clever. Or you’re asking the questions, which is a completely different experience, and it’s schadenfreude, and you’re being the hilarious quizmaster. Because essentially you’re being given eight jokes that you get to ask. Or you’re just watching! And it’s a wonderful spectator sport. But the fact that play is constantly rotating means that you’re always doing something different. So there’s always that one more round, one more round, one more round, because you want to do the next task.

Matt: And there is so much variety with the tasks. Even with the letter blocks, actually, they’re colored as well, and sometimes it’s like, “Stack them up in this order with the colors.” So it’s not all just words, it gets you doing a jumble of all different things, and it’s amazing watching people freeze up on things that you think, “Come on, this should be quite easy?”

Quinns: I was so delighted. When I was getting them to spell out letters with the cubes, I suddenly had a question which was just, “Slide a card under one of the cubes without touching it.” And it was our friend just *chasing* the cube around the table [Matt laughing] while being asked what their favorite color was, and it was… And failing both of those things!

[audience laughing]

Matt: Yeah, it’s bizarre. It’s a lot more fun than it has any right to be.

Quinns: Should we move to the next thing?

Matt: Yeah, yeah.

Quinns: Okay, so that was Stay Cool by Scorpion Masque. I don’t know if they’re demoing it publicly, but it’s certainly one to keep your eyes on.

Matt: Mmm. Lovely box as well.

## Power Rangers: Heroes of the Grid [00:09:01]

Quinns: Should we talk about something bigger? Should we alternate between some big and small things?

Matt: It’s your birthday, you can do what you like. It’s not his birthday, I don’t know why I said that. [Quinns and audience laughing] Because I was just worried everyone’s gonna be like, “Ohhhh!” and I’d be like, “No, it’s just lies.”

Quinns: Hey everybody! It’s my birthday!

[Audience cheering a little]

Matt: It’s not true.

[Audience awwing]

Quinns: [Sadly] Awww. [Audience laughing] An authentic pity thing. I would really like to talk about something that- Is Jonathan Ying here?

Matt: No.

Quinns: Okay. A game from Jonathan Ying that was a lot better than I was expecting it to be.

[Audience laughing]

Matt: That sounds like we’re dissing Jonathan Ying, which we’re not.

Quinns: No, we’re dissing the IP he was working with.

Matt: Yeah, because he’s a solid designer.

Quinns: He is. So, Jonathan Ying, designer of Bargain Quest, part of the team on Imperial Assault, has been behind a few Kickstarters recently, but we played Power Rangers: Heroes of the Grid. So this was a Kickstarter miniatures game…

Matt: Mmhm. I had no interest in playing it! He was talking to me about some of the challenges he was going up against like, ages ago, in terms of mainly just the art. He was talking about how he’s like, “You know, you go back, and you look at the show, and they’re all awful puppets, [Quinns laughing] it looks terrible, but people don’t remember it like that! So we have to kind of create the miniatures and the art that looks like the show that people remember.” And I thought that was quite interesting. But in my mind, I was like, “I’m not really interested in Power Rangers, and I’m not really interested in miniatures games,” so I thought, “That’s cool! But, I don’t want to play it.” But having now played it, I really like it!

Quinns: Oh my goodness. I would play it again in a heartbeat. So what we’ve got here is a cooperative game, lots of miniatures, so already, red flags everywhere, right?

Matt: For us, yeah.

Quinns: For us. Excuse me, I’m gonna burp. Can you fill?

Matt: Okay. Well yeah, so basically, it’s got quite large miniatures, and you’ve got five of the starting Power Rangers? I think there are literally thousands of them now.

Quinns: Well this was an amazing thing that we learned, because everyone remembers the Power Rangers, but it turns out there have been twenty five *seasons*. Like essentially twenty five reboots of the Power Rangers. Like one every couple of years? But! Because it’s a very age-specific property, everyone only remembers one of them?

Matt: Yeah.

Quinns: So in turns of Kickstarter expansions, they have *so much* to play with.

Matt: Yeah, so this is vanilla American Power Rangers.

Quinns: Which is of course originally a Japanese show.

Matt: Yeah, so they used all this footage from a Japanese show, with the fighting, and then just -- very crudely in retrospect -- [chuckling] weaved a story around it.

Quinns: Yeah, now as an adult thinking back, obviously the sections they filmed in America weren’t even shot on the same film, you know?

Matt: No. And it was like, “Oh, you know, we’re in a kind of L.A. school,” and then suddenly it’s like, “Yeah, we’re in the Rocky Mountains?!”

Quinns: Jonathan was giving us trivia. Turns out, in the original Power Rangers, the Power Rangers aren’t high school students; they live in space! It’s wild!

Matt: Yeah.

Quinns: So this is a cooperative game [Matt laughing] for between one and six play- What was that?

Matt: I just thought, can we just talk about Power Rangers for sixty minutes?

[Quinns and audience laughing]

Quinns: So it’s a cooperative game. You all have a ranger that you control. It’s a bit Pandemic-y, but sort of combat game. So there’s five regions. Everyone gets two actions a turn. You can spend your action to move, or take a little rest, or to start a fight. But the reason you gotta be clever is when you start a fight with all the miniatures in the space, any other Power Rangers that are in that space get to fight with you for free. And when you trigger a fight, you go into a little card game. You lose the game if the board becomes fully swamped with miniatures. Think of it like Pandemic. You’re trying to wipe things off the board and survive for long enough that eventually… I almost said Rita Ora, but that’s not her name.

[Matt and audience laughing]

Matt: Jesus.

Quinns: Rita…?

Matt: Rita… Repeeta?

Quinns: Rita Repulsa!

Matt: Repulsa.

Quinns: Okay, great.

Matt: Yeah.

Quinns: Not Rita Ora.

Matt: No.

Quinns: So yeah, Rita Repulsa shows up and you have to defeat her. But here’s the thing! That’s the basics, that’s why we weren’t necessarily excited. My goodness! This design is clean as heck! And the card combat is so ruddy good.

Matt: Yeah, I think it’s just amazingly evocative straightaway.

Quinns: Oh my god.

Matt: The art is lovely, and all of the moves… I was the pink ranger, the ranged ranger who had a bow and arrow, and I thought to myself, “Oh, does that mean I can shoot things from different areas?” And it’s like, “No, you have to move to the same area.”

Quinns: You can’t fire an arrow from the juice bar and hit someone in the industrial district.

Matt: Yeah, no, you can’t do that. But I kind of thought, “I wonder how that’s gonna work, if it is literally just like…” Because it’s a big chunky board. There are five spaces, but there are effectively four areas. So I thought, “How is it gonna feel like I’m a ranged character when I’m just with everyone else?” And it did! And I think a lot of it just came down to the art and the wording on the cards, of being like, “taking aim” and “firing a shot.” Every time anyone did anything, I visualized it so strongly.

Quinns: Oh my goodness, the art on the cards is great. The names of the cards are great. It actually mostly reminds me of Gloomhaven Lite, in terms of, you have a bunch of people playing a card game, and you’re just discussing which cards to play. The simple way it works is that it was actually inspired by Japanese roleplaying games, but I actually think it’s got a load of innovations that I’ve never seen in JRPGs. When you start a fight, all of the monsters in that fight get a card at random, and then that’s laid out in a line, and the Power Rangers get an opportunity to play a card between every card in that lineup. So Power Rangers, monster, Power Rangers, monster. If you kill a monster, that card is flipped and doesn't happen. So ideally, if you’re clever, you’ll be able to chain your attacks together that the monsters never attack?

Matt: Yeah.

Quinns: But! Then you get things like, “Oh, this card at the end is so bad and has a ton of health, so we should hit *that* to make sure.” And then because of dice, nothing is certain. But! The real reason it works is, this game is all about teamwork in a way that’s so pure, [Matt chuckling] and so Power Rangers, I couldn’t get over it.

Matt: Yeah.

Quinns: When you start a fight, different rangers will be in different areas, but all of your decks are different. Like anyone in this room who’s played Gloomhaven will know, that if you’re playing Gloomhaven with two, you need to learn how those two characters kind of work together. And in a very like way, if the yellow ranger provides a lot of instantaneous damage *after* the fact, sort of like a lot of teamwork, a lot of jumping in-

Matt: You’re like, “Oh, we didn’t quite kill it!” It’s like, “I can just do one bit of extra damage after your attack!” Or like, “Augh, are we gonna be able to land this with just three dice?” And someone’s like, “I can do a move that means you get to immediately have an attack and roll an extra dice.”

Quinns: Oh yeah.

Matt: So it’s like, rather than in Gloomhaven, where you have this combat that’s much more meaty and much more complicated, and you have to actually understand everything and how it interlocks in order to have a plan, in this, it’s just this thing of going7, “Oh, we can’t quite do it!” And then someone turns up and goes, “Yes we can! [Quinns laughing] I’m gonna help you!” And even the fact there was a point where it was like, “Oh no! One of the big boss characters has turned up on the other side of the city!” And I think me and you were like, fighting…

Quinns: Putties, or whatever.

Matt: Fighting putties at the school, and we’re like, “Oh no! We gotta get over there!” And it’s like, “No, they’ll be okay. We gotta stay here and fight! High five.” [laughing] It was just...

