



Nate: Stern Pinball has announced Foo Fighters as the next cornerstone theme. We're going to have a bunch of the crew that worked on the game here today on the *Stern Insiders Pinball Podcast*. Let's go.

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Nate: Welcome to the *Stern Insiders Pinball Podcast*. My name is Nate Shivers. Thank you for joining us. Welcome to 2023, the first game announcement from Stern this year is Foo Fighters. This is Jack Danger's first full cornerstone theme for Stern Pinball. Very exciting and a much-loved band in the rock and roll world jumps onto the pinball stage, as you will. Huge, huge show. More people than we've ever had from Stern on one episode. Let's jump right in.

[music]

Nate: Want to welcome everyone and I mean *everyone* to the *Stern Insiders Pinball Podcast*. We're here to talk about Foo Fighters and we have the largest panel ever assembled for a *Stern Insiders Pinball Podcast* here today. I'm going to list everybody by first name just to say hello, everyone, as we get this show going. Jack, Tanio, Eddy, Zombie, Zac, Phil... Phil, are we calling you Phil or Phillip? I got both here-- Phil.

Phil: Phil's fine. It's faster so you can lose the syllable, that's fine.

Nate: It's faster. Ray, Marc, Tom, am I missing anybody?

Mike: Mike (Kyzivat)

Jack: Zac

Nate: Mike, Zac. We're just making names up.

Jack: Yeah, there's a lot of people here.

Nate: Mike, there you are. Okay, got it. Welcome everyone. This is a landmark moment in *Stern Insiders Pinball Podcast*. New game Foo Fighters. Obviously, everyone's hearing about it now. We're recording this a little bit early so we're pre-release time and it's exciting. Jack Danger, how are you?

Jack: I'm awesome Nate! It's great to be back with you, my man.

Nate: It's great to be back with you. You had a lot here. This is your first full cornerstone release for Stern Pinball. No pressure, but what was this like in the last probably what-- year and a half, two years? How long have you been working on this game?

Jack: I'd say about what, 18 months maybe? If I can get some nods from people. Yeah, 18 months sounds about right. This is a completely different experience than



making a home pin, my goodness. The amount of stuff that goes into this, the amount of cooperation and teamwork that needs to happen to make something like this come to life is staggering and a lot more than you would think.

Nate: I believe it actually. When you're working at Stern and you're knowing you're going to design pinball machines and you have Foo Fighters offered to you or that's on the table. I don't know the exact process of how you get this as a license. What are you thinking? I'm a big fan of the Foo Fighters. What are you thinking about Foo Fighters as a pinball machine theme at the very onset?

Jack: I think as a band it was an excellent choice just from a content standpoint. They're a very fun band if you watch their-- Everyone remembers their music videos. Everyone knows their music. There's no real iconography outside of their logo but they branched out to so many weird things that they were sort of just open to whatever. And even their name relates to like UFOs and aliens and when they reach out to artists to do cool posters and stuff for their shows, more notably our good friend here, Zombie Yeti, they get sort of carte blanche to like do cool stuff, so they're just open to anything and Jeremy makes all this really dope alien stuff for them, so that, we just assumed would be the best approach to hit this.

Nate: So from a pinball machine design, you went and put a Deadpost in this game? You went and built death saves into a pinball machine? What are you doing?

Jack: (laughs) Uh, I was just trying to get in trouble and it didn't work, so I tried to put a lot of weird stuff in this. I really loved the inlane targets from... what's that game called? Heavy Metal Meltdown. Um yeah, I just reminded myself of that. I threw those in there. No one yelled at me, and was like, "Cool we get to keep doing this." And then I created that bang-back death save post thing on a homebrew years ago, and we threw it in here, again, no one yelled at me, so, here we go.

Nate: Obviously some people may know Jack originally from Dead Flip and his very popular Twitch Stream based on pinball, the most prolific and popular pinball Twitch streamer of all time I believe is the official title, right?

Jack: Aww... (laughs) Thanks, Nate.

Nate: When you were designing pinball machines on your stream you were literally doing entire streams of just like, "Hey we're designing a pinball machine, we're doing a homebrew." How much of that experience has carried into what you're doing now at Stern and with this huge cornerstone release?

Jack: I learned that I had no idea what the hell I was talking about. And everything I was doing was *bleep* if I can swear in this podcast? [laughter]

Nate: You can't. I have to edit that now, but that's okay.

Jack: Got it. Going back and looking at my homebrew now, I'm just-- just red flags everywhere. I'm like, "This can't possibly work. This couldn't be manufactured."



Things were taped and bent in certain ways that one part would probably cost more than half of your budget for the game.

But, from an idea standpoint and just coming up with cool rules and-- Oh, sorry, my watch is talking to me. Coming up with cool rules and just the way you can make the ball move, that was a fun experience to try to bring over to this, and that's what I tried to do in this game is try to make that ball do some really weird stuff that maybe we haven't tried to do before.

Nate: How important was it for you to do just that and create something new and something innovative on a playfield?

