

Content warning: at 31.41-32.16, sexual assault is mentioned in reference to divine cruelty in Greek myth.

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TRANSCRIPT

(Fireplace crackling)

STEVE:

(In the voice of the Narrator)

Well, hey there, Family.

Bet you didn't expect to find me here now, did ya?

I want to invite you all in - have a seat now.

For those of you who might not know me, my name is Steve Shell, also known as the Narrator from Old Gods of Appalachia.

But I'm not here to talk about the Old Gods, I'm here to talk about gods like the Saint Electric, the Trawler-man, and all those that hang above and below in the world...

(Dramatically)

...of The Silt Verses.

(Normal voice)

Welcome to the Silt Verses Q&A!

As I said, my name is Steve Shell, and it is an honour and just a blessing to be here, to host this Q&A, doing a little retrospective on Season 1 of the Silt Verses.

I am joined by a good chunk of the Silt Verses family - some, if not all. And as I understand it, some folks will be chiming in here and there to answer some questions as they come, and if they're specifically addressed.

I'm going to let them go around the round-table and say their names and let you know who they are, if that's all right with them.

In the order in which you're called, disciples, if you would, please.

JON:

Hello, Steve! I'm Jon Ware, I'm the writer of The Silt Verses and the voice of David on I Am In Eskew.

MUNA:

I'm Muna! I'm the other half of Eskew Productions, and I work on the Silt Verses and Eskew with Jon.

MÉABH:

And I'm Méabh, and I'm the voice of Carpenter in The Silt Verses!

JON:

And like you mentioned, we have a couple of additional answers from B. Narr - who's not with us, who's at home in Oklahoma - and our audio editor, Sammy Holden.

So yeah, their answers will be dropped **seamlessly** in through the magic of audio editing.

STEVE:

Welcome, family, welcome one and all!

Now, I have to say, y'all, if you follow our show on social media, you know that we are big fans of The Silt Verses - we've been retweeting them, pushing them down your throats, slipping them through your mailboxes, hotel dresser drawers, anywhere we can put them for you to find.

This is one of my favourite podcasts of the past couple years, we overlap in completely beautiful ways and in ways that are completely distinct, and it makes me so happy that this show is out there.

Are y'all ready to answer some Qs and some As? And I encourage you to answer cryptically, and frustrate people with mysterious things.

All right. So our first question comes from Marcus.

*"It's an obligatory what-was-the-inspiration question, but...what **was** the inspiration? Were the Verses always mulling around in the back of your mind, or did you one day happen to look at the coffee-maker and think, 'Hmm, there could be a god for this, and all the corporate bureaucracy it represents'?"*

JON:

So the idea for The Silt Verses came shortly after we'd finished I Am In Eskew. Which was our last project, which was very much a surreal horror piece, where every episode (was different).

Kind of a Quantum Leap of horror! Every episode was a shifting scenario for the main character. And that's ideal in so many ways, because every episode you can come up with something different.

And I think we were a little bit scared that we wouldn't be able to come up with a story where you could have that same flexibility, and that same shifting narrative.

And we started thinking about gods, and how gods and deities could provide that. and then we were watching True Detective Season One, which is a really good show in many ways...but also infuriating in so many others.

The folk horror is there to provide some scary figurines, but there's no mythology there. It's cosmic horror, but it never bothers going into **why** it's cribbed from Robert E Chambers and The King In Yellow.

And I really hated that, and I loved the idea of doing something that starts from exactly the same place - but goes in completely the opposite direction.

Where it's two people gathered around a body examining it for clues, but they're not detectives, they're not there to solve a crime. They're there because actually, they are followers of...whatever deity. And then we would go into the mythology of it in a much more advanced way.

And it would be about the banality of folk horror. That this is a world where the Wicker Man logic really works - if you burn me to death in a Wicker Man, it really will make your harvest of apples grow better - and having that as the foundational logic for the entire universe.

MUNA:

Yeah, I remember us having that conversation about True Detective, actually, which in Season 1 has all this beautiful religious iconography, which really brings in a lot of the tension and the fear and the horror of that first season.

And towards the end, rather than it being part of the world in a meaningful way, it's actually just cast aside. Which as Jon has said, is really one of the more disappointing parts of Season 1. And working on The Silt Verses made us want to go for that absurdist take on, "What would reality be like if it had a religious filter over it?"

And the expansion of the world grew quite organically, touching every part of it. And I've got to say, the corporate elements are actually my favourite part of it!

STEVE:

True Detective Season 1 is something near and dear to our hearts as well. In terms of, uh...because there are antlers involved.

And Jon, I just want to, just to counter-point. I had the **opposite** reaction. By the time I realised we weren't going to get a supernatural ending, which I personally - I'm not saying 'yay, me', but I think I clocked onto it a lot faster than some folks did - I was frustrated with some people who were begging for the supernatural ending.

Because I'm just like...it can just be, I know a lot of people are tired of this, but it can just be that humanity is horrible.

JON:

I suppose for me it's not even the thematic element - which, as you say, it's perfectly acceptable to have it (the work) be about the horrors of human beings.

It's more about what Ursula K LeGuin used to speak about a great deal, which is where...more grounded, quote-unquote literary types like to play around in the shallows of genre, to make references to gothic horror or fantasy and science fiction, in a way that they feel enhances the cleverness of their work.

But nevertheless, when it comes to the idea of going full genre, really diving into the strangeness and absurdity and the high concept nature of horror...
...they tend to scoff at that.

And I think if you look at the showrunner's interviews around True Detective Season One, that again was something just really at the time got my back up.

Because you had this creator who was profiting, really, from the use of Chambers and Ligotti and all these references, but who nevertheless had a bit of a sneery attitude. That his show was **not** a horror show - okay? - It was a meaningful human drama.

That at the time, I think, got me angry enough to want to make a show.

MÉABH:

(Laughing)

I feel like you're spoiling this show for a lot of people! Because I, personally, haven't seen True Detective Season 1...

STEVE:

(As if delivering a commercial voice-over)

If you haven't watched True Detective Season 1, get on HBO Max or HBO Now or your VPN or whatever you need, and go watch it-

MÉABH:

(Sternly)

Hey! Hey, Steve, hey! Silt Verses time. It's Silt Verses time.

STEVE:

Ah, that's true. Very true.

But to tie back, I love the way you guys did this, dropping us in the middle of this world. It's actually one of my favourite...my favourite thing, being dropped into the middle of everything like,

"OK, what's this? There seems to be **this**. The radio station is **this**."

And it created this lived-in world, that I didn't have any choice but to swim through and wade through. And I love the richness of that experience, I love what you guys did there.

OK, cool!

Next question.

“With Carpenter and Faulkner, there’s really a fascinating dynamic. How did that come to be? From an idea, to the page, then to voice-acting, or did that change once the actors became familiar with the characters?”

So. Carpenter and Faulkner’s dynamic. Was that invented, Jon?

Did you invent that in writing? Did that camaraderie - camaraderie’s a strong word - that rapport, did that naturally develop as the actors got a hold of it?

JON:

I think it was a little bit of both. I think we started out with the idea of the odd-couple pairing, like the two detectives from True Detective Season 1, where they’re complete opposites and they’re an ill fit for each other.

And that very easily leant itself to the idea of someone who’s been in the faith for a long time and is getting very sick of it, and the young naive convert.

And I think once we began writing it, it became very clear that wasn’t enough - that if Faulkner is just innocent and naive that’s a little bit boring, because there’s nowhere for him to go.

So I think then it became the idea that he thinks he’s a master manipulator. That he comes across as innocent and naive, and he kind of is, but he’s also got it in his head that he’s outsmarting everyone.

And then obviously B. and Méabh came in, and they crushed it.

And that - it caused some things to change and it caused some things not to change, Carpenter was already pretty fully formed - but with Faulkner, I think, B. was so likeable that we had to bring him back from the edge a bit, make him less villainous.

People liked him too much for him to go full maniac.

STEVE:

(Shocked)

He drowned his brother.

JON:

(Cheerfully)

Yeah, but it was kind of an accident!

