



PODCAST SERIES OVERVIEW
BY NOAH FEINBERG

OVERVIEW

THE HOOKUP is a sci-fi-twined thriller with a risqué backbone, chronicling the trysts of Damian Hearst; an out-of-his-element college journalism student, who's driven by the hunger to locate his missing boyfriend.

Through the course of the podcast, Damian's hookups (some skewing more horrifying than comedic) will become a blueprint towards the whereabouts of his missing beau- but if he wants to uncover the dark and raunchy underpinnings of his quiet college town, he'll have no choice but to get his hands dirty.

...And if there's anything Damian has learned, it's that no amount of showering can wash your hands of a bad hookup.



FORMAT

Each episode surrounds one of 20-year-old Damian's hookups. Some of these encounters manifest through dating apps, while others occur organically. The hookups will explore the inherent comedy, drama, and occasional horror of dating apps and gay hookup culture - while also feeding into the seasonal mystery surrounding what happened the night of Damian's First Time (more on that later).

The series plays out primarily like an audio drama (a la THE HORROR OF DOLORES ROACH), but the episodes will also include segments of read-out transcripts of chats from dating apps, iMessage, and other digital forms of communication that precede or follow the hookup. By opening up the story to multiple mediums of contact, we'll maximize how much depth and breadth of Damian's life we experience – while keeping it all connected to the hookup in question.

As narrative podcasts generally are, the story will be guided by Damian's incessant internal monologue, granting us insight into his theories, insecurity, and bad jokes he thinks are funny. As he himself states in the pilot, "I think too much, I think."

What we'll learn, however, is that **Damian is not a reliable narrator**. Sometimes he's not honest with us, and usually, he's not honest with himself.

THE HOOKUP is conceived as an ongoing 10-episode season, with each episode tackling the seasonal mystery – while also taking the freedom to be a little more tangential and go more in-depth with new thematic explorations and aspects of the characters.

Like some of Damian's hookups - **it's flexible**.



THE MYSTERY

The first season of THE HOOKUP unwraps the story of what happened the night of Damian's first time (henceforth known as "That Night").

So what's his damage? That Summer night, after a romantic evening in the Ludlow Lodge Motel Room 616, Damian went to take a shower with a grin on his face. But when he left the bathroom, his lover SANTI was gone. And not just "sneaking out after sex" gone.

Santi has been missing ever since.

The pilot kicks off three months after That Night, where Damian, inspired by a weird hookup, gradually begins searching for answers himself. In order to shed light on the evening in question in narratively-strategic intervals, each episode features a flashback to That Night.

Similar to VERONICA MARS, the story doesn't exist in two timelines per se; but deliberate flashbacks bring dimension and complexity to the drama.



THE HOOKUP

Through random (and sometimes calculated) hookups, Damian uncovers clues, connections, and seemingly-impossible facts that link Santi's disappearance to a new strain of poppers arising in the town's modest gay scene; referred to only as **"The Hookup."**

So other than the intended use, what does "The Hookup" do? Side effects included minor headache, nosebleeds, and becoming straight.

Yep. What begins as a series of odd coincidences eventually turns into an undeniable fact - There are poppers circulating Ludlow Hills that are turning the gay men straight.

Though Damian initially sets out only to track down Santi's kidnapper/killer, auspices in Santi's orbit surrounding That Night all seem to be connected to The Hookup in one way or another. The drug infiltrates Damian's personal life as well, as he begins to notice that the men he hooks up with are turning straight just days after. With fewer and fewer people to turn to, Damian starts to feel unsafe as he watches the town's queer population dwindle before his eyes.

So what's the deal? Sneaky conversion therapy scheme? Unintended chemical side effect? Catholic guilt? Good guesses, and ones that Damian will investigate; but the truth behind this unprecedented phenomena is way more bizarre than he could ever expect.



CHARACTERS

Damian Hearst



● Online now

Age: 20

Meddle Username: GreatDame

Bio:

Damian is a sophomore Journalism student at Crestwick University. His Meddle username is GreatDame, both a reference to his name, and to his all-time favorite detective - Scooby-Doo.

