

**John Barton**

Where: West Virginia Humanities Council

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Interviewer: Emily Hilliard

Transcription: Emily Hilliard

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John Barton of Milton, West Virginia, works in autism advocacy and is an avid *Fallout 76* gamer who has written several articles about the game in relation to its setting in a post-apocalyptic West Virginia. Barton visited the West Virginia Humanities Council to lead folklorist Emily Hilliard in a walk-through of the game, paying special attention to elements referencing West Virginia history and folklore.

This interview is part of a series of interviews conducted with *Fallout 76* gamers, some of whom are from West Virginia, and some of whom were inspired to visit West Virginia because of the game.

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Log (not straight transcript)

JB: John Barton

EH: Emily Hilliard

MK: Mike Keller

VP: Victoria Paul

00:00

JB: Active player base works together to find ways to overcome that. Like every, well except that it's a little bit unique. If you're talking about massive multiplayer online games, they, it's very much a Darwin structure, it's survival of the fittest. Banding together and a steep learning curve and within this game that's not the case.

01:27

EH: So you're a writer about Fallout and you do autism activism?

JB: Yeah. But what you have is most games it's very top down and for this game you've got people that actively look to help each other especially new players and are donating some of the best equipment to the game, not just to new players that are friends of theirs but to completely random level ones and the way that it's set up it allows you to build camps, to build structures in fact. And you see things popping up around where it's not just "Oh look I built this cool thing," but people are building like bars--social places! One YouTube had created a bar and then created a weekly poetry reading and was doing like Appalachian poetry kind of thing.

Okay, so when you first come out of Vault '76, this is where you are and what you see. Now looking at the...

EH: And so can you talk me through the story a little bit? I know the basics.

04:04

JB: Okay, Fallout is this post-apocalyptic world. Each, there are technically 10, a dozen, 8? A whole bunch of different versions of the game over time. Each one happens, they don't happen in chronological order. Each one happens at different points so sometimes they jump forward and you can see, you see the results of your actions hundreds of years in the future. Fallout 76 chronologically is the very first. Because the idea is you have with all the Fallout games you have vaults. Giant community shelters. And then giant nuclear war, some people are above and outside the vaults but for the players generally at some point the vault opens, they come out. Vault 76 chronologically is the first vault to open. So you're in West Virginia, the people that were selected for the vault supposedly were the best and brightest from all over where literally every other vault is some sort of weird social experiment like Stanford Prison Study or worse. Vault 76 wasn't. Or at least wasn't supposed to be. It really was the best and brightest, set to release almost 100 years before everybody else with the intention of rebuilding. And again that idea of they really captured within the game, the designers captured what it meant to be in West Virginia. There is not a land or a people or a state anywhere else that have the connection to the land that you see in West Virginia so that people would care to rebuild. You know? Like anywhere else you have a huge natural disaster, "Okay, we're going somewhere else. We're leaving!" Not "Oh there's going to be giant monsters and nuclear fallout and whatever else? Great! We're building this place back!" It doesn't work anywhere else. So that's the basic premise of the game only after you come out of the vault the leader of the vault has the title of Overseer, is leaving you messages that she was the first one out and so as she's exploring and learning about the world and other things--she leaves you messages. And you come to find out that

there is no local population. There are no surviving humans at all. What you have instead is something called The Scorched which are these zombie like creatures that are completely unique to this expansion. You don't see them anywhere else which is kind of telling. And they are zombie like creatures somehow controlled by plants/bacteria. Like there's some sort of irradiated growth that is parasitic and eventually it proves fatal. But the whole area is over run with them. And the overseer leaves you bread crumbs to track and figure out how to develop, to find a group that was trying to develop an anti-serum and finished that so that the rest of the survivors and vault dwellers won't succumb to it and then discovers that there was a queen--there was a basically they're kind of a hive mind and there was a queen that was responsible for the original expansion which leads the Overseer with trying to decide what to do and coming to the conclusion that the only solution that they have is to drop the nuclear missile on it and destroy the queen and destroy the Scorched, even though that means any chances of regrowing Appalachia are doomed at that point. But with the knowledge that there are other vaults around in other places that won't have to deal with the Scorched.

EH: So once again Appalachia is--takes the brunt.

JB: Oh yeah, we're the canary. We're very much the canary. And within the sense of every other vault is a social experiment though it's never--there's not in-game lore to prove it. There's the suggestion and the conspiracy theory that--a player theory--that Vault Tech knew about the queen and set this vault to open early to take care of that problem if the nuclear bombs that we're being dropped on it didn't take care of it to begin with. So that idea is out there.

But again that means that the social experiment for the Vault was they were being sacrificed to prevent a problem so that everybody else wouldn't have to deal with it. Now it's an open world sandbox kinda game so while that's the main questline arguably what you're supposed to be doing as far as the main campaign--it's largely just about exploring West Virginia. Like here's where you pop out. The map extends--it's the largest map of any Fallout game by a huge margin.

EH: And I think I read in one of your pieces--so it's 16 square miles?

JB: Roughly, yeah. Like if you, let's see. Let me look something up so I get terms right.

12:02

Notice how it's background music is like a score you'd have for any kind of game and yet there's something vaguely Appalachian? As well, well the nature sounds are a whole other thing. Like you'll hear--we're used to it, so a lot of time we block it out, but when the game came out there were people walking into areas and they went--because there were cicadas, so they walk into this area, and coming down all of a sudden you can hear, damn! Like because they thought they were about to be attacked by everything because this noise was everywhere and it was constant! It's like no, it's cicadas! It's like they create something? It's like no, that's normal, that's West Virginia. They're like...that's just weird! No, that's just normal.

13:52

So you pop out in the forest where Vault 76 is and even just looking at the map notice the things that immediately jump out. Not only is Point Pleasant there, but there's this huge Mothman sign, you're like there is nothing else on the map that is as obvious as Mothman. Like and nothing has this giant lettering going "Hey, go here!" As that location. And you know...

[Eric walks in]

Some of the stuff is based on fact but then they took creative license with it. So like, well if you've seen the Mothman Museum, it's mostly paper and photos, so 25 years of neglect, that's gonna be dust anyway. So inside the museum they kinda just redid the outside, but you still have the statue. You have this gorgeous mural that's on one wall. I don't think there's a Mothman mural in Point Pleasant, but there are the murals on the river wall that are there so it's kind of a taking what's there and twisting it to create something else. One of the fairgrounds where this is based doesn't have...

EH: Is that Camden Park?

JB: No, Camden Park is down here in the Ash Heap. That's Camden Park. It's down here and again like it's got a lot of stuff that's not there but you also still have the wooden roller coasters. You know, so you kinda see that. My favorite location, well...

16:51

Flatwoods. Okay. The thing about the forest is, that's northcentral West Virginia. Like forget that you're in a game and just look at the landscape, the leaf change, you actually start getting in and looking at what trees and vegetation are available going through the woods.

EH: Is it always fall in the game?

JB: Yes. The weather doesn't change. So, which is funny 'cause you get Pumpkin House and you get some Halloween decorations in their place and jack o'lanterns. You know, which is just sort of fun. But like...get away from the rock face for a little bit and...it's a survival game. It's like you want to run forever? No, you can't. And like this is deer season in northcentral. It just is. Well...

EH: There are like mutant animals?

JB: Oh yeah, yeah.

EH: I've done one walk through with friends who were not that great at the game.

JB: Giant two-headed cows, which is common throughout other Fallout games. Unique to Appalachia, giant ticks which are both terrifying and disgusting because I mean they're giant. They change colors as they're attacking you because they're feeding. And depending upon what color they are when you finally kill them, they make more of a mess.

