

Gail Simmons on the 'Top Chef' Season 23 Finale! Plus, 'Widow's Bay' Episode 9 | Prestige TV

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I need support staff to clear the room. Stand up and walk now. >> Hello and welcome to the watch. My name is Andy Greenwald. I have no official designation here at Spotify. Chris Ryan is surprise surprise traveling this great country of ours. I think he's calling it a listening tour. He hasn't really announced anything yet, but he is connecting with voters in the Midwest. very happy to have you here. We have a good show today. It is not just going to be me speaking directly to you in camera, I promise. I'm going to talk for a few minutes. Chris is going to join me somehow through the magic of time travel, aka we recorded it earlier this week to talk about this penultimate episode of Widow's Bay, which I think is our both of our favorite show of the year. And then at the end of the podcast, I will be joined for my yearly, and I don't take it for granted, my yearly conversation with the great Gail Simmons, judge, executive producer of Top Chef. That conversation hasn't happened yet. So again, miracle of podcast time travel, but I'm imagine it's going to be a good one. And we will talk about fully spoiling the just concluded season 23 in Carolina's.

So housekeeping, something I am famously bad at. you can email us the watch at spotify.com. Say whatever you want. I do not have access to that email, nor do I want it. you can also of course find us on Instagram at thewatch. oh. Oh, I always get it wrong. It's the watch >> the watch pod underscore >> underscore classic. >> Yeah. >> >> again, the watch pod was taken by a account that reviews watches. >> See, okay, that does seem inevitable to me.

>> do you think we get any crossover with the watch community? I don't personally wear one. >> I think we should try to get a sponsorship going. >> I >> a little rolly. >> Do you think we can get a Rolex subscription? Gia, this is >> if we put it out there, you never know. >> Very very optimistic. while we are on the subject of house cleaning, one small thing. Look, you guys know this about Chris again, and this is why what makes him an authentic candidate, almost authentic enough to run for Senate in Maine. He does not like to engage with the replies and the reply guys. He's just like, "The take is clean, the delivery is pure. We move on to the next one." I am not that impervious, and when I get something wrong, I do like to admit it. So, two things. Last week, I believe Chris had a really fun game where he pitched the idea that we would quote unquote star city other television shows, which is to say that we would just spontaneously I'm sorry, no, he did it as homework. I spontaneously did it alternate versions/spin-offs of beloved TV shows that looked at things from the other perspective. I was very very pleased with my final suggestion which was a show set in the Madmen universe based on the quote other Jewish firm that the that Rachel the department store error in the pilot should have been seeking business from. I didn't I fumbled basically I thought it was a good idea and I fumbled the ball at the

one yard line. longtime watch listener Jonathan zoomed in to say Mad Men was right there.

>> Was right there waiting for me and I do feel like that's just a bad look for me and I will continue to get better every day. Second thing, William B. Davis, the Canadian actor who plays the cigarette smoking man on the X-Files, a show we talked about last week and frankly I'm ready to talk about almost anytime. Still alive. Still alive. 88 years young. I buried the man last week. Guys, I'm really sorry. I conflated the actor with the man who smoked cigarettes on television for a decade. So, you understand my error, but I do apologize to Mr. Davis. I hope he's thriving today. I also hope that he's watching the NBA finals. I don't know if anyone else in this room has been watching, but the Knicks game last night was like the best TV I've seen this year. Kai, don't clip that because our Widow's Bay content is just going wild right now, and I don't ever want to be known as someone who's inconsistent in his fandom. But that was an incredible that was incredible television. Last few things of notes to go through. Slow Horses returns season 6 September 16th of this year.

This is really one of the only constants in this mad house that we call contemporary television and entertainment. I kind of love the flex here. This is all they released. Apple said that it was coming back, but we all knew it was coming back. This show puts a trailer for the next season at the end of the previous season's finale. Let's see The Pitt do that. this is their plot synopsis for their sixth season returning show. The slow horses are on the run as Diana Taverner embroils them all in a fatally highstakes game of retaliation and revenge. To which I add, is the slow horses PR person the easiest, cushiest job in Hollywood?

Literally cut and paste. Cut and paste. Ka, has there been a season of slow horses that that could not apply to? >> no. I've never really watched Slow Horses, but I that that summary just kind of gave me the gist of it. I think isn't that what they do every season? >> Yeah. I mean, I think maybe the key is that they're all on the run. Sometimes they amble, they're slow, sometimes they walk, sometimes they stumble, >> but they are always embroiled in a fatally high stakes game of retaliation and revenge. So, business as usual >> and people will tune in >> to and again, I don't know how you feel about this, Ka, but a very exciting new show announcement, at least as far as I'm concerned this week or since our last recording. Tui in Great Britain.

>> Oh, >> Tui in Great Britain. Now, again, like the Slow Horses PR blurb, it's all right there in the title. we rarely talk because of Chris's editorial Iron Fist. We rarely talk about the perverse pleasures of Tui in Italy or his previous show which was just like Tucci touches them all or whatever it was called, but it was basically the same thing. >> Wow. So, the title is really Tucci in Great Britain. >> The title? Oh, you thought I was kidding.

>> No, I Yeah, I thought >> No, no, no, no. It is called Tui in Great Britain. And longtime heads know that Stanley has lived in London for quite some time with his wife. Felicity Blunt, sister of Emily Blunt. >> And I really, really enjoy his sour puss social media content where he just sort of idly chops things and throws them in incredibly expensive pans in his incredibly expensive and beautiful kitchen in London and kind of complains about the weather. And as someone who not to the degree that Stanley Tucci lives in Great Britain, but someone who has spent time there, I am ready for Stanley Tucci to show the world about the great food tradition of a country that is unfairly maligned.

>> I'm nodding vigorously. >> So, do you Ka, do you like Tucci in Italy or do you just like Tui, Italy? Like, you're fine with both of those things? Yeah, I I never sat down and watched an episode of Tuji in Italy, but I love Stanley Tuji's Instagram content and I'm in support of all things TOG and I thought he was great in Devil Wars Prada 2, >> which by the way, I think maybe is on streaming already.

>> Sure. >> So now I can I can watch it. My kids raced me to the box, raced me to the multiplex to see it. the other thing about the Tucci story that I love is I am all for and have long been all for celebrities doing lifestyle boondoggles. I still mourn. Do you remember the show The Wine Show with Matthew Reese and Matthew Good where two of the most charming British actors alive just convinced major corporations to pay for them to drink wine.

>> Was it his boat involved in that? >> in the sense that that's another boondoggle. I don't remember if his boat actually played a role because the show I think they were traversing wine regions in Europe. >> >> it sounds like a great gig if you can get paid to do it. >> What a what a charming guy. Anyway, unrelated, but I'm happy when people use their their powers for selfishness in addition to good. >> last thing. Okay, so Kai, I don't mean to put you on the spot here, and you're off camera, which I apologize for, but you are our youth correspondent.

>> And I wondered if you had ever heard of a phenomenon called the Amazing Digital Circus. >> No. >> Okay. So, maybe some people, some Daddingtons and Momingtons are familiar with this, but The Amazing Digital Circus is a web series that premiered on YouTube in 2023 and then got upstreamed to Netflix. And I am only tangentially aware of it and maybe even mentioned it in passing ones because like with many of these things, my children, especially my younger daughter got really, really into it. And what I would see as I walked past was essentially a screen saver nightmare because it is to my eyes like extremely intense and kind of ugly. I don't know if that's partially the point, but basically it is a very very noisy visually and otherwise web series about humans or human consciousnesses that are wake up trapped in this amazing digital circus like hellscape where they are in these bodies that are sold on t-shirts and Hot Topic now. like genuinely like one person is a ragd doll named Raggatha and one person is a crazy purple bunny named Jax and they have these adventures that are also kind of torture being led by a ring leader named Kain who is a like talking what do you call it like like he's basically dentures with eyeballs in his mouth was nine episodes Fathom Entertainment released the final episode much awaited final episode into movie theaters paired with the eighth episode >> and I think people are like oh nice, like the fandom will show up. Maybe it'll make \$10 million. It made \$26 million in the box office for something that's going to be on Netflix, I think, next week. and I went to the theater and I saw it >> and I can't lie to you. There was a moment when and I got the popcorn and I went over to the old bar in the Americana movie theater called McGuffins >> with your children.