Damian Came out quietly in HS, but being from a rural conservative hometown, prospects were limited. Freshman year of college, he met Santi Vargas, the charming upperclassman who, despite their agreement to 'keep things chill' Damian developed feelings for.

Santi's disappearance on the night they finally had sex fuels Damian's search for answers, as well as his own insecurity. *Why did he leave? Was it me?*

Damian, as we'll learn, has an issue with impartiality. Despite his best efforts, he often finds himself lying - both to others, and to himself. By the end of the season, Damian will come to acknowledge and put to bed his affinity for hiding the truth. Every man he's hooked up with has been under a false pretense; he's lied every step of the way to acquire information, and has lied to us with his faulty narration.

Ultimately, once this is all over, the season ends with Damian going over to a man's house just because he wants to - no investigation, no agenda, and nothing to hide - ready to move forward and put the past to rest.

But he's going to have a hell of a time getting there.

Wade Shaw



● Online now

Age: 20

Meddle Username: **masc-discreet**

Bio: Wade is rough around the edges, and frankly, rough in the center too. There's no doubt that his malicious actions stem from his own deep insecurity - but he's still kind of awful.

Wade resides in the closet, and the longer he stays there, the further he's willing to go to convince others (and himself) that he's straight. Wade toggles effortlessly between sharp-edged and playfully pleasant, and seems to almost relish keeping people on edge. He seems great.

Halfway through the season, it's revealed that Damian has been lying to us - the night Santi went missing wasn't actually his First Time. His true first time happened a few months prior - with Wade. Damian divulges the events of this night to the listener in a gut-punching flashback. It wasn't romantic, respectful, or enjoyable... and after the unfulfilling hookup, Damian flippantly outed Wade to some of their peers in a brutal rock-bottom moment.

Now, Damian struggles with his mistake; he detests Wade, but still he broke The Code by outing him. This develops a complicated moral gray area, in which Damian is forced to try to make amends with an unamendable person, when his investigation brings him full circle back to Wade.

Elias Moore



● Online now

Age: 22

Meddle Username: **Doctor D**

Bio: Elias is a senior pre-med student, and (now that Santi is out of the picture) the current frontrunner for the Cecil Margolis Foundation Research Grant.

While this makes Elias an obvious suspect, his hands seem clean. He's friendly, philanthropic, and incredibly active in the LGBTQ community.

But if Elias is a peace-loving incarnation of the BORN THIS WAY album - you'd better believe he's got a darker B-side. Way darker.

Santi Vargas



● Offline

Age: 21*

Meddle Username: LuckyStrike

*at time of disappearance

Bio: Santi is the missing beau in question. He was pre-med on the chemistry path, and on track to become his year's recipient of the much coveted Cecil Margolis Foundation Research Grant.

Charming and a little mysterious, Santi always kept people at a distance; making it even trickier to solve his disappearance. He took Damian under his wing, but never wanted to make things official, and reciprocate Damian's affections in full.

BellBoy



● Online now

Age: ~30

Meddle Username: 🔔👤

Bio: BELLBOY is in his late 20s/early 30s, but will probably still act like a surfer bro well into his 80s. Bellboy is friendly, if a little dense. He initially comes off intimidating, assertive, and dangerous, while taking on a more vulnerable persona down the line.

He worked as a bellboy at the Ludlow Lodge Motel where the missing Santi was last seen, and now lives in the renovated building apartments. Damian circles Bellboy early on as a potential key player in Santi's disappearance.

Mateo Navarro



● Online now

Age: 21

Meddle Username: SummertimeFabness

Bio: Mateo is a Junior Journalism student, and sits comfortably at the top of his class. Damian initially reaches out to him for help on a class assignment, but their study dates quickly blossom into... well, more than just studying.

Mateo will gradually become a resource and brain trust for Damian in his investigation, but as his feelings for Damian intensify, he grows irritated with helping track down the boy Damian truly wants to be with.

THE TRUTH

Meet ELIAS, Crestwick University TA and applicant for the esteemed Cecil Margolis Foundation Research Grant. The longer Damian knows Elias, the more obsessed he seems with winning the grant. But, as Elias declares dementedly in the finale, he always feared the Margolis Foundation's promise to empower 'diverse applicants.'