Quinns: It was so lovely, because when the first monster, one of the minibosses, showed up -- which, by the way, are all based on the *crappest* monsters from Power Rangers --

Matt: I mean, I think they were all crap.

Quinns: Oh, maybe. We fought like a big pig that is carrying a knife and fork.

[Audience laughing]

Matt: A lady with big hands.

Quinns: Oh, Lady Woe! Yeah, she was spooky. There’s a skeleton who’s just called Bones. [Audience laughing] Oh yeah, there’s Knasty Knight?

Matt: Knasty Knight with a K before “nasty”?

Quinns: Yup. That’s lovely. So the first time a miniboss showed up, we had all the Power Rangers go into an area, and then you’ve got, you know, Red Ranger, who’s the leader, and so buffing everybody. Blue Ranger, me, helping people get cards in the back of their deck and blocking. Black Ranger doing all the big damage! We defeated the miniboss and it was a tough fight, but then another miniboss spawned, and all the rangers except me and Matt ran over to fight him, and it was that moment of like, “We defeated a miniboss with five, but is the power of teamwork gonna save just three rangers?!” It was so- And they did it!

Matt: They did it.

Quinns: And we were watching them do it! And here’s the really cool thing. The combat is really involved, but, at one point, as Matt and my rangers were fighting putties in the other side of the city, we were like, “Hang on, none of the mechanics in this game mean we couldn’t just do these fights at the same time.” And you can! Which means it’s this lovely organic thing where, if you’re playing, let’s say, with five people, three players might be having a fight over there, and me and Matt are fighting, but then, with how the board shakes out, maybe I go back to rest, which means Matt now fights with another player. So you’re constantly chopping and changing who you’re working with, but doing fights at the same time?

Matt: And it kind of feels like cutting a TV show in the fact that if you have two small fights and you think, “Hey, both of these groups can handle these, right?”, you can just play them simultaneously. But if you look at it and you’re like, “No, we need you to get over here, because Rita Ora is singing some real bad songs!” [Quinns and audience laughing] Then you could be like, “Okay!” and then you can quickly do your little mini-fight so you can then rush over and start the big one. There’s a lot of really neat stuff in it, but yeah, it was just- Because it was all so simple, and so light, there was no quarterbacking, it was just a thing of being like, “Ah, we can’t do this!” and it’s like, “I can do that!” and you’re like, “Cool!”

Quinns: It’s the thing from Pandemic! No one knew what cards anyone was holding, and all the decks are unique, so it was like a sixty-minute game, and for all of those sixty minutes, it was players going, “Aw, damn, I can’t do this,” and another playing going, [high-pitched enthusiasm] “I can help!!!”

Matt: Yeah.

Quinns: For sixty minutes!

Matt: You even have a collaborative experience tracker, a bit like in Mechs & Minions, of being like, every time you kill something it adds up, and every time you kill a certain amount, you level up. But when you level up, you level up as a team, and you have a deck of cards which are the Zords! And they’re randomized in order.

Quinns: If you haven’t seen Power Rangers-

Matt: -then this is confusing! [Quinns and audience laughing] The Zords, obviously, for a bunch of high school students, are giant robots like animals/dinosaurs! That they ride!

Quinns: Yup!... But- [laughing and audience laughing]

Matt: But the key thing is, it just means that you level up! And you’re like, “Oh, cool!” And it’s like, “Oh, blue player, you got your Zord!” and they’re like, [ecstatic gasp], because you don’t know who’s going to get it until you all have them, and then you get the Megazord, which -- you’ve probably worked out -- is a big robot made of all of the little robots.

Quinns: It was- You know, there’s been games where players have individual XP and level up, and that doesn't feel good. There are games where the group gets experience and then the group all levels up at the same time. This was better! We all worked together to get experience, and then it was lucky dip which of us got our Zord! It was… Matt! And all of us went, [small gasp].

Matt: It was like your friend winning a scratchcard. It was great. You’re like, “Oh, that’s cool! What did it do?!” And again the Zords do things that help your team, rather than just helping you. So yeah, the whole design just had a kind of really nice purity. And there was also, it’s gotta be said, for a very simple game, there was a lot of interesting little strategic choices within there, to do with manipulating your deck slightly, or leaving stuff on the top of your deck. So there was enough grit in there to make you feel like you were doing clever stuff with your deck specifically.

Quinns: Oh really, and same as Gloomhaven, your deck is your health. But! But, cards have different amounts of block value, which means that if you get hit, you never know whether- Oh, there was a lovely mechanic where you die -- or you fall over and have to go back to base -- if the last card in your deck is gone. But! If it has enough shields to just keep you safe, that card goes back down, which never normally happens, but it means it gives this enormously evocative thing of whenever one of you dies, maybe… you… *survive oh my god!!!* And then the card goes back, like as a little flash of, “Look!” and then it goes back down, and you’re fine.

Matt: And if you use an ability that allows you to choose a card to put back on the top of your deck, it means you know exactly how much damage you can take without it being a problem.

Quinns: We’re just nerding out right now.

Matt: I think the key thing about it is, I didn’t want to play this game, because I was like, “I don’t care about Power Rangers,” but as soon as we started playing it, it’s like the complete opposite to me of not really wanting to go near stuff like the Dark Souls board game card game, or the Bloodborne one, in the fact that I think it would just disappoint me. But I went into this being like, “I’m not interested in Power Rangers,” and within about five minutes of playing, I had all these memories come back to me, and it’s like, “Now hang on!”

Quinns: “This was awesome!”

Matt: “This is great, and I *loved* Power Rangers!”

[Audience laughing]

Quinns: Yeah!

Matt: I remembered I loved it, and I was like, “This is great!”

Quinns: Yeah, one of our friends, when we drew the Zord that was the pterodactyl, [Matt laughing] which belongs to the-

Matt: Everyone was like, [huge excited gasp].

Quinns: No, it was better than that! Because she said, “Oh my god, that was my favorite!” And I went, “Really?!” And then I looked at the art of the pterodactyl and I went, [hushed] “Oh my god. [Matt and audience laughing] It was my favorite too!” [Audience laughing]

Matt: So it’s so weird to just have zero hype, but then watch something rekindle dead memories of being like, “No yeah, this both reminded me that I loved this thing, but also exactly *why* I loved it.”

Quinns: And you know what, Matt and I are currently working on the Batman: Gotham City Chronicles video review, which is gonna be a ton of fun, but my goodness, that game is such a failure in so many ways. Such a disappointment. And to- Oh no, people are like… That’s not a joke, it’s really… it’s a hell of a thing. [Audience laughing] But then to have exactly the same thing: Oh, big IP, miniatures-heavy Kickstarter that just gets everything right?

Matt: Yeah.

Quinns: It reminds you that you’re not crazy, and that Batman is a bad man.

Matt: Yeah, I think it’s just capturing what the thing is, and Batman is just a violent man with loads of money who punches people, and the Power Rangers- I think one of my favorite cards I saw was -- I think it was the black ranger’s power -- which was just “Smooth Moves,” which was a defensive thing. It was like, “You can block two damage to any other player being done.”

Quinns: *Three* damage.

Matt: Three damage. Just because-

Quinns: Can you believe it guys?! Three!

[Audience laughing]

Matt: Three damage! Just because you did *smooth moves*. [Quinns and audience laughing] And that is so PR, the idea that someone’s about to get hit, but you just stand in the way and wiggle around and go, “Ha! Ha!” and then they’re like, “Auurggh!” And even the minis -- I’m not a big fan of minis -- but the fact that all the putty characters are so dynamic, it just reminds you of their kind of weird, wriggly [Quinns ululates like a putty] constantly like moving their arms around in a stupid way.

Quinns: Yup.

Matt: It’s great! It’s great.

Quinns: It’s a heck of a thing. So that was Power Rangers: Heroes of the Grid, certainly -- I don’t think it’s available now -- but going out to Kickstarter backers. Hopefully there’ll be a bit of a retail release.

Matt: Yeah, I hope so.

Quinns: Yeah, we were really, really impressed.

## Letter Jam [00:21:42]

Quinns: Shall we talk about Letter Jam?

Matt: Yeah! Let’s do that.

Quinns: Letter Jam, a.k.a. uhh, uhh, Anxiety Letters!

Matt: Yeah, you called it, like, Hell Jam, or something, right?

Quinns: Hell Jam. Hell Letters.

Matt: I didn’t find it that stressful.

Quinns: Yeah, that’s because you’re good at word games, but oh my goodness. Right. So. [bemoaningly] Oh, where do you start?

Matt: Okay. So, Letter Jam basically is a game whereby-

Quinns: From Czech Games Edition. It’s their new party game. So the people that brought you Codenames, and the tremendously awkward That’s A Question… Trapwords… This is their new party game.

Matt: Yeah. And it was an interesting one for me, because it has elements of word games, which I really love, and elements of Hanabi, of having cards in front of you that you can’t see but other people can. I’m not really a fan of Hanabi, I find it very dull. But! I really clicked with this, and I wasn’t sure if I would. The way it works at the start is everyone chooses how long a word they’re gonna try and get at the end of the game. You choose that many letters, and the person to your left goes through the deck, gets loads of letters, and makes a word of that number of things. You have them in front of you, and then the game is basically, one at a time, you have a little plastic stand that you pop the first letter of your word in.

