

ME: Do you remember the names of these guys?

MUM: Well, I know some of them. R2D2. Oh, this guy – the storm troopers, is that the storm troopers? Yoda of course. Chewbacca of course. Who's this guy? Oh these guys. (Laughs) Oh, this is the bad father! This is Yobi-Kenobi or whatever his name is.

ME: Obi Wan Kenobi.

MUM: Yeah.

ME: No, he was good.

That's how I began my first episode of Imaginary Worlds in 2014 -- by opening up my childhood action figure case, with my mom, who bought every one of those figures for me.

I can't believe I've hit 200 episodes of Imaginary Worlds. It feels like a momentous occasion, something to reflect on and do a super-sized episode about.

When I thought about what I'd want to do for my 200th episode, I decided, I wanted to check in with a few people who have been on the show before – people whose work inspired me, and I wanted to follow up with them, and see what they were doing now.

The first person on that list was Caro Murphy. Caro was a listener who wrote me in 2016 and asked if I ever thought of doing an episode on larping. I ended up doing several episodes on larping, including one of my personal favorite episodes, How I Won the Larp from 2018. In that episode, I did a larp with Caro Murphy where we played an estranged couple in colonial Massachusetts. Between fighting off attacks from witches, we had this incredibly emotional but totally improvised scene together.

Hi!

CARO: Hi!

I'm so excited to talk to you, so, like the last time I saw you was at...

I was excited to talk with Caro because they have an amazing new job. They are an Immersive Experience Director at the Star Wars Galactic Star Cruiser. I had read that this was a very expensive, Star Wars-themed hotel at Disney World in Florida.

CARO: It's so much more interactive than that. So imagine, so you make a character, you make up where you're from and you come and you wear a costume. And when you first walk in, like everybody's, you know, all the crew and cast and everybody are totally

immersive in character. Uh, and you get missions, and you experience a whole bunch of fun shenanigans and you, uh, even do a planet side excursion where you go and fulfill a whole bunch of these missions. You know, you it's like two full days of interactive content.

Wow. So, you're, the whole time you're on, you're in this, you're in a building, right? Or is it, is it like, like the whole time do you feel like you're on a ship or are there times you feel like you've gone to another planet? Or how does that work

CARO: When you, uh, so the first entire day you're there, you're on the ship. Um, and so the ship will travel to various places, uh, via light speed, but you don't get off until you reach your, uh, kind of port your destination port, which is Batuu, um, you can take transport shuttles, that'll bring you to Batuu where you have a planet side excursion. And then when you're done with that, you come back up to the ship and the rest of the evening there is on the ship. That's kind of when things culminate

Is there, so I know with, with different eras of Star Wars, it's like, is there a, um, a first order or an empire or this sort of take place after all that? And you're not being chased by Stormtroopers.

CARO: This is between movies eight and nine in the more, the most recent films. So there is a First Order. Kyo Ren is the Supreme leader. Like Rey is kind of, kind of known galactically now as this kind of last Jedi resistance hero.

So on the galactic cruiser, are there droids, like, are there like cool animatronic Disney type things?

CARO: Yeah, we do have an Astromech droid SK-62. Oh. Um, they are a, uh, a, like an R2 type of looking unit, Astromech droid they're gray and orange and they have a, a very big personality.

Oh, nice. Wait. So can they interact, um, on the fly I assume?

CARO: Yeah.

Oh, cool.

CARO: Yep.

So, then what's your, what was your job like in terms of, did they bring you into develop the story and then like, what is your day to day job like supervising this ongoing larp?

CARO: I was brought in November and much of the story and a lot of the different elements were already kind of designed at that point, not to say that I didn't have a hand in the story because there are definitely things that have my fingerprint on them. The, a lot of it was, you know, it was a huge team effort over like six years of development for this to be created. Most of what I do is kind of overseeing story making on the fly decisions about things that need to happen because it is a living, breathing art form. So, there are things that will just go off the rails at times and we just have to adjust. Um, and then I do a lot of training of cast. So, a lot of it's a rehearsal process and, uh, getting new cast up to speed, giving actors notes, doing lots of other director things as well.

So like what's a great day at work. What's a day where you come home and you're like, wow, that, you know, whatever happened at work that was like amazing and has not happened before.