>> Okay, thank you for asking that. >> 100% with my children. one excitedly, one grudgingly. >> Great. >> I took a picture of my children before the movie started and one child was wearing a Jack sweatshirt excitedly and my other child looked like the uni bomber. Okay. >> Because she had sunglasses on and was texting furiously and really was only there for the junior mints. But I can't lie, there was a moment when I was in the theater being like, I love the old the old multiplex.

Can't wait to see a movie. Oh, right. I'm going to be seeing 80 minutes of YouTube animation. Right. But I have to say I was shocked by this thing and not in a bad way. I was pretty riveted. This is not me talking about Euphoria exactly, but I can't say that I felt particularly lost having missed the first seven installments of The Amazing Digital Circus. But what I was really struck by, and I'm I'm trying your question was very valid, Ka, because I'm trying to get The Big Picture Sean Fantasy to see this.

>> Okay. and he asked if he could bring his much younger child to it and I assured him he could not, which does create the possibility, there are a lot of swear in it. >> It does create the possibility of maybe it's already happened of Shawn hopefully not wearing a trench coat going to see this movie alone. >> but what was crazy about it is that it is, yes, it is incredibly noisy. It is incredibly in-your-face and it's pulling these references from like extreme like Tik Tok >> fan edits/ Looney Tunes cartoons, but it was also simultaneously the single most earnest and emo piece of content that I have seen in quite some time.

>> Okay. >> Almost like punch you in the stomach with its sincerity and intensity. And I did I did a little digging into it and it does make sense. The show is the brainchild of a 31-year-old content creator, animator, composer who goes by the name of Goose Works. And it is extremely gamercoded, but it is also extremely what's the word I would use? well, it it's it's gamercoded. It's incredibly queer friendly, and it's very post therapy. And the energy of it honestly reminded me of when I was interviewing Dashboard confessional fans in 2002.

Except now there is no more amateurism about it. Now all of the energy about like I've been rejected by society and it's very hard for me to connect but it's all I want to do is connect but nothing will ever accept me. But with the professionalism of I will pour all of this into something that is going to make the Fathom Entertainment Company untold millions on a weekend in June. So fascinating content. This is my report from Youth Island. Where and where are we on the scale of the kids are all right after watching this?

>> Thank you for asking that question too because I actually I mean my younger daughter was a pre-apologizing. >> That's nice. >> she was also very worried going in because Jack's the rabbit is her favorite character and she was pretty scared that he was going to abstract because just to give you guys the full story about what happens here. The longer you were in this digital hellscape, the more unhinged you become from who you were or who you believe yourself to have been and reality. And at a certain point, some of the previous characters, including a clown and I believe a bear, >> abstracted, which means they turn into like kind of weird nightmare monsters with rainbow eyes, and they're they're lost. They've lost themselves.

So, she was worried Jax was going to abstract. I won't spoil. I will say that we get Jax's backstory which is so dark. >> So dark and involves pushing his mother and becoming unhoused. >> Oh, >> and then Pomni, who is kind of the heroine, travels through his psyche >> and there are shades of inside out and there's also shades of severance and it's this absolute blender of insanity. And I'm really glad Chris is you know pressing the flesh with voters because >> he would not care for this. No, Chris would have cut you off five minutes ago.

>> How would Chris have been able to segue from this into a take on the Lionist season 3 trailer? >> I don't even think he would have segued. I think he would have just said, "And now Lioness, >> can I ask you guys a

question since he's not here?" >> Yeah. >> Does he have a mute button for me? >> No, but I mean, >> does he have access to that? >> I I am I'm the only one with access to a mute, but I can cut your mic at any time.

>> Thank you, Ka. On that note, having delved into the world of culture that was frankly eye opening and a little bit terrifying. but that's actually not true. Kind of ultimately wholesome, we should probably get into some more wholesome content. so to recap, Chris and I are going to Chris is going to magically appear. I have a button that can do that. We're going to talk about Widow's Bay Penultimate episode, episode 9, Emergency Shelter. all spoilers for that. Obviously, the episode premiered the other day. And then straight out of that conversation, we will go into my interview with Gail Simmons discussing, spoiling Top Chef season 23. I look forward to you enjoying both of those things.

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Offered by FanDuelprediction Markets LLC, a registered futures commission merchant 18 and over. Restrictions apply. See terms at fanduel.com/predict/bonus-offer-terms. Here we are. Andy, you have presumably done the beginning of this show. We are dressed suspiciously like we were on Monday and >> it's laundry week. >> We are here to talk about the penultimate episode of season one of Widow's Bay. This one is called Emergency Shelter. Hiram Mariah is back behind the camera for these last two episodes. Tom, Patricia, Wick, and Rosemary try to find out the lineage of Richard Warren as a storm shuts down the island, sending everyone into shelters.

Everyone bar one very important resident. >> I want to talk to you about a pretty significant tonal shift that occurs in this episode. >> I'm glad I thought you were going to talk to me about accountability when I dictated exactly what was going to happen and I was >> I got you 80% of the way there and I was wrong. >> When did you do that? Last week. yeah. Two weeks, no, two weeks ago. And I was like, >> "This is what's >> one of the children escaped from the boat and swam back and had a child."

>> You were very You were very good about that, >> but I was wrong >> about who the the the the seed was. Yeah. You were worried it was Evan. >> I wasn't worried. I was enthused. >> Okay. >> But yes, I thought it was. >> Turns out it's not Evan. It's Ruth, the beloved yet, you know, comical assistant who only works half days. >> >> sorry, but tonal shift. >> Tonal shift in this series. So, we have talked about the the the horror comedy balance that Katie Dipple and her team has struck this >> this season. It's been an honestly like one of the delights of TV over the last couple of years to watch them kind of figure out how to mix funny with scary >> and then jump from subg genre to subg genre and homage to homage from episode to episode. This one felt a little bit more like a moral quandry, you know, I guess. this is basically like the the what is it the trolley car thing where it's like do you save one p do you kill one person to save many?

>> Yeah. >> And on top of that >> watch the good place. >> I think also there's a lot of a lot of like what would be real world consequences and real world tensions. >> Yeah. >> Of of the show have kind of come to a head. She trying to get off the island. Wick being like I'm not a comic relief character. I'm actually here to liberate this place from hundreds of years of of damnation. Tom's kind of arriving at this moment where you know he obviously cares about his son and he cares about like the future of the island but eventually is like kind of like we need to do what needs to be done and Patricia moving into more of a like voice of reason character. So what did you think of of this episode in terms of its tonal shift?

I want to be very clear about what I'm about to say because I'm going to immediately follow up. I'm not going to leave it alone. >> This is the weakest episode of Widow's Bay of the season and I love it for that. >> I say the weakest because this is the first episode that felt like connective tissue. This is the first episode that locked into what appears to be the the rest of the ride. Like that moment when you are at an amusement park or something and you're sitting in the weird little car on Mr. Toad's Wild Ride or whatever and it brings you right to the precipice of something and then you feel the old mach machinery click >> and suddenly you're turning left because that's where you're going next. That's what happened in this episode as it went from to your point being about everything that's happened in the past, everything that could happen in such a wildly high jinky horrorfilled island.

everything that could happen when you have a writer's room led by Katie Dipold who are completely in a hysterical creative frenzy about all their shared references in their like the bad parties they went to and also the bad horror movies they've seen their entire lives and even some of the good ones and now it's going to be about something and it's a tension that we talk about constantly when we talk about many different types of shows. It's re the most fun creatively making the show and often watching it is the we're just throwing stuff at the wall and we're seeing what we can get away with. But eventually when you're ending and I don't mean the series is ending, but you are ending a season and you paying the tax on the decision to make it serialized in a different way. You got to choose. You got to be about something. And what I loved about an episode that I am calling the weakest of the season was that even within that hard pivot, there was room for insane humor.

