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My hope is that by offering this transcription – however accurate it may be done by a machine/ AI – will help you, the listener. I'd love to offer full, proper transcription some day, but that is not feasible at this time. Thank you for listening and reading. I hope you enjoy the show and that this document was helpful. Enjoy.

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- Hello everybody, welcome to the Max Frequency Podcast.

I'm your host Max Roberts and joining me this time is the editor and host of an internet radio show, A Life Well Wasted, Robert Ashley.

Welcome to the show.

- Hey, how's it going?

- I'm well Robert, how are you?

- I'm all right.

- Robert, you pulled off a Christmas miracle last year and you released a new episode of A Life Well Wasted, a podcast that I used to listen to when I worked at Kmart, like your show has been around.

For me, Kmart doesn't exist anymore, so you're, A Life Will Waste It has outlasted Kmart.

- It outlasted a lot of things, really, I mean, just. (laughing)

Anything that lasts for more than five years is, you're gonna outlast a lot of stuff.

But yeah, yeah, I don't,

I'm not answering a question right now.

It's a show that's always stuck with me. I have vivid memories or associations of the show, like the Big Ideas episode where you talk—I don't remember the guys, I think it was Jason—but the Very Well Endowed Man episode. I was by the box compactor tearing

boxes apart during that part of the show. That stuck in my brain. And I have quotes that I wrote down in my notes at back then, from the Artist, Fans, and Engineers episode about people with impressive talent and writing.

So like your show has just been in my brain and in my podcast feed ever since I discovered it kind of back in those days.

And then 2013 episode seven work comes out.

You're getting ready to head off to GDC.

You're like, "I'm getting interviews."

And then nothing came out until last year.

And so I wanted to kick it off just by asking why now?

Why finally put episode eight out?

- Yeah, well, you know, you mentioned that GDC that I went to and I was working on interviews there. I also got a call from my wife when I was on that trip and she told me she was pregnant.

And that was kind of like the thing that really put me off the rails for a while.

And I was also making music at the time
and when I found out she was pregnant,
I was in the middle of trying to make
yet another ridiculously elaborate
"I Come to Shanghai" album that took forever to finish.
But as far as why it came out this past year,
you know, it was something I had picked out here and there
over the years, not very successfully.
I kind of lost my nerve.
I felt like I didn't know what I was doing anymore.
I just, I didn't have confidence in myself.
And the stories that I was trying to do in that episode
were really some of the more elaborate stories
that ever tried before, like trying to weave together
a lot of different interviews and stuff.
I don't know, but what really pulled me out
was I have this friend, Grant Stewart,
who I met in Athens, Georgia when I lived there.
He worked at a little art house,
movie theater called Cine in town there,
and I was buying a ticket one day,
and he goes, "Hey, are you Robert Ashley
"from A Life Well Wasted?"
And I was like, "Why, yes I am."
It's the only time that's ever happened to me my whole life.
I'm not a famous person, but we became a,
we became friends after that and he ended up moving to New York and becoming
like a regular worker in the podcasting business.
He edits and does various things for show, you know,
lots of shows including running his own fiction podcast called Milky Way
underground.
And he kind of made it his mission to pull me out of hiding and started like
giving me little things to do.
Like I helped him with his fiction show,
Milky Way Underground, he cast me as a character.
And it was like a tween,
like a weird tween mystery show that was,
funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.
They had this whole group of shows that were aimed at,
at like 12 to 16 year olds vaguely.
It was like a sort of a attempt to get younger kids
into podcasting and yeah, I don't know.
I did some work with it, including,
I did a trailer that was like a sort of in the vein
of something that I would do on A Life Well Wasted
where I got some music from the show
that had already been written
and I sort of like edited around the music
to create a trailer.
And it was the first thing I'd done in a while
where I was like, oh yeah, I forgot
that I used to do this kind of thing. Uh, and I don't know,
he just kind of worked on me until I got my confidence up. And once I,
once I sort of finished, uh, one of the stories,

I just had some momentum going and yeah, I set a deadline, which deadlines are really important to me, although very hard for me to meet if I set them myself. And that was how I eventually got this thing out so many years later.

- Well, I guess we should thank your friend for pulling you back into this space.

But what, did you, had you started editing it at, I guess over the years, there was a file somewhere, right? Or did you start from scratch all over again?

- Oh no, yeah, I didn't start from scratch, man.

I mean, like, I really, I had a ton of material, especially for the third story in that episode, which was about the kids growing up making their own Sierra online game inspired by Dragon, go ahead, inspired by--

- King's Quest. - King's Quest.

- That's what I call it, I call it the King's Quest story.

'Cause that story is mind blowing.

I re-listened to the whole back catalog before our show here just to kinda refresh myself, including episode eight, and I still can't believe that story.

I've listened to it twice now.

- That's my favorite story I've ever done.

it really hits all the all the notes that I that I like to hit like it's it's not you know, there's video game stuff going on in it. But it's not about that. It's a it's like a story about a friendship. And it's funny and a little bit sad. And just like the guys that I was talking to, they're very open with me. And I just got good material, which is, which is the best, but I had a lot of it and

I'd never, you know, I had like interviews where it's three, it's three guys. And I had interviews where I interviewed them separately, and then a couple of them together. And then I talked to other people for the story. And it was just very, I had a hard time imagining it. So for a while I was, I was just cutting this stuff down. And I actually remember one time, years ago, when

I still lived in Athens, working on it, and I was doing like rough edits with a steam controller on my living room, because I was just sure I was just trying to like make myself work on it any way I could. I was really intimidated by it. And, and so I started while my my little guy was napping, I would, I would do like rough edits on the TV. But for a long time, it was just sort of I had cut it down to various clips, and I had arranged them in a way that made some sort of sense. I had even maybe three years ago, done a couple of like musical things that maybe that actually ended up in it. But yeah, it wasn't until I finished, um, the Soviet arcade story before that, that, that, uh, that I was able to, to really dig in there.

And that was a little bit more of a manageable story for me. Uh, yeah,

I did do work on it over the years, but it wasn't like,
it wasn't like I put hundreds of hours into it before the finishing thing.
It was more like I would open it up and listen and be like, what the fuck?
I can't do this. Um, and just really,
I just lost confidence in myself entirely. Um, and, and I,
and it was across the board and everything I was doing and music and everything.
I just, I just hit like the 40 like bad zone midlife crisis,
I guess you could say. Uh, and,
and I had to work my way back to having some confidence in it.
I'm glad that you've built that confidence back up,
'cause you have something really great to offer.
You're a storyteller in a way.
Other people are telling you stories,
and then you share those with the world,
and you put your narrative flair on it,
not just the way you cut it up and splice it,
but the way you weave music into it,
and vibe, you know, put it all together.
It just makes it, it elevates.
What a story a guy could be telling you at a bar
is elevated when it's spliced up
into the narrative that you,
the tapestry you make, I guess.
You know, what I'm--
- Yeah, yeah.
I know, I know, and that's the power of radio
and what I love about it.
But there are a lot of decisions to be made along the way.
Like for example, in that story,
I stumbled into that because Anna Kipnis,
who was a programmer at Double Fine. I was at GDC.
She's a friend of mine and she's like, Hey,
I want to introduce you to this guy Brian Gibson, um, who is in,
in the band lightning bolt, who I had seen, who I love.
I wouldn't say I'm like a huge fan of the band,
but I had a crazy experience seeing them at an Oakland warehouse show,
um, in my early thirties. And I, they were like a famous band to me.
And so I was like, Oh wow, what are you doing at GDC?
And we were hanging out and everything.
And so one of the decisions I had to make was like,
how much of the context of this do you need to know at the start?
Do you need to know that he's in this band that some people know about?
Does that matter? When do you reveal that?
When do you reveal that the, that, you know,
this game that they planned as kids you know,
that they never heard back from Sierra,
when do you reveal that they found these, these elements in the next game?
just as far as what to withhold, what to tell,
what was important, all those things are,
it's just like, it takes a while to work through
what's important to the story, I guess.
Now I feel like now that I've done that work,
maybe I could approach things more quickly
and efficiently, you know?

- Yeah.

There's a pace to it, a cadence in the story
that you're telling, and I guess when you sat down
With all you know, you're all this you're figuring out the story
what

What was it like to just I'm gonna tackle it now like this is I've got the confidence I'm ready

Let's tell this let's tell the story

It was really just that I had reached a point with the construction of the narrative itself

Where it was just a bunch of clips?

laid out in my audio editing program. I use Reaper.

Um, and I had already,

I occasionally when I, whenever I lose interest or flag,

I'll like play with a musical thing.

And I had already done a couple of like the musical set pieces in it.

And so I basically just started once I felt like, okay, this is the story.

I'm going to go in here and finish it.

And then I just went like front to back and kind of did all of the musical

arranging and final edits, cutting out things that, you know,

didn't need to be there and doing all the like little micromanagement of time

that I do, which probably strikes people as like,

uh, I dunno, excessively detailed if they,

if they knew what I was doing, but I think the effect of it is important.

Like I really, I edit in a lot of space into how people talk.

Most people when they,

when you interview them will run all over themselves speaking,

they will interrupt themselves, go on tangents.

