

Drawing Maps 25: The Secret Ledger of Roseroot Hall Arc - April 2021

Transcriber: robotchangeling

Austin: Hello, and welcome to Drawing Maps for April 2021. I am your host, Austin Walker. Joining me today, Art Martinez-Tebbel.

Art: Hey, how you doing? You can find me on Twitter at [@atebbel](#).

Austin: Keith Carberry.

Keith: Hey, my name is Keith J. Carberry. You can find me on Twitter at [@KeithJCarberry](#), and you can find the let's plays that I do at [youtube.com/runbutton](#). We just restarted and are about to finish our like nine year long *Digimon World* let's play.

Austin: I saw that this morning.

Keith: We took a long break.

Janine: Hell yeah.

Keith: We're gonna finish it, for sure.

Austin: I opened Patreon and saw that it said "Digimon stream," and I was like, [excited] word? So. [Keith and Janine laugh] Psyched. Also, that was the voice—

Keith: It's exciting, 'cause we have a disc that— *Digimon World* famously has discs that break.

Austin: Right.

Keith: And so we are on our third disc.

Austin: God.

Keith: And that recording session ended because it froze at the last boss, second to last boss?

Austin: Oh my god. Oh, so you're like there.

Keith: Yep.

Austin: You're like really, truly there.

Keith: We're— yeah, yeah. But we might not be able to do it with this Digimon, and so we might need to start over [Austin makes sympathetic sound] and raise a whole new Digimon, so.
[Austin groans]

Janine: Huh.

Keith: We have to beat Mt. Infinity, and if we can't, we have to start again with a new Digimon.

Austin: But you know everything to do, and you know how to raise a good Digimon at this point—

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: So you'll probably be fine.

Keith: Yeah. Yeah.

Austin: That fucking game. Also, that was the voice of Janine Hawkins.

Janine: Hey, I'm Janine Hawkins. I'm [@bleatingheart](#) on Twitter.

Austin: Uh, let me bring you up a little bit. There we go. So, we're here to talk about our Roseroot Hall, "Secret Ledger of Roseroot Hall" arc. For people who are just tuning in for the first Drawing Maps, Drawing Maps is a show where—in its current incarnation, anyway—we kind of do a running post-mortem throughout the series of arcs as we go past them. We will probably not do them for downtime episodes, so if you have downtime relevant questions, send them in, and I'll just move them to whatever the relevant person is on the show next, if that makes sense. In general, the focal point of these episodes is to talk about kind of behind the scenes stuff, broader questions. Less so unpacking themes or doing readings. There's a question this week where I'll touch on that a very little bit, in a way to kind of show where I want to draw the line there. I think the show is best read by its readers, so to speak. It's best unpacked by the audience. "David Lynch: laughs, does not answer," dot jpeg. Because that's, I think, especially with something like Sangfielle. The one exception there is when I want to make sure certain things are clear, in terms of just what are the facts about events. So, clarifications, "Hey did X happen? I misunderstood this, or I may have misunderstood this," that stuff totally plays right in. And in general, write in. I'd rather people write in and me dismiss a question or not answer the question than you not to write in at all. This whole kind of thing works basically on the notion that people are gonna write in and ask questions, so please please please do, and let me just, you know, figure out what goes in what bucket.

That said, I also just want to open this week by opening the floor to y'all and seeing if there's anything you wanted to like bring up about this arc. As a reminder, this was the arc where your three characters were called to the offices of— or, the manor of Dayward YVE up in the hills, where you kind of attended to a haunting and eventually came across the hidden

shrine to Aterika'Kaal, a sort of demigod or god, a kind of powerful supernatural being, and kind of dealt with it as best as you could [chuckles] and stumbled around some other stuff and discovered some additional stuff along the way. We met a rat-headed god at one point, a sexy rat-headed god, if I remember correctly. So yeah, is there anything that, you know, thinking about that arc, that comes to mind? And I've sent these questions around for y'all to look at, and obviously save stuff if it's relevant to that stuff, but I'm curious for y'all, if there is anything when you're, just broadly speaking, thinking about that arc, that you were interested in or that you wish had gone differently or that you were excited about how it went.

Art: I like that you're pretending that you don't remember if that god was sexy. That's...

Austin: I...I have to think about a lot of gods. [Keith laughs]

Janine: I think the robes were sexy, right?

Austin: I think the robes were sexy. I think that's right.

Keith: Right.

Janine: The robes were sexy, but it wasn't necessarily defined that the god was sexy.

Austin: Yeah. This is Genburi, right? Is that right?

Keith: Well, just a god wearing sexy robes.

Austin: The god of education takes the form of an elderly man with the head of a rat. He is very tall and has a masculine build. His large eyes are chestnut. He is usually portrayed as *wearing* a sexy suit of *armor*—

Janine: Oh. Yeah.

Austin: —that is mostly amethyst in color and which is covered in geometric designs. [Janine chuckles] He can impart or take— *or take away* the knowledge of language.

Keith: Sexy old man. Rat.

Janine: No.

Austin: No. His armor is sexy. Sexy old man armor.

Janine: Yeah, yeah.

Austin: It doesn't say he is sexy. [Keith laughs]

Art: Mmm. Old man armor is a weird thing, now that I... [Keith laughs]

Janine: Do you think it's sexy in that it's revealing or sexy in that it has like engraved lewdness on it? We don't need to get into this, but it's just a thing I'm curious about.

Austin: I think it's...in my mind, it's armor that makes him alluring. You're like, damn, he's killin' it.

Janine: Okay. Alright.

Art: It really accentuates his bosom, I think is the... [Keith laughs]

Austin: Sure.

Keith: It's armor— yeah, it's armor that can make an old man rat look sexy.

Austin: Yeah.

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: Congrats to Genburi.

Art: Mm-hmm.

Austin: Killin' it. I think that's a good— that's a fun thing to maybe call out, is Keith, was that the first time you used that move this season?

Keith: Yeah, yeah. Totally.

Austin: Okay. And now we've used it one other time in a future downtime.

Keith: Mm-hmm.

Austin: That is already out in the feed, but is not in this set of Drawing Maps.

Keith: Sure.

Austin: So, again, we should be kind of careful about— we should be careful about spoilers, especially about stuff that hasn't hit yet, so just as a reminder, I guess for Keith— for Janine and Art, the Yellowfield stuff is out, and so feel free to say, "Hey, this is a spoiler for the Yellowfield arc," and then spoil it. But the currently ongoing Bell Metal Station arc, Keith, is not all the way out, it's worth saying.

Keith: Right. Half out.

Austin: It's half out.

Art: I'm in that game. I'm not in the other game, but yeah, I will also—

Austin: Oh wait, you are in that game. Sorry. Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. My bad.

Art: I will also try not to spoil that...

Austin: Yeah, because that goes some places. That one's wild.

Keith: Yeah. Yep.

Austin: Good arc. Anyway.

Art: If you tried really hard to spoil that arc, I think you would fail. I think you would...

Austin: Yeah, 'cause I tried prepping for that arc, and prepping is sort of like pre-spoiling, in that you're attempting [chuckles] to assert some guardrails that you think you'll like, I know what's gonna happen more or less.

Keith: Right.

Austin: Nope. Did not. Which is actually true about Roseroot Hall, too. Not just because of your use of that power, Keith, but also because I thought the entire structure of that arc would be different. I thought you would go— as a reminder, you go there, and then that night things pop of, and y'all just get right to it. I thought you would go there, I would introduce the horror of like the haunting. Mr. Kenson would go missing, would get locked behind the door, or you'd save him, but you wouldn't get solutions that night. You would kind of see how terrible it is there, or how—

Keith: Where did it— I can't remember. Where did it go off of the rails for where you had prepped?

Austin: You immediately—

Keith: I mean, I didn't know what you had prepped, but.

Austin: Yeah. I mean, this was not like a really off the rails prep, because it was mostly just a difference in—

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: —tone and pacing. The speed with which you were like, I'm going to find the secret shrine, or I believe that there is— y'all just like zeroed in very, like...uh, you were very attentive to what things were happening and where to put your attention, and so you quickly found the actual secret ledger. Which, you know, just to be clear, you know, I didn't go into that arc calling it "The Secret Ledger of Roseroot Hall." Art says, "I want to look for some books," and then a secret ledger gets invented, right?

Art: Hmm.

Austin: That's how this works.

Keith: Yep.

Austin: That I have, I know there is information there somewhere that you can find. Whether that will be a secret ledger or an occult, you know, book or a...you know, you find the shrine some other way or you make another character break down and admit something or you summon a ghost. Like, I don't know. We'll figure it out. I know the truth of what happened there, and we'll stitch together how you find it along the way, but between that and then the combo, I think Janine, you noticed something. You noticed that the sun room's roof wasn't lined up perfectly, and then Keith, you'd already succeeded once on the second floor, and then when you were like, "I wanna do another search up here," I either had to be like, "No, you're not allowed," arbitrarily—

Keith: I remember this, yeah.

Austin: —or let you do it and say it's riskier or whatever. It's like, you already did it once, but like with this added information, it makes sense for you to go ahead and do it a second time.

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: And you found—

Keith: I believe I remember you almost not letting me search up there.

Austin: I almost didn't do it, and then I was like, who cares?

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: It's fine. That's a situation where, in my mind, the structure of a haunted house mystery includes— or not the structure. The structure I was going for includes the night you stay over, and it's creepy, but it's not turned to eleven yet. And instead, we turned it to eleven basically right away. It also was weird because Art completely just demolished that combat encounter singlehandedly.

Art: Mm-hmm. [Austin and Janine laugh]

Austin: Which made the—

Art: You're welcome.

Austin: Yeah, uh huh. [Janine laughs] Which also introduced that whole—

Art: And have been paying for it in rolls ever since.

Austin: Right, ever since, right? Which introduced the whole luck arc in a real way.

Keith: Really funny, yeah.

Art: Yeah.

Austin: With Duvall, that, you know, is now tied to your character via that fallout you won't erase, and it helped kind of sharpen your enlightenment goal a little bit, which has been fun, I think. Dice, baby!

Art: Having a great time.

Austin: Yeah. Any other things from that arc that are worth shouting out at this point? That— we can always come back, or if something in one of these questions reminds us, we can always just pause and come back.

Keith: I mean, you said be careful about spoilers. I feel like this isn't a spoiler, but we did get, for the first time, the Toll Collectors.

Austin: The Toll Collectors. Yeah, definitely. Yeah. That's a fun introduction of a trio of characters who've come up since then. They were fun, I think? And I think it was cool to see...I think it was the first time we saw Es get...I mean, that was like some of the first scenes with Es, I guess, right?

[0:10:14]

Art: Mm-hmm.

Janine: Yeah. Yeah.

Austin: And you used...desanguination? Is that what it's called?

Janine: Exsanguinate.

Austin: Exsanguinate, Exsanguinate.

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: I kept wanting to say defenestration, which is when you throw someone out of a window.

Janine: [laughs] Yes.

Austin: And it wasn't that. [laughs]

Janine: That's a much more limited move.

Austin: That's a beat that Keith took during the arc that is currently coming out, was kick someone off of a high place.