>> Mhm. >> Like when Dale Dickiy's character, >> Rosemary. >> Rosemary. >> When Rosemary goes through the genealogy chart, >> dead baby, dead baby, dead baby. Yeah. >> Dead baby, dead baby, dead baby. Lesbian, dead baby. And then Patricia says, "Please stop saying that." And she says, "Oh, we're not I'm not allowed to say that anymore." And she says, "Not like that." And she goes, "Fine." And then she circles the next generation and says, "Retards." All of them.

>> Yeah. >> Yeah. >> This is a show. >> What was there was one character who was like the like something Hortense. What was the adject like that person had like >> Oh, it was like disappointing Hortense or Hortense. I I didn't note that down, but >> but this is a show that is so deeply in its bag and so comfortable with itself that it can carve out space for I mean quite broad physical comedy like Tom's temper tantrum in which a picture falls on him and then no one says don't save him. I think it's funny. I the tonal shift for me is that it was not a funny episode, but I laughed hardest maybe of the entire season was the two times I've laughed the hardest this season are Matthew Reese battling that painting >> having it nearly bisect him.

>> And then when he's like, "Cenny, help me." Like they're like, "Stand back. He could have a spinal cord injury." >> And then Rosemary throws out her own back trying to help him before the >> And then the other bit is his thing with the lighthouse guy. >> It's perfect. It's like this is a joke that could travel through time. Like you could explain the setup of the lighthouse generator joke to the founding fathers of this island >> and they'd be like that's pretty funny.

>> They'd be like like we're living in hell but I have to give it to you. That's a good one. >> Yeah. >> The joke being that the radio to the the old lighthouse keeper who we never really see >> Garrett. >> We Tom thinks he's not being heard about needing the the power generator or starter from the lighthouse. So he drives through perilous storm conditions to get there only for Garrett to wave at him from where he just came.

>> Yes. And then it turns out Garrett's doing this all on a bicycle and is like, "I'll come back to you." And he's like, "No, wait." He has to drive back. There's so many like little funny sight gags in this episode, but at the same time, I felt like be and maybe it's the conversation between Wick, Tom, and Patricia, which is played with no laughs whatsoever pretty much, you know, and and the fact that >> it's very sober, >> you know, we've we've got >> a lot of like the sort of like lore parts of the story have now activated, you know, like and now we are really truly watching this this island, you know, come under the the under attack really by by a demonic storm.

>> The interesting thing to me also is that like, you know, when I started this episode and it said it was 31 minutes, >> I was like, well, this is either going to be one of the great 31 minutes of my life or it's what I think it is, which is essentially part one of the finale. >> That's right. That's what it was. >> And if >> because it ends quite Oh, here we go. >> And if they had put like this up as a one-hour finale and it's a nine episode season, I think I would have been deeply satisfied. But it just so happens that they that they extended it. what were some of the other things that jumped out of you about this episode aside from the the death of our our favorite mushroom dealer?

>> The shaman. >> I mean, it's a bummer. >> Yeah, Chris Fleming's incredible. I hope we I hope they find him in a tree, you know? >> Yeah, I was thinking that, too. Like, when they made the show and they hired Chris Fleming to play this one small part, they were probably like, "Man, this guy's great. Who can we in the Simpsons Springfield cast of characters that we've already created, who can we sacrifice to the vengeful tornado gods?" He was a pretty funny option, especially because he wouldn't leave his socks because he said he needed them.

>> Yeah. >> but to your point, like >> I need these. >> The the the moment when they made the show essentially in a bubble of their own enthusiasm and good spirits and creativity versus now when people genuinely, not just us, love it. Like, I don't know if they would make the same decision. Like, let's burn this ascendant comedian's funny side character. But that's the freedom of what's to come. And part of the fun of watching the show has always been watching it for purely what it is, then also admiring the construction behind it. And part of the construction behind it that I'm watching now is what is their plan to resolve the show? Because I 100% believe that Katie and Hero took nothing for granted and will resolve aspects of the story. Like does it end with Tom and Evan at a Red Sox game?

Maybe. but they there there are legs here and there's somewhere else for this to go. So, the question is, what's it going to do? >> This is going to be the only season of the show. >> No, I don't have insider knowledge, but I just >> I don't either, but I wonder if they had known what a sensation it would become if they would have had this storm hitting in the end of the first season. I think they would in the sense that she knows I mean again I think we're going to get a chance to talk to her about it but like it's and it's not fair to reduce anyone to their influences but it's interesting watching this as such an incredibly successful distillation of serialized storytelling and episodic storytelling from someone who is a veteran of parks and recreation which was so good at managing the line between the two who then went on to write movies >> and knowing that you got to leave it all on the table and tell your full story.

>> Sure. then there's a third piece. What do you hold on to? Where do you go next? And I I was thinking about this show's just at this point seemingly effortless ability to transition between what you were saying, serious emotional reckonings between the characters who are 100% the same characters they've been in every episode. Patricia, the one who's sitting there being concerned or wanting to protect Tom or wanting to move things along, is the same woman who just tased a lady having a wine club meeting.

>> Yes. that's still the same person. But so a show that can manage the reality of them as well as the sur reality of them episode to episode but then also I don't know I I'm getting lost in the sauce of my own analogy these characters. >> It's like they can have repeatable like TV bones but they can be put into like almost movie scenarios, right? >> And what I was thinking about when I was watching them just do this. It can be broad, it can be specific, it can be light, it can be dark. I was thinking about the bear, which is coming back at the end of the month in just a couple weeks at this point. And I was thinking about the genuinely organic, beautifully thrilling excitement of the first season in which we were looking at characters who were seemingly capable of everything also in a show that was able to straddle multiple tones despite what the the hacks lobby would would have you believe. The bear season one was hilarious. Sure. and in impossibly tense, you know, and the inevitabilities of long- form storytelling, maybe when you didn't intend for there to be long form storytelling, it wears on shows, it wears on characters, they become less elastic. So, I'm not saying that's what's going to happen here, but I was really present in appreciating what's capable right now.

>> Yeah. I mean, there's I I guess I I would assume based on what I know about the moral world of the show >> that there will be a wrinkle to the Ruth story line. >> They're not going to kill an old lady next week. >> Yeah. I don't think I mean I think that honestly I would say Steven Root has been remarkable on this show and for as much as I admire Ko Flynn and and Matthew Reese's performances Steven Root >> is that part could go wrong like that part could be like way too much yelling at clouds way too much like this guy wouldn't be fit nobody would let him into a restaurant or nobody would want him in like he he kind of like embodies like a worn out weathered truthsayer in this series and I certainly really hope he continues on because he's such a wonderful addition to the show, but I'll be fascinated to see I mean presumably they're going to traverse across an island to go find go find Ruth with a giant tornado streaking across it.

>> Steven Root we don't talk about enough because he's like woven into the American television fabric to a degree that is almost supernatural. >> Yeah. But if you think about like the first time I became aware of Steven

Root as an actor was watching news radio when he takes a part that within two or three appearances you're like well no one else could play this part. This is so so deeply deeply specific and so remarkable that I can't but I also can't say that as a 19-year-old I was like it's a generational actor right there. I was like that guy's really funny. But you think about how at least in three cases, and I imagine if I did a deep dive on his filmography, there maybe would be more to pick out, but news radio, but particularly recently with Barry and with Widows Bay, >> the television shows do not work without Steven Root.

I'm not saying they wouldn't be well written, but if Steven Root isn't playing the part he plays on Barry the way that he plays it, in a way that only he can, and specifically here with The Widows Bay as well, which is everything he does is so knowing and broad and clever and comic, but also so soulful and technically precise that the show doesn't work. It just I I mean, I I can't imagine there was anyone else on their wish list.