Jack: I'm not hard-pressed to always have something cool and original. There are so many great ideas that were out there in the world that maybe someone tried once on a game here or there, and maybe it worked great, but in the package, it didn't work so well. I love to look back at all the awesome stuff that has been created, but there is that little itch of wanting to make that thing that no one's ever seen before, and that's sort of like wanting to get that up-post in there for a ball save, or trying to create some interesting crossovers for the ball to travel. Yeah, I don't know-- my brain is still swimming in creating this game currently. [laughter]

Nate: I can imagine. Being someone that has been so deeply rooted in the pinball community at large, probably more so than a lot of other game designers have been. I don't know if that's a smart thing to be or not. Sometimes I've felt that it's not, but you certainly are. What's-- Is there pressure? Do you think about this a lot? Are you really counting down the days to people seeing this and--

Jack: Yeah, it's tough being as accessible as I am. One, not to try to keep my mouth shut, but not let people know what the heck's going on, but two, I've been part of this community for so long, I know how we as a community can react to games and just everyone should be nervous putting their baby out into the world. You know, no matter how proud you are, you're going to have some cheers and jeers, but this game is a fricking knockout and you guys are ding dongs if you don't like it. So there it is.

Nate: So one of the things that I think this podcast since we started doing this at Stern has shown me more than I ever would've realized is, yes, Jack Danger's name is going to be up front. Yes, everyone's going to go, "Oh, Jack's design, Jack's design." Jack didn't design this by himself. Jack did not put this pinball machine (together) by himself. That's why we have such a big team here today.

I think as the games have evolved in the last few years. You're starting to see how much more effort it takes from the art side, the software side, the engineering side, and that's why we have this big team. So, we're going to talk a little bit about the art design on this game because when I opened up the photos of this game, it was one of the jaw-dropping times that you have as a pinball fan. You're like, "Oh. Oh, okay. That's what they're doing. This is pretty great." So, I know what I'm looking at first



came from Mr. Jeremy 'Zombie Yeti' Packer. There's one more to it and we'll dive into that. Jeremy... Zombie... Mr. Yeti.

Jeremy: Hello.

Nate: I know nobody's ever made that joke before, but you've worked with the band before. You've done imagery on concert posters, maybe other things that I don't know for the Foo Fighters before. What was your thought here? Obviously, aliens and color, and looks pretty, pretty amazing here. Tell me a little bit about your work here on the Foo Fighters game.

Jeremy: I'll try to be very short because I'm told I can talk a lot. I tend to get wordy. Look, I just wasted a whole sentence there. Ironically, I worked with the band probably a decade ago when I first started doing illustration. I did a bunch of just merch design, stuff like that, very removed from the band, but at the same time, it was fun.

What happened was I was at Pintastic when they invited me out. I think it was 2015-- Oh no, it was 2017, 2016. It was after Ghostbusters but before Iron Maiden. I remember that because everyone's like, "Hey, I heard you're working on Iron Maiden." I didn't know how to respond, so I just go like, "NO!" Then I spit on them. I've learned since then. I got called while I was there by Foo Fighter management because they were getting ready to do a secret show for Lollapalooza that year, and they're like, "Hey, we need a poster and we've got this tight timeframe and somebody threw your name out because they said you're really fast."

Nate: I was going to say they always say about quality, speed and cost, you should have said, "I am very fast and I'm very expensive."

Jeremy: Yes, it's not like I don't put the time in, it's not that I'm fast, it's just that I work too many hours. Anyway, I ended up doing that poster, and my original concept was just this dumb idea that there's this old World War II era, intel file with a photo of one of these pilots and it happened to be an alien with a very poor disguise. He had a taped-on mustache and a fake nose taped on his gut, it was just dumb, but I thought it was funny. When I did that, and I always do this, I come up with the stupid story behind it, kind of a dumb reasoning for it. Anyway, long story short, it just so happened, I ended up going actually, to that show, they invited me out.

I went to that show with Jody Dankberg who as you know is licensing at Stern, and low and behold, over the next couple of months, he had actually been contacted about working with the band. I got contacted by my liaison to the band who was like, "The band's talking about doing a pinball machine and we'd really like you to be on board if you work on it." I'm like, "Okay, maybe," but that was years ago, so nothing happened for years. In the meantime, I did many other posters and I didn't really go back to that well except for on two other occasions, one was for Wrigley Field and one was for an Albuquerque, New Mexico show. So I had this ridiculous notion and story in my head for a long time for what this alien character was and whatever.



I remember Jody and I had a conversation, where we were talking about if we ever did a Foo Fighters game and this was after Maiden. We came up with this dumb idea that it would have to be sort of like a Scooby Doo game, which by the way, I have heard has now been made. But the idea was just to have them, since they travel in their van, have them go around having these misadventures or whatever. Anyway, I had all these concepts that once the game came to fruition and I sat down with Tanio and Jack, and we started hammering out ideas. I kept throwing out, I'm like, "This and that, and whatever," and surprisingly, they didn't say that's dumb ever. They just kept saying, "Okay, more, more."

Nate: They liked it.

Jeremy: Yeah, and I had probably a different role in this one than I've had in a lot of others, because usually, I'm coming at it-- I think the first thing when we talked that I said to Jack and Tanio was, "This seems like the closest opportunity we're ever going to have to make an original theme." Even though technically I know we have a band involved here, the band is very creative and flexible, and fun, and goofy, and all those things that make pinball great. So, I think they're going to let us do some things, I hope, and sure enough, they did. Tanio and Jack were like, "That's a funny idea."

I'll give you an example, on this game, there's something called the FooBot. This came later as I was doing concept sketches, first off, I love robots, and for what it's worth if we can ever do a generation one Transformers game, I'm on board, and so are the Kyzivats.

