**Tuck:** Do you find yourself funding evil billionaires’ rocket ships every time you buy books? Check out Bluestockings Cooperative Bookstore in New York City or online at bluestockings.com to support a trans-owned, worker-owned, radical community space that’s bursting with great books, free Narcan trainings, free Plan B, free COVID tests, and delicious one-dollar coffee.

[Gender Reveal theme music starts]

**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 very, very excited to share my conversation with Margaret Killjoy. You may already know Margaret as the host of multiple podcasts and the author of several books, most recently We Won’t Be Here Tomorrow And Other Stories. In this episode, Margaret and I talk about the things you might expect, like anarchism and prepping and whether you should move to an off-grid land project. But we also talk about ghostwriting romance novels, playing in an anti-fascist black metal band…

**Margaret [voice clip]:** They want to say that that’s their aesthetic terrain, and I want to not let Nazis have nice things.

**Tuck:** …and also Margaret’s surprise cameo in a very famous 2005 film.

**Margaret [voice clip]:** How am I in the movie Rent? That doesn’t make any sense.

**Tuck:** Speaking of fun surprises, a fun coincidence is that Margaret is actually friends with last week’s guest from when they were both punks roaming around like 15 years ago. We don’t talk about that directly in either interview, but there is an oblique reference to Margaret in the Alynda Segarra interview that, if you go back and listen again, you might catch it. Not important, just like a fun cute connection.

Anyway, before we get to the interview, a few quick announcements. The first is that we announced our latest round of grant recipients. Our panel of nine incredible judges selected 19 trans folks of color doing rad work, and I got to say that this round is particularly special to me because we had winners from all around the world, including Pakistan, South Africa, Peru, Germany, Nigeria, and Denmark. You can find a full list of our grant recipients at genderpodcast.com/grant or on Instagram in our grant story collection. Secondly, we’ve got a live show coming up in Brooklyn on February 1st starring Mattie Lubchansky, Sabrina Imbler, AC Dumlao, and Danny Lavery. We have sold the majority of the tickets at this point, so if you want to come do not delay, grab your tickets now at TheBellHouseNY.com, link also in the show notes. And speaking of which, we’ve got an advice segment planned for the live show as well as an advice segment planned for a future bonus episode on the Gender Conceal podcast. So if you have an advice question for me and Mattie and Danny, or me and Mckenzee—you don’t know who you’re going to get, but, you know, some qualified, fun, hot people—please send it in. Link for that is in the show notes as well. And now, it’s time for This Week in Gender.

[Gentle, cheerful tones play]

**Tuck:** Hey, so I had another segment planned for this week, but then I looked at the calendar and I think I need to use this space to have an earnest emotion? So sorry in advance, but yesterday marked the fifth anniversary of the launch of the Gender Reveal podcast.

[Gentle guitar chords play]

I just wanted to say thank you all so much for being here through ten seasons, 140 episodes plus a ton of bonus episodes, eight rounds of grants, two live shows, two coasts, many many many snacks….

When I first started working on this podcast back in 2017, I was a little baby who didn’t know anything about anything. Gender, myself…and that’s why I had to become a gender detective. And I hate to say it, but every week, I really have gotten a little bit closer to understanding what the hell gender is. It has truly been an honor and a privilege to be able to learn so much from so many of you and to go on this meandering, sometimes esoteric and chaotic gender journey together. Since we started the show, many, many, many more people have come out as trans, which we love to see. A very special shoutout to all of y’all who have transitioned alongside the podcast, whether you’re in the pandemic cohort or before that. So many of you have told me that the podcast was part of your transition and it literally never gets old to hear that. In fact, it is the main reason I continue to make the podcast, so thank you for being here and for letting me be a part of your life, I guess.

And of course, as more people have come out as trans, more people have learned about trans people, and while that has sometimes had very positive effects, it turns out that with visibility and onscreen representation comes politicians and celebrities bent on doing genocide. I used to get This Week in Gender ideas by googling “transgender news,” and boy howdy, I do not do that anymore. Things have gotten better in ways that I didn’t ever imagine, and also worse in ways I didn’t ever imagine…as all of you know all too well from listening to this podcast, and also living in society. And yet here we are, all of us who have made it this far. I’m thinking of Anthony Oliveira’s famous tweet quote, “The queers who were nice, patient, gentle all got shot or bullied to death. All that’s left are me and the other pissed-off cockroach motherfuckers.” And I love to be a pissed off cockroach motherfucker, don’t get me wrong, but I have to say all of you are so unfailingly kind and patient and gentle and thoughtful, and I continue to be in awe of the grace that you all show me and the guests of the show. I hear all sorts of other podcasts and other media types complain about the mean messages that they get from listeners, and we simply don’t experience that. And to have carved out a place where it feels safe to have these kind of playful, tricky, personal gender conversations in public—that is such an amazing gift that you all just continue to give. Special thank you to the patrons who have allowed me to do this as a job for the last several years, and also allow me to pay producer Ozzy so that I can try to sometimes maybe not work. I’m getting better at that, and it is only because so many of you have demanded that I stop working so much.

By the way, every time our Patreon gets bigger, it means that our grant program gets bigger. It means we have more money to pay contributors like our This Week in Gender guest essays and our transcription team. It also means that me and producer Ozzy get a raise, and we love that. Nothing makes me happier than getting to send Ozzy extra money. We are almost to paying them a living wage, you know, you love to see it. But at the end of the day, of course it’s not about the money. If I wanted money, I wouldn’t be making a transsexual podcast. It is, of course, about reminding each other every week that there are millions of ways to be trans. That trans community is everywhere. That being trans is a gift. That trans people can be hot and fun and smart and funny. And most of all that we, all of us together, get to decide what the future of gender looks like.

[Guitar chords stop]

But also when y’all are deciding what the future of gender looks like, do not involve me. I just make the podcast. I will not be roped into trying to get three or more trans people to agree on anything, ever. It is simply impossible. Good luck out there though.

This has been, This Week in Gender.