CARO: Oh, oh man. I think that for me, probably some of the best days at work are in rehearsal. So we have to cast very deep, like each role. We have to have more than one person who's in the role, because if you didn't, people would burn out. <laugh>, it's a lot of energy to output. And I just love rehearsal. Like for me, a really successful day is that we were able to get through and have everybody understand all the different moving parts of this show and that everybody had fun while we're doing it. And that they feel like they're in a place that's safe to be able to explore and do these things. And then on the star cruiser a really good day is when you can tell that the audience is just so invested and that they are truly living their story and they're making decisions that they maybe never would've made. And there's so many stories that I, I can recall from cast members, as well as my own experiences of people, having really amazing life changing moments by being able to connect with somebody new and form trust and form bonds together.

So, do you think they could go beyond Star Wars? This is obviously doing well, so maybe in the future, you could end up working on something with Marvel, like an interactive experience where people are staying at the Avengers headquarters or something?

CARO: Yeah. And I think that a lot of folks are looking at, uh, Galactic Star Cruiser right now and saying, wow, that's really successful. How do we replicate that? How do we improve that? How do we make the next one of these things? That's going to be super cool.

This is so great because like you, you were doing amazing work, but like an independent theater scene in Boston and now you're doing the same work but getting really well paid for it. <laugh>

CARO: Getting paid for it period is awesome. <laugh>

Uh, that's okay. I'm so happy for you. This is so awesome.

CARO: It is it's really, I it's honestly, it's a dream come true in so many ways. It's it's I get to play, pretend with people as my job and make, pretend things come to life and do it in Star Wars, which I have loved since I was four years old. So, it's really wonderful.

I recently did a call out you for people to leave messages and let me know where they listen to Imaginary Worlds, and if that place is somehow evocative of imaginary worlds. Throughout this episode, we're going to be hearing these voicemails.

So, I've been listening to imaginary worlds for a really long time now. And I often listen when I'm out for a walk in the evenings. Uh, once my kiddos are sleeping, I'm in the

Northeast of Scotland. And one of my favorite places to walk is at a local stone circle. So I'm kind like what stone hinges, but much smaller. It's like four and a half thousand years old. So it's from The Bronze Age. It's one of my favorite places to go, especially whilst listening to Imaginary Worlds, because I like to imagine all of the stories that connect people who have lived near, who are on the stone circle, um, going back so far through time and all the way into the future. And it makes me feel sort of significant and insignificant all at once.

One of the most enjoyable things for me about this podcast is how international it's become. I used to work at New York Public Radio, and the show I worked on was broadcast across the U.S. but most of our listeners tended to be on the East Coast. So, I love knowing someone is listening to my show in Scotland, or more than one person.

Hi Eric, Scott Bennett here in Edinburgh, Scotland. I haven't listened to Imaginary Worlds in a place that evokes Imaginary Worlds but I'm about to because I'm probably going to listen to the 200th episode at Phantasialand in Cologne, Germany, which is a place with full of the most insanely themed, fantastically imagined worlds that there are in theme parks!

Uh, my name's Gavin and I come from Scotland. Uh, in my spare time, I'm restoring a cold warrior, a nuclear bunker. Uh, I often listen to imaginary worlds while I'm working on things underground. And I really enjoy all the different stuff that you talk about on the podcast. Uh, when I heard the episode lapping, I thought, oh, I've really got to run a Cold War theme lap down here, but I've got no idea how, um, thanks for all the hard work that you put into the show. Bye.

Now, when I got back in touch with people who had been on the show before, every one of them had a story about how the pandemic affected their careers. But Jason Suran's story is one of the most unique.

In 2019, I did an episode called Talking to the Dead. I went to one of his theatrical recreations of an old-time séance, which was really cool. Then Covid hit and all the theaters in New York shut down. But during the pandemic, I read that Jason Suran was doing virtual shows as a mentalist, which is different than a séance but still, I was curious, how does that work on Zoom? I mean part of what made his live show so good was seeing him perform these tricks right in front of your eyes.