I also, I love the old Shogun Warrior robots, and toys, and stuff, and I came with a stupid idea and I did a sketch, and it was just as a joke. What if their van transforms into this GrohlBot, which of course, was a joke off of the old GoBots, but I thought GrohlBot was funny. Anyway, of course, we don't want to call out Dave so we changed it to FooBot, but they said, "Yes, let's go for it." It made it into the game and it's actually a pretty big thing, and I'll shut up because other people need to talk, but the one thing I want to point out that's also pretty cool is one of the themes on the Premium and LE in particular and on the game itself was this idea that this was a cartoon from say like the 90s. And so, there's all of these references to toys because they had their own toy line. It was a Saturday morning cartoon or whatever, ridiculous idea, I know. At one point, I had a conversation with Jody Dankberg, again, because on (Teenage Mutant Ninja) Turtles, we ended up doing an actual physical toy, limited edition toy with NECA toys. At one point I say, "Oh, we should totally make toys of these." He's like, "No, I'll make that happen." And he did. So, one thing that's going to be coming out should be announced about the time this game comes out is there's actually a toy line based on these characters and these toys.

They actually are going to be, Jack correct me if I'm wrong, interacting physically being able to be attached and used on your toppers when the topper comes out.

Jack: That is correct.



Jeremy: Because we're all super toy nerds and we saw an opportunity and we ran with it. I won't give you any more on that but the toys are incredible. I was working on the packaging last weekend and I'm very happy with them and hopefully the team is.

Nate: That's really cool.

Jeremy: Anyway, again, I just throw that out there because this entire project has been much different than any other for me in the best possible ways. I did, however, tear my rotator cuff. I was very stiff for the entire thing and then I get-- Have you ever had a frozen shoulder? If you ever tear your rotator cuff and you don't get it taken care of, it freezes? It was a fun year.

Nate: That sounds great. Love that, love those frozen shoulders.

Jeremy: I was in physical therapy for the last half of the game but it turned out okay.

Nate: With the art team, how does your work lead into what the other members of the art and creative side team have done with this game? This is my way of segwaying to more of the members here.

Jeremy: Here's what I'll say is a lot of the concepts visually that I came up with, then Tanio took with his writing partner, and I believe was Eric Leiderman also involved with some of the writing as well?

Jack: Yeah.

Jeremy: Eric Leiderman, who's the showrunner for Seth Meyers, who's worked on I think Iron Maiden and RUSH as well, work with Tanio and Tanio's other writing partner.

Tanio: Cheryl Wagner.

Jeremy: Cheryl Wagner, and they went ahead and fleshed out all of these insanely creative ideas to actually put things into some sort of story.

Nate: I think that's a great segue, because Tanio, isn't like-- Everyone talks they want an original theme, they want this, they want that, at a glance, the Foo Fighters game, to me looks incredibly well integrated as far as bringing a theme of a rock band into a pinball machine without just saying, "Hey, look, there's a rock band, and there's a concert, here's some songs, go."

This is like, there's a story, there's assets that had to come from somewhere. Tell me please, what is the thought process in the actual—the mind synch that goes into creating literally something out of nothing here?

Tanio: It started all with conversations with Zombie Yeti and Jack Danger. Zombie Yeti, Jeremy would show us these drawings and he was like, "This is stupid." We're like, "Oh, my God, that's awesome." It all started out with this period of, I think



Jeremy had a fever for a couple of weeks, so he came up with some really good stuff in that period. We had some time. There was some, a lot of brainstorming and then as the story evolved, we started out wanting to know, we wanted to do something more than-- Jack was really pushing like, "I want to do more than just music videos, I want a story and I want animation."

So we're like, "Okay, let's do this." The story evolved. We knew we wanted a bad guy. So, this alien, this really poorly disguised alien that shows up throughout history, we flushed out the backstory for him. He crashed in Roswell in the 1940s and he was taken in by the scientists at Area 51 and raised on TV and pop culture, eventually escaped and eventually he had a big plan to take over the world and he's using music to do that. He wants to take rock and roll music and reformat it into something that's more structured and more techno. And so he's gone as far-- He's got pretty far by the time of the game, if you come out in the game, he's starting to take over cities across America and he's got this army of people that have been brainwashed and they're wearing these helmets that reformat their brains and they all have to march—And anyway, the ideas started flowing and we did a lot of back and forth.

The early on process of fleshing out the story was with Jeremy and Jack, and then Cheryl Wagner who's worked with me actually on various projects-- helping with writing on a lot of projects like Deadpool and, KISS and Mustang. She contributed to a bunch of stuff. We flushed out a bunch of stuff. The idea was to-- This game is actually based on a TV show—a cartoon TV show from the Saturday morning that everybody knew about that didn't actually exist.

And so we had to then, we came up with different adventures. So now that the game plays out these animations that are from that TV show and all your favorite memories of this TV show that didn't exist. And it wasn't really possible with just all the-- There's been a lot of collaboration in this thing. We just got together and started talking about it.

We came up with simple ideas for what these different modes would be and then gave a couple sentences of text and then handed that off to our storyboard artist. The first storyboard artist is Phil Gullet. He took that idea and was like, "Huh, what do you do with that?" Then fleshed that way out into fully timed animations and brought a whole new life to the story.

I'll mention too-- Eric Leiderman also has done a lot-- We have a lot of-- There's going to be a lot of VO in this game. The contributors to the VO have been myself and Cheryl Wagner, Eric Leiderman, Mike Kyzivat, Tom Kyzivat, and anybody else who says anything around us that's funny.

We basically take as many funny and fun ideas and like, "Oh, that's a good idea, let's do that." So it's been a great opportunity. I don't know, it sort of grew. We planted seeds with a structure of both rules and story. It was really important to have a narrative structure around the rules.



