

Tips at the Table Episode 01: Let's Not Name Names (+ Huge Thanks!)

Transcriber [Rokar- 0:00:00 to 0:54:16]; Cole to finish

Austin: Welcome to Tips at the Table. This is the advice podcast that our backers over on Patreon, our patrons over on Patreon, have allowed us to do because they've backed us at such a high level. If you're listening to this, you're one of those people. So, I'm not going to waste any time trying to sell you on what we do, except to say that there is another group of people who are watching us live right now. People who, I'm looking in the chat right now, who are saying things like 'critical games discussion,' 'critical answer building,' 'I'm excited for tips,' says gg_basilisk(?). And those are people who are backing us at a level that give them access to listen to this right now. If that sounds like something that you are interested in: watching this live, interacting with us a little bit, maybe asking us some questions via the chat; there is a level that you can back us at there, so give that a look.

Art: If you're listening to this thinking 'this is a little too tight-'

Austin: That's what you're thinking.

Art: '- a little too together...'

Austin: 'Too together, too built up, too perfect.' I'm Austin Walker, the GM of Friends at the Table and joining me for this first episode, this inaugural episode, Arthur Tebbel.

Art: Hey, I'm Art Martinez-Tebble, you can find me on Twitter-

Austin: Fuck!

Art: -[@atebbel](#).

Austin: Fuck! I wrote it!

Art: It's okay.

Austin: I wrote it the right way somewhere else! And now I feel like an asshole.

Art: I saw it. I saw it. You wrote it on the Twitch page. You did great.

Austin: It's right here; it says 'Art Martinez Tebbel,' on the Twitch page. It says it. And **Janine** Hawkins.

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

Austin: So, part of the reason I got your last name wrong, Art, is that I've known you for a decade. No, we graduated a decade ago. Fuck. Uh....

Art: Yeah, so it's more like, more like, lucky thirteen here huh?

Austin: Yeah, at least. Something like that. And then, **Janine**, I've known you for even longer. And so, I kind of wanted to kick things off with, one: two people who I've known... forever, and two: one person who I kind of got my own feet wet playing games years and years and years ago; and somebody else who's kind of just starting with this type of roleplaying. Because I know that the people who listen to us come from all sorts of backgrounds when it comes to RPGs, including lots of people who have never played... any sort of RPG. So, I'm actually going to start with something else, which is- or not something else, something similar, which is I want to know, and this comes from Alex, **'For every Friend at the table, what has been your favorite character you've played in a non-recorded RPG, and what made them your favorite?'** I'm gonna pop that over here, actually, so people can see it.

Art: Oh my g-

Austin: Let's start with you, Art. Since I know, since I know... some of those characters at least.

Art: Yeah, this is that gotcha journalism we were talking about-

Austin: [laughs]

Janine: [laughs]

Art: -in the pre-roll.

Austin: Uh huh.

Art: I mean it's, it's the answer I wish wasn't true, but it's, it's Shosuro Mitsuru from our L5R game. It's just my most indulgent..... self in that character. That like, hand-wringy, secret plans...

Austin: Who? Art, people don't know who that is. I know who Shosuro Mitsuru is.

Art: Alright. Yeah, you're right. I should, I should do better.

Austin: [laughs]

Janine: [laughs]

Art: I don't where to start. Like, so there's Legend of the Five Rings, which is a, a magical, feudal Japanese... world that is a card game and a roleplaying game. And it's, it's super problematic, but we were very young then.

Austin: We were. We liked samurai a lot because of course we did. And also ninjas.

Art: Yeah, uhm. No, I'm super excited for that game coming back, even though I know it's horrible. I should show you the T-shirt I had commissioned for it.

Austin: Oh boy. Okay.

Art: [chuckles] We're not doing that now though. That's-

Austin: I got an email today about something L5R related; we'll talk about it in the future. But, but for now... Uh huh.

Art: Alright, alright, yeah. Uhm, so, our first game we did was during a period in the game called the 'Clan War,' which is when the 2nd edition of the game was officially set. The Legend of the Five Rings had an ongoing interactive storyline, so there was like, this real desire to be like, current-

Austin: Uh-huh

Art: Or like, bleeding edge on it. And it's, it's a terrible idea. They were really right in the 1st edition when they set it before the events of the card game cause everything just gets crazy.

Austin: Yeah.

Art: Like it goes to, it goes to, it goes to Wackytown in a hurry.

Austin: [laughs] Excuse me, where does it go?

Art: It goes to Wackytown.

Austin: I'm not familiar.

Art: Uhm, yeah. I mean this is where I really wish I spoke Japanese well enough to be like, 'Well, here's Wackytown' in Japanese. But I'm, I'm not even close.

Austin: [amused] Don't worry, the people who named characters in Legend of the Five Rings didn't speak Japanese either.

Art: Yeah, it would just be like 'Wock-E-Town-O'

Austin: [laughs] That is about right.

Art: [laughs] Uh-

Austin: Luckydicekirby in the chat says 'Oh, is Wackytown the other name for Bluff City?'

Janine: [laughs]

Art: [laughs]

Austin: Uh, close enough.

Art: Yeah, and so it was, it was my first Legend of the Five Rings character was Shosuro Mitsuru. A Scorpion Clan ninja, who was hiding out because the Scorpion Clan had been disbanded following their attempt to assassinate the emperor-

Austin: Uh huh

Art: -At the Scorpion Clan Coup, the event that kicked off the Clan War.

Austin: Of course.

Art: Uhm, yeah. As everyone knows. And this, of course, led to the dark god Fu Leng replacing the Hante Emperor and the Day of Thunder. And us and our group-

Austin: The second, the second, the Second Day of Thunder.

Art: The Second Day of Thunder. Sorry.

Austin: Sorry. Yeah, you know, and-

Art: Uh... no disrespect to the original thunders.

Austin: They're incredible. What incredible thunders they are.

Art: Uh-huh. Uhm, I wish I remembered like, the names of the, the more obscure ones. Cause like, I wanted to like, like, get some cred right there, but I wanted to know the name of the Crane one. I couldn't remember.

Austin: Oh, I'm trying to pull it and I can't. Who knows? Anyway, continue. Tell me about Mitsuru.

Art: Well, Mitsuru was a, was a ninja. And he was hiding out as a Phoenix. And uhm, eventually the party had to find that out. Uh, he had a twin brother who, uhm, was disguised as, uhm, who along with a very powerful like, magical prodigy were disguised together and were unbeknownst to Mitsuru accompanying him on this journey. Uhm-

Austin: You remember way more of this than me.

Art: Yeah... uhm. I think, I think I've like.... Yeah I think like, you know more about this stuff than I do. But like, I was like, I thought about all of that a lot back then.

Austin: I remember. We used to stay up late nights like... not plotting, but like, talking through what's Mitsuru's like, plans were, and why he was the way he was. And-

Art: Yeah, which is like, bad, bad play.

Austin: Yeah... It is. It was then especially because that game was huge. That game was like, eight people by the end of the second season of it. Uhm, and-

Art: Yeah, it's funny thinking of it as seasons now.

Janine: [laughs]

Austin: But I did then too, right? Because we like, finished the first arc, we finished that first huge game in a semester, and then we came back the next year, and was like: Alright, Second Season! I, like, it was a frame story. Like, there is so much Friends at the Table in that L5R game. Like, the second season of that L5R game was you were playing descendents of your original characters. Or some of you were anyway.

Art: Yeah.

Austin: And were finding artifacts and like ephemera. That were like, uhm, like little like, you know, diaries and talking to people and hearing stories from them. And then you would switch back to your old character sheets and play those, like play out this like, the secret history of your previous characters. Uhm-

Art: Yeah.

Austin: And like, that's... part of I think what happened there was that you and I just, we were already really good friends, but like, working through that character made us incredibly tight. But also meant that when it came time to sit down at the table, we knew more about that, those characters than the ones that we didn't have those conversations with.

Art: Well, and the horrible unintended consequence of that was that for the second year, everyone wanted that level of-

Austin: Right.

Art: -secret planning. And that's when we got to like-

Austin: Yeah.

Art: -that's when we found out that the second year I did not play a Scorpion, and a few people did. And they became the worst.

Austin: It, was a lot. There was... there was a bottle that was thrown at me once. It was good. This is good-

Art: How do you-

Janine: What?!?

Art: Yeah. Oof. Mm.

Austin: Uhm-

Janine: Glass or plastic?

Art: I mean-

Austin: Plastic, but it had, it was filled with water-

Janine: Uhm, okay.

Austin: It was filled with water. Uh, or it was soda so-

Janine: Cap on or cap off?

Austin: So-

Art: Yeah. But like, that's what. That's not. That's not the fault...

Austin: [laughs] No.