JASON: I think you had to lean into the medium, right. So, I looked around at the time at sort of what other people were doing in the virtual space. And a lot of it was trying to simulate the highest quality aesthetic they could find, right? So, there was a lot of, you know, getting a lot of high-quality studio lights and, you know, three, four camera setups and people trying to sort of recreate almost like a talk show format or a big stage show. Um, and that was very uncompelling to me personally. That's just not what I was interested in doing. And I think that instinct served me well, because I think what's great about Zoom about the virtual space is that it is intimate, right? It's not like a stage show you're in people's houses, they're in yours. Everybody can see each other. And if you don't take advantage of that, then I think you're missing out on, on what it can do and I don't know that it really loses much through a camera if you do it well. Right. Because if I tell you the name of your first, you know, crush in middle school, it doesn't matter if I do that for you over the phone or six inches from your face in person, it's equally impressive. Do you know what I mean? It, it, I think it, it translates well to a virtual format in that way.

Mmm. Do you do it, are you able to, to, um, guess the name of people's junior high crushes?

JASON: Yes. I mean, it's a part of the show <laugh> so, you know, I had to figure out a way to, I had to figure out a way to do it, but it is doable. Like anything else, right? Like if you, if you think down, you go, okay, what are my, what are my resources here? What can I do? What do I have access to? Well, okay, I've got access to a camera less than a foot from their eyeballs. That's useful. I have a window into their living room. That's useful.

Wow. So did you learn, um, any new skill, like now that you're back to doing while you're doing a hybrid of virtual and some in person. Have you picked up anything through the virtual that you've now incorporated into the live shows?

JASON: Yeah. So, there was a particular piece in my live show in my virtual show that I'd never done before the whole, the whole virtual show by the way is if you end up seeing it's called Reconnected, it's very meta. Um, you know, it, it's probably the most meta thing I've ever done and there's this piece, everybody's seen it before. It's the east Indian needle mystery as it's sort of colloquial known because it was culturally appropriated from 19th century Indian street performers by Western magicians. But it's the thing where, you know, you swallow the needles, and you swallow the thread and then you regurgitate the thread with all the needles tied on in little knots. When I started writing the virtual show, my first thought was what will work better in this environment, in this world than it would on stage? Because the last thing I wanted to do was try to shoehorn material into the virtual show just because it was stuff I was used to doing. Right. Like I wanted to do things that were served by the medium. And one of the first things I thought of was the needles. That's a much scarier trick when it's right up in front of your face. And I think when you're watching something on a webcam, there's almost

a sense that more could go wrong. Do you know what I mean? When you're in a theater, a place that has a, you know, a fire marshal and emergency exits and you know, city permits and things like that, there's sort of this implicit understanding that nothing truly dangerous can happen in this space. Whereas on a webcam, you're almost like, I don't know, this guy's just in his house, like swallowing needle.

<laugh> It's like, oh my God, are we all witnessing, witnessing this guy about to kill himself for a trick?!

JASON: Kind of though, right? Like think about all the horror movies that kind of play off that about how scary the internet can be in that way. Do you know what I mean? To me it was like the perfect trick, but I am genuinely, genuinely horrified of needles. I get terrible, terrible tryphobia, every time I get my, my blood drawn or I, even when I get the, got the vaccine, I like curse like a sailor. I, I start and stop the process like three times. I just ever since I was a kid. But I figured, when am I ever gonna get more time to work on this? You know? Cause I, nobody was demanding a virtual show for me. It's not like anybody cared if I did this or not. And so I took like all the time I needed, I took like two months to just work on that one piece, you know, you start by just doing it with toothpicks. That's how they teach you to do it. Is you start by just, just doing it with toothpicks, and even that took me a full three, four days just to kind of be able to be calm with those, you know, going on to my tongue and, and it segued into one of my favorite parts of the show, which was asking everybody what they worked on during the pandemic, like what project they took on what way they tried to sort of better themselves before Tiger King came out and we all got distracted, right? Like something they just baked or something they crocheted. And that was really, really cool to me. Like that was my favorite part of the whole show.

Yeah, hi, my name is Mark Driscoff. Um, I started, uh, listening on episode 38, but, uh, it all began, uh, back in September 2014. Um, that was the month my, uh, my wife went into hospice and by early October I became a single dad of seven. Uh, I wasn't listening to any podcasts then, but, uh, I discovered episode 38, uh, and I used to play Dungeons and Dragons and my kids didn't know what that was, but they knew Marvel. So, I was able to allow them to, uh, to, to listen to that. And they started to, it was an amazing opportunity to meet them where they were at and to describe, um, parts of my childhood. It was fantastic. And I appreciate the Imaginary Worlds. And I actually met my wife on the steps of the Shire. Uh, we both went to UC Irvine in California where there's a whole dorm complex called Middle Earth. I chose it only for that reason. And I was living in the Shire when I met her first week of college in 1990. And, uh, we were married until October 2014. So, thank you. I appreciate it. You, um, it's a great podcast and, uh, still listen to it today.

