

The Wind That Makes You Dead - The Happening: Media Club

Plus S02E06

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Cold open	1
Introduction	2
The Happening [00:27:55]	19
[1:30:05]	55

Cold open

Keith: Hey everybody, just letting you know that, uh, you can go to friendsatthetable.cash to listen along with us watching the Last Airbender movie. Um, me and Sylvi and Art and Ali and Austin, uh, watched the much-hated, and rightfully so, Last Airbender movie. Uh, really, really, uh, it's a piece of shit. Um, this episode, you probably noticed, is 6 days late, and we are not gonna have an episode next week. Next week will be, um, Side Story. So Side Story, instead of coming out tomorrow, the 4th, will be on the 11th, and then we'll be back to our alternating schedules. Um, so the next episode, uh, with, uh, also with Austin, of After Earth is gonna be on the 18th. So I'll see you all on the 18th.

[musical sting]

Keith: 3, 2, 1.

Ali: All right. Oh my God. I didn't clap.

Jack: Oh, you were just hanging out?

Keith: Hell yeah.

Sylvi: Hell yeah.

Keith: It's fine. We don't need to redo it.

Sylvi: You're learning. This is our way of learning.

Art: What a delayed reaction to that too.

Ali: We weren't podcasting yet, so I just thought like, I don't need to listen.

Sylvi: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Keith: Is that how Ali treats the Clapcasts? Is that how Ali treats the pre-show? I never, I never could have guessed that.

Sylvi: God.

Ali: All right, I'm ready to lock in.

Art: All right.

Keith: Do you wanna do another 3, 2, 1, Ally?

Ali: If you'd like to.

Keith: Okay. 3, 2, 1.

[["Dr Malcolm and Friends"](#) by Jack de Quidt begins playing]

Introduction

Keith: [creepy voice] Greetings from Media Club Plus, a podcast about plunging into the media that thrills us and the stories that chill us. As always, we have been dragged to you by Friends at the Table. This season, we'll be subjecting ourselves to the twisted mind of M. Night Shyamalan. [normal voice] I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know what was happening with The Happening. I guess what I was expecting was plant monsters.

Ali: Whoa.

Sylvi: Is that the only thing you knew about this was plants? I think we talked about this at the end of the last episode. Yes.

Keith: All I knew was Mark Wahlberg and plants. And, um, like, I had some vague, uh, um, mental notions, uh, really mental notions about, uh, Mark Wahlberg looking, uh, out over, like, hills, like, in grassy fields. I was like, well, they're in grassy fields a lot. Uh, and then I think—

Art: Sure.

Sylvi: Are they?

Keith: I think another thing that I said which turned out to be totally correct was that this movie's like an escort mission.

Sylvi: Yeah, you were actually right about that.

Keith: Yeah. Um, uh, that's really all I knew. Uh, so I was very surprised to learn that this was a movie about air, actually, not about plants.

Sylvi: Well...

Ali: It's about plants.

Sylvi: It's about pollen. It's about having really bad allergies.

Keith: It's about having really bad allergies. It's about how—It's about how the human race is so bad to the Earth that the plants made the air bad.

Sylvi: Yeah.

Keith: Um, yeah, I had no idea.

Ali: Nobody in the movie says air though. They're always talking about plants. It is plants.

Keith: They say wind all the time.

Ali: Okay, sure.

Keith: Which is just a very—It was just aggressive air. Oh my God, it's coming at me!

Art: I said that, that this movie treats the wind like it's talking to someone who's never been on Earth before. Well, it's like, they're—It's like The Scene, right? When, when the scene where, where Mark Wahlberg figures that—Figures everything out. And it's like, but the wind is coming this way and they like, show the wind rustling through the grass as like a visual representation of how close—

Keith: Of where the wind is.

Art: Yeah. But like, that's not really—It's there now. That wind has actually already reached you. You're, you're dead.

Keith: Hold on. I don't know that that's true. I've been to the beach. I've seen sand down at the other end of the beach start flying, and then 5 seconds later it makes its way to me, and that air is now where I am.

Art: Sure. And if they had a visual—Did they have something in the movie that told you when—

Keith: Um, there was a line of wind in the grass. You could see it moving.

Ali: Do you think there should be some, like, evil green gas that shows that they're in danger?

Sylvi: Oh, stinky fart! Stinky fart gas!

Keith: There should be stinky farts. No, I think they should just not do the showing the wind thing.

Art: I'm on the other path.

Sylvi: Should we do a proper introduction so our guest doesn't just think they have to be silent?

Keith: Uh, yes. My name is—

Art: No, Jack will remain silent until I'm done complaining about this wind.

Ali: Spoiler.

Keith: My name is Keith J. Carberry. You can find me online at @KeithJCarberry. You can find the Let's Plays that I do at youtube.com/runbutton. You can find all of us here and more doing Friends at the Table, the excellent podcast where we play role-playing games and have a great time doing it. Uh, with me as always is Sylvi Bullet.

Sylvi: Hello, I'm Sylvia. You can find me most places online at @sylvibullet. You can check out all the streams that we do. We do a lot of streams at twitch.tv/friendsatthetable. And if you like loud music, check out my band, gutmachineband.bandcamp.com.

Keith: Uh, Ali Acampora.

Ali: Um, hi, my name is Ali, and I strongly encourage that you listen to Friends at the Table. It's an actual play podcast, and it's very good.

Keith: Uh, Art Martinez-Tebel.

Art: Hi, um, I'm Art. Um, I recommend that while—If you live in a part of the country where the tomatoes are still really good right now, take a tomato and a lime and you muddle them in the bottom of like, a jar. You fill it with water, a little bit of sugar, and even less salt. It's a delicious beverage.

Keith: Can I give a second tomato reference? If you're already going to the store getting tomatoes, um, uh, or even better, going to a market to get tomatoes. I used to be a tomato hater. And then what happened was I learned that it's just the kind of tomatoes that they sell in the grocery store are the worst—Are the worst tomatoes on earth. They're the worst tomatoes on earth. So if you can get another kind of tomato other than a grocery store tomato, just slice it into big thick slices, sprinkle on some finishing salt

and olive oil, and have yourself a tomato slice. It changed tomatoes for me, and now I love them. Uh, joining us for the secondest time is Jack de Quidt.

Jack: I have become the secondest guest.

Keith: You've become the first secondest guest of the second season.

Jack: I've become the first secondest guest of the second season. Who will be the second-secondest guest of the second season? That's the really lucky one. That's the person who's, who's got, got it together.

Keith: Well, Austin's gonna be on soon, and I'm gonna try to get Austin on the bonus that we're doing next week too.

Jack: Oh, exciting. I, uh, when we announced this project, I was like, I'm basically now thrilled because I get to watch The Happening, a film I had never seen prior to this point. I am an M. Night liker. All I knew about The Happening was the core premise and that it was like, kind of viewed as a historic disaster. And so I have been looking forward to this for months, and I'm so glad to be here.

Keith: We're glad to have you, and we're all glad to talk about The Happening, I think. I think no matter what you feel about this movie, and I think this is the least that I know what anybody feels about it going in, I think we're all excited to talk about it.

Sylvi: I am—

Jack: Can we do, like, a real quick one sentence each of us how we feel about this movie? I want to know going in what the top-level feeling from each of us is.

Keith: Okay.

Sylvi: I'm going last. Okay?

Keith: Okay.

Art: Okay. Who's going first?

Jack: Keith.

Keith: I'll go first. Um, I went into this thinking that the name *The Happening* sounded a lot like a stupid B-movie, and then that is sort of what I got. Unfortunately, M. Night Shyamalan is not able to commit to this premise strongly enough to have a movie that is totally legible. But it is maybe his least annoying movie yet. Besides *The Sixth Sense*. Least annoying movie after *The Sixth Sense*.

Art: Whoa. Wow.

Sylvi: Okay.

Jack: Um, I will, I will go, uh, off from Keith here because I think that Keith's first comment about like M. Night trying to make a B-movie but not quite being able to do it, um, is really in line with the way I feel. I will say that the specific ways in which M. Night is not able to do this, to like, pull off a B-movie, results in one of the strangest pieces of cinema I have seen. This movie—The first note that I wrote down for this film is something's gone wrong with this movie.

Keith: Yeah.

Jack: Um, and I like maintain that.

Keith: That's interesting. I found that the, one of the greatest strengths of this movie in his catalog is that it is totally unremarkable. I found it to be completely unremarkable.

Sylvi: That I don't know—I don't know how you're getting that.

Keith: Okay. Wait, let's keep going with that.

Art: I'm wondering if you even understand what a movie is.

Keith: I guess.

Sylvi: Wow.

Art: I guess I'm going next because I started by insulting Keith. That was really uncalled for. I'm sorry.

Keith: It's okay. It's okay.

Art: Um, I think that this movie sort of is the problem when Shyamalan misses. And I guess that is the end of a sentence, so I'm going to take a second sentence.

Keith: That's fine.

Art: To say that there are so many good choices in this movie. I think some of the imagery is arresting. And I think it's let down by a script that doesn't care about its characters. And some of that does seem to be on purpose. And I'm not sure that was a good choice. And some of the worst acting maybe ever committed to film.

Sylvi: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Art: And as I said in an early episode, the director is responsible for the acting, and therefore I have to commit to my own premise here and hold Shyamalan responsible for the work that especially Wahlberg and Deschanel are doing in this movie.

Keith: Yeah. Both of whom, you know, I hate Mark Wahlberg, but I've seen him give a much better acting performance than this.

Art: I don't think anyone could give a worse acting performance than Mark Wahlberg gives in this movie.

Keith: I think there's one character in this movie who does.

Ali: I suppose I'm going last. I have said before that I remember liking this movie when I saw it. I think when I saw this movie, I was, for some reason, obsessed with Mark Wahlberg. I have since corrected that opinion. And I looked at his IMDb and I don't understand why. Maybe it was *The Italian Job*, but to me, that's an Edward Norton movie. So I don't know. I don't know.

Keith: Also, it was not good.

Sylvi: Was it Max Payne that came out in the same year?

Ali: Um, I still think that his performance is really silly, and that is charming in some way. But I, I do have to defend Keith here, where, like, I feel so neutrally about this movie after watching it. It was just kind of like, that sure happened.

Jack: Um, I—Neutral is not the feeling I feel. I feel like a bunch of people have lined up and hit me in the head with different objects.

Keith: Okay.

Jack: And I've just been like, what the fuck was that? What did you just hit me with?

Keith: I'm so excited for Sylvi to give her final sentence after saying that she wanted to go last. I do. I do want to say I have to say this in response to Ali or in agreement with Ali that like one of the things—The most remarkable thing about this movie is how intense the reactions that it provokes are, while I was watching it and it was like, nothing. It was like watching nothing. It was like drinking an empty glass. You know, it wasn't offensive. It wasn't annoying.

Sylvi: It was the showroom that they go to.

Keith: It wasn't exciting. Like, I thought that the mass suicides were kind of distasteful. That was like—

Sylvi: Oh, okay, I have—We're gonna have some conversations today.

Ali: I have some strong feelings about the decisions in these movies.

Keith: Yeah.

Ali: And we will, we will, we will get to it.

Keith: Okay. Sylvi, I'm so excited to hear what you have to say.

Sylvi: Okay. So this comes with the caveat that I do not think this is a good movie, but I love this movie.

Ali: interesting, yeah.

Keith: I—

Sylvi: This is like, comfort dog shit to me. I don't know how else to put it. It's like, I recognize head to toe it's dreadful, but I've probably watched this movie like 20 times in my life.

Jack: 20?!

Sylvi: Yeah, no, I watched this movie a lot in high school.

Keith: Were you keeping this close to the vest?

Sylvi: Yes, of course I was!

Art: Wow.

Keith: Yeah, I had no idea.

Art: I was like, that's a good choice.

Keith: That was a great choice.

Sylvi: I watched this movie a lot in high school, specifically. I also—I will say, like, half of those, maybe even more of those, are with when I discovered, uh, RiffTrax, which are former Mystery Science Theater guys doing commentary. And I—

Art: God, I really wanted to say drugs. That's when you discovered drugs.

Sylvi: No, drugs came later. But let me tell you, adding those to the equation had made this a very fun time when I first watched it. I watched it twice in 24 hours. I love this movie. It's dogshit.

Keith: I don't think it's dogshit or dreadful. It's just like kind of—It's just nothing.

Sylvi: Okay, dogshit isn't—It's dogshit because it has aspirations of being more than what it is.

Keith: Do you think so? I think it has aspirations to be less than what it is.

Art: Yeah, I think that's the problem with that.

Sylvi: You cannot—You can read it either way.

Keith: Yeah, okay, that's fair.

Sylvi: Like, he doesn't commit either way, and that is the actual issue.

Keith: This is actually—

Art: He has committed. He's like given interviews about this.

Sylvi: Let Ali speak. Ali does the declaration.

Ali: I just want to say to Sylvi. I have been holding this baton for you since The Lady in the Water.

Sylvi: Yeah, I know. When you said it, I got so happy.

Jack: Oh, this is—I also particularly love that Ali introduced her feelings about this by saying, for some reason, I had a big obsession with Mark Wahlberg, and then had to really quickly qualify it. And it has been immediately eclipsed like a candle in the sun with Sylvi saying that she has seen this film 20 times.

Sylvi: Like, probably.

Ali: Yeah.

Keith: Um, here's—

Art: Because...hate crimes are less bad than this movie.

Keith: I did not know this.

Jack: That's not true.

Art: No, that's not true. That's not true. Of course that's not true. I would just say something provocative because I thought it was funny.

Sylvi: I thought you were trying to call me out for watching a Mark Wahlberg movie a bunch. I was like, hey, I didn't know.

Art: Well, it happened before this.

Sylvi: I know, but I didn't know.

Ali: Yeah, but yeah.

Keith: We all know now.

Sylvi: Yes.

Keith: Um, this is what—

Jack: Before we begin—Oh, go on, Keith

Keith: This is what I wrote because it's a—This is a very high-level thought about this movie. This is what I wrote. Uh, while I was trying to like, come up with summaries for like, my feelings about this is that I have been struggling with feeling that M. Night struggles with creating meaningful depth in his movies. His movies that are all about love and connection and family and distance between people and distance that they—You know, and I feel like he really, really struggles to like land that plane. And one of the things that I like about The Happening is that it avoids all his pitfalls by being so unapologetically shallow.

Sylvi: Yeah.

Keith: So he is a shallow—I think he's a deeply shallow writer, um, who has these ideas that he can't quite get onto the screen in a way that works for me. And The Happening works because he just sidesteps those by making a pretty surface-level film.

Ali: I'm glad you said this at the top because I definitely, in between watching these movies, had the shower thought of like, it is such a failing to the stories that he tries to make that the only opinion you can come away from is like, well, war is bad.

Keith: Yeah, yeah, like war is bad and marriage is bad.

Ali: I like this movie and I want it to be successful, so I wanna—I, you know, I have to say that war is bad because it is pretty bad, but like, just completely devoid of like, feeling or opinion.

Sylvi: There's—He is—He, he can't seem to like—For some reason, I've—I—He can't seem to capture this like really well-done interpersonal stuff he did in uh, *The Sixth Sense*. Like, and it's wild to me because that was so well done, and then every movie since has not been able to capture that lightning in the bottle, and it's been like a real letdown.

Keith: I have a guess—

Sylvi: Because like, he's not a themes guy. Like you said, he's not a themes guy, he's a characters guy, and he's not been—He's been flopping with the characters.

Keith: He's been trying to do characters, and he's been trying to do like, not action, but he's been trying to do like plot momentum, but he's really not a plot momentum guy either.

Ali: Yeah. Actually—

Art: This is horr—You're all being so unfair to good movies that we've seen in this, that this, the idea that the characters' moments don't work in, uh, that, that like, because these movies—

Sylvi: My opinions are well documented about some of these movies. I, I don't think I'm being unfair, but we just disagree.

Keith: Sorry, Ali had something, and then I do want to talk to Art about what Art is saying after that.

Ali: Well, I think it's the performances that fail these characters the most. Like, you—I mean, you can kind of do the couple who's kind of drifting apart and come closer together as panic is happening, and not being able to talk to each other, not having the moment together. But Zooey Deschanel can't break out of the person she always is in everything she's ever been in. And Mark Wahlberg is trying to do this sensitive, breathe-y thing, and like just—

Sylvi: Come on!

Keith: Maybe not trying.

Sylvi: Guys! The neurotoxin?

Ali: It's just—And he's like a—Isn't he like a pop star? Wasn't he technically like a heartthrob? He should be able to pull this from somewhere. But I guess the Boston is so in the way of—

Sylvi: Wow.

Ali: Being able to be charismatic? I don't know.

Keith: He's obsessed with being a tough guy. So he, he was, he's mad that he has to play a fucking, like, he's like, I gotta be a pussy teacher? Like, that's like, easy. But he wants to be.

Sylvi: What's that? That's what he credits for him taking the role. Like, he's like, I wanted to try being a science teacher instead of a crook or a cop. And I was like, well, buddy—

Art: But then he's like, are you surprised I didn't try? And it's like, no one forced you to do this, man.

Keith: I mean, no.

Jack: Yeah.

Keith: I looked this up because Art mentioned the, um, Art mentioned this quote that was on the Wikipedia for The Happening under cast and crew reaction, and he said, “it’s a really bad movie. Fuck it. It is what it is. You can’t blame me for not wanting to try to play a science teacher. [Sylvi: I can!] At least I wasn’t playing a crook or a cop.” So it seems like he wasn’t happy with being a science teacher, but he’s less unhappy than if he had to play a crook or a cop again?

Jack: I can’t believe how angry this makes me.

Keith: Don’t do any movie, then!

Sylvi: Don’t do the movie, yeah.

Jack: Especially because—And Ali is on the money here, I think, in terms of talking about how he is being let down by the performances. I don’t think that the script for this movie is necessarily great. I’m not making that argument.

Keith: No, it’s very bare bones. It’s not trying to be—

Jack: I think that the performances, especially—In fact, really, the performances of Wahlberg and Deschanel are some of the worst acting I have ever seen. I think that Deschanel, in particular, is delivering a piece of acting that is kind of transformatively bad.

Sylvi: She’s—it’s like she’s on Quaaludes the entire movie.

Jack: Acting is really hard to do. And there were several points in this movie where I wasn’t just thinking, I could do this better. I was thinking, how the hell is this happening? How do you get into a situation where you’re putting a camera on someone in a movie with this budget and this amount of crew, and this is happening? We can talk about it in specific scenes, as it goes, but she has this like, really spectacular inability to follow a throughline of emotions throughout individual like, lines. She will say a line with one feeling, and then get to another line which has to be delivered with a different emotion.

And, you know, an actor is trained to, like, draw a line between those 2 emotions and blend them.

Keith: Mm-hmm.

Jack: And instead, it's like she's trying to change gears at 70 miles an hour. And it just—It collapses completely. It's extraordinary.

Art: I want to defend Zooey Deschanel here by saying that the script has nothing for her.

Jack: No, no. She's not a character that's really—

Art: You could put everything this character thinks, feels, and does in this movie on an index card.

Keith: It's true. It is true. But I do think, like, you know, Jack said acting is a hard job. I don't totally disagree. Um, I don't, I don't totally agree, but it is the main thing that an actor needs to be able to do, is like, turn the index card into legible, emotional, um, character work.

Jack: Yes. And, and because I, I sort of—I got a little loose from my point by, by thinking about how bizarre this performance is. Um, part of the reason that what Wahlberg is saying here makes me so angry is that the joy of a B-movie and the skill of being an actor in a B-movie is you have to recognize it and you have to commit to it. And I feel like this is not happening here. Something has come loose. The wheels are falling off. Um, and—

Keith: We're a universe away from Toni Collette as Lynne Sear, or Olivia Wilde as Anna Crowe. We're like, this is a galaxy apart.

Jack: But we're also a galaxy away from Sam Neill in Event Horizon, you know?

Ali: However, while we're talking about performances at the top, the one actor who I have like—

Keith: Oh, there's—

Sylvi: Oh yeah.

Ali: Taxoplasmosis for fucking brings it, and that's Jeremy Strong.

Keith: He does.

Jack: Oh my God. I didn't know he was in this movie.

Keith: There's Jeremy Strong and there's the Hot Dog guy.

Ali: Well, sure, sure, sure. But Jeremy Strong, like, the way how—

Keith: Jeremy Strong—

Sylvi: Private Auster—

Ali: Like, how strange his feelings on acting is. And seeing him lock into this role, it's like he like doesn't—

Keith: He brings it. He can—

Sylvi: Jeremy Strong is putting his entire pussy into this performance.

Keith: Can I tell you, as a, as a non—what is the name of the show that he's in?

Sylvi: Succession.

Keith: Succession. As a non-Succession watcher, I, I saw the Jeremy Strong takes acting too seriously content that was coming out around the time that that show was ending in its last season or two. And I got to say, I'm behind him 1,000%. I think everything that he ever said about acting is thoughtful and serious. And the fact that other actors don't approach acting the same way doesn't make him wrong or weird.

Ali: No, no, no.

Keith: And he's a phenomenal actor. Clearly.

Sylvi: He is.

Keith: Clearly, he's a phenomenal actor.