STEVE:
(Disagreeing noise)

MÉABH:
I suppose when you look at the moral baseline of the world in general...where is that on the scale, really?

STEVE:
Well, your granny did put you in the creek with bleeding ears and a burlap sack over your head, to *see if you would get eaten*.

MÉABH:
What's the standard, y'know?

STEVE:
With Faulkner, I loved it, because Faulkner has that zeal that - as someone who grew up in an evangelical, very born-again Christian household - that zeal of 'This was for me. This sacrifice was made for me. This light, this good news, it's all for me.'

And it takes a pure and naive heart, to some extent, for those seeds to take root.

And B. does that so well, in the telling of Faulkner killing his brother. It's like...I believe this, because I know this person. I know this person who's found the truth.

I grew up evangelical. I'm not any more. But the way I got people to stop wanting to strangle my family members, who were very pamphlet-evangelical, was... 'Imagine you thought you found the answer. Imagine you had the truth that fixed you. Wouldn't you want to make people accept that? Wouldn't you want to make people accept the good news?'

It's all there with Faulkner, though. Faulkner becomes the good news in so many good ways.

MÉABH:
Yeah, and I just want to say that I completely agree, that the plot twist in terms of the depth to Faulkner is one of the best - what is it, a bait and switch? A fishbait and switch? Ha ha ha - of the series.

And B. is so likeable, you know? A fantastic voice actor. The delivery is **so** well done that Faulkner absolutely becomes a likeable character, and it makes him more of an understandable character, I think.

And I think people hugely relate to him. Not relate! But they love him!
(Laughing)
It's great.

He's unhinged.

STEVE:

The journey from Faulkner, from, in my mind, cherubic and fresh-faced -
(Imitating Faulkner)

'How could you not have your faith, Sister?'

And by the end, he's painted in the symbols, wearing what looks like the robe, calling forth the
Wither Mark abomination...

It's just like...that's a journey! *How it started. How it's going.*

MÉABH:

This is it. And personally, for me, in terms of acting out Carpenter, it really brings depth to the
way I play off B.

Especially when we're having those very antagonistic conversations. Because in a way, it is like
kicking a puppy sometimes. She (Carpenter) is really taking bites out of Faulkner!

And it just brings so much depth to their interactions as well.

STEVE:

Indeed, indeed. It is believable, it is tangible, and jumping off that...Elowen asks:

*"I was hoping you might be able to talk a bit about what themes you like concerning religion, and
how that relates to what you've done in the Silt Verses."*

MUNA:

One of my favourite parts of The Silt Verses is - it actually talks about religion in a very honest
way, that in a way we rarely do if you are religious (and disclaimer, I am in my own way
religious).

But it's a very individual thing, isn't it, having faith? That these words you're throwing out into the
world, into the night, on a daily or weekly basis, will have some effect.

That there is someone, or something out there listening. Even though you never get an answer,
you never get a response. Unless you're looking for it, or you specifically tell yourself that "Event
X" or "Result Y" is an answer.

And I think that's the thing about The Silt Verses, it just brings that to life. You've got these two
individuals when it begins, seeking out this god that may or may not answer, they've clearly
been travelling for quite a while, and when the god does answer...it's incoherent, it doesn't make
sense, and it's never quite what they want or what they need.

And I think it's really honest, as I said, about religion in a way that I don't think many things are.

JON:

Yeah, I think what Muna said is completely accurate. I also think the show is - in some ways that are not going to become clear to listeners - just delving into my own personal baggage with religion, to faith and faithlessness.

I mention it in the lorebook that you can get on Patreon, I think, but in particular when I was 13, I had a real strange Faulkner moment.

It was really peculiar. I was at a sleepover with friends, and out of the blue one kid just decided that he was the Messiah and all of us were his disciples.

And everyone just...went along with it? A very peculiar collective delusion.

But the funniest thing, I think is - the sense of not just terror, but also relief, that comes when it seems like the skies have parted and suddenly there is order to the universe, and there are answers, and everything makes sense.

And when that dissipates, when you wake up the following morning and go, 'what were we all talking about'? That's a real loss. That's a sense of mourning.

Because everything is returned to chaos, and you wonder, 'How can I get back to the place where it all makes sense, as it did for me in those fleeting moments?'

STEVE:

I thought you were about to confess to drowning one of your best friends, and I was, ah, gonna stop this recording immediately-

(Laughter)

STEVE:

So I have - great answer, great answer - I have a question from Jax, for Méabh and B.

"How did you prepare for your roles as Carpenter and Faulkner? What do you hope for them in the future?"

MÉABH:

Honestly, one of the best things about playing Carpenter was that, as written, she is one of the most complex and deep characters I have ever had the pleasure of playing.

So I would say: did I have to do a lot of preparation for Carpenter? Not really, because she was all there on the page. It was just my job to bring her to life.

I suppose I thought about the person she was, and how that person would act on a day-to-day basis. And how they would interact with the people around them.

And honestly, that was 'incredibly wary and absolutely done with everyone.' So hopefully that comes across in how I play her!

But then again, you have these incredibly touching and vulnerable moments in her monologues, whereby she's talking about her own fears and her connection with her god. So what's incredibly lovely about playing Carpenter is you get this brilliant dichotomy between this character who is outwardly, externally very gruff. (Insulting, perhaps?) But you also get to play that inward vulnerability, and reveal that sense of self.

But again. It's all there on the page. Jon writes it! I just do it.

I will say that when I'm voicing Carpenter, I just have to sit there for a second. And I...

(Lowered voice)

...have to bring myself down.

(Excitable voice)

Because I'm up here!

(Lowered voice)

...but Carpenter is down here.

So I bring myself down. And then I think, 'I am very, very tired.'

And then...that is how I read my lines.

So that is basically how I do it!

B.:

So when we first got cast, we got these really cool character breakdowns, with our histories and fears and likes and dislikes and relationships.

And it was fantastic, because we only had the first two episodes in full, script-wise. And we had the synopses of the first six.

So having that character breakdown was a huge help with prep.

One part which I can still remember without even having to look at it is - 'he's a bit like Walter White in Breaking Bad.' That there's this distance between how he thinks he's coming off and how he's actually coming off.

I loved that note - that delighted me! Because I actually went and watched quite a bit of scenes from Breaking Bad Season One, and studied Bryan Cranston's kind of indignant, stumbling, weirdly self-assured intensity to help develop Faulkner's non-monologue delivery.

I also *think* I've said this before, but I'll say it again just in case I didn't - I found ways to justify everything Faulkner thinks and does.

There are parts of him I definitely resonate with, without having to justify anything - like growing up rural and isolated and desperate for meaning, and being willing to destroy yourself to find it.

Like, that's a place I understand, and that I can transpose onto him, but for some of the other parts...like, I swear, I've never drowned anyone! I tried to tap into emotional equivalence and transpose those.

Because even if Faulkner regrets something that he's done, he always feels his actions are right and justified and probably divinely ordained in the moment.

I think my only hope for Faulkner's future is that I get to see his journey to the natural conclusion...um, whatever that is!

And I have no idea what it'll be, but I'm excited to see it, and I hope that in doing so, this character can keep bringing people joy.

STEVE:

Many people ask this question!

'If you had to pick or invent a god to worship from the horrific and terrifying pantheons that exist within The Silt Verses, which would you choose or invent, and why?'

JON:

I mean...I wouldn't choose any of them, because they're all horrific.

If I had to *invent* one, there is one that I haven't used, because it was a really dumb joke, but we may yet fit it in in some way.

When we were coming up with gods, I loved the idea of an **inert** god.

So you've got these gods of the elements of, you know, fire and stone and water. So could you have a god of...just an inert gas?

It's just argon, it's purely experimental, but the whole point of it is that...it does nothing.

You pray to it, and...it just remains perfectly stable and affects nothing.

So I think that's probably the safest god that I could possibly be worshipping, so I pick that one.

MÉABH:

That is absolutely fascinating, it's really interesting! So the idea is if it does something, something explodes, or...?

JON:

Yeah. Just praying to it to remain exactly as it is, the entire time.