Janine: Mm.

Austin: Not necessarily through a window, but. I think that sequence was cool. The Toll Collectors are a fun trio of characters who...sometimes you paint characters in a really broad brush, and it's okay, because they're so flamboyant and fun, and their initial...this is like the Lazer Ted rule, right? Which is like, you can come out with a bang, if you promise yourself to give more...more definition and nuance later.

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Austin: And they've popped up since then, and I think bit by bit, we're getting a little bit more of them, a little bit more of them. They feel kind of like Rosen— uh, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to me in this story. Not in this particular episode, but when I think about them, because...

Art: Mmm.

Austin: They're kind of there.

Janine: They're alongside.

Austin: Yeah, yeah, exactly.

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: And we'll revisit that at some point in the future. Any other notes? We can just jump into the questions and see what what prompts, what prompts us. Uh, I'll read this first one. I actually read this one last time, but it was with the Mother-Beast crew. So with y'all:

This being your first time actually playing *Heart*, were any of you really nervous about having a player character die?

Austin: I already answered the GM part of this, but:

As a player, how do you feel about the resistance/fallout system so far?

Art: Well, as someone who is cursed to only roll fallout, I'm not liking it a lot. [Austin laughs] Some sort of like reroll system or, you know, a cap on fallout per thing. [Austin laughs] Like, your bad fallout beats reach a certain point, and you're immune for X amount of time. A system like that would be great. [Austin laughs]

Austin: Is this a— oh, really quick, I'm laughing, but is this like a genuine— are you not having fun because of how often the rolls are breaking bad for you?

Austin: Oh, no, I'm having a wonderful time. It's great. [others laugh] And I'm not nervous about having a PC die at all. I'll have another character the next day. It's fine.

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: It would be cool if there was like a counter fallout system, right? Like, if there was a way it could swing in either direction, where if you did really, really well, you got something that stuck in a similar way.

Austin: Mmm.

Janine: Until X happened or something.

Austin: Sort of like the—

Janine: Because—

Austin: Go ahead.

Janine: It feels like it only goes one way, right? Like, it feels like if you succeed really well, that is a temporary thing. If you fail really badly, it can stick with you for like a really long time, actually—

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Janine: —because of the way that removing fallout works.

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: And that feels a little...I mean, it might— you know, it's a different system that we usually do. It's—

Austin: And it's—

Janine: I think it's true to that system, but maybe just feels a little weird to us, as what we usually do, if that makes sense.

Austin: I can't remember if other games using this system work the same way. There is a another game that kind of uses the same basic gist of the system. Why am I blanking on the name of it right now? It's a cyberpunk game. Is it...is it *Ascendancy*? *Ascendancy* is the name of it. I'm curious if *Ascendancy* has something like that, because I think for *Heart*, it makes sense that it skews this way, because *Heart* is a game about player characters dying.

Art: Mmm.

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: Right?

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: *Heart* is a game about like, you walk into the pit, and you don't walk out at a certain point. So, I get why it leverages that way. And obviously, also, there are— before people, you know, respond to us saying like, “Well, of course, you level up if you succeed at beats and blah blah blah,” I think that Janine is also right that it's separate from like, if you remember *Technoir*— which Janine, I know you weren't in *Technoir*, but for Keith and Art. You could stick adjectives that were positive on you to improve your character. I don't remember if we got that deep into *Technoir* to where you did that.

Keith: No, we didn't.

Austin: But that is a way that you could improve your character over time, if I recall correctly. And so that would be a similar system where like you take negative adjectives, but you could also work towards kind of cementing in positive ones. So yeah, that could be fun, a sort of fallout...like, you roll a crit and you get yourself a positive fallout that maybe can stick around for a certain amount of time, something like that.

Art: For sure.

Austin: That could be fun.

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Art: Yeah. I mean, I wouldn't get any of those either, so it kind of doesn't matter, but...

Austin: [laughs] Tight. This is true, right? What you need is the parachute or the safety net of—

Art: Yeah.

Austin: You need the the equivalent of the...what's the rule in like baseball? Is that still a thing? If someone's just getting blown out and you just like stop the—

Art: That's never been a— that's like a little league rule.

Keith: Yeah, yeah.

Austin: I prefer— that's how I play baseball.

Art: The mercy rule. Yeah.

Keith: Mercy rule, yeah.

Austin: Yeah, you need a mercy rule. All—

Keith: They have it in cricket.

Austin: Ah.

Keith: They have it in cricket.

Austin: Sure.

Keith: Oh, oh, no, it's the reverse, actually. It's you can decide that you— that your team can't win anymore, I think, in cricket.

Austin: It's like a forfeit.

Art: Great.

Keith: You just go like, "Oh, we can't win, so game over."

Austin: Mmm.

Janine: Isn't that just called forfeiting?

Austin: Yeah.

Keith: Uh...

Janine: Can't anyone do that?

Keith: But I don't think— I think in forfeit, forfeits count as forfeits. Like, it's a win with an asterisk, I think.

Austin: I gotcha. Right.

Janine: Oh.

Keith: When you forfeit, but in cricket— or maybe it's— maybe I'm wrong. Maybe it's the other way, and you go “Your team can't beat us, so let's do a game over,” and then they have to agree. Maybe that's it. I don't know cricket.

Austin: [chuckles] Okay.

Art: I would be offering that just all the time. [others laugh]

Keith: Yeah, every couple innings.

Austin: Do you want to just knock this out?

Art: “Art, you're losing.” “Well, like...”

Keith: We're down by one, but I'm feeling really good.

Art: Yeah.

Austin: [laughs] Anyone else have feelings about the game system or about nervousness around player characters dying?

Keith: E—

Janine: I—

Austin: Janine, go ahead.

Keith: Go ahead, Janine.

Janine: I was just gonna say, I kind of— I built my character with the idea that like, if I die, I've got— you know, I know what the next step is.

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Janine: Like, I know how that— I know how to continue that story rather than breaking it off. Like, it's...

Austin: Right.

Janine: I sort of built that kind of narrative safety net in.

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Janine: So, it hasn't been a thing that's worried me too, too much.

Austin: Also, you've been rolling pretty well, all said.

Janine: [not so sure] I, uh...yeah, here and there.

Austin: I guess recently, yeah, yeah. Compared to Art is really what I mean.

Keith: Right.

Janine: I still— I got a fallout. I got that wet—

Austin: Janine.

Janine: That's a Yellowfield thing. I got sticky—

Art: Oh, you have one fallout?

Austin: [laughs softly] Janine. [all laugh] We have—

Janine: I had another one. I broke a heel, remember? [Austin laughs] That happened in this arc, was I broke a heel. [laughs softly] I slightly damaged my fancy shoes.

Austin: Oh, you broke a heel. Okay.

Janine: Uh huh.

Keith: Art has had double the major fallout that I have had all fallout.

Austin: Or all—

Keith: I think.

Austin: Of all fallout, right.

Art: I think I changed cosmology of the universe in the last arc.

Janine: Listen, have you ever broken a heel? It can change a lot of things. [all laugh] Like about how you walk and what you wear the next day and stuff.

Austin: It's so funny. I'm curious for you— I asked this to the other side, but one of the things that the the authors of this game, the creators of this game, Grant and Christopher often say is that they find that players take a sort of perverse joy in getting fallout, that there is something kind of fun about writing something down on your sheet and about like a big thing happening, even though it's a bad thing. Do you find that that's a—

Keith: Okay.

Austin: Do you think that that's true? Or do you think that that's their particular experience?

Keith: I was about to say that I actually don't— and again, I've been pretty lucky with my rolls, but I like the fallout system. I saw— I read this book, and I was like, this is a book where people die.

Austin: Yeah.

Keith: This is a hard game. It's a game where it's like tense and nervous. Almost any kind of action that I want to take—

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Keith: —could end up being really bad. YVEn if it's...even if I have like very little stress taken on. But no, I still don't want to take fallout! That's ridiculous! [Austin laughs]

Janine: It depends on the kind, right? Like, there are some...there are some types of fallout that can be really informative for a character and can make you act in really interesting and different ways and can make you approach situations in interesting and different ways.

Keith: That's—

Janine: And then there are kinds of fallout where it's just like, I'm just fucked no matter what I do. [chuckles]

Austin: Yeah. Yeah, lose a skill.

Janine: Like, this is just a...

Keith: I—

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: I'm just boned, extremely, until I can...until I can sell everything I own to some old lady to get this off. [Austin laughs]

Keith: I'll say that I do...I do...I did have a lot of fun with the echo fallout that I have take— I don't remember what I took it.

Austin: Oh boy.

Keith: But at some point, I take echo fallout.

Austin: Yeah. Yeah.

Keith: And that's a fun one.

Austin: Yeah.

Art: Janine getting that fallout where she can only sell things to old ladies has really been brutal, I think. [Janine and Austin laugh]

Austin: There is—

Art: I don't wanna—

Austin: I will say—

Janine: That's a fun one! That would be a fun one.

Austin: Yeah, well, so that's the thing is I'm not there yet. But I know...I want to say Brendan. Brendan...? Brendan last name. Brendan McLeod, sulcata on Twitter, I believe I saw saying that he makes up all of his own fallout at this point, because he's run the game so many times.

[0:20:05]

Art: Mmm.

Austin: I believe that that's true.

Janine: Mmm.

Art: Fascinating.

Austin: Because he just knows— he knows the system that well. Also, I said *sulcata* on Twitter.

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: That might not be true. It's @_sulcata on Twitter. And, you know, he's like someone who writes, you know, custom playbooks and stuff for the game. So, you know, that's the sort of expertise. I'm not there yet, but yeah, you can only sell things to old ladies is a fun... [Keith laughs] I don't know how that manifests. [Janine makes amused sound] [Art laughs] Or like, I mean, this is one of the things that happens with this game, is that like, is that a mental block for you? And if so, are we then stepping into a realm that we're not really thrilled with stepping into, which is like, this thing— [mocking] this thing messed up your mind *so much* that da da da da. And like, wohhh. But it is really funny to say you can only sell stuff to old ladies. And this is the trap of trying to— of improvisation is that like, you can sometimes stumble into something that you don't necessarily mean, right?

Janine: Yeah. Yeah.

Austin: I should say—and I think I said this the other side, too—that I have been thinking a lot about our decision to avoid, quote unquote, “madness” instead of engage with it. And it's something that I think I'll address in future arcs in some way or other. I have a very clear idea of how, broadly, I guess. Because like, it feels like it goes against a lot of our traditional decisions to like deconstruct and critique from inside of instead of dismiss. And I think we dis— I think that we were doing our best to just find our footing in these arcs so I'm not surprised—

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: —that I'm like, alright, I'm not there yet. But I think that it's important. Like, you know, I come from a academic background, where I've read lots of people talking about the production of madness as a...as a category of being inside of society. And like, what, you know, where does that come from? What sort of exclusion is being done by that? et cetera. And so I've kind of come back around on thinking about the ways in which we can do that, that isn't just turn our head away from the kind of Lovecraftian version of this. And it's not just Lovecraft who's done—who uses quote, unquote, “madness” in this way. But there are ways to engage with it that I think are interesting and productive that we should think about doing. In any case, I'm glad everyone's basically having a decent time with it. I think this was the arc where I, as a GM, felt more comfortable with just like, what is the— what is a dice roll? What's it look like? 'Cause it's kind of simple. It's you add skill, you add domain, you add one, if someone's helping you add another one, if there's a reason for mastery, you add another one. That's kind of simple, you know?