In general speak too fast for someone to absorb what they're saying.

And so I do a lot of like editing in silence or editing in music,

in music to slow things down so that as a listener, you can fully absorb what's being

said. And yeah, just that you when you say the cadence, it really is like a rhythm of

things and it doesn't it's not defined by by a beat or sometimes it is if it's music,

but most of the time it's just what I what I feel like I need to hear to make it hit

or whatever to make it make sense. And that,

that part actually doesn't take that much time. That was like the finishing

process. And that took, you know,

maybe for the third story,

it took me like two weeks to,

to finish all the details,

including like outrageously detailed shit,

like hand editing every moment of, of,

of syllabants. You know, like if you're talking to a microphone very close,

I've got a pop screen on, but you get like,

sometimes you get these strong S sounds or you'll get big pops and stuff.

And I had a bunch of those in that story and I would just go,

instead of using a DSR, which sounds like crap to me,

I would go and just edit each instance of it to sound right.

And just doing little things like that, which is, you know,

it's a lot and nobody really does that, but that's just how I work.

- I feel like I'm not a musician, so I can't,

I use applications to help with that process for me.

I don't have that musician's ear,

but I do take a lot of pride in at least making

certain things, my shows, sound as good as they can

on my end, and so you and I were recording with real,

I would say real microphones or professional microphones, but you know, not everyone does.

Some people just use the headphone microphone that came with their phone seven years ago.

And it's like, well, what can I do to fix that?

And I do take time to try and fix background echo or things like that.

I guess people don't notice

'cause then the problem isn't there.

But then if, I take pride in those types of edits.

- Yeah, yeah.

It doesn't matter to me, it's not about sound quality, it's more like, does it get in the way?

Is it distracting?

And I often use sources that don't sound very good.

I mean, there are many pre-pandemic internet interviews

I did on Skype when the audio quality was really bad.

And I would just like mess with it

till it sounded all right to me.

I have nice mics 'cause yeah,

I was recording a band and everything

and we put a lot of money into that stuff.

but my, my like field recording setup was an original zoom

H two it's like 15 years old.

And I, for the first episode, the first couple of episodes,

I only use the stereo mics in it, which are a small diaphragm condensers.

And they, they pull in a lot of background sounds.

So like if you listen to the first episode and I'm on a roof of this party,

you can just hear the mission district in San Francisco, all the,

(imitates air horn)

It's totally noisy and loud.

Eventually some film person who listened to the show

was like, "Dude, I had to send this to you.

"You need to use this for your interviews."

And it was a shotgun mic.

And so I started using a shotgun mic with a foam

windscreen on it, and that's how I do my interviews now.

But yeah, you work with what you get,

and the most important thing is the material.

I mean, if you get good material, if it sounds bad,

you just need to make it like, hearable, understandable.

It's much more important to get good material

than it is to get good sound, I think.

- Oh yeah, 'cause that's what we're there for, right?

It's the stories, the peep, what,

the sound of the pinball arcade.

You know, the balls shooting up the machine

and the springs and the kids running around.

or the Soviet arcade, you can hear a boy running

at one point, it's texture.

So it's not like the cleanest sound.

It's putting you in a place, it's putting you in a room

with these people even though it's just coming

through your speakers.

- Yeah, I mean in that one, the Soviet arcade, it's funny, it's very similar to the pinball arcade story in the second episode, but I was using the shotgun mic, and so there wasn't actually a lot of bleed on stuff, but I made a bunch of field recordings and I ended up using them overlaid because it was a little trick for being able to heavily edit everything. 'Cause I was speaking to people who, most of them weren't really great English speakers, but they were willing to try with me and so there's a lot of moments that had to be cut, but I used all this noise around us to make it feel natural. And while giving you a sense of being in that space, which was hella noisy and full of all kinds of weird arcade sounds that I'd never heard before, even though I'm a big arcade game fan, 'cause it was all stuff I'd never been around before.

- Yeah. - Yeah.

- I'm thinking back to that story, that sense of place, you even give the audience directions to the arcade, Lennon's Tomb, you're like, "Turn around, there's a Gucci store."

And then all these other high, Like you paint a picture of a place with words, like I've never been to Moscow, but I feel like if I was there at Linden's Teane, I could get to this arcade based off--

- You could, yeah.

- What you said.

It's--

- Yeah.

- It's a mind's eye thing.

- Yeah, no, you know the narration stuff is another thing that I struggled with a lot.

I don't love to hear myself speak, and I have always struggled with wanting to, to sound kind of spontaneous versus written. So I had to write and record that stuff a few times to get the right feeling.

I had to write it, but then basically internalize it and improvise it after doing it several times.

And yeah, that's the thing that I'm working on, getting better at.

- Yeah, that was a weird story too because when I recorded it, it was 2017 when I was in Moscow.

My wife had a conference, she's an academic.

She had a conference in Moscow

and there was an opportunity for me to come along and I was just like, man, I gotta find something cool like while I'm here and I'd remember reading about that arcade and so I had that opportunity.

But years and years later when I finally did it,

the war in Ukraine had started,
and I was like, man, how does this,
like, how do I deal with that?
Do I need to say anything?
Is this, you know,
does it need to be part of the story?
And I decided that it was more important
just to kind of have a record of the fact that,
you know, when I was there,
it was full of human beings who were,
you know, nice, good people,
and like, look at where we are now.
I'm sure that that place doesn't get full
of patrons these days.
And it's just sad to think that things like that
aren't accessible.
I mean, no one's even going to Moscow anymore.
I wouldn't go to Moscow right now.

- Yeah.

- The borders in Europe are closed to Russia
for the most part, and people are dying
and it's fucked up.

It's weird to make a story in that political environment,
but I just sort of kept it focused on the human element
and let it speak for itself, I guess.

- Yeah, I like the context you provided.

I actually like the way you talked about, how'd you say it?
He dabbled, he dabbled with invading the, I like that.

That was, it felt good to me.

- Well, from an American point of view, I think,
from an American point of view,
I think most people think of the Ukraine situation
as having started this past year,
but I mean, Crimea happened years before that,
and it happened before I went.

They had already taken Crimea
by the time I went to the arcade.

So I just wanted to not
leave that unsaid or whatever.

I didn't want anybody to feel like
I was giving them a pass or something.

- Yeah, no, I think it's appropriate context
that doesn't weigh it down,
and it's there, and then you focus, like you said,
on the people in the place and the people behind you
maintaining this history.

- And a lot of the talk is about certain deprivations
that happened during authoritarian rule previously.
Part of what's great about what people love about those games
is that it was their first taste of things
that were just purely for joy and fun,
like having access to something just for entertainment,
because that was not an expectation of Soviet life
for a lot of that time.

And things are turning bad again,
and I don't know if everybody has the same access
to things they used to have there, but yeah.
- What, how is, you mentioned you found out
your wife was pregnant when you were at that GDC.
How has having your kids impacted the way you look at
and I guess produce the show and look for stories?
Have your kids shifted the way that you look
at a story you wanna tell on the show?
- Not really as far as I still,
I'm always just looking for the same thing,
which is just some interesting person who's very open
and maybe has like good stories to tell, you know,
and I'm always looking for things to be either funny or sad.
I like a little bit of like intellectual discussion
here and there, but I definitely can't go on
very long with that.
I need some feelings in it or something.
the kids mainly the mainly what it changes for me is just forcing
me to get a little more a little more
organized and like to work in a more rational,
reasonable way. I can't just stay up all night or
I can't just get distracted from life and focus on it entirely.
So I have to do it in little chunks,
which is hard for me because I'm kind of a inspiration driven person.
And I don't like to think of it as a job.
So I, yeah, the one thing I would say is my nine year old
has become interested in the show and really wants
to participate in making an episode with me.
And I'm not sure what that could mean,
but you know, he wants to participate in making dinner too.
that generally means like mixing the batter or, you know, I,
I just like, I guess I could teach him to, to like,
DS the audio, like here's, you know,
pull this down. This is, this is, this is the plosive. Just pull it down.
How's it sound to you now? Here's the before, here's the after.
He's he's, he's interested though. So I'll probably let him in on it.
Yeah. But otherwise it hasn't affected the stories I'm
looking for. I do.
Having kids recontextualizes video games for me.
I noticed things about games that I never noticed before.
Like my nine year old is playing breath of the wild.
And because I played that game when I was, you know,
38 or 39 or something, I just,
my experience with it is so different. I got in there and I was just like,
all right, let's go to work. Let's get through this Zelda game.
Like I've played every Zelda game. Let's hit this shit up.
And he's playing it and to him it's like the world's
largest backyard or something.
He doesn't care about progress at all,
he just loves the environment of being out in nature.
I now see that of course, like so many of these things
that in the nerd world we assume are aimed at us,
the grownups, it's really like for a kid

it's a magical place.

You get the freedom to travel around
in a beautiful, natural environment with total freedom.
Kids don't get that.

So I do notice games in a different light,
but it hasn't affected the stories I'm after just yet.

- That reminds me of a quote, I forget specifically,
who was probably on Anuma from Zelda,
but they were talking about the first time
and they showed Miyamoto the Breath of the Wild,
like the build, this is back on the Wii U or whatever.

