

[This transcript has been lightly edited for flow and sentence structure]

LIZZIE: Hello everyone, it's been far too long since I've had this microphone in front of me, but welcome back! I'm Lizzie and I am the host of Once Upon a Coaster, and this is the first episode of our third season. If you're new here or you just haven't listened to us in awhile, we are a podcast that takes a look at some classic, old, and sometimes defunct coasters, and look at how amazing they were for their time, and what kind of innovations and technology they brought to the coaster world moving forward.

Season three of Once Upon a Coaster was supposed to hit your podcast player a month or two ago, but life kind of got in the way so we're a little behind. But we'll talk to you more about that later on in this episode. For now, I am just so happy to be back and chatting with you again.

There has been so much that has happened since we last left off. Iron Gwazi is finally open, congratulations Busch Gardens, it was about time. So is the Guardians of the Galaxy coaster at Epcot. Hersheypark has rethemed their Sidewinder coaster and for some reason they're trying to pass it off as a brand new coaster, even though it's not. This podcast isn't really here to debate that, but it's not a new coaster, it's the same coaster with a new paint job. Emperor at Sea World San Diego and Pantheon at Busch Gardens are also open for summer rides now too. There are so many coasters that are finally back in the works and opening after a few years of little to no progress. It feels so great to have a coaster podcast these days so we can talk about all of this and more.

Some announcements before we move on to the meat of the episode. You've missed our announcements, right? I know you have.

A reminder to returning listeners and new listeners that we are on social media and would love to have you along for the ride. Get it? Ride? On Instagram we are at Once Upon a Coaster Pod, and on Twitter we are at O-U-A-Coaster-Pod. Even when we have to take breaks sometimes from recording our podcast, we regularly try to post on both of those social media sites, so if you need your coaster fix while we're away give us a follow on either of those platforms.

To kick off season three we are going to jump right in with our Coasterversary of the episode. This episode is going to be a little bit different from our normal episodes, but before we get into the heart of it we thought we'd celebrate a coasterversary with you first. If you're new to the podcast, Coasterversaries are celebrations we like to have to pay tribute to big milestone anniversaries that some older coasters hit during the course of our lives. This podcast as you know is all about old coasters, so we like to celebrate when an older coaster not only survives through the decades, but thrives.

This is a new feature to our podcast. We added it part way through season two last year. We ended up celebrating Phantoms Revenge turning thirty years old, River King Mine Train hitting

the big 5-0 milestone, and Dragon Fire reaching 40 years of operation. That's not even all of the ones we hit last year, just a few that I quickly pulled up.

To continue with that tradition, today we're celebrating twenty years of operation to a roller coaster that was labeled as the ultimate game changer back when it opened in 2002. Twenty years does not seem like a huge milestone to hit, but when we're talking about this coaster it is. Today we are looking at X2, the infamous fourth dimension wing coaster that opened in 2002 at Six Flags Magic Mountain. Twenty years is not the biggest coaster anniversary to be celebrating, we've looked at really old coasters here. We've looked at coasters that are forty, fifty, one hundred years old. The twenty year milestone doesn't seem to be that big. However, given the history of this ride, we should be ecstatic that she's here to ring in 2022 as a functioning roller coaster.

X2 was supposed to open in 2001, so we really should be celebrating her twenty-first birthday. There were loads of issues with the construction and the design process and it pushed everything back to 2002. X - as the coaster was known at the time - was the first coaster to offer riders not only a complete circuit track, but also individual seats that could swing up and around a full 360 degrees. The ride was designed by Arrow Dynamics; this is the ride that would ultimately seal the fate for the company, as just before X opened they filed for bankruptcy. Arrow grossly underestimated how much this ride would cost to produce, and they didn't have it in them.

Before we get too deep into look at X2, let's look at just a couple of basic ride stats. The height of the coaster is 175 feet at its tallest point and the drop is 215 feet, which makes this a true hypercoaster. The top speed is 76MPH, it flies through certain parts of the track. It has two inversions, and that doesn't count the inversions your individual seat could actually complete throughout the course of the ride.

The cost to build this was \$45 million at the time which, adjusted for inflation is \$72 million in today's money. That is a ton of money! However, you kind of expect to be spending a lot of money more for a one-of-a-kind prototype coaster.

We've talked about this a lot in this podcast but sometimes you run the risk that when you put in a brand new coaster that's never been built before it comes with its own set of challenges, and X2 was no different. When a prototype coaster opens for the first time, the expectation is that there will probably be some bugs and some kinks to work out. However, the draw of a brand new coaster to guests far outweighs what most companies would say are the little glitches that need to be adjusted when a ride first opens.