We planted the seeds there and then those grew like a magical garden of something-something, cosmic fifth-dimensional love. Each person has taken pieces of that and grown it. Like Phil and Tom Kyzivat and Mike and Ray has taken--

I mean, Ray's really focused a lot on the rules and actually making it into a pinball game where I've been taking it from a higher level of like, "here's the structure, let's make this easy and fun for people, and really engaging." Ray's meeting me from the other end of like, "Let's make this a really good tournament game. Let's make it score awesome, make it balanced." So that's what happened.

Jack: I'd like to add also, of all the weird stuff that we have brought up that Jeremy's thrown at us that I have thrown out that anyone's come to us and been like, "what if this thing does this thing?" Oh, that's really weird.

And we put it in front of the Foo Fighters. We will get approval literally in hours. Nothing has been turned down. We threw everything at this game and they're like, "Great, that's weird as hell, we can't wait to see it. Just go for it."

Nate: That's awesome. Phil, did you feel like you were designing artwork and animations for a pinball machine or a Saturday morning cartoon?

Phil: It was an awful lot like a cartoon. I hadn't worked-- I was just hired, this is my first pinball machine.

Nate: Welcome to the fold.

Phil: Thank you. I figured this is-- There's a reason Chuck brought me on board. I reverted to type and well, I know how to storyboard and I know how to storyboard for television. So, I used the paper and pencil and you write down pictures and camera direction, we'll zoom in and we cross fade here, blah, blah, blah, blah.

Just like the band every-- You show people things and nobody ever said, "Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no, that's not how we do it." They're like, "Oh, this is terrific, forward please," and nothing but positive results.

And "Can you do more of this faster?" "Yes, I can. I'll go back to my desk," and we started a storyboard. We had a stack of storyboards and drawings and everything that Jack is going to do something with apparently.

Jack: Yeah, I got a really great hand drawing of a sausage hanging in my cubicle right now that Phil drew. It's in the game and it's awesome.

Nate: **[laughter]** That's great. Explain to me the workflow there with Phil, and with Mike, and through Jeremy, and with Tom. How does all of that get passed around, and what's your tasks at hand to tie this all together? Because there's so much more artwork in a pinball machine here in 2023 than there was 5 years ago even really.



Jeremy: Oh, I'll throw out this. Once-- [laughter] I focus on my stuff, and then unless they ask me for something, I trust them and let them [laughter] do their thing, because they all are very capable human beings

Tanio: Yes. On this game, the storyboards, we took the storyboards that Phil made, and Tom had made and then turned them into animatics. Pretty early on, we were having the animatics, basically, the storyboards taken, and timed out, and turned into shots. We put those in the game and started developing the modes, and the rules, and the look, and the feel, and the sounds, and everything around this pre-done stuff, that's not final, but it looks really cool, and you can get the idea of what it was. We have artists, I don't know Zac, if we want to talk about, we then take that, and put it through the coloring stick.

Zac: Yeah, sure. I'm Zac Stark. Apparently, I'm the project lead artist. Tanio was just referring to though the putting it through the color thing. We pretty much, because of how easy the approval process was with this, we knew pretty quick that after an animatic was done, we could move on to actually coloring it in. And because Phil, and one of the fellows who wasn't able to make it today, because he is got a new kid, Bob Rissetto, I hope I'm saying his last name right.

The timing, and Tom's timing on the animatics, there was not a whole lot of area where you could screw anything up. There was pretty much anybody who can color a coloring book. We essentially just had several frames that we all had to just make sure everything was colored exactly right. Because the timing was there, the cuts were there, everything was exactly perfect. And thankfully, we had a lot of people to help with coloring. We had Olivia Jensen, Mimi Ernst, Dave Liskovec, Marc Reneses (mispronounced).

I'm not going to bother with the rest of-- [laughter] Sorry Marc. Marc Reneses, and Alex Borre, and Danai aka Samurai Pizza Cat, helped with a lot of the 3D models that we used just as reference for the 2D stuff. There were times where animating 2D animation needed a bit of help. Some of the sequences we needed, it was faster to have something, just a reference to draw over. That was essentially the process.

This is my first pin with Jack obviously, but also with Phil, and Bob, and Dave, and Marc. I worked with Tanio on Deadpool. Deadpool's, one of my favorite games of all times. They brought me back in July. I was super excited to get back with Tanio, and everyone. It was awesome to have all of these great artists. It was an adjustment for me because I was more of a production artist on Deadpool. This time, I just write things down for the most part, but it's awesome.

Nate: And then it happens. That's a nice feeling.

Zac: Yeah, exactly.

Nate: You write it down, it happens and it's approved very quickly. That's an extra nice workflow.



Zac: It was so awesome, and we had so much time, so it was awesome. I've never worked on a game for this long, and to be working with all of these, these super talented people, it's awesome. It was my first time with a lot of people, but it's so, so cool.

Nate: Marc, we were joking about your title earlier as senior artist. Tell me what your main role on Foo Fighters was, and maybe give me a highlight of something that when you look back on this game, you're like, "Oh, I did that, or that's my thing."