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Art: Mm-hmm.

Austin: Above a five is good. Above a seven is better. You know? Alright. Next question. Janine, Co(???) writes. Actually, Janine, do you want to read this one? I've been trying to pass the mic around a little bit.

Janine: Sure.

Austin: That way, it's not just me talking.

Janine: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Janine, Es so far has been a character that reacts to the world around her rather than acting upon it. How do you balance that with beats from the adventure background seeming to encourage and reward direct engagement? Is this caution coming from the fact that, ultimately, this is the host body at risk, not Es's?

Janine: So, I feel like part of what I would want to answer to this is gonna come up in another question anyway, so I'm gonna save that part for then.

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Janine: Just in terms of my approach to like, whose body it is, I guess.

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Janine: But I... [sighs] I sort of struggle with this question, because this has not been how I've felt while playing.

Austin: Sure.

Janine: I don't...you know, I could give a—

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: You know, if I wasn't playing this character, if I was reading a book about this character, I would say, oh, here are the reasons why she is behaving this way. Because, you know, maybe she's used to perceiving the world in this way or used to not doing that. But the truth is that like, that hasn't been how I've felt while playing. I think maybe the exception would be...I mean, this is especially true for Roseroot. I think in Roseroot Es was very active.

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: And in Yellowfield, maybe less so, but like the reasoning for that was like I was tired.

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: [laughs] When we were recording Yellowfield stuff, I was tired. I've been, you know, doing a lot of work. And like, sometimes it's just hard to sit down and be in the place and be the person. And I don't want to give a reasoning for that style of play that is...that is anything other than that truth of like, sometimes you're just tired.

Austin: Yeah.

Austin: Also, when you did act—

Janine: When we do the Yellowfield post-mortem, I'll probably go into deeper detail about the regrets I have about how I performed my character in that arc, but...

Austin: Sure. But that's actual play. That's...

Janine: Yes. Yeah, totally.

Austin: Like, you can't erase the player from the fiction.

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: That's why we leave all those conversations in.

Janine: Yeah. You can only you do the best you do that day—

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: —with what you have, and you know, have the minds that you have.

Austin: Also I would say, in both of these arcs, even in Yellowfield—which again, we'll get to in a future episode, which I guess will be the next one of these—you swing big when you swing. So it's not like Es is not—

Janine: Yes. It's picking the right moment to swing, right?

Austin: Yes. Yes.

Janine: Because a lot of Es's swings, a lot of the things that— [amused sound] that's a big part of it actually, right? is that like a lot of the things that Es does or can do, a lot of the tools at her disposal, are really fucking scary to normal people.

Austin: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Janine: And they're— I definitely don't want to deploy those against people who kind of have it coming. Like, that was the thing, right? Like, even with the...with the Toll— Toll?

Austin: Toll Collectors.

Janine: Collectors.

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: She warned them. She said like, I'm fully giving you a chance to not do— and like that was a separate roll, right? was like—

Austin: Right. Right. It was, yes.

Janine: I do not want to— [laughs] like, I don't want this to be a thing.

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: Because the stuff I do is a bit raw. So, you know, there's an awareness of that. It's also, you know, things...there's a cost to things. I also just like... [sighs] I don't want the adventure background to conflict with what I think is the sort of fundamentally important thing about Es, which is that she is a mix of like confidence, like ego, but also a genuine affection for like life, for existence.

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Janine: For— and like, I don't mean hers. I don't mean, like, her host. I don't just mean like people that she knows and likes. Like, in general, a big part of her character—because this is like part of her faith and the sort of underpinnings of that society—is that there is a love and a respect for the continuance of life.

Austin: Right.

Janine: And so I don't want— you know, she's not gonna ever be the person who goes in guns blazing necessarily, unless it's a situation where that already feels justified, like that already feels—

Austin: Which like, in this arc, we get—

Janine: Like, that's where we're at.

Austin: —you recovering Dyre Ode's skull from Aterika'Kaal, from the kind of the thorny heart of Aterika'Kaal by turning into your true form.

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: And you just do it. Like, that is not...

Janine: Yeah. Yes.

Austin: I guess you could call that reactive, because you're stuck in this place, but not really. That was a big active decision to make, in my mind. So.

Janine: Yeah. That was a thing where like, it felt like you were presenting a lot of— I remember being really uncertain about that, because it felt specifically like you were presenting other options, and I was worried that I was doing something foolish in ignoring them.

Austin: Right. Well, the thing that's so funny—

S; So it felt very...

Austin: The funniest thing about that is like...that whole space that doesn't exist in my prep. So, it's obv—

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Austin: It's undeniable that it can— it always feels like the GM is presenting something, because that's how it—

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: That's the experience of playing a game and having someone set up a scenario for you. But like, none of that existed in my head coming to the table. There was a room with Dyre Ode's head in it and like a rosebush, in there, right? That was Aterika— that was the remains of Aterika'Kaal.

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Austin: But you got zapped to this other place because of that fallout. I think that was echo fallout—

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Austin: —that zapped you away. It teleported you away. And then Keith had that ability to...I guess, at that point, it felt like I should just make that be a cool other place. And— yeah, Keith did have the ability.

Keith: Right. I rolled to get...to get myself there.

Austin: To get there using like a modified version of your temple walking spell or whatever, right? Your Stone Chorus spell. And so—

Keith: No, no. It was later that we used the Stone Chorus spell.

Austin: No, no, no. But I would say— but at the time, I said—

Keith: Oh, okay. Gotcha.

Austin: —you could do this because you have this—

Keith: Right. Sure.

Austin: —previous knowledge of trying to move into realms of gods, basically, right?

Keith: Sure. Yeah, that makes sense. Yeah.

Austin: If you didn't have that spell, I would not have let you make that roll, right? That would have been beyond your ken. But you specifically know how to connect to gods and like open up those doors. So, why not— and it's a very Junk Mage thing to like, let's give it a shot! You know? [chuckles] I haven't done it like this before, but let's try it.

Keith: Sure. Yeah. Yep. [Art laughs]

Austin: And so that whole area became like a fun weird zone. And that only comes out of that echo roll, that echo fallout, and then the Junk Mage, you know, Lyke being Lyke. And like all that stuff is so fun, so. So. So yeah, I think that that ended up showcasing Es in a good way there Plus Es was investigating in this arc and talking to Dyre and everyone was grilling—

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: —was grilling, uh, Dayward, so.

Janine: I think the Dyre stuff is also a good example of what I— of, I think, maybe part of what Co(???) is getting at and also what I mean when I talk about how I'm trying to negotiate Es's personality, where there's that whole thing about handing the skull over, right?

[0:30:06]

Austin: Right.

Janine: Where she's— she has it. She could just hand it over. But there's like...there is hesitation, part of it from me as a player and part of it also from her, of just like not knowing who or what Dyre is.

Austin: Yes.

Janine: And being like, is this a move I'm going to regret? But at the same time, being like I don't want to deny this to you, because I know this is yours, and I know it's— you know, it's part of— it is literally part of you.

Austin: Right.

Janine: But I need to know that we're cool. And then the way that that escalates into like Dyre feeling like he has to reveal himself—

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Janine: —and she's like really, really like, no no, no, please don't. Like, you don't have to do that. That's not what I'm here— that's not what this is about!

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Janine: I don't want money. I don't want you to like...I don't want you to have to expose yourself that way. I just want to know that like...that this is a good thing.

Austin: Yeah. Well, speaking of Dyre—

Janine: I think that's—

Austin: Oh, go ahead.

Janine: You know. I was just gonna say I think that's a good example of the reactive instead of the active, but also why...

Austin: What that's grounded in.

Janine: Why that comes in, like what that's coming from, yeah.

Austin: Yeah. Speaking of Dyre, Art or Keith, would you like to read me this one? Also from Co(???), which is why there's only one signature here. I just left the one on. Art, let's say. Can you read this for me?

Art: Alright, um.

Austin.

Austin: Hi.

Art: Yeah. I was just waiting for a response. [Janine laughs]

Austin: Yep. [Keith and Austin laugh]

Art: Now, I'm trying to remember how to pronounce, uh—

Austin: Eve.

Art: Is it ive?

Austin: Eve.

Art: What? Eve.

Janine: Dayward YVE.

Art:

Are the YVE family's and Dyre Ode's actions treating Aterika'Kaal as an object to be acted upon and shaped that different? Even if the go—

Art: The goals, jeez.

Even if the goals and results were different, both see themselves as separate from nature acting upon it, and isn't the divorce of humanity from the natural world one of the results of settler colonialism? Infinite love, Co(???).

Austin: So, I have like three answers to this, obviously. The first is that I would be— I would caution the direct comparison between what literally a settler colonial empire and the representatives thereof in YVE's family who owned plantations, and like, you know, coopted Indigenous religion and undercut it, to Dyre Ode who is themselves Indigenous to this space. And part of this, let me be clear, the second part is Dyre Ode's deal is very early. I don't know that anyone knows what Dyre Ode's whole deal is at this point, other than a little bit of what came out of this arc. So I wouldn't even blame you if you didn't realize that Dyre Ode was from Sangfielle or when Dyre Ode is from or what happened between now and then. But I would just say for instance, another way of thinking about this is: do both settler colonial states and Indigenous peoples do war? Yes. Is that the same thing? No. Right? And then my third answer here is like, you tell me. I think sometimes I can— there are characters that I know I play with such confidence and with such, um, comfort that it can feel like they are my, like, GMPC, to use a term...a term of...what's the word I'm looking for? A term of work, a term of craft. There's a word like that. That is very— maybe that's the case that there is like, I have particular affinity to

certain characters. But it's rare that that means that I think the character is right. Thinking about characters who I think have been truly right, in the history of *Friends at the Table* is very hard. Like, I think I've spent a lot of time— or not spent a lot of time, but I've mentioned that like Gur Sevraq in PARTIZAN is like extremely naive and idealistic about like telecommunications technologies as like a core thing about the way that they see the world, for instance. Ibex is Ibex, you know? I feel very comfortable playing those characters. I connect to them in a real way as a performer. But that that doesn't mean that when one of these characters who has a big personality and a clear, you know, statement about the world, when they speak, that it's me speaking or that I expect you to agree with them. So, questions like this are where I want to say, probably not the sort of things I'll answer going forward on Drawing Maps, because that's the work that the reader should be doing. That's the joy of reading, is that you get to unpack those relationships and those questions. Again, the place where I want to be clear is like, hey, maybe you didn't realize that Dyre Ode, Dyre Ode's own particular relationship is this with the place, but even there, it's...I want the work to speak for itself, insofar as big picture ideas go, and to remember that though I am the GM, I'm also, you know, my collection of characters is like a collection of characters in a book. I don't have a perspective character. I don't have a character that's like, "And this is my view on the world." I have the ability to make certain characters sound authoritative about things, and I have the ability to make certain characters sound wrong about things. I spent a lot of effort in this arc making Dayward YVE seem unsympathetic and a lot of effort making Dyre Ode seem mysterious but fundamentally in a better position than than Dayward YVE. I could have done it the other way, and I didn't— choosing to do it this way does not mean that I think that the takeaway should be "and therefore you should trust everything this Dyre Ode guy has to say." They might— they are definitely hiding many things from you, right? At the end of the downtime that follows this, Dyre Ode shows up and leaves with a person who I think I tried my best to make seem kind of creepy and weird. And so, and so there's stuff like that, that I think, in terms of what is the best relationship to have with the text is to never assume that any character—player character, NPC, or otherwise, including the narrator, [chuckles] right?—is right, or is what I think is right. I think my job would be very boring if I had to like play myself or give someone my full perspective on things. You know, Dyre Ode's skull was inside of a god that was a rosebush. Never happened to me. That's a different perspective than mine. [chuckles] It might change what my relationship to the world is, if that was the situation I'd been through. And so—

[simultaneously]

Janine: I thought you were gonna say it might change a in—

Keith: This happened to me, but the kind of god was way different.

