

SHELTERWOOD EPISODE ONE — DIRECTOR'S COMMENTARY

STEPHEN

I'm Stephen Indrisano.

PHOENIX

And I'm Phoenix Crockett.

STEPHEN

And welcome, ladies and germs, to this, our first quote-unquote director's commentary episode. For those of you who have not been following (*chuckles*) specifically, my niche hobbyist work for the past five years—this has been a little throwback introduction because Phoenix, would you tell the good people why I'm talking to you today?

PHOENIX

Yeah. Who the hell am I? Why do I get the first episode?

STEPHEN

(overlapping with Phoenix)

Who is this motherfucker?

PHOENIX

Alright, let's roll it all the way back. Stephen and I were close friends in college. We maintained that close friendship after college, partly by doing a Stephen King fan club podcast for years called *The Stephen King Boo Club*. (*Stephen laughs*) From then on, we've been close artistic collaborators. I was there for the genesis of the idea for Shelterwood and also was kind of the primary sounding board for most of the writing process and the business building process. Um, I threw a few parties to help fund it up at the beginning, and since then I have heard the episodes before literally any of you listening. So that's why it's me.

STEPHEN

Every episode at the end, when I say, you know, special thanks to Cam Collins, who is Cam Collins of *Old Gods of Appalachia*, who just threw a clean thousand bucks at this project—God bless her—the other person I thank is Phoenix Crockett, who is here with us today, and the

Fellowship of the Breaking Dawn. And the reason that they get thanked is that during the crowdfund for this show, Phoenix set up a series of fundraising parties with some of his close friends. And collectively they raised more than \$1000 to get this show made, which is just an unbelievably generous thing to do and is the only reason why we could make the show, frankly. So thank you, Phoenix, for doing that. Before we dive in, I wanted to ask you a couple of questions off the cuff on what it was like seeing this go from, you know, a seed of an idea that came about, you know, during—to my recollection—like COVID, right? Deep COVID hours.

PHOENIX

Right, yeah.

STEPHEN

Into what is now a pretty successful show on a pretty major horror network. What was that like for you?

PHOENIX

Yeah, it's interesting because of course, I never had any doubts. I knew once you said it was happening that it was happening, right? You know, I got to see you start to formulate ideas about yourself as an artist, where you were like, I'm very interested in the Suburban Gothic. I had you walk me around the areas that were significant to you that inspired the show before the show happened, right? So I was like, okay, this is a very Stephen show. It's a very Stephen thing. And then what I watched you do was learn the process of making art that isn't personal.

STEPHEN

Yes. Yeah.

PHOENIX

Or that's personal, but it's meant for an audience to hear it on purpose, and then practice those skills.

STEPHEN

Which is different than when you're a theater major and you're making art for the the 12 members of the Vermont theater polycule all of whom are reading all the same books and listening to all the same music or whatever else, like this show was really the first time that I wrote something that was supposed to have some sort of broad appeal. And so it was, I think, essential to have someone in my life to kind of bridge that gap between what it is to be

someone writing at university in this very specific context to what it is to be writing something for a general audience. It's a very, very different thing.

PHOENIX

And you know, as you made that shift, there was this really really key moment in the process where I heard episode one, and what I heard happen was an important piece of the artistic process, which is when the art becomes its own thing.

STEPHEN

Yes.

PHOENIX

Because I knew your idea and I knew my ideas of what was going to happen, and I'd read the script several times, but once I *heard* it, I was like, this is actually—not that close to either of those ideas. This is its own separate thing.

STEPHEN

Yeah, very different.

PHOENIX

I thought that was really powerful. You know, as you know, I've been working on a piece for a long time that's very wacky in the background and it actually—the main thing I'm thinking about now as I do that is what is this thing going to be if it were ever to be at that point?

STEPHEN

Right, yeah.

PHOENIX

Where it's its own separate entity with its own personality, you know.

STEPHEN

Well, and that's why I wanted to do this kind of quote-unquote directors commentary. We will have the directors on for some of these episodes.

PHOENIX

Of course.

STEPHEN

But I think that it's really important to highlight how I am not a genius, you know, like this is not like this thing that was delivered, childlike from my brain directly onto, you know, your RSS feed. It took dozens of hands and hundreds of hours between dozens of people to get this thing done. Both, you know, people who are credited in the credits at the end of every episode, and also people who I've interacted with in my life, who've just taught me things. And Phoenix is, I think, a perfect guest for episode one because he fits both categories. This is someone who has seen me grow as a person, who has been a close personal friend for years, and also someone who helped me navigate what it was to go from someone who had made zero non-hobby shows to someone who had made one (*laughs*) produced thing. So in that spirit, here's how this is. Work Phoenix and I will be listening to this episode and in the spirit of like old director commentary tracks, we will be talking over top the episode which I will have edited in in post at any point, one or both of us can say, okay, wait, wait, wait, pause. The episode will pause. We'll talk about a detail, and then we'll get back into it. Phoenix, do you have any other thoughts before we dive in?

PHOENIX

I don't. I'm excited to do it. I'm excited to hear it for the first time, for the 10th time and yeah, let's let's. Let's get her going.

STEPHEN

Hell yeah, brother. Alright—three, two, one, go. (*clicks*)

*(Transcriber's note: for the following, the left column is the transcript of the commentary track, and the right is the episode being spoken over. I have tried my best to roughly line them up as they're heard, but it's not perfect. When the episode is not being actively commented on, the episode audio is louder, which I have indicated by putting the corresponding text in **bold**. Hopefully this is readable. Because of the nature of the columns, this transcript is best read on desktop)*

STEPHEN

Right off the bat. Sam Stark's voice is just exactly what I wanted Solomon to be like from the get go. I remember when I sent you their audition, you were like oh yeah, that's Solomon.

PHOENIX

And if you're thinking, "Phoenix Crockett, Solomon Crockett, is there a relationship there"? Yeah, guys, you—you put it together.

STEPHEN

Yeah.

STEPHEN

Yeah, maybe. More than any other part of this show, we touched this monologue over and over again. Because it just has to be *the* window dressing. It's—everything needs to flow from this.

PHOENIX

It's so Stephen Indrisano it hurts. *(Stephen laughs)*

STEPHEN

The irony of that line is that I grew up in a suburb with a ton of restaurants and stores and things to do.

STEPHEN

A fun fact about this monologue is that my directors, of course, knew the big twist at the end of the show. And I was getting the note continually anytime I was doing these narration

SOLOMON

Shelterwood contains mature themes and graphic content which may not be suitable for all audiences. For a full list of content warnings, please check our transcript in the episode description. Listener discretion is advised.

NICK (V.O.)

52% of all Americans live in neighborhoods they would describe as suburban. That's 180 million people living in intentionally developed communities across the United States.

But what is suburbia? Is it white picket fences in neat little rows, or long rolling acres for the kids and a dog? Colonials or McMansions?

Does a suburb need to have cul-de-sacs, or a neighborhood watch? When you think of suburbia, what do you picture? Because I can almost guarantee, it's not exactly what I picture.

The truth is, suburbia is defined not by any one aspect of its design, but by distance; by absence. Suburbia isn't rural, but it isn't urban either. It doesn't have manufacturing or an abundance of restaurants and stores. It isn't agricultural and lord knows there isn't a whole lot to do.

What suburbia is, is a borderland. It can only ever exist on the outskirts—the outskirts of cities, mostly, but also the outskirts of farming communities, manufacturing hubs, or tourism hotspots. This podcast is about one particular suburb. A suburb not on the border of any one city, job site, or transit hub, but rather one on the border of material reality itself. This is a story of disappearances, and homecomings. Loss and grief, family and belonging. And yes—fair warning

sections—that I needed to be more energetic, more almost manic. Because the emotional beat of the Nick who recorded this is, I mean, again, almost manic, right? Like—

PHOENIX

Right.

STEPHEN

You know, in denial about a lot of things, but also triumphant about a lot of things. So that note is through *all* of the narration.

PHOENIX

When I first heard this part, I was thinking about the walk you took me on in your neighborhood that one time for like two or three hours, and I'd never—I'd never been in suburbia that long in my life. That was the first time, you know, and so I've seen that on your street, and I've heard this and that's everything I know, so.

STEPHEN

(laughs) You can take my word for it. It's all exactly like Shelterwood. It's actually more or less nonfiction.