B.:

Uh, I /love this question, holy shit.

And it's also super hard to answer, because there's a lot of gods in The Silt Verses, and there's a lot we're probably never even going to meet but...

I'd probably go seek out one of the wild gods, like, one of the stray gods. I find that concept really powerful.

And I know this is gonna sound super contradictory to everything I do, because I'm a voice actor and I also never shut up, but I think I'd try to find a god of empty places. Places that **should** rightfully have people, but don't.

(Not a god of abandoned places, because the Cairn Maiden has that covered, she's got that. I mean, I was actually kind of tempted to pick her when I was thinking about this, but...)

I'm thinking more of a focus on the stillness, rather than the inevitable decay of all things - even though that is a choice, I do love that.

But I'm more thinking like the silence at the bottom of a swimming pool. Or an empty supermarket at night. That moment where it feels like the world has just finished exhaling, and hasn't inhaled yet.

STEVE:

Méabh, what about you?

MÉABH:

I was thinking about this, and honestly I suppose the god that I would be most interested in worshipping in The Silt Verses...

The public transport system in Ireland is very poor.

And if there was a...we know that there are poor souls who have been turned into saints, who work the...

(To JON)

...is it the Tube or is it trains, Jon? Actually, how did you envisage that?

Train. It is a train, that's right.

So honestly, if you could...if there was a god in the background there, which I presume there **is**, i would be wholly on board with a god who could get me from A to B.

STEVE:

(Approvingly)

A holy god of transport. Muna, what about you?

MUNA:

I would choose...a god of grief.

Grief is just this inexplicable emotion. One that you can't explain. When everyone, you know...when people say 'love', or they say 'anger', I think people have more of a shared identity of what that means.

But I think grief is just so individual. And grief can come along in various guises.

So I think a god of grief, and when you pray to this god, what he or she or it will do is...it won't take away your grief but it will **dissipate** you.

And it's actually based on one of my favorite Somali folklore stories, where a father loses his son.

He goes to a crossroad and he prays to a god, and he says, "Please may I have the energy to keep looking for my son," and the god turns him into droplets of air.

And so he just spends the rest of eternity, not only trying to keep himself together, but also look for his son. And that's what this god of grief would do to you.

STEVE:

(Disturbed)

Don't think I would subscribe to that one, not even the free trial.

But, uh, cheerful! Very cheerful! I would...

(Still dwelling on it)

...to each their own.

All right!

So Marcus would like to ask:

"Can you take us through the general conception of an episode? Who formulates the wider plot, who writes it, who edits. That kind of stuff."

MUNA:

The writing is done by Jon, unless you're on our Patreon and then the Patreon is done by both of us. So some of the stories have been written by me, and some have been written by Jon.

But we work together on the plotting, insofar as Jon and I will sit together, he'll say, "This is where the story is going", and then we'll attack it together.

We'll say, "Does this make sense, does the flow of the episode make sense?" Lots of very boring plotting parts of it. You know, "Is this exciting enough? "Is this an episode with too much dialogue?", really keeping the listener in mind.

JON:

It's so valuable having Muna as a creative partner...because I'm such a bad collaborator.

And so my first instinct when she says, "There's a problem here, you need to fix this," is always to go,

(Obstinate voice)

"No, it's fine. It needs to be like that, for reasons I can't properly articulate or explain."

So yeah. I have to really thank her for her immense patience in working with me on this, and working on Season Two together is...I'm really enjoying it so far.

MUNA:

(Laughing)

House Eskew is still standing!

STEVE:

It hasn't been **skewed**? Or...skewered?

(Groans.)

MUNA:

Eyyyy!

STEVE:

That was terrible.

All right. Next question!

Augustine - and a similar question from Peter:

"What was the hardest part about working on the show? What was the easiest, the most fun?"

MUNA:

I think the hardest part is that...this is such a bigger undertaking than either of us expected.

We started writing it, we wanted to do something a little bit different than Eskew, and then I think...

It's just the sheer amount of work involved with bringing an episode to life and making sure that our cast are kept informed and happy, and...making sure that it all comes off, along with all the logistics.

JON:

Yeah, 100%. So, you know, Eskew was a show about loneliness and isolation, and this is a show, I guess, about other people.

And that really comes to light in the fact that the easiest part of the show is working with so many wonderful people - Méabh, B., Jimmy, Lucy, and everyone.

It's so incredible to get such great acting out of so many great people, so much energy, so much inspiration...and then the hardest part is not letting these people down.

And, you know, we let people down **all the time**. But just making sure that we keep the schedule, getting everyone paid, giving the right kind of direction and feedback. It's such a vast undertaking.

Whereas it used to be just the two of us in a room. Saying, "You need to do that again, you've pronounced it wrong". And then, uh, that was it.

STEVE:

Yeah, I wanna validate you on that, and kind of speak up for people who don't create podcasts to understand.

For people who **do** create, specifically, audio drama and fiction podcasts, it's...

Especially once you start gaining some momentum, slash attention, slash fandom, family, cult status, whatever you want to call it, blind worshippers dwelling in a cave far beneath the earth, talking to an ancient fire-worm. All those things-

MÉABH:

(Laughing)

I'm so glad they can pick up podcasts!

STEVE:

Yeah, well, the fire-worm has great wi-fi!

It can be a very lonely, very isolating experience. It's...

You know, I really want to give props to The Silt Verses. Number one, when I first fell in love with this show...it was so **ambitious**.

Because we do a lot of single-narrator, a lot of the time. There's a lot of collaboration, but it's just me and my voice.

Y'all start in a **car**, going to a **diner**, and then there's a **river**, and...

I'm just like, "This is a big swing."

The overall, just...stones on this show.

JON:

(Deadpan)

You're completely right, Steve. We are idiots.

MUNA:

Yeah. Complete hubris, y'know.

(In a naive voice)

"Let's just go for it! It won't it won't be that difficult-"

(Laughter)

STEVE:

I always say, you guys do something, you guys **don't** do something, and I love you for it.

Everybody, it seems like, has a gimmick. Magnus did the tape recorder. Found footage people do the walkie-talkie effect or the tape recorder effect - something to cover that sound compression.

We have our spooky soundscapes that drone under us, and I did those mainly originally to be like, "This is going to get squashed. I may as well give them an interesting layer to hear, you know, to fill in the gaps."

Y'all don't do that. Y'all aren't relying on found footage, you're not relying on on anything - and this is this is a push that - I'm so proud to be your friend and your colleague and your comrade - this is a push in podcasting we need.

To be able to say in fiction podcasting, **I don't need a device to tell a story**.

No offence to anybody doing found footage, or if that's your jam. I don't really mean this overly critically. But I think for a long time people have felt confined to, "Oh, well, it's got to be there, there has to be a reason that we're doing a podcast."

There's a whole genre of what I call, "Oops, I podcasted my own spooky demise," where someone is doing a podcast about something, and...oh, no, that podcast went wrong! And we get to witness it.

And there's **great** shows like Video Palace and Limetown that do that, and do that really well.

But I want us as a genre to be able to be like, "You know what? We can just tell a freaking story."

MÉABH:

I totally agree, I actually do.

And it's so funny, because a lot of people...

For example. I'm in London, we're headed to the London Podcast Festival, so obviously people (back home) were asking me, "Why are you going to London?"

And I was explaining what I do, and you know...so many people, when they think 'podcast', they think of two people having a chat, or talking about a niche interest, or history, or something like that.

And the way I always explain audio drama podcasting, I essentially explain it...it's like a radio play

And the thing about most radio plays is...they are exactly as you've just described. They originally take their setting from theatre, so obviously in-theatre. There's no reason to explain the setting, there's no reason for this play to be taking place. You're just sitting down and watching a play.

And it's the same thing with radio plays. You're just listening to a play that's happening on the radio, and I totally agree, I think people should be comfortable doing that in podcast form.

JON:

Because I...I think the other really interesting thing with horror audio drama is that it's partly evolved from creepypasta.

From Slenderman and Marble Hornets and this genre of "you are discovering the abandoned blog of someone that had a horrible experience and has now died."

