

**[00:00:00.810] - Nathan**

Hello and welcome to another episode of Nonsense and Noise, a podcast about the queer person of color, pop culture, and media experience. I am your host, Nathan Kato, and it is a lovely Sunday afternoon/evening. We're recording today on March the 19th, and you'll see that I am alone again today. Just just another solo episode. So, yeah, just actually got back a little bit ago from the GAPIMNY Queer Asian workshop that was centering around consent.

**[00:00:38.660] - Nathan**

GAPIMNY stands for the Gay Asian Pacific Islander Men of New York, and it is a group that is trying to focus on addressing the needs of queer Asian men in New York City and trying to provide that community. So it's really cool to go to that workshop, especially given that I wrote an essay about sexual racism back in May of last year. So it was really cool to go to that and just sort of talk with other Asian men about their experiences. If you've been keeping up with the podcast and or my life, you know that I don't really have a ton of connections in the queer Asian community that are immediately accessible to me. I feel like a lot of my queer Asian friends are mostly women and are also mostly based on Twitter.

**[00:01:27.130] - Nathan**

So it was really cool to actually be in physical space with these people and talk about our experiences. We're talking a lot about just experiences with hooking up and sort of the gray area of consent when it comes to queer nightlife and how some clubs-- when you go into a club, let's say the response to someone really attractive like groping you or something is different than when it comes to someone who you don't find as attractive. And I know that I've seen thoughts about this from people that I follow on Twitter. It's not something that I'm necessarily thinking about all the time just because I don't feel like I'm in those spaces a lot. But yeah, it was really cool to talk about experiences with other folks in real life.

**[00:02:22.750] - Nathan**

And other than that, I've been just really busy with work, which is kind of what I say all the time, but I know these past two weeks have really slammed me with work. My company ended up going to the- not my company, but my group was in charge of leading an effort to go to talk to the FDA about one of the projects that I'm working on. And so I had to do a lot of work for that. And then after that meeting with the FDA, basically my project expanded in scope. So I've been just really busy with getting all of that stuff together and just making sure that it's all working.

**[00:03:10.670] - Nathan**

So yeah, I've been really busy with work and so as a result, just feeling not like I have enough bandwidth on the evenings, on weeknight evenings, or even during the weekends to get in and record. So that's why hopefully this episode makes it out before the end of the month. That's my goal, just because I'm trying to

keep this on a monthly cadence. But yeah, work has been keeping me pretty busy, for better, for worse. And then of course, I've been just doing my usual gaming.

**[00:03:45.010] - Nathan**

I have been playing mostly Octopath Two as well as some Overwatch and Valorant... Been playing Overwatch with friends. Valorant has mostly been a solo endeavor, but I've been trying to play that a little bit more just because I feel like the skills that you practice in Valorant tend to be more applicable in Overwatch than vice versa just because of how the game works. So yeah, I've been trying to play more Valorant. And also there's a new character out in Valorant and the way that Valorant works, you have to unlock characters as you go. You have to spend maybe probably a couple of hours or so to do that.

**[00:04:32.600] - Nathan**

So yeah, I put in some time to try and get the newest agent unlocked. His name is Gekko and he's got a ton of little friends. And actually Valorant has done pretty well in terms of the person of color representation on their roster. It's pulling from global like the quote unquote team pulls globally. So you've got JetT from South Korea, Phoenix from the UK, Astra from Ghana, Sage is from China, Yoru is from Japan.

**[00:05:08.290] - Nathan**

Then you've got Brimstone and Viper from America. You have Raze from Brazil, Killjoy from Germany, et cetera, et cetera. So you can look up the roster if you want. It's like really global. And there's also explicit queer representation there as well.

**[00:05:22.300] - Nathan**

Killjoy and Raze are canonically a couple and I would really love if they confirmed that Phoenix and Yoru were a couple just because that's personally how I feel in the Retake cinematic. So if you're curious about that, I'll link that in the episode description so you guys can take a look and then tell me on Twitter or something if you guys think that Yoru and Phoenix are dating. Yeah, that's sort of how I am. So we'll just launch right into pop culture updates. So just because this is later in the month a lot of the games and the movies that I'm going to be talking about are going to be sort of like released already.

**[00:06:08.230] - Nathan**

There is one movie that I'll be talking about that theoretically had its premiere at Sundance, but that's obviously a very limited crowd. But yeah, we'll get into that later. So the three video games that are coming out in March that I am interested in or have my eyes on or are on my radar, the first one is Wo Long and that is- that came out on March 3 for PC, the Xbox series, as well as PS4 and 5. And it's a souls-like game from Koei Tecmo set during the Three Kingdoms period in China where you're fighting

not only people but also demons and like magical creatures and stuff. And this did pique my interest just because it looked really cool.