And I guess Miyamoto just spent all this time
climbing the trees and picking the apples,
which is not what I did in Zelda and not what you did,
but it is that childlike wonder of,

"I can do this, and I have this freedom
"to explore this place and just collect a bunch of fruit."

That sounds fun.

He's, I mean, he definitely has a singular view about play.

He's someone who has a strong sense of what it means to play.

Whereas I think for someone who grows up playing games,
we get really into these systems and I just immediately like, okay,
fill out the map, climb the tower, beat the shrine. You know,
I go immediately into like checklist mode,
even though that game doesn't require that of you at all.

I've just been like had my mind shaped by previous games.

You know, I wish I played it in a in a chiller way like that.

I, so I actually worked on, helped with the guide for that game over at IGN.

So as a part of that team, and so my job with that game was to be kind of
pragmatic of here we go, here's how we're going to find, they assigned me before
the internet found out what you get for collecting all 900 core ox seeds.

Like for a for like a week, my job was to map the core ox seats, which was horrendous.

Dude.

Oh man.

I like, I don't envy that at all.

I, I don't envy it now either.

That's like a, you know, I, I used to, I used to write video game reviews back in the day for like
electronic gaming monthly and some other, uh, game magazines.

And their policy was that you had to beat the game. And so there,
there were times and you know,

it was back in the day when we got stuff like really early, you know,
you'd get like a two month lead time on a game,

but it would destroy the fun of playing some really cool games. Like,

I still remember feeling so stressed out about finishing that,

um, Zelda, like a commie, you know, the dog cap,

Yeah, very cool looking game, but man, if you only have like five days to get through it, it's long
and

you know, you got to write a review on top of it. It was just all the stress of playing games in
that way. It was no fun at all and I was so glad to like get back into games when I was done
having to play games in that way. Yeah, I'm excited for Tears of the Kingdom because I don't
I don't have to work for it.

I can do whatever, I can take as long as I want
to beat that game.

- Yeah, and if I'm gonna beat it,

it's gonna take me a year anyway.

(laughs)

I don't really have time.

- Yeah, who knows what my time will look like.

I guess with the baby, at six months, it'll be okay.

I'll probably still be okay.

I don't have to take her too many places.

- I got a lot of games played during the early years, especially, there was this wonderful year or two there was a long afternoon nap and every afternoon, that was when I played Breath of the Wild and Metal Gear Solid 5,

I was like tanking through those games.

I mean, you just need a couple hours a day.

I just can't seem to find that now for some reason and my kids are playing games constantly.

- My time is that early morning,

it's 'cause I don't wanna take away time

from my family in the evening,

so I wake up early and play is generally my time.

We'll see how long that lasts, but that's where I'm at.

- I like sleep too much.

(laughing)

- I just go to bed early.

I'm just an old man like that, I guess.

- Yeah.

- Is 10 o'clock early?

I don't know, that's kind of--

- 10 o'clock's early, man.

- Yeah, that's the average lately.

- 10 o'clock's early.

(laughing)

I try to get to sleep by midnight.

- Okay, we'll see how my life shifts as she gets older and older.

I wanted to go back,

now where we've talked about kind of the more recent episode, the most recent episode.

I want to go back to the beginning and I'm, you know, googling around Robert Ashley, finding all this stuff and your giant bomb profile for, you have a giant bomb profile, I guess.

You do apparently. They talk about how you used to be on GFW radio, which I had never heard of, 97.5 the Brodio, I guess. But this particular profile informs me of what they call an out of the box episode of GFW Radio, which essentially was like the first episode zero of Life Well Wasted. And so I wanted to see if you, I wanted to maybe try and take you back so you should be able to hear this I will see we'll start uh okay with my favorite quote

- That was all Sean Elliott, like that whole thing.

I mean, there would have, there's, and then in another universe,

I would have made a radio show with him

and it would have been like video game jackass or something.

It like, it's, he's really funny.

And that was his whole idea.

We were pretending to be, you know,

have you ever been approached outside of a mall

or something by a consumer survey?

And they're like, can we talk to you?

Would you be interested in playing a game called the founding fighters?

If it had moves like the Knickerbocker Shocker.

The Knickerbocker Shocker kills me.

The fact it's Alexander Hamilton's before obviously the musical and like him as a founding father blew up in popularity.

I'm picturing Lin-Manuel doing the Knickerbocker Shocker.

Yeah, man,

that was just like an off episode where we had been recording at the Ziff Davis office, and they had a little podcasting setup. And it was very early in the podcasting thing. I mean, when they started podcasting there, everyone's attitude at the magazines was like, what is this shit? We don't have time, we have a magazine to make, like, who wants to even listen to us talk about video games. And then the audience response was enormous, like way more than anyone ever, you know, online ever

talked about in the magazine, like we do all this work on the magazine and people would just be on the on, you know, the gaming forums being like, wow, this this week's episode was great. And it was just some thing we like knocked out, hanging out for an hour or whatever. So it was a weird adjustment. But the one week we didn't have access or something.

And I decided that I would be the producer on it. And so we did some things like that, like some man on the street stuff.

And I can't even remember what all it was, but yeah, the other games were, there was like some call duty calls was like a call of duty thing.

But the whole thing was that the game, like we kept on telling people that the characters were like real life size instead of small.

Full size guys, not tiny guys zoomed in on us.

Yeah. Like we're not zoomed in on tiny.

I just, something about the ridiculousness of that,

Like how big is a video game character?

I don't know.

I guess that's what VR is now.

VR is like big tech.

It's like, wow, things are big now.

(laughing)

But yeah, that was hilarious.

I miss that guy.

I haven't talked to him much.

He's like a,

I don't know if he's the creative director of the new "BioShock" game.

He's like high up in the new "BioShock" there.

- Okay. - Yeah.

- Holy smokes.

There was also Tender Rondo, the Delicate Saga.

(laughing)

And Wall Cart, where you had fat people on carts in Walmart, but you had to get out of the cart to reach the top shelf.

- Yeah, that one might be regrettable.

Sean had a real interest in, I don't know,

but some not so nice looks at America, I would say.
He definitely thought America was full of fat,
crazy people or something and enjoyed the humor.
But yeah.

- It was, at first I thought it was like,
at first I couldn't tell, I was like,
"Tender, Ron, what is this?"

And then you get to duty calls, which was an ask,
like, "Oh my gosh, they are just these poor people
"they're talking to."

(laughing)

- And we're standing outside of a GameStop.
Like, we were approaching people going into GameStop
with a little clipboard and everything.
It was really silly.

- This is another particular moment,
which I think is more a life well wasted tune,
but also has another line I love.

- Probably 10.

- Okay, halfway there.

- It was 10 out of 20.

(laughing)

♪ Lock and load, duty calls ♪

♪ Surefire shooting, guts and balls ♪

♪ Online mode, baby best of all ♪

Big tag graphic, they have it small.

They have it small.

(laughing)

- No.

- It's so funny, but that's,
I assume you're the one making the song,
like the music to it and kind of,
I assume that would have been you, right?

- Yeah, no, it was me.

It was the drum track from an "I Come to Shanghai" song
that actually made it on record.

The first album, the last song on the first album,
Do We Have to Rise Again? It was just the drum track and it's
just like, I don't know what I did. It sounds like I compressed
the living fuck out of it. Like the kick drums like, bong, bong,
bong. I don't know what that is. But yeah, and he had, Sean had
an obsession with some rapper, I can't remember who I thought I
was not into it. But he had a voice like that. He sounded like
a mean hobo or something.

He would rap in that voice.

I can't remember the guy's name.

Not my thing, but Sean's version of it was pretty good
and he would do that on the GFW radio show pretty often.

- That's so funny.

I had never known about that and so part of my realism
was to go back and hear essentially the inception
of a life well wasted to a degree of interviewing people.
just how Stranger said it came stop.

- Which I gotta say also, GFW Radio,

I think the reason why we ended up being called the Brodio was they changed the name of our magazine from Computer Gaming World, which was a classic, long-standing computer gaming magazine that had been operating for like 20 years, to Games for Windows Magazine, which was sponsored by Microsoft.

And yeah, and Games for Windows was this initiative that they had at Microsoft.

Everyone at the magazine was like, this sucks.

And so no one really wanted to be called GFW, so we just had some stupid name for it.

- Oh my gosh. - Yeah.

- It's such an interesting time to think and look back at.

And I actually, it's probably a good segue.

Your first episode of Life Well Wasted was the death of EGM, essentially the death of these magazines

you used to work for and that idea and this is a bit longer of a quote I don't remember specifically you were talking to here but the gist was it's all about quick hits and and things like that and so a few American print mags left but it's obviously you know coming to an end yeah do you think do you think that we're gonna miss out on anything do you think that there's anything that isn't gonna make the jump to to the internet well I'm I'm worried about it because because more and more you're seeing a focus with internet media about being like quick hits.

Like very short content, easily digestible, easily distributable.

Like if you're on Twitter, if you're on Facebook status updates, like I have this really quick link of a top 5 or a top 10, you don't really have to invest too much time or brain power in trying to figure it out.