19:09

Just wonderfully disgusting. Okay giant overview. You've got the forest which is largely northcentral West Virginia, coming further now as far as accuracy of the map to West Virginia, it will play around with stuff inside that section, so it'll move it around, it'll adjust with scale, it'll do other things. Like their entire concept of Charleston is just ludicrously funny. Not just because they put Summersville next to Charleston but because the dam is within a mile of the capitol and is up higher, so like if the dam breaks the higher Capital City is just gonna go (makes exploding sound). But the locations that are within this region are largely where they should be included. That's not 100% true, but it's mostly true, which is kind of interesting. You go down south, The Ash Heap is the coalfields. So you get like Charleston is here, which means roughly 64 would be running this way and 77 would be coming down through here. That's the coalfields, you know? So it's squeezed all over and you get Big Bend Tunnel, the Caverns...

EH: Is there a John Henry statue?

JB: No. And I'm not sure why. I expected to see some John Henry. There are a couple of things in the game that I expected to see that wouldn't have taken much, but that weren't there.

EH: What else was that?

JB: The biggest one? The game released November the 14th. When I pointed out to the lead programmers and designers that was there a reason why they chose the date of the Marshall crash to do it, especially knowing--were they aware that Marshall completely shut down and just did...they lost all color in their face and completely freaked out and went, "Can you stick around for a second?" Like they were doing the large media event at the Greenbrier, they had us coming in in groups of 10 and 15 minute sections to do Qs and As and that all it was. And I asked them that and they're like ughh, and they stopped everything that they were doing, finished up that one, brought in a marketing person and went, "Were you aware of this?" And the marketing person again was like, yeah, we know, it's not a problem, don't worry about it.

My concern there is they had no way to know about it. They did have partnerships with the state. Someone should have informed them of that and apparently whoever locally was responsible for that just didn't care. Kind of remarkable. There is a plane crash in the game which--now they had released Beta access before the game was released and this is real close to where you originally pop out from the game. So players from Marshall, we did a Beta event at Marshall and we discovered it and searched through it and were shocked that it was there. But there's also no direct connection between it and the Marshall crash. At the same time, there's not really a historical plane crash in West Virginia, and this isn't a small 2-seater plane. Like I know there are a couple of stories of--but this isn't that. It's a larger.

MK: Where is the plane crash on the map?

JB: Northcentral. Like it's in the forest area. But effectively it would be in the northcentral region. Which again isn't a direct connection with Marshall at all, it's just I have no idea why that's there.

MK: There have been a couple of plane crash disasters, one involving military aircraft. I think a jet went down in the area near Spruce Knob some years ago.

JB: This was--this is a commercial liner that had 20-50 passengers? Like room for that. But there's no, the model of the plane, the number on the plane, there's no direct connection. Still begs the question why'd you do it?

24:48

So the first city that people discover is Flatwoods, which is funny 'cause Flatwoods used to advertise that they were the geographic center of the state. Their newer marketing alludes to it but doesn't, like it used to be when you got off the interstate there's a huge sign that said boom. And now they just more allude to that. But the first place that people discover is Flatwoods. Other than that this place has no actual connection to Flatwoods. It doesn't look like Flatwoods, there's not the outlet mall, it doesn't really look like Sutton or Gassaway, like anything that would be close to it. But harking back to sort of how they got culture, right in the time of what players are doing, there are several different factions within the game. The first faction you're introduced to, you find here and they're the reclaimers. So it starts with 1st responders. So police, ambulance, ENT, fire, first just trying to--'cause living outside the vault. So first just trying to keep order, not in an authoritarian sense, but provide some form of civilization, help people, help the survivors provide resources, collect information. Then becomes a little bit of a police force as you start having some raiding groups and criminals coming through, so they're helping people to defend and protect each other. Before--eventually this is true for every group that's there--being wiped out by the Scorched. But you pick up on holotapes, so little spoken word stories or notes where people talk about

what it was like and what was going on or just how things changed. And you learn about West Virginia and about the world through those.

EH: So you find those...

JB: Through playing and searching around.

[plays tape] "Well my back hurts....two pair eyes. I tell him I seen a big old boomer out yonder. They tell me what's a boomer then? Then some sweet young thing come up to me asking for help with that garden next door. And then just this morning I hear talk of crawdads big as a barn door cross the mountains or worse."

JB: Listen to the dialect.

[tape plays] "Flatwoods had better days. Now everything catawampus here will kill ya. I think... but damn if God would just let a bomb fall on my head! Jesus just let me die!"

JB: They did a lot of work with their voice actors on getting dialects that were accurate. And funnily enough on local pronunciation for "Appalachia." Like that was an actual, and I asked about it, did they get everybody right? They're like, "Yes, except for one guy." Out of the 400 some holotapes in the game, they recalled that they had one that just couldn't quite get it. But you know they consciously went through and tried to get everybody.

Play this one. This is the first journal that you get in the game and listen to.

"Overseer it's called personal journals. Not an official log. Something for me."

JB: She was a WVU graduate.

"One of my first? at Vault-Tec. I was so excited because..."

EH: The actor?

JB: No, the character. The character. But hear the difference in voice.

"I remember...at autumn festival, me running through the corn maze, going every which way..."

EH: And so does WVU exist or is it Vault-Tec?

JB: Yes. Okay, got it. Vault Tech University is in Morgantown and some of the large, some of the dorms are included in the game so you recognize them.

"Simple house. I wonder if it's still standing."

EH: So when you say she was a graduate, she was a Vault Tech University graduate?

JB: Yes.

EH: Okay.

31:23

JB: Like the character was a Vault Tech University graduate, but again, listening to the difference in voice there's still the Appalachian there, but it's also filtered through, you now have northern West Virginia, so Morgantown rather than more central, younger rather than older generation, but also educated. And you get that filter kinda through it.

Ash Heap, coalfields, the black is because and I'll take you down here, the area is destroyed. Imagine what Mountaintop removal or a strip mining site looks like and then magnify that and that will explain the landscape. But they managed to pull in Mine Wars history and Blair Mountain and everything else. And again, some of it's understated. If you don't know the history, it doesn't quite connect. One of the things about the map is no bombs hit WV and there were no Chinese troops attacking in WV as there were in other places like Alaska. There were robots but not troops under the things...get into the Ash Heap and there are tanks. And it's the only place in the whole map where you see heavy weaponry. (voice gets quite, confessional) They're not there because of the nuclear war. They're there because of the miners and the union and the strike. Like, they managed to pull in Blair Mountain and that history but there's nothing directly pointing it out, it's just...

EH: It's militarized?

JB: Yeah. And no other area is like that. Get into let's see, Divide, that largely runs through the middle of the map, would be the mountains and more of the Eastern part of the state. So Spruce Knob area, Elkins, the ski resorts. That all takes place up here. Golden Palace.

EH: The Golden Palace as in the Hare Krishna temple?

JB: Yeah!

EH: Oh wow.

JB: It's up here. They randomly threw in Pumpkin House and moved it up here.

35:44

And then Cranberry Bog is more... tossed a few areas that were nearby but it's largely that. And then the Mire is more the Eastern Panhandle.

See the biplane? Adventure planes from the New River Gorge that do the tours. I'm not sure what I'm looking at there.

38:16

I just haven't seen that before.

EH: One of the robots?

MK: The previous little thing across the bottom told us about the 6-legged...

JB: I wondered that but they're just not always connected. 'Cause like you notice the facts on the bottom will keep scrolling through.

"Level 2 nuclear alert...Hazmat teams are en route. Please remain indoors and await further instructions"



So my absolute favorite location in the game, from the point of answering the question, "Were they respectful or was this a wrong turn with mutant hillbilly zombies?" Is their version of Hillbilly Hotdogs. 'Cause the thing of it is, Hillbilly Hotdogs isn't...it's not making fun, like the actual place isn't making fun of--it's not Hee Haw. It really is just trying to celebrate perhaps not the best parts of Appalachian culture, but...First off, the fact that they couldn't even let themselves call it Hillbilly and not because of like copyright reasons, but... (kills mole rats in game)

They usually come up in packs. Again, talking about errors in the game, the mole rats will jump up out of the ground through the car, on top of a 4 story building. They didn't really check that it's ground, just that it's wherever you're standing. So yeah, Hillbilly Hotdogs, you get the bus, Hillfolk. You get the bus with the boat on top, not the graffiti, not the signs. the suggestion of them, like a couple of pink flamingos, carousel horse, there's a stack of deer antlers somewhere.