STEPHEN

I had so much trouble keeping track of timelines throughout this entire writing process, so you'll sometimes hear wiggle phrases like that—"over a decade ago." Well, how long exactly is that, Stephen?

to our more skeptical listeners—this is a story about the supernatural. I have seen and experienced things on this investigation which are—to vastly undersell it—impossible.

I've walked miles of roads in this other place. I've fought through verdant fields of cutting grass, guarding four-story brownstone mansions with drawn shades and silent gardens.

I've traced cul-de-sacs so massive that you can barely detect their sloping curve until you end up right where you began. **I've worn through the soles of my shoes on cobblestone laced with moss, on gravel strewn** with shells and bleached coral, on pavement as smooth as silk and twice as shiny. I've bled for this story—in fact, I've been sent to the hospital, and eagerly returned. I've been scarred, bloodied, battered, all in the service of finding someone.

Yes, **this is, sorry to say, a story about me. I know, ego-much, but it's just good ethics to note that up front. I've been searching through the byways and sidestreets of these impossible suburbs, investigating the disappearance of my sister, Saddle DeRoso. Her vanishing act, over a decade ago now, shocked the world, and it shattered my family.** It robbed me of a loved one. So I've been searching. As you'll see, it has been a harrowing ride, and as such this podcast will discuss dark themes **and may contain audio disturbing to some listeners. Discretion is advised.** **Welcome to Shelterwood.**

[Shelterwood intro theme plays.]

PHOENIX

What's the lead girl's name in *Limetown*?

STEPHEN

Oh God—Lia Haddock. That's very Lia Haddock.

PHOENIX

Yeah, Lia Haddock—that transition gave me Lia Haddock vibes.

STEPHEN

Yep, and *Limetown* was such a major inspiration for this piece. It was really the first show that I ever like, fell in love with in that way.

PHOENIX

And it's the center of audio fiction in our—

STEPHEN

Yeah, it's such a pillar.

PHOENIX

Yeah.

STEPHEN

I took that part probably 20 times.

PHOENIX

"Call me Ishmael."

STEPHEN

That is a real thing that people in DC, Maryland, and Virginia call it. We do call it "*the* DMV" like it's not a weird thing to call it.

NICK

My name is Nicholas DeRoso. I'm an actor by day, and a history podcaster by night. Acting leaves you with a lot of weird days off.

So, I would spend my free time in the most embarrassing way possible: traveling the DMV—that's D.C., Maryland, and Virginia, NOT the department of motor vehicles—going to sites of historical import, and generally geeking out about it. That show ended rather abruptly, however, **when I found... well, what I found. More on that in a bit. For the rest of you wondering where you've heard the name DeRoso before, it's probably this:**

[Newscast music starts abruptly.]

STEPHEN

This whole sequence was also aped *directly* from *Limetown*.

PHOENIX

Yep. Yep.

STEPHEN

Like the first time you heard this, I think you said "oh, like *Limetown*!"

PHOENIX

Yeah. Little known fact that—that woman's voice you're hearing right now—that's actually me. Yeah, so.

STEPHEN

That's not true—that's the wonderful Kendra Murray, who mostly does audiobooks, which makes her voice so perfect for that kind of newscaster role.

STEPHEN

That October note too is such a small detail, but it's designed there because if you listen to the final episode and then come back to this one, you'll realize that it's *that* degree of full circle.

PHOENIX

For the record, we're recording this like, days after the release of the final episode.

STEPHEN

Yeah, yeah.

STEPHEN

CASEY FRANKLIN

Good evening, my name is Casey Franklin, you're listening to Action Five News. Our top story tonight is a bizarre crime in Potomac, Maryland, involving the disappearance of a young girl, an internet chain-email, and a probable case of arson. All of that and more is coming up, right after the weather...

NICK

In 2008, my sister, sixteen-year-old Saddle Alexandra DeRosa

disappeared on a clear October night. Her disappearance was heralded by a catastrophic house fire, tendrils of black smoke billowing, unfurling, spilling into the afternoon light. By the time the authorities arrived, the only trace of her that remained was a cryptic note, placed in our mailbox, left, apparently, by Saddle herself.

These are the details which captivated the nation: a missing girl. The charred remains of a house. And an email, printed out, neatly folded, a final missive. We could start this story at any of these places, but I would like to begin with the note. Solomon, my best friend and co-producer, is going to read it now. It starts with the subject line, "URGENT: MISSING"

There was originally more to the note side plot. There was like, a whole portion about how the note was saved and all of that. And I think it might have been—it was either you, Phoenix, or Chris Rodriguez, who we'll have on later—who told me like, "pare that back. That's not important."

PHOENIX

That was Chris. I was paring back histories. He was paring back sidenotes.

STEPHEN

Yes, you were *essential* to the history.

STEPHEN

Such a clickbait thing to say.

STEPHEN

This is another one that had a *ton* of drafts.

STEPHEN

(*snickers*) I love Sam's reading of that line. It's just perfect.

PHOENIX

You'll be hearing a lot from them over the course of this show, so, consider this your introduction. You ready Sol?

SOLOMON

Yeah. **Here goes nothing. So, like Nick said, it's a printout of an email with the subject line "URGENT: MISSING", in all caps with a few question marks at the end for good measure. At the top is a note, that reads, "Police are looking for a missing person, and they need your help! She disappeared last week but first she wrote this in her diary."** and then there's this weird little poem, entitled "I'm Going Far Away." It's just two short stanzas. Here's how it goes:

**"I'm going far away today, to where there are no tears.
I'm going somewhere no one aches or hurts or frets or fears.
I'm headed to the Land of Dreams, where everybody smiles.
A land of hope and joy and love that stretches out for miles.**

**"I wish that you could see it there, that neighborhood sublime.
Beyond the iron gate and wall, between the slats of time.
I think that you would like it too! Why don't you try and see?
I'm going far away today and you should come with me."**

Then there's this creepy jpeg of a teenager smiling with her eyes blacked out. Her mouth has been digitally altered to reach up to her cheek bones. It's classic early creepypasta stuff, but... **it's unnerving all the same.** **At the bottom of the email, Saddle wrote,** "I'm sorry. I'll be better there." in black ball-point pen. The script is a little shaky.

Did you know Sam before this?

STEPHEN

No, and actually, let's pause for a second.

[The episode audio pauses.]

STEPHEN (*con't*)

So, Sam—I want to talk a little bit about the audition process for Solomon Crockett, because it was one of the more in-depth things we did. So we put out the casting call and we got hundreds of responses, which happens because there's a lot of really amazing people that want to be a part of as many projects as they can—myself included, I still audition for shows to this day—but when it came to Solomon Crockett, we knew that such an essential part of that role was chemistry—

PHOENIX

Yeah.

STEPHEN

—because there aren't actually that many scenes between Nick and Solomon.. There's a couple, but for the majority of the show, they're separate. They are in different planes of reality, so it had to hit. We had no room for a relationship between actors that didn't *immediately* feel comfortable and lived in, and Sam—we had three or four parts, three or four really excellent actors that had made it through, not only an initial call, but callbacks. And we had on for what's called a chemistry read, where you just pick a scene basically and see if it works between actors. And there was a kind of just human connection that you can't fake. The way that Sam goes about their acting and the way that I go about my acting just kind of slotted in really nicely.

PHOENIX

And you can hear that right up top, you know?

STEPHEN

Yes. Yeah, I mean it's—and some of that's the editing, but a lot of it is that there's an easy comfort there, which is just random happenstance, like you can't plan for that. You can't train

for that. So it's an odd kind of coincidence that they not only had this voice we were looking for, but the performance aspect, and the *chemistry*—later in this series I will be sitting down with Sam to do a whole one of these, because they also did do the dialogue cuts, which on a kind of metanarrative aspect is insane, because they played this character stitching the show together—and then they stitched the show together. And... that's just weird. Like that's a weird—I think it added a little spice that you can't really plan for.

PHOENIX

Yeah. And I mentioned earlier, you know, when you know an artist, you know where all their shit comes from. It makes it an interesting prospect. I mentioned earlier that in some ways Nick DeRoso having an analog to to work with in the real world named Solomon Crockett is very much like, coded in our relationship—

STEPHEN

Yes.