Austin: Wait, two things. One at a time, there. Keith, what'd do you say?

Keith: Oh, I said it's happened to me, but the type of god was way different.

Austin: The type of god— right, sure. Sure.

Keith: It wasn't in an evil bush god, it was in...

Austin: Right, right. Yes. Sorry. I've just realized the sheets, the actual questions, have not been on screen. My bad.

Janine: Yeah, I was gonna say.

Art: Yeah, I was also gonna...

Austin: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. That's how it goes sometimes.

Art: We all found out.

Austin: Yeah. That's how it goes.

Janine: Eh, it's still early.

Austin: Uh huh. Term of art was the word I was looking for before. Term of art. Alright. Next question. Uh, Keith, can you read this one from the Nirav(???)?

Keith: Sure.

Many, if not all, of your games address topics and issues that are relevant to the real world. How do you play in those settings and spaces without getting bummed out all the time? It's not a safety tools issue, for which my games effectively use lines and veils, but more question of how to tackle tough subjects—for example, racism, colonialism, oppression—while still being able to enjoy a fun tabletop roleplaying game. Thanks, Nirav(???)

Austin: Um, I...I mean, what's the line?

Art: Mm-hmm.

Austin: What's the line? Art, do you know the line?

Art: I need a little more.

Austin: Uh...

Keith: Oh, is it the Hulk line? Is that what you're doing?

Austin: Yeah. It's not the Hulk line. Well, the Hulk line is just stealing from this.

Keith: Oh, I don't—

Austin: From *Lawrence of Arabia*.

Keith: Okay. I've never seen *Lawrence of Arabia*.

Austin: The *Lawrence of Arabia* line is, um...okay.

Keith: I've also never seen the Hulk movie, so.

Austin: Well.

Art: The famous *Lawrence of Arabia* line, Avengers assemble. I think we all know...

Austin: Avengers assemble. Lawrence of Arabia extinguishes a match between his thumb and his forefinger, and a character William Potter says...tries to do it and burns his fingers. He goes, "Ooh, it hurts!" And T. E. Lawrence says, "Certainly, it hurts." And then someone says, "Well, what's the trick, then?" And he says, "The trick, William Potter, is not minding that it hurts." [chuckles] Which is, yeah, the Avengers line is "That's the secret, Cap. I'm always angry," right? It's just this.

Art: Yeah.

Keith: Right.

Austin: It's the same line. I'm bummed out all the time. Like, I'm— anyway! So...

Keith: Right. Yeah.

Austin: Why would this not— this space could never be a space that makes me— that makes *me*, at least, not bummed out. There is no...when I'm playing like, I'm playing *Skyward Sword*— I guess I'm bummed out about *Skyward Sword* because the controls are bad. But you know, when I'm playing, um, anything, any game, tabletop, video game, otherwise. I don't know. Like, I'm not disengaged from the sorts of feelings that upset me day in day out about this stuff. And in many ways, as a creator, working through them is the most productive and healthy— one of the— is a productive and healthy tool in the toolbox, not the only one. But is a way for me to think through, talk through, play with concerns that upset me.

[0:40:02]

It is a...it is a major way, like any artistic practice, to instead of turning your head away from the thing that's upsetting you, to try to engage with it in a structured way that allows me to...I can't fix global warming, right? [chuckles] That's impossible. That is not a thing that exists on an individual level. I could spend the rest of my life as a single activist, and I think I would

probably benefit the world if I did that. But barring that, where that became my life's work— and even then I don't think I could individually fix global warming, obviously, right? But barring that sort of dedication, I have these feelings about it. And so something like Hieron and Hieron's ecological narrative can kind of come to being, in the same way that Hieron is also often about kind of death and familial guilt and stuff like that. Those things become engines for narrative, and allow me to, insofar as I'm building, doing world building and stuff like that, let me play safely and think safely in some ways about this stuff, in a way that laying in bed at night and letting those thoughts fully consume me does not. In some ways, it gives me a space to be...to not make a difference, but to feel some agency around these questions that would otherwise be lacking, I think.

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: Does that make sense?

Janine: I think an example that came to mind is like, it's like the difference between a hailstorm and a snowball, right?

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Janine: Like, a hailstorm can just completely beat you down, destroy everything. Like, a hailstorm can be incredibly destructive. A snowball is a facet of a very, you know, similar, similar things, or like an ice ball, even.

Austin: Right, right.

Janine: But it's a smaller piece of it. You can make it yourself. You can break it apart. You can look at it. You can examine it. You can do things with it that a hailstorm, you can't. You just can't engage with a hailstorm in the same way.

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: There's too much of it. It's too...you know, it just beats you down. Whereas, you know, engaging with these topics in fiction, broadly, lets you sort of take them piece by piece and explore and examine and, you know, process.

Austin: Yeah. It's like what I said earlier about— and that's the other thing, is you can take it at your time, at your pace.

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Austin: You don't always have to be engaging with all of those things. Earlier, I talked about how we've kind of stepped away from the kind of literary device in in horror fiction of madness this season, because—even though it's all over *Heart* as a book—because it felt...it felt

unwieldy. But as I've sat with this season, I've gotten more comfortable trying to find an inroad to address that particular kind of concept as it's used. And so, that means that maybe for an arc or two, we might be in that space. And so, that ends up being a interesting and distinct, like, space inside of the season writ large, inside the campaign writ large, in which I'm particularly interested in that one element or question or whatever, that particular, quote unquote, "tough subject," but doesn't mean you have to try to take it all on at once. But yeah, I don't know. It's fundamentally part of what makes this enjoyable for me, is that we take it...that we think about these kind of big ideas and then match them up with character interaction and all sorts of fun improvisation and like, those things, to me, aren't antithetical, I guess. Keith or Art, do you have...do you have any other additional thoughts on this stuff?

Art: You both did really good work here. Um.

Austin: [laughs] Thank you. [Janine laughs] Very flattering.

Art: Yeah, I don't have a lot more here. I mean, and part of it's just like, you know, you don't always have to...sometimes you can like, instead of focusing on the bigger picture, focus on the very narrow picture.

Austin: Yeah.

Art: Inside of it, you know? Instead of like, oh, this is how I feel about this larger metaphor, I can just be like, today I'm just gonna focus on my very small part in this narrative, and like engage with it in a more like holistic sense?

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Art: You know?

Austin: I also think that part of it is, for me at least, when I'm thinking about that stuff in the most intense way is when I'm prepping a session, when I'm like, okay, who is Dyre Ode? What's up with Dyre Ode's history? Who is Dayward YVE? What was his family like? What type of money does he come from? Where did that money come from? Et cetera. And those are the places where, like, they're yours, you know? For me, if I feel myself getting towards content that I—that, for whatever reason, would be too heavy for me that week, I can back off on that. And likewise, if a player feels like we're going in that direction, we can pause and back off of it, and it's not the end of the world. Like, we've done that. And that sort of thing is...knowing that that's available helps quite a bit. It's not...it's not like, you know, there are movies that I like, I'm just—I am not there. I'm not in a place where I can watch this right now, right? Roleplaying games, for me, aren't quite like that, with rare exception. I think the rare exception tends to be about interpersonal conflict, where that can jump faster and further than you might think you're prepared for. We've talked about "The Feast of Patina" a billion times. I think we went into that all fairly prepared for what it would be, and it was still such a heavy play session that I think it wiped most of us out, in Twilight Mirage, late Twilight Mirage. And that's when we're like...we...

can't talk for anybody else, but I think we pushed through some of the discomfort, because discomfort isn't the end of the— isn't *the* end of the world. It's a thing that if you agreed upon that some degree of discomfort is acceptable and that you're happy with the situation and everyone's able to step away if things really get pushed past that part, we're happy to be in that space long term, 'cause we end up producing something we're really proud of. At least, that's kind of how I feel generally. I think there's different types of discomfort, right? I think I'm past the point at which I want to do a seven hour session ever again in my life, you know? [chuckles] That sort of discomfort isn't productive in any way, really, outside of the raw there's seven hours of tape now, you know? And I don't want to run the show like that ever again. But “Hey, are we all ready to step into a place that is fraught?” can still be very useful. And I think “The Feast of Patina” was that, but I also think that even knowing that it would be that, it was still heavier than then I think anticipated? At least for me, I don't know.

Art: Well, but like, and if I was doing...if I was just playing like a, you know, a home game for fun, and someone was like, do you want to do something like “Feast of Patina?” I would— my answer would be no.

Austin: Right.

Art: You know, like... [Keith laughs] No, thank you. [Austin laughs]

Janine: Get out of my house.

Austin: Who are you?

Art: Yeah.

Austin: Who let you in?

Janine: Take your wine. It's not even good.

Austin: [chuckles] Though, I will say, university era Art and Austin definitely wanted to do more Feast of Patinas. And we just weren't—

Art: Yeah. Pfft.

Austin: —surrounded by people who wanted to do that stuff that often, you know?

Art: Yeah. But now, as an old person, that's not— that's not fun.

Austin: Yeah.

Art: For me. [chuckles]

Janine: No one wants to shout at their friends for fun, no, unless there's like a greater, you know—

Austin: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Janine: There was a narrative purpose to it. There's a dramatic purpose.

Austin: Yes.

Janine: We're producing content for an audience, [laughs] as opposed to just sitting in a...sitting down at a table and being like, I'm gonna chew out a bunch of people for... [Austin laughs] for a couple hours.

Art: Or like, if you listen to the show, and you're like, "I want to do this. I want to do a game like this," I mean, you know.

Austin: You should do it.

Art: You should do it, but like...

Austin: I think that's the thing that I want to make sure is clear, is that like, I don't think that games like that are only available to us because of content making. We ourselves might make that decision, but like I think the shit we do doesn't even—

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: Like, pales in comparison to like Nordic LARP. Like, the stuff that people who are really in this space, doing very intense, very personal sessions in which there's not even the layer of metaphor about oh, this is talking about cancer. They're just like playing a game about someone dying of cancer, is like, that's— that play is happening out there, and if that sounds interesting to you, you should go like find those— you know, try to find groups like that to play with, you know?