EH: And the year, is it 2102? Or is it 2076?

JB: 2076. Yeah, 2076. Like all the things that are at Hillbilly Hot dogs and which means you're left with them going, "Oh we really want to include this location. Oh we can't include this location because it's completely making fun of stereotypes." But it's such an interesting and notable and nationally-known, so you get this toned down version of it so they can still include it. And not only that but, you see the flag? You can just catch, there are lights at the base of the flag highlighting it in the same way that Mothman Museum pops up on the map and is really noticeable. At night, you will see this giant beam of light up into the sky that is visible like again, you're in Northcentral West Virginia, but from the hills all around, you can see this coming up, you're like hey, what's that? And it draws you into this place. So not only did they include, but they actively tried to draw your attention there.

45:52

EH: What are the natural--like the plants and food that you can forage in the game?

JB: I have to google it to find all of it. I can. But any of the animals you can harvest and then the plants. And again with the plants, they're all for the most part they're not necessarily exact copies but sort of based off of.

EH: Yeah, I think is it mutfruit?

JB: Yeah, well and it's also this balance between though, what is a Fallout consistent, like mutfruit, and what's local: blackberries, that you kinda get.

EH: And this is the only Fallout game that's in a real life location?

JB: No. It's the most extensive and not just the largest but also the most detailed and the most local flavor pulled into it. You know, I mean like you've got the Chester Teapot. Not just big stuff, but small stuff. Energy plant which is John Amos.

EH: Is this the inside of the vault?

JB: Yeah. And once you leave the vault you can't go back into it. At least not without a couple of glitches that are available right now. And one of the things that they had opened up was new vaults for, oh giant mosquitos. That's not terrifying.

EH: Called a bloodbug?

JB: Yeah. Look at the size of that thing!

49:21

EH: So it's always foggy like this?

JB: Ah no. Fog will, like the weather will change slightly. And night.

So as far as layout of the city, no. But at the same time, if you've been in any downtown mainstreet, like that's eerily accurate. In every respect. Size of the streets, sidewalks, you know, it splits the time period, the time that's passed since, so the fading. The older building. Just all of it.

So Mothman Museum. You've got the mini version of the statue, and then a lot of stuff they included, you know, I mean it's kinda like yes and no. Because you still have the displays, you still have the papers, some of the random historical stuff. The way that they have that back room set up that's sort of a small viewing area.

Lots of stuff got changed or modified or would revert back to like Weston State Hospital is the Trans-Allegheny. Mothman sign, there are 2 ways that they leave notes about characters. Either the holotapes, you can listen, or just physical notes you can read. Upstairs in here there's a note on the wall that is addressed to the owner. It's like a personal note like that, but includes the owner's first name in it. So it's just sort of a reference to what's there. There is also a--do I still have that? Not on me. There's a Mothman cult within the game.

55:22

Okay, so Mothman statue, like right? Legit, realistic there, gorgeous. Again the mural it's just kind of there. Talking about things within game structure, so there are Mothman eggs for some weird reason all over Point Pleasant. In the first 6 months or so of the game, the best way to make money and really the only dependable way to make money was to come to Point Pleasant and harvest the eggs. Which means again, players are leaving Vault 76, discovering Flatwoods, then learning that if they go to the Mothman Museum in Point Pleasant, if they can make money there, and the entire game sort of depends upon money, so they're seeing those 2 locations and learning about them.

The thing I find interesting about that is Point Pleasant and the Mothman Festival have embraced that Fallout is now part of--Mothman Festival it's the Mothman people and the cryptid investigators and at a glance at that crowd, you know which is which! Because it's either the goths or the men in black suits. You know? Those two kind of things. And yeah, the first question might pop into your head is you didn't know there was that much black in West Virginia, but the first year they had the festival, the summer before the game was released and Bethesda was supposed to set up with a table there, they saw at least a 30% increase in their numbers and you could clearly see a 3rd group--The Fallout people. So that now you had gamers and cosplayers for Fallout coming in as well as Mothman and it just meshed. But so they fully embraced what was there coming in. Flatwoods on the other hand, there is not a single sign or notion or mention of anything in Flatwoods that lets you know, "Oh hey, by the way, we're in Fallout 76." Even though periodically you'll still see people online and on subreddits or social media who are players from out of the state and will post pictures from Flatwoods. Like when they come in, or they'll find the Flatwoods monster sign that's kind of there and then post that and like oh, we found this, it was cool.

EH: And there's sort of a people come from out of state and do Fallout tours?

58:46

JB: Tens of thousands? No. Do people do it? Yes. Like were very excited to do it. The ordinance works-- I'd have to look through my notes, like through my articles to find out what exactly what location that was. But that's an actual, the Talcott (?) County Fairgrounds, City of Grafton, Morgantown 'cause you asked about it.

So again the lead art designer mentioned--I ran across something when we did the early game at the Greenbrier and I found--you know the beer drinking hats? Okay, I found one in Morgantown and I went okay that's a little--so he came up and asked, so what do you think? And I went, and I put the hat on. And he went, "Oh I'm so happy you found that." He made a half dozen different party items for Morgantown because the party, and just scattered them around. So again there's no direct explanation for it, it's just there it is.

In original design discussions, they had actually considered making Native American, because there's such a Native American history--Native American culture and tribes one of the factions. Like essentially rebuilding it. But they were so intent on getting the culture right and on not screwing it up and on not including, and they couldn't figure out how to do it, because again, there's still outsiders that are trying to figure that out so they cut the entire bit of it. Which, I thought was a damn shame, but, yeah.

1:01:54

But yeah it was in the original plans, it just didn't materialize. I suspect even though nobody would own up to it, that that's what happened with the John Henry statue. 'Cause I mean you're still dealing with a black man being exploited by white power in groups. From an outsider, that only looks one way. You know, within West Virginia history, that's a completely different perspective.

EH: I mean the native, I can see why they didn't want to tackle that...it's just so difficult because there are no recognized tribes. There's just no way to ensure...

JB: Well, and it's because everybody would have been forced to move. pre-Civil War even, so you get--I mean if you're talking about, well what, there are 2 different parts of the story of the Shawnee? One that gets told in Grandview, and the other gets told at Point Pleasant? Sorry, Chief Logan? And within those stories, which are based on local historians and works, plus tying in with it mentions Point Pleasant and Cornstalk, you know, and that you're talking about a tribe that covered hundreds of miles like you were talking about going to the store. They were comfortably...and yet, they're either white forced out, massacred before even the 1800s roll around.

So...

1:04:33

WVU but not WVU. Whiteburn Hall. I think that's right? I'm a son of Marshall, so WVU's kinda.

VP: Woodburn.

JB: Yeah, that's it. So going into the Ash Heap. Is there anything else that you wanted to see? Oh do you want to see the Capitol building?

EH: Yeah.

JB: That's my character, cause they let you customize. Oh that's something I should show you. Do you see the scars? So one of the things that you'll see with a lot of games is people like the ability to customize their avatars and what they can do. And that's scars, blemishes, skin tone, burns, and in some games it'll let you add in, especially if it's a racing game or something similar, road dust or something else. You can

add in coal miner for here, so you can do everything from almost a full that to the ones where you historical, where you see sort of the hands through it and that to just a light dusting. But I thought that was really kind of interesting.

Capitol. So the way that some people from WV are really negative about WV. So the WV trolls? The comment that they'll make about the game is, well at least they got the roads right.

EH: I mean I was saying when we were playing and we went to Helvetia, I was like well the roads don't look too much different!