PHOENIX

—and there's more incidences of that, I mean Nick is the name of your brother, right? The show is kind of laced with these Stephen Indrisano lore pieces, like any good art is. And I remember hearing this first little bit and even the fact that, like, I get—not to make it all about myself or whatever—but even the fact that he has kind of a higher man's voice, right? And that kind of a lilt that takes a minute, right, like those kinds of things. It was like, ah God, when I heard that audition I'm like—that dude, that person—

STEPHEN

Ah, Jesus.

PHOENIX

—needs to be it. And they have been—they also helped with some of the editing and stuff too, right? Like, they made artistic decisions at times.

STEPHEN

Yes. Oh totally, yeah. No, absolutely. Because one of the things that a dialogue editor does is they do shot selection, right? So they say, okay, which of these performances really gets to the heart of it, and they did a ton of that throughout the show. That's a really, really major responsibility that they took on. They did an incredible job. There have been moments in this

show where I've felt—and this is so corny and so self important—but like, sometimes when you make art, you feel the universe kind of groundswell and point you in the right direction, and working with Sam has been one of those moments where I'm like, okay, here's someone who—because this character is an amalgamation of some of my closest friends and also like the people that keep me grounded, this character is an amalgamation of that: of the people that can tell me the truth when it is hard to hear, and the people that are there for me when I'm a hot mess. So it's—I think it's really a fraught role to cast for, and they took it and ran with it. So yeah, Sam, if you're listening to this—huge fuckin' shoutouts. Incredible work across the board.

PHOENIX

[indistinguishable] You killin' it. Alright, let's get back to this shit—three, two, one.

STEPHEN

All right, we're gonna—

[episode audio resumes]

PHOENIX

Yes, Stephen had no feelings about being away from his family out of state at college.

STEPHEN

That's true. Yeah. I didn't have—*(laughs)* Oh, okay, turpentine. I told Phoenix that this was the fire starter, and Phoenix gave me a laundry list of facts about how turpentine burns. I don't know why you knew that, Phoenix, but thank you because it gives it some authenticity.

PHOENIX

I've never set a fire in my life, Stephen.

STEPHEN

No, not one.

NICK

I was at college, out of state at the time, so I saw all this the same way everyone else did: through TV cameras and grainy early-2010s cell phone footage. The fire was very likely set by Sddie, unless there was someone else with her that night. The accelerant used to stoke the fire was turpentine, which we later learned she purchased in large quantities from a few different arts supply stores in the area. Because turpentine burns so black, the smoke could be seen for miles around.

SOLOMON

It's easy to understand why this story went viral. The fire was spectacular, of

PHOENIX

I'm saying that on camera to blast out to the world. Ever.

STEPHEN

Montage! Montaaaaage!

PHOENIX

The chain letter thing setting this in time, I think is really important.

STEPHEN

Yeah, I mean it is, it is kind of a period piece in a lot of ways.

PHOENIX

I think it expertly avoids anachronism, in a lot of ways.

STEPHEN

I appreciate that because I am prone to anachronism. I owe a lot of that to my editors and to my readers. I'm not a heavy researcher when I write, and so I'm really reliant on people being like, hey, that's really wrong.

STEPHEN

course, but what really set Nick's personal tragedy apart from the million other tragedies that occur every day **was that chain letter that Saddle left behind. That chain letter did what it was designed to do: it spread.**

[News intro music]

NEWSCASTER 2

Tonight, with another shocking development in the case of Saddle De Roso, a mysterious chain email, with the subject line, Urgent: missing...

NEWSCASTER 3

...and police remain baffled today over the chain-email, leaked to the press by an anonymous informant...

NEWSCASTER 4

...the email...

NEWSCASTER 5

...baffling email...

NEWSCASTER 6

...really highlights the dangers of cyber communications for today's youth. Back to you.

NICK

I've spent a lot of time thinking about that letter. Here was a **fake plea by the police, demanding action, demanding to be shared with others. And then when Saddle disappeared, it turned up in an actual investigation. That's compelling. It makes for good television. And at the time, it was horribly new. Like, people used to worry about will-o-whisps and Pied Pipers. In 2010, suddenly we had the technology for this. In time, chain emails gave way to new digital monsters—Slenderman, Momo, whatever comes next.** But I think what makes this lineage really scary—is that every now and then, one of those

It took a lot of restraint not to name drop Siren Head there, but Siren Head is, of course, intellectual property by Trevor Henderson, and I did not want to play into the public-ification of that creature design. That is Trevor Henderson's design and it is not my place to take it.

PHOENIX

Also, anachronism!

STEPHEN

Also anachronism, yeah.

PHOENIX

Seven years later than Slenderhead. Slender boy. Slender—*fuck!*

STEPHEN

The first time I heard this, I thought that Brad had pitched down Noire's voice here. Noire's voice is just this deep.

PHOENIX

It sounds like the narration on Kane Pixels's The Backrooms.

STEPHEN

It's perfect. I adore it.

monsters seems to reach out from fiction to grab someone. Sddie was taken on the national stage.

CASEY FRANKLIN

Moving on to the ongoing search for Sddie DeRoso, the sixteen year old girl from Bethesda, Maryland who allegedly burned her family home down before running away. **After repeated requests for an interview or comment, a spokesperson for the DeRoso family has finally come forward:**

SPOKESPERSON

Good afternoon and thank you for being here. The DeRoso Family asks for the nation's patience and grace during this tumultuous time. We have placed our faith in the police and we are sure that Sddie will come back home to us soon.

That is all we're prepared to say at this time. Thank you, and please, if you have any information, contact the Montgomery County Police Force.

[A brief clamor, which is quickly cut off.]

CASEY FRANKLIN

There have been, however, no new developments in the case for over two weeks and law enforcement is reportedly baffled by the disappearance. An anonymous source within the MCPD told Action Five, 'it's like she just vanished'. If you have any information about Sddie DeRoso, please call...

NICK

At the time, my parents chose to remain silent—a silence they have maintained in an attempt to avoid further attention. Unfortunately, that

PHOENIX

I thought—I thought that was you. *(Stephen laughs)* I was like, wait, were you saying something?

STEPHEN

That's really funny. Yeah, I've. I've spoken to my wife about this because she's heard—she's not a big horror person, but she's heard the first episode and it made her really unnerved because she was like, dude, I've heard you use that voice. Like, how am I supposed to feel about that? And I don't know. You know, that's acting.

PHOENIX

Unpopular opinion, I prefer my wife doesn't know what I'm doing in art. I feel like—I feel like she doesn't want to hear that shit.

STEPHEN

And that's her God-given right.

STEPHEN

Oh, a fun fact about this scene: Sam and I were both really sick, like, right before we recorded this. So you'll hear we're doing a lot of breathing, like through our mouths. There's a lot of, like, *(snorts)* in this scene, if you listen for it.

PHOENIX

Yeah, there it is.

decision has only helped fuel rumors and speculation about murder and conspiracy, child trafficking, ritual sacrifice, and about a million other proto-Pizzagate conspiracies which place Saddle's disappearance on our shoulders.

SOLOMON (V.O.)

What you're about to hear is an interview Nick and I put together well before the majority of his journey. We hope it clears the air a bit, and clarifies what Saddle's disappearance did to Nick and his family.

SOLOMON

Hey man, how are you feeling about this?

NICK

I'm okay. I'm a little nervous.

SOLOMON

You're going to be fine.

NICK

Yeah, thanks. This is just something I've been sitting on for so long, you know? Now that it's finally time to open up, I'm finding it... more vulnerable than I anticipated.

SOLOMON

Makes sense. You're in control here, though, okay? We can stop, edit stuff out—whatever you need.

NICK

Yeah. Oof, okay. Let's get going.

SOLOMON

STEPHEN

There it is. You'll hear it over and over. This is also a fun little tag to Solomon's role throughout the show, in—behind the scenes, right? "You know, we can stop, we can start, we can edit things out," that's what Solomon *does* in this season.

STEPHEN

I'm going to have to go on the record here—I have a pretty good relationship with my parents, so I actually did, like a lot of research into what family dynamics look like for families that are not like, quote-unquote, broken, but that really are not healthy. And so sometimes it's these small scenes that end up with a *lot* of research behind them and not with the bigger set pieces.

PHOENIX

Have your parents heard this?

STEPHEN

No, but I did have a conversation with them before it released to say, hey, there are some elements to this that are autobiographical, but I want to make it clear that like, the parents in this show are not you and actually, let's pause.