Ali: Truly. Yes. Yes.

Jack: He's a strange critter.

Ali: But yeah, that doesn't mean that he doesn't like reveling in being the weirdo and wearing his little outfits. So like—

Jack: Yeah, he's amazing in this movie. He's amazing in this movie.

Keith: He's amazing in this movie. He pops. He's one of the very few pops this movie has. I want to go back to—

Jack: Wait, okay, is it time for a synopsis?

Sylvi: I do have a, a, a, a, uh, thorough recap ready to go.

Keith: I have one thing that I want to do before the recap, and that is, uh, I wanted to clarify on my, my own part and Art's part, the, the, the thing about like the characters and plot momentum and themes discussion that we were having, uh, because I just want to make it clear, I'm not saying—And I, I didn't hear all of the thing that Art took issue with, uh, uh, Art, you tell me if I'm wrong about what, what you were saying. It felt to me like you thought that, that I was saying that the characters weren't working, but I was saying that's the only thing that was working for me in his movies.

Art: No, I'm taking issue with you saying that like, the characters in this work better than the other movies we've seen.

Keith: Oh no, no, no. I don't think that at all. If I implied that, that's not true.

Art: The idea that the characters in this are not as good as the characters in I think basically any movie we've seen so far, but especially every movie we've seen thus far, minus—

Keith: Yeah, I totally agree. The thing that I would say that this movie does better is that it doesn't get bogged down in the things that he does worst that annoy me, like super heavy-handed themes that are trying to be deep but aren't, and then like, um, this kind of inability to keep the plot going forward. I would say that this movie can keep the plot going forward better than his other movies. That's sort of the one thing this movie does better.

Jack: Um, before Sylvi reads the synopsis, can I say a procedural thing for the listener?

Sylvi: Yeah.

Jack: That I think it is important to say. This is a film that features as a core plot element suicide and suicidality. We are not necessarily going to be particularly gratuitous or salacious in our discussion of this. But we are going to talk about how it works in the movie, how it is shot, how it is sort of like discussed narratively. That is, you know, part and parcel of talking about this movie. So if that is not something that you feel like you are necessarily up for at the moment, this is probably not the episode of Media Club Plus for you. Um, but I wanted to make sure we set that into the camera—Into the camera, God.

Sylvi: Yeah, you got it, man.

Keith: The voice camera, whatever that thing is.

Jack: Before we begin talking.

Art: Yeah, come back next week for a movie that I'm sure will have a lot less of that, although I'm gonna be honest with you, I haven't seen it, so who knows.

The Happening [00:27:55]

Sylvi: All right. The Happening begins in Central Park on a seemingly idyllic morning when all of a sudden everyone in the area stops in their tracks and one by one begin to kill themselves. This quickly spreads through New York City, illustrated by a scene of an entire construction crew tossing themselves off their worksite to their deaths. Anyway, I

don't know if you guys have heard about this, this article in the New York Times about the honeybees vanishing. Well, apparently it's what Elliot Moore, played by Mark Wahlberg, a Philadelphia-based, high school science teacher, is talking to his class about. We got a scene that—Of him talking to his students being like, why do you guys think this is happening? And he takes a moment to bully, uh, the Chad in his classroom before he gets pulled out of class, uh, with the rest of the teachers to learn what is going on. Uh, they blame—On the news, they're blaming unspecified terrorists for the events in Central Park, uh, and everyone is sent home. We get introduced to Elliot's best buddy, uh, fellow teacher Julian, uh, played by John Leguizamo. He is a math teacher who loves his daughter, says things like people are calmed by percentages, and he hates Elliot's wife Alma very, very much because she was crying on her wedding day. Alma and Elliot, being in an M. Night Shyamalan movie, are having marital trouble. See, there's this guy at work? Joey? And he and Alma ate tiramisu together, and he keeps calling her. That's gonna be—That's gonna be—I don't know if it was important, but it'll come up a few more times. Uh, Alma and Elliot meet Julian and his daughter Jess to take the train out of Philadelphia to, uh, to Julian's—I think it's his grandmother? His mother, um, or mother-in-law?

Keith: I think his mother-in-law.

Sylvi: And his—with his wife to follow after them because she couldn't get out of work. But damn, wouldn't you know it, right after our heroes leave, that hot new neurotoxin hits the streets of Philadelphia. We got another scene of people killing themselves in the street, this time illustrated by a handgun daisy chain after someone gets—After a police officer gets infected. These are all just so that anyone who's not watching along knows, these happen in like, I would say 2-minute vignettes, and then it cuts back to, uh, the main plot. These will happen a couple times. I've got them described in here, but I can skip that if people on the show think I should skip the descriptions of what happens.

Jack: I think we'll get to it if we get to it.

Art: We'll get to it. There's some—There's some I definitely want to talk about.

Sylvi: Yeah. Okay, so after that, we cut back to everybody on the train learning that Philadelphia was hit, and then the train loses contact with And I quote, everyone, and has to stop in the little town of Filbert, Pennsylvania. The stranded passengers all flood into a local diner where Elliot comforts Jess with this routine about a mood ring that doesn't really read nearly as charming as the past M. Night Shyamalan scenes of its ilk. I'm thinking of the magic trick scene in *The Sixth Sense*, to be specific. Immediately afterwards, and I mean in the same shot, uh, a woman next to Elliot goes, oh my God, you have to see this, and shows him like a LiveLeak video of a man being eaten by lions at the Philadelphia Zoo on her iPod Touch. Um, it's revealed through another expository scene of the news that it's not a terrorist attack and it's only occurring in the Northeast United States. Uh, everybody that's been stranded from the train starts freaking out. They start trying to flee, uh, and in the midst of this, Julian decides to leave and go find his wife up in Princeton while Jess is left with Elliot and Alma. Elliot joins up with this unnamed botanist. I double-checked, this man does not get a name.

Keith: He does not get a name. He's called the nursery owner on IMDb.

Sylvi: To me, he's Hot Dog Guy. This guy loves hot dogs. They got a cool shape and they're full of protein. That's what he says. **[Keith laughs loudly]** He also hypothesizes—he also is a botanist and hypothesizes that the neurotoxin could be something plants are producing, but it's his love of hot dogs that stands out to me the most. Uh, Julian's group reach Princeton and immediately get exposed to the toxin, crashing into a tree at top speeds before Julian, uh, dies in the middle of the street. Meanwhile, Elliot and friends have to take a detour, but after their way—They've been driving with the botanist and his wife—After their way is blocked by signs of more dead bodies, um, they come to this crossroads that, uh—It turns out everybody who has been traveling away from has had to come back this way. Basically, it's, it's four paths and they all keep meeting up. This is where they meet Private Auster, played by Jeremy Strong. Everybody goes crazy. Everybody goes wild.

Jack: Cheese and crackers.

Sylvi: Cheese and crackers. He's very jittery, very nervous. He describes like, finding a military base where everyone has sort of like, killed themselves on the defenses there and stuff like that. Uh, it—You don't—We don't see that, but you know, it's a good visual to put in your head, why not? Um, while they're there, an unnamed woman gets a phone call from her daughter in Princeton giving her the news that everybody outside her window and in Princeton itself is dead. Uh, after spending a night in their cars, Elliot and Private Oster come up with this plan to start walking towards a safe zone westward where there's a much lower population, uh, and splitting into two groups of survivors. Um, oh, I forgot to mention that there's a scene of, uh, Elliot and Alma—Um, not Elliot and Alma, Elliot and Jess sort of comforting each other a little bit, the little girl, um, between that, but we'll keep it moving. Uh, while they're walking, Alma tells Elliot about Joey, the aforementioned tiramisu man, but is quickly overshadowed by the first group led by Auster being struck by the neurotoxin. Uh, his firearm is his friend and it will not leave his side. Elliot's group panic over what to do while they hear these gunshots in the distance, and mid-panic attack, Elliot comes up with the theory that the larger the group of people there are, the more likely the plants are to release the toxin near them. The remaining few split up into smaller groups, leaving two boys named Jared and Josh joining Elliot, Alma, and Jess. After a brief break in a model home and watching a guy do some pretty cool stuff with a lawnmower, they find themselves at a boarded-up house in the hopes that Jess can rest for a bit. Elliot makes the critical mistake of singing the Doobie Brothers to the paranoid man inside the house, and the two teenagers call him a bitch and a pussy before getting ventilated with a shotgun. After a few vignettes of people engaging in varying degrees of doomsday prepping, from grannies in gas masks to your sort of classic militias forming, our heroes arrive at the old rundown farm of the standoffish Mrs. Jones. Being cut off from the world, Jones doesn't know what's happening to everyone, but lets the three stay for dinner. And in spite of her hair-trigger temper and hostility towards them, even lets them stay over. She also accuses Elliott of wanting to murder her in her sleep, and he does not really rebut that in a convincing way? We'll get to it. Elliott also finds a creepy doll in the morning that he thinks is Mrs. Jones for a minute, and then when he gets close, he's like, oh, it's a doll. Weird lady. She, she freaks out, accuses him of wanting to steal her things,

leaves to go pray in her garden and promptly gets infected with the neurotoxin. Um, Elliot starts like, freaking out, trying to close all the, the doors and windows to keep the wind from getting in. The wind, by the way, has been being treated like Mike Myers from, uh, Halloween—not Mike Myers from Austin Powers—um, from Halloween—

Art: Whoa!

Sylvi: This whole time. Um, I mean, it depends on your—I'll recut this to have the Austin Powers theme playing every time the wind shows up.

Keith: Um, I did find the wind to be shagadelic.

Sylvi: It was, it was groovy, baby.

Art: And that kind of theme does kind of sound like the wind sometimes, right?

Sylvi: It's a woodwind.

Keith: Yeah.

Sylvi: Okay.

Art: That's the wind.

Sylvi: Mrs. Jones, now infected with the neurotoxin, uh, decide—Has like—I—It's not clear if it's—If the plants are onto the, the, the hiding inside plan or not, but they sure do make her—The neurotoxin sure does make her smash her head into all the windows. Uh, making our good friend Elliot run and hide up, up in a—

Keith: Uh, they did foreshadow this with the woman who was talking to her daughter on the phone.

Sylvi: Oh, they did? Did they?

Keith: Yeah, they did.

Sylvi: Oh, right, with the, the glass shattering.

Keith: The glass shattering, yeah.

Sylvi: Um, throughout this whole sequence, there's been—You can kind of hear the sounds of Alma and Jess playing in the background, and, uh—This would read more like we—Oh, we're supposed to think they're in the house if we didn't get a scene earlier telling us about the sort of sound tubes that can communicate between the main house and the field house back when this was part of the Underground Railroad. Um, so because, you know, wow, the only way that people can be open with each other is when they're not face to face, they have this whole conversation through this, um, through this sound tube system where they go over how they met. Uh, apparent—They did, uh, he—The mood ring turns out to have been the, the meet cute that spurred their, their relationship. Uh, he gave it to Alma and it turned purple and he said that was love, but it turned out that it meant she was horny. And he, he was like, that was so funny. And then his was blue, which was peaceful. And I was like, okay. But the big thing here is that neither of them remember what color love is. Isn't that sad?

Art: Wow.

Sylvi: So while they're separated between the, the, uh, with this field of, of potentially deadly toxin between them, Elliot decides, I don't, I'm, I don't want to die alone. If this is going to happen, I'm going to see my wife. I'm going out there. Uh, and Alma joins him and brings the kid with her for some reason. I don't—That part confused me a little bit. Why did she—She could have stayed inside. That's okay. Uh, they embrace, they meet in the middle of the field, and then all of a sudden, almost as if but like the power of love saved them. The neurotoxin is gone. The happening has ended as quickly as it began.

Keith: Um, science coded.

Sylvi: Whoa. Uh, we flash forward to the first day of school, uh, our—First day schools are open again after, after what happened, uh, with Jess living with The Moores, Alma and Elliot. Alma finds out she's pregnant. And we also got some scientist on the TV saying the exact same thing that that kid in Elliot's science class did about the bees, that it's an act of nature and we'll never fully understand it. He also says it's a warning that

humanity has become a threat to this planet and it could happen again. Alma and Elliot embrace after she presumably shares the news about her pregnancy. And then the final scene of the movie is in Paris, where on a seemingly idyllic morning, people stop in their tracks and begin to kill themselves. A film by M. Night Shyamalan.

Art: Um, I can't believe you left out the scene where someone just says it's gonna stop at 9 AM tomorrow morning.

Sylvi: Does somebody do that? Did I miss that?

Jack: Yeah, there's that, right?

Keith: The newscaster.

Art: Yeah, a guy on the news is like, it's gonna stop at 9:15 tomorrow morning, and then it exactly does.

Sylvi: Oh, I did miss that.

Art: He's a scientist at the—And it's like a scientist of weird plant murders.

Keith: This is, uh—

Sylvi: The only scientist I listen to has strong feelings about hot dogs. I'm sorry.

Keith: This, this is, uh, this is stupid, but it is—They do also bring this up earlier when, um, they're talking about the—They're in the model home and they're talking about the bacteria in the Australian ocean, and that what happens is that it gets exponentially worse until all of a sudden it just stops. So that, that concept was introduced. It's still really stupid to come back and restate it and have a scientist be like, 9 AM tomorrow, that's, that's when it's gonna stop. I think—

Ali: With like a little chart that says Crest.

Keith: Yeah. He can't—

Ali: With like, just numbers on it.

Keith: M. Night Shyamalan can't stop himself from having characters just know the answer to the problems of the movie. This is exactly what happens in *Signs*. It happens two times in this movie because the botanist is like, yeah, I was thinking about it. I'm pretty sure it's the plants. And then it's like, okay, 25 minutes later, it's the plants. Like, it's just so weird that the process of discovery happens off-screen with tertiary characters.

Jack: I—There was a point, because like you, Keith, here's, here's what I knew about *The Happening*. It's got Mark Wahlberg and Zooey Deschanel. There's like, a mysterious virus that makes you kill yourself. And it's—There's plants involved. And at the beginning of the movie, when characters started saying things pretty directly, like, I think it's the plants that are doing this, part of my brain was like, oh, have I misremembered this, and—

Sylvi: It's a fake-out.

Jack: That's a—It's a theory that they have, but it's actually not the plants. But no, it does turn out that, like you say, Keith, they tell us what it is early. And then we do just sort of keep going.

Keith: Did you watch *Signs*, Jack?

Jack: No, I've never seen *Signs*.

Keith: Okay. Literally the same thing happens in *Signs*. It's unbelievable.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Keith: Like—

Ali: But the person saying it is M. Night Shyamalan.

Keith: Is M. Night Shyamalan. M. Night Shyamalan shows up. He's a veterinarian, and he goes, look, man, I'm getting out of town. I'm pretty sure these aliens don't like water.

And then nothing is done with that information until the climactic scene of the movie when he starts knocking the alien into the water and the water starts melting the alien.

Sylvi: Swing away.

Jack: So—Swing away. A couple of days ago, Art sent a message in our chat saying, if anyone hasn't seen this film before and would like a secret assignment, message me. And I messaged Art and I was given a secret assignment, Taskmaster style. And Art said, and we've sort of begun to dial into this already, that M. Night and the crew said that part of the reason this movie was like, misreceived was that they were trying to make a B movie.

Sylvi: Oh, yeah.

Jack: And that is not what people thought that it was, and people judged it by the wrong yardstick, essentially. So Art said, you should watch this movie as though it is a B-movie. And the examples that M. Night gave were like *The Birds* and *God*, what was the other one, Art?

Art: The Blob. The original—

Jack: The Blob, right. Yes, I was thinking of *The Blob* too. And Art also said, and that it's supposed to be funny. And so I was watching with these two things kind of in mind, and it just made me confused and angry in different ways.

Keith: This movie's not funny.

Jack: This movie is occasionally very unintentionally funny, but I think there is so much that—I really, really like the soundtrack to this movie. It is not a funny soundtrack. The soundtrack believes with dead certainty in what is happening in this movie. The emotional stakes of, we are bringing a child along in a perilous situation, we're constantly getting, you know, derailed or whatever. This is how you would stage, like, a Spielberg *War of the Worlds* movie or something, you know? It falls apart in being a B-movie. The areas in which I think it succeeds in being a B-movie are actually in the

suicide sequences. I think that this film has a really good eye for, like, exploitative or grindhouse horror detailing.

Keith: Mm-hmm.

Jack: And we could talk about that kind of as they come up. I think those are really well—Sort of like, chosen for kind of carrying that feeling. But when I think about the B movies that I really like, this movie doesn't even come close to them because it is so emotionally muddled. A film that I thought about a lot when I was watching this was the John Carpenter movie, *Prince of Darkness*?

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: Which is about a bunch of academics who accidentally discover the devil. And John Carpenter has such a good eye for like, the ways to make his characters pulpy and funny and like, lovable or hateable, and scary, and to arrange them in space in ways that it lets him pull emotional levers. You know, if the only John Carpenter you've seen is *The Thing*, I think *The Thing* is, like, genuinely a sinister movie. Something like *Prince of Darkness* is scary, but it's, like, fun scary, and kind of, like, goofy scary. There's a really great bit where a guy gets replaced by a load of cockroaches who dress up in his clothes and walk around outside, uh, to try and scare people. Um, there's none of that like, control over when you should be funny, when you should be scary, when you should be emotive in this movie. It's all just sort of happening at once.

Keith: Um, one of the things that I was conflicted about during these scenes, and like the very beginning of it is this—Is the first mass suicide scene, and it immediately reminded me that this is the first R-rated M. Night Shyamalan movie.

Sylvi: Mm-hmm.

Keith: And at the same time that I—As I felt that these scenes were kind of cheesy in a fun way, they are gruesome and tacky in a fun way. And they also—It also screamed to me like, he doesn't know even what to do with an R rating. Like, he had the idea to make an R-rated movie without having an R-rated movie to make, because this movie is

like, full of violence that happens to nameless characters off in the distance. It's very—it's like there's very little violence that happens to like—There's no violence that happens to core characters, and there's very little violence that happens to secondary or even tertiary characters.

Ali: Yeah.

Keith: And so what, what happens is you have a PG-13 movie intercut with R-rated scenes that serve essentially no function.

Jack: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Art: Well, they're, they're visually arresting.

Keith: Besides being visually arresting, besides being visually arresting.

Art: I think when they're driving into Princeton and they see all those landscapers who have hanged themselves.

Keith: Love that. That was the best one.

Jack: Well, so—

Art: Yeah, that's—

Keith: But that wasn't even—

Art: That's M. Night Shyamalan right there, like.

Keith: Because that happens in *The Sixth Sense*, so we know he could have done that without the R rating.

Art: I don't know that you could do that in this—

Keith: No, almost the exact thing like, the hanged people happens in *The Sixth Sense*.

Ali: Yeah.

Art: But they're at the end of that hallway.

Keith: Right.

Art: I mean, I don't work for the MPAA, but I do feel like—

Keith: I think it's things like, knitting needle through the neck that is giving me R-rated.

Jack: That's such a weird moment. You know—Sorry, go on, Ali.

Ali: No, no, no. I am—There are some that are really good, and there are some that just feel like, he does not know what to do with this because he has a very particular directing style and has sort of repeated a lot of the same sort of setups and scenes and things to focus on that, like—I mean, I'm a scaredy-cat. I'm an eyes coverer for a lot of these things. But the—I think there's a well of difference between how legitimately shocking and interesting and scary the needle scene is, which spends so much time in the anticipation of the stab that you sort of know—I feel like that scene gets stretched in a way that it just ends up being kind of frustrating and not scary because of it.

Jack: Yeah.

Ali: Whereas the construction site scene with, like, the one person dropping, and then you having these actual, like, the moments with these characters where they're, like, shocked, and then the second body, and then, like, the sort of escalation of things.

Keith: Yeah. There's a death, and, like, it's a horrible accident, and there's two deaths, and it's like, oh my God, two horrible accidents.

Jack: And the punchline to that scene is this beautiful, like, wide shot tilting upwards to look at the rim of the building as people in slow motion are jumping off it, which is kind of a shock.

Keith: As they're realizing something is happening.

Jack: Some kind of happening. I do think that, and to your point, I think that on some level he kind of pulls his punches with some of these. I think that you're right, Ali, with

the needle scene there as well. I think—I really do like that initial shot of the landscapers, but it's immediately followed by this scene that is supposed to be very tense and frightening as John Leguizamo kind of tries to calm people down. And we can see empty streets in the, uh, uh, outside of the car windows behind them. And it would have been so easy to like, continue to like, crank up the, the tension and horror and pace in that scene by like, lining the road with bodies or something. But it's, it's like you say, Keith, we have this sort of, um, PG—He is a PG-13 director who was trying to insert R-rated sequences. And as soon as he gets his scare off on seeing the bodies, they sort of melt out of the scene. And we don't really see them again.

Keith: Did they despawn?

[Sylvi laughter]

Jack: They despawned. Similarly, the lion sequence is shot really weirdly. He's replicating his fascination that we started seeing for the first time in Signs, where he was like, oh, everyone really liked the TV sequence from Signs, except the cast of Media Club Plus. So we have these people on their phones looking at a LiveLeak clip of a guy deliberately getting himself eaten by, by lions.