It's safe to say in hindsight, though, that Arrow was out of money and manpower to really make this ride soar across the finish line. Lots of issues popped up soon after the ride started to operate. The biggest issue for X2 started about six months after the ride opened, it had to be completely shut down again for repairs to the train cars. Once people actually started riding this on a daily basis, the original seats were not at a quality where Six Flags needed them to be.

They were not always rotating smoothly the full 360 degrees around, they were getting stuck and jammed, and it led to a lot of downtime. The ride was closed for about two months in 2002 so that modifications could be made to help reduce or eliminate the down time.

There were some other issues too. Being a prototype, Arrow did not realize (or they failed to account for) how much stress the heavy train cars would put on the ride supports. All the tumbling and rolling that riders did added more stress to the coaster itself.

In the end, what Six Flags decided to do was shut down X2 completely in 2007 for a total retheme. The track was painted over and in my opinion it was a big upgrade because the original colors were pink and yellow, and while I'm not huge in the colors - I kind of don't care what color you paint a roller coaster it still rides the same way - but the pink yellow combo was very early 2000s and it was better when it was gone in my opinion.

They also put on new lighter weight cars that were upgraded to not jam as much and new audio features were added to certain sections of the track. The ride was also given a new name - X2 - and opened to riders again in mid-2008.

Now overall X2 is a revolutionary coaster for what it brought to the coaster world and that should never be overlooked. This is the first time that riders were able to experience a different and unique ride every time they rode it, including from the person sitting next to them. However, a lot who ride it will tell you that while X2 is fine, there's nothing wrong with it necessarily, but it really fails to meet the expectation and the hype that were originally set for it. I mean, there's a reason why only two other 4th dimension coasters have been built since the debut of X2. They're not everyone's cup of tea and they are a lot more work to manufacture and the specialty trains can lead to higher amounts of down times. In short, there's just that many more moving pieces, which gives the ride that many more chances to break down.

It's also the ride that was supposed to save Arrow's business and instead it completely bankrupted them. Arrow's problems were much deeper than just this one failed coaster - they had been having problems for years, even decades some would argue, but the size of this project was the final nail in the coffin for a company that was once seen as the front-runner of the coaster revolution throughout North America.

X2 is a unique ride that is worth riding simply to experience and appreciate the innovative design, and we're happy to see that it has remained for 20 years at Six Flags Magic Mountain. Despite all the issues the ride has gone through, we're hoping that it will continue to live on even though at times it can be a bit finicky.

[Ad Break]

Lizzie: Ok everyone, welcome back from the short break and let's get into the heart of this episode. Now, if you're one of those people that always looks at episode titles before you click on the episode you might have noticed that our title this week was a little different than most

weeks. You see, other than talking about X2 before the break, we're not actually going to be talking about a specific roller coaster this week. Normally at this point in the show we dig into the main roller coaster of the episode and talk about the nerdy, historical things about it that we all love. This episode, though, I want to walk you through season 3 and all the changes that will be coming for season 3.

I - well we - had big plans for season 3 when we signed off on season 2 last October. Lots of ideas for new items, new coasters, new parts of our show. We also had a strong desire to just improve the overall audio quality, editing, eggcetera for each episode. We were really flying high with all of these dreams and ambitions for when we came back. But then, as you know it always does when you least expect it, life happened.

I've been dealing with some health issues for the past few months and while I'm over the worst of it, it has behind on this podcast. It has put us behind on just about every aspect of our lives, but for you as a listener, it's put us behind on this podcast. I had to take some time off from most of my life and getting back into the swing of things has just proven to be more difficult than I originally expected. Obviously, on the list of things in life, podcasting kind of felt in the bottom of that list.

Now, we thought about taking a big pause on the podcast, figured we could maybe try again in 2023 when things were just in a better place for us. I also questioned whether we should even keep going with the show. We do have listeners, don't get me wrong, but trust me when I say that there's nowhere near enough listeners to make any sort of money off of this. We do it because we like to, and because we have fun, and for no other reason. This is just a giant pet projects that you get to share with us. Some people like to crochet, some people like to cook, we like to make podcasts. We're just lucky that we get to share it with you!

We decided to keep going, though, because we realized that at the end of the day that's exactly why we wanted to keep going - we are coaster nerds who just really like talking about roller coasters. It makes us happy to dig into different rides and research them, hopefully ride them, and really prepare an episode to talk about. And then to get to talk about it for a half-hour every week with everyone, it's one of our favorite parts of our weeks, our months, our season, whatever part of life we're in, it is something that we really look forward to.