Quinns: So if Matt’s word was *Idiot*, then-

Matt: Yeah, but actually they’re all jumbled up. They make a word, they give you them, you shuffle them, so it’s not actually going through a word, it’s just the letters that are in the word. And then all you do is you look around the table each round, and you’re not allowed to look at your card, obviously, but you look at the rest of them, and you just basically bid to see who can come up with the biggest word using the most letters from other players. Because then it means that effectively you can be like, “You know, I can do a five letter word with four players.” And then it means you’re going to give clues to four people, and they’re going to write down all the other letters that they can see and have the blanks, and if they can work out what the letter blank is, then you can go- As soon as you feel like you’ve got it, you go, “I’ve got it!” And then you go, “Right. Hundred percent got it.” And you put that card down, and you get the second card in your row, and you flip that one up. And basically you’ve got to go through, and you’ve got a certain number of rounds, and then after you get to the end, you’ve got what you *think*, hopefully, [Quinns laughing] are all of the letters in front of you that you’ve guessed through elimination, and taking notes, and then you have to look at that and try and work out what the word maybe is. But the cool thing is, at the end of the game, you don’t actually have to assemble the word that was given to you. You just have to assemble *a* word.

Quinns: Yup. And so, if players finish early, then there are extra letters that they can earn floating around in the middle of the table. So if there’s one letter in your scramble of letters that you’re not sure of-

Matt: Yeah, if you’re not sure about it, you’re like, “I don’t know what that is. But, I can use that T from the middle and then I can make *this* word.”

Quinns: Yeah, maybe this is all sounding a little banal, but the thing you need to understand is that already there’s- This is a game that takes maybe forty five minutes, an hour, okay? And it’s an hour of you very slowly using deduction to figure out what each of your letters is. But you’re never sure! It’s not like, “Ah, pretty sure this letter’s an L! I’ll check!” You never check. You just move on. So you have all these cards in front of you that you can *never* look at, which is just an engine for tension?

Matt: It becomes super tactical in ways you wouldn’t expect, because you also have the thing- The only thing that’s confusing about it is, at the start of the game, where like, you know, how many- how big a word do you want to make? And I thought, [so super cool voice] “I’ll make a word with six letters. Whooouurrggh! Crazy!” But actually it meant that I was doing less word stuff? Because I had so many letters to personally get through and guess, it meant it didn’t make sense for me to be being the person each time who would suggest words using other people’s letters.

Quinns: Sure.

Matt: So actually, if you’re good at words, you’d choose a shorter one. But it means that as you go on, you can look at it and you kind of can’t say anything explicitly, but you kind of go, “I’ve got one that I can do with five letters that uses three people.” And other people look at you as if to go, “Yeah, I think I know what that word is, but it’s gonna be a word that still is gonna be super vague or unknowable for the player who, really, is a bit behind?”

Quinns: Argh! And the thing that makes it really tricky often, for everybody, is that there’s an asterisk in the middle which people can use, and the asterisk is essentially like a blank letter in Scrabble. But that means often you routinely have rounds where you don’t quite know what the word is but everyone else does? I had a horrible round where a word got suggested, and then everyone looked at the letters, it’s like, “Okay, P, L, A, E, blank, oh,” and they figured it out. They spelled it.

Matt: You were just like, “What?!”

Quinns: And I was like, “What?” And then I didn’t vocalize that I was confused, because I was embarrassed? And then all the players started going, “Oh, good word, good word.” And I’m like, “Wwwhhh-” And also because there’s no room for error, one of our friends -- I figured this out later -- spelled *Friends* F, R, E, I, N, D, S. The E was mine. The I -- I think -- was in the middle. So I basically- I *write* for a living. I’m not bad at spelling. I could not for the life of me remember if it’s F-R-I-E…

Matt [laughing]: Oh no!

Quinns: ...or F-R-E-I, and I was looking it up on my phone, which you can do, so it was all fine, but it’s like- There’s just no room for error! None! And then at the end, the big grand finale, which just puts a lovely cap on the whole thing, is you have to -- like playing find the lady -- put your cards down. You think you know what each letter is. You slide them around. And then you just have to reveal to your friends. It’s a very…

Matt: So just one at a time. I was trying to write *Walrus*, and I was like, “W! A!... P!” [Quinns and audience laughing] I was like, “Alright.”

Quinns: I thought my letters were *Same*, and in a moment of like Bond-level, or Austin Powers-level luck, I got, “S! A!... K!... E!” Which wasn’t what I thought, but the person who gave me the letter went, “Sake!” And it’s like, [nervous bluffing] “Yeah, that’s what I thought I was spelling!”

Matt: Yes, it was great! It didn’t matter. As long as you reveal a word that is a word, you did it!

Quinns: You won! Congratulations!

Matt: It also has a lovely thing in the fact that at any point, you can be like, “Look.” You’ve got a certain number of rounds, but it’s a little card that looks like a flower, and basically, each of the petals on the flower is each of the players, and it means that effectively, you can just have one or two people who keep going, “Look, I’ve got a good clue, I’ve got a good clue,” but! There is a final hidden bonus move-

Quinns: A bonus round, yeah.

Matt: -a bonus round at the heart of the flower that you can only access if every player has given a word. So it gets to this point where it’s like, “Look.” It’s great, because it means it’s not like you’ve got to do it, it’s like, there’s no *harm* in doing it. Even if you give it a go and it goes really badly, we’re still gonna get an extra free round that we wouldn’t have got otherwise, you know?

Quinns: You know how I might describe it is, you know the Saw movies? [Audience laughing] Imagine a room in one of the Saw movies which was designed to torture people who hated anagrams. [Audience laughing] And it’s like, “You gotta do this.” Because-

Matt: There was only an anagram at the end, that’s the thing.

Quinns: Oh sure.

Matt: It was mostly like, “What’s that word?”

Quinns: I guess I’m just trying to get across- I’ve played a lot of word games, and usually it’s my friends going, “I spelled *Consequences*!” And I’m like, “Uh… *Cat*?” Because my brain doesn't work that way! And this was interesting, because usually you’re spelling words, spelling words, spelling words. This was like, we spelled one word in an hour, and it was pretty cool.

Matt: Yeah.

Quinns: Which is very unusual.

Matt: I think also it doesn't really reward you being super clever, in a way. Sometimes I thought, “This is a great one,” and then you realize that actually the person who needed it most, because you were using their letter and then a blank, and they’re just like, “This is impossible.” Where for everyone else it’s like, “Oh, this is easy.” So there was a lot of thought into it. I didn’t find it that stressful. I really enjoyed it. It kept me thinking, and it kept me really puzzling, of just being like, “This could be an M, or a P, or an S! But nothing else! What the hell!” And then two turns later being like, [huge gasp] “It’s a K!”

Quinns: So that’s the Yomi level *you’re* playing on. I’m sitting there going, “How do I spell *Friends*?” [Matt and audience laughing]

Matt: Alright, fair enough, fair enough.

Quinns: But no, I would play it again. I don’t know if I’d buy it, but it’s very much not for me, and yet, I really enjoyed it.

Matt: Yeah. I thought it was fun.

Quinns: So, very interesting. In terms of a Czech Games letter game I prefer, I like Trapwords a lot, but then I like annoying people.

Matt: Yeah. Yeah!

Quinns: So that’s Letter Jam.

## Welcome to Dino World [00:29:22]

Quinns: Hey! Who here likes roll-and-writes?

[scattered wooing]

Quinns: It’s like-

Matt: Three people.

Quinns: Okay, well, I’m glad…

[audience laughing]

Matt: There are a lot of them.

Quinns: Hey. Actually, no, this is a good segue.

Matt: Yeah.

Quinns: What if I told you there was a roll-and-write that didn’t bore you?

[very minimally enthusiastic cheering]

Quinns: Yeah, alright. We’ll take it.

Matt: That’s eight people.

Quinns: That’s about all we’re gonna get, I think, from this audience.

Matt: Yeah, yeah.

Quinns: What if I told you- Who likes dinosaurs?!

[short enthusiastic cheer]

Matt: Big dinosaur crowd.

Quinns: There we go. We found it. So Welcome to Dino World is interesting because I found out exactly why it is how it is. Similar size box to Welcome To. If you’re not aware, roll-and-writes are games where you get a pencil or a pen and you draw out a mistake, basically. It takes about an hour to draw your mistake, and you may realize at some point during the game where and when you’ve made your mistake. Ideally at the end you’ll realize, but often roll-and-writes are a genre where you draw one thing on this virgin piece of paper and go, “Oh! I’ve screwed it. Okay.” [Audience laughing] Because often you can’t take back what you’ve done. But would always tend to be pretty light games that take like half an hour. We really like Welcome To and Railroad Ink. But I was always being like, “Hey! Where’s the heavier game?”

