Tuck: Queer Candle Co. is a trans-owned business that makes small-batch, hand-poured soy wax candles topped with pressed flowers, dried herbs, and zested aromatics. Scents range from Teak & Leather to their special Pride Month scent, Orange Grove. My favorite thing about Queer Candle Co. is that 10% of profits get donated to the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, and you can get 10% off your first order with the promo code GENDER10. That’s all at QueerCandleCo.com.

[Gender Reveal theme music plays]

Tuck: Welcome to Gender Reveal, a podcast where we hopefully get a little bit closer to understanding what the hell gender is. I’m your host and resident gender detective, Tuck Woodstock.

[Gender Reveal theme music ends]

Tuck:Hey, everyone. Hope you’re all hanging in there. This week on the show, I am so, so stoked to share my conversation with the one and only Imogen Binnie! You of course know Imogen as the author of *Nevada*, but did you know that she is also a screenwriter and a parent and a musician who used to play in a doom metal trio? We talk about all of that in this episode, plus our takes on classic cinema…

Imogen [interview excerpt]: I’ve definitely wondered what it’s like to watch *Bob’s Burgers* if you’re not friends with a lot of trans people.

Tuck: And of course, what Imogen has been working on since Nevada…

Imogen [interview excerpt]: So I found myself with a manager in LA, cause that’s just like a thing that happened, and I’m like, “Hey, I’m gonna write a reboot of *Love, Actually* where everyone is trans,” and she was like, “Cool.”

Tuck: First, a quick reminder this is the last week to get your hands on our May merch collection! That collection features shirts that say things like, “Trans and Disabled Solidarity” and “Queer as in Fuck You” and “Everyone Knows I’m a Transsexual,” and as always, all profits are split between trans artists and trans-led organizations. That’s all at bit.ly/gendermerch through the end of May. We’ve got two Theymail messages for you this week. Theymails are tiny messages from listeners, and the first one says: “Hi, I’m Delta and I have a podcast about queerness, disability, mental health, and more. Check it out, it’s called Out\_Cast, available on most platforms.” The second message is for two listeners in particular, and it says, “Congratulations on your wedding, Ben and Eliana! You are amazing humans and you make such a fabulous pair. Wishing you many years of t4t love and happiness.” And now, it’s time for This Week in Gender.

[Transition sound effect plays, with low metallic chimes and quiet cymbals]

Tuck: Well, the news is still bad. So instead, I am just going to say the same thing to you that I have already said to every single person I’ve spoken to in my personal life in the last week, and that’s going to involve spoilers for several TV shows, so sorry in advance.

[Background music fades in]

Tuck: As some of y’all know from our newsletter, I was really excited about *Yellowjackets* a few months ago when it came out. I was excited about *Our Flag Means Death* at one point, and then I was excited about *Severance*, and that was fun for me because I don’t actually normally like that many TV shows. But one of the great things about all these shows is that they all have multiple canonically queer characters that are all in canonical gay relationships. And I was like, “This is great! Every show is gay! We live in the future, I’m thriving, what a time to be gay and alive, etc., etc.” And then I watched *Heartstopper*, and unfortunately, I have now reassessed my relationship to all other media properties.

Before I go any further, let me just say that despite having a film degree for no goddamn reason, I am not a film critic; this is not a sophisticated media analysis at all; this is literally just some gay feelings. It is extremely fine to need different things from media than I do, but that said, I am the kind of person who gravitates to shows where nothing bad happens, like *Bob’s Burgers*. There is just so much in the world that’s so sad and so bad; I personally do not go to entertainment in order to feel even more bad. And watching *Heartstopper* has made me realize that despite seeing #QueerRepresentation in pretty much any movie or TV show I watch these days, and despite seeing media that doesn’t make me feel like total shit, I still rarely if ever see gay main characters who actually get to do gay praxis without immediately being punished for their sins.

And this is not a new observation; I didn’t make it up; we all know the bury your gays trope; we all know about queer baiting; we can name a bunch of shows and movies that have done between like 90 minutes and 15 seasons of queer pining followed by like one kiss, followed by one of those two people immediately imploding or whatever. And a lot of media folks these days are really aware of these tropes, and have taken extra care to not perpetuate them, which is why I thought that maybe this wasn’t as big of an issue these days.

But it turns out that, at least in my heart and in my body, something is still very, very wrong. It’s almost like *my body has kept the score*. Because I was watching *Heartstopper*, which is a show about two British teen boys, and they started flirting and touching hands, and at one point they’re both crammed onto the same little drum set stool, and I was like, “Heh heh heh, gay!” But even though I knew it was a show about queer kids, I was like, “Surely they won’t actually kiss, because that would be good, and we aren’t allowed to have good things. Or maybe they will kiss, but only after one or two or three seasons of intense pining.” But then in the third episode, they kiss! Specifically, they kiss in an empty room at the birthday party of a homophobic classmate, so at first I was like, “Oh my god, that boy is going to burst in and see them and do homophobia to them!” But he didn’t! And then when he didn’t, I was like, “Oh I get it, this is just a fantasy sequence.” But it wasn’t! It was just a nice thing that was happening.

And I had to watch that scene, I swear to god, *three* times to really internalize that these two precious boys could kiss without their whole world immediately disintegrating around them. And there were so many moments when I felt this way. Like, every single time these boys kissed in a public place. Or when a girl asked one of the boys out on a date and it seems like he might say yes to avoid getting outed, but he instead just communicates his feelings? Like, very maturely, and she takes it really well? And then the two boys just keep dating! They’re just these kids in love and nothing really bad happens. I mean like, bad things happen in other ways; it’s a show, there’s conflict. There are homophobic comments; there are like, shitty guys; there’s assault at the beginning, just a heads up. But the conflict isn’t, “These boys kissed once and now they’re torn apart forever, and we will watch 27 episodes of them trying to be together but not being allowed to ever touch,” or whatever the fuck. They’re just cute lil boyfriends with supportive siblings and supportive parents, one of whom is Olivia Colman for some reason.

Sidenote, actually one of the boys realizes he’s bisexual by watching *Pirates of the Caribbean* with Olivia Colman, and then he also watches bisexual vlogs on YouTube right after that, and I was like, “Oh my god, why didn’t I realize I was bisexual when I watched *Pirates of the Caribbean* every day when I was like, twelve?” But in my defense, we literally did not have YouTube yet. So, gonna blame that! Anyway, it’s not even just these two boys. There’s also a cute lesbian couple in the show; there’s a trans girl who gets to be a complete, well-rounded person with interests and hobbies and plot arcs and friends, and she doesn’t experience any major onscreen trauma or transphobia either. Is that even realistic? Who gives a shit! I literally watched the entire show twice because I spent the first time being so scared for everyone anytime something good happened that I couldn’t fully enjoy it.