JB: Well but the thing of it is they kinda did. With the road signs. Like they changed some of the numbers so you get 59 instead of 79 but if you look around you can find references to most of the roads like major roads in the state.

EH: And Summersville Dam is really close.

JB: It's right there! (laughs) or you know, what's left of it. So Summersville Dam, you can see where the water level would have been and then follow along on that bank like hey, it's a game, if you really want to start getting bugged about the realism of it, you're working too hard. But still that's funny.

Oh and we've got the Grafton Monster. Who's about 3 times my size.

EH: So do the monsters attack you or are they just kind of ? or what?

JB: It depends on the monster. Most of the monsters will attack you like the cryptids that they included, with 2 sort of exceptions. The Flatwoods Monster historically is described almost kind of like an alien, the classic grey man alien. So randomly out of the corner of your eye, you will catch a little alien-looking dude who teleports out in a blue wave. And you're like...alien, what? And it disappears. And it's clearly keeping an eye on people. But for the most part that's all it does and it's just there to worry you. Mothman, a couple of different versions of him load. And some of them are neutral.

1:11:00

Some of them are helpful, so like they'll follow you around, they'll make sure that you're okay in the same way that when you look at the Mothman stories some of them were helpful, some of them were harmful, and some were just "Hey dude, what's up." So they incorporated all of that, so I found it kind of interesting.

Salt beans?

EH: Is that just in this game?

JB: Yeah, that's a Fallout 76 specific one and I'm assuming are sort of half runners?

I think it may have shut down.

1:13:02

So not really a West Virginia thing, just a DMV thing--they actually included a Charleston DMV and because of the quest that it asks you to go through, it's bureaucratic and frustrating and because of the game mechanics, you can drop nukes on locations. If you nuke a location, it radiates the area, mutates the creatures that are there and a bunch of stuff that won't pop up at any other time shows up after you nuke

it. So if you're halfway done dealing with the bureaucracy of the DMV and somebody blows it up, you just have to start all over, just like the DMV.

EH: And for the Mine Wars stuff, that's mostly the tanks--just the way it appears or is there more?

JB: No. Let me get you down there next. When we did the media event at the Greenbrier, we basically had 2 hours to play the game. So I've got this little level one character with nothing, just straight out of the vault, and my goal was to see as much of the map as I could and hit locations that people wanted to know if they were there. Which means that largely I was just running for my life.

It's through here. You'd have to run up to it but you can see it from a couple of locations. I'll see if I can find it.

VP: Oh no, I was just curious.

JB: So I'm just running like a madman. I'm first heading down to over to Point Pleasant and then down to Hillfolk Hotdogs, and then continue going to look at Camden Park which is completely overrun with Scorched. Thing of it is, the forest is like level one through 5. So whatever. But then the Ash Heap is a much higher level so now I'm still just running, running, trying to stay alive and not die so I can still see more.

So Camden Park, really close to the original, like to the sign. And you know, the sort of older nature of the park itself, games and things and roughly the set up. You've got the row of games that are there and then you know, almost exactly in order and where things are. The--what is the wooden roller coaster at Camden? Yeah! Widowmaker. But still wooden and still that. The joke that locals will make about Camden Park is that it looks great, it's amazing how much they got, and it's funny how those roller coasters look safer than anything they've ever actually seen in person at the park.

Well there's a, you'll hear a knocking through the park and there's several boards on the side that are loose and as that goes on it's this constant sound and you think it's the machinery and it's not! It's that.

So running, and now we're at a light jog 'cause it's a survival game. Landscape is still northcentral WV for the most part. Rolling hills. Road signs but also...

EH: Mount Blair [Blair Mountain]

So I'm getting up here. Think about all the history, in quotes, that popped up with Blair Mountain, Matewan, Mine Wars in general, JFK's visit as well, when he came through. See the landscape change?

KM: When you say JFK's visit, do you mean 1963 or 1965?

JB: The campaign. What's the quote, "A man, a machine?" Like the general theme of it is, he's talking about how they replaced with automation all of these areas' lost jobs. And that that's not what we should be about. There. Once you can see just the ash heap. You were just hanging out in this gorgeous...and suddenly...I mean, it's still smoking! And again, coal fires. The fact that it's been 25 years wouldn't matter. Somehow I managed to run by all the tanks, or not see them.

They personally they didn't do--there's a weird thing in the game where compared to other Fallout games, as much stuff as they did include with this, because it's blown up, it means that each individual area gets a whole lot less. So in an older game, you go into a small town and there may be 40 or 50 different notes and stories and holotapes to find. Here you go into Beckley and there are maybe a dozen. You know? Or

some of the stories are hidden more into quest or the graffiti there: "Man before Machine." So you have the miners. The miners were replaced first by robots and the miners went on strike 'cause it wasn't a complete cut, but you know they laid off half the work force. So the miners went on strike. Then the companies brought into, we'll run into 'em in a second, robot strike breakers. And you listen to what they're saying and how they're saying it and it's sort of this wonderful Appalachian dialect which is great. But as you explore further into the area, you find a couple of science laboratories and experiments and then you run into these genetically mutated creatures called mole miners. If you took all the history of the Mine Wars in West Virginia and then pushed it into 2076, so you added some sci-fi elements to it with the same levels of corporate actions, you end up with strike breaking robots. And if they're already willing--what would a company do for scabs if they could genetically mutate animals? So, and all of that is here.

EH: Yeah, I mean it's not too far off from continuous miners.

JB: No.

1:24:34

"Striking is prohibited" (robot says this) "Is that someone who needs me to kick their ass"

JB: Now here's the other thing in Beckley, 'cause you get the robots running over the town. Look at the top of the buildings. See the forts? You know, all the walls, that wouldn't have been the robots, you know? That's the miners. But yeah, I mean that's the miners actively building up and fighting against.

EH: Those are ghouls not scorched?

JB: Okay, ghouls are actually Fallout and that is their original version of zombies, so that if you had a human being that was irradiated, it affects them physically. They now will survive for hundreds of years. But they can go feral. So throughout the series you'll have ghouls that are perfectly fine and talk to you. They're frequently just discriminated against. Oh, you'll love this. But then also they go feral and just classic zombies.

EH: And do we know, if those in the vault were from this area?

JB: Theoretically, yes. Within the story that some of them are. Again, best and brightest and that would have been you know from the area and brought in.

EH: I just wondered if there was a class war element, with the scorched being the people who were left out of the vault.

JB: Ah, within the Fallout game, no.

EH: Because of the social experiments?

JB: Well, you already have something in place. The people that were left outside the vault in every other version of Fallout, you have 2 versions of them. Settlers which are people that survived and then are just trying to--so it's like a frontier. They're either living in like out on their own or they're starting to build small communities which will eventually grow into towns and you see that. The other side of that are raiders which would be the scavengers, looters, and everything else. So you definitely see life for the survivors and you see a bit of a division there between those that want to rebuild society and those who are willing to do whatever. And raiders are truly horrible people. So you see abuse, you see torture,

looting, scavenging, slave trade, drug trade, all of that takes place with raiders. For Fallout 76, as of yet, you don't have settlers or raiders. There are no human NPCs in the game yet.

EH: You think they're coming?

JB: Wastelanders is a major expansion. It keeps getting moved. Oh, there we go. Mole miner. Now, they're about human size, have these big leather jackets and respirators. But they're basically they're in this suit, but they're also locked in this suit and if you get close to 'em you can hear this raspy kind of breathing. So again even with their genetic mutation, they didn't care enough about them. That wasn't the point.

1:31:30

Destroyed almost all trees, all vegetation, and the mountains are burnt down to basically rock. Hear the wind? Which is different from what it looked like in northcentral. It's just there's nothing breaking it or stopping it now.

EH: What about the Fasnacht event?

JB: I'm familiar with it, I didn't participate in it. But yeah, Helvetia is in the game.