Marc: Oh, yeah, sure. I was actually brought into the game a little bit later in the project because I was actually working on James Bond. So, I was working on James Bond, and then probably jumped onto this game towards the tail end. Jeremy created a lot of great playfield artwork, and one of the tasks that I was assigned to early on was actually the Overdrive Ball Save, that Jack slid into the game [laughter] from his previous homebrews. Anyway, I was able to take some of Jeremy's playfield art and just adapt it to the animation effects for the Overdrive ball save on both sides. I played a smaller part in the whole production because it's like Phil and everybody else took a big chunk of the work added on at the tail end, but I was able to contribute to take up whatever Jeremy created in his playfield and incorporate it into the animations.

Nate: How important is it from the art team and feel free anybody to answer this. Jeremy does this kind of overarching big art piece of the playfield and then obviously cabinet and backglass art. With something like Foo Fighters, you're drawing a lot people, there's literally, I think six members of a band here, and they have a look and a style and Dave Grohl gets to be very fit and in great shape later in life in this game, which is cool.

How important is that look exactly gets carried over into all the animations, because then there's so many more needs for artwork inside the game nowadays? How closely are you trying to nail what Jeremy did to start with further on inside the game in the animation side?

Phil: Pretty closely. Although, as Chuck is fond of saying you have to simplify things a little bit if you're going to animate it. Fortunately, when every time Chuck said, "Now this, we got to simplify a little bit, keep the spirit there, but if it's gonna move we we got a lot of drawings to do." And nobody said no. Nobody said no. Again, if everyone said yes, as long as it looks rad. Go ahead and forward.

Nate: I have the brothers Kyzivat here and you've been very quiet so far. I would like to hear from you both. We need your contributions to the *Stern Insider's Pinball Podcast*. Tell me about the Foo Fighters from your point of view.

Tom: Do you want to go first, Mike, I have some stuff to say about the art.

Mike: We're still on the art so go ahead.



Tom: Yeah, to piggyback on what Phil said, I think the idea to what they've developed was, correct me if I'm wrong, Phil, but to go for like a Hanna Barbera sort of style for the actual 2D animation that you see in the game. So, it's taking Jeremy's art and kind of giving it the flavor of Hanna Barbera from the 1970s 1980s, which is super awesome. For me, I came out of this project a little bit later too, maybe halfway through or maybe even later.

So I was coming on it from a standpoint of a fan because I was on another project for a while and I was hearing about all the cool stuff these guys were doing on this game that's like, "Oh! Oh! It's 80 stuff and it's Scooby Doo! And it's '90s and '80s anime! And it's toys! And it's all the things I love and it's so cool! I can't wait to see how this game turns out!" And then you know, "Oh, now I'm a part of it? Oh, this is even better," so it's just been awesome. I love it.

I'm a big fan of traditional animation so we have lots of hand drawn 2D animation in the game, and beautiful painted backgrounds, just amazing stuff and it's been a lot of fun and I fell in love with the FooBot, I thought that was an amazing idea and the alien character. Fortunately for me, I got to storyboard and animate a lot of the FooBot sequences that appear in the LCD screen and the alien too, so it's just been a lot of fun to work on this project.

Nate: That's awesome. Mike, has it been a lot of fun to work on this project?

Mike: Yeah, it has. I'm in a similar situation to Tom. I was brought in sporadically. I jumped from project to project, I'd work on Foo Fighters for a little while then I went to Bond and then I'm back on Foo Fighters so but I was in the same situation like, "Oh, this is some really cool stuff. This is all '80s toys and '80s shows and cartoons which is all in my wheelhouse, stuff that I grew up with."

I too am a G-one Transformers fan so the FooBot is a favorite. [laughter] Voltron/combiner thing and just that creativity is really cool, they put in a really cool story with a lot of cool references to older things like the Voltron style FooBot, all the different references to the '80s and Scooby-Doo stuff and I really liked that I worked mostly in Area 51 multiball, which is the one I've been in control of or along with the art and Tom has done the artwork for it so that's a Kyzivat brothers, the dastarly Kyzivat brothers--

Nate: That's awesome, that's great.

Tom: Go team venture.

[laughter]

Mike: It was cool to see all these, it's really a lot of great ideas and like a lot of people have said it's like an original idea pinball machine, but with a band in it.

Nate: I think it's a fantastic art package and I can't wait to see all the animations. I saw some limited things that they've shown me. They took the handcuffs off for a



second, but I'm really excited to see how it all plays out. I love asking this question when we have someone who worked on the mechanical engineering side of the game on the show. Eddy, I have a question for you. What was the biggest pain that Jack Danger caused you in designing this game?

[laughter]

Jack: Daily, daily.

Eddy: You can only name one.

Nate: The worst. The biggest problem to solve?

Eddy: It was the crossover shot.

Nate: Which shot is that? We're talking about-

[laughter]

Nate: -from the upper flipper?

Eddy: That was a joke. There's more than one.

Nate: Oh, I see what you're saying. Yes.

Eddy: I wouldn't say that any singular thing was a pain. I mean I came in about halfway, took the project over. My role was partly teacher, partly mentor and I think on that regard, conceptually, things were pretty well mapped out. My job was to smoothen things up, increase reliability and work through a laundry list of issues that Jack was still having. I don't think it was a single thing. I think it was just a matter of working together and walking down the path.

Nate: Did you run into issues with just innovation and anything new and interesting to this game that you guys hadn't started seeing before, hadn't really done a lot of? Was there something-- An unseen problem on this one or something? Problem is not the right word. I want to stop saying problem. A new challenge?

Eddy: Challenge. There were definitely a couple of challenges. The up-post ball save was a challenge. Trying to work within the realm of pinball accuracy, pinball tolerances, pinball costing. Working within very real physical parameters to make things reliable that are sometimes on the edge of what is possible. So there were a couple of things that were a challenge, but I think we nailed them.