Keith: Yeah.

Jack: And I found this clip so, like, structurally annoying to me, because he approaches a lion, and the first lion attack is hidden from us. You know, we're on the characters' faces when he actually gets bitten. And I was like, oh, right, M. Night can't show a guy getting torn apart by a lion because he doesn't want to do that, or for whatever reason. But then we cut back to the thing, and a lion pulls the guy's arm off on screen. And I was like, the horror in that moment is the first attack by the lion. Why would you cut to a character's face in that moment?

Keith: Because he's there—

Jack: You know you're going to.

Keith: He wants to give you the blood, but not the horror. I don't really understand it.

Ali: I'm glad we're talking about this at the top because it really puts into context, I think, one of my biggest complaints watching it, which is that, like, I think the, the movie betrays how scary the actual concept is.

Keith: Yeah.

Jack: Yes!

Ali: Yeah. And I feel like the only time that I really feel like that, in terms of sympathy with the audience, is when there's so many people crowded in that little diner, and everybody's kind of getting information at once, and then they pull over the TV where it's like, yeah, you're in it. And just the thought of how scary it would actually be to feel a lack of hope, just like, I'm lost. I don't know what to do.

Jack: You can feel it coming for you.

Ali: Yeah, yeah, yeah. But every other scene, because there's no actual actor, I guess, or any real representation—Like, you have these long-spanning you know, shots of grass where the wind is picking up, and then like, music is really scary. And these actors who like, are in this situation, but like, kind of just don't give a fuck. Like, I don't know. I don't know that it ever really feels like they're scared. I don't know what it is. But, like, the concept for this movie could have been elevated in a way that, like, this kind of—I don't know how far I could get away from this thing. I don't have any visual representation of whether I'm safe or not. Could be a fear that really sticks with you after you leave it. But instead, it's just like, oh, okay, that was a film, I guess.

Sylvi: Yeah.

Keith: Yeah. Uh—

Jack: It's so sad because we're kind of cheated out of that because you also get to this great point where, like, um, it is dangerous for you to be close to people, so people have to start separating. You know, you can feel thematic work kind of there under the, under the, under the surface, but it's, it's never acted upon. It never sort of works well. I also want to say that I think that the, like, a part of, like, a big CinemaSins ding from this

movie, because we are now deep in cultural M. Night hate, um, is that it's like, this is a movie in which the trees—The only scary thing they can show you is the trees moving, or like, the wind.

Keith: Yeah.

Jack: And I think there's real potential. I don't think that the movie necessarily does it well, but I don't think that's necessarily a bad idea. I think that you can, you can get patient, good, scary photography of landscapes and of trees moving.

Sylvi: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Jack: Um, there's potential there.

Keith: I think—

Ali: Like the—

Keith: Go ahead, Ali.

Ali: The cornfield was so much scarier than any of the trees in this movie are.

Art: Infinitely scarier than this. Um, oh, there was something though. I had, I had something, I lost it. What were we at? Um, oh, the, the, the not being able to be near people.

Keith: Yeah.

Art: It comes too late.

Jack: Yes.

Sylvi: Yep.

Art: Because by the time like, they get there, there's only like four of them anyway, five of them anyway. And then immediately they, they kill those two kids. The terror of not

being able to be near anyone, sort of just like, yeah, it's too late in the film. You can't do anything with this. We've exhausted it.

Keith: Classic anime problem, I think.

Jack: Can I say something about that—

Art: I don't know, because if you put 20 more minutes in this movie, I think people would have been killing themselves in the theater too.

Keith: Well, and what a bigger scare than that.

Jack: I like, genuinely had that, that like, get me the fuck out of here feeling during the mood ring conversation at the end of the movie. I was like, I'm going to walk into a lake.

Art: And you know what happens then? You die.

Keith: You didn't like when she said that she was horny?

Jack: I just—I was not connected to these people. The movie was acting like I was. The music was telling me to be connected. James Newton Howard is a good composer. I was feeling like all the wrong synapses were firing. I was like, get me the hell out of here. But I would like to say something I like about this movie, and we can kind of get into the, the first act. I think that this film has a really good—This is a Tak Fujimoto joint.

[**Keith:** Yeah.] He's good. Yeah, we've liked him forever.

Keith: It's his 3rd M. Night?

Jack: Yeah, this film has a really great eye for the arrangement of people in scenes. There are some beautiful arrangements of people that belong in a much better movie. Like Ali said, all these people crowded in the diner looking up at the TV that these two—It's like, a CRT TV that these guys have hoisted onto the bar. And at one point, he leans down and turns the volume up, and you can see the little volume icons on the screen. There's a great shot of when the train stops in this small town, an entire train full of scared people being dumped in this leafy station out in the middle of nowhere. We

talked about it earlier. There's that crossroads where all the cars keep ending up, and that's also staged really beautifully. The film has such a good eye for like, loose arrangements of people in interesting shapes and emotive shapes, even when in the middle of it we have Mark Wahlberg and Zooey Deschanel doing absolutely jack shit.

Keith: Uh, although, on the other hand, like, for every time there's an interesting framing of people in a scene, there's two extreme close-ups on Zooey Deschanel's shocked-looking face and her wide eyes.

Sylvi: I, uh—

Art: Well, that's what you—That's what you hire her for.

Keith: I think no one—

Sylvi: I think she's like watching TV like a golden retriever the first time we see her. I don't know how else to like, describe it. She just has a very like, dog-like expression on her face.

Keith: Yeah, I, I, um, I, I understand what Zooey Deschanel's, you know, early to mid-career was, but no one has had less ability to restrain themselves, I think, than whoever was choosing how many times and for how long to show extreme close-ups of her big eyes.

Art: Um, no, I mean, I—To build on what Jack was saying about the work being done in this movie is that I do think that director M. Night Shyamalan really needs to be mad at writer M. Night Shyamalan for giving him this script.

Jack: Yeah, fucking get that guy.

Art: And producer M. Night Shyamalan for putting this cast together.

Keith: Yeah.

Art: Like, yes, the, the, the—Again, setting aside the fact that I think the directors are ultimately responsible for the acting performances, the work that like, Shyamalan and

Tak Fujimoto and James Newton Howard are doing is good work. The technical work here is, is being done. And then it's, it's just a shame that the events of this movie are what they're chronicling.

Keith: Um, here's something that I like about this movie, talking about the early stages, is this is, um, the first movie in the smartphone era. This is a, this is a mobile information age. A lot of the terror comes from people having a moment to look at the news on their phone. Like, as stupid as the lion scene was, and I have got to take credit from that actor who did a really bad job of feeding himself to the lions, I think—Sorry, guy.

Jack: There's a good idea in that scene.

Keith: There's a good idea in the scene.

Jack: His casualness and his looseness. He should be really casual and disaffected, but then you got to do more than that, man.

Keith: Yeah. And again, it's really M. Night's fault for cutting away at the exact wrong time.

Art: Yeah. I don't think the actor deserves any of the heat for this.

Keith: The way he's moving around, it was, it was one of the worst suicides in the movie. And there's a lot. There's a lot of suicides.

Art: But like, the lions aren't there, right? So this is all—

Keith: No, the lions are there.

Art: No, they're not.

Keith: Oh, you mean like in real life?

Ali: You don't think those were real lions?

Keith: No, no, no, no.

Art: I don't think the actor and the lions were in the same place.

Keith: Right. I understand. I understand.

Art: So like the actor being weird In relation to the lions is not the actor's fault.

Keith: No, it's not. I have to plead, that's what acting is though.

Jack: And that's why—

Art: When you're acting with things that aren't there, it's the responsibility of the people who put the things there to not make you look like a fucking jackass.

Keith: Damn.

Art: Um, or the responsibility of people waving the tennis balls around to—

Keith: I, this, I thought about this before I said that he was doing a bad job and I still think he's doing a bad job.

Jack: Put one real lion. This is how you shoot it. You get the lion and the lion trainer. You shoot it with one lion. The actor is the guy. We get one scene where he approaches the lion, then we cut away. Yeah, but then if we're gonna have to have—If we're going to have the lion pulling his arm off on camera, why not make them all CG, I suppose, at that point?

Sylvi: Yeah.

Ali: Yeah, I think it's one thing like—Yeah, there's just something to it where it's like, it's also a disappointment in how the—Like, this sort of impulse manifests in people, right? Where it's like, it's hard to have it be really effective visually. When everyone's supposed to have this sort of dead-eyed, almost robotic, but not quite stiff enough to be robotic kind of thing. Like, you know, the parts where this happens really fast, like the long cutout to the car.

Jack: I love that one. That was a really good one.

Ali: And then just hits the tree and hits the tree so like, abruptly that you could see the bodies come out of the windscreen is done very well.

Sylvi: Yeah.

Ali: And the violence follows through, and the ease up to the rollercoaster drop is really done effectively and quickly. And it's like a rubber band snapping, and it feels shocking, and it feels really good. But with the lion thing, you kind of have like, oh, you have to spend time with him suddenly kind of acting disaffected. And then you kind of already know that something's happening bad because why would it be in the scene anyway? And then you have him, like, gesturing to the lion and the cutaway, and it's just like, there's not enough to do with that scene when you have to consider, oh, I have to be really active, and I have to be the only actor in this scene because there is a lion here. And also, what I'm being directed to do is to look really blank and unintentional.

Jack: Do—

Keith: Here's another structural issue with that is the, uh, the choice to have had the, the woman showing Elliot the video—She's already seen it, so she's already screamed about it before we even know what's going on.—It would have been—It wouldn't have been that hard to have like everyone watch the video for the first time together and all reacting together.

Sylvi: I—Yeah, but then I would be robbed of her being like, oh my god, you've got to see this. And that's one of my favorite bits, I really like that part.

Jack: Do you know, that there were originally 2 clips shown in that diner scene.

Art: No.

Sylvi: Ooh.

Ali: I did not.

Jack: They cut one of them, because I think they're right that the line is better. And if they're just sitting around watching LiveLeak videos, the tone of the scene changes tremendously. So I can understand why they only have one. The original version of the scene, which you can find—It was released, I think, on the DVD extras—Features a man midway through a violin recital, losing his place in the music and getting stuck in a measure. This sounds like a good idea. It's not as cool as it sounds. And then they also—There's some weird implications in this scene. Then a bunch of people in the crowd just keel over. So there's a chance that maybe in this cut of the movie, sometimes you just died. And then the man puts the violin bow down his throat, which is—

Keith: Oof.

Jack: That's pretty good. But yeah, I can see why they—I can see why they cut it.

Keith: Yeah.

Jack: Um, we don't need both of those.

Keith: Um, the—There—This first act also obviously is setting up the, like, emotional stakes between, uh, Elliot and Alma, which barely exist.

Jack: Yeah. Uh, some important context as we're describing these scenes and the kind of plot maneuvers is that every five or six minutes Mark Wahlberg or Zooey Deschanel will deliver a line reading in the strangest possible way you have ever heard.

Keith: Yes, I have. I have, um—

Sylvi: I'm—Yeah, I need to know about buttons, Keith.

Keith: Uh, so I don't—Sorry, I don't yet have a—I don't know if I have a button of their sort of relationship stuff because it was so uninteresting, but I do have written a quote of their first argument. Mark Wahlberg has already set up to Johnny Legs that he's having trouble with Alma. And so when they meet up, I think that John Leguizamo very sensitively tells her, hey, I'm glad you chose to come with us. Zooey Deschanel does not like this because she thinks that Elliot has like, tattled that they've been having trouble.

And so she pulls him two feet to the side to say, you told him about our fight? I don't want to put my feelings out there for everyone to see. I'm not that type of person. In the middle of having a public fight that everyone can see, and John Leguizamo absolutely can hear. Um, I thought that was kind of funny.

Ali: That's being a bad girlfriend. That's just being a bad girlfriend.

Keith: Yeah.

Ali: Sometimes you're just an insane person.

Keith: Sometimes you're an insane person. That really, that really seems to be like one of the biggest problems in the script for this is that like, they're having fights about nothing. She's mad about nothing. They never—Like there's one scene where one of the boys that they're traveling with later on will be like, you got to take responsibility for yourself in this relationship.

Sylvi: Yeah, after he asks him if his dick doesn't work.

Keith: After, yeah, after he asks him if his dick doesn't work or if his, you know, if his swimmers don't swim. Or some whatever, whatever thing he was implying about, um, uh—

Art: Yeah, it's—It—Mm, sorry.

Keith: Uh, it's just such a weird scene where they're like, teasing this guy who they don't know. And like, you know, he has his mood ring and the kid is like, ooh, I remember when I liked these, being like, you're a baby, your relationship is falling apart, you're a loser, you don't know anything about—

Ali: That's—I think it works because they're like high school boys and he's a teacher.

Keith: Oh yeah, it works. It's just very weird.

Ali: It's weird.

Sylvi: This is the thing though, it doesn't actually work because Mark Wahlberg's performance doesn't work in it.

Keith: Yeah.

Sylvi: Like, he's, he's trying to do—Like, he's definitely trying to do cool teacher that you wish was your big brother is like, the whole thing, especially when we see him early on and like, oh, the mistress of evil is here. When the, the vice principal shows up.

Keith: But he telling that—He won't stop telling that boy how handsome he is.

Sylvi: He's gonna be a stud all his life. But he, he—

Art: Yeah, I don't want people talking to my kid like that.

Keith: Yeah, I—

Sylvi: He cannot make any dialogue he has with the children sound natural because he can't make any of the dialogue sound natural. Yeah, it really sticks out like a sore thumb there because that's supposed to be what he's good at.

Keith: But my point, my point in bringing this up is that like, we get nothing about their relationship and why they're having these issues. Like, like, she was crying on their wedding day?

Art: It's, uh, it's circular. Like they're having issues, so she's talking to this other guy. But in the end, her talking to the other guy is the issue. Like, right, it's, it's terrible and I hate it.

Keith: Yeah. We never get anything about why their relationship isn't working, but we also don't get anything like convincingly not working. Like, it's weird. He can't even—This is an R-rated movie and he can't, he can't seem to like think up—He can't seem to stomach having as a director and/or writer, M. Night can't seem to stomach the idea that she—Someone actually did something wrong.

Sylvi: She should have cheated.

Keith: She should have cheated. She should have absolutely cheated. She didn't even kiss this guy. They just had dinner.

Sylvi: They just had tiramisu.

Keith: They had tiramisu.

Sylvi: Tiramisu.

Jack: This is like—

Sylvi: Important that it's tiramisu.

Jack: Oh, go on, Ali.

Ali: No, I'm curious about what you're—Because I feel like this kind of thing happens between people, right? Like, you fight over nothing. You go through bad patches or whatever. Like, I don't know that, like, the movie would be so much worse if it felt like it needed to spend time like, justifying the weirdness between them more than it already does.

Sylvi: Fair.

Ali: And it could just be like, they were having a bad time, and also this thing is happening on top of it.

Keith: I think that you're right.

Art: It would've taken the same amount of time and just had like, a slightly more coherent reason.

Keith: Yeah. There's nothing given. It's not that she didn't cheat. It's that they specifically went out of their way to show that she didn't cheat. Like [**Sylvi:** Yeah.] Like they went out of their way to tell you, by the way, this is all about nothing. Like, they could have said less and given—It would have worked more.

Sylvi: Instead, the director just keeps calling her.

Jack: Yeah, that's M. Night on the phone.

Sylvi: Yeah, which I loved, I loved saying.

Jack: Um, this feels very strange to watch. Usually emotions kind of get in the film by accident, or rather, if you've written it badly, some emotions will kind of creep in anyway, you know, like ants if you leave food out. It's very odd watching a movie where there's just nothing between these people. You might think you've seen a movie in which there's no chemistry between characters. We're not talking about a lack of chemistry, although that is also missing.

Keith: Right.

Jack: We're talking about like, fundamental things about how people like, interact. To the point about the cheating and M. Night not necessarily wanting to show people doing bad things or whatever. It's really notable to me how sexless this movie is, and how sexless M. Night's work is generally. Um, this is especially, you know, I, I sort of started to notice this as, you know, I'd been thinking through the movies as you've been talking about them, but as he's like, deep in this B-movie space and is clearly very interested in the kind of salacious or exploitative power of the these suicide sequences to greater or lesser effect, it becomes very notable that there is a big gap missing, which is sex and horniness. We have that coy joke about the purple mood ring actually meaning you're horny at the end. That is no substitute. Um, uh, the B-Movie features, like, very particular kinds of structures in the same way that in a, uh, like a camp slasher movie, someone takes their shirt off and gets killed by [Sylvi: Yeah.] The killer midway through sex. The B-movie is going to feature our man and woman protagonist brought together in a time of like, stress, hooking up in the hotel room midway through the whatever. And we have a scene that kind of begins to gesture towards that in the strange house that we get, but nope, absolutely not. Then at the end we have a completely sexless pregnancy. We bypass any of those sort of—

Sylvi: Yeah, right.

Jack: Exciting and scary and messy feelings and emotions and actions to just go straight to, don't worry, I'm pregnant. What is going on with M. Night movies and sex? Have you kind of been able to start drawing some lines together yet?

Keith: Well, he can't do a normal relationship at all, so I'm, you know—

Jack: Oh no, but you can write really good sex stories about bad, awful relationships.

Keith: Yeah, sure. Yeah, it is—First, I think that there's a PG-13 element to a lot of this. Weirdly, and this is—I hate to say it, but his most horny movie was Lady in the Water. And that was because you had Paul Giamatti, who was like, actively—

Sylvi: Constantly resisting his urges.

Keith: Yeah, he's actively suppressing his attraction to the mermaid. What were they called? [**Sylvi:** The Narf.] Yeah, the Narf. Oh my God.

Sylvi: The Madame Narf, please.

Art: Not a mermaid. I mean, human legs.

Keith: Human—I thought that that was, uh, I thought that they, they morph when they go on land like a tadpole. Maybe I'm—Maybe that was, uh, that was just something I pulled out of the movie. [**Sylvi:** You're thinking of selkies.] Um, is that what that is?

Sylvi: Uh, it's, uh, yeah, they're, they're like seal, uh, creatures that can become people and walk on. There's one in Bluff City. Go listen to Bluff City.

Keith: Uh, yeah, go listen to Bluff City.

Sylvi: If you're listening to this, go listen to Bluff City.

Keith: It's better than The Happening.

Sylvi: It's so much better than The Happening. Oh my goodness.

Keith: We have yet to see a movie from M. Night better than Bluff City. No offense.

Ali: True. Um, I think the only, like, couple that we've seen that is actually convincingly attracted to each other was the couple from Signs. And you only see them together for like 3 minutes.

Keith: I thought—

Jack: I—

Sylvi: Sixth Sense or Signs?

Ali: Uh, Sixth Sense. Sixth Sense.

Sylvi: Yeah, because I was gonna say, in Signs, the only time we see her is when she's bisected by a car. You could—Yeah, I was like, okay, Ali, damn.

Keith: He had to restrain himself from popping what bones she had left.

Art: Um, yeah, that's, um, super That's super mean to say, Ali, about sex in The Sixth Sense.

Ali: But also in The Sixth Sense, he makes sex look like it sucks. Like when they're drunk and like, he's taking his clothes off, it's so unattractive.

Jack: That's a good scene though.

Ali: But it's like, so funny.

Keith: He's funny. Yeah, he's being funny. He's being a goofy guy.

Art: Yeah, the sex people have in real life is not as sexy as the sex people have in movies.

Ali: Yeah, no, 100%.

Keith: There's an attraction I think the connection between Bruce Willis and, um, I can't remember the name of, uh, the—

Ali: There's an intimacy. They don't ever feel like they're attracted to each other. It feels like they're stuck in each other's house.

Keith: In Unbreakable.

Ali: Yeah, yeah, I know.

Keith: Did I say Unbreakable already? I thought that you were—We were—

Sylvi: There's like a yearning there that I can like see what—Like, you can read into a bit, but they definitely like, any—Like, if we're specifically talking about like, sexual energy between characters. It's not really there, not even on the date they go on.

Jack: But then along comes a B-movie. This is your opportunity to really—

Keith: Exactly.

Sylvi: Yeah, this movie should have been more Final Destination. [**Jack:** It should have been.] Just to be kind of my takeaway from it. Like, it should have been a little trashier.

Art: Uh, is there a—Is there a lot of sex in Final Destination?

Sylvi: No, but like, you could get away with a tit in a—In that type of movie, you know what I mean? Like, that's the—That's the caliber I'm talking about necessarily, not—Not necessarily the franchise itself.

Art: This is, this is a tricky thing to think about because I'm just like scrolling ahead on the old M. Night filmography, and I don't know that we're ever gonna get there.

Sylvi: There's—It's weird because he will do a lot of stuff that evokes sexual peril, but he won't evoke actual sexuality, like in a, in a like, way between two consenting adults or anything like that. Like, he will, he will constantly play with the threat of something happening.

Keith: Does he have kids? He does have kids because his kid is in Trap.

Ali: Yes.

Keith: Yeah, he has 3 kids. So we know that he knows about sex.

Sylvi: Yes, he has. I was like, just keep going. Um, but like, I think the, the—What I was saying is like, we'll, we'll see stuff, uh, that like I said evokes, um, the threat of sexual violence. I think about Split a lot in this regard. Um, which I think we are—We have decided we'll be talking about at some point.