>> I mean, it's also like he's been doing this for 40 years. >> Yes. but yeah, I was just I forgot that he was Judge Mike Rein on Unjustified. he was on Goodwife. He was on Boardwalk Empire. He is in The Newsroom for two episodes. He's on Fargo for two episodes. I mean, this is it's just such an insane >> one one sneaky thing is that I know the Cohen brothers are celebrated, but I don't know if we >> seven episodes of of Perry Mason with Matthew Reese, which I wonder if that's where that relationship started.

>> But do you feel like the Cohen brothers get enough credit for telling us about people like it was the Cohen brothers? Like I I know that like John Goodman was like a great he was a great theater actor and everyone was like, "Wow, this guy's really got got the sauce." But the Cohen brothers, like when they see someone who can do what they want, they're telling us something. >> The first one with them, O brother, >> who?

>> Steven Root. >> I think so. But I just mean when like people like Steven Root start showing up, even like in the later movies, you're like, "Oh, that's a guy who can do this." Yeah, >> you know, in the tradition of a Trouturo or a John Goodman, there's just or a Michael Stoolberg, there's like a specificity of the type of performer that is basically telling you Tim Blake Nelson like, "Oh, these guys can pretty much do anything and should be working twice as much as they do and they already work quite a lot."

What do you think of the Basher plotline, the late introduction of his wife and this pregnancy that needs to that also has like a degree of urgency? Because before it was just like, oh, wouldn't it be nice if Evan could get off the island and blow up some steam, go to college maybe, and now it's like, well, they all know that if you're born here, you're doomed. >> So they there was like this push to get Basher's wife off of the island from Patricia. Yeah. And now it's like, you know, >> and the Wick scene there is great.

What's the plan here? The boats. >> That's great. That that boat came here on a boat. >> Great line. >> A great line. Yeah. >> I I think that there is an element of engineering to good television writing and to showunning. And the ability to be deeply within the characters and in within the script to write funny jokes or have some kind of consistency is one thing, but to also be able to step back with some perspective and say, you know what, this is actually a loadbearing wall and we're going to need to shore it up a little bit. And the show could work hurdling towards a finale, hyperfocused on the three leads and what freedom might mean for them from this

curse. But it works a lot better if there's like a ticking baby clock of a future generation that could be saved more than because like what are the like >> again we're thinking about what are the stakes for all these characters and we understand deeply Evan's unfortunate life and his limited claustrophobic existence and like why he wants to act up and get out but the stakes of him living essentially well enough for 17 years without going to a Red Sox game doesn't hit as hard as this young this young couple the young family anyway like who don't really want to be here will be cursed to live here forever. It just hits different. It's just smart engineering.

>> It really is. I cannot wait for the finale. Hopefully we'll have Katie on to discuss it next week. I will leave you to the rest of the episode. >> What do you think I'm going to do? This is exciting. At this point, decisions will have been made. Announcements, introductions will have happened. Do you have any crystal ball predictions for what I've already said about you? About how I feel about you? about how I feel about you not being here.

>> This is why I listen, you know. >> It's why I don't. >> Thanks to Ka and Ka. we'll be back on Monday with some combination of of wonderful television talk. >> You'll just talk to me about Capefar. >> That's right. >> I am so happy to be joined yet again. I don't know if this is the third year or the fourth year. It it we feel lucky every time we get to do it. We are joined by the executive producer and judge of Top Chef, our official favorite Canadian, Gail Simmons. Welcome back to the Watch.

>> Thank you so much. I always love talking to you. >> I am really excited to talk to you. We have a lot to cover for season 23. We have some good, we have some bad, and we have some >> not ugly, but some curious, >> less attractive perhaps, but also really interesting, >> fascinating, if I may. So, I do think we should start where we just ended, which is the finale. Sherry, Lawrence, and Roa are our final three. And I wondered if you could give some insight into how much time because it did feel like, again, I may be wrong about this, that there wasn't a gap this year between >> there wasn't a gap. That's right.

Because we didn't travel for our finale as we usually do. we went right through all in the Carolinas. And, you know, I was actually very mixed about that from a production standpoint. when they told us that that was the schedule we had to keep to, I brought it up several times with our showrunner, Donnine, who I also think maybe has spoken to over the years, but she I was worried that usually our chefs get a reset. you know, they get two weeks or so between the bulk of the season and that last, let's say, two to three episodes to get back to their life, rest, recoup, get their creative juices flowing again, craft this final menu.

they got none of that this time, but the flip side was >> that they just were running, you know what I mean? they didn't stop and then there's kind of a lull and you forget the and you're not sort of in the moment anymore and then you have to get back in the moment. So there's two sides to the argument. This is one of the first times the only other time I can think of when we didn't take a gap was during the pandemic when we were in Portland, Oregon.

>> But you know what? I think it worked. I do. I think that their menus were what they would have been either way. And I think that the final three were just sort of plowing forward. They were in a zone. They were, as they said many times, locked in. >> Yeah. Much like the New York Knicks, there's something to be said about being

streaky. >> That's right. >> The only thing I really like I missed was the the hairstyle glow up that we often get from the contestants. Yes, that's true. That was a shame, >> but I was willing to >> We tried to give you some ourselves.

>> You guys look great. >> Tom especially. Tom especially. >> Tom I mean I I Googled >> a glow up. >> He Tom looks amazing. I did Google Tom Kio earpiercing midway through the finale which which I I've been informed of the internet was not debuted in the finale but it sparked it season. >> Yeah. >> Incredible. >> Tom Tom does funny things when he goes away in the best way. like it makes me love him so much >> just as a side conversation.

>> You know, I think he just gets a little bit like loose and doesn't he's not focusing on the restaurants as much. He's not as stressed perhaps. >> and he you know, when we were in New Orleans in season 11, he went out one day just before the finale, too. We had a day off and he was missing his sons. They were much younger then. And he went out to Frenchman Street and got a giant tattoo out of nowhere. First tattoo he'd ever had. and he was like over 50. He just decided that day that he wanted a tattoo and he got a giant tattoo of his son's names on his arm in this beautiful script and like came back really casually the next day to shoot and I was like what the f is that he was just like yeah just felt like it.

And since then he's had like eight tattoos. But then on this season he walked into the set one day with new ear piercings. Actually, to be fair, apparently he had them or at least one of them before from years and years ago and they closed up and he was like, I was in a mood. I went and got me ears pierced. >> Restaurant people. >> Love that for him. Yeah. Love it. >> You can take them out of the restaurants, but they still have that energy.

>> Yeah. Yeah. No. >> So, with the lack of break between the penultimate episode and the finale, what opportunity did you and Tom and Kristen have to discuss what you expected? Do is that even a worthwhile question? Did you expect certain things coming into the finale? And were those expectations met or subverted in any ways with what was actually served? >> you know, we only talk about it to a certain extent because you can't put expectations on them in that way. You have no idea what they're going to do. I mean, you have some idea obviously of eating their food through the season.

You know the direction. We knew that Lawrence was going to pull from Chinese American roots. We knew he was going to, you know, he knew that trajectory. We knew that Roa had been starting to really show us this beautiful Filipino home cooking elevated. We knew that Sherry would bring in the skill and technique she had from the restaurant she worked in with >> you know her Brazilian background. Like we knew the generals, but I don't think you can ever expect and I think when you do have too much expectation, you're largely disappointed, right?

because they need to show you who they are. You can't you can't force on anyone, but certainly not on a chef in this creative outlet what you want them to do. You know, it's like children. You need to meet them where they are. And so, that was a weird metaphor, but you know what I mean? You really you can't there's just no way of knowing where they're going to pull from, where their inspiration is, and what is meaningful to them. That's the

beauty, I think, of the finale that we finally release them from all of the parameters and finally after, you know, 13 episodes of making sure they cook us exactly what we want in these very narrow >> terms, we let them just show us what they can do. And I find whenever I do really discuss it in advance or have expectations, which I have had over the years, I I'm disappointed truly. I'm like, it's never as good as I want it to be. There was a technical error here, but that takes all the joy out of them just cooking from the heart, right? And it does, it's not about being perfect sometimes. It's about sort of showing us themselves and pushing themselves and giving us a piece of who they are. And I want that to be soulful and meaningful and delicious more than I want it to be this like fussy perfection. Make sense?