MÉABH:

And honestly, sometimes there's nothing creepier than the idea that you're listening to someone who's trapped and they only have a tape recorder - that can also be an incredibly creepy situation, too. I'm a big fan of those.

STEVE:

Oh, yeah - like I said, one of the most terrifying things I ever read, pre-podcast was...

It was in a day when...in the days when texting was still fairly novel, and it was still an emerging thing. Late 90s, whatever.

There was a thread - I don't know where it was, I found it long after the fact - of someone who was going to a house and sending text messages to their friend, talking about what they found and it starts out with them typing paragraphs of like, "Oh, yeah, the porch is really creepy, and the door opens slowly" and whatever.

And then as they get up the stairs to whatever, the messages are just like,
(Sinister voice)

"It burns. The light. SENT. The light. SENT. The light. SENT."

Like those kind of things. And I never felt like, at the same time, that alternate reality gaming ever got its proper due, of leaving geocache clues around the city to find, to tell a story.

A friend and I were designing one, which might make a good podcast one day, about what happens in a Judeo-Christian setting when all the guardian angels are removed from earth in preparation of Armageddon. And some of those angels try to resist by leaving journals and notes and stickers behind, and creating that...

(Sneakily)

...well, we can talk about developing that.

Moving forward!

Judith and Sam: *"The Silt Verses presents a polytheistic world of fluid cults where everyone chooses their god. Am I right in thinking you were inspired by depictions of polytheism, such as ancient Greek myth?"*

JON:

Yeah, completely. One of the scariest stories I ever read when I was a kid was the myth of Arachne, (where) it's a lady that was *too good* at weaving, so she really pissed off the gods, because she was *too good*...

...and she gets turned into a spider.

And it's the arbitrary cruelty of deities who are not...they're not good, they're not just. They are petty and small.

And weird even in the sense of their mercy, like the Somali folktale Muna was talking about.

I love and hate the stories in Ovid, where you have things like..."Apollo was chasing this poor woman, so the tree spirits took mercy on her and turned her into a willow."

You know...that's not mercy. That's a really weird definition of mercy! That's a horrible fate!

The idea that actually a god's definition of a gift that they're bestowing upon us might be so alien to us, that it's something horrible and monstrous...is really, really fascinating to me.

STEVE:

I have to think of Medusa. You know?

Medusa was sexually assaulted by Poseidon, and she was a handmaiden of Athena. He violated her, and Athena interrupted them and stopped it. But since she was impure by her rules now, she had to get turned into a gorgon.

And she (Athena) couldn't punish Poseidon, because Poseidon's her brother and her equal, and whatever. But...

(As Athena)

"Oh, my poor servant! I can't kill you and put you out of your misery, or I can't restore you, or whatever, but I can make you a snake-haired lady that turns people into stone."

Y'all's concept of sainthood, of making saints horrifying? Uggh! Just...yeah, the giant maggot thing, ugh...

(Shuddering)

I died. I died. I am no longer here.

JON:

But I think all folk horror really can be traced back to Greek myth, right?

So Euripides' The Bacchae, I really think of as the progenitor of all folk horror.

Where it's about the agent of civility and rationality - uh, Pentheus - realizing that the stable foundations are in fact not so stable, and that something that is irrational and primal and completely inexplicable is going to rise up and devour him.

That, I think, is just the line that goes all the way back through from ancient history to The Wicker Man, Midsommar.

Old Gods of Appalachia!

STEVE:

So Celeste wants to ask the audio designer, Sammy:

"I'm really curious how the audio foley work went through Season One, since there was a fair amount of nature sounds mixed in with unnatural nature sounds from saints and such. Thank you for a wonderful season!

SAMMY:

Hi, this is Sammy!

Normally I listen to the episode second after reading the script first, and then I'll bring it together, I'll kind of mark off where all the sound effects are.

The actors are so wonderful that over half of the work is done once they've recorded their bits!

(Laughing)

During one of the early episodes, I was asked about a particular creature, the sound of a particular creature by Jon, and i wouldn't tell him how I made it! I think it was the snare dogs - I really enjoyed making their sounds.

I also enjoyed putting together the sound of the garbage dump - which is a bit of a weird one, because why would anybody enjoy a garbage dump? But building up that kind of environment from literally nothing, so it registers as a garbage dump, that then has a secret, submerged neon corridor...when I was putting that together I could visualize it, and that really helped.

I work very visually, I edit kind of visually with the sound, if that makes sense. I can imagine a picture very clearly, and I hope that that comes across - I think it does, based on the lovely fan art that I've seen!

STEVE:

Morgan wants to know:

"How much did working on I Am In Eskew help you prepare for The Silt Verses?"

MUNA:

Not at all.

(Laughter)

MUNA:

Yeah, working on Eskew was just...Jon and I recording together. It was very much, it was much easier to control.

Because it was only two voices, and, as Jon mentioned earlier, it would just be one or the other saying, "Hey, you pronounced that wrong" or, you know, "Can you just read that in a slightly different inflection or a tone?". And then we had, as you were saying earlier, Steve, we had that sort of backing sound to hide the imperfections of what we didn't know how to do on Audacity. It

was the rain, that kind of creepy rain in Eskew, that people really loved, which...you know, now we can give away the state secret!

It was a choice to hide the fact that we didn't know what we were doing-

MÉABH:

Muna, the police are at the door!

MUNA:

No, but again we've got these unbelievable, incredible voice actors who have joined us and they've made it so much simpler in some ways but then also so much harder. Because we really have to make sure that we're honoring the craft and the skill they're bringing to the characters.

So I would say...you know, it's prepared us in terms of being able to know that we can produce, and that our work and that Jon's work is viable for audio drama. But I'm not sure it did much more than that.

(To JON)

What do you think?

JON:

I think it really helped me, because I'm incredibly anxious and awkward. And with Eskew, we had, for the first few months, just downloads in the double figures.

So it really helped me to prepare for putting something out into the world and seeing a reaction to it.

Both in terms of...when we did Eskew, you'd see someone who says "I didn't think it was very scary" and you'd lie down on the floor for three weeks and just stare at the ceiling.

I can now, relatively easily, shrug off people that go "Actually, I didn't really like this bit" or "I didn't like the show."

But also setting boundaries. With Eskew, I remember, someone posted a fan fiction - it was a slash fan fiction that combined David from Eskew with the main character from The Magnus Archives.

And I'd never had anyone create anything that was fan fiction of my work!

So I think I jumped onto Archive of Your Own (sic), and was in the comments, going, (Enthusiastically)

"Yeah! I love this!"

And then I just got a very awkward response from someone, saying, "Yeah, I...didn't really think you were going to see this."

And it was just that realisation: just because someone's created something about the show doesn't mean they want to hear from you.

You've got to give people their own space, and just step back from them, and let them create what they want to create, without making it weird. So that was very useful experience.

MÉABH:

Yeah and just on that last point, I suppose, just in terms of myself: this is the first time I've been a part of anything that involves people talking about your work...but not necessarily including you in the conversation.

So I myself have decided, you know - I **do** pop into the Silt Verses tag on Twitter. I be looking!

But I've decided that unless The Silt Verses itself is actually tagged in the tweet, or unless they've tagged me, I don't engage with it. Because, you know, maybe that's not for me, maybe (people) just want to have a chat about Carpenter, and I'm not included in that conversation and that's fine!

So, just in case...I don't know if anyone would be thinking, "Why isn't she talking to me?", but please. I'd love to talk to you!

But I respect that people want to chat about the show that they enjoy amongst themselves, and some things I'm not invited to, and...that's fine.

(Mock-withering)

I guess.

STEVE:

Next question! The Trawlerman's Pet Fish asks:

"Assuming that it's possible or there's an equivalent in the TSV universe, did Carpenter ever have an emo phase? I can't help but think her teenage self would have been part of some kind of counterculture considering everything she went through."

(Everyone looks to MÉABH:)

MÉABH:

Oh well, I mean...that's just it! I'm not the arbiter of the canon of the show, but I love the idea.