I think that's happening with us and it's really, you know, it's really sad. Yeah. Happened.

I feel like that's more true today than ever. Yeah. I mean, well, nobody has reading habits anymore.

Like social media is not where you get to read. I mean, I occasionally, because I follow a bunch of publications will come off of a Twitter link into like a 3000 word story that I actually read, but something tells me that's not a common experience.

And in general, if you're just trying to get someone to show up at your website for a second, it's better to just lead with some silly thing that people might click on.

Yeah, that stuff is gone, and some of it I don't miss.

Honestly, the fact that for the past 10 years on Twitter and Facebook, we've all been just shouting our opinions at each other has made me, I don't know, much less interested in people's opinions.

And so I just don't, yeah, it's hard to see where the place of the classic critic is in video games.

I do read video game reviews that impress me and inform my thinking, but it happens very rarely, you know what I mean?

And it's only a few writers who really managed to nail that and they must do it with almost no incentive 'cause there's really no great career

to be had out there for it.
It's not like if you do really well in that environment
that you're gonna have a good job
where you can raise a family and buy a house.
It's out of just pure interest on the part of the writer,
which is cool, but when I was working for magazines,
those things paid well.

That was a good job, and that stuff is gone.

- Oh yeah, that was what I was trying to do
when I was getting ready to graduate college,
was like, oh, I'm gonna go to California,
I'm gonna work for IGN and play games,
write reviews, do all this stuff.

And I met my wife, which is the best thing
that ever happened to me, and then,
Obviously didn't end up doing that
'cause it impacted the both of us
and I don't know how anyone affords
to live in California period.

So we just never went and now,
I don't know how anyone still does it out there,
but I just get to do it for myself now.

This is why I started this, the blog thing,
you know, a couple of years ago.

It's just like, I just want a place to write
that's not 280 characters and say what I wanna say
and as many words as I need to say it
and then just put it out there.

And if someone wants to read it, they can,
and if not, fine by me.

That's kind of the idea.

- Yeah, yeah.

Well, I mean, I think that when there's more community
around things, which could happen again
as Twitter falls apart and people move
to more community-minded alternatives like Mastodon,
I can imagine there being at least more of an audience.

The thing is it just becomes another one of these areas
where people do work for free and someone
who has nothing to do with it ends up profiting from it.
And that's very irritating to me.

But yeah, I mean, it's the same situation with music where
if you're not Taylor Swift,
like why are you even trying to make a living for me?

(laughs)

It's just impossible.

And the people I know who are working musicians,
I mean, they are working,
like if they were working in the private sector,
you would say they were like workaholic exploited people,
but they're exploiting themselves,
just putting in the maximum amount of time and effort
they can so that they can make the rent.

And it's just, damn, man, it's a hard way to get it done.

- Yeah, props to the people out, like you said earlier, the grind, they are grinding.

- I think the grind is a terrible culture, but if you're grinding for yourself, I'm cool with it. Like if you wake up in the morning because you've got something you wanna do and it's your business, it's your project, and it's not for some dickhead or some company, then yeah, do it.

That's great. - I agree.

I totally agree.

That's, I did that, I've done it quite a few times, but I wrote this big history on Naughty Dog, which no one would publish today, really.

It was like 18,000 words.

And I was waking up and writing it in the morning.

It was that, I think back then I was waking up at three, 'cause I'd have to go drive down to Disney for work.

So that's an hour, it was an hour one way, so two hours a day in the car, eight hours at the office.

It was like the only time to write it would have been at home.

And so I just, I did the rise part of the grind.

- Yeah, wow. - Just to write that.

And that was for me.

- What were you doing at Disney?

- I was a technical writer.

So the maintenance manual's for attractions.

My explanation to people is like,

Space Mountain goes down, the maintenance folks would read our manual was the idea.

Yeah, yeah. So I did that for a few years and then I left last year. So during the pandemic, we had to work from home and did our jobs from home, but then they wanted everyone to start coming back in. And so when you take the two-hour commute, we had found out during the time of

of working from home that we were pregnant, and it was like, well, working from home was like getting a raise, 'cause I stopped spending \$250 on gas a week and however much in tolls, so now they wanna take all that back.

So I switched, I still do technical writing just now for a military subcontractor that's 10 minutes down the road but I can work from home and whatnot.

So I do the same thing just for a different company and more money, but.

- I just don't understand the point of bringing technical writers into an office.

What is the point?

That doesn't make any fucking sense.

It's all like, it's a back and forth in text between you and some other editor, right?

Like, what is the point?

- The idea of it would be the spontaneity of talking to an engineer, but that never happens because the engineers, or as Disney would want you

to call them the Imagineers, were so busy,
like you always had to schedule time to talk with them
or email them the thing to review
and then hound them to comment back.

- And they probably had a strong preference
for you just emailing them, I imagine.

- Yeah, I'm sure I've annoyed
quite a few engineers in my time.

And so the idea was, well you could just walk over there.

And it's like, well we never just walk over there.

We always schedule it.

And if I have to schedule it, I'll happily come in.

One of the things you have to do on site

is take pictures of things, 'cause you can't,

You have to be there to take a picture or something.

But that was always the coolest part of the job.

'Cause you get to go into Hollywood studios

at two in the morning and no one's in the park.

And so then you get to see things

that no one else would get to see and that's so fun.

So that was always my favorite part of the job

was taking pictures of stuff 'cause you get to--

- Yeah, that's cool.

- Yeah, that was like the best part of it.

And see things backstage and all sorts of.

I've been on the roof of the Chinese Theater,

which is a very cool place.

You know?

I'm the only person on Main Street at Disney World.

Like that never happens in daylight.

- Yeah, that's dreamy, strange, hard to imagine.

Yeah. - It is weird.

And then I would also take the big fancy camera

and take pictures while I'm walking around

for myself as well, 'cause you know,

when it's all decked out for Christmas,

you can get some pretty cool shots

without any people on the way.

It's fun. - People, yeah, yeah.

That's cool.

- Yeah, there were good parts of that job,

but also the whole please come back to the office

"Don't take more money."

I was like, "Oh, I don't know if I wanna do more."

- It's probably just an excuse to get rid of the older people

and just get new fans, 'cause that's what all of these

companies rely on, they have people who just really

wanna work there and then they burn through them

and get new ones.

- Yeah, and I worked there because it was an interview

and it was a job and at the time I was working

at a grocery store.

I like Disney, I'm probably more jaded now

than I was before I worked for them,

but I go see a Disney movie.
I like stuff they make,
but I'm not this woohoo Mickey Mouse.
(laughing)

Defend the mouse. - Well, there are those people
and I had a friend in college
who spent every summer working in Disney World
and his whole life aspiration was just to work there
no matter what.

And I bet he doesn't work there now,
but I don't know.

- Probably not.

pandemic has been particularly difficult for the theme park side of things.

It's, it was interesting. But speaking of, I guess,
Hollywood, there's a Tetris movie coming out,
which is a very weird thing to say. And I just, you have an episode,
I think it's, it might be big ideas.

I think it is big ideas where you talk to him. Um, Oh,
Hank, the guy who basically has the right Rogers. Yes.
He has the rights to Tetris along with the creator.

I just wanna know, do you think that the people
working on the movie have listened to your episode?

- I wonder, I mean, I--

- 'Cause your episode tells the story.

- Yeah, yeah, I don't, somewhere along the line,
I wouldn't be surprised if someone had heard that.

But I imagine they have access to Hank.

I mean, that guy's definitely been shopping around
his, his story. I, I, I, he just seems like he,
he's been looking for a venue for it or something.

Cause he's got great stories and I'll tell you a funny thing about,
about that episode, which was, you know,
you already mentioned that there's a,
and there's a story at the end of it. Um, with,
gosh, what, uh, what's, what's, uh,

I'm struggling here to remember his named, uh, Jonah Falcon, Jonah Falcon.

- I knew it was a J name.

- Yeah, Jonah Falcon was a game blogger,
sort of famous on the internet,
but mainly famous for supposedly having the largest penis,
documented, and so I interviewed him and made a story
about how this guy had sort of built his whole identity
around having a really big dick.

And it's in the same episode as the Hank Rogers story
about Tetris, and so after it came out,
I got a PR email from one of his media people
that was like, we would like to request
that you take down this episode
or remove the interview with Hank,
who does not wanna be associated with this other story.
And I was like, no, sorry.

And they didn't push beyond that,
but they didn't really have anything to say.

I don't give anyone a heads up on what's gonna happen.