**[00:06:53.670] - Nathan**

I don't think I'm actually going to end up getting it at any point in the future just because if I see souls-like in the genre, that is kind of a turn off. Just because I don't necessarily want my games to be hard for the sake of being hard. Like, sure, I do like a challenge, but I also don't like to keep throwing myself against the wall. So, yeah, that's my thoughts on that. I mean, it does look really cool and I think this is sort of in line with what Koei Tecmo puts out from the Dynasty Warriors franchise, but you get to explore a little bit more instead of doing a Dynasty Warriors type game.

**[00:07:44.440] - Nathan**

So that's Wo Long coming out on March 3 on PC, Xbox, and PS4 and 5 in case you need spelling on that, that is W-O L-O-N-G. The next game is Fatal Frame Mask of the Lunar Eclipse, which came out on March 9 on Switch, PC, Xbox and then the PlayStation 4 and 5. And it is a survival horror game. This is I think it's supposed to be like the next entry in the series.

**[00:08:12.270] - Nathan**

But this game was based on the premise of, like, you're trying to solve a mystery and you can see ghosts and talk with them once you've taken pictures of them with a special camera. So I am interested in this just because it looks really interesting. And my only context with this franchise was really the Assist trophy from Super Smash Bros. So I don't know, I think it'd be cool. I'm certainly thinking about checking it out.

**[00:08:46.170] - Nathan**

But I also have like 9 million games that I need to play still, so who knows if I will ever get to it. That is Fatal Frame Mask of the Lunar Eclipse, which came out on March 9. And then the final game that I- was on my radar is Bayonetta Origins: Cereza and the Lost Demon, which came out on March 17 on the Switch. And this is an entry in the Bayonetta franchise, which is- this game is acting more as a prequel where you get to play as a young Cereza, who's the titular Bayonetta and solve puzzles and battle with your demon companion, whose name is Cheshire. So that is all the video games that are coming out this month.

**[00:09:28.390] - Nathan**

And then as far as movies of note for this month, the first one is Creed Three, which came out on March 3, and that stars Michael B. Jordan and Jonathan Majors. Just another entry in the Creed series from what I can remember from the commercials, basically someone who I guess particular Creed grew up with is turning against him and trying to belittle him or something like that. So they duke it out in the ring. And then the next movie-- there's not really too much more I have to say about thatthe-- next movie is a

Disney Plus only release. It's called Chang Can Dunk, and that came out on March 10. It's. Starring Bloom Lee as Chang, Ben Wong as his friend Bo.

**[00:10:21.930] - Nathan**

And then Zoe Renee as Kristi, who is a love interest for Chang. And then Marty Ma as Chen, who is Chang's mother. And the whole premise of this is like a little high school, high school coming of age/love story. Chang is a really big fan of basketball, and he ends up making a bet that he can make a slam dunk and impress his crush and take her to prom. The only thing is, Chang is only five foot eight, which coming from somebody who is shorter than five eight, I guess actually, no, I've I've met up with people who are five eight, and that is still, like, not it's not short, but it's also not tall.

**[00:11:05.530] - Nathan**

But yeah, anyways, that's Chang Can Dunk. But basically along the way of him trying to, I guess, make his goal, achieve his goal, he ends up learning more about his heritage as well as his mother. So that seems like it could be a really cool, interesting story. Maybe you'll check it out. But that is Chang Can Dunk coming out on March 10.

**[00:11:32.480] - Nathan**

Chang is spelled C-H-A-N-G I'm pronouncing it the way it should be pronounced. And then the last movie, this is coming out further in the future, but this is called Past Lives, and I saw an ad for this on Instagram. It's an A24 movie, so think of Everything Everywhere All At Once in terms of just, like, the sort of studio quality. But it's called Past Lives, and it is getting a limited release on May 19. This is what I was talking about a little bit earlier where there was a Sundance premiere and there's a very limited audience at Sundance, but this is a romance story starring Greta Lee as the character Nora, and then Teo Yu as the character Hae Sung, and they both play childhood friends who are separated when Nora's family is forced to leave South Korea.

**[00:12:26.180] - Nathan**

Or I don't remember. I think actually it might be just Nora's family leaves South Korea and they're immigrants to the United States, but then they're reunited 20 years later. And Nora and Hae Sung were very close and deeply connected when they were kids. So this is basically just, like, rekindling of an old flame and just trying to figure out how to navigate this relationship now, 20 years later. It's important to note that Nora is like I think she's engaged to her fiancé or something at that point.