And I do agree - I was talking about it earlier with Muna - Carpenter has so much rage inside her. and she's not in a rebellious phase, it's just who she is, she's angry at the world!

Definitely, I feel, particularly in your younger years, that certainly comes out in a form of self-expression. And I do just love the idea of Baby Goth Carpenter. Wouldn't that be fab?

Definitely, I feel, in terms of who she is as a person, it would have to be the lowest-effort.

Lowest maintenance, you know? I'm talking about kitchen-sink hair-dye, and just doing the eyeliner the way I did my eyeliner, which is by gripping it like a crayon and drastically drawing massive circles around your eyes.

And that's it. We're done for the day.

JON:

I can imagine that - I think I'm cribbing this from a Discworld character - she would have bought herself some fantasy Doc Martens with really hard toes, so that she could just kick people if they annoyed her.

And that would be her fashion statement.

MÉABH:

(Excitedly)

Yeah! I was...yes!

(Emphatically)

Yes.

STEVE:

Lots of really old Joy Division and Depeche Mode records, and...maybe a lot of early U2.

All right. Awesome. Excellent.

Songbird has a question for Sammy again:

"Season one had a lot of whispering and some pretty horrible worm sounds.

Are you doing all right? Are you okay?"

SAMMY:

(Laughing)

Am I doing all right? Am I like...okay?

Yes, I'm doing very well, thank you! And I'm looking forward to season two, and I'm looking forward to creating more horrible nasty sounds for you all to enjoy.

STEVE:

Ezra asks:

"How did you all think of the character names? The theme and symbolism of the names being jobs is so fascinating to me, and I wonder how you all thought of it."

What **does** a Faulkner do, other than write about Mississippi?

JON:

A faulkner is what it sounds like! So it's someone that handles falcons.

I think it was very much that we wanted to have this kind of vaguely medieval journey narrative to it. So...Pilgrim's Progress, The Faerie Queene, Gawain and the Green Knight, the old stories of people going out on these religious quest narratives.

But we also wanted to try and keep the associations and parallels with the real world avoided as much as possible. So just going (with) very simple words that have associations with what that person does, but aren't necessarily - other than being medieval English names - tied to a particular culture was a good way of getting around that, we thought.

STEVE:

Rowan Jack asks:

"Who is your favorite character to write and why? Including all the side characters, not just the main ones. Love the show!"

JON:

It's Carpenter!

Because-

MÉABH:

(Cheerfully)

YEAH, IT IS!

(Laughter)

JON:

(Regretfully)

I should have said someone really cool. You know,

(With a pretentious air)

"Oh, **this** character (who) has one line in episode nine, **they're** the most fun character."

No, it's Carpenter. Because the way that she sees the world and other people is the way I see the world and other people. The way that she struggles sometimes with attention from other people, and with making conversation with other people, is exactly how I feel.

But she gets to do it and be a badass, so...it's very much just wish fulfillment of, "This is who I would be if I was, you know, witty, and could make it through a sentence without stammering."

MUNA:

OK, now I have to put a bid in here for Hayward. And hear me out, this isn't copaganda, but he is actually one of the most human characters in the whole series.

I think he is dissatisfied and deeply unhappy with his place in life - very similarly to Carpenter, actually - and he is going through the motions while internally on a different journey.

And I won't give away what happens in the upcoming season, but there is a lot of growth for him, and I think - I've got a big soft spot for Hayward.

STEVE:

Gatsby asks,

"What's been your most surprising / your favorite fan reaction to something in the show?"

MUNA:

I think mine has to be the way people reacted to Episode Four. Carpenter goes a bit crazy, and says to Charity, you know...

(In a Carpenter voice)

"I want to know whose house I've burnt down!"

And I loved the reaction to that. Because I think that was the first - it was only obviously a few episodes in - but that was the first real buzz that happened on Tumblr, and people got really excited. And I think that's when the art really started ramping up!

I...kinda could talk about the show as a whole. I think I want to come back to that point of art, because it's just so surprising and delightful to see all the various arts that people are creating, the songs that people have created.

It's just...

(Excitedly)

...people are taking time out of their day to create art based on this audio drama! And every time we see something, and we see it on Tumblr and Instagram...yeah! It's such an honor.

B.:

Let me start off with saying: we have the best fans and I love all your reactions. All of them. I love the tweets, I love the Tumblr posts, I love the art, I love the music, the playlists, the cosplay.

I mean you guys are just amazing. Honestly, you guys are phenomenal, and I love each and every one of you.

But the most surprising fan reaction, I think, might be also one of my favorites, which is that people actually have decided that Carpenter and Faulkner and Paige are this awful little found family, just a dysfunctional little found family.

It's perfect. I adore it. Like, hey, I'm a sucker for the found family trope! I love it.

And also that was immediately the joke that me and Méabh and Lucille made when we kidnapped Paige; that we were three best friends on a terrible, no good, very bad road trip. And I love the fan base seeing that, and taking it further.

And...I mean, don't they all deserve a good found family? I think they do. I don't know if they're gonna **get** it, but I think they deserve it.

JON:

i was gonna say...the most surprising reaction I had was actually Sid Wright. Which I think is down to David S. Dear's amazing performance!

Where we had this big twist lined up that obviously Sid Wright is (spoiler) gonna transcend and become the prophet of the new god of sleep but...

I didn't realize that people would really like the character up to that point.

I thought it would just be going on in the background, and people wouldn't really pay attention to it. But even as early as Sid Wright turned up people were just...they loved him, and they were excited by him! So that was one big surprise.

What wasn't...what was a surprise at first was Faulkner's name. So we'd said that Faulkner's brothers were going to be called Eddie and Charlie.

But I didn't want Faulkner's name to end in '-ie' as well, because he's already a younger character; I didn't want people kind of infantilizing him in this big emotional scene in Episode 14.

So I thought, "Okay! Uhh...what's the opposite of a name that ends in -ie? Uhhh...Richard."
(Shrugging)

You know, Richard's a sort of a...strong grown-up name?

And then I listened to the episode and...I already knew. "People are gonna hate this."
(Cheerfully)

And they absolutely did! It was on Tumblr. That whole scene, everyone loved it, but there were just people going, "...yeah, he's not Richard. I reject this from my reality. He has another name, I don't know what it is, but it's not Richard."

(Laughter)

STEVE:

So this is probably my favorite question, in scanning these, because...I'm not sure I could answer this question.

This is from miss trashcan:

"Does the story take any inspiration from Till We Have Faces by C.S. Lewis? I couldn't help be reminded of it in terms of the story's themes, and Carpenter especially reminds me of Orual."

JON:

It absolutely did! So it was a massive steal from C.S. Lewis's Till We Have Faces, which is a brilliant novel, which is very much about the uncertainty and the unknowability of the divine. And probably because Lewis was a Christian, it's a lot more positive (about that) than The Silt Verses.

You know, basically coming to the conclusion of, "If we cannot understand the gods or know the gods, it's only because we are imperfect. We are not in a condition to...until we have true faces we can never look on their faces."

A brilliant book and very much inspirational.

STEVE:

Kale - which is an occasionally delicious leafy plant - would like to know:

"What's the internal breakdown of folks who are for and against The Silt Verses being a road trip buddy comedy?"

MÉABH:

(Chanting and laughing)

Road trip buddy comedy! Road trip buddy comedy!

JON:

We were talking about this earlier, Steve, before we came on the recording.

Which was...when you're looking at the reaction to a show, people lean into certain elements of it. And often they want to have fun with it, and turn it into something that's...they find entertainment in the lighthearted bits of it. And that's wonderful!

But (as a creator) you've got to be able to remember that's its own thing.

You've got to always kind of go, "Actually, well, it's **not** a found family story, it is to some extent about the limitations of ever understanding other people. Okay, it's a buddy road trip comedy...but it's not."

So every time you think like you might be going down that road...grabbing the steering wheel, and just driving it off the cliffs in a much more grim direction is the way to go.

MÉABH:

No, and I absolutely agree with that!

I think - and the cast totally feel the same - we have fun with the concept. But no-one wants that to be the show! The show is great as it is, you know?