[Gentle, cheerful tones play]

**Tuck:** Look, I’m sure you already know how common it is for trans people specifically to get doxxed online. There’s like entire websites devoted to doing it. I was doxxed once a few years ago. Transphobes posted all of my old names and my birthday and photos of my house. It was very bad. I *hated* it. And of course they got all of that information from data broker sites. So I signed up myself, my family, and my roommates for a service that would delete all of that info off all of the data broker sites. They made it really easy for me to do that for like one convenient fee. And now when people try to dox me, I am much, much, much less worried about what they will do. You can skip the part where you get doxxed and just go straight to the part where you erase yourself from the Internet. I use DeleteMe and you can join me at joindeleteme.com and use the promo code TUCK20 to save 20% off your annual membership at joindeleteme.com.

[Gender Reveal theme music starts]

**Tuck:** Margaret Killjoy is a transfeminine author, activist, and host of the podcast Cool People Who Did Cool Stuff from iHeartMedia’s Cool Zone Media. Her work explores what it means for communities to, together, learn to be free. She is currently living in the Appalachian Mountains with her dog and her instruments.

[Gender Reveal theme music ends]

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

**Margaret:** I would call myself transfeminine, you know, or a trans woman, or whatever. Queer.

**Tuck:** Yeah, I think that I didn’t know until I was doing research for this podcast was about you changed your name and your appearance many, many years before you came out as trans and was just like “this is just a guy doing guys things.”

**Margaret:** Yeah!

**Tuck:** Can you talk about that?

**Margaret:** Yeah. I’ve been named Margaret since I was probably 21 or so, and I didn’t come out as trans until my 34th birthday. I was just a boy named Margaret who wore women’s clothes.

**Tuck:** As you do.

**Margaret:** There’s so many reasons for that, and a lot of them have to do with a lot of unconsidered transphobia. I was exposed, I think, to a lot of really negative portrayals of trans women by growing up in the 80s and the 90s, and so that never felt like it represented me, also, and so I just knew myself as someone who preferred women’s names and women’s clothing, or whatever. But I didn’t see myself represented in most representations of trans, so I didn’t necessarily identify as a trans woman. For a while I identified as a transvestite, which I know is like not a word that people do or don’t—people have feelings about now.

**Tuck:** Sure. It made sense historically, though.

**Margaret:** Right.Like in some ways I feel like I both came to understand my own trans womanhood or whatever womanhood, but in another way I feel like the umbrella of what constituted trans expanded to include me and so…yeah, no it was funny because when I would like slowly come out like a little bit at a time I’d be like, “I think I’m queer,” and people are like “Okay, Margaret.” And then I’d be like “I think I’m genderqueer,” and people are like, “Sure, Margaret.” And every step of the way I was waiting for people to gatekeep me out. You know? I was waiting for people to be like, “Oh, but you’re not really,” you know. And so I mean, I think a lot of it for me also, I mean there’s so many complicated things that go into people determining their own gender and coming to terms with themselves, but a lot of it for me was also this male guilt that I grew up. Like for some weird reason my primary activism was always feminism and LGBT stuff, you know, even though I was this straight boy the whole time.

**Tuck:** Yeah, I’m just like a straight person in the gay-straight alliance. Classic.

**Margaret:** Yeah, yeah. Exactly, exactly. Oh my god. I have so many thoughts about the gay-straight alliance. I felt guilty, like I would be taking up space if I were to present myself as anything other than the oppressive class, right? And so I was like, “Oh well, I’m going to be an ally or whatever,” and, you know, eventually I got over myself.

**Tuck:** So what are your feelings about the gay-straight alliance?

**Margaret:** Oh, I have very positive feelings about the gay-straight alliance. I think that at least where I grew up, the gay-straight alliance was really effective for two things. One, you have plausible deniability, like the gay-straight alliance in my high school, which I started with some people—there was no out gay people in it. There was also only one out gay person in our entire school.

**Tuck:** Same.

**Margaret:** Yeah, and the next town over, the person who started the gay-straight alliance got hospitalized for it and so like a lot of people might not have wanted to come out for some odd reason. And it just like it has plausible deniability, both in terms of potential bullying and homophobic attacks, but it’s also potential—it’s like plausible deniability for yourself. You know, because you, like, don’t know yet. You’re in high school. I also recognize again, this is like the late 90s and it’s twenty years later now, or whatever, you know.

**Tuck:** Yeah, it’s so funny to hear that now all of the kids are like, “We’re so bored with this, like society has progressed past the need for gay-straight alliances.” And it’s like, that was so fast, because we could like barely even have them, you know?

**Margaret:** I know!

**Tuck:** So congrats to those kids, you know? Well done.

**Margaret:** Yeah, yeah, I mean like, not to be like…. But kind of well done *us*, you know?

**Tuck:** That’s true. Yeah.

**Margaret:** Can I tell you how the hell the gay-straight alliance at my school started?

**Tuck:** Please do.

**Margaret:** I’d been going to regional gay-straight alliance meetings and you know, as a straight ally or whatever who would spend all of her time going to these meetings.

**Tuck:** Yes.

**Margaret:** And one day these two teachers who were very obviously in retrospect lesbians, and I had no idea that the very butch gym teacher and the hyphenated last name, slightly butch social studies teacher who talked about their partner, you know, were clearly lesbians, in retrospect, and neither one was out. And they cornered me in the hallway in the morning and they’re like, “Did you know that teachers can’t start gay-straight alliances or student clubs?” And I was like, “Huh.” And they were like, “Here’s all the forms already filled out to start a gay-straight alliance at our school.” And I was like, “I guess I’m starting a gay-straight alliance.” And so I say that I started it, but it was like I didn’t do any of the work.