Matt: Well honestly, I’ve not been getting bored with them, but it’s such a cool idea and it’s such a simple thing to get out in a box, really, you know, just paper and pencils-

Quinns: Oh yeah, it’s lovely

Matt: -that there’s just been a lot of them in the past year. And a lot of them announced, and more coming all the time. And honestly, a bunch of them are just *fine*.

Quinns: Yeah, but I was talking to someone today about how funny it is that a few years ago, the trend was [intense gritty voice] *Legacy games*! Games you play for a year that come in a huge box! [normal voice] And now it’s like, pencils!

[Audience laughing]

Matt: Yeah, and I love that. I love it.

Quinns: It’s not that I was tired- I love lightweight and medium-weight roll-and-writes, but I was curious. Like, what happens when your heavy designer gets their hands on this genre? And Welcome to Dino World is it. Turns out, that they didn’t do the original design, but this was a game that was finished by Nick Shaw and a gentleman called Dávid Turczi, who you might remember from Anachrony, and one of the expansions for Trickerion, so unbelievably heavy games. So, what you’ve got in Welcome to Dino World: Everyone is basically designing their own Jurassic Park.

Matt and Quinns [to the tune of John Williams’s theme to Jurassic Park]: ♫ It’s a park for dinosaurs! ♫

Quinns: ♫ Dinosaurs! ♫

Matt and Quinns: ♫ Dinosaurs are like animals, but- ♫

Matt [singing over Quinns]: ♫ -from ages ago! ♫

Quinns [singing over Matt]: ♫ -very old things! ♫

[Audience laughing]

Quinns: So, Welcome to Di- [laughing]

[Audience clapping]

Matt: We didn’t prepare that. It’s why the end was different. [Quinns and audience laughing]

Quinns: Haaa! So, Welcome to Dino World is a game. You get a grid, you’re gonna draw a dinosaur park on it. Everyone rolls three dice. If you’ve played Quinto, Qwixx, Welcome To, you’ll know how this works. Some dice are rolled in the middle, and they determine what players can roll. However, if you’ve played any roll-and-write ever, the experience is: Roll some dice! Draw a thing! Roll some dice! Welcome to Dino World is: Roll some dice! And then seven minutes pass as everyone tries to figure out what to do.

Matt: And during those seven minutes, people constantly swear because they remember they’re not allowed to draw more than one dinosaur pen, or more than one of *these* things. There’s a whole bunch of rules to it. You’ve got these three dice. You’re only allowed to make one dinosaur pen per round.

Quinns: You’re only allowed to draw one facility, which is either a campsite thing, or a sort of research facility?

Matt: Yeah, but they’re all slightly randomized, different cards, so it’s like a bunch of different things.

Quinns: The whole game’s randomized! I’ve never played a roll-and-write that’s so wildly different, because on the sheets you can always draw campsites and buildings, but they do different things. And in our game, the campsites were ziplines! So, you wanted- It’s Dinosaur Park, what do you want your ziplines to do? You want them to go over as many dinosaurs as possible.

Matt: Absolutely.

Quinns: That means cash money. And then the third thing you can do is draw roads, because dinosaur parks need to be connected with roads. But then you get into things like different dinosaurs score different victory points but require different amounts of space on your board. There’s a *ton* of objectives. And this is great. I love this mechanic. There are three objective cards between every two players. So we played with seven people, and there was this lovely thing if you’ve played Between Two Cities, where I’m playing with the player to my left and the player to my right, there’s some central objectives, but there’s this lovely thing where, when your friends are just swearing at each other, you don’t know why! It doesn't matter to you!

Matt: And it’s also the fun tactics of being like, “Alright, well, what have I got between me and this person and me and this person, and then what have *they* got?” And trying to work out, what’s the common ground for me that they’re less likely to be trying to do?

Quinns: Yeah, it’s neat.

Matt: Because they’re one-shots. It’s not like, “Oh, you got there second, so you get points.” It’s like, “I’m taking this. This is mine. I get these points.” And even the fact that if you want to make biiiig dinosaur things, like Tyrannosaurus Rexes, you’ve got to combine two dice, and it’s like, “Ohh, do you want to do that? That’s one less…” [sharp inhale]

Quinns: And then it takes up so much space on your board!

Matt: And then you’ve got the space for each dino thing, but they’re not specific shapes, it’s just like five cubes, make it any shape you want. That’s a lot of choices. And also, then it’s like, oh how big is this dinosaur, well you’re gonna need power to power it.

Quinns: Ahhhh!

Matt: And is it one power, two power, three power?

Quinns: For the electric fences. But! The electric fence generators that you draw can be *shared* between pens!

Matt: Yeah! So that’s a lot of preplanning to get it up…

Quinns: Also, we’ve probhaps [sic] buried the lede. Most important thing: You get to draw dinosaurs. But, here’s the cool thing. If you’re like me and you can’t draw, they have -- on the list of dinosaurs that you can put in pens -- they’ve drawn, not cool art assets of dinosaurs, but crappy pencil sketches of like a little T-Rex! And so you know exactly how to draw a T-Rex on your board, and it looks really small and cute and quick!

Matt: I think that is huge, honestly. My favorite thing about Welcome To is the variety of strokes and dashes and circles you get to make.

Quinns: Ah that was such a good point!

Matt: The fact that in this it has, not like a picture of the dinosaur for real, but a very simple child’s drawing of it, and encourages you to draw that in the space, is lovely!

Quinns: I love that you had some objective that meant you needed a load of Stegosaurus pens, and it was amazing, because the first one you can see Matt traced this beautiful Stegosaurus.

Matt: Eh! [laughing]

Quinns: And very cute, very sort of kawaii. I liked it!

Matt [mirthful]: It was better than the rest! [Quinns and audience laughing]

Quinns: And then I don’t know whatever DNA thing you were using to create the dinosaurs, but that machine was breaking, because those Stegosauruses getting increasingly wonky, lumpen, big eyes, [unintelligible] complex.

Matt: It’s like when -- and anyone who’s ever been a child will probably remember this -- but you know when you’ve seen that… [Quinns and audience laughing]

Quinns: Have any of you been children? I don’t…

[Audience laughing]

Matt: No. Okay. So, you know when you do that thing where you want to do a big star bubble, like an explosion or something, and you start off doing it very neatly, like *bam*, *bam*, *bam*, *bam*, *bam*, and you’re trying to work out the shape and get the triangles to be roughly the same size, and then you get about halfway round and you’re like, “I really can’t be bothered,” [Quinns laughing] and then increasingly it just gets like… The end of it is just rubbish, because you’re like, “I *do not* have the patience for this.” That was me with the dinosaurs. But I think that this wouldn’t work with all roll-and-writes. I think it’s just the fact that each round was much slower, which meant it was like the cherry on the cake. Because we played another game, I think by the same designers…

Quinns: Oh, Rome and Roll.

Matt: Rome and Roll, which we may talk about today, or may not have enough time, we’ll see. But I was thinking, in that, oh, it could be fun if you had to draw little helmets or something in the boxes, but I was like, “Actually, this, because it’s a heavier game and you’ve got more boxes to do stuff with, it might just slow you down,” but here it was like your treat for solving a horrible puzzle.

Quinns: Well it was not even solving the puzzle, but committing to the least crap option. It’s like, “Argh, I don’t know where to put this T-Rex. I guess I’ll put it in this corner.” And you feel awful as you draw the pen, but! Then you get to draw a little T-Rex.

Matt: Then you get to draw a little T-Rex.

Quinns: And that T-Rex is gonna be sad, because- Oh, we haven’t talked about the best thing. This game was super crunchy. It’s easily an hour-long, very difficult thing. And we weren’t playing with the expert mode!

Matt: No.

Quinns: Because the expert mode adds generator failures and dinosaur escapes! [Audience laughing] And if you’ve played Qwixx, this is like, we’re so beyond traditional roll-and-writes. The way that works is, at the end of each round you roll dice. If you have big dinosaurs that require generators, the dice determine how many generator failures there are, which means you slowly start to get errors in the fence. You can’t move the dinosaur, it lives there. But if the fence is ever completely destroyed, that dinosaur escapes, and the only effect is it causes damage to all adjacent dinosaur pens. So you’ve got this thing where it’s like Jurassic World but on a shoestring budget.

Matt: You’re like, “Pack ‘em in! Let’s get as many dinosaurs in this park as we can! What can go wrong?”

Quinns: My thinking is: They *know* the T-Rex is gonna escape, but all they can do -- because of bureaucracy -- is put all the other dinosaurs as far away as possible. [Matt laughing]

Matt: Yeah, it’s like, “We’ve done this so many times. Let’s not pretend.”

Quinns: “The T-Rex isn’t going to escape.” Have you seen Jurassic World?

Matt: The children are gonna eat too much ice cream.

Quinns: Do you know the dinosaur that escapes in Jurassic World?

Matt: Is it the Tyrannosaurus Rex?

Quinns: What if I told you it was invisible like the Predator?

Matt [grumbling]: Okay. Okay.

Quinns: It’s a great movie.

## Rome and Roll [00:37:44]

Quinns: Should we talk briefly about Rome and Roll then, since we mentioned it?

Matt: Yeah, no, I’d like to talk about that.