>> Yes. And then I think you got what you wanted because I think at least from an audience perspective, this was a quite imperfect finale in terms of the cooking. I was struck by and I wonder if there's any aspect of this that can be credited to the lack of break like just some pretty fundamental temperature plating cooking method decision making errors that left you guys with what seemed like >> I couldn't tell honestly. I couldn't tell ultimately if this was an incredibly hard decision because everybody kind of messed up or if ultimately it was an easy decision because one person didn't mess up as egregiously as the other two on the technical things.

>> I both it was a hard decision. It was a hard decision because all of them did at least one thing that we absolutely loved >> that we couldn't stop thinking about that really blew us away and all each of them also had something of a flaw along the way if not more. but all of their dishes I think were actually in some ways more ambitious than we often get in the finale. I think they used ingredients that we don't often see. I think they pushed themselves to sort of show us what they really could do that they've been holding back a little bit. It wasn't perfect. And I guess there's an argument, we'll never really know, to be made that they were tired because they were definitely tired.

>> I mean, they weren't tired by restaurant wars. They're always tired by restaurant wars. But the good thing is that it kind of doesn't matter because again, as we say all the time, it's graded on a bell curve. We're not comparing their dishes that night, to dishes they've made in the past, to other chefs, to what I could get somewhere else. We're only comparing them to each other in this sort of bubble of a scenario. And across the board, they were all tired. They all had the same challenges. They were all up against the same timeline. So, in a way, you just have to sort of clear your mind of like what could have been, you know, the whatifs of if we'd given them a break or, you know, >> there were a a moment or two of of disappointment for sure, about temperature, about cooking, dness once or twice, you know, two or three dishes sort of stand out to me that way.

But really, I I think it was an even race and we truly were sort of stumped at the very end of the meal. was not obviously clear. I actually think that the analogy you made towards meeting children where they are is very useful here because I definitely found as a viewer this season. I mean, how could I not be comparing seasons to seasons? But particularly there was disappointment that I felt when I realized that at least from a viewer perspective, having not tasted the food, >> none of the contestants were really elevating and transcending in a way that some of the legendary greats or even the more recent greats like a Buddha or a Tristan did. you know, Buddha was made in a lab to destroy cooking competitions, but but Tristan >> came out of he didn't Tristan

didn't come out of nowhere, but his arc over the season was almost like scripted in the sense that, oh my god, the prince who was promised has been here the entire time and he's >> built and built and built >> and found a beautiful way to express his natural gifts through the prism of the challenges. Whereas someone like Lawrence, who I loved as a contestant, I imagine I would love as a person and whose food I would choose 10 times out of 10. Yeah.

>> Stayed within his comfort zone. Elevating but within his comfort zone. So I wonder how you are able to keep your focus on the specifics of the season you are judging without remembering what is possible within the framework you've created year after year. >> I mean that's interesting because I think we've had seasons where we've thought that much more so actually. in Wisconsin I remember we thought that a lot. We had many more discussions about it. What was interesting about this cast was especially in the first five or six episodes. Yeah. They all crushed it together on days that they crushed it and they all flunked and flopped together on the days that they flopped.

>> They sure did. >> And it was a bit of a roller coaster that way. We couldn't figure out what was happening. Like they but they were also I don't know. They all played on each other really really well. And there were certainly some really memorable challenges and really memorable dishes. And I don't know. I'm so used to just thinking about it the way that I described that it is on a bell curve that it has nothing to do with how Melissa King cooked or how Buddha cooked or how Tristan cooked or you know any number of >> or Kristen Kish. Exactly. that all we have to do is think what was the best thing we ate today and what was the least best thing we ate today. Those are the parameters and when and that's part of why it's set up that way. You can't judge it like as a mark out of 10. It doesn't it's not a science, right? It is it is a craft and you need to think about it holistically, I think, in the scenario you're in. You know what I mean? You can't compare it to, you know, it's it's like sports. I mean, we talk about this all the time, Annie, right? Like it doesn't matter how you played yesterday or or how you could play tomorrow. It's how you played the game that day against the opponents who were there on the field.

>> Yep. >> And and I think that we have really trained ourselves to remember that along the way. And when we don't, we're reminded by each other and and most importantly perhaps we have a fourth judge at the table, sometimes a fifth who have no context. And they are so vital to that process to bringing us back to what is right in front of us and not worrying about anything else because it doesn't matter. There's no way to judge it fairly if you bring in those factors.

>> I I I imagine the actual grind of production is incredibly intense and so the opportunities to adjust are probably minimal. But are there producerial discussions midseason or post certain challenges about ways in which maybe you could nudge things in a direction to to challenge to surprise. because you know there there obviously producerial decisions in that direction made before the season like let's bring in a couple, let's bring in brothers and the casting the potential conflict never happened.

It was all very pleasant which I I like. >> We always talk especially the quickfires but there's always room for decision-m that we talk through in the challenges. I mean certain things are set the parameters the theme but we

can adjust the time we can adjust the ingredients. we can adjust certain factors because we are >> we are hit with real life scenarios all the time. you know, we cooked overnight for a barbecue challenge and right before we went to judges table, there was a massive possible tornado cyclone hurricane situation and you know, we had to stop down and pivot and figure it out. And so that's extreme, but we definitely look at each challenge as we come to it because they are written before we start the season and then we go into execution and >> there's always a hold on a second, can they do this? Are they as a group capable of pulling this off? Because we also don't want to give them something that then everyone's going to flunk and then no one looks good. But after episode two this season, which was our chili pepper challenge, >> yes, >> we realized that yes, they're capable.

You know, they didn't do great in episode one and they didn't do great in episode three, but they crushed it in episode two. So, we knew we could push them a little bit more than we were worried about. and push yourselves. You filmed that inside what appeared to be a torture chamber. >> It was a torture chamber. It was 97° and we were eating ghost peppers for breakfast. >> Yeah. This is season 23. You don't have to do this.

>> But you want to know what's interesting about that challenge that I keep saying? We ate that multicourse chili pepper meal and we So, we were hot like we were sweating because it was August in the Carolinas. Mh. >> But I ate some cucumbers along the way to like cool my mouth, but it didn't blow us away. I was prepared. Like we walked in thinking we're going to be like in bed for 3 days grabbing our bellies.

>> and all of us were fine because they actually figured out how to use the peppers in such beautiful ways. They didn't blow us out at all. Even Roa, who won that challenge with her final course, which was the hottest possible pepper, >> we loved it. And we didn't love it in a way that's like you love it and you're eating it and it's so good and so good and then you stop for two seconds and realize that you're about to like peel over.

>> Yeah, >> we got we got there. We were fine. It was a shock to us all. >> I'm genuinely I respect genuinely to them and to you guys. so you mentioned the the the lack of travel in the finale and so that does bring up the elephant or maybe the peacock in the room which is as a longtime viewer I couldn't help but feel that there have been some budget trims over the years and it felt >> particularly this year slightly claustrophobic that there were a lot of instudio challenges that there were there was a less >> fewer opportunities to be out and about >> Last Chance Kitchen being trimmed by a number of weeks and only one contestant returning from it. just these these smaller things on the margins up to and including in an episode that I think was rightly acclaimed.

>> I think there were two takeaways from the Asheville episode. One was this is what Top Chef does best, connecting contemporary events, culture, emotion, family, storytelling, and food to also watching it and being like they took a two-hour drive and none of the judges and Kristen didn't come with them and some of the restaurants they just did a driveby that felt small. >> Yeah, that's interesting. >> So, let me actually totally different. No, no, it's it's really interesting.