Art: That's being twenty years old. Right? That's like-

Austin: Yes. Yes. Uh, but what it's the fault of is that, uh, uh. And the thing that if I could go back and change is. Alright, so one of the rules we set with Friends at the Table from the jump, and, and people who've listened from the jump will know this, is that I said, 'No pull asides'. No 'I'm telling one player this thing'.

Art: Yeah.

Austin: We're going to all buy in to dramatic irony. We're all going to recognize that we do not have perfect information as characters. My NPCs are not going to act as if they have perfect information. And you as players aren't. And that's largely because I've played the game in which every five minutes, a player wanted to take me into another room so that we could talk about what their character knew that other people didn't. And that bred a degree of competition at the table that was not positive. So-

Art: Yeah. Uh, just to address something in the chat. Which is Nicknomic says that 'so the advice here is: this is my favorite character, and don't play like this?'

Austin: [laughs]

Art: -And I think what I'm really saying is like, you should definitely do that once.

Austin: [laughs]

Art: You should find-

Janine: [laughs]

Art: -the most self-indulgent thing you can do, and do it for like, three years.

Austin: In the end-

Art: Or less.

Austin: -didn't Mitsuru become like important? I like, vaguely remember?

Art: No. Mitsuru like, Mitsuru like, vanished. Like, he was important, and then we had to kill Matt's character, and then he like-

Austin: Oh, that arc was so good!

Art: -disappeared into the Unicorn. Yeah.

Austin: Matt was really good. We had a player named Matt, a good friend of mine, who was willing to play a doomed character. And I think Matt's character is almost a proto-Hadrian in some senses, Art.

Art: Uhm.

Austin: In that he was like, he was the Lawful Good in a party of mischief makers-

Art: Yeah.

Austin: -and knew to play that as like, he knew that the camera wouldn't frame him as a good guy. He understood that like, 'Oh, this is not going to go well for me. The world-'

Art: Yeah.

Austin: 'does not adhere to my standards. And that does not mean that I will change the world, it means that the world will get rid of me.' Uhm, and, that, he played it that way. That wasn't just

a true thing; he played into it in a really great way and like, let it happen when it was time. You know? He, it was good.

Art: I was going to say like, and part of the reason this character resonates with me so much is like, I played that character more than any other. And I guess that's not going to be true soon. I think we're, Hadrian's probably gettin' those miles on his odometer, too.

Austin: Yeah. [chuckles] He's gettin' up there.

Art: But I also think about Hadrian all the time. You know, I have, I have, there's shit I think about him that I never say out loud. You know?

Austin: Yeah. We have-

Art: Characters are hard.

Austin: -those conversations just way less, right. Uhm, we have-

Art: Well, It's less 'This is my secret plan' and more like, 'What about, what about this is just like a true fact about the world?'

Austin: Right. Totally. Janine, who's your favorite character you've ever roleplayed?

Janine: [amused] I don't know how to answer this. It feels like a trap. Uhm-

Austin: [laughs]

Art: [laughs]

Austin: I didn't ask the question. Shout-outs to Alex for asking this question.

Janine: I mean [sighs], this is such like, this is a really new tabletop player answer to give, but-

Austin: Yes.

Janine: So, a thing that I did, that people who've followed me on Twitter for a while know that I did this. Like, people who've followed me from Streamfriends times and whatever, know that I did this. But uhm, people who didn't, don't know that when I was playing Dragon Age: Inquisition, sorry, I... did an illustrated journal, the whole time that I was playing. Right up until the uh, Trespasser. I actually haven't finished those pages. But for the bulk of the game, I did like, fifty some odd pages, where it was like, text and watercolor illustrations of things I thought were important to the character I was playing, I guess. Like, I didn't start out that way, but I, I started out thinking like, 'Oh, this will be, not in character, not out of character, just stuff that I want to remember' or whatever.

Austin: [chuckles]

Janine: And it totally turned into, this like, way of getting it into... that character's head in a way that the game didn't quite allow. Like, it made me think a lot about... when I was choosing how to convert the garden or whatever. It made me think of what that meant in the world. When I was choosing what mount... I was gonna play with, it wasn't just-

Austin: Wait.

Janine: -like, 'Mya, I feel like riding a horse with a fun hat on today.' Like, it was, very-

Austin: Give me an example. Wait. Like, what's a mount you decided you had to ride as?

Janine: Well-

Austin: Also, what's your character's name?

Janine: The character's name was Iona.

Austin: Uh huh.

Janine: She was the Daelish Inquisitor, and she was a mage, so she was the Keeper of her clan. Which made her a natural candidate as the leader of the Inquisition. Because she already knew how to take care of her own.

Austin: Uh-huh. [chuckles]

Janine: [laughs]

Art: [chuckles]

Janine: So. But, for the mount example, a thing that I found myself doing once I had a choice of mounts was... when I was going to places like Val Royeaux... Or, I don't know if actually Val Royeaux lets you have a mount; I don't remember. But if I was going to like, really, densely human populated areas... I would have her pick the special armoured Inquisition horse.

Austin: Uhmmm

Janine: Because it would be familiar-

Art: Uhmmmm

Janine: -but also kind of intimidating. And be like, ya know, this is the presence that she's putting forward. But when she's going to like, the Emerald Graves and stuff like that and areas that are more wilderness or have a more Elven presence, that's when she's riding The Hart.

Austin: Right.

Janine: Because that's the, that's more her, like, natural... not her natural state, but like, that's her comfort zone, and she's in a place that her comfort zone isn't going to cost her any sort of social currency.

Austin: It-

Janine: That's the shit that I was thinking about because of this, this journal.

Austin: Was it-

Art: That's a fantastic answer. I don't know why you're even a little bit [chuckles]

Austin: So, it was actually-

Janine (quietly): Did you play Dragon Age, uh...

Austin: -this stuff that was part of why I wanted to run Dungeon World for you to begin with. I don't know if you remember that.

Janine: I do. I actually had forgotten that, but you mentioned it in the Q&A. And I was like, 'Oh right that was-'

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: '-a thing that was going to happen. And then I wussed out.'

Austin: You wussed out.

Janine: Cause I was too self-conscious.

Austin: Ah... well, there's another question in here that we'll get to eventually that's about, about this. And I, I also... did not do a great job of pitching that we should play this game. And we'll, again we'll talk about that once... once we get to that question. Uhm. But yeah. Like, for me, it's like I recognized, like, 'Oh, you really want more blank spaces.' Like, you're finding as many as there are in this video game-

Janine: [laughs] Yeah. Yeah.

Austin: But I bet you could find more if we could just open up a whole world and like, roll some dice. So, yeah. That was, that's good. I don't know what my own answer is to this-

Janine: [chuckles]

[0:15:00]

Austin: Because I think of a very similar thing to Art, which is like, 'I want to choose the indulgent character.' Which was. [sighs] Xanat- Xanatos Woodshymn. The Elven.... Bard?

Art: [stifling chuckles]

Janine: Even I know that name.

Austin: Who was-

Art: [laughs]

Austin: Who fought for kobold rights and wound up being the descendent or like, the avatar of the god of Elves. But who like, didn't like Elves in any way. And it ended up being like a whole... It- [sighs] Art and I played in a game in college that was... very influential in the way I think about telling stories with role-playing games-

Art: Huhmm

Austin: -And also very influential in the way that I think about how to... deal with people in my life. Uhm-

Art: [laughs]

Austin: And not always for good reasons. We were all very young.

Art: Yeah.

Austin: Except for the GM who was older than all of us. Uh, and there was just like, a very weird table dynamic. Very weird table dynamics. That were caught up with the personal relationships between people, as much as they were the relationships between characters. Like, a deep... deep interest in what the characters were and who they were. That is where I learned to stay up late, talking to my friends about like, what my character was thinking. Like, I did that with that GM the way in the same way that Art, you and I did it with Mitsuru. Uh- and I did it-

Art: Yeah. We were better though.

Austin: Yeah, of course... And then I did it with one of the other players, who I ended up dating. Uh, and then would later throw a bottle at me. Uhm- [laughs]

Janine: Huhmmm

Austin: But like, as those characters-

Art: [chuckles]

Austin: -uhm, this sounds different than what I mean. Before we were dating, just lots of like, 'Oh, this world is so interesting. Like, I want to know about your character. What would your character do if x?' 'What would your character do if Y?' Back and forth. And it was like, again very indulgent and very much in like... I didn't know.... I didn't know a thing that was like, 'What is your armor class?' could do this other thing, which is 'What do these myths mean, really?'

Art: Sure.