**[00:13:02.730] - Nathan**

So, yeah, it's just like, sort of exploring that relationship and how that sort of connection is, like, how to continue that 20 years later. So that is Past Lives once again coming out in May, May 19 with a limited

release. I saw the trailer on Instagram. I'll put a trailer link to the trailer in the episode notes as well, just so you guys can check it out. I know when I watch it, I'm probably going to just sob in the theater.

#### **[00:13:34.620] - Nathan**

It'll be great. So that's it on movies and that's it for the first segment of the show. So I'm going to take a quick break and then we'll be right back with main content.

#### **[00:13:45.190] - Nathan**

All right, and we are back from the break. So this week we're going to jump right in with another video game topic, but this time more of a, like, review and just impressions of a video game.

#### **[00:13:59.050] - Nathan**

And this is, I guess, somewhat timely since I just finished it and I was really excited for it. And you might be able to tell from the podcast title, but we'll be talking about Forspoken today and just sort of like going over my thoughts and feelings and impressions and how diversity and representation kind of plays a role in this game and everything. Or I guess in how it was perceived and received in the public and everything. So just to refresh people's memory, I think people were initially excited about Forspoken because it looked like a Western style RPG put out by Square Enix, which Square Enix is a Japanese publisher, and so they tend to put out Japanese RPGs over Western RPGs. So this was a huge shift in what Square Enix normally puts out.

#### **[00:14:54.990] - Nathan**

And this was partnered with Luminous Studios. And they overall did a pretty good job. They delivered on creating this really cool open world where you get to run around. And their guiding concept for movement and combat was that it should be fluid, it should be smooth, it should be really just easy to flow between. Things should be easy to traverse, the world should be easy to fight.

#### **[00:15:24.070] - Nathan**

And so I think on those particular things, they really delivered. But I know the thing that people were really harping on, and by people, I really just mean like, cis, het white gamers who were talking about it on Twitter, they were really harping on the dialogue and the characterization of Frey, the main character. And they were like, oh, the dialogue is bad. It's cringey. And I know several people who I follow who are non white gamers were like, okay, can you please define what you mean by cringey?

#### **[00:15:58.610] - Nathan**

And they were like, oh, the dialogue is immature. When some people were able to actually articulate what that actually meant to them, they mentioned the dialogue seems immature, seems really snarky, seems

really mouthy. And luckily somebody had the ability to say, actually, this is exactly the same as Deadpool. You would not complain about any other cis, het white man written this way who is appropriately snarky and mouthy and whatever. You guys would be all over this shit.

**[00:16:35.490] - Nathan**

So that's sort of the main critique that I saw, at least from white gamers. Now, the other critique which holds more water, is about the character Frey and how she was written. So before I get into that, just a quick overview of the game. This is high level synopsis, which I think there's only one spoiler that I will say I drop in this, which if you're playing the game and paying attention, I think once you hit halfway through the story, or really, actually, fairly early on into the story, like maybe chapter four or five, I think you can probably pick this up. But yeah, there's... Warnings, there are spoilers in this episode. So just high level synopsis. Frey Holland is an orphan who grew up in the foster system in New York City. She was found near the Holland Tunnel wrapped in a blanket that said Alfre. And so that's her name.

**[00:17:36.000] - Nathan**

And then her last name comes from the fact that she was found near the Holland Tunnel. The Holland Tunnel is actually a real life place in New York City. I actually happen to live near the Lincoln Tunnel, but there are a couple of tunnels that lead out from New York City and into New Jersey. The Holland Tunnel is further south on the island of Manhattan, connecting to New Jersey. So anyways, Frey was found near the Holland Tunnel, and then she's put into the foster system because she has no parents.

**[00:18:07.060] - Nathan**

And then after leaving foster care and graduating from high school, she runs into issues with the law, trying to make ends meet and trying to save up money to leave New York City. And so that's sort of like the first couple of chapters in the story dealing with, like, this is sort of the stage for what phrase life looks like in New York City. Just all of that. And then one night, as she's getting ready to leave Manhattan, she ends up finding a mysterious bracelet that transports her to the magical world of Athia. And the game goes into very classic hero's journey, and Frey really tends to stay on the beat of hero's call denied.

**[00:18:52.450] - Nathan**

I.E., Like I'm not the hero. I'm not the chosen one. I just want to be a regular person. I just want to live my life. And in this case, that denial looks just like, hey, I just want to go home.