Keith: And I think the— I think the flip side is that *Friends at the Table* is a really funny show, and joking around and laughing is motivating.

Austin: It is. Totally.

Keith: And so, like, I mean, I had basically the same reaction, Austin, the *Lawrence of Arabia* thing, where I was like, what do you mean not bummed out all the time? [Austin and Keith laugh]

Janine: [amused] Mmm.

Austin: Right. Right. This is...the fundamental thing that we get to do on this is like, get on a call with our friends and tell stories together and tell jokes. Like...

Keith: Right. Yeah.

Austin: And maybe this is an outside looking in thing that like, that's the time of the week we get to do that, you know what I mean? We're not—

Keith: Mmm.

Austin: Most of us are not able to just like hang out all the time, at this point. circa Stream Friends, that was a much more common thing. But now we're all very busy and have other commitments and stuff, and so *Friends at the Table* is like our opportunity to hang and tell jokes and look up boat facts. Something happened in a recent episode that made me laugh so hard. I don't remember what it was. I don't remember if it's out yet, but I just remembered laughing harder than I've laughed and like a year. Fuck, what was it? I don't remember. But that's part of *Friends at the Table*, right? Like, that...those things exist right next to each other. So.

[0:50:10]

Art: I just want to say that until like September, I really don't have anything going on. So if anyone wants to hang out, just reach out.

Austin: Hang out. We can just hang out.

Art: Yeah. Yeah. I know you— you're you. Pfft.

Austin: Yeah, it's weird right now. We'll talk.

Art: When does *anyone* see Austin?

Austin: Yeah. Never. Uh, content. When content is being made. Um. Did Keith— have you read one yet? Is it back around to me?

Keith: Yeah, I just read this one.

Art: Keith just read the— yeah. Keith read this one.

Austin: So, it's me again.

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: John writes in:

In the very beginning of the Roseroot arc, there was a moment in the first encounter that stood out to me. The players were working out who was going to deal with the bandits that showed up. Keith and Art both went over their character skills and domains, and their lists are strikingly similar. I know you spent time in character building discussing the apparent overlap of Chine and Marn, but it seemed to me like maybe this Lye Duvall similarity flew under the radar, because it was less about their playbooks and more about the choices they made specing out their characters. Is this something that you, Austin, or the players picked up on? And if so, did you discuss it and intentionally address it or just naturally let the characters differentiate as they developed in their own ways? —John in St. Louis.

Keith: I'll say, I didn't notice this until I read this question.

Art: Uh huh.

Austin: Yeah.

Art: I mean, I sort of had noticed this, but it has not been something I've been thinking about at all.

Keith: Right. And I've thought a good amount about Lye and Duvall, but it's mostly because I feel like Duvall is doing his whole luck thing, and part of that was...part of what was happening in the Roseroot arc while Duvall was like rolling really really good and then rolled bad and kept rolling bad forever, is that I was rolling really good.

Austin: Yeah.

Keith: And we had that like sort of goofy discussion about luck, and then now, every time I'm rolling with Art, I'm thinking about that, and—

Austin: Where does the luck come from? Yeah.

Keith: Right, yeah. So, I have been thinking about Lye and Duvall, but I haven't noticed that we have similar skills at all.

Austin: It's gotten more...it's separated out a little bit more at this point.

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: I guess I don't want to read from the sheets, because some of these could be spoilers from future episodes, but that core set of like delve, discern, mend—

Art: Just stay off the fallout section.

Austin: Yeah, I will. Don't— I'm not bringing anything up on the screen. [Art laughs] Delve, discern, mend, and then occult was an overlap between both of you.

Keith: Hmm.

Austin: And I knew that to some degree going in, because the Junk Mage starts with discern occult, and the Deep Apiarist starts with mend occult, so I knew there'd be some stuff there. And then I knew that Keith had pitched your Junk Mage as being like...mendy. Being healing-y and that you took—

Keith: Right, because you get mend. The Junk Mage gets mend with one of the equipment sets.

Austin: Is that what— right, well, you can—

Keith: That's what— yeah.

Austin: Well, you can use that as a mend ability. It's not a— that doesn't give you the skill. That gives you the...

Keith: Oh, sure, yeah.

Austin: That just gives you a tool that you can use in mend rolls, but your Mark of the Weaver, the one that lets you fix things in a matter of seconds—

Keith: Right.

Austin: That gives you that mend skill—

Keith: That gives me mend, yeah.

Austin: —which has been a key part of who you've been forever at this point.

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: So, I knew that there was overlap, but because it's a fiction first game, that overlap is still distinct or still allows for distinction between the two of them, in a lot of ways that like...I think that the way that we see Duvall, you know, the way that Duvall delves is different than the way that Lye delves, for instance. And so it doesn't bother me too much. Also, there are only, what, eight skills and eight domains, or nine domains, nine skills, something like that?

Keith: There's seven players.

Austin: Right.

Austin: So, I knew it would overlap eventually, right? We did have conversations during our...our Drawing Maps character creation talks with these characters about like, what's your take on occult, since you're sharing it? But beyond that, I wasn't too worried about it. I was more worried about Chine and Marn, because their very earliest conceptions of the characters were very similar in terms of, okay, you come to town. Who are you fundamentally? And both of those stories were like, we're people who come to town to solve problems. Like, for instance, if someone was sick with a werewolf bite, I would know what to do. Those are both true about Chine and Marn. And they're still true about both Chine and Marn. And it was about making sure that there was distinction between those two, what the answers would be, and kind of what the cultural and social kind of positioning of those characters would be. What makes a Keen, a member of the Telluricist Union like Marn, different than a Cleaver? That was an important distinction. And it was also important, 'cause we had to figure out what the entire Telluricist Union and the Keen were and then what Dre's version of the Cleavers were. With you two, like one of you is a Junk Mage, and one of you is a bee, is bug person. Is a *bug person*. And like, at that point, I'm not too worried about people from the outside looking at you and being like, these two are the same, you know? So. I think—

Janine: I think the like real thing that came up there was I remember you saying when we were midway through Roseroot, like, oh, I forgot this is not a very combat party. [chuckles]

Austin: Yeah, that actually hit me.

[voice from a video playing: Hello, it is Monday, Ju—]

Austin: [softly] Oops.

Janine: Yeah. And then that— I think that was probably why I was quick to sort of move hard when we were—

Austin: Yes.

Janine: —in that second session, was because I realized like, other than Duvall's like amazing— [Janine and Keith laugh] amazing roll.

Austin: Yeah, super combat roll.

Janine: I was kind of aware of like, okay, I might be the heavy hitter in this group. I should probably, you know—

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: —act accordingly, just to make sure this goes okay.

Austin: Apologies to everyone who just heard Chris Remo from formerly *Idle Thumbs* doing a crossword puzzle. [Janine laughs softly] Or alternatively, congratulations to everyone who just heard Chris Remo from *Idle Thumbs* doing a crossword puzzle. [Janine and Art laugh] Alright. In any case, I think you both developed in your own way since then. I think the moves you've taken have separated yourselves, so I'm not too worried about it at this point. Uh, Janine, do you want to read this one from Kel(???)?

Janine: Yeah.

My question is does *Heart* as a system not encourage inter-party interactions that much? I'm really loving the season and all of the characters, but I feel like I have less of a grasp on the group dynamics than I did with PARTIZAN. One thing that stood out for me is the out of character comments on characters doing weird power things (bug powers, Es's eye form) and Austin making sure to say that no one's seen this happen before, but then none of the other player characters ever brought it up later. I was wondering if this is on purpose—are characters avoiding digging into each other's background of privacy concerns? Or is it the result of the new system/something else? Thank you all.
Kel(???), they/them.

Austin: I don't think it's the system. I think it's— this is—

Keith: I've—

Austin: Go ahead, Keith.

Janine: It's the world, right?

Keith: I'll say that I had noticed that I have been talking less to— I haven't like noticed as a game, but I've noticed that like, in the ones that I've been in, there's been less sort of like chatting and talking about stuff. I noticed it after the last session, which was like really good, and I was thinking about it. I was like, that was a ton of fun. And then I was like, you know, we haven't done like a lot of talking to each other. And part of that is because there was some characters separation.

Austin: Yeah.

Keith: In the last arc, so like that affected things.

Austin: Well, that's funny, 'cause I think that this current arc that's coming out now has the most character conversation, but it's not with you.

Keith: Yeah, and that's sort of why—

Austin: You're separated from it.

Keith: That's sort of what made me think about it.

Austin: Yeah, totally. Yeah, it is mostly Jack and Art who are in positions to where they can do that sort of stuff.

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: You're right, though. I do think that that's— that is— it hasn't happened much.

Keith: Right.

Austin: Who's— Janine, were you gonna say it's the world?

Janine: I think yeah, there's a degree to which the world— all of these people. [clears throat] The premise of this, right, is all of these people have entered into a part of the world that is hyper weird and hyper dangerous and like everything is fucking nuts, like everything's...everything is wild and weird and, you know, intense.

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: So, I think there's a degree to which it's really easy to just kind of, you know, either deliberately or just because we're forgetting that maybe some characters wouldn't have the exposure that others do to all of this—

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Janine: —to just kind of play it at face value of just like, yeah, well, I guess that's a thing that that person does. Okay. Um.

Austin: Uh huh.

Keith: Yeah, the specific example that Kel(???) gives is something that like, I sort of...I actually think I have done this season is comment on something weird that someone does, but it's also like a joke that I've done before as other characters. And so it like, doesn't feel as urgent to every time someone does something be like, "What was that?" And I also think that Lyke is a character that's seen a good number of weird things already, and so is sort of, I don't know, I guess not desensitized, 'cause the whole point of his character, that character, is that he's, like, interested and curious about weird stuff.

Austin: Yeah. Yeah.

Keith: But maybe also— maybe isn't as, you know, ready to just shout it out like Fero would be or something.

Austin: Shout it out! Yeah. [quiet laughter]

Janine: It's also a thing of like, if we're— you know, because of the way we have a fairly large group, and we—

Austin: Yes.

Janine: We chop and screw that group several times, like it's, you know, everyone gets shuffled around. [Austin chuckles] And like, how many times can you have the conversation? Like, how many times can Es have the conversation about being an eye, an eye creature?

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: In that form.

Art: Yeah.

Janine: Because it would have to be at least three times, right? 'Cause...

[1:00:02]

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: Because like, I still haven't been in a group with Jack.

Austin: Right.

Janine: So eventually, the like, you know. And then how do you prioritize like, well, why did so-and-so ask but such-and-such didn't?

Art: Yeah.

Janine: It's tough to do that. And at the same time, you don't want to have a downtime episode where everyone sits down, is like, "So you're full of bees?"

Austin: Right.

Art: Mm-hmm.

Janine: Or, you know, like... [chuckles]

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: I don't know. It's—

Austin: I would be happy with that episode. But like, I think that that downtime episode's a great
(??? 1:00:28)

Janine: It's easier to do in a small group.