Nate: That's great. Jack, what do you think your biggest pain towards the mechanical engineering team was from your point of view?

Jack: When I design, I design using markers and magic and some of that doesn't translate to the real life. [laughter] It's me making stuff in programs like *Visual Pinball*



and I'm like, "Guys, look, this ball can go upside down and levitate and break into three other balls." Then I get slapped in the head and they're like, "Okay, how do we make this real?" I'm still very green to this whole process and it's been a fun learning experience. This being my first cornerstone. Again, I learned a whole lot and it's been awesome working with everybody to sort of hold my hand a little bit to show me the ropes.

Nate: Ray Davidson. How are you, sir?

Ray: Good.

Nate: You're still one of the best pinball players on the planet. Right? Is that true?

Ray: Try to be.

Nate: What do you do in Foo Fighters? What's the thought process here? You've got a playfield with, I would say more than a few inserts to work with here. You've got a story. Where are we going with this? What are we going to do in the Foo Fighters game?

Ray: There's basically, the playfield has all the different sections of all the things going on. Everything's labeled nicely. You can see the six band modes in the middle, different cities around the map, and you can select the order you want to play them in. Like Tanio said earlier, Tanio comes up with the big picture, and then I have to make it real. For the band modes, it was challenging to integrate the modes in a way that was intuitive but wasn't just hit the blinky lights.

It's like, "Oh, you're progressing a story," and then also, it was tricky because we wanted to kind of make it simple. It's like, "Oh, every mode, you're filling up a progress meter, and you're making progress and then you beat the mode." I had to come up with the numbers of like, "Okay, how many shots is a good number for the modes?" It's like, "Well, turns out 14," that seemed to work pretty good. There's a lot of that that I had to do on this game of dialing in kind of magic numbers and then also working with the artists.

I've been working really close with Zac Stark. He gives me something on the UI and I'd be like, "Hey, can you make this cut up into 14 segments so I can fill up the progress meter," and just coming up with that, or sometimes, when you're selecting a mode, you'll see all your different van modifications, which is an entirely separate area of the playfield. It's that little drop target with the paddle behind it. You can-- Before you play a van mode, you can mod your van. That was another thing where we had all these ideas of how do we level up your van? How do we make it simple, but engaging and give you perks that are easy to understand? I tried to add those to the Van Select screen, so when you're choosing your mode, you can see, "Oh, I've got more time."

Kind of like Deadpool, we drew a lot of inspiration from the team ups there. It's basically as I'm filling out the features, if I realize as a player, "Hey, I'd love to see



this or that," it's up to me to just to make it happen. Work with the artist sometimes put in some, text boxes myself or, whatever. Then dialing in all the logic so that, "Oh, that sounds like a cool idea." Becomes, "Oh, it is precisely this."

This is how this works, this is how that works. I did all the van modes, the Overlord and multiballs. Just anything I can-- As I'm playing I'm like, "Oh, this needs to be filled out more." And we kind of had an overarching document with all the different features and a lot of them just had one line of text and so then I had to turn that into the actual feature.

Nate: Absolutely. How is the music, and this is a question if anybody wants to answer. How is the music of the Foo Fighters integrated into the game? We've talked a lot about what the game looks like, what's going on in the game. You've got this great story, but how is the music? Because this is a band with a lot of generationally hit songs. Certainly, a lot of the people on this show today have grown up hearing Foo Fighters either on the radio, on their own stereos, just in their head later in the day. One of the biggest bands of our lifetime, really. How is the music working into the game?

Tanio: Each one of the different modes and the multiballs have a song associated with it. We have 15 songs. There's six Van modes. They each have a song associated with it. The songs help tell the story. For instance, one of the Van Modes, you go to Chicago and the song is Something From Nothing, which is a song that they made as part of their Sonic Highways. They made that song, they wrote it and recorded it here in Chicago.

It's about Chicago. Each one, like the song for the Seattle, when you go there, that song is, This is a Call and it's in that mode you're going out. Trying to gather-- You're trying to-- They're pretty much driving around in their van with a big speaker on top calling out for people to action, come join us this fight against the Evil Overlord. So each song we've taken and interwoven it into the story.

In addition to that, at the beginning when you first plunge the ball, there's no mode running. You have a tape deck that comes up and you can pick from I think it's about eight different songs. So you can, in main play, you can just pick a song that you want to listen to as your bass song. And then as you start a mode, it'll go and start the mode and play the song that goes with that.

Nate: It's almost a hybrid of how other Stern music pinball machines have worked over time. Because sometimes it's like you're picking a song to play with, or the mode is the song.

Tanio: Yeah. One of the questions we've gotten is like, when you pick a song at the start what does it do? What it does is, it plays the song [laughter], but then once you start the mode, then the song is integrated in the mode. We've also done some pretty cool things with the light shows. We're using expressive lighting on the LE and the Premium will support it.



And so we'll have light shows that are timed to that. We're also going to do some features where you'll hear the music has been transformed by the Overlord. His minions into this reformatted version that's this kind of poppy—Well, you'll hear it. It's kind of like this electronica stuff that's very, it sounds like it was made in the 70s for kids TV show.

Jack: It's kind of video gamey too. That again, is another thing where we even messed with the Foo Fighters' music and they're like, "Cool. Yeah, sure!"

Nate: That's pretty amazing. That's what I was thinking. I was like, you got that approved? Wow. That's awesome.