Quinns: So Dávid Turczi and Nick Shaw, who work on very heavy games- I love designers who are honest, because they came up to us and went, “Hey, we’d really like to show you our new game.” [chuckle] They said, “It’s a roll-and-write.” And then leans in close. “It’s not really a roll-and-write though. [Matt laughing] It’s a eurogame, but we’re just making it look like a roll-and-write.” [Audience laughing]

Matt [laughing]: Yeah, yeah.

Quinns: And it’s like, the thing is, when we play your game, we’ll figure that out anyway, so you might as well be honest out of the gate. I was at WizKids today, and I was like, “Can we get a copy of this game?” And they’re like, [inhales through teeth] “Why don’t we give you *this* game instead?” [Matt laughing] And you know what? That just saves everybody time!

Matt: It does. It really does.

Quinns: Okay so Rome and Roll is, oh my goodness, it’s quite a historically accurate game of rebuilding Rome after it burnt down. Like ancient Rome, not like modern Rome, that would be weird and depressing. Oh goodness, it’s a dice-drafting game where you draft resources and actions, you mark all the resources down on your pad, and then -- you know, if anyone’s been playing Uwe Rosenberg’s polyomino things -- you’re building buildings, but! You get to draw them on this central shared map of Rome! And it’s a bit like Terra Mystica, where you want your buildings to be near other players, because every time they use a building it procs.

Matt: Yup, and you get bonuses for doing it yourself, so it’s like, “Hey! It’s good for you, it’s good for me.” But then also, you’ve got hills, because Rome -- apparently, I’ve never been -- is got loads of hills.

Quinns: Yup. And then a building can only straddle one hill.

Matt: Yup. Like a person. [Quinns and audience laughing] And it basically means that you get really annoyed. And you can only have one shrine on each hill, and you discover that, and you’re like, “But they’ve already made a shrine on the hill I was gonna make a shrine on. God… DAMN it!”

Quinns: Yup.

Matt: It was *wonderfully* interactive, to be honest.

Quinns: The best thing we can say about Rome and Roll is, this was a really heavy eurogame that we played first thing in the morning, and because of the booth we had to *stand up*.

Matt: Yeah. And I was not happy about that, when I turned up and I was like, “Do you seriously expect people to play a eurogame whilst standing up?”

Quinns: Yup. And learning it!

Matt: But it was- I didn’t care!

Quinns: We stayed for like *two hours*! It was great! And you know what? I mean, this is kind of a geeky thing for me to be interested in, but the thing that the roll-and-writes did on a design level is in having players mark their sheets and hatching and drawing Rome, here’s the thing: It could do a lot of components stuff, because players were drawing instead? So it only really used drawing. Like for example, there were *loads* of different kinds of resources. There’s five different kinds of victory, five different kinds of resources, senators, generals… If you had to do tokens or pieces for that? It would be a nightmare! It would be [unintelligible]. In fact, it would be like Terraforming Mars.

Matt: Well, that’s it. I haven’t talked about this with you, but that’s exactly what I was saying to someone else earlier.

Quinns: Oh, really.

Matt: It’s the fact that it allows it to have all these different tracks, all these different things, and even the juggling of like- You know when you have a round where it’s like, “Well this round I get four wood and three stone, but I’m gonna spend two of those stone and four of those wood,” and then you just do this sort of like, “Euurgh, okay, err, urggh,” and you end up just [Quinns: Here’s the thing.] holding things and going, “Are these mine?” Whereas this, it’s just like, “Wood, W W W, B B B, cross cross cross, dih dih dih,” and it’s just like, kind of back up (?) as like accounting, but it means that-

Quinns: Dude, I was just gonna say, here’s the tragic thing. Board games are pretty good at hiding the fact that most of the games we enjoy are accounting.

Matt: Yeah, yeah yeah yeah yeah.

Quinns: But slowly but surely, we’re working our way towards this thing of like, “You know, the most efficient way to play this game would be Excel!” [Audience laughing]

Matt: Yeah no, I think there was so much flavor in this as well though, in the fact that you had these unique player boards, with different advisors that you could level up and get different skills. So you were like super fight-y, and I was super into politics. And just being able to do this thing of being like, [Machievallian planning voice] “Alright, I’m gonna make this fish. I’ll get this fish, and then I’m gonna buy some jewelry, and I’m gonna give it a senator and be like, ‘You gonna be my friend? I’ll give you a fish and a necklace.’ [Quinns and audience laughing] And he’ll be like, ‘I’ll be your friend.’ And then that senator’s got some really good deals on some more jewelry, and I can give jewelry to other senators.” So I was doing like QVC, [Quinns laughing] and you were doing like… war.

Quinns: Oh. No it was… Honestly, I can’t make this sound interesting, but I can use the tone of my voice. So basically, there was a few turns where I collected a lot of stone, and you know what you use stone for? You build roads. You know what roads get you? They get you a lot of points. But only from places you’ve conquered, but I conquered a lot of places. And then you know what I did?

Matt: Mmm?

Quinns: I built three roads in one turn-

Matt: Whoa.

Quinns: -using seven stone. And you get a multiplier for building more than two roads in a turn.

Matt: Yeah.

Quinns: And then, you know what I did?

Matt: What?

Quinns: I started going, [manic shouting] “AH YES! YES! YES!” [Matt laughing] I was so excited, and the designer was there watching me, and he wasn’t like, [disturbed] “Whoa,” he was like, [satisfied] “Yup.” [Audience laughing]

Matt: Yeah, I know, it was great. And it was funny. I think after that, you said, “I’ve just had my big turn. Should we leave now?” [Quinns laughing] Because with the whole game we knew we weren’t going to have a time to finish it. It was like, “Yeah, that’s fine.” He was like, “Ah, you should probably do this for points.” I’m like, “Dude, we’re not finishing this game. There’s no way we’re gonna finish this today.”

Quinns: It was unfinished, but oh my goodness, that was just- It just showed so much promise!

Matt: No, I really loved it. It was evocative and fun, and it was actually interesting, at one point I found myself, when we were putting down all of the different buildings, in terms of like- We were literally just drawing an outline of a shape, and then writing the name of the building on it in our colored pen.

Quinns: Yup.

Matt: And there was a part of me that thought, “Ahhh, this would be so cool if you had a box of little plastic buildings you could build,” and I was like, “N-no.” [Quinns laughing] Because it really actually didn’t need it. It was so evocative, in terms of being like, “I’m gonna do this. I’m gonna build up this district, and then I’m gonna build an army, and I’m gonna go down the road, and I’m gonna take those villages or whatever,” and it was like I was in the little world.

Quinns: You know what? And also, as far as Rome and Roll goes, because of the roll-and-write nature of it, and it uses pads, the box is really quite small.

Matt: Yeah, it should be.

Quinns: And you know, this isn’t a funny thing, but an observation -- if you guys care about the board game industry -- is we have never, *ever*, in seven years of doing Shut Up & Sit Down, been to a convention with this many small boxes, and I would put money on that being a trend. I think manufacturing in China, and I think the way the market’s going, people are starting to appreciate small boxes, and publishers are becoming more aware of increased shipping size, and I think that’s wicked!

Matt: I think it’s great. Honestly, I’ve played about three or four games this week, and afterwards, after we packed it away, we were just being like, “This is *tiny*!” And it’s just amazing!

Quinns: Anyone who’s held Root, you know? How small is the box for Root?

Matt: Yeah. Yeah.

Quinns: My goodness.

Matt: Big experiences, small boxes, I love it.

Quinns: Should we briefly talk about this?

Matt: Yeah, we could talk about it briefly.

## Vampire: The Masquerade - Blood Feud [00:43:28]

Quinns: Okay, right, so we played a game that we kind of want to warn people away a little bit, unless it certainly undergoes serious, serious renovation.

Matt: Yeah.

Quinns: So we played- Because we were so excited about this, because we love megagames. Megagames are amazing. And recently, a company started talking about a game called Vampire: The Masquerade - Blood Feud. This is being pitched as the world’s first boxed product megagame. So essentially it looks like a board game, but you take it home and then it’s… But it’s a megagame!

Matt: It’s a megagame with the materials you need to play at home.

Quinns: Yup.

Matt: With your friends. And you know, megagames are something that have been talked about, and, you know, for people who’ve followed our work for a long time, they know it’s something that’s very close to our heart, and we feel we kind of have a connection with. So there’s a lot of people out there who really want to try a megagame, and if you don’t live near to a city, or you don’t feel confident enough to go into a room with hundreds of people you don’t know, the idea of being able to buy a boxed product that you can play with fifteen, thirty friends is really quite exciting. Also, the key thing is, me and Quinns, completely by chance -- well, not chance, we’re just both nerds [Quinns laughing] -- both, when we were teenagers, had quite a bit of fun playing the Vampire: The Masquerade roleplaying game. So, we were kind of like, “Yeah! Actually, I think we’re both fans of Vampire: The Masquerade, and the world.” And we’re both fans of megagames, so we thought, “Let’s check it out!”

Quinns: Yup.

Matt: And it was unfortunately -- and we don’t say this with any glee or malice -- it was a disappointment in almost every regard.

Quinns: I think the easy way to sum it up is it definitely was not a megagame.