And I was like, “Why does this sweet little show feel so completely foreign to my brain and my body?” And I started looking back at all the shows that I’ve been watching recently that I mentioned at the top of this segment. So like, *Severance*: the gays touch hands once; they almost kiss; they get forcibly separated. *Our Flag Means Death*: there are like three gay couples who all get forcibly separated at the end of the season, including one that had just hooked up for the first time, and another one that kissed exactly once before completely destroying their entire lives for no goddamn reason. *Yellowjackets*: complicated, but for all we know they eat each other, so let’s move on. I started thinking about movies. *Rafiki*, *Moonlight*, *Blue is the Warmest Color*, *Brokeback Mountain—*oh my god, no wonder every time two gays kiss I’m like, “Something bad is going to happen! Someone is about to do a hate crime, someone’s gonna panic, someone’s about to die.”

And I know something bad has to happen in order for stories to have stakes and arcs and plots, but some of us are depressed gays from fucked-up families, and we need to watch literally any gay person experience more than five seconds of happiness in order to convince ourselves that it’s at all, ever possible. Because as it turns out, I personally also get very scared any time something good-seeming happens to me, especially in a relationship capacity, although also, generally. Not to quote Phoebe at you, but I really do get this feeling whenever I feel good that it’ll be the last time. And maybe that’s partly because I was taught over and over and over and over and over again that this was true!

So let me just say two things. One: I know *Heartstopper* isn’t the only show that’s ever done this. Feel free to share more, tag us somewhere, write in, whatever. Also, *Heartstopper* is a show on Netflix, which is currently being extremely evil. They just laid off like all of their queer and brown people. So if you want to check out *Heartstopper*, it’s also a graphic novel and webcomic that you can read. I read like one page that my roommate sent me and immediately started crying, so that’s where I’m at emotionally. And hey, maybe you have more emotional resilience than I do right now and you know that relationships can exist and you don’t need to consume a lot of painfully earnest content about gay teens, I don’t know! Maybe some of you aren’t completely busted! Can you imagine anything good happening? I can’t. But I have decided to start trying again.

[Background music fades out]

Tuck: Or at least, I was trying. For like, mmmm, four or five minutes, and then I got permanently banned from Tinder, so we’re back to square one on that one. This has been, This Week in Gender.

[Transition sound effect plays, with low metallic chimes and quiet cymbals]

[Gender Reveal theme plays]

Tuck: Imogen Binnie is a writer and musician best known for her novel *Nevada*, her column in *Maximum Rocknroll* magazine, and the TV show *Cruel Summer*. She’s been involved in trans communities since the late 90s.

[Gender Reveal theme ends]

Tuck: So the way we always start the show is by asking, in terms of gender, how do you describe yourself?

Imogen: Um, trans woman. Pretty straightforward.

Tuck: Great. So Ozzy and I like to poke around and look at other interviews our guests have done, and a lot of what you have done is for the first *Nevada* press cycle in 2013. And I was just interested what it’s been like to do press again, almost a decade later for the same book, and how that’s comparing to the first go around?

Imogen: Yeah, it’s fuckin’ weird. It’s super weird, because this book feels very 2008 to me. I spent a lot of time on the book, working and editing and all those things, like you do with a book the first time around. And then yeah, I’ve just been doing other stuff since then, and to come back to it, I’m like, “Wow, this is where I was 15 years ago.” You know what I mean? “I guess I’ll just get very, very close to where I was 15 years ago.” I feel like a distinction that I’ve noticed for sure is that, you know, the first time around I was talking to a lot of people and doing interviews, and I feel like I had a lot that I was like, “I need to say this thing,” like, “I need people to fucking *get* this.” And now I’m kind of like, “I don’t know, man.” [Both laugh] A lot has changed, and I don’t know that I have anything intelligent to say about trans stuff that people aren’t already saying. Which felt different back then, you know what I mean? I really felt like people hadn’t heard the type of shit that we were trying to say.

And I mean, of course they had, right? We didn’t invent giving trans people agency on the page or anything, you know? I just feel like times have changed, and I got old, and I have jobs and kids and stuff and I, like…. There was a window. There was a point in my life, five or six years ago, maybe more, maybe less, I don’t know, where I was like, “Yeah yeah, I wanna talk about trans stuff; I wanna talk about gender; this is what is compelling to me,” and would be stoked to have those conversations wherever they came up. And at this point I’m not like, “I *don’t* wanna talk about trans stuff or gender,” it just doesn’t feel compelling to me in the same way, you know what I mean? Which is not to say I would have anybody shut up or anything, it’s just like, yeah, I’m just in a different place I guess. I don’t know! I feel like as I’m saying this, I’m like, “That’s bullshit; you’re overstating this very strongly.” I don’t know if I agree with myself.

But getting back to the original question of how is it different to do interviews now than it was the first time around…. It’s all so surreal, because the outlets—outlets, what a wild term—the people who are stoked to talk to me are like, *Vulture*, and like, I think *W Magazine* got in touch with the publicist. And it’s just like, it had a subcultural moment, right? There was a moment when it came out where it was like, it felt like it was *doing a thing* in trans communities in a way that felt good. And at this point it’s kind of wild to be like, “Okay, so now a lot of people are mad at trans people in the world, and a lot of people are looking for ways to support trans people even though they might not necessarily be coming from a background in which they know how to do that with any kind of nuance,” right? And, you know, not to critique anybody, not coming after anybody who is stoked to do an interview with me because this book is going back into print, but it’s so surreal to be like, “How do I give an interview that’s gonna be read or heard by a lot of people who aren’t—have really different contexts for it than what I imagined for it initially?”

It’s wild, right? It’s a weird little book, and to be having it have this moment in the sun right now, when you know, so many people are mad about trans stuff…. And it’s not a flattering book. The point of it was that I wanted, you know, it doesn’t paint any of—well, I guess it paints both of the significant others of the two main characters in relatively flattering lights? But yeah, it’s just a funny book to be having another moment right now, I guess. I feel like, as I mention, I’m not super online anymore in the way that I used to be, and so I don’t feel like I have as much of a sense of the context, the kind of granularity of the context of trans stuff right now, as I felt like I did back then. And of course, even when it first came out, it was still a very specific wedge of queer subcultures that were really embracing it, you know what I mean? It’s not like it was widely beloved by all queer and trans people or anything. I don’t know! Yeah, it’s wild.

Tuck: Yeah, there’s so much in there. [Imogen laughs] But I think the first thing that I just wanted to acknowledge is how almost backwards it ended up being that when you were doing your first tour, I’m sure you got to talk a lot about the trans stuff you wanted to talk about and were eager to do, but I would guess that it was more for trans and queer audiences, and now that you’re like, “I’m kind of over this a little bit” is the time when all of these presumably, at least some, cis reporters are being like, “It’s cool to talk to trans people now, and also it is an extremely important time to talk to trans people, and so let’s talk to this trans person and see what she has to say about transness,” and you’re like, “No, I was—I did that one already. Can we talk about the TV show that I write on or whatever?” So interesting.