**Tuck:** I love that. I love that they clocked you so deeply.

**Margaret:** Yeah. Yeah, totally.

**Tuck:** Beautiful. Well, I feel like I had a really similar question when I talked to our mutual friend Io on the show, but my understanding of your background is that you spent a bunch of years hopping freight trains, living out of vans, squatting, maybe sitting in a tree, roaming around, and then a few years ago you decided to stay put. And I’m always curious about what do you think drove you to be going, going, going, going, and then what changed to allow you to sort of stay in one place a little bit more, although and you still leave to go tour and whatnot?

**Margaret:** Yeah, I mean that’s a fairly accurate description. I wasn’t very good at hopping trains. I tried, I succeeded a couple times, but I failed.

**Tuck:** I mean, you have legs. So you did good.

**Margaret:** Good, that’s true, and I didn’t go to jail.

**Tuck:** Wow, yeah, good work.

**Margaret:** So a part of why I changed my mind about hopping trains, is everyone I knew who hopped trains ended up in jail. And I don’t like jail very much for reasons that once again have become obvious in retrospect, like the idea of—I mean, jail is obviously horrible for everyone, but I think that there’s a specific horror to the idea, for me, to be trapped with a bunch of men, right?

**Tuck:** For sure.

**Margaret.** It’s never been the social environment that I thrive in. And I did it because I wanted an interesting life. Right? I wanted adventure, I wanted to see the world, I wanted to change the world, I wanted to live free in order to spend more of my time working on activist projects, to be unencumbered so that, in some ways, actually, so that I could risk going to jail. But I wanted to risk going to jail at demonstrations, not just getting from one demonstration to another. And so I did that for a very long time. I did that for about fifteen years, and then in my early to mid-30s or something I eventually it kind of caught up to me, and I started having increasing physical and mental health issues that were a reflection of the lifestyle that I led, whether it was living in a van where I couldn’t stand up in the van and so eventually that started causing a chest injury that I had to get a little bit more chronic, you know, because I was always hunched over; or anxiety issues that got worse and worse, and so eventually I just had to stop. And it was very hard to stop. I’d really built my whole identity around being a wandering anarchist. And then time started moving faster, which is the downside of staying still, right. Time goes much, much faster once you’re not traveling all the time, and so my goal is to eventually build back up into a balance where I’m able to spend a third of my time, or some amount of time that’s sustainable on the road, the rest of the time at home.

**Tuck:** Well, speaking of home, a lot of queer city people like to talk about moving to some sort of off-grid land project, whether it’s like a farm, a cabin in the woods. I grew up in the woods, on grid, and I’m always like, “Okay, and what I love is a good and a service, but I’m happy for you.” But you were living off grid for a while. I believe you still live on some sort of land project today, but also something that I appreciate is that despite doing that, you’ve always emphasized that I’ve seen that you enjoy living in a society and that the concept of the grid and networks are good, actually.

**Margaret:** Yeah.

**Tuck:** So I was just wondering with all that in mind, if you could talk more about those experiences and what you think people should take into consideration when they’re considering or idealizing a move like that.

**Margaret:** That’s such a good question. You know, I lived off grid by need when I lived out of first of a backpack and then out of a vehicle and I spent a lot of time living in squats, some of which had different levels of access of power and heat and water, and things like that, you know. And so I was very used to that, but it wasn’t ideal. And then eventually I found myself living at a queer land project in Appalachia and it was off grid, and I had my off-grid cabin that I built and I ran everything off of solar power and we like, you know, gather water and then store it and, you know, the shower was rainwater and propane and all of the things, right? And people absolutely romanticized that. I think that that is sort of a trap. As you pointed out, I do, I believe very strongly in living in society, and I think that for the most part, you know, I would watch people come and go, right? And I was a little bit older than some of the people that would come and stay on the land project and you know people would idealize this concept and then they would come and it actually, just—it’s actually just hard, like literally all it means is these problems have not been solved for you and you have to solve them yourself. And there’s some joy to be found in that; there’s some beauty of self-reliance and all of that.

Now, if you have a ton of money, off-grid life could be just as easy as regular life, right? Because you can just drop money into solar panels and build your own—dig your own well and whatever and have a giant propane tank and have generators and whatever the hell you want. But for a scrappy DIY project, you’re going to have a lot of health issues with mold. If you live in the South, you’re going to have—that’s actually the main one. That’s like the main one that I keep thinking about. And it’s just hard. And it’s not bad, and it’s good that we are capable of doing that and building that. But most people don’t want to live that way long term and frankly, I didn’t, you know. And once I had enough money I got an on-grid place, still in Appalachia. Still rural. I like a lot of things about living rural. But I’m tied into the grid and I appreciate that.

Now, if you’re stuck in that situation, right, you should romanticize it a little bit, because we should romanticize struggle because we’re stuck with it. Don’t romanticize other people’s struggles. Romanticize your own struggle, like when you’re like drinking cheap wine in a plastic goblet in the moonlight in an unheated squat somewhere and hanging out with your friends and someone’s playing beautiful music on a kind of shitty guitar or something, you should romanticize that because that is beautiful and you get to live it. But if someone else is doing that, you shouldn’t be like, “Oh, I want to go live that life instead,” because I think that’s where you get the dangerous romanticization. I don’t know. I actually can’t even immediately point to the danger of those romanticizations, but it doesn’t seem to serve. Like people would always be like, “Oh wow. You live in a tiny house,” and I’m like, “Yeah, it’s bigger than my van,” and now I live in a medium house, and you know what my favorite sized house is so far? Medium house.

**Tuck:** Medium! Yeah, well I think I heard you say in another podcast—so I lived in Portland for a long time, and I was living there when everyone got really obsessed with tiny houses. And I think you said on some other show one time that like, yeah, the majority of people who go from a house-sized house to a tiny house end up regretting it. It just depends where you’re coming from. And these days I feel like I see tiny houses actually as a standard for people who did not have houses, in which case it comes as an upgrade, perhaps; that makes a lot more sense.