Austin: It is. (???) with set groups, that's the trade off, right?

Janine: Yes. Yeah. Yeah.

Austin: The nice thing about this season being so episodic, so far...I do think that the— I do think that by the end of this arc, you will start to see structure towards a larger thing, finally, though it will still remain episodic in many ways. The benefit is we can just, like, hey, let's flip these parties around. Who's interested in a haunted house mystery? Who wants to go into a different dimension, you know, abbey? Alright, who wants to go to a weird candle factory? Who wants to do a train adventure, right? Like those sorts of conversations mean that we can kind of move stuff around in fun ways. And you do get characters interacting at like a superficial level with each other, that are, you know, a little more mixed up than what we would have gotten in Hieron or in like Twilight Mirage, where for the first half of that season, you know, that's a long half of the season where characters don't even— aren't even near each other. PARTIZAN, for that matter, same thing. But that trade off is you don't fall into that easy familiarity with the characters, and you haven't written—as Thomas Whitney points out—like beliefs or drives about other characters, which I think is another— is a mechanical thing here, which is...I mean, I would say, if I had to guess and prioritize this, the number one thing from my perspective is everyone's learning their characters still, which is not a mechanical thing. That's a we've only done two arcs for each of these characters so far.

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Austin: That's not a lot to know your character well enough to start feeling super comfortable with just chattin' it up. I expected some more of that in the first downtime session, but like, this leads to the second thing. Mechanically speaking, *Heart* is a very like busy game, in terms of what you have to keep in your head. From—

Keith: Yeah, I spent that whole game doing like management that I needed to get done.

Austin: Right.

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: Doing like, okay, what am I— I'm trying to manage my stress. I'm trying to figure out what my resources are. I'm trying to hit these beats. Et cetera, et cetera. And all that stuff, I think, can...I think that that stuff is really fun, and I'm really enjoying this system. But I can see

where, until that stuff is second nature, it's a little harder to like find time to do one-on-one scenes. I'm also just not sure what the chemistry or the vibes are between characters at this point, because we just haven't had that sort of interaction yet, you know?

Keith: I like almost haven't met Marn or Chine. Like...

Art: Mmm.

Austin: Right, you haven't done missions with them, right? You haven't done anything with them yet?

Keith: Right. Yeah.

Art: Yeah, I don't want to just linger on things people have already said too much, but I think that it's right that you can't...you can't have everyone talk about everyone's powers every time. It's only interesting when it's *really* interesting, and I don't think we've really hit on too many of those yet. Especially because the time that Duvall made three people disappear in one thing—

Austin: Uh huh.

Art: —no one was there to see it.

Austin: No one was there to see it. Yeah, true. [Janine laughs softly]

Art: That was the interesting one, but...

Austin: Well, also, I think what we've gotten, what we have right now, is a bunch of things that will lead to good character— character interaction...there's different types of character interaction. One type of character interaction is kind of soft and fluffy and playful, and I think that requires a great deal of confidence in the character you're playing and familiarity with them and how they would respond in a casual environment with other characters. And that's kind of open RP, you're walking through the marketplace and just chatting it up, right? Or whatever the situation is. You take someone out to dinner, and you're talking in character. I think that requires a degree of skill and, again, deep familiarity with who the character is you're planning. For me, anyway. Or I guess, for me...that's not true. For me as a player character, it's that. As a GM, I can do that in a snap, because it's so low risk in so many ways. I don't have that like, oh no, I'm getting this character wrong. If I like start playing a character, if I like, if you— if we had done that dinner scene between Myron and Es from the downtime that comes after this Roseroot arc, and I had started playing Myron as like mean, that wouldn't— I would be like, oh, I guess Myron's mean, okay. I don't have the structure or the kind of fear of like, "Oh fuck, I'm playing this character mean. I wasn't supposed to make this character mean. Let me try to like fix the situation." So that's like an example of like...of a difference between player and GM situations.

But the other type of play is not that kind of soft stuff. It is the stakes driven play, in which characters have a perspective about something and speak about that perspective, and that drives character interaction. And that's like convincing someone to do a thing, being at different sides of a dilemma. In *Twilight Mirage*, that's "The Feast of Patina," but even before "The Feast of Patina," that's the Advent group founding stuff. That's the Ark kids in *Twilight Mirage*, people wanting different things to do that. The first arc of *Friends at the Table*, it's what do we do with this book that's at the top of this tower? Here's who Hadrian is. Here is who Fantasma is. That stuff hasn't come up yet. It will. Keith, at the end of this arc, leaves was Aterika'Kaal. That is not a thing I've forgotten. It's a thing I continue to foreshadow and will be a driver of drama at a certain point, because people will have different opinions about that, if and when it comes out. There are other things that have happened, kind of at the climax of *Yellowfield*, that introduce new things that are like macguffins around which people will have different perspectives and opinions. The place that they're— that the next set of arcs is going to be will have a number of things that I think will push people to have different perspectives and opinions, at least somewhat. And I think that stuff will start, will kind of—I hope, we'll see—jumpstart some of the more in-character stuff, if that makes sense. Any other thoughts here? [brief pause] Alright.

Janine: Um...

Austin: Ope, go back.

Janine: I was just gonna say there's also like, you know, there is also something here about like...trying to make time to kind of just add little flavor notes in. I think about the downtime thing where I like...I was... [laughs] I think I was like kind of desperate for some character interaction.

Austin: Mm-hmm?

Janine: And I was just like, um, I want a thing where Es accidentally takes the wrong parasol or something—

Austin: Right, yes.

Janine: —and has to rush back and exchange parasols with Virtue because, you know, she took the one that actually blocks the sun instead of taking the one that's just superficial and lacy or whatever.

Austin: Right, yes. Yes.

Janine: So there's something about like trying to make time for those little moments that sort of tip like, these are people who know each other, know about each other to a degree—

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: Where it's appropriate, but...

Austin: Yeah. I will always stop whatever we're doing for two characters to talk to each other. Do you know what I mean? Like I—

Janine: Sure, but that's—

Austin: No, no, no. I'm just—

Janine: It's a tough proposition when it's like a huge group, right?

Austin: Yes, yes.

Janine: Like, you'll stop, but also there are a bunch of other people who are like, have partners waiting for them to finish—

Austin: Yes, yes. That's the other half of this.

Janine: —and all of that stuff that's hard to...you have to keep that in mind. [laughs]

Austin: Yeah, yeah. Definitely. We do not have the luxury of like...stopping everything we do for a full day to do just RP scenes with each other, unfortunately.

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Art: We could, we would just have to like really schedule it, you know? [Janine makes amused sound]

Austin: And we'd have to hope it was good!

Art: Yeah, uh huh.

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: You know?

Art: Yeah, if we did like RP day, it would probably be a real disaster.

Janine: Oh, that would probably drag. [sighs]

Austin: It would be hard. It would be— yeah, it doesn't come from that. I don't think it comes from put on a room and make them talk.

Janine: No.

Austin: Like. I think we could get there, and I think that I know how to get there with characters in one-on-one sessions from things like the Twilight Mirage, the kind of one week time skip stuff that happens in that season. But even that was like, a difficult thing. And we tried to keep them as limited as possible. And I had the benefit of like, introducing a character I thought would work well with each of you, instead of it needing to be just like...let's just make it work with every individual pairing, you know? So. Anyway. This next one...who wants to read this from Felix? It's Janine.

Art: I'll go.

Austin: Or Art, go ahead.

Art: Oh, it is a Janine question, yeah.

Austin: It's to Janine. So yeah, Janine, go ahead.

Janine: [laughs] Yeah, I was gonna say.

Hi there. I love *Friends the Table*, and I particularly love the degree of thought and care and deliberateness that goes into your storytelling. I'm curious about Janine's character Es and the discussion you've had with the Emphabet system with regards to how you're approaching plural identity. What has that been like? How are you thinking about this reading of the character? Are there particular things you're trying to keep in mind or make clear? I am myself an alter, and I love stories of possession and body sharing, and I'm very excited to see how things go with Es.

Janine: Thank you, Felix. [sighs] One thing I feel like I should say, because this is one of the things I'm very cautious about, is like...when you say approaching plural identity, like a thing that I think is really important with Es, is that Es is an attempt to approach possession, like a story of possession. And we, you know, have...you know, we've consulted on plurality, because there's an inescapable comparison to make there, and a thing where we want that to be at the forefront so that we don't— so that I don't say anything incredibly foolish and hurtful because I'm thinking only of possession, right?

[1:10:13]

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Janine: And because I'm thinking of only my like, "I'm gonna do a fun spin on possession and things like that." So it's the thing that I want to emphasize, is that like, you know, if in the like modern world AU of Sangfielle, then, you know, in that world, I don't think it's fair to say that Es comes in and is an alter or is plural in the way that is true to our reality, right?

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Janine: You know, Es is the product of a race of ghosts. So I, you know, I want to mention that just because I think it's important context. And it's a thing that I try to be careful about, because...you know, for a lot of reasons, I don't want to pretend that I'm doing something that I'm— that I didn't set out to do, even if I'm trying to do it carefully and sensitively and with great awareness of, you know, of toes that I might step on along the way. Actually, the Emphabet system made a— when I was speaking about this with them, this concern that I was having with them, they sort of made the distinction between plurality and experiencing plurality—

Austin: Hmm.

Janine: —which I think is good, like a character experiencing plurality. I think that's kind of valuable...that's valuable for me in terms of how I was thinking of it, anyway. But you know, where this comes in is that like, originally, because I was thinking only about possession, and like, what's a positive spin on possession? I was thinking really, really heavily about overemphasizing the host's personhood and being really dismissive of the heritrix's personhood. And a thing that came up in the conversation with the Emphabet system was that like, that's a problem. Right?

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Janine: Like, the alter in the situation has as much of a right to be who they are as anyone else. So, I sort of after that conversation was like, I actually need to rethink how I'm doing this, because in my effort to view this as being fair to the host, the person who's being possessed, I've been really, really unfair to the other person in this partnership, right?

Austin: Right.

Janine: Who has as much of a right to life, and, you know, it's an agreement that they're both involved in, and, you know. So, there's always negotiation and conversation and stuff that's happening— at the moment, happening off screen. I think Austin and I have talked about like maybe surfacing a bit of that—

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: —at some point just, just to get a little more of what that's like, but...

Austin: Yeah, we had a good conversation recently, because it was like one of those things—it's worth just saying out loud here—where it's like I wasn't sure what you wanted brought to the forefront, or...

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Austin: Or the degree to which the world— the camera lens of the show should zoom in, other characters should recognize, et cetera. And so I'd been kind of hands off. Also, again, just feeling out the system.

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Austin: And it's enough to juggle running the game at a basic level before doing that second level character deep dive stuff, with anybody, including Es.

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: Anyway.

Janine: Um, I think that's a...

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: Does that cover everything?

Austin: I think that makes...

Janine: [??? 1:13:47]

Art: On the other hand, wouldn't you say that we all come from a race of ghosts?

Janine: Eh.

Austin: No. Not like this. [Janine laughs]

Art: Most people are dead. [Janine laughs]

Austin: [chuckles] Okay. Most people aren't ghosts. Only certain people who've been cursed to ghosthood.