Austin: Like, not just 'What do they mean?,' but 'what do they mean? What does it mean to be the descendent of the Elven god who doesn't want to be related to the Elven god or doesn't want anything to do with Elves at all,' right? So that's like, my gut answer. But more recently I think, I had a lot of fun playing a character named Smith July in a Apocalypse World game run by Adam Koebel, who co-wrote Dungeon World. And what's interesting is that I was playing that character. He was a, he was a, a hit man and a... singer. I guess he was kinda both. He was kind of a lounge singer and a hit man in a flooded, post-apocalyptic, I think Pacific Northwest? And was in... a really... complex relationship with a character who had the ability to like, not brainwash people, but like, influence them psychically. And that relationship was really interesting to play, because I was playing with someone who... I didn't know super, super well. But who I trusted almost immediately to go into some complex... like, relationship dynamics. And then also, because I got to look up pop songs, and turn them into... croons basically. Like, there was definitely a moment, I don't know if this ever actually game to be, but like, that I like planned out an entire song around... uh, uhm... what is that Lorde song? That is like, 'the Lorde song'?

Art: Royals?

Austin: Royals. But it was like, 'Oh, but what if Royals was like sung by Chiwetel Ejiofor as a hitman, in like a lounge style? And it was actually about how the party was killing a local warlord'? Uhm, it was really fucking good.

Art: [chuckles]

Austin: I really loved playing that character for other indulgent reasons. And then I got a job. I got a job at Giant Bomb, and I had to... not play because that game happened on Tuesday afternoons. And you can't be like, 'Hey, thanks for the new job. Love it. But uh, quick thing. For the next like eight weeks I need to not be here on Tuesday afternoons.'

Art: [laughs]

Austin: So. Really great, really great session. That's up somewhere. I think on the Roll20 Youtube or something? And one of the reasons I liked him is how the party reacted when he left. There was a really, I'm not going to spoil it, but there's a really great way that the character was

written off that took my own disappearance into account in a really good way. So go, go watch that stuff.

Art: Whereas like, I would really want it to be the most hack-y thing possible. It's like, 'Oh, that character was just blown up by a Giant Bomb.'

Austin: Right. Right.

Art: Wink, wink.

Austin: Totally.

Janine: [chuckles]

Austin: So, uh, that's a tough one. Okay. So, I'm going to hit some other questions briefly that Alex also sent in. We got a lot of questions, but uh... this is one of the, that first one is so good I'm gonna save it and make sure everybody answers it. But the rest of these, I'm probably just going to have people answer... this time. So, Alex also asks **'As a long time player, but first time GM, I'm worried about being able to juggle so many actors while keeping the pace up, without spending the entire session fumbling. What advice does Austin have for transitioning from a reactive roleplaying experience to a proactive one?'**

I think you will have heard me get better about this over the last couple of years. Push. It's hard because you don't want to railroad, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't push. There are times when what you need to do is... say... 'Okay, this thing happens.' You know, one of the rules that are in a lot of the Powered by the Apocalypse games, but I think that, honestly, this should be true regardless of system that you're ru- maybe not regardless, but in a lot of systems is... 'When there is quiet at the table, introduce an element that forces people to act.' Think about whatever your characters are. Think about what their beliefs or their bonds are. Think about ways of testing those things or leading those things into action. Think about, you know, you talk about how moves snowball? Think about things that were already in motion in a previous scene or in a previous session. Suddenly reintroduce an NPC from a year ago, or six months ago, or from three sessions ago. They just run into that person again, and that, and I promise that will raise a bunch of questions.

So, just like throw something at the wall when you realize that something is not happening, and that will at the very least [sighs] push them to do a thing. There's a whole other line of, you know, it depends on why they're not doing something. And in downtime, you can figure out what to do around... why the group was being... you know, was not necessarily giving you space to be proactive or was doing the opposite and was giving you too much space and you didn't know what to do there. And so like, I guess the third thing here is to have the right sort of prep, there's a lot of prep questions that we'll get to eventually, either this week or some other future episode.

But, I think one of the big ones really is just, like [sighs] have prep you can pull from, not prep that only exists out in the world. Have prep that you can kind of, like, spice in. You can kind of like, 'I'm going to salt this scene with this element even though in my head, it was only going to happen when they get to the next village.' Make sure your stuff is flexible enough for that, and that will help you become way more proactive. [long pause] So, here's a question that I actually have, this is as much for y'all as for me, **'How do you handle newer, or even veteran players, who have a difficult time adjusting to the idea that role-playing games are rarely about winning against both the game itself and their fellow players?'** I'm curious what, as players, you think about this kind of feeling.

Art: I mean, it is and it isn't, right? There are so many-

Austin: [chuckles]

Art: -people who do think it is about winning, and there are so many games made for them. And I really hope that they're having fun with them.

Austin: Right. I do think that's true. First and foremost, there are games that are about winning and that have reward schedules that are built to make you feel good when you... mostly when you level up. Versus, I'll just say we just recorded a game of Fiasco last night, the first game set in Bluff City, and there's a moment in that game where someone realizes that succeeding does not necessarily feel good.

Art: Huhm

Janine: [chuckles]

Austin: And that was a really cool moment, is all I'll say. But I guess, **Janine**, what about you, as someone who first got into this for the first time this past year?

Janine: Yeah, I...this is, this is kind of... I touched on this in the post-mortem. Of like, how I approached scenes initially, and how I sort of came out of the end of season three feeling differently about things... where for me it was initially like, 'Okay, I have to solve this puzzle. I have to solve this problem.' It wasn't that I wanted to win over anyone else. Like, I wasn't thinking, 'I need to be better than Hadrian right now.'

Austin: [chuckles]

Janine: It was specifically, like, 'Here is the problem; I gotta crack it'. Like, me specifically, 'I have to crack it. It is why I'm here' or whatever.

Austin: Uh-huh

Janine: And the thing that stopped that, as I said before, was like, me understanding that it's not about the outcome so much as it's about the story.

Austin: Right.

Janine: So, on the subject of winning, it's more like... you have to define what winning actually is. Because in the context of what we do, 'winning' is telling a really good story.

Austin: Right.

Janine: It's not necessarily coming out of it great. It's not coming out of it with every character super happy... and now... have boyfriends and girlfriends and partners and everyone's got a lot of money, and everyone who shouldn't have died didn't die, and everyone who should have died did die.

Austin: Which is-

Janine: And that's not really useful to us.

Austin: Which is like, and I love Bioware games, but to some degree that is the Bioware model, right? It's like, 'Alright-'

Janine: Yeah.

Art: Yeah.

Austin: '-I checked out all the boxes. I got the best equipment. You know I got that sex scene.' Like, 'Boom. Got it all. Swish.' And like, 'Boy Corypheus is going down. That guy is a forgettable villain, but I beat the shit out of him.' And like, that's-

Janine: I read that walkthrough-

Austin: [laughs]

Janine: -so that when I had Talk B with Cullen he wouldn't dump me-

Austin: [laughs]

Janine: Et cetera, et cetera. Like-

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: Yeah.

Art: But I mean, you can tell how new Janine is, because she didn't even mention a 'Plus ten Blessed Champion.' What are we even talking about without that?

Austin: [laughs]

Art: But yeah, in like, a lot of ways we don't have the internal scoreboard cause we have an external scoreboard? Right?

Austin: Right.

Art: Which is like, how many people are listening to our show?

Austin: That's a good point actually. Right? Because we do win. We do get that feeling when it's like... I mean it's, it happens like, eight times. Right? Cause it happens like, you finish a session, and you go 'Oh, I thought this session was going to be bad, and it was good. Hohhh.' Or it's the other way, it's like 'Oh, that was really bad' and over the next week you slowly come to terms and like, 'Actually, it was pretty good, it was pretty good,' and then maybe **Jack** scores a scene you were in, and you're like, 'Holy Shit! We make something amazing!'

Janine: [chuckles]

Austin: 'How did that scene turn into this scene! This is incredible! I can't believe we make beautiful stuff!' And then that gets released, and so there is this like, reward mechanism, which is just like, 'Oh my god that scene with Benjamin. Oh my god, you know, that scene with Samol out on the shore.' And it's just like, 'Ah, yeah. Yes. It found an audience. It landed.' And I think you can have that internally, too, but it is nice for what we do that we do have that positive response from fans. And then like, and sometimes they draw it, and that's like 'Wow! Wow. Like, I can't. I'm overwhelmed. I'm like, completely overwhelmed that this thing turned into that thing.'

Art: Yeah.

Austin: So. It's, it's wild. I think about, there's a... an... For people who don't, for people who are listening on the archive, this was recorded at twitch.tv/IbexwasRight. And there's an Ibex comic of, uh, in which, it's the intro to the episode where Ibex is talking with Quentin on the Boardwalk. And it's just... beautiful. It's just like, that scene made me cr- almost cry, made me choke up while I was doing it. I -It was, it was Maggie Dreadful, thank you Imperial_Hare. @DreadfulComics on Twitter. That scene made me choke up while I was doing it. And seeing it drawn out was like, 'Oh, I don't deserve this.' And so we do, I guess, get to win. Sometimes.