So that's the only negative, actually that episode in general,
I got some feedback from Jonah and I have,
I have like regretted from time to time,
some of the presentation of his story,
because I think it's a little too having fun with him.
I always want people to feel like fairly drawn in a story.
Like I want them to hear a story and be like, yeah, that's me. And that's,
that's what I'm about. You know? And I think I had a little too much fun with him,
but it was hard to resist because it's strange
to meet someone whose whole thing is having a big penis.
- Yeah, I tried finding his blog, you know?
Now, you search his name, you can't find anything except--
- Yeah, no, it's what he, he took a weird life path
to choose to become known for that
while not doing porn or anything.
He doesn't show people that,
but he wants to talk about it
and wants to be known for it.
And I think it's just that he got a lot of attention
from an early age, and some of it not so good, honestly.
I mean, he lost his virginity
to some random neighborhood girl
who heard about his endowment
and he was much older than him.
And the kind of stuff that you hear about now
and be like, "Oh, that's not okay."
And he just got a lot of attention for it.
And I thought that it was a worthy story.
I just think maybe I could,
when he wrote back, he said he was getting some
trolling responses from people online about it.
And I didn't want people to abuse him or anything.
He's a nice guy.
He lives with his mom.
He's kind of a sweetheart.
He really just wants affection.
And yeah, I don't know.
But it was funny that they wanted me to take it down.
I'm interested to see the Tetris movie.
It seems a little more keyed up
than the story that he told me,
which was serious enough.
It's definitely a dicey situation
to walk in the Soviet Union
and try to get the commercial rights
for some intellectual property.
That's kind of audacious,
and they were lucky that they got it.
- Yeah, it effectively changed his life forever.
- Yeah.
- I mean, I was just playing Tetris yesterday.
- Yeah, that game will never pass,
unless there's no electricity.
If we really hit the dark ages again,

we'll have to retreat back to chess or something,
Tetris is a permanent feature of humanity at this point, I think.
That was part of, I actually, I wrote the Tetris Effect review for Dual Shockers back
in the day when that game launched.
And that was part of my angle, essentially.
My grandmother introduced me to Tetris.
She had the Game Boy with the cartridge, right?
And that was my first exposure to it.
And she eventually, she became sick with dementia and she passed away a few years ago.
I was playing this Tetris effect,
which is kind of this whole thing of weaving music
and lights and sounds and effects,
and then connecting the world together to do stuff.
So it's not just Tetris,
it's this whole experience, right?
And I remember, it might be the closing paragraph,
or essentially it was just like,
Tetris is a language we all speak, essentially, these days.
And my grandmother was a part of that,
and she passed, you know, it was at the time
probably a way for me to memorialize her in some way,
even though it was associated with a video game,
which was the angle.
But yeah, Tetris is never, ever, ever going away.
- Yeah, a few games have reached that kind of ubiquity,
I feel like, and they dress it up in various ways,
but it's really the same game, you know?
And I guess maybe it's analogous to a card game
that has been played for a long time, like poker,
I don't know.
But it would be interesting to see
in what ways people play Tetris 100 years from now.
I'm sure they will.
- Oh yeah, I mean we're already at VR Tetris,
so I don't know what's next.
I don't know.
- Yeah, I mean you look up and the Tetris field
is like a skyscraper or something.
The scale of VR stuff is what interests me.
Like we were joking about the big tech or whatever,
but it would be cool for Tetris pieces
to be the size of a car and you're like,
they're falling down.
But maybe you don't even need that kind of stimulation.
Maybe we just need to pare it back to the most simple
Tetris and just enjoy the form for what it is.
It doesn't need much.
- No, the core of it, no.
- Yeah. - For sure not.
So one of the themes I kind of noticed, I guess,
in the way you've talked about a life well wasted
since over the years is you have this escalation
to yourself.
we kinda always were escalating the edit up, up, up, up.

Now that eight is done and you've said
you're working on the next episode,
whenever that'll come out, I'm excited to hear that.
Is it still escalating or are you just trying
to keep that in check?
Have you toned it back?
What's the vibe there?
- I'm not trying to escalate anything.
Now it's more like there are subtle things
that I would like to be better at.
And also just, like I'm in the material gathering portion,
so right now I'm really focused on
how much good material matters, you know?
And yeah, just getting good material is the whole thing,
and I'm trying to get in the mode of just taking in material
as much as possible whenever I can.
But yeah, I'm not looking,
there's not another level that I have in mind.
I mean, I would say I probably already reached
the absolute limits of my insanity like a long time ago.
In that same episode, the big ideas episode,
when I had people call in and leave messages
with their game ideas, and then I edited it all together
into like a song thing that I made.
That was like a manic episode that I had.
I, I, that, that took me like two weeks just to make that five minute thing.
And I can remember being up at like really weird hours and,
you know, just do all, all, just being totally obsessed with that thing.
Um, I, I'm still proud of it,
but I don't know that I'll ever go any crazier than that as far as like a collage
piece. Maybe, maybe I will, maybe I'll like get more and more comfortable.
I definitely have like a comfort with my software now.
Like I work on a computer that is 14 years old
and hasn't been updated since 2015 with any new software.
And I replaced the power supply in it
this past year successfully and it's still functioning.
And I just, I know everything.
I know how everything works in it.
I know what I like to use for all my sound stuff.
It's very, very, it's a great tool,
and so I'm prepared to do that stuff.
At the same time, I'm also, I'm working on a new series
with that same friend of mine, Grant Stewart,
that I mentioned.
- Yeah.
- And so I don't know that I have the time
to go deeper into production.
I'll probably just be struggling to maintain
my current level working on these shows concurrently.
concurrently. I would say my goal for a life well wasted is probably no more
intense than you know trying to get out at least an episode a year. Okay that's
like an episode an episode or two a year would be it would be great and honestly
like my poster guy Ali he doesn't really have time to do much more than that and
it's not really a business anyway it's like an art project for me that I want

to maintain. So, so yeah,
I would like to still keep some sort of regularity.
I kind of liked that it's an event when it comes out. I mean,
people probably like reward me for the wrong thing by me waiting for a long time.
There was a big response and I was like, Oh, well shit, I'll just keep waiting.
We've trained you the wrong way. Yeah, yeah, exactly. No, but I mean, I, I am,
I I've already done like many interviews in this past
couple of months. So I am gathering material and stuff and maybe,
maybe grant will get me in a situation where I can get,
get everything done more quickly.
I'm learning to collaborate with people since this has been entirely like my
singular thing on my own the whole time. So
that song that in the, it's the big ideas I give, that's, I guess the,
I, and that's also the episode I remember by the, the box compactor.
so I guess it's probably the one that sticks with me the most, but that and actually hear
memory too as well. They kick, memory kicks off with a song that you kind of take the
Super Mario 64 speed runner and his narrative of like up, forward, jump, turn, kick, and
you put that to the beat of the Super Mario music. And I think he even talks about you
keeping up with a click or the beat of the song and it reminded me of I'm gonna
say it wrong but George George O by more Mordor I don't know the third song on
random access memories by daft Punk however you say that but Giovanni Georgia
George every yeah Georgia Georgia George O room Giorgio Marotta the famous
Italian synth composer. Yeah, they take in that song, he says "I knew we needed a click"
so we put a click on the 24th track and they have it comes in behind him click
click click and you do the same thing. To make this more consistent we count the
beats of the background music so we can keep track of this click click click
click click click so for example you needed a beat beat beat and then you put Mario in
there and his instructions and it I remember starting the episode in the car
on the way to the grocery store and I was like Robert hasn't missed a step
the way you the way you weave your music into the stories I'm just I'm fascinated
by that process yeah like how you approach music with the show yeah well
- Well, I love that song.
I didn't think about that weirdly.
I mean, that's a radio story, that Daft Punk song.
That's a Daft Punk radio story and I'm standing by it.
I know exactly what you're talking about.
- It's like one of my favorite songs on that album.
- I hadn't thought about it.
'Cause they're kind of explaining how their music works,
what it means to be a composer.
There's a lot of story going on in that song.
But yeah, you know,
I actually tried to represent that guy's run
as closely as I could, 'cause he does,
it's a blindfolded speed run, which is an absurd thing
that I didn't even really realize happened
until this past year, and that's the only story
I was like freshly recorded for 2022 last year,
'cause I needed another like small story.
But yeah, I tried really hard to represent
what he actually does to the beat of the song.
The trouble being that the pace of it
is actually too fast to say everything to the beat.
And so I slowed down the song from the level.

It's like if you listen to it next to the original,
it's like pitch down.
It's because I actually have just time stretched it
by playing it at a lower play rate.
And then I worked with him to get him to say
exactly what his inputs were
for getting a star in this one level.
And that's a good example of how I use music
because I don't weave music into something.
I actually use music as the scaffold for the interview
or for the radio stuff.
I'll take on the rhythm of the music that I'm using.
And oftentimes it'll be something that I just stumble on
because I have in my audio editor software
a bunch of tracks of interviews, of sound clips,
and I'll just start putting music in there.
I have a big library of original music
that has already been made for the show.
occasionally I'll make something else, but in this,
in this case and in a lot,
I'll just sort of lay something under and I'll be like, oh,
that's actually got a,
that's actually got like a musical quality or, or,
or like in the story you're talking about, there's a,
there's a moment where I used a clip of, from a,
a stream of what is it? Games done quick.
It's a,
It's like kind of an online streaming show
where people do speed runs.
- Yeah.
- And I think it's actually for charity.
People are donating money and it goes to Child's Play
or something.
- They do it twice a year.
- Okay.
- For the Prevent Cancer Foundation and then
on Blink and on, they do two charities,
but yeah, one in the summer and one in the winter.
And that's also where I first learned
about blind speed runs.
The Zelda speed runner did Ocarina of Time,
which blew my mind.
- Yeah, that's wild.
I mean, I remember reading about that,
but wasn't that guy actually blind?
Like there was a guy who was really blind who had done--
- Yes. - Yes, okay.
- So that person was in touch.
The speedrunners helped develop strategies
to help that person beat the whole game.
So then the speedrunner then took that to GDQ
as like a showcase and also raised more money for charity.
But yeah, so the speedrunners helped this person
who is blind beat Ocarina of Time.