Tanio: Yeah. It is. [laughter]

Nate: That's exciting. Jack, I got to ask because I know anyone who follows music and pop culture. Rock and roll has seen obviously the untimely passing of Taylor Hawkins. This happened during the development of this game. Was that like? I don't even know how you think about that. That's rough.

Jack: Yeah, it was—untimely is not even the word for it. We're in the middle of this thing, horrible, horrible thing to happen. And it affected ourselves mentally, but also the project in itself. We were sort of in limbo, like, what is going to happen with this game? Because what's going to happen with the band? They went radio silent. Obviously, on social media and everywhere, and we were just-- waiting for something. But yeah, I was able to keep working, because my stuff is very mechanical, very geometric. Jeremy could probably talk more to some of those experiences to have like, what happened around that time.

Jeremy: Yeah, it was definitely unexpected, and it was definitely a gut punch. And it was one of those things where we were at with the concepts, and some of the ideas that we were that I was playing with and we were kind of brewing on the side, it was one of those things where you start to question you go, "Oh, wait a minute, how is this going to work out?" And what happened is, and I can't remember exactly when, but I was talking with their management, Kristen. And she said one thing that changed everything in my mind. And she kind of said, "Listen, we just gotta make sure that this game is fun for the kids."

Meaning the kids of the band. She's changed the direction-- I'm like, "Well, first off that's our job, to begin with, is to make sense of fun." For some reason, in my head, it kind of brought me back up from that low that we were at and try figure out how do we move-- and at that point, I go, "Okay, let's really lean into this." And from my perspective, that's sort of what I did. I just want to say, first off, just to throw this out here, not to get us off subject, but I think absolutely everyone on this team, and I'm always amazed. I think this is my 68th game with Stern now.

Nate: [laughter]



Jeremy: Not really good with numbers. Everyone on this team, absolutely crushed and destroyed what they did and put as much of themselves into making it just that much more of a multiplier across the board. I've always said if everybody does their job with the same amount of passion the end result is just insane, and I've been fortunate enough to be on a few of those projects, and this was definitely one of them. And I thank everyone involved for not making me look like crap.

Jack: [laughter] Love you, dude.

Nate: Jack, sell me on the Premium and the Limited Edition. Why should I buy that game?

Jack: Uh, 'cause I'm Jack Danger. [coughs]

Nate: Okay, sold.

Jack: [laughter]

Nate: No, really. Tell me why.

Jack: We threw as much cool stuff at this to match the awesome story that we came up with. We have fully sculpted the van that they're driving around in we have fully sculpted the Overlord and his vehicle that you will be battling throughout this. They're interactive, especially the Overlord, he's talking to you and bouncing around and reacting to you hitting him or he's talking. But more notably, the Premium has that up-post outlane Overdrive save, you gotta have that thing, okay? Because, just freaking do it. But the upper playfield on this thing is a blast. Because we've got two little orbits there, you've got the sculpted Area 51. It's meant to not keep you up there for too long because I know the biggest complaint about upper playfields is like, "Oh God, I'm just up here for the whole freaking game."

So we tried to combat that a little bit while still keeping some fun and speed up there. So, some of those shots, if you hit them just right you don't get to react and that ball just comes back down. Plus the right ramp actually, if you shoot up there, you don't even have to interact with the upper playfield if you don't want to, if you got something more pressing on the main playfield, it's just a throughput to let the ball come back down and straight onto the play. We did a really good job of keeping a lot of cool elements on the Pro from the Premium so they're both-- I think you're going to have a hit on your hands no matter what you buy.

The art package is-- good luck choosing between those! [laughter]

Nate: I was going to say that I get nervous on these shows because I don't want to undersell anything but I got to say I really like the pro backclass a lot.

Jack: Yeah, the Pro cabinet with the fight scene, but the Premium backclass with sort of like a glimpse until what the finale is of this game. The LE with its alien green. Oh,



man. We even got laser-cut armor just naturally on the LE. When is the last time that happened? I can't think of. Anyway, it's-- good luck!

Nate: Blowing the budget, Jack. You're blowing the budget.

Jack: [laughter]

Jeremy: He saved some money by removing the pop bumpers.

Jack: [laughter] Alright. There are zero pop bumpers on this.

Tom: That was on my list of notes here and I got there. So, you didn't put any pop bumpers on a game Jack, what's up?

Jack: I'm sorry. I'm trying to make it more expensive for the other designers. To keep--

Eddy: We had to put the flippers back in.

Jack: Yeah, there you go. [laughter]

Nate: Good point, good point. That's right.

Jack: To keep the chaos, though, something that, again, going back to my homebrew, I put one of those old Gottlieb kicker targets on there because I'm in love with that action. It's a target that you hit, but it fires it back at you. And the awesome engineers at Stern Pinball were like, "Let's take this on. Let's make one of these. We put it in the game facing up so that at any point, if the ball doesn't have enough momentum coming around the main orbit, or if it ricochets off something, depending on the angle at which it hits that, that thing will add the chaos that you're missing from a pop bumper. It also supports some of the shots for you.

So quite often, you'll see this thing shooting up that upper left ramp for you, just from it hitting itself, shooting against the UFO captive ball. It'll go up through the spinner shot. We've seen it accidentally start your Overlord multiball by shooting into the Overlord arena. It'll hit some drop targets for you. It adds that chaos, but it's just a cooler, more direct action.

Nate: Also on my list here of little notes, there seems to be targets in the outlanes.