Art: Yeah... but not in universe, ya know?

Austin: No! No.

Art: In universe, we're just-

Janine: [interjecting] Yeah, its like, that's what I mean is... you have to define what winning is for you.

Austin: For you.

Janine: And for us, it's telling stories that really resonate with us and with others.

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: For someone else, that's not necessarily going to be the case. Like....

Austin: Let's move on to another question. This one is actually from the uh, uh, the post-mortem from season three, but we didn't get a chance to answer it. And I want you both to, and I'll think about my own answer, and this is another one that I'm gonna to keep around for a while. This comes in from MathsBlog, I think. M-A-T-H-S-Blog, who asks, **'What's improved about your play? Where would you still like it to improve?'**

Janine: Well, I, so, I've already kinda-

Austin: You've kind of hit this, yeah.

Art: Sure.

Janine: -answered this one a few times, cause it's... and that is, I hit that a lot because that was, that's been a very significant thing for me to understand. As a person and a player and, in some context, as a character getting my head around that stuff. Uhm, I think what's also improved, or what's, what I can feel improving like, basically right in our most recent recordings. Uhm-

Austin: Uh-huh.

Janine: I think I'm getting better at being a character and less at being... just myself within certain confines.

Austin: Right, that makes sense.

Art: Sure.

Janine: I think I'm getting a little more comfortable leaning into certain attitudes and bits. And like, I'm also, I think... I'm trying to get, like, I'm actively trying to get better at this. I'm trying to get better at getting the right headspace. Because the character I'm playing in Twilight Mirage is really different from Adaire in some really fundamental ways. And it's difficult for me to not constantly make jokes and stuff-

Austin: Uh-huh.

Janine: Uh, because that immediately undermines that character. So that's, I think that's-

Austin: I think that's a huge step.

Janine: -what's in the process of improving.

Austin: Of like, 'Oh, hey, how do I not just do this, how do I not just step in front of a microphone, and think and get into the head of this one character and what they do,' but it's this, that second step of 'Okay, well how would this be different if I was someone else?'

Janine: Uh-huh.

Austin: -works backwards actually. Where it's like, you step outside so that you can see that character even better. Cause once I know, when I'm playing a character, like, even as an NPC... 'Okay, this is what-' Okay, let's say there are two characters who are shitty, right? Who are like, out for... You know, I'll use two that I actually get compared a lot, which is Snitch Nightly and Lazer Ted. Which is like, from the inside I could imagine playing them both as characters who are very similar in terms of like, they are quick-dealing. They are fast-talking. They have contacts that are always like, always don't like them. There are all of these similar qualities.

[0:30:00]

But when I step outside of either of those, when I stepped outside of Snitch Nightly and was like, 'Okay, well, who is Snitch Nightly? How is Snitch Nightly different in my own mind from Lazer Ted?' The difference is like, how far they would go to get a leg up. And Snitch would go all the way, right? I'm not convinced Snitch didn't kill his mother. You know? Like, that's, like for a buck. You know? Like, that's the thing that I realized for those two. And I do that with as many NPCs as I can when I say like 'Okay, let me not just think about this scene from this character's perspective, let me think about it from a different character's perspective.' What would, what is the difference between what Ibex would do here than Arrell, right? Especially when I was trying to figure out what Arrell was like, I thought about Ibex was a lot, and like, what the difference was.

And the answer there was the opposite. Which is like, there are times where Ibex wouldn't pull a trigger, and Arrell would. And figuring out that distinction was very important to make sure that I wasn't just retreading old ground, and also just helped me to just characterize those characters as like, 'these are antagonists who think they're doing the right thing for the world, but that doesn't mean it's the same.' It means that they actually have, they still are, there are still levels of difference in that or kinda, huge, huge, differences in that. Outside of just they want the right thing and are willing to use the wrong means to do it.

Art: Uhm, I mean to answer this, I have to like... talk about Stone Cold Steve Austin's podcast for a second.

Austin: Oh, uh-huh.

Art: Which is like, he always talks about how in a match, you have to like... If in a good match, in a match where like, you look good, you get all your shit in.

Austin: Uh-huh. Mm.

Art: And that like, I think for a long time, ya know, before the podcast and I think even earlier in the podcast, I was like, really obsessed with like, I have to get my shit in all the time.

Austin: Right.

Art: Like I have to make sure if something is happening... I'm doing something with it. So, like, you know, you know, it's, it's like, I'm mixing the Stone Cold to old Simpsons, but it's like-

Austin: [chuckles]

Art: Ya know, everyone should be asking, 'Where's Poochey?' Right?

Janine: [chuckles]

Art: Like, that I need like, like Hadiran needs to be this like focus, in a way.

Austin: Mhm.

Art: And in season three what I was really trying to do was not do it. And it helped that like, I listened to Marielda, so I was pretty sure that my stuff was gonna come up.

Austin: Right.

Janine: [chuckles]

Art: The like plot-

Austin: [chuckles] That stuff's out there. [laughs]

Art: I was gonna have some hooks to get into. Uhm, so, this season I was kinda like, 'I'm just gonna, I'm just gonna hang out. Like, when my time comes, I know that I'll be ready, and I'll get my stuff in, and it'll be good.' And when I'm waiting for that, I can kind of like, let other people do it. And I think I did a good job of that, in... Thrandir, Adaire, and Hadrian going to talk to, uh, what's his name in Old Man's Chin and in the town there-

Austin: Yeah.

Art: -about the bridge. And I think that toward the end of the season, I started to get too far the other way. And that's, I guess, that's what I want to improve-

Austin: Huh.

Art: -going forward. Is that like, I was, so I was giving everyone, I was trying to give everyone all the space they needed and trying to like, you know, make sure everyone got their time. You know, I thought it was especially important because Adaire was new, that like, 'We need five Adaire moments right away'-

Austin: [sighs] Right.

Janine: [sighs a laugh]

Art: So that everyone gets Adaire. But like, what I should have been doing was using... instead of being like, 'You can have this time; I'll just be here to support,' I should have been more like... instead of like, 'I should give Adaire space to have a moment here' I should be like... I should be pushing Adaire to have a moment here.

Austin: I think that there's definitely... By the end of that season, there was definitely... what I would have loved is that, too. Is like, I wanted to put everybody in that house, and then like, have... the house create something between people. And I needed to do a better job of being like, 'How can I pair them off in a way that will naturally push in that direction?' Or like, 'How can I have Samol ask questions that will lead there?' And instead was just kinda like, 'Alright, y'all have a bunch of time!' So, I think that's definitely a place that I can improve, is, is... Okay, I see everybody's stuff. Going back to your stuff, you know, phrase. I've gotten very good at saying like, 'How do I get this character to deal with their stuff?' And it's way harder to be like, 'How do we get these two characters to interact on this axis?'

Art: Yeah.

Austin: Especially coming off Fiasco last night and earlier in the week where it was like, 'Okay, all of this stuff is actually really great' cause there's hooks between everybody, and everybody is able to hook in and be like, 'Okay, well, we're all interested in this thing. We're all interested in that thing. This bird, let me tell you. This bird. Woof. Everybody's got something to do with this bird.' Uh, whereas there were definitely times in last season where it was like, 'Well, okay. This scene is the scene that is for Fero. This scene is the scene that is for Lem.' And that is a different thing. I think I'm doing better so far-

Art: But that's on you, and it's also on us, right? Like-

Austin: Yeah, it's on everybody.

Art: I consider I'm being like, 'Well I should do a scene with Hella because doing a scene with Hella is good and fun! and we have all of this backstory that informs what we do.' But I should also be- you know, we should also be sitting around, like, ya know, 'I really like the relationship

Hadrian that, you know, has with Throndir.' But that's so much... You know, that relationship exists more in the ether than on the page.

Austin: Right.

Art: The quote-unquote page. Like, you know, I would- I wish we had five more scenes of the two of them just talking about what it is to do good.

Austin: This season should be-

Art: But like, one, we don't have time for that, but-

Austin: This is me saying this is the season for that. Partially cause we have the momentum right now, I'm so excited about being in a season. Partially because unlike the Sprawl, the Veil is not built around missions. I've already had off the page conversations with the ship game. In which we've said, 'Okay, what does the game after this look like?' Or 'Once we finish this sequence out, what do we want to show some of in the next little bit?' And that has been really useful because it has been a way for us to conceptualize already what like, moments from when those characters can be in, not just in, quote-unquote 'in downtime,' but to stop thinking about downtime as 'downtime' and start thinking of it as just more time.

Art: Sure.