JON:

I think that's exactly what I meant earlier about fan fiction being its own thing.

Remembering that people can enjoy taking this in another direction, but it doesn't mean they want the core show to be that.

They're making their own thing.

STEVE:

And it doesn't mean that we as creators have to make our shows that! You can do some fan service and work an in-joke in, or have...you know, have a nod to something.

That's one thing. But when you start to let...when they start to drive, it becomes a different story.

Speaking of 'them'! A mysterious, unknown person asked:

"What made you decide to go with an interactive ensemble cast for Silt Verses, rather than sticking to the one-person monologue you used with Eskew? Was it just about resources or was Silt Verses just different from the start? And which do you prefer?"

MUNA:

Ooh! Which do we prefer? I'm going to come back to that.

I think again - we mentioned this earlier - it really was that we'd already done Eskew, we'd already done just the two of us. And neither of us - certainly I'm not very good at accents, Jon does a fair bit better than I do! - but if we were going to just go ahead and it be two voices, it would have to be probably us two.

And then you'd be having us trying to voice multiple different characters, because we needed to expand, you know?

We didn't want to do just a first person narration again. We wanted to do something a little bit different, so that we weren't just a one-trick pony, really!

And that kind of drove the choice. So we thought we'd put a call out there and we'd see.

You know, if we don't, if we didn't get any...I remember one of the first bits that we put on the website, we'd said, "We're just going to give this a go and if there's no interest we'll just quietly wrap it up!"

And I think as soon as we put out the call for auditions, we had something like 70, 80 people auditioning.

We thought, "...oh, my God. People are actually interested??" And from there, it kind of snowballed.

STEVE:

Yeah, it brings a different level of depth to the production! Like I said, that's one of the things I love about the show, is just...the ambition and the scope that you fools have thrown yourselves into.

Jax asks:

"Tell us about the religious wars! How did they get started? Were propaganda gods meant to be an analog for nuclear weapons? How does one build and maintain them?"

That sounds like it could get spoilery. So I would respect any decision to, uh...

MUNA:

I think Jon wants to answer this - but I will be watching him carefully.

JON:

I can't comment on how the religious wars got started...because I've got no idea.

But I loved the idea of - thinking about how wars would work in this setting - that it would be very much about the territory that people are fighting battles in.

Because you could be..."We're going to have the battle of, uh, Boghollow Hill. There's a god that's very powerful there." And so both sides, rather than fighting each other, both are desperately praying to this god, to try and get it to beat up the other side.

And propaganda gods were not meant to be an analog for nuclear weapons, they were an analog for...um, there's a Monty Python sketch about an experimental joke that's so powerful that it kills you.

And this joke is then weaponized, and it's sent out across the battlefield, played over loudspeakers, and everyone just laughs so hard they drop down dead. And that idea of a viral

joke, of viral worship that could then be weaponized against the enemy, is something I thought was really fun.

STEVE:

Gatsby would like to know:

"If the characters of TSV were DND characters, what class would they be?"

JON:

So there was actually a Twitter thread a couple of weeks ago, where it was meant to be...it was bad DnD ideas.

And someone had suggested, "It's a cleric and a paladin of the same faith but they hate each other and they're always trying to one-up each other in the eyes of their god."

And people kept tagging us, going, "This is The Silt Verses."

So that's an easy question to answer! I think Méabh is definitely the paladin - Carpenter is the weary paladin who's been serving her god for too long. And Faulkner is the cleric who's all about the fire and the fluster.

STEVE:

We have a question that says:

"What's your favorite kind of scene to act out? Do you have a favorite scene you've done so far?"

MÉABH:

Oh, so let me see uh... what's my favourite kind of scene to act out?

(Chuckling)

Well I think we **know** what my favourite kind of scenes to act out are!

They are either the scenes where Carpenter gets to be incredibly insulting and abrupt with people...or goes off the rails entirely.

I really love the extremes that her character can get to, considering normally she's very subdued and level-spoken. So when she really lets rip, it's fantastic! And I enjoy it hugely.

Um, so. What's my favorite scene that I've done so far...I think to back up what Muna was saying earlier, the response to Episode Four was so fantastic, because that is the first instance where you do get to see Carpenter go to that extreme.

And I definitely wanted to push it to that level, and the response it got was so rewarding!

And equally, I suppose, every single time I've had the space and ability as an actor to stretch myself that far, the response has always been fantastic.

So I think, probably episode four and then the finale - when I genuinely was hoarse the next day! Because it was a level of raw anger that I felt could only be achieved through expressing the anger that's constantly coiled within Carpenter. And those were, honestly...those were my favorite scenes to do. I felt I was really pushing myself as an actor, and it was brilliant to be able to portray a character to such extremes.

B.:

My favorite kind of scene to act out is definitely arguments.

Any time Carpenter and Faulkner are arguing, just know that I am living, I'm loving it.

Because that's just...I love to get the rhythm of the snippy back and forth, right? It's almost like doing a dance. And Méabh is an exceptional dance partner.

She's a joy to act with - she's a joy in every regard, let's be real - and that makes the arguments that much more fun!

I also really liked getting to drown Stanton, the motel owner. I mean, who doesn't love turning people into crustaceans? I'm Team Pro-carcinisation, but that's just me.

And also, Calder's very good at drowning - I think I tweeted about it before - but they're excellent at drowning.

Everyone's super talented, and I could probably ramble for a long time about how everyone's super talented, and how much I love every scene...so I will spare you all that.

STEVE:

For Méabh: what are your favorite and least favorite things about playing Carpenter?

MÉABH:

So what I love about Carpenter is that...as a character, she's incredible, and immediately when I read the sample script that Jon and Muna put up online as an audition piece, I just knew I absolutely had to play this character! (Well, you know, it was up to them who they'd cast. But certainly, I needed to get an audition in.)

Because while media is becoming more and more comfortable with female characters who are unlikable and who are abrupt and, you know, insulting...for the most part they are portrayed as being incredibly slick and attractive and witty

You've got *The Devil Wears Prada* where Meryl Streep plays, you know, she's an incredibly unlikable character! But everyone loves her, and she's so stylish and she's in control and she's powerful.

What I love about Carpenter is that she is none of those things. She is abrupt, she is rude, she never tries for anyone except herself - and even then maybe only some.

And when I say try, I mean in terms of activities, because God knows I certainly don't think she's putting any effort into her appearance whatsoever! And I just love it. She's not playing any political games or anything like that. She is just trying to get through the goddamn day.

She gets to be that grizzled haggard anti-hero detective character. It's an absolute joy, just as an actress...you know, I've never had the opportunity to play that kind of character before, and it is an absolute gift to have the opportunity to do so now.

So that, coupled with the wild range of emotional extremes I get to try and portray - it's just been such a fantastic experience! And I feel like I've really grown as an actor doing it.

Then, you know, spin that around. My **least** favorite part about playing Carpenter...it honestly has nothing to do with the character. She is perfect, no notes.

But Jon does be using some vocab sometimes, that I - and I gave out to him earlier - I do have to go away and YouTube it, and say, "How does one (pronounce)..."

I think 'primordially', Jon, was the word, actually!

I was saying, "There was a word you made me say, I'll look it up." The other one was 'revetment'. Jon didn't even remember using 'revetment'!

So that's the only thing. The only thing is, sometimes there will be a word, slap bang in the middle. And, you know, I'm sitting down, I'm recording my monologue...

(Carpenter voice)

...I'm doing the Carpenter voice...

And then I come across a word, and I'm like, "Oh, Jesus Christ, let's YouTube. How do I say it?"

So that's it. That's the only thing.

(Laughing)

Jon's like,

(Doing a Jon impression)

"Mmm! And you will continue to do so!"

STEVE;

Marcus wants to know:

"What makes the Verses especially unique as a podcast is the fantastic balance between dialogue and prose. You see this too in Old Gods of Appalachia, another favorite podcast of mine-"

-thank you, Family-

"Was that the plan from the beginning, to have it spoken...to have a story spoken at us, with snatches of dialogue and foley here and there to ground us in present action or...?"