Keith: Oh, yes.

Sylvi: Which I don't know if it actually explicitly goes there, but that is the tone.

Art: Right, yeah, and then it turns out it's about something very different.

Keith: Okay, yeah.

Art: Won't spoil Split for you right now, but—

Keith: I have a theory about this. I have a theory.

Ali: Okay.

Keith: I started to make a point about, because we're recording this, I'm 2/3 of the way through editing the Media Club Plus that was supposed to come out yesterday, and I was talking about—Which is the, the episode for The Village. And we were, we were talking about Spielberg and how he, he seems to want to model himself off of Spielberg. And a point that I didn't get to make is that Spielberg, attributed to him is this quote about like, I do one for the studios and then one for me, because he's—He for a while was going back and forth between doing more personal projects and doing more blockbuster-style projects. And the thing I was trying to lead into but never got to was that M. Night doesn't have ones for him. Like, he is doing movies for the studio, for the audience. He's doing—He's trying to make blockbusters. And by the way, I think one of the issues here, he's trying to make them very quickly. These movies have all come out—

Sylvi: Two years apart.

Keith: Very, very fast. Back to back to back to back. So he's not getting a lot of time to, like, work on these, which I think is maybe one of the big issues. But, uh—

Art: Lady in the Water was definitely one for him.

Keith: Yeah, Lady in the Water was one for him. Yes.

Ali: I would argue they all are one for him, and that's why—

Keith: But his him is for the studio.

Sylvi: I see what Keith means. It's sort of like a square peg, round hole situation, right? Where he keeps trying to take the ones for him and making them—He thinks they should be like—

Keith: Right. I think that he's trying very hard to know what big American, maybe white American audiences are wanting from a movie, from a PG-13 sort of horror kind of movie, where it has gestures at being scary, but it's not too scary. There's a lot of sort of playing on the bounds of like, conservative ideology and sort of reflections on that conservative ideology, but it never goes really far. Like, he's obsessed with crime and obsessed with like, showing you that people are afraid of crime. Like the newspaper in this, you see next to the photo of him being married.

Sylvi: All-time bad shot.

Keith: It's a, it's a shot of a newspaper that says, Killadelphia: murder rate skyrockets! Or something like that. Definitely says Killadelphia. And, and so, and like, maybe these are all just like real genuine M. Night feelings and ideas, but what it seems like to me is that he is trying to triangulate what his perceived audience wants from him as a director, or wants from movies, wants from blockbuster movies.

Jack: Mm-hmm.

Keith: And what's happening is that he is not that good at hitting that mark. And so people keep being like, this kind of feels weird. And I think it's because he's not creating

art that is honest to himself, I think. I think that maybe *Lady in the Water* was his closest shot at doing that, but it has, like, all of these same issues with his scripting that he's had before. And so, I—This is all to say that I think that these movies don't have sex in them because he thinks that sex doesn't actually sell. And I think that what he thinks sells is the idea of sex. I think that he thinks that looking at Bryce Dallas Howard and Zooey Deschanel is what people want, not tawdry like, scenes where women are getting killed at the lake.

Art: Well, I mean, the, the presentation of Bryce Dallas Howard in *Lady in the Water* is kind of exploitative. Like, there's no sort of getting around that. That is, you know—

Keith: But it's a PG-13 exploitation.

Art: Sure, but we are always being like—Our attention is always being drawn to that she's not wearing any clothes.

Keith: Yeah.

Art: And, you know, wink wink, you know what a naked lady looks like.

Keith: That—And that's the problem.

Jack: You better, because we won't show you.

Keith: I think all those wink winks, I think that that is the dishonesty of his art.

Ali: Yeah, I don't know. I feel like there's too much overlap in theme in these movies and this constant drilling of working through these same thoughts. that I have a hard time agreeing that, like, what's happening here is that it's dishonest. And instead is that because he's trying to go away from the contemporaries of his time, and because he—Maybe what we've learned from the *Lady in the Water* book, like, thinks that he's such an auteur in this way, is like, well, I'm either not interested in writing relationships in these ways, because he doesn't seem to want to write a relationship between people who actually like each other. And also, like, those other movies have sex in them, and I don't know that mine does. You know, I don't know. It's a weird thing. Bringing it back to

The Happening is that if there's not going to be this sort of pulpy, B-movie, sort of like, the world is ending, but—It's a rom-com. but every—Like, our emotions about that are overshadowed by, you know, the frustration that we're having with each other, the way that we want to be with each other, and that there's no hidden kiss or weird hookup scene, is that it also isn't relying on the intimacy of parenthood. You know, in all of the scenes with Jess, there's barely anything happening there.

Jack: It's odd.

Ali: There's like—there are times when the movie has to sort of cut to her because it feels like it needs to acknowledge her again. And, you know, the fact that we even end up, like—The, like, core problem of the movie is like, oh, we have to get away from other people. We have to like, be considerate of how many people are with us. That there's no sort of like, attention drawn or tension drawn to the fact that like, it is the kids who seem to want to flock to Mark Wahlberg. And, like, what are you gonna do with the responsibility of like, needing to be a parental figure in this moment when you can't even be, like, a good husband? Which could be a very interesting concept.

Sylvi: Think about the total whiff that comes from Josh and Jared. Like, we talked about that one conversation, and that's kind of the only scene we get of them bonding with Elliot, and then they're dead like, one scene later.

Keith: Yeah, there's one scene in the model home that is less tense.

Sylvi: Right.

Keith: Maybe they feel comfort—Being generous, they feel comfortable with him enough to... Fuck with him a bit.

Jack: The scene with Jess that really got me feeling like there was something—Something had gone wrong with the movie, that there was something emotionally wrong and there was something like narratively wrong, is the scene where John Leguizamo, who I think is doing a great job—

Sylvi: He's trying.

Keith: He is one of the best things in the movie.

Jack: And I think he is actually dialed into the B-movie. He can play the scenery-chewing, having a good time, and also the—I think a lot about when Michael Caine—

Sylvi: Don't you take my daughter's hand unless you mean it.

Jack: Yeah! When Michael Caine was in Muppet Christmas Carol, he was like, I'm gonna treat these guys like they're real actors. I'm gonna play this, you know, deadly seriously, famously. And I think that there's a skill to acting in a B-movie that resembles something like that, where when you are imperiled, you have got to believe it, but you also have to balance that with knowing that you're a character in a B-movie in all the other scenes. This is—

Sylvi: I feel like everybody in this cast gets that, except for Wahlberg and Deschanel.

Jack: The two leads, yeah. So, Leguizamo is—He is going to go to, um, uh, Princeton to meet up with his doomed wife.

Sylvi: Yes.

Jack: Uh, and—

Sylvi: Never seen on screen, never heard of.

Jack: Never seen on screen, never heard of.

Keith: And he gets so doomed by the camera, too. First of all, they get into a Jeep Wrangler, and you're immediately like—Or at least I was like, oh, people fucking die in Jeep Wranglers. That's the car you die in.

Jack: Is this—Wait, what? Why?

Keith: So there's three things altogether. One, they're extremely unsafe in real life. Two—Like, they're the most unsafe car by far in real life. Two, when people die in

movies, they're always fucking dying in Jeep Wranglers. And three, the air is dangerous and it doesn't have walls.

Sylvi: Yeah, that's true.

Keith: Yeah, so I saw the Jeep Wrangler and I was like, these fucking people are gonna die. And then it shows John Leguizamo in slow motion driving away. And I was like, motherfucker's dead as hell.

Sylvi: It's fake slow motion.

Keith: The deadest guy of all time.

Art: And, um, one, the don't hold my daughter's hand unless you mean it line is one of the strangest lines in the film.

Sylvi: It's weird.

Art: Um, he's like, she's going to the town of Princeton. And I know that that's there because like people not from the Northeast would just hear Princeton and think of the university. Like, why is she going to the university and not know it's a town. No one in the Northeast would say that.

Keith: Correct.

Jack: No.

Art: That if you were in Philadelphia and someone said, she's going to Princeton, you would know they meant the town and not the university. And so that just hit me very wrong. And to build on M. Night Shyamalan doesn't make movies where people have sex, how sexless John Leguizamo is in this movie.

Jack: One of the sexiest men.

Art: A deeply sexy man. And they're just like, fuck up your hair and look like an asshole the whole time.

Ali: So he's supposed to be a dork. He's a math dork.

Sylvi: Yeah, he should've been Elliot.

Art: There are sexy mad dorks.

Ali: No, I'm kid—I'm kidding.

Jack: So, he is saying to Alma, which is Zooey Deschanel, and Elliot, that, you know, I'm gonna go, and you need to take my kid because I'm essentially kind of going to go into danger. And there are two emotive lines that you can draw through here, ways that you could stage this scene. One is slightly easier, and one is slightly harder. The slightly easier scene is that you stage a farewell between the father and daughter. This is very—The emotional stakes here are very clear. An audience is tuned into this. They have been a kid saying goodbye to someone. They have been an adult saying goodbye to a kid. The slightly harder one is that Leguizamo has to sell, or rather, um, uh, what's his fucking name? What's that character's name?

Sylvi: Julian. Julian.

Jack: Julian has to sell to Elliot and Alma, you need to become surrogate parents.

Sylvi: Right.

Jack: I don't care how not ready you are. I don't care how complex the feeling of shepherding a child that's not your own through this apocalypse is. You need to step up to the plate because I can't bring her into danger. That is the option Shyamalan chooses. He whiffs that by not dialing into the emotional stakes of that scene whatsoever. And then he completely neglects the farewell between father and daughter.

Sylvi: Yeah.

Jack: Such to the point that at one point we cut to see that Jess is standing next to Alma and Elliot, and I went, she was in this scene the whole time? [**Art** laughter] She's

just been here? It's bizarre. You have these two beautiful emotional paths and you choose neither of them.

Keith: Yeah, they pay her almost no mind for the whole movie. Um, they, they front-load that, you know, when she's scared she doesn't talk, and it's like, okay, easy way out on that one. We're gonna give the kid nothing to say. And then—

Sylvi: Do you think about—We—Actually, Keith, you finish up, and then I have a question about—

Keith: They follow through on that. She basically doesn't say anything for the whole movie. This is only relevant one time, when she's, like, feeling danger coming, uh, and is unable to explain that danger, and her new surrogate parents like, essentially ignore her tugging at their arms.

Sylvi: Yeah.

Keith: Which is very sad.

Sylvi: When they're splitting up?

Keith: Uh, when—no, this is right before Jared and Josh get absolutely obliterated by the gun.

Ali: Oh. Mm-hmm.

Keith: She notices—I think that what hap—I honestly, I think this is an interesting thing. She notices that the swing set is swinging. And so I think that she's worried that there's too many people and that they need to get out of here, or they're going to start all killing themselves. But instead, what happens is—This is my reading, I'm bringing this because she doesn't say what's happening because she doesn't speak. The people in the house kill Josh and Jared, maybe saving all of their lives.

Jack: Mm, that's fun. That's good. That would have been fun in the movie.

Keith: That would have been fun if they had—If they had maybe hinted that that was what was happening a little bit more. I don't understand why the swing set swinging made her so panicked to leave if that wasn't the case. That's my—

Jack: Because there's no fucking causality in this stupid movie.

Sylvi: Here's my question.

Jack: It's a scary thing. Sorry, Sylvi.

Sylvi: Do you think that this is M. Night once again doing his favorite thing of, uh, vaguely magical children, and like, this is supposed to read like that? Or am I just reading it like that because I've watched a lot of M. Night Shyamalan movies?

Keith: I agree that that's—Yeah, I—

Jack: No, I think that that is a reach, but I understand why you get there, Sylvi. In the same way that air wants to rush in to fill a vacuum.

Sylvi: Well, I don't think it feels like—It feels like a, a dropped plot line that she is like aware of, of like the danger they're in more so than the, the two grown-ass adults.

Keith: Her choice to try to pull them out of interacting with this home is so intentional that I think that it is a cut below even this movie for it to have been random.

Sylvi: Yeah, that—So this is one of the scenes that, like, has been, like, a thing I've been thinking about the most on this viewing, because there's also, like, the, the tone that this guy in the house has is of the, like, prepper, um, like, uh, don't let the gas in vibe.

[1:30:05]

Sylvi: There's like a—It definitely kind of reads, and maybe this is me bringing baggage to it, kind of like, very like, um, like, neocon bunkering down shit. Um, and then you have the, the kid who is like, one of the like, few like, racialized people in the movie

movie, um, being like, immediately get—Grokking the danger of someone of this. And I don't know if that is M. Night trying to do something given the, the, the time that he's in, and—or if it's just something that like, that like, feels like, on the table that he didn't thematically engage with properly. Um, and I think I'd lean towards the latter. Um, but yeah, it—Since we don't talk about—We talked about how sex doesn't come up in these The only time race has really come up in these movies has been in the, like, the ending of *The Village*, I think, is when we talked about it.

Ali: Right. Of cut content of *The Village*.

Sylvi: Of cut content of *The Village*, yes.

Ali: And it's, like, shocking how much this movie does not engage with this theme at all, despite kind of wanting to.

Sylvi: It wants to visually.

Ali: Yeah. And, like, well, it wants to, like—It just seems weird to have sort of, like, the—The conceit of the movie, the fear of the movie being like, you have to stay away from people, and you need to keep going to more and more desolate places. Like, one of the first plans is like, we need to go to a town that is literally not on the map anymore.

Art: Mm-hmm.

Ali: And, like, you know, I thought—The first time this really occurred to me, and I was like, why aren't you doing anything with this? Is the model house scene where you kind of go into the house, and it's kind of like, oh, did they leave in such a rush that like, they left all the food out? But it's just that it's like, fake stuff set up for like, a house staging. And then it's this empty house. And, like, when they leave the house, for some reason, the camera really lingers on this thing that says, model house. And it's like, yeah, I got that.

Keith: Do you see what else that thing says?

Sylvi: You deserve it!

Keith: You deserve it!

Sylvi: It says on a—

Keith: There's a big billboard saying, yeah, new houses, \$300,000. You deserve it.

Ali: Yeah, so I was like, is he trying to say something about, like, you know, there's this safe place, it's not owned by anybody, but it's not accessed by them? Like, is he trying to say something about luxury?

Keith: I think he's trying to say that American suburban life is fake. Yeah.

Jack: Yes. Because that scene ends in, I think, my favorite of the suicide scenes in the movie, where the guy lies in front of the lawnmower.

Sylvi: Yeah.

Jack: That is like the sort of the latent ideology of a model home where everything is fake, that you have to flee from, and then you look back to it and see a man turn a lawnmower on, on like, a perfect manicured lawn right in front of it. [**Keith:** The one real thing.] Well, I mean, there is latent ideology there. He is saying something. He does not have the movie to say it.

Keith: And even in this moment, there's a whole crowd of people in there. If I'm making this movie, they're lining up in front of that lawnmower to all get run over.

Jack: No, it's scarier if it's one guy though.

Keith: I don't think so. I think it's not scary if it's one guy.

Sylvi: You don't get as effective a visual. It becomes—

Keith: Well, we'll never know. We have—We didn't get to—

Sylvi: Yeah, I know, but let me, let me finish a sentence. Um, the, uh, if you want to lean into the B-movie of it and make it like campier and funnier, I think have them line up and

that reads way sillier. Um, but I think the lawnmower scene is one of the most effective like, horror visuals in the movie. I really like it.

Keith: Yeah, but this movie is way way closer to working as a B-movie than working as a real movie.

Sylvi: I agree.

Keith: Um, uh, so, so this model house, this comes, uh, after, um, we—They've like realized that splitting up into the smallest possible group is the way to survive. Uh, I think we have no clue what ends up happening to like the other five or six that split off from, from Elliot's group.

Sylvi: Um, no.

Jack: Lawnmower again, presumably.

Keith: Yeah, yeah, I assume lawnmower for all of them. But I do want to go—

Jack: They deserve it.

Keith: They deserve it. It says it right there on the billboard. They wouldn't put it there if it wasn't true. I do want to go back because we need to talk about Hot Dog Guy, the second-best actor in the movie, who shows up when they're all stuck at, at, uh, in Filbert, Pennsylvania, uh, because of the trains stop.

Art: Yes.

Keith: Uh, and they're in the diner where they watch the lion thing, which we talked about. Um, there's a theme of this movie that we haven't talked about, is which I think is—Makes absolutely no sense. They try to bring it up like four different times, is this idea of like, the bystander who like, lets I think a largely disproven thing, by the way, which is like, people watching someone die on the street and like, no one calls 911 because they're all like, oh, someone else will do it. Um, like, that is weirdly a theme of this movie. And so everyone's driving away, trying to get out of town as fast as possible.

Even if they have space in the car, they're not letting anyone else in their car. This makes sense to me. I think this scans as possible. People in a panic, they're closing in. They're like, you know, they're protecting their sign farms. Um, and though there's one—There's two guys who will help, uh, Julian, Elliot, and the rest of them. One of them wants to take Julian to the town of Princeton, and the other one wants to like, go west to New Jersey, and they have space in the car. It's hot dog guy and his wife. They own a nursery. Um, yeah, uh, they're like, we have room for—We have room for 3 more, so you can all come. We just have to go to the nursery, uh, and check it out. This guy's great. I love this guy.

Jack: This guy's great.

Keith: I'm gonna press my first button of the day called hot dogs.

Sylvi: Yessss.

[audio from The Happening starts playing]

Hot Dog Guy: We're packing hot dogs for the road. You know, hot dogs get a bad rap. They got a cool shape. They've got protein. You like hot dogs, right? By the way, I think I know what's causing this.

Elliot: You do?

Hot Dog Guy: It's the plants. They can release chemicals. You like hot dogs, don't you? [to the plants] Okay, babies, we are going to be going, but we will be back soon, okay? [to the people] Oh, plants react to human stimulus. They proved it in tests.

[audio ends]

Jack: This guy knows what he has to do.

Sylvi: Yeah, this dude understands the assignment.

Keith: Yeah, this guy's huge, he's weird, he's right, he understands the plot of the movie merely 31 minutes in.

Art: I have to imagine the direction was, we're gonna do this scene, say hot dog as weird as you possibly can.

Sylvi: What has occurred to me watching this, because it's been—I've watched this movie a lot, like I said, but it had been a substantial break since I last did—Was realizing that when I want to say hot dog in a funny way, I say it like this guy.

Keith: How did he say it?

Sylvi: Hot dog.

[audio from The Happening starts playing]

Hot Dog Guy: We're packing hot dogs for—.

[audio ends]

Keith: Hot dogs. That's how you say it.

Sylvi: Yeah, no, he says it normally the first time, but it's when he's asking.

Jack: He lures you in the first time. This is—I love this hot dog scene. Um, this is one of the scenes where I feel like the B-movie is humming along nicely. I'm enjoying it.

Sylvi: Yeah.

Keith: They've got a cool shape.

Jack: Yeah, it's great.

Sylvi: That's what he leads with. The Glizzy Goblin is here.

Jack: Zooey Deschanel, however, scares the shit out of me, as she often does in these scenes, by doing something completely baffling. The punchline to the hot dogs bit is that he asks Zooey Deschanel if she likes hot dogs, and she shakes her head no.

Keith: While smiling.

Sylvi: And then she makes a funny face.

Keith: Yeah.

Jack: Hang on.

Keith: I think she's trying to be polite?

Jack: A, everyone likes hot dogs.

Ali: She's famously and quirkishly a vegan.

Jack: Oh, so at that point is—

Keith: This is a reference to her real personal veganhood.

Jack: How she doesn't eat hot dogs, and synthetic meat hasn't showed up yet, I suppose. Or it's not good yet. I will say, re Zooey Deschanel's quirkiness in this movie. Um, uh, who is it who plays the sister or the friend or the girlfriend of the woman who gets neck stabbed at the beginning? What? She's another famous actress. She's, um—

Ali: Oh, she's in *The Bear*.

Jack: She's another quirky actress. What is her name?

Ali: She's the sister from *The Bear*.

Keith: Uh-oh, I have the IMDb up. Let me see if I can find her.

Jack: Sister of slash girlfriend of neck stab lady.

Ali: Abby Elliott.

Jack: She is doing better quirky eye acting for her 40 seconds of the movie than Zooey Deschanel puts into the rest of the whole thing.

Ali: Yeah.

Jack: You know, I think you could, you could do a quirky eye acting character in this B-movie thing. The problem is, is that she's just doing it appallingly. No expression that she makes is representative of any human expression.

Art: It's very strange watching this movie knowing that Zooey Deschanel is about to like, take off.

Sylvi: Literally next year after this.

Art: Like, yeah, she has this movie, the next movie she's in is that Yes Man, uh, with Jim Carrey.

Keith: Yeah.

Sylvi: And then 500 Days of Summer.

Art: And then 500 Days of Summer. It's weird to look at this and 500 Days of Summer and be like, this made twice as much money as 500 Days of Summer.

Keith: Oh, because that movie—

Art: And then she gets on New Girl and then she's on your TV every week for like, six years or however long that show—

Sylvi: Not my TV!

Keith: It's very funny because this was like, I had, I had already had my—

Art: She's on my channel.