**[00:19:08.050] - Nathan**

I don't want to be in this really chaotic place. I would just like to go home.

**[00:19:18.210] - Nathan**

In order for her to go home, she has to basically save Athia with her powers because there's something that only she can do in that world, essentially. So that's the high level synopsis. We'll start off with the bad part of the game, which is not really the dialogue that she has with the magical bracelet that she finds. It's more actually the fact that Frey sometimes feels like a caricature of Black people. And Frey is mixed Black, and it is sometimes very obvious that she was written by white people.

**[00:20:03.410] - Nathan**

I have in my notes here, just like Cyborg booyah energy. Like, if you guys remember Cyborg from Teen Titans and his catchphrase was booyah.

**[00:20:14.390] - Nathan**

Generally, Black folks in real life do not do that. It's very reductive and takes characters down to just a flat, one dimensional stereotype. Frey luckily, doesn't have a catchphrase per se, but she does maintain a sort of rough and tumble language as well as just like, using slang all the time instead of or not in a bad way as much as it's just weird. Like, she only calls shoes kicks and yeah, I don't know.

**[00:20:56.370] - Nathan**

The only reason why I bring this up is because I've seen complaints from Black gamers on Twitter who say, like, hey, this character is very clearly not written by a Black person and that is not doing her a service. Like, this character could be a lot richer if she was written by a Black person. And so with that, I agree. There are definitely some dialogue beats where it really shines through. Like, oh, this is just really like it just feels kind of silly and reductive.

**[00:21:31.850] - Nathan**

And I know that Frey is young, I think she's like 20 or 21 in this, but also at the same time, I don't know, having that level of stereotyped dialogue just doesn't feel good. So, yeah, I think that is an area of improvement for the game in terms of the writing. Additionally, I do think that Frey's characterization feels really inconsistent. As I mentioned before, Frey is an orphan. She has apparently no connections, no family, no extended family, no nothing in New York City on Earth.

**[00:22:15.850] - Nathan**

And so it is understandable that she comes to Athia and is just like, what's going on? This is crazy. I want to go home. I don't want to have any more part of this. But as the story progresses, and especially as she's exploring the world, there's never really any resistance, let's say, to her exploration and her sort of building a bond with the people that she meets and just like the world in general.

**[00:22:51.110] - Nathan**

So it's just really weird that over the course of the game, really up until a very critical story point, Frey sort of bounces back and forth between, oh, this is an interesting place, and I'm like having a decent time to like, I hate it here, I just want to go home and being selfish. I do understand that the character grew up in the foster system and I think that a lot of trauma happens in the foster system and some people can emerge from that and end up being very they're looking out for themselves. They are independent and they don't tend to like to rely on other people because trusting people has only gotten them in trouble or has exacerbated their problems. And I think Frey falls into that sort of characterization or like, that's the inspiration. It's just like, she's been burned so many times, it no longer behooves her to be nice to people.

**[00:23:56.490] - Nathan**

She can't see folks offering their help and support without an ulterior motive. And that comes from a very real place. And also, at the same time, I would imagine that someone who really genuinely has nothing to return to her only sort of anchor point in the human world is her cat. And one can say that that's enough. And also, on the other hand, over the course of her journey in Athia, she's connecting with people.

**[00:24:35.820] - Nathan**

She's connecting with one of her friends, one of the friend characters that she finds earlier on. She's got kind of a mentor of sorts. And just like pretty much every human character that she finds, she's connecting with on a certain level. And as I mentioned, her banter that she has with the magical bracelet Cuff over the course of her adventure sort of builds this impression that she's somewhat enjoying herself and that she's enjoying seeing the world and with a cautious optimism. And there is some warmth in her interactions with people.

**[00:25:22.470] - Nathan**

She is concerned with getting home, but also there are several beats where somebody is injured or somebody needs help and she's reluctant. But then for the most part, she'll go through with like, you know what, fuck it. I will help this person. And I think it's really great that the character gets to see that level of exploration and be able to say, like, oh, this didn't really work out too well in the human world, but like in Athia, maybe it's different. So she does that several times over the course of the story and it's enough to where you reach the climax.

**[00:26:03.100] - Nathan**

There's like a huge argument that she has and basically ends up storming off because she's just like, you guys were selfish. I knew this was the reason why you wanted me to save the world. I'm not going to do it. This is not my problem. Which the subject of the well, I guess here's a spoiler is like, she gets into an argument with one of her friends and it's over her friend's father's death.