Imogen: Yeah, and I mean, I’m overstating it when I say I’m over it. It’s been really valuable and important to me to be building trans community. I’ve started a number of trans groups in different parts of the United States, and yeah. One of the things that was so rad about getting to publish *Nevada* with Topside Press, which was like, all trans people, was that they got it, right? The goal is not to get rich and famous. The goal is to get this into the hands of trans people who might like it or benefit from it or feel seen by it, I guess, most importantly. And so, if you’ve looked at the old interviews…. I can’t. But I remember talking a lot about the thing that really felt new, I guess, to me about *Nevada* was being like, “No no, I’m gonna write this for a trans audience rather than a cis audience.”

Because there was at the time, and I’m sure you still see this, but at the time it was very much like, if there was a trans character in a book then the narrative would fucking screech to a halt so that they could explain what hormones do and whether you know, if estrogen does anything to your voice, or like, what penile inversion surgery—or you know, it just felt like you could not tell a story about a fuckin’ trans person, and if they showed up they were either tragic, dying-in-a-gutter figures, or angelic… angels, I guess. [Both laugh] And so the idea really was, you know, let’s write this for a trans audience. And now to be like, oh, this thing that assumed some level of knowledge is suddenly going out to this wider audience which does not, like I said before, doesn’t have the same…I don’t know. I was gonna say, “which doesn’t have the same context,” but at this point, I guess people in general know more about trans people than they did 15 years ago, right? So like…. [Laughs] Are you kind of saying yes and no?

Tuck: I think the ones who are picking up *Nevada* does, yeah. I’m thinking about, a lot of my job outside of this is talking to cis people about gender, and I’m like, “A lot of them still don’t know any of it,” but they probably aren’t reading *Nevada*, so, I guess that’s fair.

Imogen: Right, yeah.

Tuck: Yeah. Well, it’s so interesting ’cause at the top, you were talking about how you felt like things had changed a lot since *Nevada* first came out, which makes sense. But when I was reading *Nevada*, and also the interviews around *Nevada*, a lot of what struck me was how well everything you were saying was holding up. And on one hand, I think it’s just a testament to your ability as a person, but I think also it unfortunately speaks to the fact that we’re still sort of having the same conversations that we were 10-plus years ago. But yeah, I guess I was curious what you feel *has* changed? Because I was so struck by what was exactly the same.

Imogen: Yeah, good question. So, when you write a thing and then you live with it for a while—this has probably been your experience as well—if it becomes a thing, you keep returning to it; at some point all you can really notice is the things you would do differently about it. The things where you’re kind of like, you know, “Aww, I didn’t nail that at all.” Maybe this is just me.

Tuck: No, totally.

Imogen: I know it’s not just me, but I shouldn’t imply that you, specifically, have this relationship to your own work.

Tuck: [Laughs] I extremely do, and I talk about it constantly on this show, so! [Both laugh]

Imogen: Great! Here’s the thing: I feel like there is a lot of inter-queer community politics stuff that feels very New-York-in-2006 in a way that, you know, trans guys have criticized some of the ways that Maria talks about trans guys in the book, in ways that I feel like…. [Laughs] I see you doing a little—

Tuck: A lot of it’s very valid. [Laughs]

Imogen: I mean, it feels un-nuanced to me, right? And at this point, it doesn’t feel as urgent to me—again, I don’t know, maybe this is what people are experiencing. But my sense is that the questions that people are asking as they’re coming out and sort of the conversations that they’re having have evolved to some extent. I mean, maybe not. You speak to it! You tell me! I don’t know. Did the inter-community politics not feel fucked up to you?

Tuck: No, they feel fucked up. [Both laugh] Well, I mean, I was wondering, a lot of your interviews are—not to completely derail what you’re already saying, but a lot of your interviews from like 10 years ago were like, “I’m breaking up with queer community,” right? And I was like…where’re you at? Did that get better? ’Cause it’s still fucked up, in general.

Imogen: I had to take a step away from that, for sure. I don’t know that I feel like I have broken up with the queer community. I think I had this kind of binary idea that you grow up in straight culture, and then you come out as queer or trans, and then you move over to queer or trans culture world, right? And so you’re like, you know, assuming that there’s the same—like, in straight world, straight people are kind of just accepted, there’s a lot of homophobic slurs and people are mean to each other in straight world, but it’s all just kind of reinforcing the fact that hey, we’re all straight here and we’re all doing our thing. And I think I had this idea that moving over to queer world would be relatively chill; you would just be accepted by queer world and then move on on that trajectory instead. And yeah, found that that was not my case. My expectations for queer world when I started living in queer world were way higher than they probably should have been, and so I got my heart broken a lot, right?

Yeah, and so when I was doing press for *Nevada*, I lived in the Bay Area ’til like 2010, and then we moved to Portland, Maine, and we were there for a couple years. And the Bay Area queers had been heartbreaking in a number of ways, but what I figured out in the Bay Area was I was like, “Oh, I just need to be friends with trans people, and I need to stop hanging out with other fucking people who don’t get trans women and who are just gonna, you know, very predictably do a shitty job.” It’s a very broad brush that I’m painting with, but kind of, that was the experience. And so while I was living in Portland, we knew queers and queers were hanging out and stuff, but there were like two incidents in a row that happened a couple months apart from each other I think, of trans guys coming over and just saying fucked-up things about trans women with no idea that they were saying fucked up shit about trans women. And that was the thing that really led to me being like, “Yeah, I don’t trust queers now. You were both vetted by friends who are not trans women, and yet you still came over to my house and were saying shit that made me have to go upstairs and cry, at one point on my birthday.” And so I was like, “Yeah, fuck this, I don’t trust any of you, y’all are doing your thing.”

And you know, we live in patriarchy and different trajectories of transitioning look really different under patriarchy, right? And so I don’t know. On one hand I’m sort of like, I shouldn’t have expected too much from anybody… but on the other hand, I’m kind of like, I *should* have. [Laughs] I should have been able to expect that, you know what I mean? But yeah, so I was kind of like, “I don’t trust the queers anymore.” And you know, it’s not like I don’t trust the queers anymore in a way like I’m not interested in what the queers are making or engaging. At that point when I was living in Portland, Maine, and really feeling kind of destroyed by the queer community, I also started a band called Correspondences that played for a few years that’s like, definitely the most beloved band that I’ve ever played in. That was with two other queer women who are still some of my favorite people. So I don’t want to paint it as uncomplex, but yeah, there was a thing going on. So….

You know what it is? *Here’s* what we’re driving towards: I needed to learn to have my guards up better around the queers. So I did the *Nevada* tour, and I stayed on a lot of queers’ floors and couches and shit who are not trans women. And yeah, just had to have lower expectations for people I guess, which is a bummer, but also was necessary at the time. I feel like, you know, we talk a lot about performing being a good ally or whatever, but I feel like that has kind of raised the bar for interaction with each other in a way that just did not exist in 2008, 2010, 2012. I remember, you know, a trans guy who had been involved in Camp Trans at one point who was a friend of friends, but we had hung out a few times, and I remember him being like, “Hey, I’m gonna go play a show with Bitch,” who’s like, notorious for having played Michfest a bunch of times and defending Michfest, you know, him being like, “I hope you’re okay with this.” And me being like, “How the fuck am I gonna be okay with this? ’Cause it’s good for your fucking band’s career? Fuck you for misjudging so—” Apparently, I’m still mad about this! [Tuck laughs] Yeah, I don’t know.