JON:

Up to a point. I think part of it was honestly an experience and lack of confidence.

So obviously we'd done a show that was all monologue all the time, with only a few tiny snippets of dialogue.

I definitely didn't feel confident as a writer to do that kind of exposition, to carry a completely fantastical world, where there's a lot of lore that needs explaining, just through dialogue.

You know, (imagine) doing even that first episode, but having the characters saying to each other,

(As Carpenter)

"Oh, Faulkner, look! There's a fishing boat...that's made out of people...who have mutated into a mast of crab flesh."

I think we'd really have struggled with that.

I think we start to drift away from the narration as the series goes on. Which is completely not a deliberate choice, but it does kind of work, because the characters become less isolated.

They start to know each other a little bit better, and so having less of them being in their own heads plotting against each other probably makes a lot of sense.

STEVE:

You kind of return back to it though, in a moment, in the finale. Because we get, uh, the big thing that happens at the end of the finale from different POVs- and I thought that was an interesting choice! - of different characters and what they saw, and how they witnessed the thing. That was really cool!

This is a question I have. I agree with Sean C here:

"How do you just lose a town to the Wither Mark? Did nobody notice the town nearby just stopped being full of living people? Seems like a real policing failure."

(Firmly)

Not a plot hole, but a policing failure.

And I love the description of Bellwethers, I love...you make crustaceans so freaking scary! And I mean, they **are** weird alien hellbeasts and are delicious with butter but...but just, I love how you use the crustaceans.

So how is it...or unless that's too spoilery?

JON:

No, definitely, I mean...

I love your point there, because one of the main inspirations for the show was, uh, Junji Ito's Gyo, which is about fish on robotic crab legs that invade the land.

And I love the idea that cosmic horror doesn't need to be all about cephalopods, you know? Okay, we've had Cthulhu, we've had octopus tentacles...it's been done! What about barnacles? Barnacles are really weird and creepy. So just getting into the lesser-known water life.

But yeah, as for the Wither Mark, I think something that comes across in parts in the show, but (which) we were going to emphasize more was the fact that this is a really fragmented world.

In the first episode, Carpenter and Faulkner talk about how they're going outside of the radio towers. We talk about the fact that this is a world where every village has its own god.

That this is a country, the Peninsula, where everything is fragmented. There's only recently been any kind of attempt to unify it into a single nation. And most of it still doesn't function.

So we were going to have a whole episode with Hayward trying to find out more about Carpenter and Faulkner, getting on the line to Felix, his handler.

Felix then gets on the line to someone else in this vast crumbling bureaucracy, who then calls someone else, and someone else...

Lots of people talking to each other, and no one's communicating well, and no one knows what's happening anywhere. But eventually they figure out that something's happening in Bellwethers.

And in the end we looked at it, and we were like, "...this is going to need 10 new voice actors for characters we're never going to meet again. This is a really stupid idea."

But it would have conveyed the idea a bit more strongly, I think, that this is a country where no one's talking to each other because it's been localized for centuries, and that's the way that it functions.

So very much the idea, I think, that...yeah, this is a world where sometimes a god wipes out a village.

And what you do is, you put the ticker tape around it. You leave it the hell alone for a couple of decades, and then you come back and you see if it's any better.

STEVE:

And I couldn't help but pick up on the social commentary - Bad Cop to Good Cop being like, "We can do whatever we want! They'll believe us, you know, we can...this person doesn't have to make it back to the station."

"We'll be heroes. Even though it's on the record that this town has been like toast for however long, you know, we're still going to manage to kill this woman and blame this disaster on her, which clearly they couldn't have caused."

Which, by the way? Wither Mark. Brilliant name for that, by the way.

Love it, love it. Wither is such a magnificent word. Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.

JON:

Yeah, the Wither Mark was one of the first things we came up with!

But completely on the...I think also, the parallel between what happens to Carpenter and Faulkner.

Where, in the end, it's a messy story, that has the human moments where things go wrong and people fuck up.

But it's about how it's interpreted into something that's coherent, and seems logical, but is completely false, by both the cops (on who they want to pin Bellwethers on) but also then by Mason at the very end. Trying to make sense of this bizarre little journey that Carpenter and Faulkner have gone on. Turning it into a heroic narrative, where actually they upheld the values of the faith.

STEVE:

I think there's an atmosphere of weariness to the Peninsula.

There's an atmosphere of, like...the cops listening to Paige. They just shut up! Like,
(As Paige)

"Hey, what's going on, you're gonna go here and do this."

(As worn-down cops)

"All right."

It's not like...

Everybody's just happy to serve their god, get through the day, and get home, and go to sleep at night.

And that brokenness of that world is there, and that's...I get the feeling some of the places Faulkner is from aren't far from where Paige is, clearly. But Faulkner talks about them like they're this distant wonderland that they might one day see. Like, "Is it nice?"

You know, it's right there, this world is barely, like...

(Worn-down cop voice)

"Wait. Nothing. No, nothing. We didn't lose another city today. That's a win! That's a win! Everybody praise the Saint."

MÉABH:

They've got one of those (signs) at the police station! "It has been how many days since we lost our last city."

(Laughter)

STEVE:

Your radio host, Sid - I see the mistake you made in your brain, of thinking nobody would notice or nobody would miss him.

That was one of the first things of, like, "Oh, this is a lived-in world! This is a known person, this is a presence that everyone is used to, and he's the obnoxious fast-talking DJ...and he's suffering and slowly dying."

And I think within horror podcasting, everybody has the radio attachment, the soft spot for Cecil from Night Vale or the folks from King Falls. I think 'radio DJ' has an automatic, default, like... that's the person we know - that's an archetype.

And to see that happen, and to see the new (spoiler) the new god of sleep emerge...

...and the way people talk about 'our god', you know? The great...Hamburger In The Sky, or the King Crunch, or the Trawler-man.

Like, there's a reverence...but then there's like,

(Noir detective voice)

"Looks like the work of a god on the loose." at the same time.

It's like, it can be immediately commodified and packaged.

"That's the Bronze Savant? Nah, we can replace that next week with the Cookie Monster ceramic jar we got at the thrift store. That's the new god. Pray to it, worship it, give it your daughters." You know?

MÉABH:

Can I just hop in really quickly to say...

Just what you were saying about it being a lived-in world. The world building is incredible, it's incredible, and I think the best...like you said, I mean, that's such a good way to put it!

It's a lived-in world. People live here! And I think my favorite examples of that are Sid, and then the fantastic fast food franchise that we see Paige and Faulkner and...I mean, that was just brilliant! And the automated ordering system and the fact that you might be sacrificed. Take your chances!

You're like, "I really, really, really want that barbecue."

STEVE:

I also love that when we talk about the Cloak, he (Hayward) is like... this is such a shit god! Everyone knows that the Cloak is a shit god.

(Enthusiastic voice)

"Well, you have the Cloak!"

(Weary voice)

"Yeah, we have the Cloak, fuck me."

MÉABH:

(As Hayward)

"It's fine! It's fine. It's fine."

But also can i just say...what Jon excels in, in my personal opinion - I've said this before to him - is he is able to take the realities of living in this world, just absolutely destroyed by capitalism and bureaucracy, and see, just first of all, the horror of it but also the incredible dark comedy within it.

So you can see, when that comes into play in the show as well, I just think it again, it adds to that lived-in element of the show. But it is also an incredible element of the show, in and of itself! You know, the idea of registering your religion, the sanctioned sacrifices.

Yeah, it's just brilliant. Brilliant.

JON:

So if you look at the show descriptions, you'll see we really go back and forth on what to call it; whether it's fantasy or weird fiction or horror.

And I saw someone on Twitter describe it as 'slipstream'.

And slipstream was really not something I was thinking of while we were making it, because number one, I think I had a kind of snobbery in mind where I saw slipstream as fantasy's plotless, pretentious younger cousin that doesn't quite want to commit to being called fantasy. And number two, because - for SEO reasons, I don't think anyone is really searching on Apple Podcasts for 'slipstream'.