**Margaret:** Yeah, totally.

**Tuck:** Speaking of self-sufficiency, you make two podcasts. One of them is called Live Like the World is Dying, that’s about prepping or preparedness depending on what word you want to use. I know you talk about this a lot; I’m going to ask it anyway. If we think that preparedness is not just about the end of the world, but instead for preparing for any and all type of disasters that can happen on this planet and do happen all the time. I’m curious if you could share just a few basic ways that you would suggest that people can prepare that won’t feel so overwhelming that we just won’t do it, because that I’m one of those people where, when I was living in Portland for many years, they’re like, “The earthquake is coming; you should get ready,” and I was like, “That sounds so hard, what if I just run to the New Seasons when the earthquake comes?” You know, so like, yeah. What are the basics that you would suggest?

**Margaret:** And part of it is like, okay, there’s so many different things you can do, any of which would increase your happiness or survival. And so do which ones appeal to you instead of trying to do it all. Right? Because one of the things is that we do live in a society and so there will be other people around that you can work together with. And maybe people have prepared different things, but I would say overall what I try to encourage my friends to do is have at least a couple days’ food and water stored in your house, you know, and I know that space is at a premium and money is hard and stuff like that. Like if nothing else, some five-gallon jugs full of water. You know, you can go and get the—they’re not ideal for long term storage—but you can go get those clear ones at the Whole Foods or whatever. The five-gallon ones, you know, that are for office things or whatever. Basically just having some food and water around I think goes a really long way. And I also think that having, rather than like, being like, this is my go bag, if you’re the kind of person like me, I travel and I carry a laptop with me most places, so I often have a backpack with me, right? Just a small one. And within that backpack I’m always going to have a multi-tool, a flashlight, an emergency blanket—you know, these things that are just tiny, but can dramatically increase your ability to solve certain problems, right? Because what is preparedness but just like being set ahead of time to have some solutions in mind for certain problems that you might run into and kind of just like working out from there? Like making sure that your house has, you know, or wherever you live has some basics for what do you do if it gets really cold and your heat doesn’t work?

And you know, one of the main things I use as an example is like purse snacks. Purse snacks are prepping, right. You go to the club and you have some medications and some whatever in your purse, you’re more prepared than most of the people around you. And so there’s this—it’s actually really funny, cause there’s this very gendered preparedness, where like a man will walk around with a flashlight and a multi tool, and depending on where you live, like a gun or whatever, right? And then a woman will walk around with purse snacks and ibuprofen and sanitary pads. And whatever the fuck else, right? It’s just all the same thing. They’re all useful, like it’s great and you know, I usually try to have most things that both genders would carry around as a default thing.

**Tuck:** The true nonbinary experience. Yes, being prepared for both genders. I think the community aspect of it is also important, though, because it was like, was my house in Portland ready for an earthquake? No, but do I have a good relationship with my next door neighbor who is a prepper? Yes, so my plan was go next door, you know. So like even that is helpful, I feel.

**Margaret:** Oh totally. And actually I should have led with this. The main number one thing is know your neighbors. Don’t necessarily become friends with them all, but ideally. But even if you know ahead of time being like, “Oh this one like this guy’s a transphobe,” or like, you know, like knowing ahead of time of what’s around, right? But ideally being on decent terms of your neighbors, and it’s great. You know, people talk shit about cities for preparedness, but it’s like cities have more resources than most other places. Most survival is not backwoods survival, you know.

**Tuck:** Mm-hmm. So I asked you about your one podcast. You also make a podcast called Cool People Who Did Cool Stuff. Who are these cool people? What kind of cool stuff do they do? Why should we know about the cool people who do cool stuff?

**Margaret:** I do a podcast about basically the history of revolutionaries, rebels, iconoclasts, people who I find interesting. You know? It could be anything from the women who did the computation to put us on the moon and do a lot of early astronomy to the nihilists of Russia who spent a very long time and eventually succeeded at exploding the tsar. And okay, my basic premise is that history shouldn’t be boring. We’re part of the grandest narrative that has ever happened, like you and I are part of the grandest narrative that has ever happened. There is no story more epic than human history, and we’re part of that. But we see we often get it presented as this dry list of facts or whatever, or even this sort of “here’s some theoretical analysis.” People will talk about old movements and not bother telling the story, so you know it’s like if you hear about the Russian nihilists and all they talk about is what they believed. You’re like, “Okay, that’s cool.” But what’s extra interesting is the time that they dug a tunnel to put some bombs under the middle of the square so that they could explode the tsar because he kept doing bad things. I find that more interesting, and so I try to tell interesting stories because what is podcasting but an entertainment medium?

**Tuck:** I love that. I think it’s a great strategy. I also just have to acknowledge because I mentioned that we’re both friends with Io that when Io was on this show they also talked about exploding the tsar and I just love that the ribbon runs through it. Perfect! Perfect theme.

**Margaret:** Io was the guest for that episode.

**Tuck:** Yes, I did hear that; that’s perfect. It’s so good. Well, speaking of blowing up the tsar, our producer Ozzy, they wrote this question actually for a different interview with a different guest that I am instead of stealing for this interview because I think it’s a good use and they wrote, “We get a lot of listener questions that are like ‘How do I know if I’m trans or not?’ and I would actually like to ask you a similar question, which is ‘How do I know if I’m an anarchist or not?’”

**Margaret:** I think if you’re doing a lot of questioning about whether you’re not an anarchist, you should look into it because you might be because anarchism is basically the idea that we don’t need hierarchies to organize society. And that’s the thing we can do. I mean at the basic concept anarchism is the idea that we don’t want to have rulers. Not necessarily—sometimes people argue about whether or not we have leaders or not, like that’s gets blurrier. But rulers, we want to do without, we want to have a bottom-up society instead of a top-down society. We want each person to be sort of the master of their own fate, but we also recognize that in order to be the masters of our own fate, we do that in conjunction with other people, you know. Freedom is this thing that we give to each other by creating these like relationships of freedom in which we all try to maximize our ability to express our own will. And there’s this massive history of a social movement of people kind of trying to make this happen. I don’t know. I mean, there’s quick and easy ways to say this. Like if your idea of a good social relationship is everyone comes down to dinner and no one tells anyone else what to do and you just kind of figure it out together, if that’s your idea of the way social relations should work, then you might be an anarchist.