- Yeah, well, so I got this clip just as an introduction to the person I was talking to, Bubzia, the speedrunner, and he's got the guy who's running the stream, the game's on Quickstream, he's got a great broadcast voice and he's up there with this big voice and he says something where he's like, "Today, you know, I always like to show you something that you've never seen before, "but today you're gonna get to see something that the runner isn't even going to get to see it all. And there was something about the rhythm of his words as I was just listening to this thing and the thing where I was just like, Oh, you could loop this and it would be a perfect. It would be a perfect rhythm, you know, isn't even going to get to see it all, isn't it? And then I just started playing around with that. But it's usually, you know, I like to think of music as an act of listening, as opposed to composition. Like if you really wanna make something, or for me, if I really wanna make something that I will end up liking, it's gonna be because I've been listening to myself goof around and like, oh, I like this thing, what else can I find in it? And that was really a moment of just discovering music in the speech of a person, you know?

- So do you consider A Life Well Wasted to, I wrote it as like, to be, I come to Shanghai's sixth album? 'Cause you and your bandmate have made the music for the show over the years, and like you said, you have a library. Is this kinda like the sixth album, or did you--

- You know, I don't think that Sam, the other guy in the band would see it that way.

- Okay.

- You know, it's really, so when I first started making the record, I mean, when I first started making the podcast, he and I were working on our first album together, and we had some cast-off material that I was playing around with, and I used the name because it was us playing that stuff, and because it was just another way for people to hear that I made music, and you should check out what we were making.

And then after I started in on the series more and was going out of my way to make music, I used to get him to come into the studio, 'cause I'm not, I have a musical education now, but at that time, I really, I was like a primitive, I can play a lot of things, but I play by ear. He went to Berklee, and he's like a little music ideas generator, and so I could just bring him in and be like, Sam, play me some melodies.

(laughing)

"blah, blah, blah," you know, or "I need something that sounds Western."

"Blah, blah, blah," you know, he could help me sort of come up with things very quickly.

And we would work in a way that was very opposite from how we work on our music for our albums,

which would be to just like destroy ourselves, trying to make and remake things, always constantly rearranging and rewriting kind of perfectionist stuff.

Whereas when I would make music with him for the show, it was really like, Hey man, we got like 30 minutes. Let's let's like knock some stuff out. And I, and I ended up liking a lot of that stuff. And so it became a library.

I would say that there are three kinds of music that are in a life or wasted there's, there's the cast off B side material of,

I come to Shanghai that never made it into anything.

there's stuff that I asked him to help me write for the show.

And then there's stuff that I wrote on my own for the show and I just use the name. I mean, honestly, we're not really in contact with each other.

I didn't even tell him that this episode came out. I don't know if he knows, he's not really online. So yeah, it's not really,

I come to Shanghai at this point, but if it uses anything that I made with him,

I'm just going to keep using that name, you know? Yeah. But like I'm making music, original music for this new series. Um, and it's just me, you know,

I'm not going to use Robert Ashley. Yeah. Yeah. Or if you have your own solo,

do you just going to do musicians come up with their own names? Like a show?

They do. Yeah, sure. I mean that, that happens pretty often. Uh,

what about like a wise blood pops into my mind?

Like she was making solo records,

but calling herself variations on that name for awhile.

But yeah, I'll just keep my name in this case,

especially since, you know,

kind of hoping to attract some clients

for making music for other things, you know?

- Yeah.

You have it here that I certainly don't have, so.

- Yeah, well, we'll see.

I'm happy to be working on new stuff.

And we've already, we are working with a production company.

It's like a serious thing.

- Big thing.

- Yeah.

- Very cool.

I wanted to ask you, what does it feel like

to be entrusted with telling other people's stories?

I think after the first couple episodes,

you put calls to action out of,

if you've heard anything, let me know.

or tell me your story, and then you find things at GDC.

And so people come to you and they open up

and they just tell you these stories,

and I don't know if these people

tell these stories other places.

I mean, Jonah Falcon, of course, he told everyone.

But you know, like the King's Quest story,

I hadn't heard that before.

So what is it to feel like to be entrusted

to tell those stories?

- Well, so when you were asking earlier why I finally finished that last year.

I think a lot of people would have, I would have given up on an episode of a podcast that took eight years to make or however long it took to make.

But part of my feeling about needing to finish it was that they had entrusted me with that King's Quest story. It was, you know, great interviews.

No one had really told that story before and they had given that to me and I needed to like get it across the finish line.

And so, yeah, there's some responsibility that I feel when someone, especially when someone tells me like a great story that, you know, someone who was, any like journalist worth their salt could turn into something worth reading or listening to. I feel like I need to do it.

I also, at the same time though, I collect a ton of material and sometimes, well, not sometimes, I would say like 60% of the material I collect doesn't end up going anywhere.

and I feel a little bit bad about it, but people like to talk for the most part and get a lot out of just having a conversation and someone who's interested in hearing them talk. I've had instances of interviewing people where when the interview was over, they couldn't stop.

That King's Quest interview, I'm trying to remember the second guy.

So not Brian Gibson, but his friend, gosh, I cannot remember his first name right now. Not the Bloomberg reporter in China, but the other guy. Anyway, when we did those recordings, it was during that GDC period, we had gone to Oakland and we were recording at a friend of mine's house and just hanging out, drinking beers.

And afterwards he had really enjoyed the interview so much that he heard that we were going to see a show that night at a space in Emeryville.

And he went to the show and then started chatting me up, telling me more and more of his personal story at the show. And I had to flee.

People like to talk.

And sometimes they just need someone to talk to.

And I'm happy to be that, but just not, you know.

- All the time.

- After it's done, you know.

(laughing)

Yeah, but it's great to,

I love the feeling of getting someone to open up.

I have strong memories of Jerry Ellsworth, who is an engineer and a really interesting person.

She worked at Valve for a while
on their augmented reality project.
Like Valve had VR and AR projects.

- Okay.

- And when they chose to go with the VR project
instead of the AR project,
they actually gave her all of her work
and let her walk away with her AR project,
which is it called Tilt 5?

Or am I confusing that?

They have this like AR glasses system
really for playing tabletop games.

- Tilt Five, yeah.

- Tilt Five, it's really cool.

I love the idea of augmented reality board games.

- It was on Kickstarter.

- Yeah.

- Okay.

- No, but she's just a really interesting person
and had a wild childhood, built her own race car,
just kind of a genius engineer.

She owns an electron microscope,
has a huge pinball collection.

- This lady from the show.

- Yeah, yeah, no, but I remember,
I interviewed her because I went to a Maker Faire
in the South Bay and she was speaking there
and afterwards, after I saw her speak,
and I was like, "Yeah, this is really interesting."

There were a couple of little girls
waiting to talk to her afterwards
who were also really into making stuff
and were kind of inspired by her
and I thought she was really cool.

She was really shy.

We went to talk and I needed a quiet place.

we went and sat in the front seat of my wife's Jeep Cherokee.

- Okay.

- And we had the conversation in that way.

Have you ever had a conversation in a car
where you have a deep conversation
and it's somehow enhanced by the fact
that you're not making eye contact?

- Yes.

- Like you're just looking out the windshield?

It was that kind of situation

where I don't think I would have gotten her
to be as personal if we hadn't been in a situation
we were just staring straight out the window
and I just lucked into it and I was grateful for her
for being able to talk to me in that personal way
'cause I was a total stranger.

I don't know what it takes for people to open up
in that way but I try to make that happen.

And that's why I have such a strong preference for in-person interviews.

- Yeah, there's always something, it's different being in person.

Like, you know, we're having a video call now, but our conversation would be entirely different if we were together in a space and could play off each other in real space, I don't know, in real life.

It feels weird to say that.

- Yeah, yeah.

- It was just that it is different.

And I think...

- It's different.

I think people have gotten better at it though.

I noticed coming back to this after the pandemic, 'cause I guess people got used to Zoom calls with not just work, but also their friends.

And so I've been doing a lot of Zoom interviews lately, 'cause that's just the reality of living in Norman, Oklahoma is that I don't have a lot of in-person opportunities unless I fly to them.

And I'm willing to do that for some things, but I just, you know, I gotta wait for the right thing.

And I, you know, I've gotten some pretty good material from that, better than the Skype stuff that I did in the past, I would say, yeah.

- Yeah, some people have learned video call etiquette, I would think, not everyone, but.

- Yeah, and video kind of helps, you know?

It's a little bit more like the real life situation, especially 'cause people can't be distractedly like clicking around the internet or looking at their phones or doing whatever.

Although sometimes that can be a help, I don't know.

in that new episode where it's the Soviet Arcade Games that ends with an interview with this guy, Roman Murdov, who was kind of a skeptic about Russian arcade games.

He didn't think that stuff was very good, and he had the dendi instead, that's what he grew up with.