You picked up on all those different things and you are right and wrong about them. >> Love it. First of all, we did just as many in studio challenges as we have done in the last five years. >> Okay. >> we have a mandate because we build a giant studio. that we have to do or well we do almost all our quickfires there and we have to

do I think at least two eliminations there. I I could be wrong like I don't have the you know I don't have the details in front of me but that's the same as we've been doing actually for the last several years.

That did not change. I actually felt like we were out in the most beautiful locations so much. But what did change is that usually obviously this isn't a secret. We work very closely with the CVB of every city we're going to, right? With the visitors bureau and the tourism, you know, the tourism board, the city, the mayor and or or the state. and this year the Carolina stepped up in such a big way that that was their deal.

They wanted the whole thing. Usually we don't we don't sell them the whole thing, >> but they made a really compelling argument for being in different places and moving, you know, to from Charlotte, obviously basing ourselves in Charlotte, but then moving to Greenville and doing three full episodes in Greenville and then a little bit in Asheville. But that was because there were different cities playing into it. And Charlotte and and and Greenville >> gave us 90% of the support we needed. in Asheville. We wanted to do Asheville.

That was us wanting to honor Asheville. Obviously, Asheville is known for so much of its culinary. It has an amazing >> dining such a small place and so we wanted to go to Asheville. so we did it the best we could because we it really wasn't in the resources of what >> Yeah. >> you know, in as big a way as the other two places. So, we found a creative way to work Asheville in and hurricane relief and speak to some of those chefs who we tried to get to come to Charlotte and for other reasons weren't able to make it.

>> >> so, you know, we had to use the budget creatively, but it wasn't necessarily because it was trimmed that we didn't go on a finale. It was just more that South that North Carolina and specifically Charlotte came to us with such a big plan. >> It's interesting. They were like, "This is what we want to do. we want to keep it here the whole time. >> I also think as I understand it, >> part of it is also I think that you know there's there's benefits to filming more regionally that are that are exciting and seeing things we've never seen before, but I would also imagine it presents an issue in terms of scheduling and budget too to then bring in recognizable >> chefs. You want to celebrate local, but you also want some bigger >> names for sure. All of the above.

>> Yeah. >> But interestingly, when you mentioned Las Kitchen, that's a completely separate budget actually. It's a completely different show. It operates like its own show actually. >> So the changes with that definitely came to play, but that had nothing to do with the with Top Chef proper that we were making. so yes, there was a different sponsor. You know, there were sponsorship changes and and and certainly they chose to make it a smaller show this year. Yeah. But it has nothing to do with sort of like the bigger picture of Top Chef itself. that would have happened no matter what.

>> And I say this as a as a fan and someone who wants the show to be healthy. I was also concerned by the the time slot shenanigans. >> you know, >> me too. >> And it felt like Kristen was too. Kristen was out out there about it on on social media like >> well because she gets heat for it and it all falls to her and us. I mean because we are the ones who get yelled at by fans. But want to know something interesting?

>> Yes, very much. >> It didn't matter. Now, is it doesn't matter because the fans are the fans or it doesn't matter

because increasingly people are watching it on Tuesdays on Peacock anyway and so 9:45 is abstracted. >> Correct. It was a weird social experiment and it annoyed us because we're all not Gen Z alphas and don't we don't understand how TV works these days. But the proof is in the numbers which is so interesting and I wish I could get more specific. I just don't have that information. But the story is actually pretty amazing. It drove us nuts. And then also that same thing that always happens with social media that like the few people who are the loudest get the attention.

>> Oh yeah. >> But it turns out there's only a few of them, >> you know, in comparison to the numbers we're seeing. So, as frustrating it is as it is for me because I want to say Mondays at 9. >> Yeah. >> And it moved 16 times. Apparently, everyone's really thrilled and it didn't make enough of a big difference. >> Okay. to really be a problem which I actually think is fascinating. >> Yes. As a study in the de I mean the show straddled so many eras that it can continue to thrive and adjust and evolve is a good thing.

>> Correct. >> Okay. So we have to talk about two specific moments obviously. I did think and I was trying to I was doing the the Tik Tok as in the clock not the app. >> what went on here? And I think we can trace it all back to Czechov's tire swing because from what I remember correctly, Jen >> swung on a tire swing right before showing up in the Carolinas, injured her shoulder, and then a lot of crazy stuff happened all because of that initial injury.

>> Yes. So, >> correct. >> So, she's >> as I understand it as well. >> So, she was injured. She arrives slightly injured, gets she exacerbates the injury through repetitive chopping and doing all the things she needs to do as a cook. She sits out one or two quickfires. She is warned that we can't really accommodate this. she says, "I'm going to stay." but then has to go due to an onset of what may have been Belle's palsy or something.

>> It was Belle's pausy. Yes. I think I hope that >> No, I think that was public. It wasn't on the episode, but >> which by the way is was related, but Belle's pausy is a whole other thing. And it's a virus, right, as I understand it. And it's brought on not quite sure how stress >> I think stress plus. Yeah. So she so so she has to go. >> Justin who has been eliminated her partner is offered the chance to stay and he lovingly and generously says I need to be with her.

>> So he leaves. >> now what we learned I think awkwardly this season is that the last chance kitchen taping is not happening concurrently with the rhythm of the show. This is something that you know the magic of television. >> Yeah. We save them up. We save them up and do them in bulk. We didn't >> because we need a few people at a time >> and we didn't know that. So what led to was a very very strange felt like cover up situation >> briefly. That's funny.

>> Well, only because we >> you didn't know what was happening. >> We didn't know what was happening cuz So Seager does not show up in Last Chance Kitchen. No one shows up in Last Chance Kitchen. The next week, Justin shows up in Last Chance Kitchen. Having determined that Jen is well enough for him to compete, he loses and Roa comes back eventually, but Seager has already come back. Correct. >> any lessons to be learned here in rel in regards to the last chance kitchen of it all or is this really a freak one-off in which a contestant is

injured and everyone tried to do their best?

>> It was a freak runoff. I mean it was it was just an unmitigated circumstance that we could have never anticipated. the onset of what you know when we saw her suffering really that last day you could see that like beyond her shoulder her her face was paralyzed >> and it was getting worse and worse and we just had to call I mean you have to call it right we need you at what cost are you doing this to yourself right and so as a >> organization we have to say it's time for you to take care of yourself and and then the sort of domino effect of okay well what do we do Now, it just was this, you know, that was the the good and bad of bringing in a couple that by what are the chances >> that the last person to have been eliminated in that episode was Justin.

>> And then did he want to stay or go? Well, he did, I think, the right thing. >> And all of a sudden, we had to figure it out because there was no footprint for this. There's no precedent. it's it was happening in real time. And I remember that night staying really late and Kristen staying even later to film that conversation with Justin to go in and tell him because Jennifer was at the hospital and we all sort of were waiting. I ended up going home and I was waiting for Kristen to text me to tell me what was happening because we needed to know where the show was going to go and Donnina our showrunner was in touch with us all and and we were figuring it out as we went along.

so I, you know, I I can't imagine it would ever happen again. you know, we want, we wished we could have like shown more of her journey. Yeah. But also there's only so much you can follow someone into an urgent care situation. but but we just want to make sure she was better and she is. She has made a recovery. >> We're glad about that. downstream of this decision, Seager is eliminated, is saved by a act of God, dodges Roa in Last Chance Kitchen, >> survives deeper into the competition, >> makes chicken liver parfait in 90° heat that looks frankly >> deeply unappealing >> even to a viewer.

>> And then has an alltime crash out at judges table. something that we haven't seen on the show maybe ever. and also kind of bracingly broke the seal of a very beautiful supportive gentel kind of vibe that has been cultivated over the last few years where everyone is supporting each other, everyone is there to make friends >> and you know eliminations are tough but fair. How shocked were all of you? How much did we not see?