Keith: I had already had my Zooey Deschanel phase. It ended with Yes Man. And so I sort of thought that she was gone after this, but I guess not.

Jack: Is she good in Elf?

Sylvi: The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy guy?

Keith: I think that—

Jack: Oh, she's not bad in Hitchhiker's Guide.

Keith: She's not bad in Elf. Elf is very weird for her.

Jack: She can do a better performance than this. I'm not a Zooey Deschanel fan, but she is, she is a more capable actress than this movie would make you think she is.

Keith: In Elf, she has this very interesting hugely disaffected cynicism that is a lot of fun. And it is only—It is only the weirdness of Zooey Deschanel's character, Jovie, dating a man who knows nothing and is extremely weird. That is the problem with that movie, I think. He is like, a 40-year-old fucking weirdo that eats spaghetti covered in maple syrup.

Ali: Well, she falls in love with him because she's falling in love with the Christmas spirit.

Keith: She's falling in love with the Christmas spirit. He is child-coded though. It's, it's kind of an age gap relationship in both ways. Like, he's too old for her, but also way too young for her.

Sylvi: It's a less problematic version of Big. I understand what you're saying.

Keith: It's a less—It's a less problematic version of Big.

Ali: Two things. I want to correct myself because the woman on the bench just really looks like the woman from The Bear. Her name is actually Kristin Connelly. And it looks like the only other important—Not—Sorry. Notable credit that she has is of Cabin in the Woods. So we will talk about her later. Or no, that's not M. Night.

Keith: That's not M. Night. That's Joss Whedon.

Ali: That is—

Jack: No, it's not. It's Drew Goddard.

Keith: Oh, is it not Joss Whedon?

Sylvi: Joss Whedon produced.

Keith: Produced.

Ali: Okay. Which one is the Oh, M. Night Cabin?

Sylvi: That is Knock at the Cabin.

Art: Knock at the Cabin. Yeah.

Ali: Oh, okay, okay, okay. I was just gonna be wrong twice. Secondly, on Zooey Deschanel, it's, like, really frustrating because it feels like her character just melts. Like, the note before about like, you can fit her on an index card can sometimes be a really good thing about a character. Like, you can just have a very strong concept. You can kind of understand who she is. And Zooey Deschanel can be the sort of person who embodies the kind of weird girl. And for her to be sort of like, constantly disagreeing or being really floaty or being more concerned with like, how people are acting than what's actually happening in the scene could be interesting. But it isn't ever? I feel like in this hot dog scene, like, it's where it's starting to fall apart. And it could be—it could have been her place in the movie because her being sort of the audience like, surrogate of being like, I don't want to be with these strangers. I think these people are really weird, is—Could have been both something that's really sympathetic and cool to watch. So you have this sort of grounding thing and the ridiculousness of what the concept of this movie actually is.

Keith: She could be winking at the camera and instead she's blinking at the camera.

Ali: Right. And also calling out the weirdness of these other characters, of the hot dog guy, could be like, you know, enlightening, putting that performance even better

because it's clashing against hers. But instead, we're setting up all these things where she's emotionally distant with Elliot, and that just kind of goes nowhere because the relationship doesn't mean anything, and it is what it is.

Jack: Yeah.

Ali: She keeps having these sort of like, I don't trust this person. I don't think that we should do this. I think we should do this other thing. I'm distrustful of people in situations like this. I'm disappointed in humanity in a way that like, she could be the emotional one, and Mark Wahlberg could be like, the analytical one. And it never even really feels like that's a tension that ever comes up, despite there being like, lines that acknowledge it. Like, they're sort of, like, playing the beats, but there's never—It never feels like it becomes like, a melody in terms of, like—

Keith: It's difficult even to explain how little we get of them as a couple, or even as individuals.

Ali: Yeah, it's just, it just—Like, these are characters that are there, you know? Like, I don't, I don't know what to do.

Jack: These are your protagonists!

Ali: Yeah. Yes.

Keith: Yeah.

Ali: Yeah.

Keith: Yeah.

Jack: This is a problem. When your movie is doing this, it's very sick.

Keith: Um, I, uh, I—

Sylvi: Your movie has the toxin.

Keith: I, I just watched, uh, two movies the other day. Um, is—It's not, um, it is not fair to compare this movie to either of those because they're very different, but I just wanted to illustrate how amazing of a movie you can do without really having characters that you know anything about in them. Uh, I watched, uh, Playtime.

Jack: Best movie ever made.

Keith: Uh, Jacques Tati movie Playtime. And then I watched from the same year, also French, uh, uh, Le Samouraï.

Jack: I'm not familiar with that movie.

Keith: Well, Le Samouraï is a Melville film. It is a noir contract killer film. This is a movie where you learn maybe two facts about Alain Delon's character, Jeff Costello, in that movie. Like this movie, it's obsessed with showing you his big, beautiful face and eyes. And it is so good. It's so much better. All of the questions that I ask about this movie, I'm like, why didn't we get anything about their relationship? Why don't I know what's going on here? You know, Le Samouraï also doesn't answer those movies, and asking them is fun instead of frustrating.

Jack: And what we know about the protagonist of Playtime is that he sits on chairs and it makes a funny noise.

Keith: Yeah, he says, yeah, yeah. Like, you know, Hulot, like Mark Wahlberg in this movie, kind of gets pulled through, reluctantly for the most part, this insane and confusing world. He gives very little of himself, and we kind of just see him moving through. And it's super compelling and interesting, and it's doing something way different than this movie, obviously.

Sylvi: Well, yeah, you said it was super compelling and interesting.

Keith: Right. Um, but, but, but you don't—I don't know anything about—I know that—Here's what I know about Hulot. He has army buddies all over town.

Jack: Yeah, he might have used to be a cop. I don't know.

Keith: He maybe used to be a cop, and he, like—He doesn't like to get invited to somewhere, but he ends up having a decent time anyway.

Jack: I feel like I—This is sort of—I say this so often, often in company with Keith and Ali, that it's essentially a running joke at this point. And I'm sorry that I'm gonna say it again, but viewer, listener, if you want to see how this movie should go, you should watch Prince of Darkness, which I mentioned earlier, and you should watch Halloween III.

Ali: Mm.

Sylvi: Ooh.

Jack: Which is a film about a man and a woman going to try and figure out a mystery at a Halloween mask factory. And it is a B-movie that is titillating and scary and funny and has real command over its tone. If you wanna see one of these things humming along in the kind of silly, enjoyable way that they're supposed to, I think Halloween III: Season of the Witch is a movie that I really recommend.

Keith: There is one—

Jack: But we're here!

Keith: We're here. You mean we're here at Jeremy Strong?

Jack: We're here at Jeremy Strong. Jeremy Strong arrives in the movie. He says, cheese and crackers. I sit bolt upright in my chair. I'm on board. Jeremy Strong—We described Hot Dog Man, you know, understanding the assignment and coming in. Jeremy Strong understands the assignment, and he's also one of the best actors of his generation. This produces a weird effect, where you're like—

Keith: Jeremy Strong, the actor, is great. He didn't just understand the assignment, he predicted the next assignment and did it ahead of time. I have his little intro if we want to hear it.

Sylvi: Please do.

Jack: Oh, please.

[audio from The Happening starts playing]

Hot Dog Guy: Oh, it's the Army!

[audio ends]

Keith: I just want to highlight that. Hot dog guy being relieved. Oh my God. Thank God the army is here. And it's the private.

Art: It's the new guy. Completely, completely. But it's also like, that's not who that guy is.

Keith: No!

Sylvi: He was spying on his neighbors with binoculars.

Keith: It's true. It's true. But, but, you know...

Ali: No, you can be really gossipy and old and weird and still, like, fiercely, like, align with the American government, unfortunately.

Sylvi: I think I just wanted to mention that he was spying on his neighbors.

Keith: I think that you can also, like, hold—You can hold, you know, cynical, suspicious, right or wrong conspiratorial views about the American government, and then when everyone around you is killing themselves, you can still maybe have some hope that the army can save you.

Jack: Yeah, man, I live in Ann Arbor. I know what this feels like.

Keith: I disagree, man.

Jack: Um, he arrives.

[audio from The Happening starts playing]

Hot Dog Guy: Oh, it's the army. We're safe.

Auster: My name is Private Auster. I'm stationed at Westover Military Base about 10 miles back. I think they've been affected by whatever's happening. I lost communication with them. When I approached the base, I saw military personnel in the barbed wire, in the fence. So I suggest no one take that road.

Hot Dog Guy: There's a town about 8 miles behind us. There were bodies on the road into town.

Auster: Cheese and crackers.

[audio ends]

Keith: While Jeremy Strong is alive, the movie is a full letter grade better.

Sylvi: I agree.

Keith: For the duration. And I'm going to say this, while Hot Dog Guy's alive, the movie is half a letter grade better. So when they die, the movie, for a brief moment, it was a B movie in, in my rating system. And it very quickly drops from a B in one scene to a D.

Sylvi: Yeah.... I, I love his floppy armed run when he first shows up. It makes me so happy.

Jack: He's so good.

Keith: His—He's trying to keep this professionalism. He's in the army, he's been trained. He's not been trained for this. He's losing his mind, but he's still trying to like have that air of, I'm in the army, I'm here, I'm—

Jack: And the script lets him do it.

Sylvi: And the scene where he—The scene where he's like talking about the zone of attack or whatever.

Keith: Yeah.

Sylvi: Um, and like trying to get—When you're—When there's no escape from the, like, I can't—I don't have the specific, uh, like wording he uses, but when there's no escape from like the area under attack, you seek a safe zone within it. Yeah. Um, that part's really good because he is perfectly nailing the, the performance of guy who is in over his head but wants to project that he has some sort of grip on things.

Keith: And probably the guy who has the best grip on things.

Ali: Yeah. And it's just like, talking about this performance really just—Really puts into frame the failing of the other ones because like, Mark Wahlberg also later has a scene where it's like, I need to be the decision maker, but I'm in over my head. And it's just like, characters yelling at each other with no effect. And then him needing to take a long time to like, oh, I have to think analytically about this. I'm going to talk about science stuff.

Keith: Sorry, I've got that as a button if you want to hear it.

Art: Oh my God, that's the worst scene.

Keith: It is the worst scene. Well, it is also the scene where he's closest to being funny. So if he's supposed to be funny in this—**[Ali:** Beside the plant scene.] Oh, right. Okay, so that's where he's genuinely funny.

Ali: I think that's supposed to be a really tense scene, and you're supposed to be like, oh, this is this character finally coming together. This is the value of this guy by being able to first scream that he needs to be calm, but once he's able to be calm, he can sort of think through things. Where it's like, there's no actual emotion or urgency or realism or lived-in-ness of that besides him being loud for a second, because I guess the louder you are, the more emotional you are. Whereas with Jeremy Strong, like, even in that clip we just heard, the cadence of him reporting in to these civilians, you know what I mean? By kind of just going through each of the beats of what's happening.

Keith: Anxious stammering.

Ali: Yeah. And being really nervous about it and like, the limits of how he is able to communicate because of his training and because of his situation and all of that. There's so much character there in 30 seconds.

Keith: It drives me crazy. There's so much acting in the world, and people are not putting the actors in the movies. Why don't we put actors in movies? Why do we put people like Mark Wahlberg in them? It reminds me of—He reminded me of the guy from Signs who comes in, I can tell—I'll tell you what I think. You know, the, the colonel guy, he's like, coming all stealth-like, like that guy, you know, pitch perfect, perfectly acted, you know, different kind of army guy, you know, confident, overconfident army guy, like, I know exactly what's going on, this is a tactic, they're using tactics.

Jack: So I have a remedy here. I'm curious if you feel the same way. I think that Mark Wahlberg should have been replaced by Owen Wilson.

Sylvi: Ooh! That would've been—He's kinda doing an Owen Wilson impression at some points.

Ali: Yeah, he really is.

Jack: But he's not doing it well.

Keith: No.

Jack: And there is a moment in the otherwise not terribly good Wes Anderson film Darjeeling Limited, which features Owen Wilson, Luke Wilson, and Jason Schwartzman, I think, as three brothers who are—

Keith: Wes Anderson, Owen Wilson, Luke Wilson, and Jason Schwartzman? Are you sure?

Sylvi: Are you sure?

Jack: They are playing three brothers who are kind of taking a trip across India after what transpires to have been a suicide attempt that Owen Wilson's character survived.

He was in a motorcycle crash. And there's this scene that I think about all the time where he is—He's in bandages for most of this movie, and he's really excited to take the bandages off as a kind of like, transformative, you know, like emotional beat or whatever. And they all gather together in the bathroom of a station, and he takes the bandages off, and his face is just completely fucked up. You know, he's still absolutely in the process of healing. And Owen Wilson manages to deliver this like, very sad, very meaningful, but still very funny line delivery of like, oh, I guess it needs a bit more time, or whatever. And then they very slowly put the bandages back on. And his control over the nuance of that emotion has stuck with me since I saw it.

Keith: He's a really good actor.

Jack: I think it would be perfect for this kind of movie to be able to do the stuff like, I'm talking to a plant, and also do the classic Owen Wilson like, wow, I'm in over my head stuff, but also like, anchor you emotionally to what is happening. Owen Wilson would have had so much more chemistry with, for example, the like, um, narrative and emotive questions of what happens if I have to be a surrogate parent all of a sudden, you know? Um, um, so Owen Wilson is my pick.

Keith: That's a good pick. I mean, I would put Owen Wilson in almost any movie.

Sylvi: Wow.

Jack: One Battle After Another. Owen Wilson.

Art: I also think Luke Wilson or Jason Schwartzman would have been better in this movie.

Keith: Yeah, yeah. And I don't particularly even like Jason Schwartzman.

Art: Honestly, put Bill Murray in it, whatever.

Keith: Whatever.

Sylvi: I draw the line. I hate Bill Murray.

Ali: Okay, no, that was somebody else. No, I was gonna say I can't stand Bill Murray and Zooey Deschanel again, but then remember that that was Scarlett Johansson.

Keith: That was Scarlett Johansson. Yeah, it would be just as torturous.

Sylvi: Yes.

Jack: Um, they all set off together in multiple groups. Uh, one group is too big. This is when we work it out. We get an off-screen like, handgun daisy chain that we saw in the movie earlier. This playing off-screen is a really nice horror beat. We know what this looks like. I actually don't think we need the kind of unsubtle movement here. This is when Zooey Deschanel has her stupid, I'm not gonna stand by while someone commits a crime.

Keith: I wanna pause right here because I do have that button, but first I wanna say that—That I already said that the movie was better when Jeremy Strong was alive, but I want to specifically highlight the crossroads minutiae bit where cars are coming in from the four directions that they have to choose, and every car is coming in reporting that in that direction everyone's dead.

Jack: Yeah, it's lovely. That's good stuff.

Keith: And I love—I loved seeing all the cars blocking the road. I loved kind of everybody kind of telling each other what was going on, and I like this sort of tense decision. Like, we've got to find a small place and march ahead. Like, it works for me and I like it.

Jack: It's good stakes, good delivery. [baby crying in the background] Oh, little one.

Keith: Oh, sad baby. Um, I'm glad to learn that that was a baby just now because I thought someone was really disagreeing with me in the back.

Jack: She might have disagreed with you.

Art: Yeah, she really disagreed with your interpretation of this scene.

Ali: Art, do you need five, or—

Art: No, she's—Her mom's got her.

Ali: Okay.

Keith: Uh, I would love to hear, um, Elliot freaking out because no one will give him a second to think where his solution ultimately is.

Jack: Is this button going to feature the first appearance of Zooey Deschanel in the buttons?

Keith: Yes.

Jack: Good. Yeah, strap in, listener.

[audio from The Happening starts playing]

[gunshot]

Elliot: Toxin?

Keith: Toxin?

Elliot: Toxin is affecting them.

Alma: Are those people killing themselves?

Man: You were with it, Private. What do we do?

Alma: We need to do something.

Elliot: Just let me think.

[gunshot]

Alma: They're dying.

Elliot: I need a second. They released it? We're not near the road.

Alma: We can't just stand here as uninvolved observers!

Elliot: I need a second, okay? Just give me a second!

[gunshot]

Alma: We're not gonna be one of those assholes on the news who watches a crime happen and not do something. We're not assholes!

Elliot: Just a second!

Alma: There were children in that bus! Elliot, please! Tell us what to do!

Elliot: I need a second, okay? [gunshot] Why can't anybody give me a goddamn second? All right, be scientific, douchebag. Identify the variables. That's the two groups. [gunshot]

Jack: This is fucking terrible.

Keith: It's terrible. It's the worst thing in the movie.

Elliot: That's what I'm trying to do. The dogs are the experimental data. Interpret. [gunshot] What if it is the plants?

[audio ends]

[laughter]

Sylvi: Rules.

Ali: They should have had him actually go into a mind palace, like it's a Sherlock or something.

Keith: What's that? Oh my God, what's the scene with the woman looking at the numbers? What is that?

Ali: We all know.

Jack: Oh, I don't know what that's from. Numbers Lady.

Sylvi: That's from, like, a telenovela, I think.

Jack: It is, yes.

Art: That's so bad. One, no one is doing science. He's not—He has no ability to do the thing he's saying here. He's not isolating any variables.

Keith: Yes.

Art: It's so annoying.

Keith: We also know that he doesn't believe in science. He believes in natural law that is different than what science is. At the very beginning, when talking about the bees and people are like, it's global warming, it's pollution, it's this, he goes, nuh-uh, let me ask the handsome boy. Handsome boy, one day you might not be so smoking hot. Uh, why don't you tell me what you think? And, um, you know, when he says like, oh, we'll just never know, uh, he goes—

Sylvi: Act of nature.

Keith: He goes ding ding ding. He says, science will come up with some reason to put in the books, but in the end it will be just a theory. We will fail to acknowledge there are forces at work beyond our understanding. To be a good scientist, you must have a respectful awe for the laws of nature. This is—

Sylvi: This is how we learn he's teaching at a Catholic school.

Keith: Yes, he's not a science teacher, he's a weirdo. This is not science. In fact, I would call this anti-science. This is a non-scientific understanding of science. Like, the—He is trying to negotiate that, like, science is a process, but he comes across like in Always Sunny when he's like, science is a liar sometimes. Like, that is—

[laughter]

Art: Oh my God, this would be better with him in it.

Keith: Yes, this movie would be better with him in it, with any of them. Danny DeVito, with uh, uh, uh, uh, Rob Mac.

Ali: Charlie Day.

Art: Rob Mac, yeah. Charlie Day.

Keith: Charlie Day.

Jack: And then it says the gang runs themselves over with a lawnmower.

Keith: Glenn Howerton. Hey, put Kaitlin Olson in there instead of, uh, uh, wait.

Art: Oh, that would be way better. She would have been way better in this. Yeah.

Sylvi: You know, the videos of people where people have like green—Like, cut Danny DeVito from Always Sunny into like Cyberpunk or whatever. I need someone to do that for The Happening. I don't have the free time to do it right now, but if you could just like find a way to do that for me, [**Jack:** That would be excellent.] That would be really nice.

Keith: One of the things I've—I've always felt this, and it's what leads to the exodus of really talented comic actors into doing drama, which is that, uh, comic actors know how to act better on average. I think, I just think that that's true about the world. I think that there are phenomenal dramatic actors, but there's something about being a comedian and a comic actor that puts you in touch with timing and character and dialogue, and they have an easier time accessing emotion because one of the most difficult things about being a comic actor is having to sell real emotion—Anger, sadness, grief—As humor. That's hard to do. And because they can do that, they slot themselves into drama and have immediate access to a pathos that dramatic actors sometimes have difficulty accessing, or I should say non-comedic actors, anyway.

Sylvi: This is why your favorite movie is The Number 23.

Keith: This is why my favorite movie is number 23. No, but this is like how—you know, John Candy died—

Sylvi: No, I don't disagree necessarily.

Keith: John Candy died a little bit after doing Planes, Trains, and Automobiles when he was on the verge of being the best dramatic actor in the whole world. Who has more pathos? Who can gin up a heart-swelling moment faster than John Candy right after making you laugh your ass off. Sorry, go ahead, Ali.

Ali: I think that this is also unique to horror and comedy. I'm gonna be biting here off of an interview I recently heard with Jordan Peele on the Conan Needs a Friend podcast. But, like, that the structure of the scenes in terms of, like, needing to make you comfortable in a situation and then sort of build up the absurdity or the fear or the sort of lack of reality, and then also like, sort of hit those notes where you keep rising and rising and rising that tension until there's like, a shoe drop, is the same structure in horror and in comedy scenes.

Sylvi: Mm-hmm.

Ali: So, an actor who is able to do that good in a comedy would be able to feel those same paces in the way that um, like, you're able to in a horror movie because it, it, it, it's the same sort of muscle that you're working, almost.

Keith: Yeah, that makes sense.

Jack: I think you're right.

Keith: Yeah, you and Jordan Peele. I mean, that's a great guy to say that too. I mean, he would know, right?

Ali: Yeah, no, he was very right.

Keith: By the way, I, I, I try to say this at every possible opportunity. If you missed Nope because of the pandemic, that is like maybe the best movie of the last twenty years. Nope is wildly, unbelievably underrated. It's Jordan Peele's best movie. It's so good.