[Episode audio fades out.]

Cool. So just to start with, I happen to know the answer to this, because we're like, real life buds, but is it true that you've become estranged from your parents?

NICK

Unfortunately, yes.

SOLOMON

Gotcha. And when was the last time you saw them?

NICK

I guess it would be... six or seven years now? I know how that sounds, but it is for the best. The last time I saw them was like, Christmas 2016. Look, anyone who's got a separated or complicated family can tell you that the holidays can be really rough. For us, you know, after, uh, Mom and Dad had this way of... pushing me. Like, purposefully bringing up topics they knew that I had trouble with. A-and it was never presented as intentionally malicious, but... they knew what bothered me and I knew they knew what bothered me. And, I just, I don't do passive aggression, so, I tended to get... heated. We'd fight, and after a certain point I decided it was for the best to just avoid them all together.

SOLOMON

That sounds hard.

NICK

Yeah.

SOLOMON

What was the nature of those fights?

NICK

This and that. Some mundane stuff about whether I was dating, y'know, what my career was doing, but... it was always really about Saddie. So, hey think she died that night...

STEPHEN

So this is I think really interesting because I was on a road trip with my mom, and I kind of took this opportunity to say hey, you know, I'd like to talk to you about the show that's going to be releasing. Um, there are some obvious parallels that are really there to people that know me personally in terms of—not just like, names, right, like my brother's name is Nick, my name is Stephen, Saddle is like a rough genderbend of that. There are other elements of this show that are very me, and that was important to me. I think when you're writing horror, you need to kind of hew close to the things that have impacted you. But I wanted to make it really clear to my parents that like I am okay, (*laughs*) that I am not, you know—I don't feel that I have this damaged relationship with my family. A lot of this show was writing from a place of my own anxieties and fears of like, what if my life had been just a little different, and I had this conversation with her about—It's really weird to write a show that plays on dynamics that are similar but different when you also have written a show that is obsessed with doppelgangers and like people that are similar but different. And this felt like the time to mention, it is in this stuff around Nick's family because the show is a lot about my relationship to family and my relationship to grief and the fear of losing people.

PHOENIX

And Stephen's mom is a wonderful and balanced person who would not struggle to understand the difference between someone's life and—

STEPHEN

Well, she got me into horror. I mean, she gave me my first Stephen King novel. She is a very, like, literate person in that way of knowing about the writing process and knowing about creativity in that way, and so is my dad. And so I think that they have always been incredibly supportive of me, which is so—an unbelievable stroke of luck. And so I, you know, I wanted to go on the record and say, look, a lot of this is autobiographical, but I have been profoundly lucky to have parents that supported me through not only the writing of this, but also just like being a human being. There's resonances in the writing. I have fears about, what if my parents had not supported me through really difficult times, and this shows a little bit about that. It's about my fears and my persistent anxieties that if things had been a little different, I would be fundamentally not—not doing too good, my friends! And so I thought this was the right moment to bring that up.

PHOENIX

Shout out to Mama and Big Dog Indrisano. I call your dad Big Dog.

STEPHEN

That's what I call him every time I see him, I say what's up Big Dog. *(laughs)* Alright, let's resume in three, two, one—

PHOENIX

Oh my God, we're only 15 minutes into the show so far.

STEPHEN

(laughs) This is some quality content.

PHOENIX

I like your beer koozie.

STEPHEN

Yeah, yeah. For those who can't see because this is a podcast, I am drinking Lawson's Sip of Sunshine, typically only available in New England. I found it at a specialty beer store. I'm drinking it out of a "you'll float too" koozie. Stephen King reference.

PHOENIX

I am having a Heineken, which Stephen has never seen me drink.

STEPHEN

(laughs) It's not a director commentary track unless you get a little bit loose with it.

STEPHEN

That line reading was really fun because the conception behind it was that Nick has told this story like a million times. And so it's kind of—it's not a lie, but it is really rehearsed.

PHOENIX

Yeah, yeah.

STEPHEN

NICK

So, they think she died that night, and that I'm like, developmentally stunted or something because I don't buy it. I always thought she was still out there, somewhere, maybe under an assumed name or just so far away that no one put two and two together. My parents thought—think—that I'm delusional, which my father in particular is very vocal about, you know, once the arguments really get going. I think they gave up on finding her, which—in fairness, I am also very vocal about.

And the difference of opinion generally devolves into a shouting match between me and Dad, and it—I can just tell it really breaks mom's heart, so... yeah, I don't just keep in contact anymore.

SOLOMON

Why don't you tell me about Saddie? What was she like before she disappeared, before the cameras started rolling?

NICK

Sure. Yeah. Um, so Saddie was born when I was three, June 19th, 1994. She was actually born on my birthday, so we shared that. We were twins separated by a few years, or so—it's what we used to say. I never minded, because we were immediately very close. She was a—just a great kid. So funny, too. We were pretty much inseparable, even with the age gap. But um, she wasn't great with emotions—hers or others. I learned pretty early on how to handle myself around our parents and, you know, keep the peace, but... she needed me around to stay above water. We kept each other afloat, really. Oh, and she was an amazing musician. Like, pick up an instrument and learn to play it in an afternoon amazing.

In fact, this whole interview section is kind of about Nick going from the rehearsed to the raw, the real. And I think it's—it's a really solid introduction into Nick's character because he has so much artificiality to him. He's a performer, and he performs a lot in his even just day-to-day.

PHOENIX

(sarcastic) I don't know anybody like that.

STEPHEN

(also sarcastic) No, you've never met someone like that, which is also Solomon's dynamic in this, is stripping away the rehearsed stuff. Which has nothing to do with our friendship either.

PHOENIX

(even more sarcastic) Comes from nowhere.

STEPHEN

(you get it) Comes from nowhere. I came up with it straight off the dome! *(laughs)*

PHOENIX

We learned nothing about authenticity and our communication from our close friends when we're young. *(Stephen giggles)*

STEPHEN

I do think a big difference between me and Nick DeRoso is that Nick DeRoso does not have a sense of humor about the terrible things that have happened to him, and I think that that's what kills you in the end.

SOLOMON

Wow. Um, how was she before she disappeared?

NICK

I... I think she must have been really struggling, mentally. She was sixteen, at that point, which is just a hard age. I was nineteen. I had been struggling myself, with college. So I was up in Vermont, and she was down in Maryland, and we weren't talking very much because I was busy. Um, it was October-

Mom told me later that she had depression, that she had been sleeping like 14 hours a day and wasn't eating well. Why they hadn't told me before she disappeared I'll never understand, but that's just how our family is. Communication is either shouts or whispers. So I was at college, in my own world, and then she was gone.

SOLOMON

What was that night like for you?

NICK

(beat)

Well, it was late. I was up because I was supposed to be writing an essay but instead I was just kind of sitting there, you know.

SOLOMON

STEPHEN

That laughter was totally just from Sam. There's nothing about that in the script. That's just like, raw—

PHOENIX

Acting.

STEPHEN

—connection to the acting, yeah.

STEPHEN

That line, that "it's *gone*," that's a direct kind of homage to Knifepoint Horror. That's kind of my impression of Soren Narnia.

PHOENIX

Who we got to interview once on our former podcast.

STEPHEN

Yeah, on our show. He was actually instrumental in me continuing to write. After that interview, I sent him a short story I had written, and he gave me really positive feedback. So shout to Soren Narnia, not only a titan of the genre, but it's just a really nice guy.

STEPHEN

Based on a real roommate I had.

PHOENIX

I loved your high roommates.

STEPHEN

They were great guys! I'm glad I didn't have like, crises when they were my roommates.

(*chuckles*)

Yeah.

NICK

It was snowing these skinny little snowflakes, because it was already so cold out in October. And—my Dad called. Usually Mom called, so that was the first thing that was wrong. **And when I picked up, he was—he was in this panic. I'd never heard him like that before or since. He wasn't coherent, at least not to me. He said the house was gone, that it's all gone.** His voice had this awful, like, ragged quality to it? Like, he was just barely holding it together. So I hung up and called Saddle, and when she didn't answer, I just... I called Mom and asked if Saddle was okay, and she said—I'll never forget this—she said, we just don't know. Just like that. Nonchalant. We just don't know.