Austin: And I don't know that Hieron will ever feel like that. Like, Hieron is supposed to be a high adventure story that is like, 'I'm off doing a thing.' Though the next season, if what I have in mind for Hieron would, would allow for different party variation and, and, more what would be called 'downtime' in that game, I think. More like, hanging around in a single place and like, talking with each other, if that's a thing y'all want to explore. But at the end of the day, it has to be something you want to do. And that can be hard. Because anytime that it's like, 'Oh, Hadrian and Throndir are talking for twenty minutes.' Like, 'Alright. Well, no one else is doing shit!' So [chuckles]

Art: Yeah.

Austin: Which is tough, it's sucks to-

Janine: I, uh-

Austin: -know when to be selfish.

Janine: After we recorded the scene at Samol's place where he like, comes out and tries to talk to Adaire... like, we had a little convo there where I really felt like it was a wasted opportunity.

Austin: Right.

Janine: Like, 'Oh, I really should have had some good shit to say there.' And then I ended up turning around on that. Like, it ended up sort of like, that kind of worked and the greater... [sighs] I'm worried this goes against what you just said-

Austin: Yeah, go for it.

Janine: I don't think it does, but I think for some characters in particular, for characters like Adaire, you look back at the scenes she had in season three and like, the juicy bits don't come out when she's around other people.

Austin: Uh-huh.

Janine: And like, that's part of who she is. The juicy bits come out when something is happening to her on her own-

Austin: Right.

Janine: -and she's working through it. And like, that is, that is sometimes how that's going to go maybe for the characters- Like, I don't know that there's ever going to be some scene where Hadrian sits Adaire down and says, 'Adaire, why are you so? [chuckles] Why are you so like-'

Austin: Whatev, right. Right.

Janine: '-like, ya know, like you are? Like that?' Like that's, that would never go anywhere.

Austin: Right. Well, that's like-

Janine: With that character-

Art: But that's the like, that conversation must have happened. Like, there must be off camera stuff-

Austin: Right.

Art: -with Hadrian and Adaire. Just to like, reconcile...

Austin: That's where fanfic comes in, I think, actually-

Janine: [laughs]

Art: Sure.

Austin: -is that. And so, actually, in the chat, as_a_g says 'Honestly Austin, the best way to prepare people on a common axis is to practice by writing for crack pairing,' which is a fandom term that means like, 'very strange pairs.' Like people that shouldn't be paired together.

Janine: That's a good point.

Austin: I actually disagree with it. As someone who's written fic, and-

Janine: Really? Yeah?

Austin: -playing a game is not that. I could write-

Janine: Well... Yeah.

Austin: You've read my Arrel/Alyosha letters. Like, I can dig into two characters when I have agency over them. There's something else-

Janine: Trying to predict how another player is going to react to a situation-

Austin: A hundred percent.

Janine: -Is never good, That's never a good way to go.

Austin: It's not the same. Like, I can tell you what I think would be-

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: -a common motivator across characters. But like, that isn't the same thing as, 'Okay. I'm gonna put this thing out there. In my mind and in my practice I know that this is what Hella and Adaire will bond over and will have a really great scene over.' It won't happen. I've tried it. I've tried to put stuff down for pairs of character, trios of characters to hook on. I'm doing it now in the session that we recorded on Sunday of Twilight Mirage. And it's like, 'Okay. I'm blending these things.' I have no idea if that will go anywhere, even though in the fic I would write, trust me, Signet and Tender would have a long conversation about that shit that just happened. And-

Janine: But also, it's hard-

Austin: Totally.

Janine: -it's hard to pick up on that. Like, it's hard to-

Austin: Right.

Janine: -if you're just doing that on your own. Whereas like, I think it is a useful exercise, but it has to go somewhere. It has to be like, I don't know-

Austin: At that level-

Janine: -do you think both these characters like the same kind of ice cream?

Austin: [laughs] Right, but I think at some level it has to be driven by player action.

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: Like, I can't just say- I mean that's not true. There are games in which what you say is, 'I would like a scene with blank.' Again, Fiasco helped us with that, I think.

Janine: Uh-huh.

Austin: That's one of the reasons I'm so excited about Bluff City. It's one of the reasons I'm so excited about doing these livestream one-shots is it will get all of us in the practice of saying, 'I want a scene with blank.'

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: We haven't talked about the planetside game yet, of Twilight Mirage, but Art, there's an element of that game that I... I don't want you to just say, 'I want a scene with blank.' I want you to say like, 'I just want a shot. I want to open on a shot of my character,' whose name I almost said out loud, but I'm saving for the next episode...

Art: [chuckles]

Janine: [chuckles]

Austin: Uhm, '-here.' Or like, 'Hey, what's over there? What's at that point on the map? Can I just have a scene with my character... and Dre's character, whatever that is?' Like, I wanna just open up, we're exploring this new place. Which is gonna be a weird thing, but will help give color that we don't have already. So like, that's definitely a point that we should all improve at is like, 'I want a scene.' Y'all should tell me that. Uhm...

Janine: Yeah. Making that clear that that's an option, I think, is a big thing. Cause there is... For me as a player, I think this came up in our last recording session cause I don't like interrupting you...

Austin: Uh-huh

Janine: -uhm, when you're explaining, when you're like, talking about, when you're describing something, when you're talking about action, I don't ever want to interrupt you, but at the same time I need to act or else you're going to keep acting.

Austin: Yep. Totally.

Janine: And that often goes very bad. So...

Austin: Yeah. [chuckles]

Janine: It's one of those things where it's like, understanding the boundaries and knowing what's actually on the table is like, half the battle.

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: Of just like, 'Yeah, you can totally just request a scene' or whatever.

Austin: So, this is actually a really great question that builds off of all of this for y'all, which is from Alyssa, who says **'Hello, I've been playing tabletops for a couple of months. Part about what I love from Friends at the Table is the forward momentum of the story. A lot of that comes from the GM, but what can I do as a player to keep the story moving forward and make the game fun for everyone? There are a couple of specific situations I've run into.'** Uh, I'm going to go over all of these, but we don't have to come up with an answer for each of these necessarily. That seems like it would be a lot. **'I don't want to suck the air of the room, any advice on balancing my interest in and affection for my own characters with not stealing focus?'** I think we've answered that one a little bit, unless somebody actually has some more there.

Janine: I kind of do.

Austin: Uh okay, I don-

Janine: Which is just-

Austin: -Go ahead-

Janine: Sorry. You can continue.

Austin: [makes a noise]

Janine: I was just- It's short. It's, you often say like, 'Be fans of the players.' I think the players should also be fans of each other.

Austin: That's a good point. Totally. Get excited when somebody else has a rad scene. Like, that was a thing I had to learn when I went back to playing games with Adam was like, 'Oh, right. Like, the Woodsman is going to do a dope scene in this roll20, uh or in this Burning Wheel game.' And I need to be stoked for that. I need to be like... I have to give attention. I need to pay attention when other people are doing things because... One, it's exciting, and it will make my own play better when I have a better grasp on what they are doing. And two, it will make them better because they will have an immediate audience, right? Like, when someone is like, does some cool shit and... someone, there's an email in about Keith laughing off mic when a really funny scene is happening, even when he's not in it, and, like, that's the best feeling in the world. To land a joke, and then hear Keith fuckin just laugh...

Janine: [chuckles]

Austin: -like, from across the room is like, 'Yes!' Like, I, 'Swish!' Like, 'Yes, perfect.' Uh, so yeah. That's a really good piece of advice, **Janine**. Another thing Alyssa says is '**Keeping in the headspace of my character. Our games tend to be pretty long, three to four hours.**' Same. '**And I have trouble maintaining my character's perspective for that long, even though I'm having fun.**' Any answer for that one?

Art: Practice?

Janine: Well, yeah.

Austin: What did you say Art?

Art: Practice. I mean-

Austin: Yeah. Yeah, right.

Janine: Uh-huh.

Art: It is hard. And over long enough, you get it. And always be willing to advocate for your own breaks.

Austin: Yes! Yell at me.

Art: Yeah, and that's it, right? It is hard. It sucks, you know, sometimes. But like-

Austin: [chuckles]

Art: -I mean honestly... I think it was like, the end of Counter/Weight where I was like, 'I don't know how to-' I mean it turned out really well. But like, the end of Counter/Weight was like....

Austin: Yeah.

Art: You know...

Janine: Yeah.

Art: They say when you're like, really training for something, it's like, what you do when you're-like, you train so that when you're really tired you can do it on instinct.

Austin: Yeah.

Art: And like, that was, we were all just going on fumes then.

Austin: Uh, we-

Art: And like, that's it, right? Like.

Austin: That recording session was unbelievable. Was like... the end of Counter/Weight was us recording four days in a row, or four days inside of a week of six days or something. Uhm-

Art: Yeah.