Tuck: I was going to ask about Camp Trans and by extension Michfest, but I just wanted to acknowledge first that it was funny, because in my notes I had written down that in your *Maximum Rocknroll* column you had said that Correspondences the band was a really important thing in your life for learning not to fucking hate everybody, and I just wrote, “Can you say more about that? I’d love to also not hate everybody.”

Imogen: Yeah, you know I’d played in bands before Correspondences, I’d played in a couple bands in New York and I’d played in a band for a few years in the Bay Area. And they were cool experiences, but I don’t know, I think it was a product of my complicating my relationship to the queer community. Cause my whole thing about wanting to trust the queer community so whole-heartedly, I think had been, like a lot of stuff in my life, sort of about blaming myself for things that were not my fault. And so as that was evolving after having existed in queer world for you know, five or six years or however long it was, there was a going away party for a friend in Portland who was leaving. And my friend Emily was there, my friend Lee was there, and I had been just holing up in my house; I hadn’t really met new people. And we hadn’t hung out that much, but we were hanging out and talking shit and we were like, “We should start a fucking band!” And Emily was like, “You know, I went to school for playing cello, so I should play cello in our band.” I was like, “Great! I’ve been playing guitar in bands for forever, I wanna play bass,” and Lee was like, “Well, I have drums that I can kinda play.” And we were like, “In order to have a band, we should just play doom metal, which is the slowest variant of metal music, so that you can play the drums slowly, and then we don’t have to stress about you having to practice too much.”

And so we did! And you know, I’d never, I didn’t know shit about doom metal. Doom metal was like a joke to my previous band before then, where we would pretend to play shitty doom metal cause we didn’t understand it. But Lee and Emily both were chill and did a good job about trans stuff when it came up, which wasn’t that often. I was also like, “I don’t really wanna talk about it,” I just didn’t want people offhandedly to make me want to leave cause of saying fucked-up shit. And that never happened, and Correspondences was a really kind of magical experience. Lee was working at a bakery at the time, and so there was always delicious pastries to eat during band practice in her living room, and Emily is this phenomenally talented musician. And I don’t wanna talk shit about Lee’s drumming, cause she is incredible. She’s one of my *favorite* drummers. She has such a weird, specific way of playing drums.

We started wearing tulle, like that fabric, as veils, and playing by candlelight in basements, and just leaning into the fact that we were like, “Let’s just do something fucking wild!” And it really started from a place of like, we would like to start a band. We are all playing weird instruments that are not traditionally associated with bands, so why not pick a genre that like…. It just wound up being such a specific like, “Let’s make this work; this is really just an excuse to hang out with each other and have fun” kind of band, which is I feel like what bands should be. And so we played a big show with Silver Mount Zion at the SPACE Gallery in Portland that much of Portland’s music-going community was at, and we got to play by candlelight on the floor! It was just really giving ourselves permission to just do whatever the fuck, in a way that really *worked*. After I left the Bay, I think I kind of needed to evolve a little bit, and getting away from “I am always in pain about trans stuff,” that was a really helpful way to do it, I guess.

Tuck: Yeah. I was just talking with Avery Tucker on the show, who’s a trans guy who’s in a band, and I feel like the trans-guy-in-a-band experience is all about being in pain because you’re trans, because all of a sudden you can’t use your voice anymore, and you’re just suffering whether you want to or not. And your experience is like, “And then we got to wear veils and play in candlelight! [Imogen laughs] And there was a cello!” And I’m just like, this rules! This is so good.

Imogen: I mean it was so great! Cause I could be like, “You know what, I don’t wanna sing.” And they’d be like, “Great! We’re all here to make ourselves feel stoked about this band.” And I’d be like, “Okay, now I just wanna do black metal vocals,” right? And they’d be like, “Great, let’s do a 15-minute song where the last couple minutes are you screaming like a black metal singer!” You know? It’s just like, I don’t know. Special is such a goofy word, but. It was a very *specific* experience. And it’s all really down to the three of us in the room really being good at making a band happen that was fun to be in.

Tuck: Mm, I love that. Well, speaking of hanging out, maybe….

Imogen: Yeah, let’s do it!

Tuck: I wanna circle back to Camp Trans, because you wrote about it in the new afterword for *Nevada*. And you mentioned that you were a head organizer one year, and just a lil bit about what you learned about the importance of being in physical space with trans community, and not just internet space that we’re all in. So yeah, I was just wondering if you could talk more about, I guess literally *what* Camp Trans *was*, because not everyone has read the foreword of the not-yet-rereleased *Nevada*, and maybe didn’t go to Camp Trans in 2006. [Imogen laughs] Maybe just more about that and what it taught you?

Imogen: Yeah! So, it’s wild. It’s like, it really feels like such a different era. The history of Camp Trans is that there was a women’s music festival called the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival, where “women” was spelled with a Y, that started in the 70s as like a feminist thing. A lot of the history is kind of vague, but my understanding is that there was at least one trans woman who played there back then, but it may have been more complicated than that, and I may be confusing it with a different thing that happened with Olivia Records, I don’t know. I don’t know what the fuck happened before I was born. But in the early 90s, there was a trans woman named Nancy Burkholder, who was kicked out of Michfest for being trans. And suddenly the policy, the policy like capital-P *Policy* of Michfest, was that trans women were not womyn with a Y, and therefore were not welcome at Michfest. And so, I think the Lesbian Avengers in Chicago—I could have some of this history wrong. Hopefully somebody will do a fucking oral history of this shit at some point. They started holding Camp Trans outside, and I think Les Feinberg was involved. And Michfest is this week-long music festival in Michigan, which meant you had to either be pretty affluent or else able to figure out… you had to be kind of cunning to figure out how to get there for a week, you know. But lots of bands played, I mean, whatever. I’m debating, do I talk shit about anyone who played Michfest? And I feel like, no; if you need to see me talking shit about people who played Michfest…

Tuck: [Laughs] It’s available.