Art: Uh, hmm.

Janine: Okay, maybe ghosts was the wrong...was the wrong word.

Austin: Yes, disembodied spirits. Right? Or not even disembodied, 'cause disembodiment suggests...

Janine: Unembodied.

Janine: Unembodied spirits is what—

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: Yeah, is what heritrixes are.

Janine: It's all...yeah. I'm trying to...I'm trying to be very careful and conscious of that, but also I want to, you know, I want to make it clear where...where it's coming from, 'cause again, I don't want to represent it as something that came from a different place than it actually did.

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Janine: Or, you know, there's like an intersection there that's, you know, scary. It's a little— it's scary for me, 'cause it's not a thing I've experienced.

Austin: Right.

Janine: So, you know.

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: Please tell me if I fuck up. I will absolutely— you know, I...I'm... [laughs softly] I don't want to, you know, I'm not saying that as in like I'm trying to offload work on other people. I am actively trying to not fuck up.

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: But also plurality in particular— and this was another thing that came up in the conversations with the Emphabet system, is that like, plurality is a deeply unique experience to all of those who experience it—

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Janine: And everyone has very, very different perspectives. And, you know, I...I really, really appreciate the consultation that we had with the Emphabet system, but I'm also open— open. Oppen? [Austin chuckles] I'm also open to the fact that like, it's not a universal experience. So, you know, there are some things that will align with someone's experience and not align with another and I, you know.

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: I want to bear that in mind as well.

Austin: Yeah. Which, again, goes back to the thing you were saying of like, your goal here is not to represent the, you know—

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: —the plural experience writ large, let alone, you know.

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: Or like, that's not where you came from originally. And you're interested in and, you know, recognize that reading, but you're not trying to like, "And here is what's the monolithic experience of plurality is," or something like that, so.

Janine: Yeah. Exactly.

Austin: Yeah. That makes sense.

Janine: I don't want to hurt anyone with this story of possession.

Austin: Right. Alright.

Janine: Yeah. That's...

Austin: Yeah. That makes sense. Art, can you read this next one?

Art: Yeah.

Austin: This has some summary in it, because Luke said a very long two email question, and I wanted to summarize it, and we'll talk some more about it. So at the point at which I have a bracket, those are my words.

Art: Alright. I want to point out that I don't think you closed this bracket.

Austin: I didn't close the bracket. I just— I didn't. It's fine.

Art: It goes forever.

Austin: Yeah.

Keith: It just means that nothing ever stops being Austin's words from that point forward.

Austin: Yes. Yep. Until you see another bracket.

Art: Yeah, the rest of this podcast and, in fact, if you're listening to this, the rest of your life [Keith laughs] is Austin summarizing this question.

Austin: Well, I could drop another bracket at any point. You don't know.

Art: Sure.

Austin: If I drop another bracket somewhere else, that's the end of it. So.

Art: Alright.

In *Heart*, loot and resources are probably the most important they've ever been in a season of *Friends at the Table*. In short, can you talk about how that system works in general, whether you're playing it as written, how and why some players end up with more loot than others (like Lyke, the Junk Mage), loot prep and distribution, and what thought you've put into sharing resources between players?

Art: I'd like to say personally, I've decided to not engage with the loot system at all [Keith laughs] and just hope it works out at the end.

Keith: How do you feel like that's been going? [Janine chuckles]

Art: Um, medium bad?

Austin: Oh.

Janine: Yeah.

Art: I have a lot of fallout, and I think I should have more junk.

Austin: Well, that's a problem. Uh, it's weird to prep for. I prep a lot of loot. Um.

Keith: Mm-hmm.

Austin: And then it's hard to be like, "Go do the loot. There's loot over there," if it's not you want a thing. On the other hand, the thing that happens is someone's like, "Can I find *blank*?" Keith does this all the time. Can I look for something? Yeah, I guess I'll come up with some shit. Let's come up with some shit. What do you find? So, it can be like...there are times when I've really thought out the loot. I think I showed some of this before, but like...in fact, let me just pull up. Let me see if I can pull it up and put it in the...

Keith: Are these cases where you can't just swap loot that you thought about into where I've decided to check instead of where it actually is?

Austin: That's not...why would it be there? Why would, when you go to a temple to a rat god, would you find—

Keith: Right.

Austin: —the same loot there that would have been in the fight against the wax people, the turpentine or the resin people?

Keith: Well, that's— obviously that's a case where it would not apply.

Austin: Yes, yes.

Keith: That's what I'm asking. Are there cases where you can just slide it over?

Janine: Like coins, and you just decide what kind of stuff's on the coin.

Keith: Sure, yeah.

Austin: Yeah, but that's not fun loot in these systems.

Janine: Is there a sexy rat god on the coin? Or is there a...candle?

Austin: [chuckles] So, it's—

Art: The sexy *armor* of the rat god is on the coin. [laughs]

Austin: Please, yeah.

Janine: Right. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Austin: This didn't copy great, 'cause it came over from a Google doc, and I think it's on screen now. But here is like...here are the notes that I take before I start doing any prep for a session. What are your beats? Lyke, you know, Lye Lychen, he/him. Beats: go somewhere no one else has stepped foot for at least a century. "Some sort of heart of the house?" I've written. Help an important or influential figure in a haven—Dayward YVE. Stress: you have supplies protection. Skills: you have discern and mend. Domains: you have occult and religion. Notes: can fix something very quickly. Again, this is like step one. This is not all of my prep. This is the very beginning of prep, is who are your characters? What's going on here? Where are places that I can help? Et cetera. And starting from this, I then also— is also where I end up getting, you know, resources here, right? So when, for instance, I eventually make the pitch, the folks that you fight, the resin like creatures.

[1:20:00]

If you had dealt with them in a way that didn't eat them, for instance, you could have gotten some arcane resin from them. And that would have had the occult domain, because Lyke and— Lyke, Es, and Duvall all have the occult domain, and that means that that's something

that maybe you could put to use with a skill, right? And that comes out of sitting down like, okay, what's everything you have available to you? And so that is a big part of, on the prep side, how I do my best to make sure that there is a spread of loot for everybody. And another thing you'll just hear me do is you'll hear me just suddenly go like, "Oh, and there's also this other thing there," because even though this person did the thing, I want there to be multiple— there's enough here for multiple people. I think that came up more— of the arcs we've talked about in these Drawing Maps, that came up more in Mother-Beast where like when Dre and Jack pulled the dragon leg out of the fire, there was stuff there for multiple people if they wanted to dig into it and try to like find stuff. And that's really the thing is like if you do the verb of trying to find loot, you will find loot in this game. If you want to find resources, you will find those resources.

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: That said, Keith, you are— this is the most I've ever seen you go ham at trying to just have stuff in a game.

Keith: Right, Junk Mage. It's in the name.

Austin: Yeah, and I think— is that what your— that's your thought here, is like, I am just gonna be scavenging constantly.

Keith: Yeah. Anywhere could have—

Art: Always be junkin'.

Austin: Always be junkin'. Always.

Keith: And yeah, and it's really like...that's sort of the thing, is like, for the Junk Mage, any place could have something that's useful.

Austin: Right.

Keith: And it's like, if all I get out of it is something that's valuable but not useful to me—

Austin: Uh huh.

Keith: —then that's still great.

Austin: Right, right.

Keith: Especially because, I mean... [sighs] This kind of sucks as an answer, but I read the book, and I was like, wow, having stuff is important in this game.

Austin: [chuckles] You weren't wrong, were you?

Keith: I already like the character whose thing is about stuff.

Austin: Yeah.

Keith: And so let me just do that and keep looking, getting stuff. And I think it's kind of funny. I think, I don't know, I just think like wanting to find something somewhere is like kind of— is like a little bit funny.

Austin: Yeah.

Keith: And then it's also high level useful, so it sort of is kind of a no brainer for me to ask whenever I can.

Austin: Yeah.

Keith: And sometimes it's like, you can only have something here if you trade for it, and then it's like, ah, well, okay, well, fine.

Austin: Right. Right. Um.

Keith: And then it's about deciding, like, figuring out what are the kinds of stuff that Lyke most likes finding?

Austin: Yeah. Yeah.

Keith: And it sort of developed pretty early on that...that he likes finding...that he likes getting religious tokens from places, [laughs] because he ends up being in a lot of places that have religious tokens.

Austin: Right.

Keith: And it's like, ah, I might as well, you know.

Austin: Grab some stuff from here.

Keith: These gods are real. Like, this stuff could come in handy.

Austin: [laughs] Right. And I think it's interesting, because I don't know that we've— I can't remember if we've seen it yet. Has anyone paid for anybody else's stuff yet? Anyone like, picked up someone's healing before or anything like that?

Keith: You mean from a— sorry, you mean from another PC?

Art: I don't think that happened.

Austin: Yeah.

Keith: No.

Austin: I wonder if it will at some point, because...there are times when I know player characters need a resource to do a thing, for instance. And either for healing or for something else where it's like, oh, I want to use ability, but I don't have a *blank* resource. I would like to live in the world in which like, you know, Chine has the eat a thing to get a resource thing. And for Chine to be like, "Hey, does anyone have a technology resource for me to chew on real quick?" you know? I don't think that's happened yet.

Keith: [chuckles] Let me chew on your wires?

Austin: And I do think— [chuckles] yeah. I do think that that's partly because of the way the system...the way resources feel like they exist only on your sheet and not in like a social space, you know? But.

Keith: Yeah. I think I offered...I think there was a situation in the most recent arc—

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Keith: —that I offered...it didn't end up happening, I don't think, but I think I offered something to someone for this, and we did something else instead. So.

Austin: Yeah, that makes sense.

Keith: I'm being vague, but that— because I don't know where people are, but I don't think that's a spoiler.

Austin: No, I think you're good. I think you're right.

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: There was a part of what Luke asked, also, was like, well how do people get paid in the Blackwick Group, blah blah blah. You know, the Blackwick Group exists in Blackwick which exists in Sangfielle and explicitly in a part of Sangfielle that is still very much has the touch of Aldomina on it. You know, this was a city that the Empress was go— or a town the Empress was going to visit at some point. They get paid with, as far as we've seen, company scrip and with rent money being paid for them—

Keith: Mm-hmm.

Austin: —and, you know, a couple meals a day from the nearby, you know, automat or whatever. They are not working for Kay'Va, you know? They are not working for the communist seahorses here. I think that they are—

Keith: Can I say, though, that talking about the automat in this season has made me want to go to one really bad?

Austin: I want to go to one so bad. I want to go to one so bad. [Keith laughs]

Janine: Mmm.

Austin: Art, do you know if the one on St. Mark's—

Art: There used to be one on St. Mark's. Is it still there?

Austin: Yeah, I was gonna ask you. I was asking *you* if the automat on St. Mark's is still there.

Art: Well, I haven't lived in New York for...thirteen years now.

Austin: Nah, it seems like it's...it looks like it might be closed.

Keith: The last time I saw one was in New York, and it was not a very good one, but.

Austin: Mmm. Yeah.

Keith: I like declined to get a burger from there.