Austin: There was one less day that week. It was, it was unbelievable. [chuckles] And it was... By the end of it, like, each session went for four or five hours. And each session was also just, really heavy because of what was happening, and we knew we were ending this, this series, this show, that season anyway. And it was just like... I don't have it. Like, I don't, I mentioned the other day, or during... maybe it was during the post-mortem, I don't remember, but like.... I, oh it was in the chat, the fan discord. I almost ended that season. I almost made Counter/Weight two seasons after... it was either Animal Out of Context or it was right after Animal Out of- I think it was Animal Out of Context. It was like, 'I don't know what the fuck to do after this. How, what am I supposed to do? Like that, what if we just end this on Ibex's speech and we'll come back to this in a year? I don't know what the fuck to do.' And then like, that exhaustion was times a thousand for that end, endgame. And we should have taken more breaks. We should have spread that out over a couple of weeks. Like, a hundred percent.

Art: Yeah.

Austin: Be your own advocate.

Art: Well, and we did two pickups, and it really helped. Right? Like, there was, ya know, the Cass and Aria conversation was a pickup. And the end, the Four and the Ship, that was a pickup. Like, I think that helped a lot, cause it like, cause that was new. We were fresh when we recorded those.

Austin: Yeah.

Art: And those were things that needed to happen.

Austin: Yeah. Totally.

[0:45:00]

Janine: Um. I was just going to say that, my sort of like, super practical advice for this is like... I have little routines. Like I, when we're playing, I have an iPad, and I'm always taking notes.

Austin: Mm.

Janine: And part of that note taking process involves setting up the notes beforehand. Like, I've got a notebook for each character, and I have a few like, lines and stuff that I'll bring over. With

Adaire, especially at the beginning, it was a lot of like, problem solving stuff like 'Here's some ideas to try, and here's all your holds' and shit like that.

Austin: Mhm.

Janine: But it would also be a couple of throwaway phrases like, uh, I think the one I used most was, 'Don't be afraid to be a weasel.'

Austin: Uh huh.

Janine: Uhm. And so that would be at the start of all my notes for every session, sort of like in a side column. Uh, with Twilight Mirage, I do it as a header now, and I've done it, I do it a lot more organized. I have, I take like a picture. I have a folder of like, inspiration pictures, and I pick the one that feels right for where we're starting out at the start of the session, and I put that on top.

Austin: Uhm

Janine: And then I add some notes for like, headspace stuff. Sometimes they repeat. Sometimes they are brand new and individual to the situation. I also, with Adaire, always drank a cup of coffee, and with Signet I usually drink a cup of tea. [Austin chuckles] Which is like, such a... probably makes no difference, [Art laughs] but it makes me feel a little bit...

Austin: You're in character. Uh-huh.

Janine: -better, I guess.

Art: No, that's great-

Janine: Yeah.

Art: That's, I feel like such a slacker. [Austin and Janine laugh]

Austin: Did you, uh... you drank some coffee this past week. That didn't. How did that go? Maybe that's why things went the way they went, Janine?

Janine: [sighs] It's hot, and I didn't want to, I don't, Iced tea... I don't know how to make Iced Tea out of like, tea now. Right now. I only just figured out cold brew.

Austin: Okay.

Janine: So, you know, I had the cold brew, and it didn't go great.

Austin: We'll get there. Uh...

Art: You make a slightly concentrated tea, and then you just put it over ice.

Austin: [chuckles] Is that all?

Janine: No! We, we do sweet tea up here. Iced tea is sweet tea. I'm not just-

Austin: Then add sugar.

Janine: -gonna drink cold tea.

Art: [chuckles] Okay. Let's-

Austin: Moving on-

Art: We're all friends here.

Austin: [laughs] Art. Uhm, for now. [**Janine** chuckles] Uhm. We've talked about keeping headspace. Making play fun for all involved. I think we've also addressed this one kind of. Uhm. Unless someone has more here. I like that it was like, 'We're not going to read all of these and give answers,' but they're all really good questions that we all have answers for. So, uh, **'Making play fun for all involved. I play a character who wants to talk things out and usually succeeds because of her stats and training. That turns into a dialogue between my character and an NPC, which is fun for me but excludes the other player characters and keeps us out of potentially fun combat situations.'**

This actually ties into one of the other little questions which is **'There are mistakes and choices that a character definitely wouldn't make, but that would make the story more lively for the players. Where is the balance in getting us into fun, interesting, trouble versus staying true to a character that's pretty smart about the risks she takes?'** My advice is, most people are not as smart as characters that you play at a role-playing game table. It's really hard to keep your cool when you're talking to somebody about real things. And that's not even life or death things. Let yourself make mistakes. Give away too much information. Have plans that don't work. That don't make any sense. Like, again when we recorded Fiasco yesterday, my character came up with a plan that in the first three scenes that the plan came up, made no sense. He played it as if he was super confident. And then like, eventually figured out, sort of what the plan was. But it was more important for him to have a plan, and like, push people into that plan than it was for that plan to make sense or be good.

So, the first thing that I will say is like, try it again. Get out of your character's- Try to get out of the headspace of you the person at the table who is like, 'I know what to say to win this conversa- or like, to get this conversation to go my way' and instead think like, 'What if my character was really afraid right now? What if my character like, didn't like this dude's haircut? What if my character like, was just like, didn't sleep well last night?' Would I be able to produce the dialogue, that I, me at the table, can, the way that a character in a play can. Or would I fuck up? Would I be quiet. Would I let somebody else, like, handle it? That's one way to do this while

remaining, quote-unquote, 'in character'. The other is to just let somebody else have the scene. And just let it happen.

Art: Yeah, and if nobody else at your table wants to participate in those dialogue conversations, like, one, if you're making all these good social rolls, you're- people should be chiming in. And if your GM won't engage with them, that's bad. And if none of them want to be talking, if they all want to be fighting, I mean y'all should talk about that, too.

Austin: Yeah.

Art: Like, maybe someone should, maybe you should change things up a little bit.

Austin: Maybe that just means like, having, making sure that the, you know, the GM should make sure there's a good balance between that stuff. Or, like, you know, there can be hard conversations about like, what do we all want from this game? Uhm-

Janine: Mhm.

Austin: Is there something else we want here? And that is... a tough conversation, but a productive one. We only have so much time. I, you know, spend it doing stuff you really want to be doing. I got into so many tabletop games I didn't want to be part of, but I, I dreaded not being a part of them because my friends were there. Or because I thought that was the thing I was supposed to be doing. And I wish I had that time back. Like, not all of it, but some of it. There are too many bad games that I was a part of because there were people at the table that I liked and not because we were doing something really good.

Art: Yeah, well College is hard.

Austin: College is hard. So is after college. So is before. Like, yeah, uhm...

Janine: I mean it doesn't also have to- it also doesn't have to be like, a thing where... [sighs] If we played different games, I would have built my characters really differently.

Austin: Totally.

Janine: And I don't think it would have been like- There are some situations where it would have been upsetting, like if I really did want to play a chatty character, and everyone else really did just want to fight constantly, that would suck.

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: But there's a degree of like, if you're really not super married to that, it's kinda like, it's part of that storytelling thing. It's part of that, 'Am I doing this so I have a cool character, or am I doing this so that we have this cool... thing that we've made together?'

Austin: Yeah. Totally.

Janine: And like, if you're in a party where people want to fight, and it doesn't like, you know, really fly in the face of necessarily what you want to do then... there's nothing wrong with building a character that, you know, fights more. Or, it's, it's like.... I don't know.

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: Don't play games you don't want to play in, but also get a sense of-

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: -what you all want to do together.

Austin: Because maybe you will have fun playing the hack and slash game because what you're there to do really is spend time with your friends. And it can be fun to cast a fireball into a group of zombies-

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: -and to make them blow up. Like, that is a fun game to play, it's just not one I'm interested in doing into a microphone. Me-a-scattering, or my_scattering, says '**How do you stop playing a bad game that isn't fun and makes you feel bad?**' And a couple people in the chat are just like, 'Say 'I quit. Shut that shit down hard.' Like, it, it's... I want to recognize that it is hard to disengage. Like, it is hard-

Art: Yeah.

Austin: -to say, 'I don't want to do this anymore.' Especially because other players, Nick and I talked about this on the post mortem. Like, Nick knew that I had prepped based around stuff and that like, I would have to pivot on a bunch of things and blah blah blah. But like, at the end of the day, when we had that conversation about it, it was incredibly respectful and helpful and like, 'How do I work this out?' Like, there are ways to step away from things that require a great deal of care, but if you put that care in and are honest about your experience And hopefully you're dealing with someone who is compassionate, like, that experience will be difficult, but I trust that most people will be able to pull that off. And if it goes bad, that's... shitty. But I also believe that you'll grow as part of that. And hopefully next time be able to learn from that and go in and have, and be more interested up front in what the expectations are. Be able to have those conversations up front. Like, sometimes you get scarred, and it fucking sucks. But next time you'll be able to say, 'Hey, before we dig into this, can I get some information about like, what everyone here is looking to do?' Like-

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: 'How are people- You know, what sort of game-'

Art: Yeah.