**[00:26:33.310] - Nathan**



The father character was doing research on the magical portals that allowed Frey to travel into Athia. So as a result, she was really relying on him to be able to help her get home. And so I understand that the character needs a moment and a story beat to grieve the possibility or the death of the possibility of going home. And I think a Black writer would have grappled with that differently because what I put together and what I sort of pieced together is this is a very uniquely Black story in that similar to Black people being taken from Africa and spirited away to this new land where they are treated terribly. There are parallels to Frey's journey into Athia.

**[00:27:35.030] - Nathan**

She doesn't have any way of getting home, and that is a level of trauma and losing the possibility of going home and returning to life as she once knew it. I think that is-- Grieving that loss is a very valid story beat and I wish that that had been handled better. Like I said, there's that parallel and I think that Black folks would probably- or a Black writer would have probably honored that more than having... What happens is Frey is mourning the loss of that possibility and then her friend walks in on her saying that and is just like, my dad just died, can you have a heart? And then Frey ends up saying, oh, I knew that you had it out for me, and basically turns on her friend because they're both grieving the loss of somebody who is very important.

**[00:28:47.850] - Nathan**

For one of them, this character is important because it's her father. For the other character, it's important because this person represented her way home.

**[00:29:00.970] - Nathan**

I think I could understand more if the friction between those two pushing towards the next story beat played out differently. And I do think that a Black writer would have been able to do that a little bit better than the way it was. But yeah, that happens. And then Frey storms off and is really upset and whatever, and then she's still upset and then the next major story beat happens and then she sort of catapults back or you have this sort of period of really seeing for yourself what the truth behind the story is. And I think that part is really well done.

**[00:29:53.230] - Nathan**

And that story beat kept me like, really wanting to go and continue playing more and more. And then you end up at a choice, basically. You can either go back to New York City or you basically give up your possibility of returning home, or Frey gives up her possibility of returning home and saves Athia. And there's one choice that feels the most genuine or the most true to Frey's character, and that is saving Athia after everything. But it was just sort of weird how the story really wobbled back and forth between like, I hate it here, I love it here, I hate it here, I love it here.

**[00:30:42.830] - Nathan**

It wasn't ever really consistent. And maybe that's just because that was supposed to show that the character is really just indecisive on what she wants and she's still trying to grapple with her new surroundings and her powers and stuff. But also at the same time, I just sort of wish that the writing would show that better. Especially in this game, you are running around by yourself.

**[00:31:13.190] - Nathan**

There are no characters that join your party. It's just Frey running around by herself. And Cuff is the only person that really interacts with her, or person, quote unquote, that interacts with her on a regular basis. And so when she banters with Cuff, there's a lot of sort of warmth and sarcasm. And I never really got the feeling that she disliked it in Athia. At the beginning of the story that shines through a little bit more because there are a lot of beats of like, why are you so anxious to get back to New York? And it's like, oh, this world is absolutely crazy. It's bonkers, I can't do this, I need to go home. But then as the story progresses and she is continuing in her journey, that level of reluctance and desire to go home, those banter pieces end up dropping off a lot more. And granted, I did end up having banter turned down to the lowest setting because, oh, man, the banter between them is like annoying and constant.

**[00:32:20.690] - Nathan**

I will say that is a valid criticism that people had. I don't think it was even really articulated that well by folks online. But the back and forth between Cuff and Frey is a little insufferable. But that's not necessarily because of the content as much as just how often it happens. And I can understand if it was happening a lot and each line was different and new.

**[00:32:46.280] - Nathan**

But the thing is, as you're running around this huge open world, the banter does not really change. It's like the same recycled, like three to five lines or three to five exchanges between the two of them and it gets annoying really quick. So I turned my banter setting down to story beats only, and even then the banter was barely tolerable. But yeah, all that to say, consistency in writing just felt nonexistent. And there is that critical choice point in the story and it really only feels logical and true to Frey's character to make one choice.

**[00:33:34.450] - Nathan**

And I mean, the game also reflects that in terms of just like how the story plays out. I looked at spoilers or at the other route because I personally just did not feel like I wanted to, even for completionist sake, I was just like, that route just does not appeal to me. And it also just doesn't feel true to Frey's character, especially after everything that she learns during the whole quest for the truth and stuff. So I know that it was really just like what I thought of the entire time. When Frey is in that critical juncture, it's just like, what is driving her to go home?

**[00:34:21.570] - Nathan**

And I don't think that the writing really speaks to that at all because she genuinely has nothing at the end of her time on Earth, the place that she's living gets burned down. So she has literally no home. She only has a cat that she ended up leaving with another character in the story.