So it's at this point that I started to really panic. I hung up and I remember thinking that I just needed to get out, so I got up out of bed and I went out into the freezing cold air without a coat or anything, and I just let it sting for a bit. I don't know how long I was like that, but eventually my roommate got back from the library or whatever and brought me inside. He was a good dude, but he was high just all the time, and he really didn't know how to help.

Anyways, once I was a little more under control I called Mom again, **and she explained everything—that the house was on fire and it was bad, that Saddle had left some kind of weird note in the yard, that Dad was in shock.** And the next day you—er, Solomon, for those listening—gave me a ride to the airport and got me home.

SOLOMON

STEPHEN

There is actually a character later in this show who I named Lucas after an *excellent* friend and roommate of mine who helped me get into therapy for the first time. So shoutouts to Lucas.

PHOENIX

He's a G. He's studying wolves or birds or something now.

STEPHEN

Augh, what a cool guy.

PHOENIX

And handsome.

STEPHEN

I think this is the first time I really connected to the acting, was this rant.

Because you've heard me do that, laugh in terrible times.

PHOENIX

I've seen your—I've heard your voice crack like that when you were not doing good.

STEPHEN

Struggling. Mm-hmm.

STEPHEN

That repetition is not in the script either.

And what happened when you were back in Maryland?

NICK

The media machine started. It was just—hell. I've never felt so powerless in my life, not before and not since. **And these people would hound us, whenever we went out for groceries or just to get the morning paper, anything. We all agreed not to talk to any of the cameras, because we were in shock. My parents were sure that Saddle had died in the fire, but that doesn't make any sense, because she left a note, you know, a goddamn note that she was going somewhere! And there was no body anywhere. Not to be gruesome, but when someone burns to death, it leaves behind a body, a skeleton at least.** But Dad said it was a fucking suicide note, and Mom just went along with it. **And that's bullshit, it's just bullshit!** She wouldn't have done that, they didn't even know their own daughter well enough to know that she wouldn't, um—(*choked up*)—she wouldn't—

SOLOMON

Okay, hey, take some deep breaths.

NICK

I'm sorry. I'm sorry, it's just—I knew, I knew, I knew she was still out there. Someone like her doesn't just up and—do that—it doesn't make sense.

SOLOMON

Nick, are you sure you still want to go through with this?

NICK

(*sniffles*)

Yeah. Yes, yes. I have to, for her.

NICK (V.O.)

So, that's what the world knows. My sister, Saddle, disappeared at 16,

STEPHEN

Here's where you can hear that mania again, right?

PHOENIX

Mm-hmm.

STEPHEN

That uncomfortable positivity that really probably shouldn't be there. That was very intentionally directed.

STEPHEN

I sent our sound designer, Brad, a series of videos from this era of YouTube just to get this kind of recording quality just right.

PHOENIX

How old is she supposed to be in this?

STEPHEN

She's supposed to be 15 or 16. The actor who plays this, Alex, is like, a *Broadway* performer, so it took a lot of direction to get her a little bit pitchy. You can hear the talent coming through and the training coming through, but it took work to get her *backwards*.

STEPHEN

leaving behind a charred foundation, a grieving family, and a mystery.

It caught national attention, attracted internet sleuths, and as for me? Well, I kept searching, too, on my own.

SOLOMON (V.O.)

Before we make our way forward, we want to leave you with a memory, something to hang on to. Something to humanize this mythical Disappeared Girl.

As Nick mentioned, Saddie loved music. She had a YouTube channel, which is now unlisted thanks to a barrage of conspiracy theorists in the comments, where she would write and perform songs on piano and guitar. This was one of her first videos. We hope it makes her more real for you. More human.

SADDIE

(tinny)

Hey! Um, welcome to my channel. I uh—write songs. Anyways, um, here's one. Take two.

[Saddie starts playing some gentle acoustic guitar]

SADDIE

(sung)

Living alone in the world is a hard thing to do

Being with friends isn't easy when they don't really know you

When you're afraid and alone and upset

Brimming with rage, filled with regret

Remember this song, remember this song

Remember this song, remember this song

and sing:

I'm not alone!

I'm not alone!

Give me a call and I'll pick up the phone!

Another fun thing about this is that click track was not originally going to be in the show, but we thought it lent it kind of a degree of amateurishness that gave it that young, young, young feeling.

I'm not alone!

I'm not alone!

I've got a melody, a dumb little song

I'm not alone.

[Clears throat, spoken] **That's as far as I've gotten. It still needs like, another verse or two but it actually sounds like a song for once so... yeah! I hope you enjoyed it. Okay. Bye!**

SOLOMON

When we return, we return to Shelterwood. Stay with us.

PHOENIX

You know, I have a gift for you, Stephen that I'll send you after this, which is—

STEPHEN

What, a gift?

PHOENIX

It, it's virtual, it's a digital gift and what it is, is based on that video we just heard from Sadie.

It's a video of my brother and I at age 14 on YouTube singing "Good Riddance" by Green Day.

STEPHEN

Fuck off. That's amazing.

PHOENIX

It's still there. It's so good.

STEPHEN

It was such an era, such an era of time.

STEPHEN

I also named dropped Shelterwood. as much as I could in this first episode just for like, brand recognition purposes, I guess. It's also the name of a best selling novel that's completely separate from either of those things. So sometimes I think a word just wants to be in the zeitgeist, by any means possible.

SOLOMON

So far, we've told you one half of the story. Don't get me wrong, it's super important—to Nick, and to me. But we want to acknowledge that as a society—as a world—we've kind of buried the lede here. See, for as long as there have been people with homes and maps, there have been stories of places just beyond the borders. Call it Atlantis. Call it El Dorado. Call it what you will. In her note, Saddle called it the land of dreams. Nick, well... he would come to call it Shelterwood.

[A car door shuts, crickets are heard in the background.]

NICK *(Field)*

Okay, uh. Note to Soloman, this is the raw audio for episode ninety-one on Glen Echo park. All the Intro Voiceover stuff should already be uploaded. I'll send you some audio from the drive too, I know how you feel about capturing ambiance or whatever. **Uh, I think that's everything so, here we go!**

SOLOMON

When Nick and I used to make the other podcast—Midatlantic Hidden Histories—this is how we'd do it. Nick would take his mic with him somewhere and just kind of... ramble.

NICK *(Field)*

Hello, dear listener! I am in a parking lot—well kept up, there are some dogwood trees lining the lot that are in bloom, looks like maybe a community garden out by the exit as well, which is lovely, uhhhhhh...

SOLOMON

Normally I'd clean all this up in post, but for this, I think it's important that you hear everything.

NICK *(Field)*

PHOENIX

Glen Echo is so legit, if you get the chance.

STEPHEN

It's a beautiful park. It's really worth going to. And I've spent *days* of my life wandering around there.

STEPHEN

So much of this cadence is the cadence that I would use when we were doing the Stephen King podcast.

PHOENIX

Yep. If anyone keeps hearing us drop that and is going to go listen to it, you should do that, but um, you know—

STEPHEN

It's older. It's different.

PHOENIX

Start in the middle.

STEPHEN

Yeah.

PHOENIX

The first first four or five—nnnnn. Start in the middle.

STEPHEN

This sequence is one of the most directly inspired by Silent Hill. The description of the bridge in particular is nigh-Silent Hill fanfiction.

It does look like mine is the only car here, even though there are what—two dozen or so other spaces? I was definitely expecting some more, like, foot traffic or whatever on a day as nice as today because I have just arrived at the one and only Glen Echo Park, out here in the tiny suburb-within-a-suburb of Glen Echo, Maryland. Only, I must be at some sort of back entrance or something, because this is not what the internet told me Glen Echo Park would look like. Anyway, here we go.

[Footsteps as Nick starts walking around.]

NICK (con't)

Okay! So, first impressions—things are off to a rocky start as I appear to be at a side lot or something here in Glen Echo. According to my phone it is... 2:20 P.M. and there is seriously no one out here. I can hear birds chirping and kids playing... somewhere, off in the distance. There should be a little footpath here across a wooden bridge over to the park itself. But... the bridge I'm looking at... is a little worse for wear. It looks like an old train crossing, which would make sense because, you see, the park itself was a train stop on the way into D.C.