The sort of tip of the iceberg that people see of anarchism is the—well, it depends at different times, but right now I would guess that most people see anarchists either from people wearing all black smashing things at protests, or possibly people organizing mutual aid programs and I would say those are the two most obvious parts of anarchism right now. And I think those are both great parts of anarchism, but they’re not the whole of it, and especially understanding the mutual aid aspect of it is a very important part. Anarchists do so much, most of it behind the scenes, most of it not for recognition. And it’s also the pitch for why be an anarchist: more than any other decision I’ve made in my life, it has made my life more beautiful. It has given a sort of direction to my life without doing it in kind of a culty way where I’m trying to bolster a leader or even trick other people into joining some ideology or whatever. But instead it’s like a set of challenges to myself about how I can be my best self and live my best life.

I really like it. I’ve been at it for about 20 years and every time I start questioning it, I realize usually I’m questioning not my actual personal commitment to this concept, but just whether or not whether or not I’m grouchy and other people call themselves anarchists at any given point, right? And you know, usually if there’s one group of anarchists that are annoying you, there’s another group of anarchists somewhere else, and every group of anarchists thinks that, like, “this is the way anarchists do things” and you go somewhere else and they’re like, “*this* is the way anarchists do things,” and it’s a totally different way. And I really like that about it and it doesn’t surprise me at all. And of course this is the lens that I saw things through: the anarchist scene was absolutely where I first encountered trans people and started encountering trans people just being themselves instead of needing to kind of—like when I go into society, like everything is either about the fact that I’m trans or I’m in like boy drag and trying to pass as a boy. And anarchist spaces are some of the first places I saw where like that didn’t necessarily need to be the case, you know?

And anarchism actually has a very long queer history, on the left. There’s a Hirschfeld, the complicated guy who had the Hirschfeld Institute in Germany or whatever, one of the first places in the western world to talk about transness explicitly, I think it’s his quote. Basically, “if you want to find the queers, hang out the anarchists,” because we accept a lot more ideas and like a more, a constant evolution and mish mash of ideas more than some other sort of leftist ideologies. I wasn’t trying to turn that into being anti-other leftist ideologies, but that’s just been my experience. So anarchism gave me access to a space where it was really easy for me to come out as trans. Within my social circles I had zero problems coming out as trans because of hanging out with the anarchists.

**Tuck:** You’re in a bunch of musical projects, including feminist black metal band called Feminazgûl, which is a top tier iconic name. Congratulations on that name.

**Margaret:** Thanks, thanks.

**Tuck:** I am not a black metal person, but from what I understand it is significant to be a feminist trans, anti-fascist black metal group because it can also be a very fashy misogynist Nazi space. So I was trying to write a question about that, but I kept thinking about in your new book, which is called We Won’t Be Here Tomorrow and Other Stories. In your new book, one of my favorite stories from it is “The Free Orcs of Cascadia,” which seems perhaps inspired in part by this whole scene. So yeah, I was actually wondering if you could talk about that story and then any sort of inspirations from your life or from music scene in general that went into it.

**Margaret:** Yeah. So I wrote a story called “The Free Orcs of Cascadia” and on a personal, literally just bragging level, it was my first story I ever sold to this magazine called Fantasy and Science Fiction, is the name of the magazine.

**Tuck:** Oh, I didn’t know that’s who it was, that’s huge, hey.

**Margaret:** Yeah, and it was the magazine that I grew up with on my dad’s shelf, and so that was a very landmark sale from my point of view. And it’s also one of my favorite stories ever written and the basic concept is that a bunch of people living in the Pacific Northwest during the climate apocalypse decided to drop out of society, call themselves orcs, file down their teeth and go out and live in the woods, sometimes bringing their cell phones, sometimes not. And then within that you get a power struggle where people take the same sort of code of honor and half of them interpret it in a matriarchal/anarchist way and half of it interpret it in a patriarchal/fascistic way and then they go to war with spears and swords and outside. A journalist comes in and it’s like, “What the fuck, there’s guns. Why are you using spears and swords?” And they’re like, “You wouldn’t understand!”

**Tuck:** Yeah, that’s one of the things that I really love about it is, I feel like I get inserted into this story where I just get to walk into a fantasy story and be like, “Hey guys, what are you doing?”

**Margaret:** Yeah, totally. And that was what was kind of fun for me about it is that I’m not the protagonist. I’m not the journalist in that. If anything, there’s a self-insert where the journalist has a crush on a, you know, a trans girl who doesn’t feminize her voice. And I’m like, “Ooh.” Carries a large knife at the small of her back like I did at the time that I wrote that story. And so in a lot of ways it is this like study on black metal and these other aesthetic and subcultural spaces that I believe we should not cede to fascists. You know, for example, like the OG Nazis were really into pre-modern life and like, you know, trad wife shit right? And like honor and community and these kind of quasi-hippie values as well as all of their blood and death and murder everyone thing. And I don’t think that we should let them lay claim to the beauty of rural life, right? They want it. They want to say that that’s their aesthetic terrain and I want to not let Nazis have nice things, so I want them to not have it. And black metal as a subculture and as an aesthetic and as a musical genre explores a lot of themes that are very interesting and we should not give up, and some of them are very complicated, like hate is a very important part of black metal, right?

But there are ways like we have a song, a Feminazgûl song, you know, in which a sort of unnamed woman is singing about basically an abuser and is like, I’m gonna hate you forever, right? I don’t want to state that as a political claim, right? Like I’m anti-carceral, prison abolitionist, I’m not trying to be like—I believe that most everyone can work through the worst things that they’ve ever done, right. But I also think it’s very powerful for myself as a survivor to be able to just be like, yeah, you know what the person who did this to me, I’m never going to forgive them. I fucking hate them. And that was like, for me, a way of letting go. Whereas compared to, we’re told that forgiveness is the way to let go, and I think that’s sometimes true, but I think sometimes just accepting—because I no longer, you know, this person I’m thinking of doesn’t sit in my brain anymore, right? The way that they did before I finally came to terms with being like no, I fucking hate you.