By the way, episode 38 that he referenced was called Why They Fight, and it was about how you can apply D&D character alignments to Marvel, and a lot of other fantasy universes.

We'll hear a lot more from listeners and previous guests after the break.

BREAK

In 2017, I did an episode called Atari vs. The Imagination Gap. In that episode, I interviewed Tim Lapetino who wrote a book about the artwork on Atari boxes and how it compensated for the limited graphics of the games. Since then, he's come out with a new book about Pac Man, which I really wanted to talk with him. When we got on Zoom, I saw right behind him was a full-sized Pac Man cabinet arcade game from the '80s.

TIM: You know, part of the goal of this was during this is I was going to play Pac Man more and get a sense of, okay, I played this game, but what does it take to be good at it? What does it take? What are some of the secrets? I even read some of the, both the vintage and the modern books of like how to win it, Pac Man. And I've established that I'm a, still a terrible Pac Man player.

Can you, uh, were you able to use it as a tax write-off?

TIM: Oh, of course. It's a business expense. <laugh>

Excellent.

TIM: Yeah, it was one of the things I did during the pandemic. A little, not really little, but a little project. I did, I did something called 365 days of Pac Man. And every day of 2020, I experienced something Pac Man, like, so I played all of the Pac Man or video games. Pretty much all of them. I ate old Pac Man cereal, 40-year-old box of cereal, did all this stuff and I documented it on Twitter.

How did you get a 40-year-old box of Pac Man cereal?

TIM: eBay? <laugh> it was, it wasn't as bad as, uh, as you might think. The whole thing was just sort of a little dried out.

Although I think it's kind of disturbing that it's still, that it's not that it hadn't gotten stale.

TIM: <laugh> it was still sealed. So, it was still sealed and I opened it up and, uh, made my kids eat it too. Although that, that was fine compared to the gum that I ate in the Pac Man trading cards that did not go as well.

The funny thing is I feel like, like, even as kids, that cereal was probably you, you knew that cereal would last for 40 years, at the same time, you know, that gum was stale. The minute you opened it, <laugh>

TIM: A hundred percent, a hundred percent.

Yeah. So, yeah. So, tell me about the Pac Man book. What did you, uh, what did you discover, uh, in researching it?

TIM: I was really interested in writing a book about it, because I feel like the origins of the game were not well understood or well known, but also Pacman's got an unusual history in that it came from Japan, but it didn't do particularly well in Japan, but when it was licensed and brought over to the United States, that's when it sort of became the cultural behemoth. That happened in Chicago. It came from a company called Midway that operate operated right outside of Chicago and they sort of took the license, but then they kind of made Pac Mac a little bit their own. And I was really curious this bit of video game pop culture history had sort of happened in my backyard. So, I really wanted to investigate that.

So, well, why did it not take off in Japan?

TIM: You know, I think some of the interest in the game at first in Japan, it was that it was a moderate success. It did well, and it did what they wanted it to do. The programming team really wanted to create a game that appealed to not just men, but also women where, you know, men were very much the staple of arcades in 1977, '80, '78, '79, and into 1980, when the game came out. Toru Iwatani who sort of headed up the design and really just kind of his brainchild really wanted a game that would appeal to women. It would be something different from what he would call at the time, violent, aggressive games, which it's kind of funny to think about things like Space Invaders and, uh, Galaga, Galaxia, those being violent, aggressive games, but they are sort of this high twitch, you know, fast moving game where it's sort of stressful and it's kill or be killed. Whereas Pac Man, there's a little bit more exploration. There's a little more puzzle solving and it's cute and really approachable. So, he wanted to focus on making sure that women would feel included on that. And that happened just, it was just one of those things where it didn't quite catch on.

Yeah. Well, why then why did it catch on in the United States if it didn't catch on Japan?