A few years ago, a white gay man like Elias might qualify. But as intersectional activism gained momentum and Elias read the writing on the wall that his Diverse status was waning, he misguidedly set out to do something about it - unwilling to accept that even as a queer person, he still held significant privilege.

So he created poppers that turn gay men straight.

He didn't create The Hookup because he hates being gay;
he created it because he wants to be the only gay man left.

Given how closely Santi and Elias worked together as TAs, it stands to reason that Elias could've killed him to keep his plan under wraps. But the truth is never that easy.

Ultimately, Santi's true killer had nothing to do with Elias or The Hookup. It was a crime of passion, committed by the contentious WADE - a former fling of both Damian and Santi's, who murdered Santi out of jealousy when he ditched him for Damian.

It's a shockingly grounded answer to such a heightened mystery, but cuts deep given the turbulent history of resentment between Damian and Wade - and how satisfying it will be for the listener when they stop pulling punches and finally go at it.



THE APP

It's impossible to introduce all the characters without explaining the tool that connects them. To that end - meet **Meddle**.

Meddle is the Grindr of our series. It's the #1 gay dating app, although it skews more towards hookups than traditional dates. Meddle is sleek and charmingly sleazy - just like our series.

But Meddle is more than just a copyright-safe version of Grindr; it operates off an algorithm no one quite understands.

See, while similar dating apps in real life display all the users sorted by proximity, there initially seems to be no rhyme or reason to why the app shows you certain profiles at certain times. To that end, it subtly functions as a "guide" for Damian - highlighting certain profiles that lead to clues when he's hit a dead end.

While Meddle is introduced and always in the periphery through Season One, it doesn't become a central focus until Season Two - when Damian transfers to LA where the Meddle Headquarters resides.

When a resurgence of The Hookup poppers begin flooding Los Angeles, Damian is forced to accept that someone new has taken over manufacturing them.

And as signs begin pointing towards the Meddle company as a suspect, Damian begrudgingly enters the belly of the beast - taking part in the annual social media pageant to become "Mr. Meddle."

And how do you investigate a dating app company? Easy - sleep with its employees!



MAKE TROUBLE™

TONE

There's no doubt this is a raunchy program. Damian is on the front lines of experiencing gay hookup culture, and we're all living in his head. With that in mind, the inability to actually see these scenarios softens the explicit edge, keeping it edgy and provocative but eliminating the presence of shock-value nudity.

The series is choc' full of spicy moments - but it's never a blow-by-blow telling of Damian's sexual encounters.

Ultimately, **THE HOOKUP** is, as previously mentioned, 'a sci-fi-twinged thriller with a risqué backbone.' Certain moments feel appropriately impactful, heartfelt, and shocking - but the series never loses sight of what it is; the only way to keep a story about a gay poppers conspiracy grounded is by hanging a lantern on it. In other words, it's in on the joke.

THE HOOKUP acknowledges and leans into its 'out there' buy-ins, so that the profound moments hit that much harder.



THEMES

There are all these questions and preferences you're supposed to know about yourself, and coming of age in gay hookup culture (like any other time in queer history) is an arena where no amount of research can answer those questions. You have to experiment and figure things out for yourself - and that experimentation process is scary and humorous. And ripe for storytelling.

Despite its comedic bent, **THE HOOKUP** will tackle a lot of meaty issues. Internalized homophobia, LGBTQ discord, sexual health, general adolescent angst - but never leans on them too heavily. This is neither a soapbox nor an angsty allegory of the gay human condition. It's an entertaining genre mystery series with relevance and accuracy to the LGBTQ demographic.

Similarly, although genre and mystery projects tend to lean on bad things happening to people - this will never dwell on hate crimes or sexual assault. There will be dark nights of the soul, real horror moments, and gut-punching betrayals; Damian will get hurt. His self esteem will wax and wane. He'll love himself, hate himself, and hate other people. But there will also be moments of romance, humor, and heartfelt expression.

Because ultimately, the crime of this story is not homophobia. It's losing sight of the mission, and abusing the systems put in place to help disenfranchised communities get ahead - while lightly posing some edgy questions that society is beginning to press.

In other words, this isn't "Get Out, for gays." This is something else.

This is **THE HOOKUP**.