>> So where do we begin? Yes, the chicken liver mist was unappealing. Again, that we are living and judged on a bell curve of what was the best thing we ate that day and what was the worst thing we ate that day under the circumstances of the challenge that were given. And it was very obvious to us that although he had good intentions and there was good flavor, it was not a successful dish for a few reasons.

you know, we know the chefs so peripherally in terms of their personal relationship to us. We had been hearing a little bit of grumblings. We caught kind of small whiffs of perhaps overconfidence, but he also had done some amazing things in the course of his trajectory on the show. Oh, I mean, yes, he got eliminated and there were a few clunkers, but there was also some really amazing moments for Seagar. I think food-wise, it was a surprise to us. I always say that I'm actually surprised it doesn't happen more often because it is very hard to take criticism, even if we are trying to be constructive. You are on camera being told what you failed at. And that is an

incredibly hard pill to swallow no matter how who you are. I mean, Tom always says, you chose to be a chef, you will get reviewed in your career. That is the path you chose. If you want to be a restaurant chef, you will be critiqued. If you want to be an opera singer, if you want to be an athlete, if you want to be a dancer, a singer, an actor, you will be critiqued. That is the craft that you've chosen. I think what happened with Seager was, you know, I'm still trying to process what happened with Seager. Truthfully, there was a lot you didn't see. there was a lot more conversation back and forth between all of us. But then you did see you really saw I think the the crux of what happened. He didn't understand from what I could take away why he was going home because he followed the challenge. He incorporated two or more ingredients from the Appalachian pantry.

He made a dish that he finished. But what I don't understand is like someone has to go and of all the things we tasted like everybody was successful in doing that. Every single person used two or more ingredients and every single person finished their dish and served us something great. And even if it was great, it was the least great of the five dishes that day. >> I think the show has really thrived as it has steered away. And I say has steered away, this is like already 20 years old, but there's very little of the quote unquote reality show left. is a very very high-minded and supportive competition program. but that said, there are some reality elements and eliminated contestants don't go home.

so he's stewing around Charlotte somewhere and then is comes back for the finale. Was there any bumpiness or any friction that you perceived of? Was that ever an issue? Well, I was wondering the same thing, but he did calm down. And then in everything I've heard from Roa and seen on the final cut and then I actually this morning was reading an interview with Roa about that exact question of how was it then cooking with Seager knowing what had happened in his elimination.

She was like so thrilled to have him and she knew he would show up for her and he did. He cooked his heart out for her. He supported her. He executed as she needed him to. and they worked really really well together and they're really close and in fact I think he just flew to Hawaii to cook a dinner with her last night or over the last couple days. >> So I I think he was able to get over it.

I I I wish I understood what his point was more like what was he trying to tell us? I'm not totally sure. >> I'm not going to give him his flowers for being willing he was willing to fly to Hawaii. >> no no I'm just saying that they are close. I'm just making the point that they are so close. She invited him, right? So like they it worked. >> All of these people are professionals. They've worked with high, you know, hot blooded people.

>> No, but they are particularly close is what I mean. Even after this happening. >> Okay. So I have to call you guys in this and find out what's going on. There was some feeling that the that that you know that that Nana should have gone home in the first episode for the ring mold, but I I'm not on that camp. I loved that episode. I love for the way it demonstrated the evolving role of the judges, you guys in your pastoral role, especially Kristen and what she brings to the show and also Tom being like, I liked it more. Good for Tom. So, I'm not worried about that. There was one elimination that still sticks in my craw and I need to know understand more about it.

>> Oh, totally. >> So, Roa is amazing at the top, falls to the bottom, last chance kitchen. She boat races everyone. She christens, she she crescendos back in as a as a topline competitor. >> I know where you're >> She walks back in and her reward for winning Last Chance Kitchen in such a dominating fashion is to get shanked. No, that would be lamb shank. Shaved with dessert. >> Yes. >> Set up to fail. >> Does fail. Makes what is clearly to the audience >> the worst dish of the day. And then Oscar goes home cuz he put rice on his plate. That felt a little >> terrible under >> the hand of God a little bit. That felt a little >> It wasn't as I remember it. And again, it's so hard to remember it all.

>> But as and I try to remember it versus just pull from what the showed you. You know what I mean? His dish, the rice was terrible. Like the rice was legitimately not great. And it should have been. if if he was going to add something that was duplicative or redundant since his assignment wasn't to make rice. Is that the thinking? >> So, he added something he shouldn't have and the thing he added was bad. >> But but you know, it wasn't like it there was no hand of God. It was really just like again sometimes when there's a few things that are sort of in the same at the same level and we have to make a decision. There's no well let's just not send anyone home or let's send two people home. We we go about it from different angles and often it's well what would I rather eat again? And I would rather eat that dessert a hundred times over >> than eat what Oscar served us. It just wasn't successful. It wasn't delicious.

Hers was a bit of a mess. It was, but it wasn't like there was nothing sort of like bad tasting about it or texturally bad about it. It just wasn't skillfully put together. >> Okay, I'll allow it. Plus, she won and she deserved to be there and I would have been angrier if she was gone. But I'm just saying. >> Yeah. Yeah. Okay. So, >> no, it's it's a it's a good perspective. I like hearing all this stuff. It's very helpful. You I've said this before. You should be a producer on the show.

>> You should be the audience producing. >> Call give me a call. we I have I have plenty of questions that we don't really have time for about just like, you know, I like talking to you very much about the state of the industry as well as the way it reflects on Top Chef. So I think I can sort of consolidate that into one basic question which is one of the beauties of the show over many years and now decades has been seeing the way the show has both led the industry and responded to changes in the industry and you can see changes from like the you know the the the dominating masculine brigade system to this beautiful moment when diner's eyes and stomachs turn towards cuisines they may not have been familiar with and the and the and the the contestants reflected that. we are in a very very strange and kind of dark moment I would say economically certainly I mean generally yes but particularly for the restaurant industry at the moment and here's a quote I want to give you from a recent interview in New York magazine with Dan Kuger who's a great chef in New York who >> yes I love him so much and I love his restaurant >> luring place which he is closing after 10 years. So here's the question and the answer here's the question. How do you operate in a place where you need to charge \$50 for an appetizer that once cost \$20? In Dan's answer, you don't, which is why we're closing.

>> Correct. >> This is the moment that restaurants are in. >> I mean, three restaurants, major to me, important, vital restaurants to the lifeblood of New York City closed last week or are planning or announced closure last week, >> including Tom Kikio's Craft. >> Correct. So, how can or how should Top Chef reflect this reality or

how does the contestant pool reflect this reality? >> I think that your earlier question about budget constraints does reflect this reality, >> but there is still appetite for what we do and we are so lucky that we can give our contestants the means to do it on our show. Our show isn't the real world, right? We know that. But we do pride ourselves in it reflecting realworld circumstances of what it takes to run a restaurant or be a chef today. Obviously, we are not including so many things. We give them the money they need. Obviously, we do put constraints on it. They're never like, >> you know, I think it's not actually helpful to just say, "Oh, you have all the money you need to buy caviar and vagra." and >> they do get two point they get 2.5% back also. Let's be clear about that.

>> Correct. There's cash back. >> That's been mentioned. >> Wells Fargo. Thank you very much. >> we love Wells Fargo. But we, you know, I do think that it is still a hard, it's still challenging. But what I think it allows people to do is to push themselves creatively to figure out what they can serve that still reflects who they are when you're not relying on the crutches of easy luxury. >> Yes. >> and and I think that that actually is really important to the moment we're in.