But the fact that someone had defined it that way really made me take a good hard look at myself! And slipstream defines itself as the genre that 'makes the familiar feel strange and the strange feel familiar.'

And that actually is a perfect description of what I think we were trying to achieve in trying to create a world where the horror doesn't lie in the strangeness and unknowability quite so much as in the banality and unthinking acceptance of the everyday.

STEVE:

Marcus wants to know - actually, this may be my favorite question:

"Two faces, two mouths. One devours, one returns. Between Carpenter and Faulkner, who devours and who returns?"

MUNA:

Carpenter devours, I would say!

Because Carpenter is just...she's just sick of it, isn't she?

You know, she's sick of Faulkner, and religion, and I think...you know, the hope has been leeched out of her. The ending happens, and...

...ah, OK, I'm gonna stop talking, because I'm about to start saying things about Season Two. No more!

JON:

Okay, non-spoilers!

This is really interesting, the question, to me. Because I think it's all these parallels that you don't realize when you're making something.

So the Trawler-man having two faces, that was just a high school geography joke! Where a river, it erodes soil on one side of the bank, so it devours, and then it returns soil and deposits on the other side, and that creates the curve of the river.

And so I liked the idea of that being something that is the Trawler-man being a god of the river; he's got two mouths, one sucks up the soil, one returns it.

But then of course Carpenter and Faulkner are opposites! And I never saw them as neatly as being "one devours, one returns." I saw it really being about religion versus faith.

So Carpenter's relationship with her god is about her, and her god, and other people are a detriment to that. And she almost wants to clear out the people around her, so she can just have something pure and meaningful that she can focus on.

And Faulkner, he claims to have a personal relationship, but it doesn't work unless there are other people around. You can't be a messiah without people to follow you! And so it becomes very much about faith as a personal connection, and religion as a community experience.

STEVE:

"How do you feel about people using the setting of The Silt Verses - or Eskew for that matter, this can be general - for their own creative things, like RPG settings? Assuming they're not selling anything, naturally?"

MUNA:

Yeah, I mean, you're very welcome to! We love that. In the same way that we were talking earlier about just feeling so honored that people are creating art based on the Silt Verses, whether that be visual or music.

JON: Yeah, so we have not been as good as the Magnus Archives folks as being prominent about it, but it's under a Creative Commons license. So go ahead and create something as long as it's not for profit, and we'd love to see it when you make it!

STEVE:

All right!

SJ wants to know:

"The voice acting in the show is phenomenal, the casting is spot on. Is there an in-universe logic behind the characters' different accents being from different parts of the country, or did you just cast voice actors and roles you thought they would excel in, regardless of accent?"

MUNA:

Yes, we absolutely cast people in roles they thought they would excel in. I actually remember exactly where we were when we heard Méabh's audition for Carpenter; where we were sitting, and what we were doing as we were going through the excellent auditions...but as soon as we heard Méabh's take on Carpenter, that was it.

We knew she was exactly the right fit for that character. And it's exactly the same for Mason, for B., for all our main voice actors, actually.

JON:

Yeah, completely. I think as we were casting, Game of Thrones was just finishing and...I think I hadn't realized, but I'm actually really annoyed by the kind of slight pedantry in fantasy casting, where it's really Anglo-centric.

And it's always, "Okay, so we're in a fantasy world. So if you've got a posh RP English accent, you are the aristocracy. If you've got any kind of regional English accent, you are the lower-class plucky underdogs."

"And if you've got an accent from anywhere else at all - Americans aren't allowed, sorry, Steve - but if you've got an accent from anywhere else in the world, that's only justified if you're from the fantasy version of that country."

And it's such nonsense. Because it's not naturalism! Even the Stark actors don't have the same regional accents. They couldn't be a family.

It's a gloss that's based on our ignorance. And of course it exists because it makes these easy, familiar parallels with the real world, but...we didn't particularly want to do that.

We wanted it to be a bit disruptive and strange, and so it became absurd to go, "We're going to put this casting call out. It's a fantasy world that's not really anywhere in particular, it's just a generic western capitalist society...but we're going to insist that everyone needs to have English accents."

It would have been so stupid, and so limiting, and would have meant we wouldn't get to work with so many fantastic people.

STEVE:

I love it, and when I first heard it, my first reaction was, uh...

So as an American, I'm a big fan of the new Doctor Who. Or I have been, I've kind of fallen off in recent years - Jody Whittaker is wonderful, though.

There is an episode of the David Tennant years, uh... 'The Daleks Take Manhattan.' And of course, we all know Doctor Who is all English actors, all the time.

And it's an episode set in the 1930s, in New York. There's just...the "Gosh, golly, Seymour" showgirl. And then there's the old Southern preacher who's in New York City for no reason! And, (New Jersey accent)

"Oh boss, we'll be here, we're from Joisey!"

It's just like...basically I feel like they went to Central Casting.

(Calling out)

"Who can do an American accent? Any of them, doesn't matter! You, you, you, you." And that's what it felt like at first.

I'm like, "this is really weird!"

And then again, once it clicked, "Oh! Not our world. Rules don't apply." And you just have to be able to let that go. Like, maybe they have an Ireland in this world! Maybe it's jammed up against Louisiana. We don't know, it's not my business.

JON:

That's exactly it! I think sci-fi has got a lot better at just ignoring that. And that is partly because it's a bigger scope.

Watch Star Wars: Rogue One, and you go, "Okay, we've got all these different accents."

No one is going, "We need to explain where all these characters are from and all the different planets that have these accents!"

The audience just accepts it as part of the set dressing, and gets on with enjoying the show, and I think fantasy can really learn from that.

MÉABH:

Plus, Jon...i suppose it also could play into what you were saying about this world being so divided. The idea (that) these communities stick with themselves all the time.

I mean, look, I was talking to Muna earlier, and we were talking about how I think there's more people in the entire population of London than there is in Ireland.

Yet we manage to have a wide range of accents just around the country! You know, it's only an hour's drive between where my mother grew up and my father grew up, and the Cork and Kerry accent is completely different, you know?

So maybe it's a little bit more extreme in The Silt Verses, but I think it still works perfectly well!

STEVE:

I mean, my accent is descended from yours! Like, the Appalachian accent is the Scots-Irish, you know? The melding of the two, both in immigration, and in the times when Scots or the Irish actually married (Americans), before the big immigration over.

Like you know, if I relax into my actual accent, the way I sound when I talk to my family...
(accent changes)

...you know it comes out more like this.

And that's why for me, when I reach for, like, "Well, what would old Appalachian sound like?"...

Daniel Day-Lewis, when they made Gangs of New York, went and lived in isolation and studied - what would an early, first-generation American accent sound like? Still influenced by the British, still influenced by the French, still trying to find its own way, even with some indigenous influence...

(Bill the Butcher voice)

...and you get Bill the Butcher! You get that voice that he created that...doesn't really sound like any place. Its own thing.

We have one last question and...I honestly think it's the most important question out of all of them.

Brandon wants to know:

"What color are Faulkner's shoes?"

JON:

So Faulkner's shoes...are brown.

Because they are caked in river shit.

(Laughter)

JON:

At this point we have to remember where these characters have been! They started the entire series wading through the mud. Whatever Faulkner's shoes originally were, they are caked in **so many layers** of dried mud.

(Grimly)

There is nothing left of what the shoes were.

STEVE:

And that's a fair, fair question.

And that brings us, Family, to the end of the Silt Verses Season One question and answer session!

I want to thank Jon and Muna and Méabh for joining us and for being...number one, I want to thank you for producing this show!

Because it makes me so happy, and I think you guys have an incredibly bright future...as long as you don't screw it up.

But uh, I really...I've enjoyed this journey, I know a lot of folks out there listening have enjoyed this, I know our fanbase have taken to you guys.

But thank you so much for the work you do, for the world you've created.

(Narrator's voice)

Family, at this time I'd ask you to scooch your chairs back under the table as you leave, make sure you dust your feet off before you go back out into my green, make sure you don't leave no hats or coats behind.

And we'll talk to you soon, Family. Talk to you real soon.