Jack: In the inlanes, yes.

Nate: Inlanes, excuse me, Inlanes. Sorry.

Jack: Oh, man. Can I put targets in the out-lanes?!

Nate: Sorry that I said that.

Jack: [laughter]



Ray: It's is a sore subject.

Jack: Yeah, right. Spinners in the outlanes-- I don't want to talk about it right now, but yes. Targets in the inlanes. This was something that I really love from a game called Heavy Metal Meltdown. You're not meant to shoot these directly. You could try and screw yourself if you're not good at Shatsing. But what's cool about these is, you're rewarded by trapping the ball, and the ball will roll up and hit those targets and come back, and then we use those to accentuate shot values and stuff. But more notably, and something that drives me freaking nuts in pinball is often I'll like-- If a ball is coming at a flipper and I'll trap up and let the ball roll up the inlane so I can control it. I don't know what the terminology, is it called up-and-over.

It's where you successfully caught the ball, but it rolls up the inlane and decides to go out the outlane and you feel like you were sort of screwed by trying to control the ball. This is not even a possibility on this game because you're rewarded for trying to catch that ball.

Nate: Yeah. I got to say, when I looked at this game first, that was the first thing that popped into my head is like, unique in modern pinball. I know it's been done, but I don't think a lot of people have ever seen that so that's very interesting. I would like to hear from anybody else in this giant room of people and man, I'm sorry we can't get around everybody more, but this is a big show. What is everyone else's takeaway here on Foo Fighters as we get to the release?

Phil: I need a nap. I need a vacation.

[laughter]

Nate: A lot of work, I'm sure. I can only imagine what's gone into this.

Eddy: I think it's going to blow people's minds how cool this game is.

Tanio: Oh, I came up with a tagline, you guys so, like on Deadpool broke the fourth wall. The Foo Fighters pinball breaks through to the fifth dimension and higher.

[crosstalk] Woah! Put that on the flyer!

Tanio: You really need to spend time staring at Jeremy's art. Actually, what you need to do is you have to buy both the Pro and either a Premium or the LE so you really get the full story and the package because you have to look in there and study every little detail in there is--There's something about it. There's a secret-- The whole story reveals itself. It's going to take a couple of years for everybody to really get the full picture, but I'm really excited about it.

Jeremy: [crosstalk] Tanio is being a little-- Oh, I'm sorry. Go ahead, Eddy.

Eddy: I was going to say there's your fifth dimension right there. People want both [laughter].



Jeremy: No, I was just going to say Tanio was just being a little facetious there. But I do think you should buy two of each.

Nate: Straight from Zombie Yeti's mouth. You should buy two of each. I will say, so my sales pitch on the game is, I have seen people who-- Leaks happen in the world. And there's been some rumors of maybe there was going to be a Foo Fighters pinball machine. The internet does what the internet does. I've seen some people who maybe aren't familiar with the band, say, "Ah, I'm not buying a Foo Fighters machine, hard pass. Save me my money." I think a lot of people who said that are going to be reconsidering that statement when they see the game because this game looks pretty freaking cool. So I think it's a big win for you guys at Stern. Congratulations to everybody on all the hard work. I am impressed by the games that are coming out of your company. I love working with you guys. Congratulations, Jack. Jack, you're incredibly humble, and I'm sure that your team likes working with you.

[laughter]

Nate: I think this is going to be really cool. I'm excited to see it in person.

Jack: I'm also very excited in that. That was also a big reason why I wanted to make sure we are all here because like any-- Designers get a lot of praise and stuff like that, but I had such a small part in this whole freaking thing. And everything that everyone's done has brought this game to the next freaking level. And I love it, and I love this team. To something Zac said earlier, Deadpool also is my absolute favorite pinball machine. The fact that I get to work with Deadpool's artist, and programmer, I've been fan grilling this entire time. This has been awesome.

Nate: There you have it. I wish you all the best of luck. Can't wait to play the game. Send some to the Netherlands. Let's do this.

[laughter]

Nate: I'm Nate. This is a whole bunch of people from Stern. I can actually run down names again. It's Mike, Tom, Ray, Marc, Phil, Tanio, Jack, Eddy, Zac, and Mr. Zombie Yeti. That's been the *Stern Insider's Pinball Podcast*. Go find Foo Fighters, put your quarters in it. Get Insider Connected to it. Buy it and put it in your house.

Jack: Whoo hoo!

Nate: Thanks, everyone.

All: Thank you.

Various: Woo hoo!

[music]



Nate: That is the *Stern Insiders Pinball Podcast*. I want to thank everyone for listening. I want to thank everyone for playing a lot of pinball. I want to thank half the company of Stern was on the podcast today. That's fantastic. I like it. I'll leave you with this: When I was 16 years old I went and saw the Foo Fighters in Boise, Idaho at the very end of their first US tour. Dave Grohl came out after the show and hung out with a bunch of us sweaty, gross, disgusting, teenage boys who were obsessed with Foo Fighters, Nirvana, and stuff, and talked to us for like a half an hour, and was super, super cool. If nothing else, he's left a really positive impression of famous rockstar on this person throughout my life. So anyway, looking forward to playing Foo Fighters. Looking forward to the future of Stern Pinball games down the road. There'll be more. We'll talk about them. Thanks for listening.

[background noise]

Nate: I can do that.

Jack: Do you guys want me to start this by talking about my colonoscopy?

All: Yeah!

[00:58:08] [END OF AUDIO]