TIM: Some of it I think was timing, but I also think the other part of it is that it felt like a fresh game. It felt different. And then Midway did some things that were pretty standard practice in the time is they took a Japanese feeling game; a Japanese looking game and they Americanized the marketing. The character designs became less kawaii, less cute, less Japanese sounding or looking. And they made it feel more American. They sort of drew from old animation things like Hanna Barbara or Popeye in terms of character design, and they started putting it on t-shirts and those t-shirts sold well. And then they put it on cereal bowls and boxer shorts and sleeping bags, and suddenly it became a phenomenon. And Pac Man sort of became a stand in a little bit for video games in general, in a culture that's still sort of discovering it.

I, I had, I had a Pac Man doll. I think it's still in my parents' house somewhere. I used to watch that Hanna Barbara, Pac Man cartoon, which was awful, and I still

watched it. And I actually just got, uh, for Christmas this year, I got Pac Man socks,

TIM: Pac Man persists. And, but then each sort of iteration of the licensing sort of furthered the story. And I think that was really important for sort of the longevity. Whereas you, you didn't have a huge storyline, but you did have Ms. Pac Man. And then suddenly there's a relationship between two characters and there's a baby. And then you have baby Pac Man and junior Pac Man, and a Pac of dog that shows up in the cartoon, you know, these little bits of story for things that are not the case for Space Invaders. Like there was no narrative through line between Space Invaders and Space Invaders. Deluxe.

Yeah. Yeah. Pong was really missing a storyline too. <laugh>

TIM: It's an epic quest of a, a circle and a rectangle <laugh>

Hi, Eric and team. Um, this is Moritz from Germany and I just wanted to congratulate you to 200 epic episodes. I'm a public policy. Uh, I have a public policy master's degree and, uh, I've been working in NGOs for a while, but thanks to your podcast. I was inspired to develop a course for my old home university on, uh, pop culture and politics and utopia. And yeah, I'm now an external lecturer at my university at my old university. And I'm preparing to teach the, the course actually tomorrow. Thank you so much. Congratulations and all the very, very best.

Hi there. My name is Joanna. I'm a listener from Portugal, and I've been listening to your podcast for a really long time. Now I've got to say that Imaginary Worlds is, um, a door, uh, portal to a world of magic and fantasy that has brought me several moments of joy over the course of the last few years. I remember especially an episode about the fairies that came in a time in my life where magic was lacking, and I could feel how much it filled my, my dream mourn with joy while I was commuting to a work I didn't like. So yes. Imagine our world has been very important to me in my life. And I want to thank Eric, and everyone involved with the podcast.

One of the best developments with the podcast over the years was bringing on Stephanie Billman as assistant producer. And for this episode, Stephanie wanted to check in with Shari Spiros.

In 2018, we did an episode called Board Games Go Indie about how new technology was allowing people to create their own board games and get them distributed. Shari Spiros is a big player in that industry. Her company AdMagic publishes indie games like Cards Against Humanity, and she's made a lot of game designer's dreams come true. But she told Stephanie the pandemic has created some nightmare scenarios for her company.

SHARI: I, I really feel like I deserve, and my team deserves an award that is the size of a six-story building out of solid gold <laugh>, uh, preferably shaped like a giant meatball.

<laugh>

SHARI: Because we are, we are living in extraordinarily difficult times to run a company. There have been days where, you know, the COVID levels were so high that we just, you know, shut down the warehouse at the end of the week. And that part has been difficult. You know, the price of boat transport went up 10 times what it used to be. So we had to deal with that. Uh, they are coming back down, but now there are rolling COVID shutdowns in China, again. You know, boats have been delayed. Wal-Mart shipments have been delayed and they're like, you know, just crazy, crazy stuff. Um, the other thing is we, we literally signed a lease on a hundred thousand square foot warehouse because I don't know what you know, but I took over Black Box in the beginning of 2020.

Oh

SHARI: Right. So Black Box was originally owned by Cards Against Humanity. And, um, and they, they were, they were done with it. We started, we signed the lease for March 2020. And just as we were moving into the warehouse.

Oooh.

SHARI: COVID hit.

Yeah.

SHARI: So, we had no people, we had to be very, very careful. We didn't want people to get sick. And yet we had to set up a hundred thousand square foot warehouse with racking. So that was the worst timing. And yet it was something that had to be done.