You know, I read an interview and for what it's worth, I'll send it to you after this call because I've sent it to so many people. It's actually was written by a chef in Toronto who I'm friendly with, who I was on Top Chef Canada with and whose restaurants we ate at a lot when we were shooting in Canada last season. and he's a chef I respect a great deal. and he wrote an article recently and what he said like I can't get out of my head and it's very similar to what Dan Kuger said which is that he said the problem is that restaurant and I'm paraphrasing >> the problem is that restaurants are unable to charge the prices of what food costs they have to charge what diners are willing to spend and there is such a massive discrepancy between the two and diners have no idea.

And if we really charge if we I do not run a restaurant for this reason. If restaurants really charged for profit margins like that reflect the margins of any other industry in the world, >> no one would go to restaurants. Interestingly, if I may say, I am about to publish a book in November called guesting. And it tackles this question in a big way in part of the book about how to be a a good guest in all different scenarios. And and much of the book is about going to people's homes and building community and the reciprocal relationship between hosting guests, but a third of the book, sorry, a quarter of the book is dedicated to restaurants and how to be a good guest in restaurants. And it really breaks that down. why we don't understand when we go to a restaurant that is it is not just transactional and in fact we are getting nine times out of 10 an amazing deal.

>> Yeah. >> And let's act accordingly and let's respect and show grace for the people who choose to do this for us for a living because it is especially right now financially almost near impossible. Well, I think also Top Chef has done a lot of great work in the contestants particularly when they've left the show in educating people not just on what the cost is financial emotional labor but also that there is such a profoundly in like just ingrained disparity between what we think should cost certain amounts of money. So seeing like whatqwaame has done in New York with ingredients that maybe people weren't or Paul Carmichael at Koba right being like yes this is built on a tradition of things that you can get at on the corner in Brooklyn but we are elevating it and there's a >> you can pay for tortillas and you can pay for the Chinese of Chinese food.

>> Chinese food is I always say is and it goes back to a lot of things. I mean, there's so many layers to unpack here, but you know, >> the traditional cheap takeout, right? And that is >> xenophobic, >> but it is also like ingrained in American culture in a way that has to change because we now know that so many of these cuisines are the great cuisines of the world. and to do them well and with education and thought and and with the best quality ingredients, those same best quality ingredients that we expect when we go to Leernard or to craft, you have to pay for it.

>> But now what do we do about this moment where the first decade of Top Chef it was clear you win Top Chef, you open a restaurant in your hometown and then you have a restaurant empire and then you do whatever you want. second decade of Top Chef. You win Top Chef and you become a brand and you you know you you consult and you you work on yourself and you don't tie yourself to >> work on the Food Network. They give you a show or two.

>> We are now in this era where we are in the fried chicken with with caviar era, right? Like that's all anybody wants to eat, 1% or 99% and you put caviar in the fried chicken and you charge whatever. And that's where we're at. Mhm. >> What what do we do with the or who are the next generation of contestants and what are their ambitions? Because I think that I I again I'm not faulting anyone, but to come on and be like, I am a ninja of of execution and fine dining like Buddha. Well, what is the endgame for that these days without a restaurant? the creativity of a Richard Blase or countless other contestants who I'm not really thinking of at this exact moment, but like do they come in with that same creativity or are they just like I live in the world as it is and my margins are what they are and I'm just >> No, I think they come in with bigger aspirations and I think a lot of them come in.

>> I do because we always say like just keep cooking. You know what I mean? Like keep your you win. It's very easy to be distracted by the shiny lights and the sparkles of the caviar, but if you stop cooking, and I don't mean restaurant cooking is the only way to cook, but if you stop cooking, it's very hard to maintain that level of respect, right, in the industry. >> but I look at so many successful chefs whose food I admire so much. Melissa King, for example, who marketedly actually never had a restaurant for any of us to go to. but she has managed to be relevant because she is so good at what she does and she is a creative and she's able to bring that to us in many different ways, whether it's through her book or popups or you know, any number of things that she that she does, travel the country, collaborations. And I do think that there's a lot to be said for that. We all, they need to make a living, number one, and I know for sure that it is easier for Melissa to make a living doing what she's doing. I'm just using her as an example, than it is for most restaurant chefs who have one restaurant that they are >> not always, but often just like, you know, tied to day after day. Just the financials. she doesn't have a staff. She doesn't have a lease.

so you know, I think that's reality and that doesn't mean that they're not chefs and that their experience and that their creativity creativity isn't valid. I I just think that we're going to see more of it >> because at the end of the day, people need to make a a living wage and that sounds crazy but also so simple. >> So any way you can do that while doing what you love is a gift, I think. And I think that there's just we we are a little traditional in that, you know, we're always like just go back to the restaurant and put your head down and cook. That's not there.

What's this?

There's many ways to skin a cat. That is a weird expression. >> It is really weird. >> But, you know, there's just so many ways and I think we we all will fall behind if we maintain only that thinking. >> I think that's we're all Uber drivers now, Gail. We're all >> right. Well, me too, right? Like I was a journalist. Like I I worked at Food Magazine for 15 years. That's how I got this gig. And sometimes people ask me now, well, what do you do? Like if Top Chef only takes eight weeks of your year, what do you do? What are you? And I'm like, I'm still a journalist. Just because I'm not working at a legacy media company anymore. I'm actually doing way more. and my platform has allowed me. I mean being on Top Chef is reporting and research and exploration and giving voice to my industry. the books I'm able to write, the articles I'm able to write, the you know keynote speeches, the research I I still, you know, but it's just about thinking you can't be you can't get stuck in how it was 20 years ago when I started this gig. You have to evolve.

And I think the chefs have actually done a great job of that. That was a very long answer. No, I find this fascinating and it's part of I mean I think we touch on this in different versions every year we get to talk and it it stays relevant and it stays interesting. It'll be interesting to see what Roa does too because she's at Ober and in on the big island which is gorgeous and she's the chef there and I hope she stays there and for a while and shows you know because I think now people want to find her but I also know she said it herself like who knows what her trajectory will be and where she wants to go next and she's figuring that out and I'm just really excited to see all all of them. I I adore them. I really do. I think they were a great group of chefs. But with Roa in particular as our winner, I think she will do something unexpected and beautiful and I think she'll really give a platform to the food that she loves just as Tristan did.

>> Truly. we'll go we'll I'll let you go on this. Every year I do something that is unwelcome potentially and impossible which is I ask you to tease where you're going next and then inevitably you do a great job, we can't figure it out and then like 48 hours later it's announced. So there's this beautiful little lacun between that and I wonder if you have anything prepared to tease us with. >> I you know I'm going to disappoint you this year because often I do know right around now. June is generally generally when we find out because we start shooting in August >> but we are not shooting in August this year. we've been pushed back a little bit really only for scheduling. It's going to make a lot more sense to our to our year >> and our planning for the for the network, not just our own show. and that's a great thing, but it means that no one has told me anything.

>> This isn't like that isn't a hint in itself like when they >> It's not I wish I had better information. All I know is that we will shoot, we will make another season and that's all I care about. I still have a job which is awesome. >> This isn't like the year. Every year it's the cherry on top. You know what I mean? You can't you can't take it for granted. >> The year they delayed the World Cup to because they were it was in Qatar and it was they had to do it in the winter.

This isn't that this isn't Top Chef Middle East. You're not trying to give us a hint. >> No, we're not. No, but that is an amazing reference. >> Okay. >> But it is not dissimilar, but it is the truth. >> Okay. All right. I'm going to trust you on that. >> yeah, >> we're eager to find out when it's announced. Gil, maybe >> me, too. >> It does.

Maybe it'll give you time to promote your book and maybe we could talk again more broadly about things then. Personally, it really let it allows well, first of all, allows all of us to have a summer for the first time in years instead of cutting it, you know, early and taking off from my family. and it's going to allow me a much easier fall because I'm launching my book and going on book tour. So, that's like my own personal and it's going to let us actually plan a couple of great things, I hope, to make sure that this season is the best it can be.

>> Well, I hope so, too, as the unofficial audience consultant. yes, Gail, thank you. So, you're always so generous with your time. Thank you. Another year in the books. Really appreciate it.