And I picked this as like the first black metal aesthetic thing, whereas a ton of the other black metal aesthetic ideas are way easier to understand from a leftist point of view or an anti-authoritarian point of view: the beauty of nature, like alienation from other people, a sorrow at the the end of things, at the end of nature. And also like a deep love for myth and the fact that myth is real, it is a real part of our lives and so all of this terrain is really easy to be like no, you just don’t get to have it. We will fight you for it, and so that is what Feminazgûl exists to do. I mean mostly it exists to be me and Laura’s explorations of music, right? But where we position ourselves is very intentionally counter to all of that. And it’s interesting because we don’t really share a scene with the Nazi black metal people. It’s like, I don’t interact with Nazi black metal people on a daily basis. Well, I mean now I don’t interact with anyone on a daily basis, but even when I interacted with humans, no one would show up to a Feminazgûl show thinking it’s a safe space for Nazis and our primary issue is feminism, right? Our points of unity is that we’re feminists and we’re anti-fascist, and we thought it was gonna be a big fight because the metal scene’s very male-dominated. But what we found instead—and cis male-dominated in particular—what we found instead was people really excited to invite us in because they realized that we took our music seriously. We have a kind of a joke name, but I fuckin’ love the name, but the music is a serious expression and so as soon as people realize we’re not making fun of black metal at all, we are earnestly excited about the music we make and these ideas and people are like hell yeah, I’m kind of sick of only hanging out with cis men too. It just made me all warm and fuzzy and have a lot of hope for the world.

**Tuck:** Mmm, that’s so good. I love that. So like I said, you have this new book out. We Won’t Be Here Tomorrow and Other Stories. You’ve also written so many other books and short stories, and I feel like you write in this really, really specific genre, like the Margaret Killjoy genre. And you know, I was trying to describe it to my friend and I was like, “Wow. Well, the stories are all titled things like, ‘The Bones of Children,’ ‘We Who Will Destroy the Future,’ ‘Not One of Us Will Survive This Fog,’ and they’re like, ‘And her name’s Margaret Killjoy, huh?’” And I was like, “Yeah,” but I don’t think that actually does a great job of summarizing your entire thing. I think that some of the energy is missing. So I was wondering how you would describe a Margaret Killjoy story, ™, ™, ™, like, what do you think your thing is?

**Margaret:** Oh damn. So I really like writing characters that are sort of in the margins. I like writing, you know, thieves and vagabonds and all these characters. I’m far less interested in the princesses and princesses or whatever. Right? And a lot of my work is classified as horror and I very rarely set out to write horror, even though I include things like ghouls and demons and all this stuff. Because most of the time, I think if you add magic to the world you’re fucking with power and power does horrible things. And so, my first horror novella, The Lamb Will Slaughter the Lion, I didn’t set out to write a horror book and then eventually it was classified as horror and I was like, well, I guess that makes sense. It’s about a demon deer that eats people, but it’s really just this very transparent metaphor about power, and that’s just kind of what magic is. And that’s what I think magic is a useful metaphor for. But actually more than anything else, what I’m really interested in is writing about how power, magic, nature, gods, demons, whatever, are like neutral entities and the people who are doing evil are the humans who are involved. And so in some ways that makes the monsters seem like the good guys, but they’re very rarely consciously the good guy. They’re usually the other neutral force. Like I wrote this—also, a lot of my stories are transparent metaphors—one of the stories is, you know, it’s a story about this trans girl who feeds men to her mermaid girlfriend and wants—

**Tuck:** Again, aspirational, like who does not want that?

**Margaret:** Totally! And in some ways it’s this trans narrative and it’s very complicated. I mean the protagonist is trans, but she also specifically is raising money to transform herself into a mermaid. To hire a witch to turn her into a mermaid. But she decides against it at the end, and for me it is this narrative about—and this is not intended as a statement about other people’s experience as trans people. But I—early on in my trans career, whatever—you know, yeah.

**Tuck:** Yes, don’t correct that. Trans career.

**Margaret:** I was like, well, I guess I’m going to get on hormones now and I guess I’m gonna start considering facial feminization surgery and all of this stuff. And finally after a lot of soul searching, I realized that I don’t want that, at least for now. You know, whatever, we all change. Except now that I’m saying that I’m actually not sure if that’s totally what the mermaid story is about. It’s also about moving to be with a partner and not bending your life to be with a partner. And how that’s a bad idea, whatever. Yeah, thinly veiled metaphors. Ethical questions that are not normally asked and outside protagonists, like criminal protagonists. That’s what I go for. That’s the Margaret Killjoy™, maybe.

**Tuck:** Yeah, I mean it is interesting because before I had actually read your work I was like, hmm, this isn’t the genre that I typically go for. I actually don’t typically go for sci-fi fantasy. And I think the reason that I really liked your work is because there are just characters that feel more like me and my friends. It’s like oh, like yeah there’s gonna be people in here that are trans, or people in here that are queer, like there’s always gonna be queer people in this story. Also, everyone in here is like a punk who’s worried about OPSEC as they run from the cops. Like it’s just like a lot more relatable than a lot of what I would think of, you know, and so that genre. So, and I also think it does have a nice balance of some stories end kind of dark, some stories end really hopeful. A lot of them are both dark and hopeful. And like I think that’s a lot of what we’re looking for, and I feel like you write that balance well, so.

**Margaret:** Thank you!

**Tuck:** Yeah! I wouldn’t say it if I didn’t mean it, because most books are bad. But speaking of this being your sort of signature, Margaret Killjoy brand, I actually recently learned that you had gone off-brand previously in your life and previously ghostwritten heterosexual romance novels and that, while doing this, you were given the rules of heterosexual romance novels.