So, I was curious because when we were, you know, you can only do so much watching TV and eventually, you know, you and whoever you're living with, when you're on lockdown, you're like, we need to find something else fun to do. So, me and my husband played a lot of games and, you know, I love board games, especially trivia games. So, I'm curious, did your sales go up during COVID?

SHARI: Oh, absolutely.

So, you got like a significant spike, thanks to the fact that everyone was, was like at home and didn't have to do.

SHARI: Yeah, I'm going to be honest. We had, we had a banner year, couple of banner years. Sure. Because people were buying things they had never even looked at before gamers came out of the woodwork and then people who never played games before were driving to the store to buy games, going online to look for games, just like anything, anything to keep themselves occupied. And we wound up going into the that's, how we went into the puzzle business.

So, on the creative side, can you talk some about some of the games, the new newer games, since we last spoke that you're really excited about

SHARI: Probably our biggest project is we licensed the movie Luck. Um, so Luck is coming out on apple TV, August 6th. Then we are, we are manufacturing the game and it's Luck the game. And the strategy for Luck, the game is based on the game of 49, one of our all time, best sellers.

I've actually not heard anything about the movie itself. Can you explain the plot of that?

SHARI: It's about the land of Luck. There is a land that actually generates Luck. And, uh, and the, the little girl who stars in the movie stars with a cat and it's all animated she's pegged as the unluckiest girl in the world. And it shows her visit into the land of Luck and how she winds up, you know, getting there and what winds up happening. And then we also are releasing Mansplaining. Mansplaining is a great game.

Hmm. Can you explain what, um, the game mansplaining is about?

SHARI: <laugh> Yeah, well, you know, everybody has a different definition of what mansplaining actually is and like anybody can mansplaining, I'm kind of mansplaining to you right now, but, um, <laugh> basically when you sort of are expert in a category maybe that other people already know about. Right. So, it's kind of funny because it's a, it's a, it's a really a tongue and cheek type of thing. I think people will be, you know, have a lot of fun with it because it's different, it's different and it's timely. One of the other games that we're involved with is a game called Doomlings, which is just adorable. And Doomlings the imagery on the cards is just so adorable. These Doomlings are like little characters, which probably will be stuffed animals one day. Right. And they are just so cute. But I think that doom is a, I hate to say it. I just think it's a big theme because people are like, it's the end of the world, as we know it, you know, <laugh> yeah.

SHARI: I, I don't believe that I, I am a, I am an optimist but I gotta tell you the popularity, this, this game. Doomlings isn't, it's crazy. It's and it's so cute. These guys did such a good job and not, not for nothing. We did a great job printing it, but the design is just, it's just amazing.

I'm just calling in and, uh, you know, I'm listening to the imaginary worlds, but I'm actually living a pretty concrete world walking by a dairy farm, listening to birds, um, just in the countryside. So, um, I love the show and I love things about the different things, but I also really like being routed in my, my real world. So anyway, thanks. And, uh, congratulations for 200 episodes.

One of the most popular episodes we've ever done was called Solarpunk the Future. It came out in April 2020. I think part of what made that episode resonate with so many people was the timing. The pandemic had just hit, and it was

refreshing to hear about a creative movement that was built on hope and light – literal sunlight.

In that episode, I talked with Jane and Scot Noel. They run a marketing agency together and in their spare time, they publish a Solarpunk-themed magazine called Dream Forge. When I interviewed them in early March of 2020, COVID had spread yet to where they live in Pennsylvania. After that, things changed quickly. They had to stop printing the magazine and go digital, although they're slowly coming back to a print edition.

I was curious, where do they see the movement of Solarpunk these days, what's changed in the last 2 years? And they were really excited to tell me their magazine Dream Forge now has a rival magazine out there called Solarpunk.

JANE: There's a, a magazine that, that titled themselves Solarpunk Magazine. So I think that's pretty cool too, that, that there's enough interest to get that, um, Serena Ulibarri that you had had on the show with us in the first place, she has a story and um, I think it's the second issue of that. The other thing I'd say is, um, I've seen an awful lot of Kim Stanley Robinson in the news that has definitely been, I think maybe getting broader than just the science fiction audience with some of the work that he's done too.