Matt: No.

Quinns: Because the main thing about megagames, and the reason they’re so lovely, and the reason that we adore them and think they’re really important, is they lift up a game from the table. Rather than spending the whole game looking down at things, you look up at all the different players. It’s the whole reason there’s a high player count!

Matt: Yeah.

Quinns: Because the humans become the components in that circumstance, and then you’re talking to lots of different people. You have different relationships, you’re running around, it’s like The West Wing because everyone’s constantly walking while talking to each other. Everything about the design of Vampire: The Masquerade - Blood Feud shunted your attention down back to the table.

Matt: Yeah.

Quinns: So it was a game with tons of players that required moderation that was- If I had to describe it simply, imagine something like a bad version of Twilight Imperium that was broken into chunks and then different players were in charge of those chunks. But it was not even a good board game to begin with, and certainly it did not resemble a megagame, and it is almost certainly a misunderstanding of what the genre is about.

Matt: Yeah, I think so. It was a game where there was a winner at the end -- people who got the most victory points won -- which is already like, “Hmm.”

Quinns [talking over Matt]: Which is already like, megagames *don’t have winners!*

Matt: No, it’s about having a story. There was very little characterization. It was when we turned up the-

Quinns: Oh, what was your character’s name?

Matt: I was… Orange Vampire B.

Quinns: I was Yellow Vampire C.

Matt: Sure, yeah. [Audience laughing] The thing was, it wasn’t just us either. A lot of the time we can go to things and we can be a bit snooty, and there are other people there clearly having a really fun time, but we sat down with a table of people who were also on the Counts. They were supposed to be the politics people.

Quinns: Oh yeah, Matt and I didn’t really have much choice about what we were doing, because it was pitched as, “Alright every team! Decide who is argumentative.”

Matt: Yeah, so it’s like, “Alright, I guess it’s me and Quinns going to that table.”

Quinns [talking over Matt]: Me and Matt are like, “Okay.”

[Audience laughing]

Matt: Anyway, we got there, and we were talking to everyone else on the table before it went, and everyone was like, “Yeah, I used to love-” People *all* really loved Vampire: The Masquerade, and a bunch of them have not tried a megagame and wanted to try it. So it was disappointing to discover, first off, that half the players would be humans. Because like, who wants to be a human?!

Quinns [chuckling]: Yeah it’s like, “Welcome to the vampire LARP!” And then we got our teams given out. It’s like, “This half of the room is vampires. The rest of you are [spooky voice] huuummmaaannnn.”

Matt: And you’re like, “That’s not fun.” And then also they’re like, “We haven’t actually finished the stuff, it’s a bit more complicated, the stuff to do with being in different vampire clans. So you’re just vampires or humans.” And it’s like, “Whaaa?! Where’s the flavor?”

Quinns: I was panicking so much about looking for a theme that I went over to the world map, because all of our units in New York- Because the whole thing takes place in New York over one night, which is a lovely idea.

Matt: Yeah!

Quinns: Like, oh there’s this one long night, [Matt: One night of madness. Fine.] war’s breaking out, who knows what’ll happen when day breaks. But because there was no theme around our faction whatsoever, I was looking at where all the factions started. It’s like, “Okay, hey, you know what? Wherever my vampire clan starts, that’s gonna give me the theme I need.” You know where we started?

Matt: What?

Quinns: The cemetery.

[Audience laughing]

Matt: Yeah, they were all like, the spooky house, or the cemetery, or the spooky…

Quinns: Spooky laboratory.

Matt: ...laboratory. Okay, fine. But the thing was, it just didn’t hang together. We had this thing of we had to pass edicts that would affect things, but we had five minutes, and we went over to try and talk to our team about what might advantage them this turn, but they’d already put down their orders. Everybody just ended up quite detached from it, and it was disappointing, and it mainly was disappointing that it didn’t even feel like- Not even didn’t feel like Vampire: The Masquerade, it didn’t feel like we were vampires. I mean, the most telling thing was, when we were drinking blood from humans, if there was a human faction in the same space on the strange area control board, then you just got two assets, which was basically money. And it’s like, it could have been gangsters, it could have been anything.

Quinns: Yup. We weren’t even going to talk about it, because we don’t usually talk about bad games on the podcast, but we kind of got the fear a little bit, because we realized how many people *don’t* live in cities where megagames are being run, and we thought, “Oh my goodness. Are people gonna buy this because they can’t play a megagame normally? Is the megagame community going to have its reputation tarnished because the first commercial one becomes something that people buy not knowing it’s *not* a megagame?” You know? So we felt it was not necessarily great for a live show, but important to put into our podcast more as a public service announcement?

Matt: Yeah, and we had a guy opposite us on the table who was clearly having a really bad time, and I was talking to him. Like everyone, he was like, “I thought this was gonna be kind of a roleplaying thing, [Quinns [high-pitched]: Which megagames usually are!] and I love Vampire,” and it’s like, yeah usually they are. And at one point somebody came over to him and said, “Oh, is this your first megagame?” And he’s like, “Yeah.” And then after the guy had left -- because I think he was filming and kind of involved with him, I didn’t want to make a scene -- I kind of went over and said, “Look, you know, [chuckling] you should try another megagame.” And he was like, “Oh.” And I was explaining to him what they were usually like, and he was like, “Oh, thank you so much, because after this I wouldn’t have tried it.” And after that it was like, no, we gotta mention this, because it’s like, if people- It’s kind of annoying, because it feels to me that the people who’ve made the game maybe haven’t experienced enough -- or understood enough -- the spirit of megagames.

Quinns: Or perhaps they’re compromising too much to pack this into a box.

Matt: I don’t know, but all that really matters is, to come out and be like, “Hey! This is a megagame you can buy,” and then to do it such a disservice, I just feel like is at best irresponsible, and at worst, cynical.

Quinns: Yup. Okay.

Matt: And that’s all we’re gonna say on it really.

## Top 10 Games You Can Play In Your Head, By Yourself [00:49:35]

Quinns: But hey, hey. We’re gonna move on to our fun feature now!

Matt: Fun features!

Quinns: Hey, who remembers, a while back at the UK Games Expo…

Matt [talking over Quinns]: Who likes fun? [Soft audience cheers] We got two people who like fun! [Audience laughing]

Quinns: Oh no, there were like like seven or eight, I think. Okay, so.

Matt: Three, sorry.

Quinns: A few years back we played -- during one of our live shows -- a *game* with the audience. What if I told you that all of you in this room, if you so choose, if you are brave enough, are about to go on a journey into your own imagination.

Audience: OoooooOOOOOOOoooooo.

Matt [to the tune of Pure Imagination]: ♫ Stay right there, and you’ll be, in a world of your imagination. ♫

Quinns: This is a book that’s been published recently called *The Top Ten Games You Can Play In Your Head, By Yourself*. [Audience laughing] Now I know what you’re thinking: “Ah, this is gonna be hilarious!” You have *no* idea! [Audience laughing]

Matt: I remember the first time you tried to read this book. We were on a plane I believe, and you briefly told me about it, and you said it’s apparently really interesting, and I just looked over and saw Quinns with his eyes closed, looking like he was concentrating *so hard*, and all I could imagine is that he just read a sentence that said, “Imagine a tree.” [Quinns and audience laughing]

Quinns: Okay, so here’s the thing. This book, even though it’s been published now, and it’s edited by Sam Gorski and D. F. Lovett, they did not write it. In fact, the first words in the book are, “WE DID NOT WRITE THIS BOOK! Although we wish we did.” So basically, in the late 80s and early 1990s, there was a small-print publisher who published a lot of books, many books by a particular -- I believe anonymous -- author. Oh no, sorry, he has a name: J. Theophrastus Bartholomew. And he published a whole load of books about games you can play in your head by yourself. So this is a new collected anthology. The name of the book if you’re looking to buy it is, *Top Ten Games You Can Play In Your Head, By Yourself*, edited by Sam Gorski. So, right, we’re just gonna do a brief introduction now. So, they got in touch with the original author for this collection, and there’s a new introduction that sort of gets everybody ready. So, where should we start?

[Reading from the book] “In this busy, frightening world, this time and place we call America in the 1990s, you may not only forget how to daydream, but that to daydream is even an option. You are distracted by your television, your video games, your portable cassette players and home computers, and a telephone in the kitchen that rings off the hook!” This kind of paints a picture, doesn't it. “It is because of this that I have compiled a list of my ten best games, and I do mean the very best. I have created over six *thousand* games in my life.” [Audience laughing] Reiner Knizia, who we make fun of for making a lot of games, I believe is around six hundred. “Every one of which can be played… ALONE! These are the absolute *creams* of the crop, the grandest of them all, the pinnacle of my short life’s achievement! All of these games, like every game I’ve created, are ones that you can play in your head by yourself BECAUSE!!! We are most truly ourselves, and our very best selves, when we were absolutely alone!” [Audience laughing]

Matt: It’s like Enoch Powell for incels. [Quinns and audience laughing] I don’t like it! No we should be really clear on that point -- because that’s a mean joke -- that we are- This book in particular, we are both equally laughing at and in awe of.

Quinns: Yes.