This bridge is black metal and has been covered over in... Well, to be honest, some pretty shoddy plywood. And across the bridge looks like, well, mostly woods. So I'm assuming this is a back-door kind of deal. I'm not sure why GPS brought me here, but what can you do, right? **Onwards and upwards!**

PHOENIX

The foot—the footstep sounds also have like, Silent Hill, just—

STEPHEN

Yeah. So that's because our sound designer, Brad, uses a MIDI program to do the sound footsteps. Which kind of gives it an almost video-gamey feel. It's really pretty convenient for the design, and if you're not actively listening for it, I think it's really effective.

STEPHEN

I love this sequence. This—every episode I had a moment where I just like, laughed and clapped and lost my mind. The crossing of the threshold was that for me this episode.

PHOENIX

I remember being in the Royall Tyler Theater on UVM campus and describing to Stephen how I—I was often feeling recently, at that time, like I was crossing beyond the veil, like I was going to another place separately from where we were, and I wanted him to believe me, that I was having a more or less supernatural experience or religious experience. You know, he let me—he gave me that for six to twelve months before pointing out like, "hey, yeah, you know, totally. Maybe you're disassociating from stress. So, you know, maybe."

STEPHEN

But, it's interesting because we've both had that dissociative experience. Like, we're both people that you know, however you

[The sounds of walking and ambient "park" sounds continue as Nick starts to speak in voiceover and creeping mystery background music starts to play.]

NICK (V.O.)

I believe that what I found that day was a kind of tear in the fabric of reality. A wormhole, of sorts. A portal. Across that bridge was not Glen Echo Park but another suburb, not on the outskirts of D.C., but on the outskirts of what is considered to be our material reality. What you're about to hear is the crossing of a threshold.

It feels every bit as surreal as it sounds. The first few steps are normal. Soles on, on wood. And then, there's a kind of membrane that you pass through. The air clings to your skin, like a spiderweb. It takes a few paces to push through. While you're in that moment—in the push—there is a bombardment of sensations. It feels like... falling. Like drowning. **Like the moment just before smoke turns to fire. There's a moment of intense head rush, and then the membrane breaks and you're through.**

[There's a loud snapping as he crosses over into the other world.]

NICK (Field)

Oh my God. What was that?

NICK (V.O.)

I remember the first time I opened my eyes underwater, when I was a kid. That feeling, of being somewhere alien, but also somewhere bright and clear and crisp—that's what it's like on the other side. Our world is beautiful, but it's also messy. It's beautiful in bare moments that you have to hold on to. This other place? It isn't like that. The world over there is painted in Technicolor. What looked like a thicket of underbrush from our side of the bridge is actually an Eden's bounty of flowering trees, singing birds, and high, green grass. The forest grows dense and dark, but there's a clear path laid down through it. That path—really, just a few steps of cobblestone—leads to the Shelterwood Gate.

want to label it, whether you want to be spiritual, or whether you want to be like hyper-scientific. This is that—that dissociation, that extreme sudden shift in cognitive experience. It's this.

PHOENIX

It's this. I mean essentially, right? It's this section, and this part of the theme of the piece.

STEPHEN

Yeah.

PHOENIX

You could say—fan theory, if we're doing themes and literary analysis, that Shelterwood is a long dissociative event by someone who had a tragedy come out and was very stressed by them.

STEPHEN

Yeah, yeah. I mean it's a show about tragedy and about capital-T Trauma—

PHOENIX

—about towers, about balloons, about everything.

STEPHEN

Everything! It's about everything, baby. Tell your parents about it.

PHOENIX

My mom has heard it, actually.

STEPHEN

Oh hell yeah.

STEPHEN

I wrote this inspired by Richard Scarry's illustrations—

NICK (*Field*)

Okay, uh—this definitely isn't Glen Echo Park. I've just come across a huge wrought iron gate, very ornate, black and, and woven. Overtop there's a sign, or a banner of sorts. It reads, Welcome to Shelterwood: Land of—Oh my God. Solomon? It reads: Welcome to Shelterwood: Land of Dreams.

[More creepy, mysterious music.]

SOLOMON

Beyond the gate was a development of sorts. Nick looked out through miles upon miles of Shelterwood circumscribed by the wall. **And what, exactly, is Shelterwood?**

NICK (*Field*)

Okay—I'm—I—I'm looking out. At a—like, a patchwork of neighborhoods. The view is at once neat and hectic, a storybook image of every kind of geography, every kind of neighborhood, every kind of home. There are trailer parks and Victorian mansions, apartment buildings and shotgun shacks, and castles and campers, and it—**it just goes**

PHOENIX

Oh?

STEPHEN

—which is very funny.

STEPHEN

(laughs) One of a very few pop culture references. This is also exactly what I would do if I was in like, an impossible situation, is I'd just call someone immediately. I'd be like, video call, get it on the record, what is happening.

STEPHEN

God bless Sam Stark for nailing "my dude" as like, not a weird thing to say.

on and on, contained by the wall. It's all one great, big, impossible suburb. *[Beat]* Hold on, I'm just gonna call you.

[Perspective shifts and we're now with SOLOMON. Their phone rings.]

NICK *(Phone)*

Heyyy buddy. Are you recording now?

SOLOMON

Yes, I'm recording! What's happening?? You crossed a bridge and now you're, what, in Narnia?

NICK *(Phone)*

I mean, kinda! I don't know, dude, it's—it's like I'm in some old movie from the 60s. Everything is kind of pastel and—very—colorful? Vi-vibrant, I guess. I know that doesn't make sense but it's **the only way I can think to describe what I'm seeing.**

SOLOMON

What about you? Are you okay?

NICK

Yeah! Yeah, I'm fine, I almost fainted coming across the bridge but now that I'm here I feel great.

SOLOMON

My dude. You are kind of freaking me out here.

NICK

I'm good, I'm good, I'm good, it's just... I really think this is the place, Sol. I mean, **we're close enough to home that she could have walked here that night.**

SOLOMON

Slow down. Who?

STEPHEN

The Dark Tower babeyyy. We were reading Stephen King's *The Dark Tower* series when I started working on this.

PHOENIX

Yeah. Yeah.

STEPHEN

The other thing the tower was inspired by is the tarot concept of the tower, of destruction.

PHOENIX

Yep, you'll notice some of the promotional materials look like tarot sometimes.

STEPHEN

Yes, that was very intentional. I want to someday do a Shelterwood tarot deck I think would be really fun, but I have not had the bandwidth yet. It will, I think, inevitably happen.

NICK

Saddie.

SOLOMON

Oh. *(beat)* **Oh.**

NICK

So, you know, if she made it across the bridge, she could be here. She could be here, which is why no one ever found her.

SOLOMON

Where is here exactly?

NICK

It's like—okay I'm on a hill, I think, because I'm looking out—or down maybe—on... houses. Houses and streets. Hundreds. No, thousands of them. And then—there's a tower of some sort in the middle. Way, way far off.

SOLOMON

What, so like a city?

NICK

No, it's more spread out than that. I think it's all one big neighborhood. It goes on for a long way. There's this big brick wall, closing it all in. And there's a big iron gate that I'm under and it it reads, "Welcome to Shelterwood, Land of Dreams".

SOLOMON

I still don't follow you.

NICK

(Mild exasperation)

I'm going far away today, to where there are no tears.

STEPHEN

This is another thing in the writing process that I had to hammer home, like, why Nick would immediately assume that this is where Saddy ended up. And it was like, draft after draft after draft of how can I make this clearer? How can I make this more direct?

PHOENIX

Right.

STEPHEN

I just love this character detail that Nick has fully memorized this poem. What a deeply, uh, unhealthy way of dealing with this. If you've undergone something traumatic, do not memorize every detail of it.

PHOENIX

I had a friend in high school who blew his knee out in a basketball game and I found him one time having watched the four or five second clip like, hundreds of times in a row.

STEPHEN

Oof, not great.

PHOENIX

Shout out Cole if you're out there.

STEPHEN

Yeah. That's the instinct, though, right? It's that picking at something until you can't.

I'm going somewhere no one aches or hurts or frets or fears.

I'm headed to the *Land of Dreams*, where everybody smiles.

A land of hope and joy and love that stretches out for miles.

SOLOMON

Nick—what?

NICK

It's the poem! From Saddy's fucking letter.

"I wish that you could see it there, that neighborhood sublime.

Beyond the *iron gate and wall*, between the slats of time.