**[00:34:52.830] - Nathan**

She truly has nothing left on Earth. So on one hand, it's like, okay, I can understand wanting to go home because it's familiar and at least you know how the world works there. But as the story progresses, as I said, she is experiencing and expressing interest and excitement over the world. And so it just seems weird that she's like, jonesing so hard to go back to Earth.

**[00:35:25.270] - Nathan**

Especially it just feels weird that that choice is given after you're shown the truth of everything, which like I said, that's probably one of the better story beats. In terms of the banter and stuff that I mentioned earlier, it really is about the same level as if you are annoyed with this, then you probably are also annoyed by Deadpool and Marvel dialogue because it's the same level of comedic prowess in that it's not there. But of course the issue is with that reception is like the people who are saying that tend to be cis het white gamers and they would never apply that metric to Deadpool or the MCU. And so that's why people were really pushing back on like, hey, you wouldn't have this sort of criticism for these pieces of media because this is exactly the same sort of snark, this is the same sort of wit that powers Deadpool, that powers MCU, that powers all that dialogue.

**[00:36:35.650] - Nathan**

So it's just unfair for you to be applying your ruler so strictly to this one situation just because the lead is a Black woman versus the leads that are not Black women. So yes, that is sort of the wrapping up all the bad. In terms of the good. There was actually like a decent chunk of stuff that I really liked about this game. Sort of continuing on the vein of story, the story starts very slow. I will say there are twelve chapters in all and I would say the story doesn't really start picking up until like chapter seven.

**[00:37:11.450] - Nathan**

So it is unfortunate in that there's a long way to go through. I will say the game, it was never like I was itching to play it. It was more like, well, I spent the money on this and I'm having an okay time, so I'll keep going and I'm glad that I did because I made it to where the story picked up and actually was very compelling and really enjoyed it. This story really talks about themes of belonging, the impacts of hero worship, and then also the importance of community. Belonging and community I think are really important aspects because Frey is an orphan, she's been through the traumatizing event that is the foster

system in the United States and then she's also a mixed Black woman, so life has not been kind to her and so she's pretty much just standing on her own, flying solo.

**[00:38:17.870] - Nathan**

And so for her to be able to experience actual community and actual friends who support her, I think that was really encouraging to see in terms of just like, this is the difference that the impact that you can make and that connections with people are important. I will say that the downside of it is of course just like it is sort of the trope of the strong Black woman. She is an independent actor. There is no sort of support that she has.

**[00:38:57.850] - Nathan**

All of her powers are hers. Which is great. And also at the same time, it does play into that trope a little bit. And of course I'm not Black, so I'm not the final cultural arbiter on this. Would definitely love to talk about this game with Black game devs and Black gamers who have played this game just to get your input and your perspectives too, because I think that is incredibly valuable or more valuable to this conversation than mine is.

**[00:39:31.110] - Nathan**

So those are the really important themes that this game, the story really explores. Like I said, the story takes a while to pick up, but once it does, it's actually quite good. I think what had happened was there was one Thursday where I was like, oh, let me just play some Forspoken and happened to get into the really good story beats. And I happened to just beat the game that evening because just like, the story pulled me all the way through and I think that's a mark of good writing. It just sucks that it took like, I think probably about 25 hours to get there.

**[00:40:09.510] - Nathan**

25 hours is probably a little generous because I was running around doing all of the things like little mini side quests just because that is how I game, unfortunately. And it's a little bit unbearable to watch on stream. But yeah, it took a while for the story to become actually really cool and very compelling instead of just like it's whatever. And like I just said, this story is also positive representation for mixed Black folks. Even though the story itself is clumsy.

**[00:40:46.430] - Nathan**

A big reason why I wanted to start this podcast was because I was talking with a friend one time about mixed representation, just mixed in general representation in video games. And they were talking about their experiences and how I think it's in Dragon Age, there was one scene where there's a mixed character and the way that this mixed character referred to themselves and talked about their reception and how they were perceived, really threw my friend for a loop in terms of just like. This felt bad to hear.

We play video games to escape, to hear stories, to take a brief respite from our reality. Right? Especially RPGs.

**[00:41:40.360] - Nathan**

We're playing those to immerse ourselves in that world. And so then it becomes very jarring and very upsetting when we hear stories about us that take those really crummy pieces of real life and sort of jam them in there. And so this, at least from someone who is adjacent to that experience, obviously don't have that experience exactly. I technically am mixed, but between Taiwanese and Japanese, I am two different types of Asian. I am not two larger races like as mixed together.