Imogen: …you can find it online somewhere. Yeah, it’s there. [Laughs] But yeah, I guess there was Round 1 of Camp Trans that happened for a few years in the 90s, and then it kind of fell apart. And they brought it back a few years later, so I think it started happening again in 200m 2003, maybe. I didn’t go til 2006. But it started out as a protest across the street from Michfest saying, “Trans women are women; let trans women in.” As it kind of gained steam, before my time there, they sort of moved down the road and had a much bigger space, and it kind of became its own thing as well. And we would walk the line of all the people who were waiting to get into Michfest and be like, “Hey, we’re from Camp Trans, we want you to know blah blah,” and it was a wild rollercoaster. There was one year, I think maybe the first year that I went was 2006, and I think 2006 Camp Trans declared victory, because they let a trans woman buy a ticket. And then the victory was rescinded; it was all, it was a fiasco. But I shouldn’t call it a fiasco, that’s overstating it. You know, it was a complicated thing. Because a lot of capital-F Feminists were going to Michfest, which meant a lot of capital-F Feminists were coming back to the domestic violence organizations that they ran, or shelters that they were a part of, and kind of taking Michfest policy and enacting it there. And so in a sense the policy of Michfest, which was this, you know, almost religious experience that these people—or like these women, I should say—although, it wasn’t all women, right? A lot of trans guys were going to Michfest, and that was how we defined trans at the time. “How we defined trans at the time” is probably not exactly how I mean that, but how they defined “womyn,” I guess, with a Y, was it included trans men, nonbinary, whatever.

Tuck: I mean, that still shows up in just random people at random organizations where they’ll be like, “Oh, should we be including trans men in ‘women’?” and I’m like, “No, *absolutely* not! We actually don’t want that either! Nobody asked for that!” [Imogen laughs] So, anyway.

Imogen: Right! And I mean it feels complicated, right? Because when you have a domestic violence agency, it should be supporting men and women, right?

Tuck: Right, yes.

Imogen: Like, that is the work you should be doing, and be clear and obvious, and people shouldn’t have to fucking worry about it. I worked in domestic violence for a long time, and so I may have strong opinions about this stuff, but anyway. For me, it was important to be protesting Michfest and pushing back on Michfest, but it wound up being a lot more valuable to me just to be in space with these trans people. And again, you either had to be kind of affluent to be able to get off work for a week and get out to Michfest and be there, or, you know, be really good with coming up with a scam to get out to Michfest, you know? I found a number of Craigslist rides to get out there, and it was always a thing, but Camp Trans really, you know…. I was thinking recently a lot about the zines that we used to just publish about gender, right? And you don’t see zines in the same way that you used to, because everybody can just post a Tumblr post or a TikTok video. Is a TikTok video just a TikTok? I’m on TikTok, I don’t know why I’m acting like I don’t know anything about TikTok! [Tuck laughs] It’s just like, I’m on the part of TikTok—I think I tweeted about this at one point—that’s like, people being hilarious about their trauma and emotional damage, not so much the part where they talk about trans stuff. Not that the part where they talk about trans stuff would be the part where they explain whether a TikTok video is called a TikTok video or a TikTok. [Tuck laughs] Anyway! [Imogen laughs]

Tuck: I was on TikTok like a year or two ago, and something I really liked then was seeing all the trans teens who didn’t spend a lot of time sort of explaining anything and was just like, “Yes, I’m trans, and here I am at the Starbucks,” and it was so cool and refreshing to see that. And my understanding, because I kind of left, was that it became a lot more sort of preachy, Tumblr-Twitter lite of like, “We have to have serious conversations about *issues*,” and I was like, “No, I was here for bits. That’s why I liked it here.” [Laughs]

Imogen: Right! I mean, yeah! It’s so complicated, cause I think a lot of what you see… and whatever, I don’t wanna talk shit or anything. But I feel like a lot of people come to a trans identity from a place of relative privilege, and they learn about things like what privilege is and how we can talk about it in ways that actually help people. But because they’re still pretty close to this relatively privileged place, what they do is they kind of turn that tool which is talking about these really important things into the same kind of club that people use everything from in the privileged place where they’re from. And so it stops being helpful and starts being a way of creating hierarchies about who’s fucked up and who’s good at, uh…. I don’t know. I don’t wanna be like, “Social justice warriors are bad,” but, you know. I did it! I was like, “You’re fucked up!” to people that it was probably not that helpful, to be like, “You’re fucked up!” Right? And part of it is just being relatively inexperienced, but exactly what you said, right? Kids being able to be like, “I’m trans and I’m at Starbucks!” That’s fucking funny, and that’s fucking cool, and I think that’s what I’m talking about when I say it feels like things are pretty different. You know what I mean? I don’t think GSAs were a thing. I’m old, but GSAs were not a thing when I was in high school, right? And now people are *over* GSAs, a lot of kids in high school, in a way where I’m like, “This is rad!” You know?

Tuck: Mm-hm. I don’t know why this made me think of this, but I was talking to my friend Cass and he said that he wrote this essay three years ago that still hasn’t been published, it’s still pending, but that touches on how in *Nevada*, he’s obsessed with Maria forgetting her shot being like, a drama of the novel. And he wrote—I’m just gonna read what he said—he said, “We’re supposed to be good medical citizens if we’re allowed to take these drugs, but most of us fuck up and forget or don’t do our labs and don’t use alcohol swabs or whatever—” That’s me, I’ve never used an alcohol swab. “—and it makes me feel incredibly good to see that in a novel, and it also creates a ticking clock of tension in the first half of the book, which I assume cis readers or people not on HRT don’t sense and don’t feel anxious about, which means the trans experience of reading the book is somatically different.” Anyways this is not a question. [Imogen laughs] But as soon as you said that, I was just like, “Oh my god, you’re right.” I had literal tension in my body every time she mentioned that she still hadn’t done her shot. I wanted to be like, “Everyone stop, and do your shot! [Imogen laughs] And then we’ll keep going.” You know? And so it’s just so interesting to think about that people could read that book and not have that somatic experience of like, “Oh my gosh, please just do your shot.” [Laughs]

Imogen: Yeah! I mean, that’s kind of, that was the point of like, that was a conscious decision to be like, I’m not gonna stop this narrative and explain what happens when you don’t do your shot, right? Except to acknowledge that you will have an emotional consequence if you’re not doing your shot or whatever. Yeah, it um… I can’t imagine what somebody who doesn’t know any trans people would think when they read this book. I mean, I know I’ve seen people talk about it and are like, “Yeah, I like this, and I never thought about this stuff,” or whatever, but it’s so wild. Again, just the context into which it is being released in wider release this time with that stuff not necessarily being legible, right?

Tuck: Yeah. Ozzy, did you have a question before you left?

Ozzy: Yeah, I guess I just wanted to ask, because I know you made a podcast about watching movies, Imogen Watches Classic Films. I listened to the episode that you did about *Sleepaway Camp*, which I know you’re very interested in, and I’m also obsessed with. I just wanted to ask if there’s anything that you wanted to say about horror and transness?