Matt: It’s something which is like, it’s clearly funny, but also this guy is clearly amazing.

Quinns: Yeah, there is some tremendously fun game design in here, and I really do enjoy doing this. So it’s a mix of being like…

Matt: But there’s also some weird bitterness in the writing, which you can’t help but enjoy.

Quinns: There’s a section next which I won’t read, but it’s “The whens and wheres and the whos and hows and the whys.” The only one I’ll read out is “the whos.” [Reading] “This is the most beautiful of all the answers. If you are reading this right now, then you have all the WHO you could ever NEED!” [Audience laughing] Okay, right. Oh my goodness. I mean, there’s too much of this to not read.

Matt: Yeah, just do it.

Quinns: “One of the many simple tasks required of you throughout this book is the ordinary task of fragmenting your mind to create opposing selves within yourself.” Who’s read *In the Name of the Wind*? Right! Oh, three of you, that’s a surprise.

Matt: More people than enjoy fun. [Audience laughing] That’s our demographic!

Quinns: “Now sure you understand? Consider that you shapeshift as you walk through the halls of your school, shifting from child to scholar to athlete to *hungry beast*! Or, if you are an adult who attempts to function as a cog in the blood-soaked machine we call the American dream! [Audience laughing] Consider how you swallow your own soul as you daily enter the factory where you go to die piece by piece! FIVE FOR EVERY SEVEN DAYS!!!!” [Audience laughing]

Matt: Wowww. We gotta get this boy to the Globe. [Audience clapping, Matt laughing]

Quinns: Okay, now, we’re gonna get everyone in this room warmed up. This includes Matt, but I’m talking about all of you. Because this is the warm-up exercise [Matt laughing] titled -- and every word in this sentence is capitalized -- “THE SIMPLE EXERCISE THAT EVEN THE MOST FOOLISH CHILDREN CAN DO!” [Audience laughing] You don’t obviously have to if you’re uncomfortable, but I would -- if you’re interested -- encourage all of you to close your eyes. Oh, I’ve skipped the beginning, but do your best to visualize this. And also, importantly, there are no wrong answers. If something goes insane in your imagination, follow it, okay? Games can be played for years, or seconds, so. “You are walking through a field. You look down and see your shadow cast from the sun shining down-” Oh, sorry, we should say, before we move any further, if you’re listening to this podcast, do attempt to do this at home, unless you’re driving a car.

[Audience laughing]

Quinns: “You’re walking through a field. You look down and see your shadow cast from the sun. Darkness upon the grains of wheat matching the outline of your body. You know your shadow well and you always have. Your shadow walks with you, a fellow self. You reach a building here in the field. The building should be something of your choice. Conjure it up; a barn, a cottage, an abandoned house, a mill, or a burned-down castle. This is your sanctuary. It beckons you. It’s something special, and you know it. However, the shadow cannot come with you. So reach down now, and grab the shadow by the place it connects to your feet, and pluck it off you, tossing it backwards into the field. It is no longer your shadow, it is your shadow self. Now, enter the sanctuary. Look around. Imagine it. Perhaps it’s a bit cleaner than you thought it would be. Perhaps it’s more cluttered. Take a look at the objects throughout the sanctuary. Imagine all of the objects that are there in the one room or the thousand.

Now, you must play a game with your shadow self. Leave the sanctuary. Now, your shadow self will enter and explore with one simple objective: To steal an object from the sanctuary. You cannot look in the windows as your shadow self sneaks through the building with the simple purpose of tricking you. It will steal an item, but more so it will rearrange the entirety of the building. Now, remember, you are both of the selves. You control each. The goal is not to trick the shadow self or the human self, the goal is to be both, to contain multitudes. Wait for the shadow self outside your sanctuary while the shadow self gets into mischief. Now, when you are ready, go back inside and see what your shadow self has done. Look at it… and…” [Quinns claps once] Okay, wake up! We’ll call it there!

That is the warm-up exercise, okay? [high-pitched voice] Is that a little spooky for everybody? [Audience laughing] Okay, so now, that’s just an example of what your imagination might do. Now, that’s sort of the end of the introductory chapter. However, the final thing in the introduction is just magical, because-

Matt: While you do this, I’m gonna have to do my now-regular podcast feature.

Quinns: Going to…

Matt [mirthful]: Going to the toilet.

Quinns: Oh my goodness.

Matt: I don’t know what it is! Conventions!

Quinns: Stop talking!

[Audience laughing]

Matt: Coffee!

Quinns: Now the final chapter in the introduction reads-

Matt: It’s only a wee!

Quinns: -”HOW TO EXPLAIN IT. How to explain this habit of yours to others.” Okay? [Audience laughing] “Surely your parents are like my own once were: Distant, frowning entities, [Audience laughing] with a set of stern rules, including that you should stop being a couch potato and *do your damned chores!* It is hard to blame them, of course. Idle hands are indeed the playthings of shadow selves. [Audience laughing] But I recommend being a couch potato with your eyes closed and the television off. That’ll teach ‘em. Try it, speak it, say it aloud: I am playing a game, father! A game that requires *you* to leave me in peace, and allow *me* to be a more fully-formed HUMAN!” [Audience laughing]

Audience member: I am playing!

Quinns: No, I would like you to, sir. I would like everybody in this room. So, altogether now: [audience shakily speaks along with Quinns] I am playing a game, father! A game that requires *you* to leave me in peace, and allow me to be a more fully-formed HUMAN! [Quinns alone] Give yourselves a round of applause!

[Audience applauds]

Quinns: Now, you might think, from that kind of curious and sort of insidious introductory exercise, that this game is going to be particularly artistic. Oh boy! It was very difficult for us to choose a game that I would like you all to play, but I’m just gonna turn to page 59. Now, before I reveal what this game is, Matt and I would love to have just one of you as an example. But what we’re looking for is the person with the most powerful imagination. Do we have any volunteers? You won’t have to say much, really, we just would love to have you on stage, and sort of direct this game at you. There is one gentleman brave enough, or perhaps, we can’t quite see… Would you like to come up to the stage. Sir! Give our guest a round of applause everybody.

[Audience applauds]

Matt: When the most powerful imagination meets the least powerful bladder. [Quinns and audience laughing] Anything is possible. I really wish I had something I could be more famous for. Welcome.

Quinns: Please, take a seat. It’s like being a game show contestant.

Matt: It’s like really budget Knightmare.

Quinns: Yeah, budget Knightmare, but we couldn’t afford any kind of set.

Matt: Nothing, absolutely nothing.

Quinns: What is your name, contestant?

Contestant: Hi, my name is John.

Quinns: John! Does anything in particular make you feel you have a tremendously powerful imagination?

John (heretofore Contestant): Largely that I could almost feel nothing else when you were talking about sitting on the sofa and having the TV off and essentially screaming at your father with your eyes closed.

Quinns: Wow!

[Audience laughing]

John: And it’s like, “Wow, okay, yeah, no, that hits pretty hard.”

Quinns: So it sounds like we have someone whose parents most resemble the parents of J. Theophrastus Bartholomew. [Audience laughing]

John: I feel that’s a little harsh on my parents. [Quinns laughing] It was mainly that we had an argument about whether or not the TV could be switched on, but you are meant to figure out-

Quinns [speaking over John]: But that argument left a deep mark. [Audience laughing]

John: Oh yeah.

Matt: And an even deeper... imagination. [Audience laughing]

Quinns: Now, of course- I’m sorry, one moment, I’m terrible with this, what was your name?

John: John.

Quinns: John. I was gonna say John!

Matt: John Theophrastus Bartholomew. [Audience laughing]

Quinns: Oh, it’s actually…

Matt and Quinns: Oh… my… god!!!

[Audience laughing and clapping]

Matt: The first initial of this name is J.

Quinns: Yes, no, we weren’t kidding. Right, so the game that John and all of you will be playing for probably maybe about ten minutes is Trucks! [Audience laughing] It’s not what you expected, is it? The chapter begins: “HONK HONK! [Audience laughing] Your airhorn sounds a d-” Don’t close your eyes yet, this is just the intro. “Your airhorn sounds a deafening wave of sound through the crowd of children.” [Audience laughing] I had not read that particular sentence. [John and audience laughing] “They scream and cover their ears, running from the sidewalks, scared and searching for cover. A sly grin crosses your face.” Okay, twist ending: “Because they signaled you with the motion, the tugging in the air, to honk your horn.”

Matt: Ahhhh. Plot twist.

Quinns: So, the sort of back-of-the-box description for this game, John, is: “Become a legendary truck driver by transporting goods around the greater United States of America. Buy low, sell high, upgrade your truck, all while supporting yourself and your family.” So then, there’s a map of America, which has about ten places in it, and a wigwam. Oh, I hadn’t- Oh, okay. Oh, and a t- Okay, right, moving on. [Matt laughing] Okay, so, John, would you like to pick your starting city out of- You know what, that’s not funny content.

Matt: How are we doing this? Are we gonna get everyone imagining, or are we just gonna put all of the imagination coins in one basket?

Quinns: Oh no, I think everybody should imagine. If they want to, or they can watch John.

Matt: Okay.