Jack: There is a scare towards the end of Nope, or I suppose in the kind of the third act, that made me laugh so much because it hit me—It got me so spectacularly. Um, it involves something falling through the windshield of someone's car. Um, and I felt electrified by it. It was great. Um, I think Nope is fantastic.

Keith: Yeah.

Jack: Um, then they all run away from the—

Art: Great movie. Not the best movie in the last 20 years. Keith is out of his mind.

Jack: Then they all run away from the wind. Uh, I think that when they're all running away from the wind, this is tremendous. Um, I was delighted by this. I would have liked the movie to have more of this spirit. I think that people who say it is not interesting to watch people run away from the wind are not touching the right part of their heart in this scene.

Keith: I mean, talk about a movie where you run away from the wind. Nope is a movie where you run away from the wind.

Ali: Yeah.

Jack: You don't like this scene, Art?

Art: No.

Jack: Why don't you like it?

Art: No, I think all of the dramatic wind stuff doesn't hit for me.

Jack: I think I don't view it as dramatic. I think I view it as entertaining. And then it kind of starts to come alive. You know, I know that when I'm on Big Thunder Mountain, I'm

not on a ghost train, and I'm not about to get blown up by dynamite, but I'm going, wee, hahaha. And this is how I feel watching them all run around in the wind. It's so stupid.

Ali: But it doesn't evoke anything, really.

Jack: No, no.

Ali: It's just kind of happening.

Sylvi: Whoa.

Ali: And it, like, you know, it's what the situation of the film is. But, like, again, forests have been scary forever. Like—

Jack: Yes. Do I think that you could make this scene scarier? indefinitely, you know?

Keith: Yeah, for sure. It could be done better. I think the thing that's scary is the—And dramatic—is the, like, the hopeless, pointless failure of it. It doesn't work. They don't run away from the wind machine.

Jack: Yeah.

Keith: So there's this, like, kind of inevitable acceptance of fate that's happening where you can watch them not be able to run away from what they think is about to kill them, and then it doesn't.

Jack: Then I think if I—If that was the feeling that I wanted to get, because again, I think, I think that both you and Ali are right. Ali, in that it's like you can shoot wind moving in a much scarier way. You could put them in a forest, you could put them in some, some like, arrangement of buildings or arrangement of set that lets you really crank up the tension. And Keith's right that like, it seems like what M. Night is going for is the futility of it. I think you shoot the scene differently if you want them in a field and you want them to feel that humility. You know, there's no aerial shots of like, wind moving. We're like, way down at ground level. And I think if I want my characters to feel lonely in a shot, you know, I move the camera away from them.

Keith: Well, this movie's also—

Jack: We don't have any of that.

Keith: This movie's committed to doing two things. It's committed to keeping them away from trees because the trees are the bad guy. So I don't think it would make sense to put them in a forest. And then the other thing that it's committed to doing is like, it's committed to putting everyone in big wide open spaces because they're going to more and more desolate areas, and it's not helping them because the air is—That there's no—You can't hide behind a tree from the air. I'm not saying it works, I'm just describing why.

Ali: No, no, no, no. And I just want to correct myself here. I'm not saying that would be scarier if they were in a forest. I'm saying that cameras have been able to make trees scary for decades.

Keith: Okay, okay. I understand.

Ali: And, like, rustling wind, and like, danger on the edge of the plains, and the sort of, like, unawareness, and, you know, the sort of like, danger is approaching me and I don't know where from, is tension that is very—I don't want to say easy, because apparently it isn't very easy to do, but the techniques are out there.

Sylvi: People have been doing it forever.

Ali: They could have been implemented on, and it just doesn't feel like anything in this scene. And I don't know if it's like that the music is too dramatic. I feel like this is a good score, but I feel like there are times when it reaches a pitch in places that don't feel appropriate. I remember that, like, in the first train scene, when the train is starting to stop, the music is so intense in a way that doesn't feel like—

Sylvi: Yeah.

Ali: It just feels like it's interrupting the scene instead of letting it happen. I feel like almost that's what's happening here, because there's not like, a—There's not like, a—If

the thing is the scope, the scene setting, the like, the sort of distance between actors, except that one of the actors is just the grass, it doesn't feel like there's any like—Like, you know, actual—There's no feeling there.

Keith: There's no there there.

Sylvi: There's—

Jack: No, there is no there.

Sylvi: There's something weird happening where M. Night is kind of playing within the realm of the disaster movie, the sort of like, um, Day After Tomorrow like, post-apocalyptic doomsday stuff. Like, obviously, uh, trying to evoke that in some places. Um, but you can't—It's hard to make any of that work when you don't have the catastrophe everywhere. We talked about that one scene where they're driving through the town and it's empty streets as opposed to like, like, seeing the carnage of the bodies behind them. Like, the world doesn't feel like it is undergoing this massive event. It feels like it is empty now.

Jack: The, the techno thriller that I think this is actually drawing very closely from and kind of misserving is Michael Crichton's *The Andromeda Strain*, which is from the late '60s, I want to say. *The Andromeda Strain* is about a, like, an alien pathogen, like a virus from outer space that lands on a satellite.

Keith: This is a movie that I used to confuse with *Event Horizon* before *Friends at the Table* talked about *Event Horizon* a lot.

Jack: It targets this small town, and the people in the town all kill themselves in strange ways. And what Michael Crichton does in *The Andromeda Strain* is he has the virus mutate. The virus is mutating very rapidly over the course of the book. And so it allows for this kind of transformation to happen because it's, you know, to put it into the schematic of this film, it's not just like the wind is targeting people, it would be like the wind is now able to attack other weaker plants, or the wind is able to like, depower gasoline in cars or something. The big thing that the virus in the *Andromeda Strain*

starts doing really quickly is starts eating plastic. So all of their like, vents and seals also start breaking down.

Keith: Cool.

Jack: Which is really interesting. And much like um, this movie, The Andromeda Strain, ends with the virus simply mutating to a place where it is no longer dangerous to us. It kind of just fizzles out. Um, and I feel like both of those plot points, the virus that makes you kill yourself in weird ways and, uh, the virus kind of eventually just leaving of its own accord, um, get ported over to The Happening, but none of the additional apparatus gets carried over either.

Sylvi: Is the blank that makes you blank the sort of like, haunted lamp for M. Night?

Keith: Okay, so for Signs, you've got the alien that makes you defend your home. For Lady in the Water, it's—you have the—

Sylvi: The girl that makes you write.

Keith: The girl that makes you write.

Jack: Sixth Sense is the getting shot that makes you dead, but you don't know it.

Keith: Oh, I thought it was the ghost that makes you therapize, or the ghost that makes you go to therapy.

Sylvi: The child that makes you angel.

Keith: The child that makes you therapize.

Jack: Yeah. Uh, The Village is tricky.

Keith: Um, the town that makes you leave.

Sylvi: Yeah, we're nailing it, guys! We are cooking!

Art: Yeah.

Jack: Um... OK. Uh, they all run through, they all, they all have to split up, they're all gone. Um, at this point I wrote down Mark Wahlberg's affect throughout is extraordinary, because the more I hear it, the more I'm like, it's starting to dawn on me that nothing is actually gonna happen with this affect, that this is just sort of something that we're gonna have to deal with.

Sylvi: He just sort of asks everything like it's a question?

Keith: That's his whole career, though.

Sylvi: Yeah, I know, but it's really funny in this one.

Keith: You telling me I have affect? Call my brother, Donnie?

Sylvi: Get you a break.

Jack: Just before the—I need a second scene, and we heard him kind of say this, uh, but he says it more clearly just slightly before the button that we heard, he delivers the line, oh no, the toxin, kind of exactly like I just delivered it.

Keith: Yeah, hold on, I can—I can—It's right at the beginning of this.

Sylvi: Please, it's my favorite.

[audio from The Happening starts playing]

Elliot: The toxin?

[audio ends]

Jack: No, come on.

Sylvi: No, you got to let it roll a little more because like, people need to hear how every line of his is punctuated by another gunshot.

Ali: Well, we've played this clip already

Sylvi: Yeah, I guess we have.

Keith: Yeah.

[audio from The Happening starts playing]

Elliot: You were with it, Private. What do we do?

Alma: We need to do something.

[audio ends]

Keith: You know, I think that I, I think that I, uh, there was a lot more gunshots in the preceding—I made sure to include a gunshot, but I think they mostly stopped with the gunshots. But it was—

Jack: Then they go to the model home. Uh, this is when Mark Wahlberg has, I think, one of the best scenes in the movie. He starts trying to negotiate with a plant. Um, I actually think that this scene is really good.

Keith: Yeah, he's hapless, and this movie doesn't play him as hapless. It plays him as competent, hyper-competent.

Jack: Yeah, there's a weird moment. So he's pleading with the plant. He says, we're just here to, you know, rest, see if we can find some supplies. And then he kind of reaches forward, and it's scary, and he touches the thing. And then he says, oh, it's a plastic plant. I'm talking to a plastic plant. And then he pauses and he says, and I'm still talking to it. And for once in the movie, I think that Mark Wahlberg has dialed into the emotion. I had a laugh when I was like, uh, he's talking to a plastic plant, this is funny. And then when he said, I'm still kind of continuing in this like, this useless ritual here, I felt like, a little shred of like, an actual piece of emotional content.

Sylvi: Holy shit, there's a performance.

Keith: Yeah.

Jack: Yeah, but then it passes like a cloud over the sun.

Sylvi: Yeah, and it feels accidental.

Jack: Yes.

Keith: It must be crazy to be Mark Wahlberg. and to be cast in all these movies and to be so uninterested in doing any of it. He just doesn't seem like he wants to be there.

[**Jack:** He wants to be racist—] Zooey Deschanel doesn't give that vibe. Zooey Deschanel seems like she's getting bad direction. She's delivering poorly written lines poorly.

Sylvi: Yeah.

Keith: And, and she's confused about what her role is as a member of the cast, as a character in the movie. Mark Wahlberg just feels upset to be working.

Sylvi: Yeah, I think Mark Wahlberg has like, one performance I would call like—That like, sticks out in my mind, and then one that I can talk—Like, I think is just fine. The first being Boogie Nights, the second being The Departed. And then everything else he's in, he is just like nothing. I love him in The Departed. He is such a shithead in that. It's great.

Keith: A long, long, long time ago, I saw the movie The Other Guys and liked it, but I couldn't tell you—

Ali: Oh, sure.

Keith: The 2010 action comedy with Will Ferrell.

Sylvi: Again, I always get that mixed up with the Shane Black The Nice Guys.

Keith: The Nice Guys, yes, which is a much better movie. Much, much, much better movie.

Sylvi: Very different movie.

Keith: I can't tell you that *The Other Guys* is a movie that I would like. What I can tell you is that it's the only other time I've seen Mark Wahlberg on screen and, and, and—Because I agree with your two and I'm adding asterisks on the other guys.

Sylvi: The one where he like, dies at the beginning or, oh no, he's not one of the guys who dies.

Ali: No, it's, it's Dwayne Johnson and Samuel Jackson, I think?

Keith: They're the hotshots. And then Mark Wahlberg and Will Ferrell are the other guys.

Jack: Oh, this movie.

Sylvi: Right.

Art: Yes.

Sylvi: I have seen this movie. I just can't recall any of it other than the guys die at the part and it's funny.

Ali: One of my core memories is seeing that movie in theaters and being one of the only two people bellowing laughing when the shot happens, when it cuts to their grave.

Keith: Yeah.

Ali: That movie's all right.

Sylvi: That's an all right gag. That's an all right gag.

Keith: You know, I—it's, you know, written and directed by Adam McKay. I tend to like his movies when I've seen them. I haven't seen any of them in a decade, but like, I didn't see *Don't Let It Go*. I didn't see *Vice*.

Jack: Um, okay. Various events transpire. They go to the house. The two boys get shot. Do we want to talk about these boys getting shot?

Sylvi: It feels very shock factory and not like—

Keith: And I have a button for it too.

Sylvi: In a way that like, feels less well-executed than some of the other ones. I don't know.

Jack: Hit the button.

[audio from The Happening starts playing]

Man: You ain't from around here. You best leave now.

Elliot: Okay, it's not worth it.

Josh: Open the door, bitch!

Elliot: Hey, Josh, don't do that. He didn't mean that.

Jack: Come on, Josh

Josh: There's more than one in there.

Alma: Jess! Jess, come here.

Josh: Listen, we just want some food for a little girl, you pussies!

Alma: Jess, come here.

Elliot: Josh, stop it.

Man: Best not let that gas in here.

Elliot: Sir, the air is fine out here right now. You don't need to worry.

Man: Might be with the terrorists.

Elliot: I don't think it's terrorists. [Josh banging on door] Josh, stop it!

Josh: You're being crazy, Mr. Moore!

Man: Show your faces! Let the gas in!

Elliot: No!

[audio ends]

Keith: Um, in case you didn't pick this up, this is, um, uh, this is Spencer Breslin, maybe most famous for being in the Santa Claus movies, uh, with Tim Allen.

Sylvi: He's dubbing The Cat in the Hat. Wow.

Keith: He's also in The Cat in the Hat, and he also plays the son from The Kid, the movie about Bruce Willis being a baseball player? It's the one that's not The Rookie, which is the one that I remember better, with one of the Quaid's. Dennis Quaid is in The Rookie.

Art: And brother of—

Sylvi: Abigail Breslin.

Art: Abigail Breslin, who was in Signs.

Sylvi: Yeah.

Keith: Oh, I didn't know that. I thought you were gonna say brother of Randy Quaid.

Art: No, that's not true.

Keith: It's not true, but they are related. Aren't they cousins, I think?

Jack: I thought you meant that the old man was Spencer Breslin, and in my brain I thought Spencer Breslin was a young man, and then you said he was in The Santa Clause, and I was like, oh, he must have been one of the Santas, the old Santas or something? **[Keith: What?]** I haven't seen The Santa Clause

Keith: Oh, okay.

Jack: And I couldn't—I don't remember who Spencer Breslin was.

Sylvi: Yeah, and there's many Santa Clauses. Um, he's one of the Santa Clauses.

Keith: Dennis Quaid and Randy Quaid are in fact brothers.

Ali: The movie is so unfair to these kids.

Sylvi: It's wild. They're there for like two scenes and then they get blasted.

Keith: They get blasted.

Sylvi: It's insane. Yeah.

Ali: And it's just like—

Sylvi: Humanity, man.

Ali: It's so telegraphed because they're so expendable. Like the hot dog guy who does not get a name and is killed presumably off screen at some point. Like, the movie just doesn't care about them, despite also not really caring about Elliot and Alma, the two main characters.

Keith: Every character who gets more than a couple lines gets killed, and they were all better and more interesting characters.

Sylvi: Yeah.

Ali: It's just, like, weird that you don't have any interactions with the kids. You don't have Jess talking to the two boys. You have this whole concept of like, oh, we need to get away from people, but you don't have the like, group on the horizon who wants to join up with you, but you have to refuse them. I guess you were kind of getting that plot beat here, but instead you're just getting weird hick with gun who does not—Like homestead guy.

Sylvi: Yeah.

Ali: Which is a guy to exist in a horror movie, but to like—Keith said before that Mark Wahlberg is—The character is being shown as hyper-confident. And I don't think that true in the script. I think that that's true in his performance because he can't let himself be vulnerable or embarrassing in that way. But the fact that, like, he doesn't have any control over these kids who are yelling pussy at a fucking—

Keith: Yeah, it's the only thing he should be good at is getting high school kids to stop acting out.

Ali: Yeah.

Sylvi: Hey, guys, this isn't Xbox Live.

Jack: I did feel like that moment of the kids suddenly laughing was—That felt good in the movie. I liked this violent emotion kind of coming out, the frustration that they weren't being allowed in.

Art: Mm-hmm.

Jack: And also the way that it would, in theory, test Mark Wahlberg. But it can't, because, like you said, the performances aren't there to make that work. I do think the moment of the kid kind of snapping and slamming on the door is, in theory, good. And I think that Spencer Breslin, famous Old Santa, Spencer Breslin, delivers it well. Also, I think that the kid getting shot is—It's like you said, it's shock value. And you identified it as not working quite as well as the other one. And I think part of the reason it doesn't work quite as well for me is that the other kid is shot in exactly the same way afterwards.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: You could make an argument for like, this is the futility of the thing. They're just both getting taken out in the same way. It's like, punctuation to the scene. But that's not

really how a B-movie works. If you're going to like, take these two characters out violently and shockingly, give them two different, you know, ways to go, right?

Sylvi: You have to treat it like a slasher movie. The kills have to be unique if you're trying to nail the B-movie.

Keith: Well, chest and head.

Sylvi: Yeah. Anyway, sorry, Jack, continue.

Jack: No, I just—I, I, I was disappointed by the, um, by the way this was—By the way this played out. Um, we talked earlier about the weird tension in this scene with, with, with, uh, Jess as well. Um, it's all very odd. Does she have the Shining? I don't—You know.

Sylvi: Yeah.

Jack: Um, it's not a very good scene. Oh, I do want to—We've moved past it. I want to actually talk very briefly about the one Jess emotive moment that really works for me, which is after the, um, encounter with Auster at the crossroads. Um, Mark Wahlberg goes and sits in the like, you know, cow parsley by the side of the road or whatever, and kind of like, puts his head in his hands. And Jess goes up to him and says something to him, inaudible. And then she kind of just like, collapses into his arms and starts crying. And we hear her crying distantly, like, the mic position is on the camera rather than with them. And I thought that worked really well. It makes me sad that it worked well when both of our actors' faces were obscured, and the emotive value of the scene was a child crying, something that everybody feels bad about.

Keith: Yeah.

Jack: Um, but it was a moment where I was like, oh, right, I am actually feeling a kind of grief and sorrow and anxiety for these characters and this poor kid.

Ali: Yeah. I mean, in this scene, she's presumably learning that her parents have passed.

Sylvi: She—Yeah, I think she—Like, this was right after the phone call where they find out about the situation in Princeton.

Ali: Yeah. It just feels like it's brushed aside so quickly, and then that is basically never mentioned again until she's, like, an orphan. She's like, adopted by them, essentially.

Jack: She's not really a person. None of them are.

Sylvi: No.

Ali: Yeah.

Art: Yeah. Oh, and it's—I don't—Okay, so they—

Sylvi: I'm excited for whatever this is.

Art: This girl's parents die.

Jack: They do. Offscreen.

Art: Offscreen.

Jack: Well, no, John Leguizamo dies on screen.

Art: Right. Um, and a huge number of people die. Enough people die that it's 3 months later and the schools are opening. She has new parents. She has to find like, her new way with this new family. And they immediately have a baby, which is going to make this child feel imperiled in this relationship. Like, now they have a quote unquote real baby. To do this at this point in this relationship is so irresponsible.

Keith: I agree. I totally agree. I had that same thought. It was gonna suck. They wanted to have a kid, and then they got a kid via a disaster, but they don't see that. So they still have to have a kid in order to close the loop on the having a kid plotline. They already have a kid. Her name is Jess.

Sylvi: If your relationship's failing, adopt a kid. And if that doesn't work, have your own.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Sylvi: And everyone will come out doing great. The kids will be super normal and super healthy, and it'll be—everyone will love it.

Jack: Accidentally, we're accidentally walking towards some good and emotionally perhaps interesting stuff to explore, so don't worry about it.

Sylvi: Shit, you're right. Let me say hot dog real quick.

Jack: It's time to enter creepy old lady zone.

Sylvi: Mrs. Johnson... Mrs. Jones, right.

Jack: We go to Arundel. The movie briefly reinvents *The Village*. This idea of like an area without—It's not even on the maps. There's no electricity. The people there are, per the sort of cosmology of the movie, good and kind of empty—Sorry, sorry, separate from the dangers of the world. *The Village* gets briefly rebuilt, and then as he obviously eventually goes on, or went on to say in *The Village*, it's, it's more complicated than that. But it is funny that he just sort of nesting-dolled another one of his movies into this movie.

Keith: Mrs. Jones has to be her own monster.

Sylvi: I'm glad you said that because there is also a line earlier where he's like, we're in a small town, nothing bad can happen to us here, which is like, really funny. I'm like, okay, man. Yeah, I saw that. I saw *The Village*. I know what you're doing, man. I get it. Hell yeah.

Ali: M. Night's desire to be cute in his movies will undercut everything that he's done. And this one, he doesn't even put himself in it. You thought that he would stop looking at the camera.

Sylvi: I missed him!

Keith: I think he got so much shit for how he appears in Lady in the Water that he goes, well, I can't—I have to be true to myself and be in this movie, but I can't be in this movie in any way that will cause anyone to criticize that move.

Sylvi: You know what? I love tiramisu.

Jack: I love tiramisu.

Keith: You know, I also love tiramisu. This is—I was wrong about it as a kid.

Jack: Have you had Tiramisu? Tiramisu is fucking great.

Keith: I was wrong. I didn't like it as a kid.

Jack: I was wrong.

Keith: I was—It was wrong of me.

Ali: It's an intense flavor for a kid.

Jack: This woman lives in a farmhouse. There's no electricity. She is odd.

Keith: She has lemon drink.