Imogen: Yeah, it’s a great question. I mean, and there’s stuff in *Nevada* about that, right? Maria goes and sees at least one horror movie over the course of *Nevada*. I don’t watch as much horror as I used to. I used to be deeply invested in horror, it was kinda my shit. And, I don’t know, part of it is the anxiety that a lot of people have developed over the last few years, and part of it I think is just being more in touch with my feelings. My friend Noel proposed the idea that horror movies can be a form of self-harm, and she was talking about intentionally choosing to watch comedies rather than horror movies. And I started working on a master’s degree in clinical mental health counseling in 2011? So like, as *The Collection* was coming out from Topside Press, but before *Nevada* came out. And one thing that I have seen in a lot of different contexts is the idea that trauma removes you from your body, right? And being not in your body feels bad, even if it feels like nothing at the time, right? That sense of removal doesn’t feel good. And I think in retrospect one of the things that horror movies did for me was to make me *feel* things. I never felt the kind of visceral, horrified that I think a lot of people experience who don’t like horror movies as much, I seem to experience from horror movies, right? Never felt upset about it, I was always stoked, like, “Look at this fucked up shit, right? This is great!” Or like, “Holy shit, you surprised me!” And so yeah, I think horror movies were a really good way for me to have feelings for a very long time. I think I have spent a lot of my life pretty dissociated from my feelings, as have a lot of trans people, and a lot of people who are not trans. It’s like a trauma *thing*. And so… I feel like I’m comin’ at you for saying [Laughs] that you’re also interested in horror movies, and that’s why….

Ozzy: [Laughs] I know! I’m like, “You’re making me do introspection now, I don’t like it!” [Both laugh]

Imogen: I’m so sorry! I don’t mean it! Except for you. I should have said this at the beginning. Except for you *specifically*, this is what I mean. [Ozzy and Tuck laugh] Part of it is having kids, too; since I’ve had kids, I just haven’t felt as drawn to seeing fucked-up shit like that. I mean, you know 80s slashers and stuff, that’s all fun, and the whole unnamed premise of my podcast was that I had just finished grad school and I was like, “Holy shit! I don’t have an enormous weight on my shoulder of obligation where I have to write lots of papers and shit. I better start doing a podcast every week so I have some kind of obligation,” right? Cause I don’t know how not to feel like I have homework. For *me*, I’ll say for me, it was a great way to have feelings that were not, uh… they could kind of cut through that layer of dissociation, or whatever.

Tuck: I had the exact tonal opposite question of this in regards to sort of…*cinema*, because sometimes when I have a guest I’ll just sort of deep scroll their Twitter for a while. And the tweets that made me *the* most excited, which is completely ridiculous, but I sent these to like three people, is from four years ago when you said, “Pretty sure *Bob’s Burgers* and *Steven Universe* take place in the same town. I don’t know what the fuck Uncle Grandpa is, but that should’ve been a Bob’s Burgers crossover.” [Imogen laughs] So first of all, I just wanted to say I know exactly what you’re talking about and you are 100% correct, that is the correct take. Two of the best shows ever, but also incredibly trans shows. And I think Steven Universe does it a little bit less subtly, probably because they have a trans showrunner, but my friend Niko and I, who’s been on the show, are constantly like, “Do we need to do a whole podcast or essay about the transness of Bob’s Burgers?” And I just wanted to ask you if you think *Bob’s Burgers* is trans, and if so, whomst on the show?

Imogen: I mean, Gene, obviously, right? There is not an episode of *Bob’s Burgers* that does not contribute evidence to the argument that Gene is trans. I don’t know, that’s my main one… I mean, obviously there’s Marshmallow. There’s probably other people. I don’t think I have anything really intelligent to say about *Bob’s Burgers* as a trans show, though, except that everybody is kind and therefore people have more room to explore gender in ways that aren’t like, “I’m exploring gender!” But I’m curious to hear your take; I don’t know, you tell me! Why do you think *Bob’s Burgers* is trans?

Tuck: Well Gene is trans; there’s a lot of arguments that Louise is nonbinary. But also I just was curious, because it’s possible to read the fact that there are two women who are voiced by men as just fucked up and patriarchy that they won’t give any roles to women. Or you can just be like, maybe these actually aren’t men, maybe these are just trans people, and that’s why they’re this way. And not to say that all trans women are like, *sounding like men*. But you know how you, like, you can just have this concept. In which case, it’s just a whole family of trans people, except Bob who’s a bisexual ally. And like, that’s kind of a fun read!

Imogen: I’ve definitely wondered what it’s like to watch *Bob’s Burgers* if you’re not friends with a lot of trans people because they do so much, for lack of a better term, cross gender voice casting. I’ve never– I never notice, I’m just like, “Yeah, I know a lot of people with a lot of different kinds of voices, this feels normal to me.” But does it *not* feel normal to some people? Is it a joke? I can’t imagine.

Ozzy: That’s so interesting to think about.

Imogen: Right?

Ozzy: That’s never occurred to me. [Ozzy and Imogen laugh]

Tuck: Yeah.

Imogen: Yeah! Good show.

Tuck: Good show!

Imogen: Mm-hm.

Tuck: Well, while we’re talking about TV, you’ve written for several television shows at this point, including the show *Doubt*, which included Laverne Cox doing groundbreaking things like hanging out with other trans women on network television. And also shows that didn’t have historic trans plotlines. And we heard that you almost worked on *Transparent*, but your ideas were too good? [Imogen laughs] Which, uh, fucked up of them. But I would love to hear how you got involved in screenwriting, and whether that’s something that you’ve always been working towards?

Imogen: Yeah, no, it’s not something I’ve always been working towards at *all*. In fact, it was something that was not on my radar even a little bit. It always seemed like something that other people did; it literally never occurred to me to try to do screenwriting. Which is kind of just based in my perspective on all of this stuff, which was kind of like, before I even wrote the first draft of *Nevada*, I was like, “I’m gonna write whatever I can, and if people want me to publish it, I’m gonna publish it wherever they’ll let me.” And it started very small, and just feels like it got bigger organically, you know what I mean? I wrote a lot online whenever anybody would let me, and then it turned into a story in the first Topside Press book, and then that turned into *Nevada*, and from there…. Yeah, it kind of snowballed. What happened was, 2000…I think it was probably 2016, I had probably just finished grad school, and I got a phone call from Joan Rater, who had been a showrunner on a bunch of seasons of *Grey’s Anatomy* with her husband Tony Phelan. And she was like, “Hey, we’re doing this show with Laverne Cox in LA. Do you wanna come write for it?” Like, “We read *Nevada*, do you wanna come write for our show? We’d love for you to write for Laverne Cox.” And I was sort of like, “I mean there’s no way this is *real*. Like, I’ll look up your name, but I don’t know that you’re this person who’s got a Wikipedia article.” But I was like, “Fuck it, why not, let’s give it a shot!” And I went out to LA, and it turned out to be real, and I got to write for Laverne Cox. And yeah, LA fucking came to me! And I wasn’t gonna say no. So I was just very fortunate. I was, I’ve been really lucky that, you know, when opportunities have presented themselves, I’ve been able to jump on them. They, I think, wanted a trans writer in the room for *Doubt* , and they liked *Nevada,* so they brought me out. And I guess I did a pretty good job, cause the next time they had a show go, they hired me for that too. That was *Council of Dads*. And then for *Council of Dads*, Bert Royal, who created *Cruel Summer*, sort of invited me to come write on *Cruel Summer* as well.