I think that you would like it too! Why don't you try and see?

I'm going far away today and you should come with me."

SOLOMON

Jesus H. Christ.

NICK

I know! Just—here, I'm sending you a picture.

[Phone notification.]

SOLOMON

Oh my god. Where— what—

NICK

I don't know dude! Should I go down and check it out, or what?

SOLOMON

I—are you being serious right now?

NICK

Of course!

SOLOMON

I mean, how confident are you that you'll make it back?

NICK

I mean, look, I guess I don't know, but what if I leave and I can't find this place again? What if I drive away to get like, supplies or whatever and it goes back to being a regular bridge? **I couldn't live with that. I mean, I really don't think I could live with that.**

SOLOMON

Ohhh, okay. I get it, but—be careful. You don't have a phone charger on you, do you?

NICK

Just my little emergency battery pack.

STEPHEN

Oooh, okay, pause. The emergency battery pack is a retcon, because—

PHOENIX

I *knew* that.

STEPHEN

This—okay, originally—and we'll talk about this probably again when we get to the town hall basement—originally, the idea is that Nick can't call Solomon because his cell phone dies, which is why the call cuts off in the basement when he's like, "Solomon I'm going through crazy trauma right now," and Solomon's like, "don't," and he's like, "okay." But I didn't have a reason why he could then later call Solomon back because his battery should be dead. So I had to— literally during the recording session I was like, okay. How can he get battery back? What would make sense for a podcaster to have? And Sam did not need to record any new lines. I just took one line where I said, "my charger's in the car," and I replaced it with "just my little battery pack," and you can actually hear that the sound quality is a little bit different because I recorded it on a different day when my voice was more warmed up. And, I just—you can make as many drafts of your show as you want. You *will* somehow, no matter how many eyes see it, you will have some sort of weird plot hole that never occurred to you until you are sitting down to record it, and you will need to go back and rewrite something. And that is my example from this episode.

SOLOMON

You don't have a phone charger on you, do you?

NICK

Just my little emergency battery pack.

SOLOMON

Right. Of course. You call me back in an hour. If I don't hear from you, who can I call in your area to go try and find you?

NICK

My Mom, I guess. I don't know if she'd believe in any of this but my folks still live pretty close.

SOLOMON

Got it. Stay safe, Nick. You come back to us.

NICK

I will. Wish me luck.

STEPHEN

Deeply upsetting line knowing how it ends.

SOLOMON

Yeah man. **Good luck.**

NICK

Thanks.

SOLOMON

(exhales) **Okay. One hour.**

NICK (V.O.)

I descended into Shelterwood with a mix of fear and awe and... hope fermenting in my gut. I remember that my hands were shaking. Uncharted territories lay ahead as I walked down Main Street. And

PHOENIX

This is my favorite part.

STEPHEN

This is another sequence—yeah, I mean, this sequence I think is when it really kind of found its worldbuilding heart, is this—it's a universe that is designed for found footage and designed for almost anthology-style, "Here's a fucked up situation!"

PHOENIX

I also am such a slut for audio, uh, background stuff. I got distracted by Mount Mansfield in Vermont.

STEPHEN

Yes. By the waves.

STEPHEN

This section, too, was kind of a playground for me in terms of imagery and playing with describing unnerving things as a kind of hors d'oeuvre for the things you might imagine happening here. It's a combination of every shot and every horror movie of, you know, the plane going over the deep woods or whatever. It's Nick going through all of that within the suburbs.

just give you a taste of the world I discovered, here's a sampling of Shelterwood's many, many subdivisions.

NICK (*Field*)

Ookay here we go. Streets with names. I am at the corner of Main and Willow Street. Willow street goes off in either direction with neat rows of Cape Cod-style houses with scrubby grass in front. I can smell the beach (*chuckle*) and hear the ocean! God I want to check it out but... for now, I'm just going to try and see where Main Street leads.

SOLOMON

As Nick descended into the neighborhood, he tried to take note of the streets he passed. **Some were relatively normal.**

NICK (*Field*)

White Oak Street. Looks like a 50s sitcom. Even the cars are old. Palm View, huh? Feels like... New Mexico, maybe. Hot at this corner. Is that a mall? Oh man, I want to go check out the mall. God that's tempting. I'm gonna get my ear pierced outside of time and space. Ugh. Maybe later.

SOLOMON

Some were... less so.

[There is a desolate wind.]

NICK (*Field*)

Hey, wai—This is Vermont! How—where were the mountains hiding before? That's Manfield—that should have been visible blocks ago. Ugh—weird. Weird weird weird.

Coming up on a dirt road now. Street sign looks like driftwood. It just reads "no trespassing." Is that—Solomon, there's a—there's a bird. It's crucified out in the woods through there.

[Creepy distant loon call]

NICK

Oookay. Time to go

SOLOMON

The more Nick wandered, the stranger things became.

PHOENIX

Pause.

PHOENIX

Okay. Couple of things. Couple of things with the crucified loon. He says there's a crucified bird in front of a house.

STEPHEN

Mm-hmm.

PHOENIX

And then you hear a loon call, so it implies—

STEPHEN

Yep.

PHOENIX

—what that kind of fowl is. And there—I have no idea when that exact line was written, but I clocked it immediately. At the time that Steve was starting this, I was working on another script that I hope never sees the light of day. (*Stephen snickers*) But, the very central picture of, and central image of, that script and the thing that brought the whole story together was this crucified loon, right?

STEPHEN

Yep, Yep.

PHOENIX

And—

STEPHEN

Direct reference.

PHOENIX

Yeah. And so every, every time I hear it, I'm like, oh, wow, interesting. But, also too at, you know, from an imagery standpoint, what is this corrupt Christianity, right? And as you're expressing—

STEPHEN

Yes.

PHOENIX

—American Gothic, how do you settle into that in this space? And I really thought that was an artful little, "oh, here's a (*clicks*)—here's a something for you," you know?

STEPHEN

I do wish that I had more time in this season to explore religion because you can't really talk about the horror of American conformity without touching religion. There's a little bit of it in later episodes in terms of Nick's kind of religious framing for his trauma, but it's not really—like I would love to do an episode on like, a megachurch in Shelterwood, and I haven't figured out how to do that yet, but season two is being written, so who knows? Maybe we'll see it.

PHOENIX

I have the best idea. Oh man. Ask me later.

STEPHEN

Okay, don't sp—yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah. When we're not recording this.

PHOENIX

All right.

STEPHEN

Okay, three, two, one, go.

STEPHEN

The idea that time is loose in Shelterwood is a really convenient thing for me as a writer because I'm bad at chronology. So it's a little bit of an escape hatch. I do think, though, that it's true to the experience of remembering something terrible, because *my* memory is horrible, especially around periods where things are going really wrong.

PHOENIX

It also goes along with the whole, you know, central word of lost, you know?

STEPHEN

Yes. Yeah. Well, and the idea of Americana, right, this timeless, but still very stuck in time aesthetic.

PHOENIX

Mm-hmm.

NICK

So I'm not sure how long I've been walking for. Main Street has been pretty consistently paved, but I'm coming up a wide cross avenue with no street sign and it is... what is that, tile? There are no houses, either, actually. There's... nothing out here. Just fields and a road, if you can call it that. Looks like old broken pottery. Is that...? Solomon, way off in the distance, there's a—a figure running. Just, running. It's so flat on this street they must be miles out. I'm not sure if they're running towards or away from me. Um... I don't think I wanna find out.

NICK (*V.O.*)

Sometimes there were long stretches of blank road with only trim grass and high hedges. Sometimes the streets would crowd together like children telling secrets. Some streets would recur, maybe looping around to meet the road again and again. I'm not sure how long I walked, because time is kind of loose in Shelterwood—but one thing remained constant: the building at the end of Main Street.

NICK (*Field*)

Just passed Rockefeller Avenue, again. That must have been the third or fourth time. Same houses, I think. Uh, Colonials in neat rows with neat lawns. I can't see the next intersection yet, but—I can see something.

NICK (*V.O.*)

At the center of Shelterwood, there is a building unlike any I've ever seen. It's made of marble and granite and concrete and steel and about **a dozen other materials that I cannot readily identify. If I had to define its shape, I guess I'd have to call it a tower, although that implies order of some kind or other. Approaching the town hall was like watching the ground rush towards me in a nightmare about falling. It seemed to corkscrew up out of the ground, like it grew there. It's beautiful and**

PHOENIX

I'm from New England, so I genuinely can't relate to super ugly architecture, so I had to get into your head a little bit on this part and investigate like, what—what is this, you know?