**[00:42:23.680] - Nathan**

So adjacent to this experience in that my cultures of my heritage are not similar. But also there are, I guess, similarities. They're more akin to each other than someone who's mixed white and Black. So yeah, this was really good representation for showing mixed Black folks and Black folks that there's a space for them in the fantasy world, that they can be the heroes of a fantasy story. Granted, I think there could have been more important characters that were people of color.

**[00:43:07.100] - Nathan**

I think there are obviously other fantasy stories that do this representation much better. I'm thinking of the fantasy series Children of Blood and Bone, I think it is, and that is written by a Nigerian American author I believe? The series that I'm thinking of that does this better is Children of Blood and Bone by Tomi Adeyemi. And Tomi is a Nigerian American novelist. So obviously this is a Black created series and so obviously does representation for Black folks way better than any other media creation from anyone else, especially from compared to Forspoken, which was created pretty much by white people.

**[00:43:59.470] - Nathan**

So, yeah, it's obviously not the be all, end all in terms of representation and fantasy, but it certainly is a good part of it. I think overall, the potential for the material itself is quite good. Just sort of the execution which unsurprising that's generally how it is. The material is great, just how it was executed. Just kind of piss poor. So, yeah, in terms of some of the story beats that I know that I've heard from my friends who are mixed that they don't really enjoy. The really big part of this was Frey's mother in a flashback that you get to see during the major story beats. Like when you're discovering the truth of everything this character says explicitly, like, I wanted you and I had to sacrifice our relationship together and our time together because of this curse that was put on her by the main antagonist in the series or in the game. And there's also, I guess, interestingly enough, there's no discussion of race at all in the story, which say what you will, I think it would have been nice to at least have that acknowledgment because it becomes very immediately clear that Frey is mixed. Her mom is a white woman and then that just means that her dad had to be a Black man.

**[00:45:32.730] - Nathan**

So I think that's really important to just have that story beat of you were wanted. And I deeply am remorseful that we couldn't spend time together because of the story beats and stuff. But yeah, otherwise there's no real discussion of race in the game, which I think that the story would have been richer for it to explore some of those themes and how they intersect. Because on one hand, I'm firmly in the camp of like, we don't need racism in fantasy because fantasy is supposed to be exploring beyond the bounds of reality and so we don't need racism. And also at the same time, I think it would have been really interesting for Frey to come in because she's transported in from real life New York City into a magical world where I guess they don't care about race.

**[00:46:37.630] - Nathan**

And I think it would have been interesting for her to sort of work on that. Reconciliation of "this is a vital part of my identity and that basically impacted how I was treated when I was living in New York City and somehow it now is no longer a factor." I think that would have been cool to hear about. So those are the content parts that were good. And then switching over purely to gameplay. The gameplay itself was actually pretty fun.

**[00:47:16.890] - Nathan**

Once you get the ability to run around the map and start switching between your spell systems, the game and the combat is actually incredibly smooth, very enjoyable. Like I said, before the major story beats happened I was like, okay, the story isn't that compelling, but I am having a great time just running around, exploring the map and combat is incredibly fun. There are four main spell systems and once you get there, there are unique spells in each of those spell systems that allow you to switch between the magic very rapidly, which I felt was really fun. It really added another layer to combat that made things flow very smoothly.

**[00:48:10.590] - Nathan**

I did for a while switch manually between spell systems, which made combat very clunky and slow and not enjoyable. So once I started actually, I guess, playing the game the way that it was supposed to be played, it was a lot of fun.

**[00:48:29.490] - Nathan**

So that was a lot of fun to do and just felt good. Like I said, when I wasn't looking at points of interest on the map, I was actually running around and trying to find enemies just so I could play out the combat because it was fun. And each of the spells that you learn, there's what's called like a spellcraft system where you improve your spells. So that's what I'm doing now in the postgame is like running around, improving all the spells and doing some of the post game side quests and everything and yeah, just like

having full reign of the map and my abilities is really fun. It just makes exploration really fun and I think that is a big part of open world games is the exploration aspect.

#### **[00:49:15.570] - Nathan**

So I guess overall out of ten, I would rate this game a 7. If you were interested in this game and really wanted to play it, but you didn't get a chance to grab it on release or you didn't have the funds to get it on release, I would say wait until it goes on sale. It's a decent game, it is not a must play and I think that, like I just said, the gameplay is pretty great in terms of exploration and combat. I think it can really help to buoy your experience when you're slogging through those first chapters where the story beats are few and far between and the story feels stale. I think my overall impression and I think I might have mentioned this before is like, I'm not ever itching to play or like at least pre major story beats.