So the LA stuff has been surreal and… and awesome! I think, so going back to where I started, I think the reason I never thought of doing screenwriting, where it was *not* on my radar, was very much like, I wanted to write about trans people. You know what I mean? I wanted to read about trans people, and so I figured I had to write about trans people. And in fucking 2005, 2008, you know, maybe you could publish something on a small press, but I hadn’t seen very much of that. And there was just no way that there was gonna be movies about trans people that weren’t like, *Breakfast on Pluto* or, you know, just these very like, cis gays world things that were not compelling to me. And so, you know, it takes so much work for normal people who want to be doing screenwriting to get to that place, and I was like, “It’d be fucking silly for me to do that kind of work. There’s no way I’m gonna get hired to write, I don’t know, anything that feels good about trans people.” On top of that too, we had to find ways to scam our way to Michfest and get the time off in the summer for—I guess we didn’t go to Michfest, we went to Camp Trans. But I guess I should just say, there’s also just the financial piece, where it felt fucking goofy to be like, “I’m gonna write a screenplay,” right? Like, “I work in a bookstore, I play in a band, I have no time or money, I’m not gonna try to write a screenplay that I’m gonna go down to LA and sell. That’s ridiculous. I could write fiction, I could see that going somewhere.” And that was always home base anyway, you know? I was an English major in college, and just was working in bookstores for a million years. Fiction was where I lived, and so it made sense, so yeah. To have LA sort of come to me in the form of Tony and Joan was an unreal opportunity. I’m so thankful to them for making that happen. And now I find myself in development with a bunch of shit that may or may not go anywhere, the same way everybody in LA does, even though I don’t live in LA now. You know, it’s a fiasco, but I’m super grateful that that just came to me.

Tuck: Yeah, absolutely. Well, I’m sure that you’re getting asked this every time you do press since forever, but I did wanna ask what you’ve been working on these days, and aside from anything in TV and film-land that you may or may not be allowed to talk about in any way, I saw you reference a novel related to Kurt Cobain being trans; a novel about ghosts, the apocalypse, and Tumblr; and a novel codenamed *Keep the Piss Christ in Piss Christmas*? And I was like, I don’t know if this is one project, if this is three projects, if this is real, but I just wanted to check in. I cannot stop thinking about *Keep the Piss Christ in Piss Christmas*.

Imogen: [Laughs] Isn’t it a good title?

Tuck: It’s so good.

Imogen: I think I may have stolen that from somebody. I don’t think—I may not even have made that up, and I wish I could remember who it was. I think those are two projects. I think the apocalypse and ghosts and Tumblr thing was *Keep the Piss Christ in Piss Christmas*. That one kind of fell by the wayside, because in trying to figure out how to make it work, I was really trying to… I was like, “I’m gonna write a book with a lot of Black trans women in it, cause I feel like I wanna see more Black trans woman representation in the world.” And then I was like, “I don’t know if I’m the person to do that! I don’t know if I wanna read a book by *me* about Black trans women.” And so, you know, it’s a complicated subject. But where I landed, for me, was like, I don’t think that this is the book that I’m gonna dedicate the next however many years of trying to make it not be shitty and fucked up. So that one kind of, that one fell through. The book about Nirvana still exists. The problem with that fucking book is that, in terms of narrative, it kind of hits a wall pretty early on and things stop happening. And so, you know, I pick up that draft every, you know, couple times a year. And I’m like, “This time I’m gonna fucking make this thing work!” And then, you know, just other stuff comes up. Like I said, I have kids; I have work; I have also these things in development in LA; I’ve got a couple shows that I’m working on in LA, and I’ve got a movie actually that I sold that is an adaptation of somebody else’s book. That I don’t think I can talk about now, but I feel like I should, because it’s been kind of stuck in Covid development heck for a while, and maybe if everybody was like, “Make that movie!” then there would be lots of interest and they would make that movie. I don’t know what’s going on with it; I should follow up with the production company. But yeah, I sold a movie that hopefully will happen at some point.

Tuck: I mean, I think if we’re starting campaigns for anything to be made, I need to start a campaign for the all-trans remake of *Love, Actually* to be made that’s available on Twitter dot com.

Imogen: Yeah, yeah, that one is also ready to go. [Laughs] It’s so funny. That one specifically, I found myself with a manager in LA, cause that’s just like a thing that happened and I’m like, “Hey, I’m gonna write a reboot of *Love, Actually* where everyone is trans,” and she was like, “Cool.” And I wrote it! I spent a lot of time, you know. It takes a minute to put together a screenplay that works.

Tuck: It’s like 120 pages.

Imogen: Yeah. [Tuck laughs] And she was like, “Oh, I didn’t know that you meant it so literally that you were just doing a scene-for-scene…. This violates intellectual copyright law, and you *cannot* try to sell this.” [Laughs] And I was like, “That is *disappointing*.” I was actually, it *was* a pretty serious hit to my momentum that I had going with writing stuff. I think I was ready to hop from that to kind of a high concept sci fi thing that I haven’t been able to get on top of. But I mean, a big part of it, too, is just like, you know, we need an income to pay our rent, and I’ve got kids who are waking me up at 5:30 or 6:00 every morning. It’s just like, there’s so much going on that it’s hard to sit down and be like, “I’m going to just do all the work of making you know, a 75,000-or-whatever-word novel work and all of its pieces.” So yeah, there’s a lot of stuff right now. I’ve got, I mean it’s so easy to have a good idea for a novel, and so hard to find the time and energy to actually make it be a good novel. But I’ve got another idea that I’ve been kicking around. But I would love…I still like, the Nirvana thing isn’t dead. But it would be good if I could make it work! It just doesn’t work yet.

Tuck: Mm. Yeah, I mean, that’s…that’s fair. I don’t know how anyone has ever made a book work. [Imogen laughs] So I am impressed every single time.

Imogen: Yeah, turns out it’s a lot of work. [Both laugh]

Tuck: This is sort of a radical departure from what we’ve been talking about, but I think there’s this concept that you wrote *Nevada* and disappeared into the mist never to be heard from again, which is so funny cause you’ve been on and off social media, you’ve made a podcast, you’ve had a long-running column, your name has been on network television. But there’s this sort of sense that there’s this mythology, kind of one part Harper Lee and one part Gloss [Imogen laughs] where it’s like, “She did this one amazing thing for the culture and then vanished!” I’m just wondering what you make of that, and if you’ve felt that from people being like, “What’s Imogen Binnie up to?”

Imogen: I did not know that that was the narrative! I guess I can kinda see it, but it’s, I mean it’s interesting, right? I feel like, up til 2013, 2014, when I was still on Facebook, I had a policy of like, if a trans person tries to friend me on a thing, I will friend them. I’m just stoked to have trans people, I don’t know, in community, whatever that looks like. And at some point I had to stop, because there are so fuckin’ many trans people!

Tuck: There’s so fucking many.