But that entire conversation, he was doing his dishes during part of it, which was kind of a sound nightmare that I had to take care of,

but he was kind of distracted,

And he was hard to get to speak personally, but I did get him to tell that story about getting lost in the line at the first Moscow McDonald's.

Yeah, which was a real win, 'cause I was like, "Oh, this guy's not gonna be personal at all."

But yeah, I dragged that out of him.

I think it happened while he was doing the dishes, so.

- Sometimes it can help.

- Yeah, yeah.

- I can only imagine the raw sound of that.

- Yeah.

- That had been something.

Uh, to, to wrap up the life,
well wasted discussion. You, you asked a question in episode two
to the, and I'm forgetting the gentleman's name,
but he owned the pinball museum.

Yeah. Lucky Juju, lucky Juju Alameda. Yeah.

Alameda is a little island in the East bay. Um,
it connected with a bridge and it's very like it's the
Americana area of the East Bay, I would say there's something
that just feels like it's never going to get out of the 1950s.

And some of it may be that the cops are incredibly aggressive
and horrible. And Alameda. And so they like, you know, really
keep people out of their unwanteds, I suppose. But it's
an amazing pinball collection. And since I did that interview,
I've been back there and they've got like three times as much space and it's it's a while
I wouldn't when I did the interview you used to be able to just pay
Ten bucks and bring your own six-pack in there and they had like cup holders on the pinball
machines. They don't do that anymore

That was it was amazing. That place is great. And that guy that guy was fun

Yeah, but what were you saying you you asked no

There's a pinball arcade at the bowling alley actually down the street and you're you have a
pinball theme kind of throughout

out a life well wasted, this kind of made me want to go
check out the pinball arcade and go play.

- I love pinball.

- It's been so long since I've played a real table.

But you asked him, could you walk away?

And I wanted to ask you the same question.

A life well wasted's been around for over a decade.

Eight episodes, you're working on another one.

Could you ever walk away?

I

Don't know I like I

Guess if I if I walked away it would be because I found what I was working on in a life all
wasted in another

Form and I was doing that instead. I definitely know that I

Do a lot of things. I have a lot of interests, but radio is where I
work best as far as like if I'm gonna have a

Creative job of some kind like radio is definitely the thing that I would like to do

Like if you got it if you got to work, right and I enjoy it and I especially enjoy
doing it in a way where I get like all this creative freedom to try and experiment and

Play with the forum because I think we live in actually like a super
radio

Dominated time people don't really think about it, but there's a lot of time that people spend
listening to just audio

You wouldn't think it since we have so much visual media,
but we also just hate to think ever,
or to like have time to ourselves.

So people are cramming in all kinds of audio content
when they're driving or cleaning or walking or running
or whatever it is they're doing.

And I actually think there's a lot of creative room

out there to play with what radio can be.
And because it got so quickly eaten up by, you know,
sort of corporate interests and turned immediately
into a form that feels like unshakable,
I don't think people are like thinking
of what all you could do with it.
I mean, you can make very surprising and weird radio
that could be very entertaining or cool.
I mean, it could also be really annoying, I don't know,
but I wanna play with that.
I wanna enjoy creating in that space.
So, a life well wasted to me right now
is where I feel total freedom.
I can do whatever the fuck I want with it.
There's no one to tell me that that's not allowed.
And the audience is super supportive.
And I was blown away that there were so many people
who stuck around who had kept it subscribed even,
but also people who, once they found out about it,
were hyped to hear a new one.
I kind of worried that the reaction would be like,
one episode after nine years, you know?
But really, people were just very happy about it,
and that was awesome.
And I do a lot of creative things
that don't get a lot of outlet.
It's nice to have an audience,
and I appreciate an audience.
So I'm definitely gonna try to keep putting work in
where there's an audience.
It's not gonna stop me from doing things
that don't have an audience, like making music.
Not that there's no audience for that,
but it's not as big of an audience for me
as the podcasting.
- Right. - So, yeah.
- You know, before we wrap up,
I did video game podcasts, or internet radio show.
It's not the only thing you do.
You cook a lot, you make lots of food.
It seems like you update everyone, actually,
in the memory episode, you're like,
you learned everything about bread making.
So, and I think a lot of people probably got
into bread making during the pandemic,
'cause they're like, well, I'm home.
I have time, I guess, now to have a sourdough starter
and keep it alive.
I was, I guess I'm just curious
about your bread making stuff,
'cause like I did that too for a bit,
and then we went away on a trip
and my sourdough starter died, rest in peace.
And I just haven't, I guess built up the gumption

to like restart that, keep it alive.

- Yeah, well, I actually,

I got into bread making before the pandemic.

- Yeah.

- 'Cause I'm cool.

- Yeah, you are cool.

(both laughing)

- No, I got into it because we moved to Oklahoma and where we were living previously, there was like a good bakery that I relied on there for good bread and we got here and there was just nothing. I was eating like ciabatta from the sprouts.

And I think I-

- I've had that before.

- Yeah, well, we were eating it like, you know, for half a year and at some point I was just like, as God as my witness,

I will never eat sprouts ciabatta again, you know?

Like I got to learn to make bread.

And so I just fumbled around for like the right book.

I'm kind of a cookbook person

more than an internet recipe person

that it's too ephemeral for me.

I need like a, I need not just a recipe, but more like a philosophy.

I like to know people's outlook on cooking.

That stuff is interesting to me

and important for getting me into it, I guess.

And so I, yeah, I got really into the Ken Forkish salt, flour, water, yeast.

I can't remember the order of those words,

but it's, you know, it was right after

salt, fat, acid, heat came out.

And I think book marketers were like,

"All the books gotta be four words with commas."

(laughing)

But it's a fantastic bread baking book.

I mean, there are many that people rely on.

The Tartine book is also famously a good one to learn from.

But I started using that guy's methods

and then got a textbook that I liked about bread

that was really like a college textbook about bread baking.

and just got really nerdy about it.

And yeah, now for maybe like four years now,

I've made all of the bread for my family that we eat.

I make sourdough, two loaves of it, like every five days.

And my kids really like a white bread, sandwich bread

kind of thing, and I do a pandemie or pullman loaf,

like a square pan with a lid on it

that makes perfectly square, long loaves of bread

that has lots of butter and some sugar in it,

which is what my kids like undoubtedly.

They'll eat the sourdough too,

but they're always dying for the pure white bread

with sugar and butter.

- Delicious.

- And yeah, yeah, no, it's just like one of the things I got into and pizza making.

I'm a big nerd and I get really into whatever it is that I'm passionate about and I'll end up learning stuff.

And I've been cooking my whole adult, not adult life, my whole life that I can remember really.

I mean, I have so many memories of, I was a latchkey kid when I was young, like a very young latchkey kid.

I was a latchkey kid in first grade.

Would come home to the house by myself and make a snack.

and I very early, like too early, started using the stove and did some really dumb things.

I remember watching, there was a PBS cooking show for a long time called Yan Can Cook.

It was my first experience of Chinese cooking demonstrated on TV, and I loved to watch it, and I'd never eaten any of the stuff that he was making, but I remember one day I watched him make egg drop soup, and I was like, this I can do.

And so I was probably in fifth grade and I took out a pot that had plastic handles, like a stock pot or a soup pot.

And I put in, you know, like water and celery and some onion.

I don't know if I chopped it.

I didn't follow the directions.

I had not yet learned to follow a recipe.

I did know that you needed to put an egg in it.

So I put an egg in it.

And then I don't know where I got this, but I turned on the broiler

and I put the soup with the plastic handles, the soup pot with the plastic handles under the broiler, which then caused the handles to melt onto the floor of the oven.

And it was a horrible, yeah, terrible stuff.

- Oh boy.

- I also around the same time tried to skip the process of putting a grilled cheese sandwich on a plate because I didn't like to wash dishes.

I was like, why would I use a plate when that's already in a pan.

And so I brought the grilled cheese sandwich in a pan and sat down in front of the TV to watch cartoons and just sat the pan down on the carpet right in front of the TV.

And after I was done eating,

I went to pull it up and was like, oh, it's stuck.

And I pull it up and there's just a big black circle on the rental house, a part, you know, carpet, right in front of the TV.