EH: And it looks very real.

JB: And Fasnacht with the giant masks, those are in there and were very popular. I don't know if Helvetia is actually seeing any kind of changes or growth?

EH: I listened to a few podcasts that were specifically about Fallout 76 in WV. Are there any you would recommend?

JB: No. I'm not a big podcast. Mostly I follow the Fallout 76 subreddit, which is fo76. And it's got an active community and they'll link to other resources and other things that pop up. So it's a good source there.

Just randomly 'cause I'm the only person that tells this joke. So like I said, northcentral WV, there in largely accurate and roughly in the right location. The Ash Heap, roughly in the right location, Savage Divide--yes and no, you know? If you consider that the bogs and Eastern Panhandle would be on the other side of the mountains, then they're not suggesting that it runs down through the center of the state. So while people complain about it being, well they shifted everything around, for the most part, they really didn't. It's largely kind of confined and accurate for where it is!

Except when you get up to the northern part of the map, this is Toxic Valley. Now Toxic Valley is the nickname for Charleston. You know, Chemical Valley. So they shifted this up here. Now they included the Oglebay Park so the waterpark. So there's not a lot, yeah, there's not a lot of, well in Toxic Valley there's just. So what do I have that's just...Grafton. Okay. Going to Grafton. It's mostly barren. It really is. It looks like a toxic waste dump. But and there are a couple, like Oglebay. But also Moundsville Prison is up there and here's the thing that's kinda weird. There are only a handful of places on the map that actually aren't in WV. Close, Mt. Storm, Mt. Weather, which is across the border in VA and is the super secret, so they pulled it in. It's only 10 miles, 12 miles, you know, right across the border. And honestly depending how large the thing actually is, but they pulled it in.

But for the Toxic Valley, they also pulled in a dam. Now the closest dam in the area is the Yangtze (?) it's in Pennsylvania and there's a river that runs north. So should be a tributary leading into one of the rivers for Pittsburgh, alright? So everywhere else there's all this stuff, all these areas, all of these other things and mostly where they should be. There's Toxic Valley which is not in the right place. Which barely includes anything except for Moundsville Prison, a whole bunch of toxic waste, and for some reason they felt it was important to pull a dam across the state line to there. 12 years ago Fallout 3 came out. One of the DLCs for Fallout 3 was The Pit. Pittsburgh also wasn't hit by a nuclear bomb, but for some unexplained reason, was overrun with raiders, the whole area had been hit with toxic waste and it had become just toxic, which is what killed most of the population and then raiders came in and set up in huge numbers. I mean like Pittsburgh became this giant mecca for raiders. So the question is out there then, where did the toxic waste that flooded the city and where did the raiders come from? If that dam broke, and flooded Toxic Valley, it would have also damaged Moundsville, so now you have this mass prison break, which looking at Moundsville Prison, it looks like they did. The waste would have flowed north into Pittsburgh, and you know, the locals, trying to get away from where they were were going towards the state line, so now you've explained both the raiders except here's the other thing. WVU fan?

EH: Me? No.

JB: Okay, WVU football for going on 50 years, their rivals have been Pitt, the chant has been "Eat shit, Pitt," okay. Pitt ended up with the Toxic Valley and the prisoners. The physical and human refuse from WV leading into the Pitt.

EH: Got it.

JB: So I ask, they all went, like every artist, every designer, everything else went...okay, I can't say somebody didn't, 'cause that sounds like what we would do, but because of their design, their structure, it's very group, so they couldn't pin it down and go, oh yeah, that was Bob. But it still begs the question, even if they weren't trying to make the WVU joke, they still managed to tie it into a DLC. Absolutely from that long ago. 'Cause that's otherwise there's no reason to have done it.

EH: Can we look at the Hare Krishna temple?

JB: Yeah, let me...

1:41:21

Windigos are the other thing that popped up in the game. And honestly it's probably the only thing that truly has the Native American sort of reference to it. It's just not in any way that people would recognize or connect.

Northern part of the state and Eastern, so Elkins area. And you get higher elevations so different plant life, different sounds, more wind. Trees are now more pines and a lot of windswept.

EH: At the poetry reading are they reading classic Appalachian poets?

JB: I don't know. I was reading an article that the person that created it had written kind of describing and overview of their 6 months or so playing the game and just how things had shaped and evolved. So she mentioned that they were reading it but she didn't say what they were reading.

Oh! Possums. 2-headed possums. Also the possums generally aren't aggressive. They just run away from you.



EH: What was that?

JB: Some of the quests that pop up are location-specific. And some of them are random events. So you don't really get a, "Oh yeah, I'd like to do this!" You just get a "Hey, let's start this!" It's like no. Leave me alone and now we're into--hear the cicadas?

EH: Oh yeah.

JB: And because people are going through rocks, they're like are those snakes?

EH: (remarks on hot jazz on Appalachia Radio)

JB: Well again, some of the stuff they included in the game is distinctly Appalachian and some is distinctly Fallout, so you know the 1950s world of tomorrow kind of stuff? That's very much the world of Fallout before the bombs. It's basically an alternative history after WWII.

But yeah, it'll have jazz--it's a little more Fallout specific and then a lot of other Appalachian plus "Country Roads."

1:48:18

EH: And you said this was 25 years after the disaster?

JB: Yes. The earlier set of vaults didn't open until at least 100 years. High enough elevation though, that you can hear the wind, and it almost sounds cold. Like it's this harsher...

Surprised I haven't run into any of them yet. Oh, there we are! Speaking of...

EH: Is that a mountaineer?

JB: No, super mutant. Oh, seriously? So super mutants are a classic Fallout 76 type villain. But in this game they get sort of an added flavor. The water crisis in Charleston--there's a little bit of a suggestion here in one of the towns that a place was working on the virus, an early version of the virus that created the super mutants, which is something that's been in the Fallout lore for a while from other areas. Only here it leaked into the water supply and they just didn't bother telling anybody, so it mutated the population.

But yeah, the similarities between the current player base and people that live in WV is just--because there's no reason why it should have developed that way, and it really is fairly unique in that sense of helping each other and helping, and not even helping each other for benefit. People are just dropping stuff and helping and giving people whatever. While at the same time the designers aren't--there have been numerous problems with glitching and cheating and they haven't done anything really to...

Palace of the Winding Path [Hare Krishna temple]

EH: Have you been here in real life?

JB: No.

(recording at temple) "The outside world has no meaning. While you focus on your inner self."

2:00:04

EH: There's some strange giant figures at the Hare Krishna temple.

JB: I'll hop back up there and see if I can find 'em. Toxic Valley is what we're looking at there and again there's a view of this expansive valley. But everything looks wrong. Like the trees and growth are stunted you can see the complete lack of vegetation in through the middle. And when you walk up on it it's just, it's like a bog pit with, except that it's bubbling waste and sulfur fumes coming up kind of thing.

Okay so, giant statues at the palace?

EH: Yeah, it's like these dancing women. In real life it's kind of down the hill from the palace.

JB: The first modification Bethesda had to make to the game was--cause you can set up a camp. And that is basically a spawn point--the things you can do there. Create items and whatever else. Well, people were finding--setting up camps not where they were the most strategically important. But like it was real estate, in just beautiful locations. Well the camp is semi-permanent so if you log off, when you log back on your camp will still be wherever you left it. People were logging on and automatically being assigned to a server and it was, someone else already had that same location and it just didn't know what to do so it either crashed the server or it overlapped the 2 camps or it would damage the player file. So one of the first things they had to do was make it so that the game would check if somebody was already in your camp and if it was, move you to a different server and check it again. And I just found that interesting. 'Cause the overall size of the thing and yet, and the camps aren't that big, but people were still "No, I want to put mine here because it gives me the perfect view of whatever."

EH: So people were choosing the same campsite?

JB: Yeah.

2:04:31

EH: And then do you feel like there's a community of West Virginia players that has emerged?