**Margaret:** Oh it’s true. It’s true.

**Tuck:** Yeah, so we have a bonus podcast called Gender Conceal and we were talking the other day on the bonus podcast how reality shows can sometimes be like going to the straight people zoo, and I feel like getting handed like the romance rule tropes is also like it’s giving straight people zoo energy to me. So I was just wondering if you learned anything about, I don’t know, heterosexuality or gender or whatever on your trip to the straight people zoo to write these romance novels.

**Margaret:** Yeah, no, I really like that way of framing it. Yeah, I had very little money. My van was broken down. I wasn’t even successfully living in a van. I was just living in my partner’s bed and basically I had an opportunity to go just write a romance novel for $5,000 and I had a broken computer and you know, I was like, yes, this is absolutely what I will do. And they were like, all right. We have a month to do it. And I was like this whole thing seems so sketchy that I assume it’s a scam, so I’m gonna wait till the check clears. And so the first check cleared so that I only had three weeks to write this novel, and so I wrote this trashy heterosexual romance novel, and I also wrote a second one for the same company, and there are so many rules that I didn’t know about in romance genre that therefore I feel like are kind of unspoken rules about how people expect people to behave in society. One of these rules is that—okay, so the character always starts off dating a floozy who’s bad for him. I wrote male point of view romance, which is actually really funny because I had just come out as nonbinary or genderqueer or whatever when they were like hey, do you want to write male point of view romance? And I was like sure, but then eventually I realized, like, transfeminine or a trans person in general is probably the ideal person to write this kind of romance because it’s for a female audience, but it’s a male protagonist or whatever you know, and so I’ve been like, oh, I can write about both experiences in some ways; in other ways I can’t write about either ’cause I’ve never been a cis man or a cis woman, but…you know, whatever. And so okay, the protagonist has to start off dating a floozy. And you know she’s a floozy because she gives him a blowjob—these are trashy romance novels, to be clear—and is sexually forward and aggressive.

**Tuck:** And we hate that in romance novels. We hate when people want to have sex.

**Margaret:** Yeah, apparently. I know. I know, because only the man can want to have sex.

**Tuck:** Okay, cool, good.

**Margaret:** Yeah, I mean. Even though the whole point of these stories is to get women off as they read them, you know, like I mean part of it—it’s a kind of a holistic getting you off too though, right? Because it’s also about what if I had if I was dating someone actually cared about me or whatever, you? Yes, although showing how you care in very toxic ways, often. Okay, so once the man has met and gone on any kind of date with the actual love interest of the story, he can no longer hook up with the floozy. Like even while he’s broken up with the main character or whatever because it’s seen as psychic cheating.

**Tuck:** Yeah, yeah, that sounds—that’s giving heterosexuality.

**Margaret:** Yeah, it’s just like all this like really toxic shit. What are the other ones? Some of the ones are really funny, like one of them I was expected to write a football player and I was told to not make him a giant of a man. Make him an average football NFL player. And I was like, okay. He’s a quarterback in the NFL. I looked it up; the average height of an NFL quarterback is 5’10”, so I make the character 5’10”. They send me back notes. They’re like no, he has to be at least 6 feet tall. And then some of the other notes were really bad, like one of the notes in one of the books he’s the protagonist, the NFL guy, is dating a mom. He’s dating a single mom. And so I was like, you know, I’m going to write him appreciating the stretch marks on his lover. And they were like no, no, no. Can’t have stretch marks.

**Tuck:** She just doesn’t have stretch marks?

**Margaret:** I guess! I don’t know.

**Tuck:** That’s so rude!

**Margaret:** I know, and like who’s your fuckin’ audience? Like I thought the goal was to make the woman who’s reading this book feel beautiful and loved. I fought really hard to make these books as passively feminist as I could, and it’s like I put the bar in a different place than I put for my own writing.

**Tuck:** Totally, yeah.

**Margaret:** One of the other ones was that he needs to be the sort of aggressor in all of the sex. Okay, but he’s injured. He’s actually dating his physical therapist, which is totally chill, and so he has to somehow be the dominant character. And that was actually my favorite sex scene in the whole thing to write because he’s like, he’s a power bottoming, I mean he, you know, he’s like, “now do this, now do that.” But I ended up with more appreciation of the genre than I expected, but also a lot of things that I’m specifically mad about.

**Tuck:** But yeah, I mean I think it’s possibly both true. Not that this is what you’re saying, but I think it’s both true that it can be a difficult genre to write at times and also people are being constrained so that they’re not allowed to make it good, as was demonstrated by you. So both things can be true at once. So as I said, Ozzy couldn’t be here, but Ozzy did do an incredible job doing research for this interview; came across some really incredible tidbits when putting this together, so I have to ask you: were you or were you not an uncredited melodica player in the 2005 film version of the film Rent?

**Margaret:** I was not accredited. I am accredited on IMDb after a lawsuit.

**Tuck:** After a lawsuit. Is that real?

**Margaret:** Yeah, well, they settled out of court.

**Tuck:** Oh my god.

**Margaret:** So in 2004 I was a squatter in New York City with almost no musical talent, almost no artistic talent and I needed to get up some money to take a Chinatown bus to go home and see my family for Christmas. So I go to Tompkins Square Park and that’s not where I busk, because that’s where I practice, right? And I’m practicing melodica and I have this art next to me, this comic strip art, that I was going to try and sell for the 15 bucks or whatever I needed, I don’t remember. And this film crew comes up with a 16 millimeter Bolex camera, and they tell me that they’re students. And you know, they have a student camera. This makes sense, and they’re like can we film you, and I was like yeah, sure, because I figure they’re gonna give me the 15 bucks. So they film me and I’m like, hey, do you want to buy this painting? 15 bucks, or whatever. And they’re like no. And I was like, well, I need 15 bucks to go home and see my family for Christmas, can I at least get a couple of bucks? And so they pull out a bunch of money and the guy pulls off two one-dollar bills. [Tuck gasps] And he hands it to me and he says, “You get what you ask for in life.”