Jack: She has lemon drink.

Keith: Why are you eyeing my lemon drink?

Jack: And she's very suspicious about the lemon drink.

[audio from The Happening starts playing]

Mrs. Jones: Why are you eyeing my lemon drink?

[audio ends]

Sylvi: Yeah! Sorry.

Jack: We turned over the card, the index card for this woman, and on the other side it just said suspicion? And that's sort of her whole deal. So, but she has this really—God, there's like bits of this movie that are more interesting movies that are like pulsing away underneath it.

Keith: I really love this sort of obligation where she's like, cutely sort of like, um, kind of a wink, winkingly being like, I guess I've gotta serve you dinner. I guess I've gotta let you stay here. And it feels like she's kind of being sweet, uh, but actually it feels like maybe she really strongly and powerfully negatively feels those things.

Jack: It's good. I think that, uh, stuff with—What is her fucking name? We said it 10 seconds ago. [**Keith:** Mrs. Jones.] Mrs. Jones. is good. Unfortunately, it's arriving way too late for me to have fond feelings about it.

Sylvi: Yeah.

Jack: Kind of compared to the rest of the movie. But earlier, Ali was describing the way you stage, or you could stage interesting and kind of stakes-filled encounters with survivors, the band on the horizon, how do we feel about them whatsoever, et cetera. And here we have in Mrs. Jones, the person that you meet who it becomes clear very early on very quickly has got something going on. Um, this is a stock character and it works really well, and the movie tries its best to make it go. They stay in her house, they have dinner, and midway through dinner—I thought this was great—Um, uh, Jess goes to pick up a biscuit or something and Mrs. Jones like, slaps her hand really violently.

Art: Yeah.

Jack: And I was like, oh my God, that's a really violent slap. I know this woman's supposed to be kind of cruel. Does the movie know that that was a really odd, intense gesture that the actress did? Or was it—

Keith: I can't wait for her new surrogate parents to stand up for her.

Art: Yeah, I would have present—I would have prevented 9/11. Uh, Marky Mark fucking just let someone hit his kid right there.

Jack: But interestingly, the movie intended that hit to be hard, right?

Keith: Yes.

Jack: Uh, later we have, um, Zooey say, did you see how, how she hit, uh, Jess.

Keith: Yeah, but they said and did nothing in the moment.

Jack: No, no, they said and did nothing. They—Yes, they sat and did nothing in the moment. And I think in a movie that has got both hands on the wheel, you play with that feeling. You know, you can do a sort of like, Ruben Östlund force majeure, like, how does a parent act in crisis thing going on. Um, but I did think it was, it was one of those moments where I was like, oh, he does kind of know what he's doing when we had that, that really jarring, violent moment against the kid. And then Zooey Deschanel specifically talk about it later, but not act. I liked that. I thought it was good.

Ali: Well, it just feels tough to me because you could have an entire movie that's just in the house with this lady.

Jack: You could! It would be great!

Ali: And the fact that this is able to hit those beats and that she's sort of kind of one of the most engaging characters in the movie because she is this threat that finally has a face, and this sort of like, oh, she's mild-mannered enough, or feels kind of compelled to be a gracious host, that she's willing to feed them and willing to let them sit down, but she does not trust them, and she is not going to be warm to them. And she doesn't care about the world, and the world doesn't care about me.

Keith: She's so misanthropic. Yeah, she says—

Ali: It's just like, it's so late in the movie that there's no there there. And then in a mo—We have this kind of—A thing that we talk about on AMCA, a Star Wars podcast that I do, is this sort of full meal, crumbs sort of thing. And the thought of this entire movie being an entire banquet set out with dishes with no food on them is really what this feels like.

Keith: Yeah, it's the food from the model home.

Ali: Right? Truly. And the introduction of this character and the introduction of like, feels so tense and scary and real and, like, tropey in a way that feels good in terms of, like, you're watching a horror movie and you're waiting for the door slam, or you're waiting for the escalation of where the danger is going to be in this thing. And instead, it's just like, oh, there's a weird slap. They kind of talk about it. In the morning, there's sort of a fight, but she's justified in being angry. So that's already kind of, like, weird anyway.

Keith: Well, she's not justified in being angry. That door was open. He knocked. He's looking for his wife and kid. He doesn't touch anything.

Jack: I don't want to get quite ahead of ourselves, because there's a really beautiful—So first she says—We hear about this well house, which is connected by a speaking tube. You know, you can hear clearly. And the woman says, they used to hide people from slave chasers back there. Once again, there are, there are things moving under the surface of this movie that this movie does not have the time, patience, or interest to kind of like, work through.

Keith: And I want to, I want to just quickly speak on that, where the other M. Night Shyamalan movies have tried to speak on things. They have all failed for me. And so it is almost a relief that this one decides to not spend any time on anything else. Um, uh, and so I was actually surprised when that shows up as a plot point, and then was again then not surprised that it—It, like everything else in this movie, was moved on from very quickly.

Jack: And then as they're going to bed, they have this like, anxious little whispered conversation with Jess in the room, um, which builds into a really effective little horror beat. I like this a lot. As Mark Wahlberg goes to leave, the woman is standing in the hallway in a white nightgown. This house is all like, plaster walls and kind of like, rough. She's an older woman with short gray hair standing in the middle of this corridor in like, a linen nightgown. It's a good scary image. And then they botch the scene.

Alma: There's something exorcistic. How could she hit Jess like that?

Elliot: We need to stay in this house. You want me to protect you.

Jack: I don't care that she hit my child.

Elliot: Let's just deal with her.

Mrs. Jones: I hear you whispering. Planning on stealing something?

Elliot: No, ma'am, we're not.

Mrs. Jones: Plan on murdering me in my sleep?

Elliot: What? No!

[audio ends]

Sylvi: They are! Now it's a documentary!

Keith: It's the scariest thing that happens in the movie, and it's his funniest delivery.

Jack: It's so funny watching them.

Keith: What? No!

Jack: They just crash the scene off a cliff.

Keith: If the whole movie—If the whole movie was like that, it would be a comedy though. It would be maybe—It would be a maybe funny comedy.

Jack: Yes, but, but the, the, the woman who is so paranoid—The woman whose house you're staying in, who you don't know, who is so paranoid that she hears you whispering, that she waits outside the room to confront you about it—That's good scary stuff.

Keith: Yeah.

Jack: Now, Mark, we're gonna need you to deliver this line really normally. Can you do that, Mark?

Keith: [as Mark Wahlberg] Yeah, sure. Yeah, sure.

Sylvi: [as Mark Wahlberg] Yeah, I got you guys.

Keith: [as Mark Wahlberg] Yeah, sure, I can do that.

Jack: Come the morning, he goes down to her room, Mrs. Jones', finds it open, knocks on the door, and, seeing something on the bed that from the feet I could tell immediately is not Mrs. Jones, walks towards it and finds an extremely cool creepy prop. I thought this doll looked great.

Keith: The whole room was a creepy prop. There was weird religion stuff all on the walls.

Jack: Good set dressing, good production design, great creepy prop. I like that we don't know why this lady has this.

Keith: Mm-hmm. We have no clue.

Jack: Um, but, uh, moving on.

Keith: And she's very protective of that doll.

Jack: She's very angry.

Ali: I, I just want to say, if you're in a stranger's house, whether or not she recently threatened you because she thought you were gonna steal something, but especially so. If you're walking into someone's bedroom and you weren't invited and they aren't aware you were there, you are fucking up and you are being rude. And she is allowed to think that you're stealing from her and you're doing a fucked up thing.

Keith: Thousand percent disagree. Couldn't disagree anymore. The door was, one, wide open.

Jack: You stay at the threshold, Keith.

Keith: He did stay at the threshold until there was a creepy doll in there.

Jack: Oh, the doll.

Keith: I see. And so the doll is magnetic. I think the doll is sort of psychically magnetic. This is not magically, but I mean personal psychology. But then the other thing is he's looking for his kid. He needs to protect this kid. If the kid is in the room—He can hear her laughing somewhere in the house. We know, because we're not stupid like him, that it's the tubes. So we know that she's not in the house the whole time.

Jack: It's the tubes, Mark.

Art: Other things have happened to him, whereas we just heard about the tubes 20 seconds ago. He had nine hours to experience some of that stuff.

Keith: He had a sleep, yeah. He had a whole night of sleep. But that sleep is where your short-term memory becomes long-term memory. So something's going on with Mark, I think.

Jack: So I think I know what's going on with this woman. Um, you know when you do a reparative reading of a text?

Keith: She's worshipping a non-Christian god by mistake? She's accidentally a demon worshipper?

Jack: No, no, no. Here is, here is what I think this movie's trying to—

Art: Hold on, I wanna hear Keith out on this demon worshipper thing.

Keith: I think that God is real because it's an M. Night Shyamalan movie, and somehow this woman's got it twisted. She's been praying to something that isn't—

Sylvi: That is how they talk about nature.

Jack: Um, it is how they talk about nature. Uh, here is the movie I would like to see. The whole movie takes place in this house, like Ali said. It is about this couple, uh, Alma and Elliot, and their adoptive daughter who has been kind of handed off to them by Elliot's friend who—He has gone off to die. Uh, uh, uh, Jess is not their kid. They run into this

house of this woman who is a, like, isolate, uh, suspicious woman who is nevertheless trying to play at being, um, uh, welcoming and hospitable even though it's not in her nature. Based on props inside the house that we saw in this movie, I think that this woman, uh, had a husband who died in the Vietnam War, um, like a soldier husband, and he left and went away before they could have children. They wanted to have children together very badly, and after he died and she became more and more isolate and weird in Arundel, she constructed a doll child that she would then raise, like, as her surrogate kid into this fucked-up environment that the Happening is also happening—You know, on outside. We put Alma and Elliot, who are themselves trying to deal with a kid that is not their own but is a real living flesh-and-blood kid, and then we just bash these characters against each other for like two hours. Um, that's the movie I want to see.

Keith: Uh, yeah, I mean, they have something with Mrs. Jones and then they don't really do anything.

Jack: She doesn't even get a particularly cool death.

Keith: No, she gets one of the worst.

Jack: She goes out into the garden on her own and gets got by the, by the Happening. That's notable because it's not supposed to happen, right?

Keith: Yes, the Happening has gotten so—It's happening so much that, that it even happens to you when you're alone now.

Jack: That's scary.

Keith: Yeah.

Ali: It's scary, but it also feels weird. I sort of feel like I was waiting for the movie to—This is maybe stupid, but waiting for the movie to introduce this feeling of, like, the plants know if you're evil or not.

Jack: Yes, I also felt this.

Ali: The toxin will only—It won't affect you if you're pure of heart, which I feel like almost is the ending that we get because—

Sylvi: But you have the hot dog guy!

Ali: Right. But the hot dog guy should have been pure of heart.

Sylvi: He was supposed to be.

Keith: Yeah, that's what I'm saying. It had—It couldn't have been that.

Ali: Oh yeah, I don't know. But like, it feels like it's always gesturing at that because the main characters have plot armor and not like, an actual immunity that makes sense in the first place.

Keith: Sure. Yeah, yeah.

Ali: So I don't know.

Keith: There is a—the thing is that the movie constantly makes you ask, why them? Why these these two? Like, why are they making it through? And the answer is like, because Mark is a smart—Not Mark, uh, Elliot is a smart science teacher who figures it out as he's going along. But it's just not a good answer because he doesn't seem that smart, and the stuff he figures out doesn't seem that important.

Jack: No. That's the answer we sort of get to, but it's not happening.

Keith: Right.

Ali: He's also not able to protect anyone ever, and I'm like, surprised that the movie pay more attention to that, and there's no like, acknowledgment of that failure and reversal of that failure. Like, the hand slap scene after he just saw two kids in his ward get their brains fucking blown out—

Sylvi: Yeah.

Ali: —And not immediately rise to that occasion and be like, you are not touching a child. I am not going to be anywhere near someone who's willing to touch a child like that, makes no fucking sense.

Jack: It's, it's, it's bizarre because that stuff is kind of handed to the script on a platter, right? Like, that's where the movie could be.

Keith: It's what makes me so conflicted about being—About any of these movies so far, is that M. Night's ability to direct and his ability to write a script are so in conflict with each other. Like, he is, he is good at directing mostly. This is his worst directorial effort yet. It still looks good because he's got Tak Fujimoto.

Sylvi: He's talented, but it is definitely his least visually interesting movie, I'd say.

Keith: It is for sure. I think the least—There's—Jack, you, you already pointed out, like, there's some good scene composition, uh, but, but beyond that, the movie kind of doesn't have it visually. But, but I, I'll grant him that because every other one of these movies has had it visually. It's had better acting. Every single movie, every single movie that we've watched has had better acting, has pretty much had better, uh, written characters. I almost said better script. That's not true. They have more interesting ideological positions, but the scripts can't pull out and hit on the same level as the directing. And so it's really weird when you have a guy who insists on being a writer-director. He's a guy who's always pretty competently directing pretty bad scripts.

Art: Yeah.

Ali: Yeah.

Jack: We will continue, or you will continue to have that feeling.

Keith: Yeah.

Jack: I think.

Keith: Yeah.

Jack: And I suspect, I suspect—Yeah, I'm not gonna say. So then we connect to, we connect through the pipe. Mrs. Jones bashes her head through the windows and stuff.

Sylvi: Another good horror beat, I think.

Jack: The smashing the heads through the window?

Sylvi: Yeah, I like—I think that stuff works as a horror movie thing.

Keith: Um, it reminds me of those, like, uh, the parasites that make worms, um, like—

Jack: Oh, climb up the big trees.

Keith: Sit on the—well, I think they all have it, you know. It makes worms wriggle up to the surface. It makes, uh, grasshoppers, like, come out into the open. It may, you know, different parasites that, that make you vulnerable to your prey. But it's sort of like a Predator version of that where the, the, the, the, the virus or whatever is making you make other people available to it.

Jack: Yeah, that's cool. It's good stuff.

Keith: Thank God it was the very last thing in the movie that introduced the idea.

Jack: I'm also a sucker for, sugar glass. Uh, I think it's great when actors bash their heads through sugar glass or hit each other on the heads with sugar glass bottles.

Keith: I just do that for fun. I have sugar glass every morning.

Sylvi: Can someone clip out Jack saying, I like when actors bash their heads, so if we ever need to destroy their reputation, we can?

Jack: Um, we talked to Zooey Deschanel, to Alma.

Keith: Yeah.

Jack: And everyone decides that they want to commit the right kind of suicide, rather than the evil suicide.

Keith: Yes, we're gonna commit suicide on our terms.

Jack: Um, this is, uh, staged like you stage the sort of, um, like, uh, correct death scene in like, a monster movie or like, in a disaster movie where it's like, we're going to go down with the ship.

Sylvi: Yeah.

Jack: Um, it takes on a different context when the mechanism by which the evil kills you is suicide, because it really does just look like good suicide versus bad suicide. It's odd. Also, they involve the child.

Sylvi: Yes, it's wild that, like, I know it's because he wants the visual of them all in the field together. [**Jack:** Yeah.] But it does still feel like, okay, really?

Keith: I, I don't want to—I, I'm not defending this, but there's no good version of this. This is a, this is a core concept failure, not an execution failure. Because the other thing that you do is, okay, so they both commit suicide, and then Jess is stuck in the shed until she, what, starves to death? Like, there's no—

Ali: You can make the relationship between Jess and the surrogate parenting strong enough in the film that it is a decision that they all make together. Jess can also be someone who doesn't want to die alone. Like, it sucks because she's eight, and I don't really know how you put that. But, like, the—the capacity of, like, we are a family now, we should be together in this moment, could be there if the movie cared about them being a family.

Keith: The other bit of tension here, in addition to that, is they waited no time. They did not spend a lot of time trying to, like, wait out the wind. Like, they're—Even though Elliot is the one who introduced the concept of the collapse of the threat when he talked about the bacteria in Australia. They have one conversation about their marriage and about the mood ring.

Jack: Death now? Death now?

Keith: And then he goes, time for death now. I'm going to die now.

Sylvi: Like, this conversation is so bad.

Jack: This is what I'm saying.

Art: Um, but you're, you're right. It's, it's—You're right, Ali. There's like, no way to do this.

Jack: No, no, he's, uh—did I write a note about this? Yes. I said it's sort of technically impossible to sell because of the way the attack works.

Keith: Right. You either leave her alone or you take her out to die with you.

Ali: Yeah. I think Keith thinks it's impossible. I think that it could be possible if the movie was completely different.

Keith: I think that that's the same thought. I think with the materials we have, it's impossible. If there were new materials, get back to me.

Jack: Also, yeah, I don't know. In the scene where we trip and the fire reaches us and doesn't actually burn us, that's good because we got to see fire moving. In this case, they just go out and then they're like, I guess no death.

Sylvi: Yeah, I guess we're fine. It's been 2 minutes.

Jack: Zooey Deschanel looks disappointed. What is that about?

Sylvi: Oh no, I have to stay married to Mark Wahlberg.

Jack: I can only really understand this as like a failure of acting because, um, I don't know why she would be looking disappointed, but she does. Then it's six months later? Three months later?

Keith: Three months later, which seemed to me—I was like, that's not long enough.

Ali: Shockingly, the only movie we've watched so far with an actual ending.

Keith: I wrote that all over my notes. I wrote, oh my God, it has an ending. The very last thing was in all caps. I wrote three times bigger than anything else, a real ending, three exclamation points. On my other page, when I was summarizing it, all the movies we've watched so far and what I most hated about them, I wrote next to *The Happening*, but it actually has an ending.

Jack: I think you're being spoiled. I do not think that this really is—It's not a good ending. I suppose it is an ending.

Keith: None of the other movies had falling action.

Jack: Yes.

Keith: Even, even in the most generous possible terms. They had a climax. They maybe had a scene that was like a scene that like, referenced, by the way, we are post-climax. But there was no denouement. This movie has a denouement.

Art: I'm not sure that *The Sixth Sense* doesn't, now that I'm like all the way here.

Keith: I went back and watched it to make sure. I said it in the original episode, and I, and I double-checked, and I want to stick to it. He comes home still thinking that he's a therapist. He sees a thing and then has a Dr. House-style realization that he is a ghost. And then the movie rolls credits.

Art: But like, that's not the important thing. The important thing, like the falling, the, the scene in the car with Cole and his mom is the—That's the—

Keith: That is—I mean, I think that you have a kind of structurally weird movie when the, the, the secondary character of the movie is the one that has the emotional climax. But I don't—

Art: But, but, but his goal is to fix Cole. By seeing Cole do that, we see him get the thing that he wants. He doesn't see it happen, but we do. And we're the important part because we're the ones who spent \$10.25 to watch this movie.

Keith: Yeah. I just think that it's—To me, it's so clear that the movie ends wildly abruptly. I don't disagree with you that there is an emotional climax with Cole that, what's his name, Crowe doesn't experience. Malcolm Crowe, is that his name?

Keith: I think so.

Sylvi: Malcolm—

Jack: It is Malcolm Crowe.

Sylvi: I keep getting his character, him and David Dunn mixed up, so I was like, um...

Keith: But there is such a weirdness to the way that he comes home, has a flashback, has like a long flashback about everything that happened to him, and then we—He goes like, you don't have to worry anymore, and then he—Then roll credits. It's very strange. And it is, it is the second most ending that we get out of all of them. So after The Happening, The Sixth Sense has the most of an ending.

Jack: Yes, although, so we've already talked about the sort of like, absolutely ruinous family dynamics that are being produced by them having another kid. Zooey Deschanel gets a positive pregnancy test, sends the kid off to school, puts a little photo—Sorry, I'm saying these out of order. Uh, puts a photo of John Leguizamo and mom, dead mom, in your backpack. Take that to school with you. Off you go. Good luck. Mark Wahlberg puts her on the bus. They say goodbye. She takes a positive pregnancy test and tells Mark Wahlberg about it through just some awful sort of body acting. She just sort of like, bobs about.

Sylvi: Yeah, when I was watching this with, uh, my partner Moose, he said, oh, she needs to go to the bathroom again already.

Jack: Yeah, it did look like that. I, I, I can't get over how bad these two actors are. Every, every new emotion that they could do is a pit that I fall into. Um, and then of course we get the classic stinger of the movie, Bad News France.

Keith: Bad News France.

Sylvi: Bad News France.

Keith: So I really like that we get the guy talking about the plants on the news and like the plant fear is kind of the fringe theory. And the guy, the newscaster's like, everybody's pretty sure it's the government. And, uh, the science guy is like, well, I, I think the reason it only happened in one place is just sort of like a, uh, like a random sort of hotbed of activity, and that if we don't start taking care of the planet, it'll happen again. And then it happens again. Very heavy-handed.

Sylvi: Um, um, this is where my fix for the movie comes in, where it should have been—We should have been revealed that Hot Dog Guy lived and he's on TV.

Jack: Oh, he's saying—

Sylvi: Or we got a post-credits sequence of Hot Dog Guy walking out of the forest with a glizzy in hand being like, well, that was, that was crazy.

Keith: As a botanist, he should have—

Art: You could have had that character live.

Keith: You could have had him live.

Sylvi: I agree. You should have had him live.