Austin: '-are we gonna play? What-'

Janine: Know what questions to ask.

Austin: Totally. 'What sort of characters are people making?' And if what you hear is like, 'Oh, well, I definitely want to prestige class into holy warrior because they have this ability that like, just zaps all the undead.' Like, 'Okay, that's what type of game this is.' And then you'll know how much of yourself to put it into.

Art: Yeah, and I hate to like, keep putting we used to know on blast or whatever, but like, that's much better than like, what we... Are we saying, are we naming names?

Austin: No, let's not name names, I'll know who you mean.

Janine: Hmmm.

Art: Alright, well you remember that game of a D&D 2nd Edition we were playin' in?

Austin: Yeah, I remember-

Art: For a good long while?

Austin: Yeah, uh huh.

Art: And like, that game ended because people weren't having fun in it. But it didn't end because we had a nice conversation.

Austin: No. [groans]

Art: It ended because like, we had an in-game fight that like, made anything untenable anymore.

Austin: [laughs] Ugh. College-

Art: That's a bad way to do it is to just to set the world on fire and walk away with your middle fingers up.

Austin: [sighs] College was weird. One day we'll name names. One day we'll have that conversation.

Art: In the Friends at the Table Tell-all book.

Austin: Yeah.

Art: That will come out in twenty years.

Austin: Well, and it was also just shitty cause that was just like, personal relationship stuff on top of everything else. That was like, 'Is the GM like, giving stuff to their significant other that they aren't giving to other players? Are the politics of different people at the table changing?' Like, it was so many things. 'Is the fact that everyone at the table didn't like my significant other at the time, [lightly laughs] uh, impacting things?' 'Yes' was the answer. [exhales a small laugh] College. I think we've got the- the biggest part of all of this stuff. But does anybody else have anything to say here about- about like, how to keep the story moving forward? I bring this up because I think both of you actually played a really important role in this past season for specifically being active members of the party who like, pushed when I needed something to get pushed.

Janine: I think it's- It's one of those things where it's like, you need to genuinely want to know what's gonna happen next.

Austin: Mhm.

Janine: You know? I think that's part of like, if- [sighs] Yeah, I- Your interests can't just be in your character. Like, you need to want to know- Like, I- [laughs] I wanna know what's gonna happen to Hella.

Austin: Right.

Janine: Like, I'm deeply invested in that. I wanna know what's gonna happen to- I- I just- I wanna know. I wanna know what these places are. And I wanna know what's going on in them. And I wanna know how that's gonna affect people. And I wanna know if people are ever gonna find out x, y, z. If I'm ever gonna find out x, y, z.

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: And so, you're gonna- That'll make you ask questions that you wanna move with.

Austin: Actually- Yeah, you'll actually wanna- Cause that's the thing, too. You can always spark someone else to like, 'Hey.' You can ask other players, 'I would love to know what's going on with such-and-such.' It's weird for us to think about that, but like, pass the camera around and sometimes, as players, being willing to be like, 'Hey, can I actually find out something from Hella? Hey, can I actually find something out about other player?' Um, that's something we don't do at all, or we haven't started it yet, but it's something I'd love to get us to. Because I really think that that's part of what, Janine, you called being a fan of the characters as a player is.

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: [CandianSoyo???] in the chat also says, 'People need to bring up if they're having fun or not and set expectations, for sure. It's hard, but I can't see anyone disliking that conversation.'

Art: Oh, people hate that conversation.

Austin: People hate that conversation.

Janine: Yeah...

Austin: Cause people put a lot of time into their games. Like, I think this is true for a lot of people. They put a lot of time into prep. They put a lot of time into like, developing their characters, their NPCs, their worlds. And it's so easy, especially when you're young and especially when you put a lot of yourself into something.

Janine: Mhm.

Austin: Literally, when you put your material being into things- Like, we talk about blood, sweat, and tears, but like, literally you burn calories to write down the name of an NPC. Like, that is literally the thing that is happening there. It can suck to be like, 'Oh, you don't like this. I'm doing this. I'm the one who is broken. I've fucked up.' And that can lead to very immature responses that are very negative and very like- I've seen that turn into a shouting match. I used to work in a tabletop role-playing game store, comic shop like- **[Art laughs quietly]** board-gaming store. I have seen those fights. They are ridiculous, and it isn't- They are ridiculous, and my point isn't, 'And those people are bad and unreasonable,' it's 'And I see exactly why people react the way they do, even if I wish they would react better.' Yeah, it can be rough.

Alright, let's jump ahead to another question. This one's from Kyle who says, **'Hi. I recently got asked to GM some games with a group at work. They want to do it, but I don't think they're necessarily in the right mindset for it.'** **[Austin makes a noise]** **Excuse me. 'My workplace is often very reserved and creativity isn't always rewarded. How do I, as the GM for the game, encourage them to open up and be comfortable with new ideas and possibilities?'** That's a really hard one. Because taking that leap from, 'We work together' to 'We are playing- We are orcs together' is... 'We are orcs together, and I don't mean in Warcraft where like, it's easy to just be orcs together, I mean like, you have to look someone in the face and be like, [in a gruff voice] 'Uklan. Come with me.' Or like- **[Janine laughs]** Like that's a- It is a leap. My first suggestion is to like, hang out with them outside of work, in general. Spend- Like, go out for a meal or for drinks or for a walk or meet up in a- at a park. Find a way to- A movie-watch is actually a really good idea. If you're gonna play a fantasy game, maybe watch something that inspires your fantasy game. Or what you think would be inspirational for it.

Janine: Mhm.

Austin: Just like, have the fun time of hanging out on a couch, eating popcorn, and talking shit about Gimli or whatever. Like, that will- Gimli? Jimli? What's his- Is it Jimli?

Art: It's- it's-

Janine: I think it's Gif.

Austin: Gif. Gif, right. It's a soft 'G.'

Art: Gifli.

Austin: That's what the creator [breathes a laugh] Gif R. R. Tolkien told us about the name. [Janine laughs] Um, that's what the 'J' in J.R.R. Tolkien stands for, by the way. It's Jif. Uh... [breathes another laugh] It's Jiffrey. It's Yif- Okay. Uh...

Janine: [laughs] No....

Austin: It's a silent 'J.' It's a-

Art: [groans] You're going down a different path now? [laughs]

Austin: It's a 'J.' It's like- Okay. Uh, so that's-

Art: Yif R. R. Tolkien is something I do not want to put into Google. [Austin laughs hard] [Janine laughs]

Austin: [groans] Fuck. [exhales] Um... the first step is hang out with them. The- And say like, 'Aw, man. I really love elves.' And they'll be like, 'I hate elves.' And be like, 'Okay. Well, what do you not like about elves? Like, let's talk about how to make elves cool for you in this fantasy game.'

[1:00:00]

Go watch Blade Runner together and be like, 'We all love this movie, but the pacing is really hard in a modern- in a modern context, huh?' Like, that stuff is so much of how again, like, a lot of my early groups bounded and also was like, how I became friends with people. And that- the step from that to, 'Now you're holding this cursed sword' is so much easier than like, 'Hey! Uh... you know, I know that normally the only time I talk to you is to give you updates on how the server is or whatever my job is in this scenario, [Art laughs] but now- [laughs] now you're a half-elf goddess.' Um, like, that's way harder.

Art: I also love this like, insight into what Austin thinks jobs are. [Janine laughs]

Austin: Servers. Servers?

Art: [amused] Servers.

Austin: [deflated] Servers.

Janine: Uh, I was-

Art: Everything's on servers these days.

Janine: I was definitely gonna say like, the thing I would recommend is sharing fiction because-

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: Like, that's basically what you said. But that was [laughs] that's- I think it comes down to that a lot for me in like, my own personal experience of like, why I became more comfortable with this kind of thing than I was when you initially pitched a game for me and Ali of just like- I don't know. I didn't feel like I could talk in that space in the same way that I felt I could after. Well, a large part of it was after hearing you guys already doing that and being like-

Austin: Right.

Janine: -and sort of sharing in that fiction as an audience member. And so, I think- I feel like watching movies and even talking about like, games, books, things like that- anything that... things that put you in the mindset of being able to talk about things that aren't real.

Austin: Right. [laughs] Yes. Yeah. Totally.

Janine: Like, you know, being able to talk about things other than the photocopier.

Austin: Well, that was like-

Janine: Because part of the- part of the like, weird stuff is like, looking someone in the eye and even just saying, 'orcs.' Like, that's a- [laughs]

Austin: It's hard-

Janine: That's a big part of it when you just know someone from work.

Austin: Yeah. It really is. And it totally helps to have that earlier... And it totally helps to even like, play boardgames. Play video games. Like, make that first step.

Janine: Mhm.