**Tuck:** What?!

**Margaret:** Because I said a couple of bucks, you know.

**Tuck:** But you had previously—okay.

**Margaret:** Yeah, so he leaves and I’m like, man, what a rude NYU student or whatever, you know. And then I go busk and I eventually get up the money and I go home, see my family for Christmas, and about a year later my brother was the first person to call me and was like, “Magpie”—which is short for Margaret, and how I ended up—I ended up Margaret because my name was Magpie—like, “Magpie, did you know you’re in the movie Rent?” and I was like “What? How am I in the movie Rent? That doesn’t make any sense,” you know. And eventually I figured it out and my dad goes to the Washington Post and tells him this story. And they reach out to Sony Pictures and Sony Pictures doesn’t answer. So Washington Post runs my side of the story. The name of the article is “And the award for rudest film crew goes to….” [Tuck laughs] And then the Screen Actors Guild of Maryland reaches out to me and it’s like, “Hey, do you want us to represent you to Sony?” And I’m like “Yeah, fuck yeah, I love unions and I love the possibility of actually getting paid for this fucking thing.” And then basically as soon as the Screen Actors Guild showed up, Sony was like, “We did nothing wrong and here’s like, 110 bucks or whatever.” Whatever the SAG day rate for, yeah, for a talented extra or whatever it was. So yeah, I’m in Rent and then at some point someone added it to IMDb. So that’s why I have an IMDb page.

**Tuck:** Incredible. Absolutely amazing. Wow. Another reason to not like Rent. Okay. This is the part of the show where I ask you if there’s anything else that you want to talk about today that we haven’t talked about yet.

**Margaret:** I know it’s probably the thing that you talk about a lot or half to talk about a lot, but I feel like it’s like worth—well, how do I wanna say this. It’s like I used to not care a lot about being trans. I was trans and it was fine, but it wasn’t the most important part of my identity. It wasn’t the part of me that I’d want to put forward, it’s the part of me that everyone kept drawing attention to, and I sort of wished it wasn’t.

**Tuck:** Right.

**Margaret:** But we’re in the middle of a culture war where we’re the center of it completely by accident and like completely unwillingly. I guess it’s like a stay safe. That’s what I was gonna say, is that when I started being like, I’m sure you have to talk about this all the time. It’s just the fact that like what it means to be trans is constantly shifting under our feet, both in terms of what it means to be trans like, what trans identities are, and blah blah blah. But just like literally the way that we walk through society changes as society changes around us. And it’s swinging back in a way that is not excited about us again and I don’t know, I guess I want to cleverly come up with some way of saying we’ve got this, but it’s like we do have this. We will hold each other as safely as we can. No one is guaranteed safety in this world. LGBT people are among the people who are less promised safety right now than other people, but it is something that we can navigate. Much like all of humanity is staring down this climate crisis, right, that is going to happen, is happening, and what we can do is we can soberly look at it and not panic because we realize that we l have each other. We have our ancestors or trans-estors or whatever and you know the history of all the people who survived and didn’t survive, who came before us who have taught us so many lessons about how to resist and how to stay safe. And in how when safety is impossible, how to live our best lives. And so I feel like every chance I get I kind of want to try and spread that not everything’s fine message, but like “bad times are coming but we can fucking do it.” We can get through these times that are coming. That’s the thing that I always want to talk about.

**Tuck:** Yeah, I mean I think it’s good to, again, striking the balance between some things, end up on a happy note. Some things end on a sad note. Sometimes you just end in the middle where you go yeah, it’s hard, but we’re going to do it. And I feel like that’s all your stuff. All right. Well, the way we end the show is by asking—and I almost feel like you sometimes answer this a tiny bit with your work—but in your ideal world, what would the future of gender look like?

**Margaret:** That’s so hard. I mostly just don’t want to be in charge of what the future of gender looks like. I don’t even know what positions will get people mad at me right now or not, but overall I like not thinking about gender. I’m kind of in my perfect world. I would just be queer. And my gender and who I’m attracted to or not attracted to is between me and the people who aren’t attracted to me. And it’s just a free for all. I feel like that’s the future I want. I want to reach a point where transfeminine or trans woman or whatever isn’t even necessarily something that I would need to feel attached to, but for the world we do live in, I do feel very attached to the strength and power of being a trans woman. And maybe other people will be like no, I want to continue to have those things and I don’t want to be the one running around being like “Well, you can’t identify as that.” So yeah, yeah, that’s the future of gender I want—is people can identify with or without a gender as they fuckin’ please. That’s what I want.

[Gender Reveal theme music starts]

**Tuck:** That’s going to do it for this week’s show. If you had a good time or learned something, please share this episode with folx in the community. You can find Margaret on the podcast Cool People Who Did Cool Stuff and Live Like the World is Dying and at birdsbeforethestorm.net. Margaret’s short story collection We Won’t Be Here Tomorrow is available now from AK Press, as are several of her other books. As always, you could find us on Twitter and Instagram @gendereveal and at genderpodcast.com, where you can also find transcripts of every episode. You can also find us at patreon.com/gender, where we release a newsletter every week and a bonus episode at least once a month. Also, we’ve got a live show coming up, so grab your tickets for that and also send us your advice questions, which you can send in even if you’re not going to the show. Links to all of that in the show notes.

Today’s episode was produced and edited by Ozzy Llinas Goodman and by me, Tuck Woodstock. Our logo is by Ira M. Leigh. Our theme song is by Breakmaster Cylinder. Additional music this week by Blue Dot Sessions. We’ll be back next week with more feelings about gender.

[Gender Reveal theme music ends]

**Margaret:** It’s the same as if you look at like #vanlife versus people who live in vans—they’re different concepts, you know. And if you live in a van because you want to travel all the time and it’s the cheap way to do so, that’s great. But if you live in a van just as a cutesy thing, and you could totally afford to do anything else, I mean, whatever. Also maybe I’m just jealous, right? Like I wish I had a sick Sprinter with, sure, you know, an incinerator toilet in it or something, right?