Austin: Yeah, this seems like—

Keith: Even though it was exciting.

Austin: Yeah, this closed— ah, wow, this closed in uh... [typing] Oh, wait, that was 2009 that one closed. Jesus. What?

Janine: Automat makes return in Jersey City with modern twist.

Austin: I lived in Jersey City. I'm alright.

Janine: Says an article here.

Austin: I'm not going.

Keith: What's the modern twist?

Janine: You don't want to go to an automat in Jersey City? I don't know.

Keith: Oh, this is the one.

Janine: I clicked, and it's a video, so fuck off.

Keith: I just found it.

Austin: Apparently, there is a...

Keith: Bamn! That's what it was called.

Austin: There's an East Village dumpling shop. Hey, it's near St. Mark's. So, that's an auto— it's a dumpling automat. 32 different kinds of dumpling.

Art: I'm in!

Austin: Let's go. Honestly?

Art: I'm gonna be in town at the end of September.

Austin: Let's fucking go. Everyone come down.

Keith: I found the automat that I didn't go to, and it was called a Bamn!

Austin: Yeah, I think that— yes. Yes. I've been— I've walked past it. That's the one that's on St. Mark's. Keith, the one that you're talking about is the one that—

Keith: Oh, it is?

Austin: That is on St. Mark's.

Keith: The pink one?

Austin: Yeah, Bamn! Automat.

Keith: Okay.

Austin: Yeah, yeah. St Mark's Place. Yep.

Keith: These look— this looks better than when I was in there. Maybe I should have gotten some. [Austin chuckles] But it's also the pictures on the website, so.

Austin: Yeah, this looks okay. This looks fine.

Janine: Do you think, like...do you think like the last people who are really invested in automats for a while, like COVID came around and they were like, [disappointed] “Man! We coulda done— like we coulda—” I feel like an automat is more COVID friendly than most dining.

Austin: This is— the article I'm reading about this dumpling one is explicitly them saying they're betting on the automat for its pandemic survival.

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: Yeah. So.

Art: I think we should open an automat.

Austin: [??? 1:27:03]

Art: We should stop doing a podcast.

Austin: No. What? No.

Art: We should—

Austin: I'm not good at this. I'm not— no. [chuckles] This is the thing I'm not good at.

Keith: What, you're not gonna making dumplings or you're not good at running a restaurant?

Austin: Either. [Keith chuckles] Neither. Alright. One second here. Let's load this back up.

Keith: Frenzy for Brooklyn dumplings—

Austin: There we go.

Keith: Dumpling shop's automat model.

Austin: There's the closed bracket.

Art: Think of it like making a theme restaurant of your own life.

Austin: No. Ugh, ew. [Art laughs] Absolutely not. Alright, we've closed the bracket. Now we can keep moving. [Keith laughs] Uh, Art. Do you want to use this? Do you want to hit this one?

Art: I just did that one. That's how we got the bracket aside.

Keith: I think it's me. I think we were gonna do me next.

Austin: Alright. Here you go, Keith.

Keith: Okay, so...okay. Arp:

Austin gets to describe NPCs all the time. Thank you for the food.

Keith: I don't know that means. Is that from— is that—?

Austin: You don't know what "thank you for the food" means? [Janine laughs]

Keith: I literally do not remember anything that happens in *Friends at the Table*.

Austin: If I said— If I— no, no, no, no, no, no, no. Like, internet colloquialism. Thank you for the food.

Keith: Oh! Okay. Now I get it. I thought this was a reference to a fun NPC [Austin laughs] who was grateful for some food. [Austin and Janine laugh] Okay, I get it. I get it. I'm sorry.

Austin gets to describe NPCs all the time (thank you for the food), but PCs don't get the convenience of fresh introductions to prompt visual details. Now that y'all have had more time playing them, if you were describing your character for the first time, would anything be different or new? And yes, I'm a fan artist fishing for details—sorry—but I'm not at all asking for complete descriptions that would ruin the joy of character design for anybody, just a little material to work with if there is any.

Janine: I have a big answer for this.

Keith: Oh, that's great. You can answer for you and it'll count for me.

Janine: [laughs] Oh, this one specifically does not. Um. This is a thing that came up where like, I had this conversation with Austin like a few weeks ago.

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: And, Austin, you were like, you should maybe clarify this.

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: Es's eyeball form is sexy. [laughs] Like, it's not like...I mean, it's monstrous. It's an eye. It's a big eyeball.

Austin: But you— right.

Janine: It's a person-shaped eyeball, but like the silhouette should... [laughs] should be hot?

Austin: You're saying, like, is curvy.

Janine: I don't know, like—

Art: No, no, no.

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: Sorry, like conventionally— sorry, I should— I'll clarify.

Austin: Yeah, you mean conventionally.

Keith: Right.

Austin: You don't mean like, I wanna fuck that—

Janine: Is like, conventionally—

Austin: Uh huh.

Janine: It's like a conventionally...not a mud flap silhouette, but like, you know, Es is a person who—

Austin: But close enough that you had to say...

Keith: Kinda.

Austin: [chuckles] My mud flap silhouette is answering a lot of questions. [Janine laughs] Or, raising a lot of questions. You know what I'm saying.

Janine: But like, Es, you know, wears corsets and bustles and things that enhance that kind of sort of stereotypical silhouette.

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Janine: That stereotypically sort of Victorian high femme.

Austin: Right.

Janine: Like, that's the thing, and I don't think she loses that with the eyeball form.

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Janine: And I definitely failed to explain that, I think.

[1:30:00]

Austin: I did not understand at all. I was like, deadass, really, truly imagining it as a...

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: Am I the only person here who's played *We Know the Devil*? Is that...probably I am.

Keith: I have not played it.

Austin: Well, that ends with some characters taking on incredibly monstrous forms. They're also meant to be powerful embodiments of the self in a way that one might describe as, to the other characters— and other characters in that world might say “That character is sexy to me.”

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Austin: But they are meant to be more...they are meant to be monstrous in the MegaTen angel monster, the— or really not the MegaTen angel monster. The biblical angel, you know, that style of monster.

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: And you're that, but you're also, like, a hot babe.

Janine: You know, so... [sighs] You know, again, I want to qualify this in a couple different ways, 'cause I don't want to just be like, yeah, she's sexy.

Austin: Yes.

Janine: And assume this is what sexy means.

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: Like all of that crap. Fuck it. But, you know, I think sort of half of this is like there is a psychosexual component.

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Janine: Which is just like, an aesthetic...there's a certain aesthetic I'm pursuing there.

Austin: Yes.

Janine: And the other half of it is that like, for me, there is an underlying part of Es—and this is sort of how I negotiate why she prefers she/her but also uses they/them—

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Janine: Is that like she is in sort of a stage of deciding, like, oh actually, I really like this high femme presentation. I really like femininity. I really feel better like this than I do, you know, when I— when my host is presenting differently. So, because her true form is all about perception and value and things like that, part of what she believes or part of what she values and part of what she values in being perceived, which is her whole thing—

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Janine: That's the whole eye thing, is she wants to be perceived, is that sort of archetype I guess—

Austin: Right.

Janine: That she's identifying with and starting to increasingly pursue as she sort of, um...matures as a heritrix, right? Like, she's finding that identity rather than...than not having it.

Austin: Yeah. Yeah. That notion—

Janine: So that's part of why it's like, the silhouette is important to that.

Austin: Yes. It is...in the same way— it is fashion in a real way. It is form that you've decided you want to pursue.

Janine: Yeah. Yes.

Austin: Yeah. That makes sense.

Keith: For what it's worth, I did picture the body as being— the eyeball as being human shaped but an eyeball, but failed to consider how sexy that eyeball may or may not be. [Janine laughs]

Austin: Yeah. Right.

Janine: I'm glad I had the chance to correct it.

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: To right this wrong. I'll be clearer next time.

Austin: Thank you.

Janine: And describe the eyeball form, [chuckles] and be like, “Hey, everyone, just so you know: the eyeball monster is a smokeshow.”

Austin: Right. [laughs] Right. Deal with it.

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: Wants to be perceived, also is a tool of perception.

Janine: Yes.

Austin: Any other people— uh, following that, any Lyke or Duvall updates here?

Art: Really hard to follow that. I just gotta, uh...

Austin: Well...yeah.

Art: Just say that.

Austin: Let me prompt you just sort of thinking. You know where this next adventure is gonna be. Think about what like seaside wear would be for your characters, and—

Art: Well, and I'm about to take the move that replaces my entire body.

Austin: Ah. [Janine laughs] Well, think about that then, too, I would say.

Art: Where your body, instead of being made out of mostly flesh stuff, is made out of mostly hive stuff.

Austin: Mm-hmm. Right.

Keith: I would say my body's all flesh stuff, no hive. For me.

Janine: [??? 1:33:58]

Art: Yeah, see, that's the contrast I'm drawing here.

Austin: Sexy or not?

Art: [brief pause] Um, I think that's the thing. When remade in the hives, the—

Austin: Right.

Art: Duvall's body becomes just a— just gets a Pixar mom dump truck ass, I think is the... [all laugh]

Austin: Damn!

Art: The change that we gotta make there.

Austin: Good. Good to know. I love this.

Art: Yeah. So like, waxy and papery, and just like, boom! [trailing off] I don't know, yeah.

Austin: Okay. Yeah, boom, got it. [Janine chuckles] Fantastic.

Art: Yeah.

Austin: Alright. That is it. That's the final question. [Austin and Art laugh]
Tipsatthetable@gmail.com is the web address, the email address to send questions in. Our next one of these will be for the, uh...what did we call that, the Yellowfield one? Was it just called...I know the current one is What Happened at Bell— oh, "The Candle Factory." The Candle Factory arc. That was a fun arc. I like that arc a lot. Send those questions in. Uh, I don't like the beginning of that arc a lot, and we'll talk about that at the beginning of the next arc. I had like a whole— the next Drawing Maps.

Keith: Which arc do you not like the beginning of?

Austin: "The Candle Factory," the next one that we're gonna do this for, which we'll try to do next week at some point. And we'll talk about that on that episode. Send in your questions about "The Candle Factory" to tipsatthetable@gmail.com. As a reminder, that will be Janine, Dre, Ali, and Jack, I believe? Is that right, Janine?

Art: Is Jack in both?

Janine: No, was it...

Austin: Yeah, 'cause this is number— this is— oh, I guess it wasn't Jack. No.

Janine: Oh.

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: No, no, no, you're right.

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: Who's the— oh, Sylvi. It was Sylvi. That was a Virtue game.

Janine: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah.

Austin: Yes. Yes, yes, yes, yes. There was a— there is a train knight, there's a Shape Knight in that arc. It is not Pickman. Yes. So Sylvi, Ali, Janine, and Dre.

Keith: Wow. There's a ton of Shape Knights. There must be a lot of them.

Austin: I mean, they're all over the place. This was a single one, you know? The headline doesn't— uh, Drawing Maps. Use Drawing Maps in the subject, so there you go. Alright, until next time. I hope everyone has a good remainder of their Sunday. I hope everyone's week is good. Friendsatthetable.cash is the address to go support the show. We will talk to you all in the future.