However, season 3 is going to be a little different from past seasons as we get back into life again. First, we cut our episode count from 8 to 6. Eight just seemed a little ambitious for where we currently are. We'd like to promise a few bonus episodes this year, because personally bonus episodes are some of my favorite episodes to do. I get to kind of just mess around and talk about all kinds of things that maybe aren't always related to historical coasters and it's been a ton of fun every time we've put out a bonus episode. That being said, I can't promise a bonus episode but that's my hope. My hope is a bonus or two, but let's see where life takes us before we commit to that.

The other big change for season 3 is that episodes are probably not going to be released weekly. We're hoping for a biweekly release schedule, but that's a bit loose right now too. Basically, whenever we get the episodes edited, they'll publish.

Finally the biggest change for the season is that this is probably going to be our only season for 2022. We want to give you the best episodes possible and not slap everything together haphazardly and not commit to giving you quality podcast listening. So a small season for this year will let us not only deliver good episodes, but also set us up to continue with more episodes in the future. That way we still get to talk to you, we still get to engage in the coaster world, but we do it in a way where we're not stressing about it and it doesn't feel like our lives are just completely overwhelmed trying to make and edit and release a podcast without any extra time added to our days.

So that should be it. If you're listening to this podcast in the future and all of the episodes are released, then you really don't have anything different from what you've already been listening to: all the episodes should be there and you can just click play and keep going through them with no stoppage in time. But if you're one of our listeners who listens every week as a new episode drops, we just ask that you be a little more patient with us this year. We are still determined to get you some great episodes to listen to, but it's just going to probably take us a little longer because we're just trying to catch up on our lives, me especially. I'm just trying to get back in the swing of everything and catch up on all of the things that I put off for a little while. Life is busy outside of the podcasting world for me, and it probably was smart to reduce the episode count for this season. It probably would have been smarter to just put a pin in it, but I didn't want to because I really like talking to you guys, I really like during the research for all of these episodes, and I really just like being in that coaster universe. This is something that I personally look forward to, so we're going to push on even if maybe it's not the smartest decision. Honestly, when do we ever do things that we're supposed to do? Never. We do things because we want to do them, and I want to do this podcast so we're going to do it.

Before we start to wrap everything up for this episode I just wanted to offer a huge thank you to all your support over the past 18 months with this podcast. I started this podcast in the middle of a pandemic because I really didn't know what else to do with my life. I was bored, we couldn't leave the house, and I really was missing amusement parks. I remember when the pandemic first started, when everyone was inside, the world was shut down, there were no cars on the highway, I would drive past my local amusement park (and for me my local amusement park is Kennywood in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) and I would drive by and look at all the rides. I mean, there was no one there - the gates weren't open, there were no cars in the parking lot, I doubt there was even more than a handful of essential employees there, and yet I would just drive by it and look at all the coasters and be like, one day I will get back.

I think I was missing my normal life when I started talking about this podcast. In one sense that's why I created this podcast, I just wanted to talk again to people about roller coasters and the thrills we have. Then I realize that nobody ever seems to talk about the older coasters - everyone's always excited about the new ones, the newest ride opening up. I get it, I mean the

new rides that are opening up this year alone that we talked about in the beginning of the episode are mind blowing with all of the tricks and thrills and new innovations that they bring to the coaster world. But I have such a soft spot for those old rickety ones, and I just thought it's high time we give some praise to those older rides.

Thank you for listening. Thank you for coming along with me even as we've gone on a little bit of an extended hiatus that wasn't planned. Our listening numbers are small, they're not huge. We are never going to get a ton of ad support - you are probably never going to hear a hellofresh ad on this podcast because hellofresh doesn't even know we exist. But even though our numbers are small, they're consistent. Week-over-week we get the same numbers listening to this podcast, meaning that you keep coming back for more once you start to listen, and that means the world to us, it means the world to me. I sit here and I talk into a microphone and sometimes I wonder does anyone actually hear me and the answer is yes, most definitely you are out there with me and you hear me.

So thank you so much for listening, and I hope that season 3 can be just as exciting as the first two seasons for you, if not more so. We will be back soon with a new episode and it will be a great episode to jump back into season 3 with. We are recording it today, actually, we usually record a bulk of episodes together to give us some time to edit and I am super excited to dive back into the coaster world. We have a few fun things lined up for this season and I can't wait to share them with you. Until then, I'm Lizzie, stay safe, be well, and I will talk to you real soon. Bye!