JB: No. But not because of dislike of the game. If you look at the Microsoft 2 years ago held an event in Charleston on Broadband access in West Virginia and one of the things that they had were maps of all the access different places and basically you had Charleston, Morgantown, Wheeling, Lewisburg, Huntington, and then everything else was just (makes empty motion). So there's very--there are gamers, people game, but as the gaming industry moves more and more towards massive multi-player games that require connections to be able to move, and not just that but all of the content creators that go along with it. I think it's interesting and disturbing to note that there aren't that many content creators from West Virginia. Like you won't find YouTube channels, media influencers. There should be a YouTube star who shows up at the state fair and is featured at the state fair. You know, that kind of thing. Politicians should be... it doesn't exist because the infrastructure is not there. So no. There were a couple before the game came out. There was a YouTube channel that did some really extraordinary work and they did some early stuff. And there was a podcast Vault Boys.

EH: Oh yeah.

JB: Podcast, cause they interviewed me for one of 'em.

EH: I might have listened to that.

JB: And they did a lot of really good stuff, but I don't know that either one of 'em are still doing it.

EH: Yeah, it didn't seem like it.

JB: I know on the subreddit there's not--there are players that are local, but they're not you know, the most prominent or they don't have a following or anything else because of it. It's just every once in a while you see a comment pop up that "I'm from here and it's nice to be able to see that."

EH: Well I don't want to keep you too much longer, but is there anything else that you think would be important to see?

JB: We focused on the folklore...the Ash Heap and Blair Mountain really is I think the most important. Because that's a history that we really don't teach hard in West Virginia. Like I taught in Lincoln County for close to 15 years. I know every school I was at spent at least a month teaching something related to the Holocaust. Usually with freshman. But whether it was Night or history class or something, they spent at least a month digging into that and yet I don't know of a single lesson that covered Blair Mountain, The Mine Wars, Storming Heaven. And I was a--I graduated high school in '94. I was a junior in high school before I'd even heard about Blair Mountain, and the only reason I'd heard about is because I was at a summer camp and they required us to read Storming Heaven. If not for that, there was nothing in my school system that would have let me know.

Mothman and some other cryptids. It's not necessarily folklore, but just the different locations...

EH: Yeah I guess I'm thinking about the way this can cement West Virginia folklore. Especially in the minds of people who don't live in the state. I've gotten so many emails "I became interested in West Virginia folklore because of this game."

JB: Because of this!

EH: And this will codify some things--I mean, Blair Mountain alone.

JB: It gets when you see the things from the people, you get this idea of...I come back to how the players, everything else, but I really do think it's a matter of modeling. You get these stories of what West Virginians were like and not just the vault dwellers but the survivors and what they did and whether they intended to emulate it or not, that's exactly what they've done, is they've tried to follow the example that these theoretical characters had set before.

There's a lot with corporate and corporate exploitation and extraction. You'll see it show up in all kinds of ways. When you first leave the vault, one of the first places that you run across is there's a lumber mill that has robot lumberjacks that are still clearing wood. Which again means that they automated that system plus removed any environmental [barriers] just for doing that.

Any other locations or stories like in general of West Virginia folklore that stand out to you that are important?

EH: I've done a lot of work in Helvetia, but we looked around there. What is the Big Bend Tunnel? Is it a pretty significant site?

JB: Within the game? Uh, yes. It ends up, it'll cross through much of the map. It's overrun with Scorched and I believe will leave you towards the Scorched Queen. Let me double check that.

One thing about it, with the thing with Appalachia--outside of the state-- you get a lot of Appalachia and I don't know if that's--I honestly don't know if that's getting it wrong or if that's everybody else in the connected region, choosing a different pronunciation. Personally since West Virginia is the only one entirely within. I think we should get to say it and everybody should have to follow. But because this is Appalachia and it's so consistently Appalachia, like the map is called Appalachia, that you reinforce that pronunciation over and over and over again. So how many people saying a word does it take to change what is considered appropriate. But I appreciated that at the very least.

2:15:00

Talking about businesses, there's also a pharmaceutical company that is there which is again really sort of spot on. It's also really close to the Ash Heap, you know? So...

Big Bend just connects. It connects the Ash Heap over towards Lewisburg, which would be right across the map. And just has you searching for some survivors through it.

Anyplace else?

EH: Maybe the holotapes? I can probably also find some on YouTube, right?

JB: Yeah, anything specific you were looking for?

EH: I don't know I was just thinking... but yeah, if you have recommendations (inaudible)--you think the subreddit is the best source of information?

JB: It is. And while there are trolls everywhere, there are people that are good about answering questions or helping people. And my--just being excited seeing who you were and what you were doing.

Nate Purkeypiled. Did you watch the Fallout documentary that Bethesda did?

EH: No.

JB: It's about half an hour or so. It's more of a making of.

EH: Is that on YouTube?

JB: Yes. @npurkeypiled. And...but he was approachable and interested in really--this was very much his baby. You see the documentary, he's the guy in the Mothman t-shirt, you know? It's interesting because nobody working on the game is from West Virginia. One of the marketing people, and not one of the main marketing people, was a WVU graduate that was a West Virginia native. And basically that's it. But as I was talking to the artist and some of the writers and designers, as they had dug into all this history and culture and work, I got the impression they fell in love with the place. That it just became important to them that they get it right.

EH: Do you know what books they read and movies they watched and what did they do? It would be cool to get their bibliography?

JB: Ask Nate, 'cause he was the one I was talking about that had come down and had gone on the tours and I'm sure he could tell you.

2:21:55

What they had dug into and other things.

EH: And so they're rolling out game after game?

JB: There have been--they've done a couple of DLCs for the game but their--every time they add something, they haven't fixed what was still a problem, and what they add becomes more of a problem. So they added in a couple of different vaults that allowed raids, like to go in and attack that vault and it would load as a thing, but the servers are already sketchy so they crash. It doesn't automatically connect you back to the server that you were on. And it would kick you out of the raid if you were in it. And the raids themselves were crashing and kicking people out, because they took, because they had all these loading screens and it was taking longer to load. So it's like you added in this thing that not only didn't work, but it should have showed up in beta testing that that didn't work. They recently released a couple months ago, released a new power armor that may well be the most powerful armor in the game, but it has this poison effect like as an area effect. And it will put a visual marker on things that its affecting. So one person is wearing it, okay. If several people are wearing it and they're in the same location, the game will crash. So you created this high-tier item and it's going to crash your game and it's like, at what point did you have 5 of your programmers just God-loading the best stuff in the game, "Let's kill the Scorched!" and the game crashes? You're like, "Huh, we should fix that!" It's just--there is no decent quality control and it's not, people are holding out hope for Wastelanders, 'cause it's a major--they're hinting, it's a major overhaul and adds in...Larger titles of games that want to expand the life of their games rather than just releasing 4 DLCs the first year and calling it done and seeing what happens have started doing year 1, year 2, so that you get, when year 2 rolls around, you'll get up to 8 new DLC in areas to explore and usually a new storyline so that you'll functionally change the game. For Wastelanders, the hint was that survivors that were outside the area would have heard the vault dwellers and what they were doing and that it was safer, so they're coming in to explore. So then you get, 'cause that's what the game doesn't have, it doesn't having NPCs to talk to. So that with that you will get settlers and raiders that are both coming into the region and how that will change. But the questions also that did you fix all of the other stuff? Bethesda historically, 'cause this is the first time they've done really online. With everything else, they released it, then they opened it up to Mods and the player base fixed the problems. They don't have a history of doing a good job of fixing their own work. At one point, Fallout 3 or Fallout 4, I believe they ended up taking somebody's mod an essentially making an update for the game because it was so good and it corrected a lot of problems. But that means that they got all that troubleshooting for next to nothing. But now with this, it's like they don't quite have, know how to correct or fix their stuff.