Imogen: You know what I mean? There’s like, a lot! And I don’t wanna attribute this to anybody else. So, let’s say there was a thing that happened in my life where I was like, “I’m coming out as trans and I’m gonna transition and I don’t feel very safe so I need to make myself be important so that in some level—” I don’t know if it’s about safety, or if it’s about feeling legitimate or valid as we all love to say all day every day. [Tuck laughs] Or like, I don’t know exactly what the benefit is to being like, “I’m important. I’ve got thousands of followers. I have made an important thing.” I mean, you know what it is, for me, it’s just insecurity. I will not be a bad person if a lot of people care about me, right? It’s the drive of an insecure person to try to get fame. And it doesn’t work; that’s not how we start to, I don’t know, feel centered and legitimate. But part of the impulse behind, you know, establishing a brand on Twitter starting in like 2008, or being extremely available on Tumblr and all of that stuff, I think there was a component of that to me of like, if people are paying attention to what I’m saying and it’s smart and insightful, then that will make me feel less, you know, fucked up about my location in the world. And I don’t think it worked. [Both laugh]

Tuck: But it was a good effort!

Imogen: But it, I’m trying—yeah. Well no, cause I mean you know, I *did* wind up with a few thousand Twitter followers. It was like, “Oh, I actually feel stressed out about this instead of feeling good about it.” You know, you forget that the reason you become a writer instead of a dancer or actor or something is that you don’t want people to fucking look at you, right? [Laughs]

Tuck: Absolutely.

Imogen: And so, yeah. I think it just got overwhelming to be like, “I have a lot of people I don’t know paying attention to me. And you know, it’s great, I don’t wanna act like that’s bad or anything. It’s so rad every single time that somebody’s like, “You made this thing that has meant a lot to me.” And talking about *Nevada*, people who really love *Nevada*, it’s been really important to a lot of people. And to hear that from people, it’s kind of like, “Holy shit, this thing that I made and that I wanted it to do, has done that thing.” That’s incredible. Like I said before, right, a big part of what’s important to me in the world is building trans community and to see that happening around this book and it becoming a subcultural touchstone in this way has been so rad. But at the same time, [laughs] I don’t wanna diagnose myself with hypervigilance necessarily, but maintaining a personal brand on the internet is fucking exhausting! At least it was for me. And so it was really fun to be like, this is the way that I write on Twitter, and people like this, right? But it just became too automatic. It stopped being good for me, I think, and I don’t know…I don’t think I know how to be a normal person on social media? But you know, I don’t know how many of us do, right? That’s kind of the thing that we’re seeing about social media, is people are putting up what they want us to see, and blah blah blah, whatever. And so that’s why I guess I started the answer to this question with this idea of like, “Well, if I was important then I would not feel insecure,” or I would not feel whatever number of negative emotions that have characterized my own experience around stuff. Which is not to say I’m hyper-depressed all the time or anything, I just feel like everybody’s got their shit, and I’ve got mine. Having a personal brand that was kind of effective on the internet was not good for it. You know what I mean?

Tuck: Mm-hm. My absolute most important question is that you’ve written at least three characters named Melissa, and also you mentioned in the new afterword that you used to use the pseudonym Melissa Virus. I was just wondering, is there a secret backstory to the name Melissa?

Imogen: Wow, great question! You know what, there probably is. I think I feel like it just sounds like a rich white girl from the 90s name, in a way that is a compelling tension to me, having been a white trans teenager in the 90s. It doesn’t feel as simple as it was aspirational or something. Yeah, beyond that I don’t think there’s a great story. No, you know what it is? When I was a child, there was…. No, I’m not gonna make up a fucking story. I don’t know. [Tuck laughs] Yeah, I don’t have a good answer.

Tuck: I was ready for it! [Imogen laughs] Uh, great. Well. Then, we always ask before the last question if there’s anything else that you wanna talk about that we haven’t talked about yet.

Imogen: Oh, man. I wanna talk about John Darnielle’s novels, have you read John Darnielle?

Tuck: Mm-hm. I read the first one.

Imogen: Oh my god.

Tuck: I haven’t read the rest.

Imogen: He’s my favorite right now, I’m obsessed. He’s just…I remember reading reviews of his second book, where people were pissed about it cause they were like, “This was supposed to be a horror thing, and this is not a fucking horror thing.” Whereas I was so delighted by the fact that it was set up to be a horror thing and what it wound up being was just a kind of complexly structured melancholy thing instead that was really intense in places. The things that he subverts and the ways that he subverts them with compassion is so compelling to me. And so, yeah, I want to encourage everybody to read all four of John Darnielle’s novels cause of what they do and that’s, I guess, what I’m choosing.

Tuck: Mm. The way we always end the show is by asking, in your ideal world, what would the future of gender look like?

Imogen: Just be chill. Everybody should just chill the fuck out about it and let people be gendered. Or not. [Laughs] How’s that for wisdom?

[Gender Reveal theme plays]

Tuck: That’s gonna do it for this week’s show. If you had a good time, or learned something, please share this episode with other folks you think might also like it. You can preorder the re-release of *Nevada* wherever books are sold. You can also find Imogen’s old band Correspondences on Bandcamp. You can listen to her podcast Imogen Watches Classic Films in the Apple Podcasts app. Imogen is also on Twitter and Instagram as @imogenbinnie. We are on those platforms at @gendereveal and at genderpodcast.com where you can find transcripts of every episode and all sorts of other resources. We’ve got a bunch of good merch in the store through the end of May. Take a look at all of the new designs before they’re gone at bit.ly/gendermerch. If you like what we do here at Gender Reveal, please consider supporting the show at patreon.com/gender. By signing up you’ll automatically get access to our weekly newsletter, our bonus podcast feed which has another bonus pod coming out soon, I think next week, and all sorts of other fun stuff.

This episode was produced and edited by Ozzy Llinas Goodman and by me, Tuck Woodstock. Research help this week by Cass Adair. Our logo is by Ira M. Leigh. Our theme song is by Breakmaster Cylinder. Additional music this week by Blue Dot Sessions. We are off next week, because… I just, I just need a week you guys! [Laughs] But we’ll be back in *two* weeks with more feelings about gender. Sorry for saying guys on the trans podcast, please don’t cancel me.

[Gender Reveal theme ends]

Ozzy: I think your internet, Tuck, is doing something… bad.

Imogen: [Laughs] Wouldn’t it be great to be able to say your internet is doing something good?

Tuck: Sorry.

Imogen: Wait, now it’s saying *my* internet connection is unstable. What an adventure. [Ozzy laughs]

Tuck: What an adventure!

Imogen: Do you think we’ve been cursed?

Ozzy: I’m so confused. I’m like, “I can’t tell whose internet is the problem.” [Laughs] Maybe it’s all of us.

Imogen: Maybe it’s all of us.

[Bright chimes sound effect plays]

Imogen: You know, when I was listening to the episode with Jackie the other day, I was like, “Wow, she’s just talking for a really long time, how’s she doing that?” [Tuck laughs] And here I am, talking for a very long time! [Laughs] Thanks for having me on your podcast, again, good luck editing this into something that makes sense.