#### **[00:50:06.730] - Nathan**

I was never itching to play Forspoken. It was kind of like it's in my Steam library. It's a massive game, so I do want to finish it so I can get it off my computer, so I can go back to playing other things in my Steam library. I just sort of use it to pass time. And now, of course, now that I'm in the postgame and I know everything that happens, the postgame content is a lot less sort of pressing.

#### **[00:50:32.970] - Nathan**

But I'm still happy to fire up Forspoken, run around the world, fight some monsters, and just explore and have fun with those real smooth exploration mechanics as well as combat stuff. So, yeah, that's my review of Forspoken. Hope you guys gave you some things that gave you an honest review and material to think about for if you want to pick it up or not. I'm going to take a quick break and then we'll be back with closing out.

#### **[00:51:09.510] - Nathan**

All right, and we are back from the break. So as you may know, the last segment of the show is called What's Your Nonsense? This is where I talk about something that either I'm into that nobody else seems to be into or talking about, or something that just makes me happy. And let me tell you guys, I did think about this for a very long time because I just feel like things have been either just like average or less than average for the past few weeks or like the past month or so. So this kind of feels like it's scraping the bottom of the barrel.

#### **[00:51:46.620] - Nathan**

But I think actually I might end up doing an episode about this at some point. But my nonsense for this month is Shadow and Bone season two. Like I said, there's a lot that I can say about this particular topic and I'm probably going to have an episode about it. But overall, the series is fun. I read the books and this season I was really excited because they're getting into.

**[00:52:16.970] - Nathan**

So as you may know, Shadow and Bone covers not only the book itself and the book series Shadow and Bone, but there are more books set in the same universe called The Grisha Verse by Leigh Bardugo. Also, fun fact, Grisha is actually like the shortened nickname version of, I think, Grigory in Russian. And the Grisha are magic users. And so this would basically be the same as calling your magic users Greg, which I think is very funny. So Leigh Bardugo's World of Greg is what I call it, but it is commonly known as Leigh Bardugo's Grisha verse.

**[00:53:01.690] - Nathan**

But so anyways, the Shadow and Bone series, like the first season, covers the first book in the Shadow and Bone trilogy, as well as incorporating some of the characters from the there are a couple other companion series. One of them is called The Six of Crows and the other one is called oh boy, I don't remember what the other one is called, but basically there are two other duologies that are written in the same universe. And the cast of characters from Six of Crows I really like because they are doing heists all the time and I'm a huge sucker for heist movies and stuff. Season two has been really I mean, it's been fun to watch. So far I'm on episode six out of eight, so I'm almost done.

**[00:53:50.330] - Nathan**

But yeah, that's been enjoyable. So that is my nonsense. Plenty of actors of color in that series, but of course the main thing that I will be talking about when I eventually do my podcast episode on Shadow and Bone is their handling of people of color and how Leigh Bardugo handles her world building. It's very strange. So that is my nonsense.

**[00:54:15.810] - Nathan**

If you have made it this far and you enjoyed what you've heard, thank you so much for listening and please swing by my Patreon page. It's [patreon.com/nonsenseandnoisepod](https://patreon.com/nonsenseandnoisepod). This is a completely independent run operation. I do all the recording and the editing myself. There are a couple of different sponsorship tiers.

**[00:54:40.970] - Nathan**

Tier one, it gets you a shout out on the episode. Tier two gets you access to bonus episodes. I was going to try and do some bonus episodes this month. We'll see how that works out if I'm able to get this thing edited in time, then maybe I'll put out some bonus episodes where I talk about Octopath or something like that.

**[00:55:00.700] - Nathan**



Something that makes me happy, something that's sort of like frivolous that I can put behind the paywall. And then tier three gets you access to pitch topic ideas. And I have done a couple tier three ideas in the past, talking about the world of Avatar, The Last Airbender, as well as Boys Love. So you can swing by [Patreon.com/nonsenseandnoise](https://patreon.com/nonsenseandnoise)pod.

**[00:55:27.200] - Nathan**

Pick a tier that suits you the best and your support would be greatly appreciated. If you want more of me, you can find me on Twitch, Instagram, and Twitter at kahtonotkayto. That's K-A-H-T-O-N-O-T-K-A-Y-T-O. I'm most active on Twitter and then twitch. I've been trying to stream a little bit of my Octopath experience, but you can follow me on Twitter for notifications when I go live there.

**[00:55:55.040] - Nathan**

Instagram I just sort of have for the memes and stuff. So follow me there and yeah. Thanks for listening and hope to see you next time. Thanks. Bye.