2:27:54

EH: What was the thing where they had people who had paid extra, and people were playing some free version were attacking them?

JB: They opened up a subscription model: Private world, Fallout 1st, like Fallout 1st was back. But it allowed for private servers. So you would set up just like people do with any of the Fallout games where you play a private server and just invite their friends over to it. Theoretically setting up private servers is the first step to allowing modding. Because it's now running effectively on my machine and for local

clients, it allows me to manipulate and do things with it and go from there. And because of with ? in Fallout 4, Bethesda was able to incorporate mods for console as well as PC. Then it means that there's a system in place that if people have created a mod for their server, they can upload it and somebody else can run the same mod for their server and go from there.

And then nuclear winter is a completely different thing and it's just a battle royale survivor version similar to Fortnite--it's the same concept, so they would try to jump on the battle royale style, "Oh, this is what our version looks like!" Even though PVP in our game doesn't work. It's such a wonderfully promising game and it's beautiful. I literally don't know, I don't know anything else that is the size of this world or is as gorgeous. Even if I didn't love West Virginia, it would still be phenomenal. And yet there's so much, there was so much content lacking when they released it and they haven't added to that or updated it.

And they're so--I could get into the nitty gritty of like character leveling system and the combat system and the equipment, but it's just, it's (laughs) and other games figured out, from different companies, figure out these kind of problems years ago, so there were models available, "Oh, that's how you do that." And it's like they just ignored all of that.

They've toned that down a bit 'cause that was a lot more.

EH: Cool, well yeah, I think that's all I need for now. I might contact you.

JB: Yeah! Actually what are you doing March 14?

EH: I think I will be at the Appalachian--is that that Herdcon?

JB: Herdcon.

EH: Yeah, I'll be at the App Studies Conference.

JB: Michelle Tyler works at Drinko Library at Marshall--she's the one that organizes and started Herdcon. But I'm sure she'd be more than happy to talk to you and also could put you in touch with some other people that play. And that are connected through Marshall, so you're getting academics. Which means everybody kinda brings a little something else into it.

2:35:05

One thing I started on but stepped aside from, they based Vault Tec University in West Virginia. This is where, it's not just that it's a school and they changed the name. This is where the Overseers are being trained for their program. The Vault 76 is the premiere vault that's there so there's the suggestion even though it doesn't--that Vault Tec is based in West Virginia. At the very least for whatever reason they have a very strong presence here. And that--I know something you want to see.

But that, like going into West Virginia and corporations and that kind of thing, that's...okay I don't have access to it at the moment. You said you have some friends that play?

EH: Yeah.

JB: Did they take you through the Greenbrier?

EH: Yeah.

JB: And the vaults?

EH: No.

JB: See if you can get into the vaults for the Greenbrier. Just because there's some interesting storyline there. And also like reading through the holotapes and everything else in the Greenbrier. You get--they laid off employees, they replaced them with robots. And then after the bombs fell, you get what happens afterwards, and then essentially like them wanting to open up and then the robots took over which is why it is the way it is. But the robots were for the most part following protocols which means that--there was a flaw in the system that caused a problem, but the intention was that the Greenbrier would become a shield for the people that were there, not that it would welcome more people in. But would actively exclude and put them out. And then with the vaults underneath you get a separate storyline, but you get to see inside the vaults and that area.

EH: And is it based on the bunker that was there at all?

JB: Ah, yes. Like if your again, allow them, have you ever gone on the tour of the bunker?

EH: I haven't--I really want to do that.

JB: Ever gone on a tour of a battleship, aircraft carrier.

EH: Not really.

JB: Military designers are military designers.

EH: (laughs)

JB: And because it's a bunker it's sort of a cramped space the same way that a ship is.

EH: Yeah. I guess I've been on a submarine at the Museum of Science in Industry in Chicago.

JB: The thing to keep in mind for the original, design of the original bunker is it was intended for Congress, but not the president. And was intended to be temporary like months not indefinite, so the size of the thing is both impressive and terrifying. But also how it couldn't last longer than--there's not the storage that's there for things. It just doesn't exist but yeah, there's a lot. There's one in the Greenbrier and the area outside it and the area outside the bunkers. If I recall correctly, there's the outside bomb door, where it is clearly, there's something and they've got people knocking on it kinda thing and trying to get in. But...trying to filter through the game stuff, that's game stuff and stuff that's West Virginia.

2:41:02

Trans-Allegheny and Moundsville are both there. People get to explore them, but...

And it's like the others, it's like no, that's not right and yet, it's you know...

EH: (inaudible) Is there some kind of explanation for that?

JB: (at Pumpkin House) The robot invites you to come in and replace pumpkins coming in. Plus he's clearly built for it and pumpkins will volunteer.

(robot) "So many pumpkins to carve, so little time"

You know there's both that he's doing it, the possibility that they're not actual pumpkins, which I'm not exactly sure about. But certainly that he's going because he has to get help and collect them so he can keep doing it. Which is kind of one that I always felt like it was the most accurate.

2:43:40

2:43:40

JB: There is a smaller city that a coal company wants to drill, wants to operate in. And promises them that it won't cause any problems and everything should be fine. Even though they're essentially going to be mining underneath the town. And almost immediately people started having problems. They agreed to it and they're all like, "Yes, this will mean jobs." And the first thing is that the jobs don't really materialize. And then people started having problems with foundations and basements or getting sick. And then those problems get worse and dude just pulls out. So they're left with their town is just functionally destroyed.

Bramwell's a little bit in the Ash Heap. Top of the World, Green Bank, Wautoga, Harper's Ferry. There's a whole storyline about politicians and newspaper reporters and a coal company CEO and just like killing, blackmail, cover-up.

EH: And that comes through in the holotapes?

JB: Yeah, and that comes through in the holotapes.

2:48:35

EH: And you can read those messages online? People post them on YouTube?

JB: That's a good question. Let's find out. Yes. The White Spring Holotapes no commentary, 29 minutes 14 seconds. Fallout 76 Survivor stories, current--yeah. So they're available. I would do a search for just a list of the holotapes and then see what catches your eye or what you're interested in from there. Because going through the YouTube, there are other things thrown in on locations or how to get something or play-throughs and that's not what you're looking for.

Hornright Mining Company went full throttle and every automated worker program the company had so did everything they could do remove human workers. Developed an auto-miner company and that was the company that was out Mount Blair. Started by sacking the miners who worked in the Hornright Mine, replaced them with the auto-miners...their mining strategies, like what they were doing, is the reason why the Ash Heap is polluted. Like what they were doing devastated the ecosystem, filled the air with soot and ash from the stripmined mountaintop. A company approached him about developing airscrubbers. He liked the idea because it would mean that they were able to collect particles in the air and mine them. And to make them work better he went ahead and set all of the older mines on fire so that it put more--it would put it into the air and then they could mine it from there.

Yeah, miners rose up, riots across Appalachia, National Guard sent in, fleets of combat robots. And they wiped out all of the, killed all of the striking miners.

Oh, a note for you to jot down. Do a search for Ballot Measure 6. I've forgotten about this. When you're wandering around through the towns and cities, there are what are clearly political type booths, like



election day booths, and voting machines everywhere. Governor decided that they could eliminate government spending by automating all government services. So firing everybody and replacing them with robots. When you consider how much of West Virginia is employed in local government. But also if you look at some of the cities, you'll see evidence of how that sort of played out.

EH: And are these--it seems like there are common themes in Fallout but specific to WV?

JB: The idea that politicians can be self-serving and corrupt or that corporations can be profit-driven over people, but they're specific to certain things. The enclave are a shadow government that plays a huge role in a lot of the early Fallout games and so will pop up from time to time in other places. Again it's very specific. Not all politicians, the enclave.