And we just had that for like a year afterwards
until we left that house.
I'm sure my mom was pissed, but.
- Oh my gosh. - Yeah.
- That, I don't have quite a story like that.
I do remember I came home from,
I guess it would have been kindergarten,
'cause I was riding the bus and we lived in Ohio.
And I came home, I guess my mom was out running errands
with my brother and the front door was locked
but the back door was open,
so I just went through the back door
and I got on a chair and opened the freezer
and got out mint chocolate chip ice cream
and just sat on the floor and scooped a bowl for me
and scooped a bowl for the dog,
and we were both eating ice cream when she came home.
And I've always been a cookbook person as well, actually.
I still, I'll find videos or whatever,
or chefs that I like,
but then I usually end up just buying their books
and reading those and being inspired.
I feel like, at least,
I'll say like Matty Matheson as an example.
I feel like he's more honest and vulnerable
in his cookbook about his life story
alongside why he makes the food he makes
and how he makes it than he would be in a video.
'Cause Matty, especially, has a personality
that just comes through in every video.
But his books are so, I think, more the actual Matty
that you would get to know.
My mom, ironically, the other day sent me a picture from,
I have no idea when, I don't know the date on this,
but I'm a tiny person.
and I have like Cooking Rocks by Rachael Ray,
30 Minute Meals for Kids.
So like that's where the cookbook obsession started
and I would flip through my mom's like
Nigella Lawson dessert cookbook.
I still remember the,
I can pull up the pictures in my mind's eye
'cause that's what I was looking at then
was pictures, not really the words.
But I love a book and I collect,
even if I find a recipe in a video,
I'll find the written version of it
and use that instead than the video
and read and learn from that.
- And sometimes that's actually a mistake.
'Cause I do that too, but for example,
I went through a period of nerding out about Korean food.
And in English, you're like,
best hope at having any kind of success is mongchi,

who is this awesome, I think she might be 50 by now, year old Korean lady who lives in Canada and who started making cookbook videos like really cute, um, not cookbook videos, a really cute cooking videos on YouTube of her making, you know, awesome Korean food.

And she became super popular and became like the kind of authority on, on Korean cooking in English, um, kind of overnight.

But she got a book deal and, and I, you know, I had made a few of her video things before and I got the book and just dedicated myself to it, but I discovered that the book just really didn't have the best versions of the recipes, 'cause she was updating her web recipes over time based on audience feedback.

And there were just some things that really were better to rely on the internet for in that way.

And I worry that that's where we're going with cookbooks, 'cause cookbooks have become more of like a record, like a vinyl record that you hang on your wall or something.

You buy the cookbook 'cause you like this person.

Yeah, yeah, instead of being just a really useful thing.

I mean, there are great cookbooks out there, but I run into just duds fairly regularly, and I'm kind of in a rut where I don't really have cookbook that I'm too interested in. I am a slowly, very, very, very slowly, especially given the price of ingredients and where I am in my access to those ingredients. I'm working through Mary Robbins' pasta book. I'm a big pasta guy. I like years ago, maybe six or seven years ago, started a regular Saturday night where I would always make fresh pasta on Saturday night. This book is incredibly like has awesome elaborate recipes, but it's, you gotta start cooking at like two o'clock on a Saturday if you're gonna have dinner on the table by six 30. And yeah, and like I said, the ingredients can be pretty expensive, but I'm slowly making my, my way through that.

And other than that, I'm, I'm, I'm, I'm kind of lately because, especially cause I'm getting other work done and cooking sometimes just becomes my creative outlet, I'm a little bit more in the just cooking for my family, trying to make good meals and not getting too obsessed at the moment.

Yeah, well, your video is a life well-tasted, which is a perfect name. I watched some of those just to prep for this week just to see what other stuff you're doing. This week, I'm making those wings because that sauce sounded delicious. I've done the Kenji Lopez. That's how I make my wings at home.

But I was like, that sauce sounds pretty awesome.

So that's this week.

And then yesterday my wife's like, I want a burger.

And I'm like, well, I'll buy,

'cause I don't have my own kimchi,

but I was like, I'll buy some kimchi.

I'll do the kimchi smash burger.

(laughing)

So the two that I watched, I've ended up, those will be this week.

- The kimchi smash burger is like a regular feature in our house, 'cause we do have kimchi always on hand.

I haven't made the wings in a while with that sauce.

That was a Yotam Ota Lengi sauce recipe from a recipe for ribs that I just repurposed. And I love that sauce. Just 'cause I also love those mama thuku hot mango pickles. That stuff, I don't care. I could eat dal every day of the week. The most simple thing, if I could just have a couple of scoops of those things, it just makes everything delicious. It's so intense.

- I'm excited to try them when they show up this week. I tried looking locally, couldn't find them.
- Yeah, I can't get them locally either. I gotta order them from the internet. That's my--
- The power of the internet.

Well, thank you so much, Robert, for your time today and just taking time to talk to me about your show and a little bit about bread and some food. Thank you so much. Where, I mean, the people can find you online at alifewellwasted.com. You tweet occasionally it seems. I don't, I've left Twitter, I don't really know what's happening over there. Is there anywhere else people could find your stuff?

- I'm on Twitter still. I don't really use it that much lately. Obviously the vibe is very, very bad at Twitter. I've been there for 10 years. I can't quite quit it entirely, especially because I find that I have, not just like, I do have a lot of community connections there, but then also my audience is there, and so I'm not gonna like bail.
- I only left 'cause I was addicted. It just happens to coincide with Elon like burning the place to the ground.
- Yeah, I mean, me too. I have been addicted.
- I was just like, I need a, I use the kid as a healthy reset. I was like, I don't want her to grow up thinking all I do is look at Twitter on my phone. So I used to have it.
- So what do you look at on your phone instead now?
- Probably too many YouTube videos and check Discord. But I've been playing chess with my dad and my uncle, so that's been probably mentally more engaging than Twitter.
- Discord has been filling a hole for me.
- Yeah, I have an RSS reader now, so that's where I get my news and articles and stuff now.
- I need to go back to that place.
- It's a pure time. - Take me back to Google Reader.

That was the ultimate.

Well, yeah, so just Twitter and alifewellwasted.com,
I guess, I don't really have any other things.

I don't really use Facebook or anything.

- No, that's, yeah.

So you can find links to that in the show notes.

You can find myself at maxfrequency.net,
and you could follow me on Twitter @maxroberts143,
but all that happens there is tweets
when articles and shows go up.

so the website's probably the best place to go.

You could also check out my other show, Chapter Select,
a seasonal podcast where we bounce back and forth
between a series.

Right now, season five's going on Resident Evil,
so we're chipping away at that.

So you could go check that out.

But until next time, adios.

- Thank you.

- Thank you very much to Robert Ashley
for joining me on the show.

I wanted to channel a little

a life-well-wasted energy here and have a few clips that I couldn't fit into the
show. How are you? Um, all right. Where are you?

Where are you calling from? Uh, town called Ovito, Florida,
like 10 minutes from UCF. So basically Orlando, Orlando.

But you're on central. Is that no, you, I just looked, you're Oklahoma.

So I just looked. Oh, okay. Okay.

For some reason I thought you said you were also on central and I was like,
what? No. I do. I do have some friends who I regularly talk to on central.

So my brain,

my brain is thinking an hour behind and then I've worked for people in
California for, Oh gosh, I guess over a decade now.

So I'm always subtracting three hours from my time anyway.

Yeah. I mean I think the pandemic thing like got everyone talking at different
times and yeah, now I'm pretty used to, I just,

I just always mess up overseas, but that's what Google's for.

That is what Google's for. I had a job at stare at who,

he's made some YouTube videos like good blood. It's his name, his channel.

He did some Zelda analysis and it got a war video and stuff. Anyway,

he's in Australia and so that one was like,

he's a day ahead and there's like a 16 hour difference and I was like, Oh gosh,
I don't think, I don't think the world should be that big.

I think we should do something about that. It's too, it's too, too expansive.

There should not be people on other days.

Yeah. That's the part that really trips me up. You know? Yeah. What are they?

Australia gets games like the day before us on like the app store or something.

I don't know. It's weird.

Yeah. It used to be like new New Zealand was the,

New Zealand was the launching place for iOS games back when,

when iOS games were a big deal when there was a briefly an awesome culture around
that stuff and yeah, you would envy New Zealand getting those games first and not realize
that you should envy New Zealand for many other things.

New Zealand I only envy I guess suppose Lorde is there, Peter Jackson essentially just lives

on a compound there just like walking around making movies.
It's also like the default refuge in apocalyptic scenarios for billionaires which tells you
you that it's like, you know, a safe spot. Yeah.
It doesn't feel, it doesn't feel like anywhere.
So yeah, Peter Jackson and James Cameron on their huge farms.
I think that New Zealand is one of those places where you can buy, um,
citizenship if you have, if you have the money and a lot of people have. So,
yeah, interesting.
That that's available in more countries than you would imagine. You can,
you can, if you have the money, you can buy your way into it.
I do not have the money to buy my way into it.
No, well, you need to grind, man. Get up earlier.
4 AM feels pretty early.
3, sorry. 3 is real grinding. Hell no, I'm not, I don't grind.
Wait until
they VR that game and you realize that Nathan is
popping the skulls of 50 people an hour.
He's the most famous mass murderer.
There's so much.
The intro video to this, the new one,
is like eight minutes long,
and it's the history of cars and the world.
You can find it on YouTube.
It's so funny.
- What do you mean, like, hit the history of the world?
It's like through the pyramids,
and then suddenly like a dog piper appears?
- I don't know where he,
as close to the world and cars as it can be.
There's actually a museum in the game,
not just for cars, but you can look
at the Michelin timeline, and then beneath that
is a timeline of the world back to,
I mean, COVID-19 is on there.
Obama becoming president.
There are these historical landmark events,
and then above it is like, here's when Michelin
invented this tire technology.
- I wanna see it up against a Metal Gear Solid timeline.
I'm gonna match up the I
Want to know the alternate history the real history. This is when naked snake dropped it - yes
jungle
[LAUGHTER]