Keith: Because the last thing that we see is him still, like, um, thinking and feeling. He grabs his wife's hand, uh, and then we cut away and we hear the gunshots.

Jack: It's fucking sad and scary if that happened.

Keith: Yeah. It is.

Jack: But the movie sort of—

Keith: The movie doesn't really care. It doesn't care.

Sylvi: And, uh, Zooey Deschanel and Mark Wahlberg should have died in that scene, and then they should have had to take care of it.

Keith: Yeah, yeah, that would have been—

Jack: You gotta watch—You gotta watch Halloween: Season of the Witch. You gotta watch it.

Keith: I actually haven't. I've only seen the first Halloween.

Ali: You really should.

Art: Oh, you should also see the second Halloween.

Jack: Have I seen the second one? I think I've seen 1 and 3.

Art: Um, oh, 2 is, 2 is—2 is fine.

Sylvi: I don't think I've seen the second one either.

Keith: Anyway, I like the idea that there's a—That there's like the plant theory is out there, and it's like the fringe theory. That's like my favorite little thing.

Jack: Did we all check in with our video games?

Sylvi: Oh, I took a screenshot. Hold on.

Jack: Below the TV for this entire scene, are PlayStation 2 video games. They are Heatseeker.

Keith: Okay.

Jack: GTA 3?

Sylvi: I think so.

Jack: I think there's 2 GTA games.

Keith: Could be San Andreas. I think that's San Andreas.

Jack: That's Grand Theft Auto and Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas.

Sylvi: Yeah.

Keith: I just guessed San Andreas based on the year. Well, and now looking at this picture, I think that it is San Andreas.

Jack: It could be Vice City.

Art: It's too long to be Vice City.

Jack: Oh yeah. Um, but I think you're right, Keith. I really do like this, this weird angry scientist. Um, I like the fringe—I like the fringe theory. Um, I like that they connect it to the red bloom, the algae bloom.

Keith: Yeah.

Jack: Um, and I like that towards the end, and by towards the end, I mean literally in these last two minutes, it turns into like an eco thriller. They're like, you know, yeah, it's maybe because humans' global warming is all bad.

Keith: I want to say that I think that there the whole time.

Sylvi: He was trying to have it there the whole time.

Jack: He was trying to have it there the whole time.

Sylvi: I don't think it lands the whole time. Like, I think, like, we were talking about the, the cutesy billboard of the, you deserve this. It feels like it could have worked if there was more—Like, if we saw the construction scene took place in a place where they're like hollowing out like a bunch of natural land for like, suburbs or something. But again, there's no thematic tie there. It's just—

Keith: Yeah, this is a weird movie. This is a weird movie. **[Ali:** Yeah...] I think that—sorry, Ali, did you want to go first?

Ali: No, I was just gonna say, or you keep the botanist alive and you have that sort of plot beat come up again and again. Oh, yeah, like, yeah, we are cruel to the world, we have to be considerate in this way. Like, it's just bad. It's just—

Sylvi: We're team botanist.

Keith: Um, yeah, the hot dog guy's so good. He's so funny.

Sylvi: Shout out to HDG.

Keith: Um, uh, he looks like a comedian that I like, Dan Lippert. If you've heard Dan Lippert on any podcast that I like, but, uh, he looks like what if Dan Lippert was a little older and had a big beard. I think he does have a big beard sometimes. Um, it might also be his height. I think they're both extremely tall. Uh, but—

Sylvi: Oh my God, he was in an episode of It's Always Sunny.

Keith: Dan Lippert was, or this guy?

Sylvi: No, this guy, Frank Collison.

Keith: Um, Hot Dog Guy. Well, who was he?

Sylvi: Uh, he in one episode played a character named Smokey in The Gang Buys a Roller Rink, which I don't think I've seen yet.

Keith: Oh, that's a fun episode. It's kind of a stupid fun episode.

Sylvi: Damn, he's in Guild Wars 2. He plays Hunklo.

Keith: Oh my God, does he know about—Does he know about Bored Dead?

Art: Bored Dead?

Sylvi: I don't know.

Keith: Does Frank Collender know about—Does Frank Collison know about Bored Dead?

Ali: Oh, I hope so.

Keith: Um, uh, so I, I think that the most—The weirdest thing to me about this movie is the potency of the reaction to it. I feel like I see movies this bad all the time. Like, oh yeah, like all the things that I said about this movie, I fundamentally don't think it's remarkable in its badness.

Sylvi: It's just kind of stupid.

Keith: I think it's like, kind of a D, D+ movie. You know, I, I think that we've seen worse movies from M. Night, movies that I found more difficult to get through. I have almost nothing—

Art: Oh, I don't know about that.

Keith: I have nothing positive to say about this movie. Um, my only defense of it is like, there's a ton of fucking bad movies. Why is this one so remarkable? I don't see what people saw about this that made them so furious.

Sylvi: I mean, again—

Art: People were ready to hate M. Night Shyamalan at this point.

Sylvi: Yeah, yeah, I was literally about to say the exact same thing. Like, it is fully just like people waiting on a downfall. It's the people who are posting about how Pedro Pascal is in too many movies now. Like, it's the exact same thing where they just want to—They, they want a guy to—And it's not one-to-one, I'm just—It's just a modern comparison. Yeah. Um, where they're like, they want—They—People were already down after like, The Village was kind of mixed, and then Lady in the Water was a real dud, and then knives are out for this one. And like, he's a big name. Like, you flop like this, uh, at the level of like a like shitty Blumhouse like low-budget like horror movie,

you're a like, fucking fart in the wind. But if you—If you're M. Night Shyamalan, you're a stink bomb. You're like—

Keith: No.

Sylvi: Filling the whole room.

Keith: Here's the weird thing.

Sylvi: This was not a bomb.

Keith: This was not a bomb. We talked a lot about—

Sylvi: I'm talking critically.

Keith: No, you're totally right.

Sylvi: I'm not talking finances.

Keith: This was way more—You're totally right. I just think that it's interesting that this was not a bomb because in *Lady in the Water*, we talked about how it made \$72 million off a budget of \$70 million. And then, Art, I think you said that with marketing and everything, it was more like a \$40 million loss or something.

Art: It was like, a \$70 million loss.

Sylvi: I can see it.

Art: The marketing is like 100% at that level of scale.

Sylvi: I am obviously not aware of the way that this was marketed, um, because I was not paying attention to the, uh, release schedule.

Ali: They didn't even have to market it to you when you saw it 20 times this year.

Sylvi: Yeah, no,

Art: You're gonna get kidnapped by a movie studio. They're gonna study your brain in a lab.

Sylvi: I watched it because I heard it was bad. Um, this one—But, but like, I though—Sorry, just I think that the success of this is easier to explain as when you, when you pitch it as M. Night Shyamalan's back to doing a horror movie, right?

Jack: Yeah.

Sylvi: Yeah, like, like even though we've talked about how he hasn't really done stuff that feels as horror-y as his reputation like, lends itself. He is still like, in the minds of the public as a horror movie director. And so being—Going like, yeah, he did, he did his weird *The Village* and like, he did his, his fairy tale movie, but he's back now and it's R-rated. That also is a draw. That's—That is a draw for horror movies in general. Like if you tell people there's gonna be gore, they're more likely to see it than if you tell them it's a PG-13 horror.

Keith: And there is gore.

Sylvi: There is gore.

Art: And looking at—Look, I'm sorry, go ahead.

Sylvi: No, no, I'm basically done. Like, I just—I can see why this had the financial success it did, and I can see how that led to people turning on it even more.

Keith: Just to put some numbers on it, I saw budget as \$50 to \$60 million, box office \$163.4 million.

Art: And I'm sure that, that they wanted it to make more money. You know, if you look at this as like, well, this cost about what *The Village* cost and it made less. It cost a little less than *Signs*. It made half of what *Signs* made. You know, it's—This isn't—They don't want to see these like—This is, this is an uptick, but it's still down from when he was [Keith: At his peak.] Really hitting them out of the park, right?

Sylvi: Yeah.

Art: And looking ahead, and I don't want to like, spoil what's coming up, but his next movie is going to, again, profit even, even accounting for 100% marketing. The next movie is in the green, but not by a lot, and they probably expected a lot more from, uh, from that franchise.

Jack: Mm-hmm.

Art: And then his movie after that is also like a little, down if you consider 100% marketing. And then you go on, he's making big money again. This, like, I remember thinking at *The Visit* that like, oh, Shyamalan is back. And if you sort of look at it, he really never left. Like, I understand that, like, he started to—Like, the, the, the, the, the collective consciousness sort of turned against him, but people were buying tickets to his movies, with the exception of *Lady in the Water*, the whole time.

Keith: Yeah. Yeah. And ironically, you know, I had a lot bad to say about it, but looking at his movies all in a row, *Lady in the Water* is in the top half, I think.

Sylvi: Okay.

Keith: I think *Lady in the Water*—

Sylvi: How many have we watched so far? Six? Five?

Art: Oh, uh, nonsense. You're a fool.

Keith: *Sixth Sense*, *The Happening*, *Lady in the Water*, or *Sixth Sense*, *Unbreakable*, *Signs*, *Village*, *Lady in the Water*, *The Happening*.

Art: I think they might be in order for me. The six movies are just getting—That's my order.

Keith: Each one is worse.

Art: Each one is worse.

Keith: Yeah, I, I thought a lot about this today, um, because I did want to see how I was feeling about these as we've been recording them. You watch more, your thoughts change about them. You know, my fee—My feelings about Signs have gotten so much worse since watching it that I really, really wanted to put it last for me. But I have to admit that Signs is better than Unbreakable. Unbreakable—

Sylvi: Wow, that is not the one I was expecting to come after that.

Keith: Unbreakable is so bad to me. It is barely a movie. [**Ali:** Weird...] Um, it is, um, it has two really high highs. And, you know, I like a movie with some friction, but when you're working with bad material, friction is not what you need. Like, you can't take a movie that's kind of bad and clunky and add friction and be like, ooh, that's interesting at least. Like, to me, if you have bad material, like if you're, if you're, uh, if you're not working with something interesting by default, then, then the friction only makes it more difficult for me to watch. And Unbreakable was full of friction and weirdness. Then Signs is the second worst.

Jack: Wow.

Art: Now you're, you're, you're a, you're a fool.

Ali: Whoa.

Art: Your opinions are bad and you should feel bad, I think.

Keith: Signs, again, it was like I was really liking it in the first half and then everything about the second half I found irritating and chafing. Um, now we talked that—Now—You know what? I'm going to put The Happening next. The Happening was an easy-to-watch piece of shit.

Sylvi: It's a real easy-to-watch piece of shit.

Keith: It was an easy-to-watch piece of shit. Nothing happened—

Sylvi: You have to remember the piece of shit part, though.

Keith: Yes. Nothing happened that was like, uuuuugh. I see bad acting all the time. The fact that Wahlberg—

Art: Are you kidding? Play that Wahlberg clip again. Every time Mark Wahlberg spoke, I was like, ugh.

Elliot: Just let me think.

[gunshot]

Alma: They're dying.

Elliot: I need a second. They released it? We're not near the road.

Alma: We can't just stand here as uninvolved observers!

Elliot: I need a second, okay? Just give me a second!

[gunshot]

Sylvi: See, that's funny!

Jack: Yeah, you're not making the argument that this film is not uniquely bad. I don't think—

Elliot: I need a second, okay? [gunshot] Why can't anybody give me a goddamn second? All right, be scientific, douchebag.

[audio ends]

Keith: Be scientific, douchebag. Yeah, I just really quick have to do mental scientific process. I'm testing my mental hypothesis.

Art: That is so much worse than anything in Signs.

Keith: Uh, no, Ray Reddy showing up and being like, by the way, I think it's water, and then driving away. That's worse, I think.

Art: No, it's, it's not worse. It can't—

Keith: Because that—

Sylvi: I'm with you.

Keith: Thank you. This ruins—

Sylvi: I don't think that the movie's worse. I do think that that is maybe my low point of this season so far though.

Keith: The, um, the difference for me is that the Ray Reddy scene, it totally pivots the rest of the movie on an axis and makes everything that happens after it stupid and bad. This scene is so bad that it's funny and then doesn't matter for the whole rest of the movie. So it's sort of like, this isolated piece of shit in a box that doesn't really change anything.

Art: It doesn't matter. It's the thing for the rest of the movie. That's like, and now we can't be together. Like, the people density is the rest of the movie.

Keith: Oh, you think that? I don't see—I don't think that the concept is what's bad. It is the acting that's bad. So I don't think that it really has a lot of bandwidth. Like, yeah, the thing he figures out is that we should split up, but that's not the part that's bad to me. The part that's bad is like, be scientific, douchebag. And like, we're not assholes. We can't be like those people on the news. You should run to where all those suicides are happening and try to stop them or something. Like, that's what's bad to me. But like, my problem wasn't with M. Night's acting in that scene was with like, the ideas being presented. So when, when for the rest of the movie they have to like, keep splitting it, it already felt like a movie where we had to get—Keep having smaller and smaller little parties. Like that kind of, that kind of like, felt already present to me. Um, and M. Night's movies are like, to me, always chasing, you know, the characters catching up with what the audience already knows in a really frustrating way.

Ali: Um, I feel like I have to go with Art here because I—Like, even thinking of impact and thinking of, like, character value—

Keith: I refuse to think of impact.

Ali: Time spent. Like, the sort of, like, we're not gonna be like other people and not do something about this—[background noise] Ice machine—Is as absurd as saying, oh, I think it's aliens, and walking away. Like, it's both as meaningless and, like, just useless to the film, really, and to the character—The characters in the same way that, like, I think that they exist on the same plane.

Keith: I'm not here to say that this scene is better, except that it's funny. Being funny makes it better. [Sylvi laughs loudly] I'm not here to say that it's better. I'm just saying that the result of the Ray Reddington scene is to like, prematurely spoil the movie. Like, it is a weird—Like, a character off-screen figures out that, that they're weak to water and then just tells you to your face and then goes like, by the way, you know, sorry I killed your wife, but it seemed like fate. Okay, bye. Like, it is so absurd and it changes how the rest of the movie is. I don't think that this scene changes the rest of the movie. It just kind of exists on its own as a weird, stupid bit of dialogue. And I'm not easy on M. Night's dialogue. I think that he's been shit at writing dialogue at this point for more than half of a decade. But after The Happening, I think it's Lady in the Water, then The Village, and then of course Sixth Sense, which is like, way better than the second place in first.

Sylvi: Oh yeah.

Keith: Like it's not even close.

Sylvi: It's still like, heads and shoulders his best movie.

Keith: Yeah, like for sure. Nothing, nothing is within striking distance, I think, of The Sixth Sense. I think it's far and away the best one of these.

Jack: What's next?

Keith: Next is After Earth.

Sylvi: Should we also, like, do we want to announce what we're doing on the Patreon?

Keith: Yes. On the Patreon, we are going to do a watch-along of the famously reviled Last Airbender movie.

Sylvi: Yeah.

Keith: Everyone hates it.

Art: 5% on Rotten Tomatoes.

Keith: Yeah, it is like, kind of like, it's in the running of like worst American—Like people talk about it in the same category categories like, worst American films. Um, I have no idea what happens in it. I also know that the Avatar: The Last Airbender people are really easy to upset. They're very sensitive about their stupid cartoon.

Sylvi: And it is stupid, and we—Keith and I are saying that.

Keith: Uh, I like it. I like it. [**Sylvi:** Oh.] I like it fine. I like it fine. It's fine. It's from 2005. I'm over it. I'm on to new stuff.

Art: Yeah, I think that's really fair. Yeah, it's fine.

Sylvi: I mean, it's fine. I'm not 13 any more.

Art: You should—Yeah, you shouldn't feel bad. No one involved should feel bad.

Keith: No one involved should feel bad. No one who likes it should feel bad for liking it.

Sylvi: No, it's like whatever.

Keith: But kind of get over it.

Sylvi: Yeah...

Keith: Um, that's my feeling about Avatar: The Last Airbender.

Art: Um, oh my God, there's a Wikipedia page for films considered—List of films considered the worst.

Sylvi: Ooh.

Art: By decade.

Keith: Is it on there?

Art: I have not seen this movie, but looking at the other films on this list that I've seen, it would be hard for this to be the worst.

Keith: People, I—People try to memory hole this, but there was a time when people would say that about a movie that I very strongly think is not close to being the worst movie, The Phantom Menace.

Sylvi: Okay. I don't have any opinion on this. It's just really funny how it always comes back to this shit.

Keith: Well, I just think this was very formative for me. I learned very young that huge groups of people will very loudly and confidently say a movie that is not even close to being the worst movie, they will declare it the worst for years and years. And then it was a second lesson when 10, 12, 15 years later, people sort of revised—Like, it's not the worst, it's just bad—And acted like, no, no, we never were insane about The Phantom Menace. We just always didn't really like it. Uh, and so that was a second lesson in how people behave.

Ali: Um, we're three hours into this. We can't talk about this. This episode is over. I'm sorry to say.

Sylvi: Thank you, Ali.

Ali: We can't talk about The Phantom Menace. I'm really sorry to say.

Keith: No one can stop me from talking about The Phantom Menace. You can leave the call if you need to.

Art: I would, I would say it's hard to believe this movie is worse than either the Adam Sandler film Jack and Jill, which is on this list, or Battlefield Earth, which are both, like, very bad movies.

Sylvi: I've seen both. I'll be able to compare.

Keith: I—

Sylvi: Yeah, but Dunkaccino's pretty funny.

Keith: I don't know the difference between Battlefield Earth and After Earth, by the way. I don't know what the difference is between those.

Sylvi: Dunkaccino.

Art: Well, that's—We're gonna really have to get into that.

Keith: We're gonna really get into that.

Jack: Just so we're clear, the next episode in the main feed is gonna be about After Earth.

Ali: Correct.

Sylvi: Yes, that is correct.

Jack: Avatar: The Last Airbender is a Patreon exclusive?

Sylvi: It's a Patreon exclusive watch-along. Because we—I don't want to do a 3-hour podcast on that movie.

Keith: And I—Honestly, I think that the best way to present it and what will be the most fun is to be talking over it and having a good time and laughing and not spending three hours talking about it.

Art: Yeah, and if I have time, I'll try to just watch the whole first season of the show to be really fresh on it for next week. I don't think I have the time, but if I do, I'll try.

Keith: Um, is there anything else we need to say before leaving.

Jack: Uh, do we have a review?

Sylvi: I'm gonna see if we have any new reviews. I don't know if the last call for review—Oh, we do. Wonderful. Uh, okay. “The 5th character is always dysfunctional family dynamics”, from Professor Puppy Feet. I didn't read that username before I started reading this. Really enjoying revisiting the works of M. Night with y'all. As someone who was very much into them when they first came out, I'm rewatching most of them with you for the first time in ages, and while they don't all hold up, your reviews and insights keep me interested and frequently cackling. I've even roped my husband into watching a bunch he's never seen, so thanks for that. Love this pod and pretty much all you do.

Keith: Thanks, Professor.

Sylvi: Thank you. I love roping spouses into watching movies that they might not watch otherwise.

Art: And does any—Does anyone not know what After Earth is about and wants to guess?

Keith: So I have no clue.

Sylvi: I think that it is effectively going to be the same as that movie where Adam Driver goes back in time and has to kill a bunch of dinosaurs with like, a laser rifle because he's from like, an advanced civilization. I haven't seen it, I've only seen the trailer. Um, I think that's what it's like.

Keith: Um, yeah, I genuinely—The only thing I know about After Earth is that it has Will Smith and Jaden Smith in it. That's—I don't—I couldn't even—I can't even guess. Um, I—Is it maybe gonna be he redoes—He does a sci-fi version of I Am Legend where, um, you've got like robots instead of zombies?

Art: Mm. A remake of I Am Legend where his son is playing the dog.

Keith: Yes. And then again, robots instead of zombies.

Sylvi: Robots instead of zombies.

Art: Great. I don't think I've seen After Earth, but—

Sylvi: I know one thing about After Earth actually, because my, my partner has seen it in theaters, apparently, one of the three M. Night movies he had seen in theaters, which I think is really funny. Um, I know that there's something about a, a, a accent, and that's all I'll say.

Art: All right. Well, all right. See y'all next time. And if you start with—If we decide for the Patreon, that'll be up before or concurrently with, or—

Sylvi: Um, we'll figure it out. It'll, it'll be on the way.

Keith: So, I'll say this. That's not gonna get edited. There's nothing I can do to us talking over a podcast. So, the, uh, the work I will do to it is like making sure that everything sounds good, but like, we can't cut it down because we would ruin the watch-along part of it.

Sylvi: Yeah.

Keith: So, um, like, it is going to have like, a lot less done to it than usual, probably. Uh, and I'm going to guarantee that this—That After Earth and, um, uh, by the time this goes up—I said After Earth, I meant Last Airbender. By the time this goes up, Last Airbender will already be up.

[[“Dr Malcolm and Friends”](#) by Jack de Quidt starts playing]

Sylvi: Wow.

Art: All right.

Keith: Yeah.

Jack: Well, okay, bye.

Sylvi: Thank you.

Ali: Bye. Bye.

[["Dr Malcolm and Friends"](#) by Jack de Quidt plays in its entirety]