Yeah. Back in 2017, I interviewed him for an episode I did about his novel, New York 2140, which is a great book about a flooded New York City that's sort of functioning like Venice and it's funny cuz in interviews people will describe his work as dystopian. He's like, what are you talking about? I'm doing best case scenarios here!

JANE: <laugh>

So have you two done any little Solarpunk in your lives, put up some panels, start growing, uh, herbs on your, on your windowsill or anything?

JANE: We haven't gotten into. We spend so much of our time on the magazine. We haven't gotten into the idea.

SCOT: One of the things you can't well, no, no, no. One of the things you can't see here and that Jane is blind to because it surrounds her. If you just turned her camera into the room, it would be filled with plants, uh, big plants, little trees that, that are in her office there. If you were to go into our living room, it looks like you're walking into a solarium because

JANE: I counted, when I brought them all inside from, from out outside is there's 50 50 house plants.

SCOT: They don't all fit in the house so.

JANE: There's others are still at the office because I couldn't didn't have room to bring them home.

Have you seen any other, um, in the last two years, any other kind of influences, maybe like an advertising campaign or a movie where you're like, Hey, that looks pretty, that I, I see the influence of Solarpunk even if the people creating it may not have even known that that was Solarpunk?

SCOT: One of the things that I can say to that is when we make our, when we make our videos and, and you know, we do things we, and even at our day job, we have resources that you call upon for video clips and, um, uh, for images and that sort of thing. Uh, but I'm very surprised to look at that and see, oh, I'm seeing pictures of, of, you know, green arch colleges, big building projects, where, where they're growing plants on buildings. And lots of times, if you're looking for science fiction clips, they do the traditional dystopian thing. It's like, well, here's the science fiction clips. There's the destroyed city that looks like, you know, something's happening in Ukraine now. And, and there's the guy in the radiation suit, but now I'm starting to see, oh, you want to see a future city will look, there's a bright, beautiful shining city with the sun behind it and the blue sky and clouds. And one thing that, that ties together that this is something we've seen in Dream Forge, and it kind of ties together. You were asking earlier about, well, do you guys have plants and, and, and do gardening and that sort of thing. And we've published, we've seen, and then we've published two stories in, in the last year or so that, uh, just were interesting to me because they, they weren't specifically about, oh, well, here's light as power generation, but, but that idea of, of plants and humans getting so close together that you, you kind of have the two blending and we did one, uh, that was a fantasy called In The Leaves Embrace by Deborah L. Davitt. That story is a wonderful story of a tribe of people who, who actually a, a woman basically ends up with a lover that is really a tree. And you have this, you have this romance and you have this understanding of the two different worlds and it's, it's done in a fantasy way. And it sounds absolutely ridiculous when I say it, but, but it's a wonderful story that, uh, is very emotional and, and very well done. And, and another one that was even stranger than that was, um, Eat and Be Eaten by JL Akagi and, uh, that made it to Tangents recommended reading list for 2021. And it was literally about someone who is in a future technological world is making the choice well, I'm, I'm done with being a human. I want to be a tree and they have a way to do that. And it's, it's all presented a, a little bit in that idea of, you know, what is your identity and how are you dealing with some past conflicts? And it's like, well, I want to become a tree and become part of this park and it gets into how that entire nature environment speaks to itself and shares water and resources and how they, how they develop a relationship with the gardener. And you know, we're seeing some things like that, so we are some good stories on different levels of getting past just humans as destroying the climate.

I could go on forever checking in with previous guests.

You know, I began this show in 2014 talking about my career changes, how I left home in Boston to become an animation storyboard artist in Los Angeles, and then complexly changed direction, and moved to New York and went into public radio. This podcast began out as a side project, and I'm really happy that it's become my full career.

When I worked in public radio, we'd often say something like, "this show couldn't exist without the support of listeners like you." Those words feel so true right now. This community of listeners means the world to me. Thank you so much for listening.

So, I'm going to close the episode with the voice I began with. You ready?

MUM: Yup.

That's it for this week. Special thanks to Caro Murphy, Jason Suran, Shari Spiros, Tim Lapetino, Scot Noel and Jane Noel, all the listeners who called in. Also, extra special thanks to Sono Sanctus, who has provided a lot of music for the show over the years.

The show's assistant producer is Stephanie Billman. You can follow Imaginary Worlds on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

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