Quinns: John, I believe your adventure as a truck driver in America will start now. Please close your eyes. Everybody wish John the best of luck, he’s going to more dangerous place than any of us could imagine. Okay, right. Where should we start? So, let’s start with the introduction of old, sly Willy.

Matt: Yeah, I saw that written down.

Quinns: “Small bells attached to the door ring as you enter a dim mechanic’s office. A man sits at a table filled with papers. He turns to greet you. [high-pitched old prospector voice] ‘So, you’ve finally decided to step up to the plate,’ he says, looking you over. [the voice takes on an increasingly Gollum-like quality] ‘Take over the family business! Truckin’ ain’t ever an easy job, but someone’s gotta do it.’ ‘Willy’ reads the embroidered patch on his stained work shirt, just below a pack of cigarettes. He explains the company’s great tr-” Ah, it’s exactly like being a GM, this. “He explains that the company’s great trucking fleet has been all but whittled down to the hard times. You’re going to be driving a Ford F-150 to begin this game.” That’s a van. I would like you to picture your van, but most importantly, I would like you to picture your family, everybody.

“Where do you think you’re headed in the truck? This is a *family* business. Before you hit the road, you have to build a realistic family. Envision what kind of family you would like. A few things to consider: Are you married, single, divorced, or separated? How many children do you have? You must have as few as two, or as many as nine. [Audience laughing] What are your children named? What are their favorite subjects? Which child is your favorite? [Audience laughing] Which is your least favorite? Rank the children in order of preference, [Audience laughing] including the least positive traits of each child. How many cats do you have? You can have as few as four, [audience laughing] or as many as fifteen.” [Audience laughing] Okay, right, so this family is located in your hometown. Got the family figured out? Get ready, because I’ll tell you something right now. You don’t know the half of it!

Your truck -- which, remember, is a van -- starts with two loads of corn. Now very quickly let me turn to the chart here, in the book. We’ll say you’re starting the game in Chicago, where corn sells for three dollars. It sells in Toledo for two dollars. Okay, we’ll say you’re… Mmm, you know what, actually we’ll leave you in Chicago, where you bought corn at a high price, and you’re gonna have to figure out what to do with it. Other things you can buy in Chicago include hot dogs, which are five dollars. Now, here’s the thing: There is a full-on Excel spreadsheet of prices here! You are fully expected to drive between different towns, buying low and selling high and not cheating! Okay? John, what’s your most favorite- No, what’s your least favorite child like?

John: Well, basically, he’s just very loud. He was only born about six months ago, and he just really won’t shut up.

Quinns: He doesn't really do anything.

John: Yeah he’s just, you know, at the stuff-coming-from-both-ends-constantly phase.

Matt: Mmm, what about the best child. Same situation?

John: Oh no no, she is nine, and she wants to be a truck driver like me.

Matt: Ohhh! How many children do you have?

John: Three.

Matt: Three.

Quinns: How many cats do you have?

John: There were more, but we don’t talk about those.

Quinns: Whoa.

[Audience laughing]

John: I have…

Quinns: What did we say? John’s imagination is a dark and dangerous place. [Audience laughing] There have already been deaths!

Matt: Did you have warnings on the door about John’s imagination? [Quinns and audience laughing]

John: I decided to keep it conservative, with only eight cats.

Quinns: John, you’ve got some expensive corn. Are you gonna buy any hot dogs?

John: Can I feed the children on the corn?

Quinns: Ohhhh!

John: And/or the cats, for that matter.

Quinns: Welcome to the world of *Games You Can Play In Your Head, By Yourself*. The answer to that question, John, is within you. [Audience laughing]

John: It’s no, isn’t it.

Quinns: No, of course it- John!

[Audience laughing]

Matt: No, if you say no, then it’s no. The rules of the world exist in your mind.

Quinns: Oh wow.

Matt: If you believe you can… But if you don’t believe it would be *right* to feed your children and/or cats with corn, then don’t. How do you feel about it, as your trucker?

John: It is sad to see the unhappy faces of my children as I try and make them eat corn.

Quinns: Where do you think you’re gonna head?

John: Ohh. Umm. What’s the nearest city where corn sells for more than…

Quinns: Three dollars.

John: Three dollars, yeah.

Quinns: We’ll just say New York, okay?

John: Great, okay.

Matt: They love it. Home o’ Corn!

John: Do I have to take my children with me?

Quinns: No! And you know why, John? Here’s the twist of trucking. Let’s talk about your other family. [John and audience laughing]

Matt: It’s about time!

Quinns: So this is when we’re like, “This man might be a genius,” because we were looking through this book. First off, I opened *Trucking*, and I’m like, “Oh my god, it’s a game where you’re expected to play a complicated economic trading game by yourself.” Oh no, it’s got a bigamy minigame! [Audience laughing]

Matt: You have to max out the bigamy level to get the best truck!

Quinns: I love it! This is one of those games that tells you way more about the designer than it does… [Matt and audience laughing] I’m gonna read this verbatim. “Creating a second family while on the road is an inevitability of truck life. [Audience laughing] When one family disappears into the horizon, another one rises in front of you. It’s best that your second family has considerable distance. Coastal split’s the obvious choice for some, but there are other methods. To make it easier, feel free to find a partner with the same name. [Audience laughing] And consider reusing the names of the children of one family.” [Audience laughing]

Matt: Is that like, advice for the game?! Or advice for bigamy? You’ll never mess up. Just give ‘em all the same names!

Quinns: And now, just to sort of accelerate this, because we do have to end the podcast, I’m gonna rapidly move onto- There’s a few different scenarios that you can introduce to yourself, little things to spark off your imagination. They all have difficult levels, starting with medium. John, we’re just going to cast your imagination into the one with the difficulty level quoted as *Catastrophic*. [John and audience laughing] It’s called *Little Lloyd*- Oh sorry, what’s the name of your favorite son in the first family?

John: Uh, it was a daughter actually.

Quinns: Oh daughter, yes.

John: Her name’s Laura.

Quinns: He’s good. [Audience laughing] *Little Laura Wants to Go to Disneyworld*. Okay. “Commonly a child will expr-” [laughing] This is so scientific. [aristocratic scientist voice] “Commonly a child will express their interest in going to Disneyworld. This can be a wonderful experience for one man. [normal voice] A random child from each of your families has convinced their respective mother that going to Disneyworld on the same week will be a good idea. Don’t try and stop them! They’ve both already purchased the tickets.” John, I would like you to start thinking about how you’re going to handle this. You’ve really screwed this up, John. What were you thinking, John?! John, you’ve got a rusting van full of corn. There’s no time to even deliver it to New York. “Keep in mind that if the two families come into contact physically with each other at any point during this trip, or ever, even if you’re not present, the marriages on both side will immediately dissolve. Naturally, all of this will have a disastrous effect on your psyche.” Now, here’s the twist ending. John? We’re going to leave you here. We can’t follow you on this adventure. We cannot go where you need to go. This is an adventure that you’re going to carry with you when you leave the podcast. [Audience laughing] But John. Any ideas for how you’re not going to make this a disaster?

John: I’m guessing that at least one of the families could potentially be lied to about which park they’re actually going to. They have, after all, ignored the fact that I’ve been away for long enough to have actually two or three other families on the road.

Quinns: WHOA!

[Audience laughing]

John: So, it’s probably possible to hoodwink them that much.

Matt: Well they did, “As the sun sets behind you, a new family rises,” which does imply like, one a day. [Quinns and audience laughing] But, you can’t get out with that one, because they said specifically that the women involved *have bought the tickets*. So you’re going.

John: Yeah, I guess maybe then it’s about trying to make sure that the children have phobias of particular parts of the park, so that that way… [Audience laughing and clapping] They’ll just stay apart naturally.

Quinns: I’m with that. “The leather interior squeaks in your van as you hop inside, and the steel door of your father’s Ford F-150 slams shut as you close it, rattling the cab. You kick the-” Oh my god. “You kick the empty old cans of Hamm’s beer away from the pedals. ‘Ha!’ you think. ‘Pops sure loved his beer.’ The keys fit into the ignition like a glove. Varoom. [Audience laughing] The engine starts with a cacophonic kick; you’re on your way to Disneyland. Whether you succeed there… is up to you.” Everybody, give a round of applause to John.

[Audience cheers and applauds]

Quinns [under the applause]: Thank you so much!

John [under the applause]: Thank you very much.

Matt: Yeah! John’s imagination was, frankly, terrifying. It was wonderful, it was rich. He was like a dark mirror universe version of Dr. Phil. Like, “You want some advice? I got some advice. Scare your kids.” [Audience laughing]

Quinns: But of course, we only peeked through the window of John’s mind. He has to live in it all the time. [Audience laughing] If you would like to- Frankly, I didn’t realize just how- I’ve not given it as close of a read as we did during this podcast. This book’s amazing. If you would like to read it or give it a shot, this is, once again, *Top Ten Games You Can Play In Your Head, By Yourself*, the collected edition. And this has been, I think, the Shut Up & Sit Down podcast.

Matt: I think it has been.

Quinns: Give yourselves a round of applause everybody.

[Audience applauds and cheers]

[funky outro music]