On the other hand, Grafton has a robot mayor and is all about taking bribes. And in dumping stuff. Like the city of Graft is built on graft. And it's completely obvious about it. Like he'll be like, "Hey, something happened and there are all these industrial toxic waste barrels in the lake, and if you could just move those to the other side of the lake so they're next to the other town, that would be great." (laughs) But that's it. In other games it's very specific. Vault Tec and their vaults are just despicable with what they do and the disregard for human life and the question of who are they serving. But in Fallout 76? It's everywhere. The--while you have specific examples of people in area trying to do the right thing and take care of people--it very much stresses the idea of the individual person standing up for what is right and trying to, but that the top down and the system largely supports these extractive, destructive citizens as the enemy or worse, or expendable notions. And it beats that over the head, time and time again.

Like the Reclaimers from Flatwoods--all the first responders. They do that in the absence of central leadership. It's not that what powers existed in government attempted to hold together. Which is theoretically why it's not--it doesn't become an authoritarian push, because it's very people-driven, people-centered. And local grassroots efforts. And you see them interacting with some of the other groups that are in the area, and you see that kind of playing out.

Something else to google and look up, one of the factions that's in the state is the Free State. And they're like libertarian militia, what's the phrase for the guys that don't have to follow traffic laws because they're not?

EH: I'm not sure.

JB: It's a west coast um...but yeah there is a free state faction that gains a following before the bomb's dropped. Which means after they drop, they kind of become their own thing.

3:01:07

Sovereigns. Sovereign citizens.

EH: Oh yeah.

JB: But yeah, the free staters are very--kind of along that same lines. You'll see a lot of areas that are mansions, so that idea of class inequality through real estate. And again it's very, it's kinda subtle.

EH: It seems like a lot of the houses are guarded by robots?

JB: Yes, and not just--like some places it's towns so it's government, and a lot of the places it's corporate. The thing that's interesting is that with the town, there'd be some understanding that it might be with

lethal force. But if it's corporate and they're using military-grade robots, that's a whole other kind of weird...

Ah, Wautoga. If you want to explore the city taken over by robots and automated, take a look at Wautoga.

Oh, just for fun, there is a location in the game for New Gad.

EH: What's that? New Gad?

JB: Yeah. Let me look it up. Yeah. Summersville Lake tradition holds the project named after the town the nearest the site of construction unless named for a person, the village of Gad.

EH: Oh yes, yes! I know this.

JB: So, Gad Dam.

EH: Yeah, uh-huh. Yep.

JB: So they named it for the next place, which is Summersville.

EH: Right, right.

JB: Well they actually included New Gad.

EH: Got it. They did their homework.

JB: The amount of stuff they included just amazes me. Dolly Sods is in the game, a little bit. One of the things, one of the early DLCs that they did added moonshining to the game. There were already stills that were all over the place set up, but it allows you to make moonshine, and depending on what type of moonshine you made, it would give funky affects. One would teleport you across the map, which literally means it would give the impression that you passed out and woke up somewhere else.

EH: (laughs)

3:06:08

JB: Yep, Monongah.

EH: What is that?

JB: Sorry, I was still trying to find a mining camp. Historically the Monongah Mining Disaster of 1907 was one of if not the largest known mine disaster in the state. Within the game that's part of the history but by the late 21st century, mining was largely exhausted so people were losing jobs. Coal miners rented out by the township to a mining company in return for royalty payments until the mine ran dry. Town hopped on the chance. They tore through the mines taking everything they could and then left. So paying the minimal amount that they had to. The royalty rights to overtake it, they mined underneath the town. And since the mine is now completely empty, there's no jobs available for anything or anything else.

And going through the stories of things that are happening in and you see its fall into alcohol, drugs, crime, suicide I think even. But like you see a town fall apart.

EH: Cool! There's a lot to cover!

JB: Well you asked how it just kind of covered everywhere, one of the few stories in Beckley is there's a guy selling sandwiches that have a cranberry sauce on them, lost his job as a miner, opened up that, was doing really well somebody else opens up a shop across the street selling basically the same thing, but undercutting his prices. And he's like that's not possible, it just can't be done. So he follows him one night and the competition is driving down to Cranberry Bog and picking up irradiated cranberries and that's what they're using for the food. So even at the small business level, people are cutting corners and willing to cause damage to the locals just to make a buck.

EH: That's very telling!

JB: But there are examples like that all through. And while other Fallout games have--you're in a post apocalyptic world. Of course you gonna have somebody selling mystery meat! That's basically part of that. Or having cannibals. But somehow within the game here. It takes on a different flavor. There's just--it's just interesting to see that idea coming though over and over again in all kind of different ways. And it does it consistently.

EH: Well thank you so much. This was incredibly helpful.

JB: I'm glad.

EH: So are you going to do more WV Explorer articles?

JB: If anything new comes out with it. The last article I did was, the game came out in January, I'm sorry the game came out in November. A lot of my stuff had been over the summer and in the fall leading up to it. And but then about 2 months after the game out in January, I wrote, it was probably the longest piece which was just covering people's reactions to the game and what was there and what WVU tourism had done with the game and not done with the game and just kind of touched on that. And it was--I tried really hard to not be, for it to not be a negative rant, but it was still--there wasn't a lot positive to say.

EH: Yeah, because Tourism hasn't really capitalized on it?

JB: Not just that they haven't capitalized on it and not just that they dropped the ball, but also the only effort that Tourism appears to have made was in if they did at all, was in the event at the Greenbrier, because it had--there was an international event with about 150 influencers and then a North America event with about 150 influencers. And it took up about a week and a half. Plus Bethesda staff, so Greenbrier made a quarter of a million more. There were no tourism people at that event. Didn't even make an appearance. Weren't there! But that was the largest single thing that happened. For every other Fallout game, Fallout, Bethesda did a release party for the game. For this they didn't. Apparently they put the marketing budget into the influencers. 'Cause from a certain standpoint, it basically, it's the same people. The influencers and that's who'd you invite. Just doing it as part of a pre-release, they thought they'd get more bang for their buck.

Which means that the release parties that I held at Marshall is the only release party that was hold not just in WV, but anywhere. For Fallout 76. So that's one of those things that I occasionally put down, 'cause it looks great on paper, which makes me feel so much better about how it actually went. But the last piece that I did for 'em pointed out just here's what didn't happen and here are the things that could have happened. There still aren't little Fallout boys on interstate signs, next to places that are in the game. There still aren't signs at city limits that say "Featured in Fallout 76".

And the ultimate point that--we lose population by everything. Were you going to drive a lot of tourism into the state through this? Probably not.

EH: Yeah, but it's not nothing.

JB: But what about convincing people to move here? If you fixed the infrastructure problems, so digital, because of our unique location, we are a perfect remote work for most of the East Coast. You know? You could live in the Northern Panhandle and commute to most of Ohio or Pennsylvania. Even New York is not a stretch if you're only doing it once a month or one weekend out of the month. You know, from the Eastern Panhandle, you've got...so if you convince people of that, this place is gorgeous and the people are really friendly and how many would make a difference?

EH: I mean it's a gateway, definitely.

3:18:21

JB: Yeah, but that was, and then everything--I keep thinking maybe I'd go back in and look at something else, but it's--there's no way it's not just all negative. You know? All the positive stuff has already been covered. And much like living in West Virginia, it's too much of a grind to keep harping on how great it is when there's so much other stuff that needs fixed. And again like living here, the people that see that and work on it don't really have the power to do it. Until at some point they open up private servers and mods, which they may never do, there's no way for those people to fix it any other way than what they're doing which is grinding equipment and then giving it away to other people because they're happy to see somebody else enjoying the game that they love. In spite of all of its faults. Like I know of--I can't think of an example of anything more West Virginian than the people that enjoy playing this game and seeing them talk about playing it online, and it's just like--and you live where? Because you may as well just move. But yeah, I would like to see it grow and change, I just don't... And it's not just because of this game but because of their history as in--that's just not what they do. so unless there's a change...

3:20:10

END OF TAPE