STEPHEN

Yeah, I think that some of that is growing up near DC where there's a lot of kind of neoclassical influence, where it's like, this—we're not in Greece, why are we doing this? And I think that's true in a lot of small towns where there's kind of an architectural influence, but not in an exact replication of it. Anyway, architecture.

PHOENIX

"Childe Roland to the Dark Tower went." Yeah yeah, a little Browning reference! *(sings along to the instrumental theme music)*

STEPHEN

I love this theme. Ali Hylton did such a good job. I tried to write this theme myself, like, multiple times over and I couldn't quite get it right. I hired—

PHOENIX

I also tried to take a few swings at it. That was also not right.

STEPHEN

Yeah, we both really took a swing at it, like, as two musicians. And it's like Ali pulled it out of my heart.

PHOENIX

Yep.

STEPHEN

stately as a town hall should be, but it's also... disturbing. Like, viscerally disgusting to look at. The building bubbles out and curves in on itself and it cuts the skyline at odd angles, terminating in a capped dome with a strange, rusted weathervane, easily hundreds of feet tall. If ever there was an imposing building, it would be The Shelterwood Town Hall.

SOLOMON (V.O.)

Next time on Shelterwood:

[Outro music]

NICK

Solomon? What's **that old poem?** "**Childe Roland** to the Dark Tower came?"

STEPHEN

Shelterwood: A Suburban Gothic was written and produced by Stephen Indrisano and Indrisano Audio, LLC. This episode featured: Stephen Indrisano as Nicholas DeRoso

SAM

Sam Stark as Solomon Crockett.

KENDRA

Kendra Murray as Casey Franklin.

SARAH

Sarah Golding as Newscaster 2.

DONNA

Donna Xia as Newscaster 3.

VIRGINIA

Like, I don't know how they did it, but it's just the perfect podcast-y, investigative vibe. I adore it.

Virginia Spotts as Newscaster 4.

VARUN

Varun Sathi as Newscaster 5.

LAUREN

Lauren Kong as Newscaster 6.

NOIR

Noir Thornton as the DeRoso Family Spokesperson.

ALEX

Alexandra Rose DeAngelis as **Saddie DeRoso**.

SIVAN

Directed by Sivan Raz.

MADELEINE

And Madeleine Regina.

EMILY

Songwriting by Emily Branam.

ALI

Theme composition by Ali Hylton.

SAM

Dialogue editing by Sam Stark.

ROOK

Transcripts by Rook Mogavero.

BRAD

Sound design by Brad Colbrook. Additional music by Monument studios.

EMMA

Produced by Emma Puranen.

STEPHEN

Special thanks as well to our executive funding producers: Cam Collins and The Fellowship of the Breaking Dawn, a.k.a. The Vermont Party Association. Although some of the locations, people, and events in Shelterwood may seem real, worry not—this is a work of fiction. Thank you for listening. A Bloody FM Production!

STEPHEN

Ohhhh goodness, episode one. I have a lot of feelings. It's just amazing to think about, you know, it took—'cause to you, the listener, it's been under a year since episode one came out, but it took me, what, three, three-and-a-half, four years to go from first writing on the page to now. And that's not even counting like Draft zero, where this was almost an improvised podcast where I actually did wander around suburbia.

PHOENIX

Yeah, I've had three kids since you started—

STEPHEN

Yeah. Insane. *(both laugh)*

PHOENIX

—this. Yeah. And you know, I like that original idea, but I also, I recognized at the time like, something's brewing in that head of his. He's got something that needs to get out, you know. And it's not like you quit your day job and made a bunch of art like, you did nights and weekends to the point of insanity.

STEPHEN

Yes. Yeah. Truly, truly, I mean. My number one advice, having done this, is like, take *more* time. You know? I worked myself to the bone, especially during the crowdfund. Jesus Lord.

PHOENIX

Yeah, you were cracking.

STEPHEN

Yes. Yeah. It's interesting being a writer who writes horror and who writes about traumatic experiences, because when you have a really terrible experience, there's a *liiiiittle* part of your brain that's like, oooh, I can use this. And I think... episode one of this show is really interesting to me because it got so many drafts. It got so many layers of paint, but at the end of the day, I still listen to this and I'm like, "ooh, I could do it better.?" You know what I mean?

PHOENIX

Yeah.

STEPHEN

Like, when it's the *first* thing you've done in this way, there's always a part of you that's going to kind of itch to make it different. But I respect the sanctity of the first step of a journey, and I think that's what this episode is. I don't think this is a perfect episode one, but there's an exploration to it and an interest and a kind of mystery to it that I don't think you can get from a lot of polish. And I'm really grateful.

PHOENIX

You know, I think it's a lot better now that I've heard everything, because when I first heard it, it wasn't the first one produced. But when I first heard it, and then the first four or so, I was like, "okay okay, first episode nothing really happens, like we get the big crossing over of the veil. Where's the setup for episode two? Where's like, the big "huzzah" moment?" But that's actually not how this series is set up.

STEPHEN

Yes.

PHOENIX

Each act has three or four episodes.

STEPHEN

Yes.

PHOENIX

And settling into it, knowing like, "you what I'm going to do? I'm going to crack out this episode and a little bit of the next one. Like, I'm gonna do a little bit of it," I think is

the—personally it's the way that I enjoy listening to it most, I like listening to it in big healthy bites and chunks so that I hear that piece and I'm like, "Okay, okay. Give me some more." You know?

STEPHEN

Yeah. Well, and it was very intentionally written that way, every episode except may—well, no. This one ends on a cliffhanger too, cause you're like, "Wait, where is he now?" And that's kind of the hook for the whole show. This is the only episode that was released as part of a duo. Episodes one and two came out simultaneously because I listened to this, and I was like, *(sighs)*. I wouldn't wait two weeks for the next one. I would wait two weeks after one and two, but not after episode one.

PHOENIX

You told me about that decision when I basically had a message to you written to be like, you're gonna have to—you're gonna have to bundle those up.

STEPHEN

(laughs) Yeah. And I think that's okay. You know, I as much as I would love to be so skilled that I could bang out an incredible episode, one that everyone then immediately says, "I want 1000 more of these," like so many of my favorite things, it takes more than half an hour/40 minutes to get to the point where you're obsessed with it, and I'm okay with that. I'm comfortable with that. You know, this puts enough of the dominoes on the table that you can make an informed decision whether or not you want to continue. And I think that's healthy.

PHOENIX

Yeah, and think about other pieces of art that you were inspired by that do episode one really, really well, and then the wheels come off. *Black Tapes*, for example.

STEPHEN

Black Tapes, yeah.

PHOENIX

Whereas *Magnus Archives*, for example, hugely influential to you, eight or ten episodes in, you're still deciding if you like it. And then of course it becomes this much greater thing.

STEPHEN

Totally. Twin Peaks, same way, right?

PHOENIX

Twin Peaks, exactly like that.

STEPHEN

You need to get through like, a lot of episodes and then it's—something gets into you, and it compels you to keep going. So for me, I'm happy with how this is, even if there's a perfectionist part of me that's like, "We could have been more efficient." Well, who wants to be more efficient? Right. Let it be a little sprawling.

PHOENIX

There's a story to be told!

STEPHEN

Yes, yes, exactly. Phoenix, thank you so much for joining me. I really hope that people enjoyed this. The rest of this series will be releasing on our Patreon page for the duration of the Season Two writing process. If people are interested in keeping up with that writing process, I'll be talking about it on Patreon. There's a free membership level that will get all of the writing updates, as well as a newsletter that we will link to in the description of this director's commentary. I—it's been such an honor to make this and I—looking back on it, cannot overstate how much it's meant to me. So thank you for even listening to this at all. And Phoenix, thank you for joining me today. I—thank you for being my friend and for helping me through this artistic process.

PHOENIX

Love you, boy. Love this show, can't wait for more.

STEPHEN

I love you! Thank you for saying it. It's something that Phoenix Crockett can say, but Solomon Crockett cannot. And that's art, baby. *(laughs)*

PHOENIX

All right.

STEPHEN

Alright, bye everyone.