Austin: And then, bit by bit, they'll get there. And then- and then it's still gonna be awkward for the early bit. And the thing to do then is, if you're gonna GM, is to look for what I think, you know, a lot of really great sources on how to GM well talk about as flags. Whether that's like, kind of rule flags or fictionally flags. What is the- what is your player interested in? Because

you're gonna get people at the table who are like- they won't say, 'Oh, I really want to play a game in which I'm doin' like, really cool tactical moves.' Or like, 'I'm the- I'm the sneaky character who stabs people in the back.' And they're not gonna say, 'I want opportunities to stab people in the back.' What they will do is like, 'Um... thief looks cool.' And then like, 'Alright. This motherfucker wants to stab people in the back.' [Janine and Art laugh lightly] Um [laughs] I know that Janine says she doesn't want to stab people in the back, but... y'all should listen to the end of that season because... [Austin and Art laugh]

Janine: Yeahhhh. That's- I mean... that was good in its own way. [overlapped] That was-

Austin: Yeah, that's what- that's what I'm sayin'. That's one of those things is just like, pay attention to your players and like, try to hook into what... they're into. I mean the other thing with Adaire was just like, 'Oh, Adaire knows people. Okay, what can I- what can I give her here where it's like, she knows someone here?'

Janine: Mhm.

Austin: 'Okay, what- what opportunity can I offer her?' And like, pay- paying attention is so important.

Janine: That was- that was another... big thing I had to learn was that I went into this trying to pick... I- I definitely like, when I was first making a character for Dungeon World, went into it like I was making a character for a game. Like, I- like, a video game. Of like, 'Okay, what are the situations that are likely to come up, and what are the things I can take that'd be the most useful?' And then I remembered like, 'Wait. I fuckin' listen to this show.' [Austin laughs] Like, I know that's not how this- it's not gonna- If I pick these just like, 'Wow, this helps you kill more people faster,' like that's not what this is.

Austin: Right.

Janine: Like, it was- it was so much a matter of understanding that like, the things I picked would come, so it was more important to pick the things that made sense for the character because you were so serious about reading those flags.

Austin: Right.

Janine: It's the same with Twilight Mirage of just like, there are skills I could take that are very advantageous for my class, and then there are skills that I could take that are very interesting for my character. And I know that whichever I take will- use will be made of it.

Austin: Totally.

Janine: So, it's better to go with the character stuff.

Art: Can I- can I have a- can I have a quick just like, tangent?

Austin: Yeah, of course.

Art: Cause like, what I realized about like, talking about like, thieves and rogues and back-stabbing is that like, I want like- I want the thief that's like a real-life thief. I want the fantasy game that lets me like, be a mob boss.

Austin: Okay.

Art: That's- that's what I want.

Austin: That would be fun.

Art: Not from like- not from like this. I don't think we could do that, but like, I don't know.

Austin: I think Bluff City could.

Art: Yeah.

Janine: Yeah, I was gonna say you're gonna love that first Bluff City ep.

Austin: You're gonna fuckin' love the- Hm. Man.

Janine: Oh boy.

Art: There's a lotta- there's a lotta crime in New Jersey.

Austin: Yeah. [Janine laughs] Let me tell you about A.C. A lot of it's legal. Um, so- [Art laughs] the... next question- Actually, there's another brief thing here which is I- this is where I wanted to say that I went ba- I did a bad job of getting you and Ali into Dungeon World the first time. Which was I left- I left a lot of blank spaces, but based on my pitch, which was this like, 'Alright. Here is the world. I'm gonna give you a pitch of the world in the broad strokes' instead of sitting down with you and working through that stuff together. Instead of just saying, 'Ah, just- we'll just call one day, and we'll talk about it. And we'll figure out how it goes.' I was like, 'Alright. Here is the world. It is called blank. Here are- There are three cities that are interesting. There is- Obviously there's lots of blank spaces on the map, but here are the three cool big cities. Here's what the mages are like in this world. Here is a prince that you need to go save.' Like, it was all of like, the stuff that was the hard- I was giving you the hard video game pitch.

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: Because in my head, I thought that that is how to get y'all onboard. Whereas in the end, what got people onboard was like, 'Alright, do y'all wanna tell a story?'

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: 'What if we got together and told a story and then like, fought some... some weird autonomous knights? Does that sound cool?' Like, 'Alright, cool. Let's do that.' And that-

Janine: At that point, I still thought it was just like- I thought it was just like D&D. Like, I'd roll a- I'd roll a die and then, 'Oh, you do eight damage to the goblin.' Um... and- [laughs]

Austin: Right.

Janine: 'And then, there's also a prince there.' Like.

Austin: Well, and also, like, we had been friends for over a decade at that point. We grew up playing role-playing games on the internet together.

Janine: Mhm.

Austin: But it still would have been hard to be like, 'I'm an orc. [laughs] It's me, the orc.'

Janine: There were no- there were no dice in those games was the thing.

Austin: Yeah, totally. Totally. Cause it's a big difference.

Janine: Like, that's the- yeah.

Austin: Yeah. Um... so this is the other side of this question. This is from Johnny from England who says, **'Hello, Friends at the Table. I have a number of really cool friends that I want to share my favorite pastimes with, indie tabletop rpgs. However, preconceptions about the games and the people who play them scare them a lot- scare them away. How do I share these games with my friends? How do I pitch it? How do I-'**

Janine: It's a good dovetail.

Austin: **'How do I convert a one-shot into an ongoing thing?'** First thing I'll say is like, it's okay if you don't convert a one-shot into an ongoing thing. Try a different one-shot. Eventually someone will say, 'I really want to know what... what, you know, Jerome is up to. I really loved playing Jerome. I- Can we... can we go back to Jerome?' And like, 'Yeah, we can go back to Jerome. That sounds good.' And like, make them think that it's their idea, and they'll be like, 'Aw, man. I'm so glad I came to you and said I wanted to go back to being Jerome.' And you'll be very happy. That's- that's my first piece of advice. What about for y'all? When you think about- Again like, Janine, this was recent for you, but even Art, going all the way back, like, what brought you in, not just to rpgs, but these specifically. Because when I think about you, Art, you're the one who brought me into indie tabletop rpgs. Up until then-

Art: Yeah.

Austin: -I was like, Vampire the Masquerade, L5R, D&D... and then like, I know what Burning Wheel is, but like, 'eh.'

Art: Well, I mean that was- I went to that convention with- I don't even remember who I was with, so I guess it makes it easier for me not to name names in this particular case. **[Austin laughs]** But like, some of us went to Dex Con in North Jersey.

Austin: Mm. [laughs]

Art: Were you there?

Austin: No, I-

Art: You weren't there.

Austin: You, me, and uh, Brian went some other year, remember? We got lost?

Art: I think that- Yeah. [firmer] Yeah. But um, and I played in a- in a demo that Luke ran. This was back when like- this was back when like, Burning Wheel was like, pages stapled together in his trunk.

Austin: Yeah.

Art: And yeah, he ran a demo, and I loved it. And I like- I think I- I don't know if I bought the book that day or like, a few weeks later, but like, and I brought it back. I was like, 'We should play this,' and we never did.

Austin: Well, and we tried to do this thing. Like, we did the thing that-

Art: Yeah.

Austin: -Johnny from England is tryin' to do which was like, 'We have to get people to play uh... Burning Wheel. We have to.' We tried to get them to play fantasy Burning Wheel. That didn't work for a lot of reasons, including we were trying to get too many people. There was gonna be a fantasy circus. We were gonna go- Oh my god. That fuckin' game would have been so cool. Do you remember that?

Art: Yeah, it was we were gonna be- It was gonna be a group of thieves disguised as circus performers, and it was gonna be great. And it just-

Austin: That would be so good.

Art: But like, yeah. We invited like, seven people cause we were like, everyone- like, we'd been talking about it for years at that point, and like, everyone showed up and, you know-

Austin: Yeah.

Art: -getting seven people to agree on something when some of them are frankly morons is hard.

Austin: [laughs] Hey! Some of them were... not interested in playing that game, and they were interested in hanging out with us. And... and we should have never tried to sell it to them. Like, we should have understood-

Art: Yeah.

Austin: -that that's not what they were coming for, and also, that seven people for a Burning Wheel game is too many people...

Art: Yeah, that would have been terrible in retrospect.

Austin: It would have been terrible. Um, and then we tried-

Art: And then tried to do Blossoms.

Austin: Well, we- well, even before Blossoms, we tried to do uh... What was the um... [clicks tongue] the one that was like Dune, with the spice?

Art: Oh, yeah.

Austin: We tried to do all of these-

Art: I don't remember.

Austin: -versions of Burning Wheel. And then yeah, we tried to do the 'Blossoms Are Falling,' which is actually- Like, speaking of games that I don't think I could run for fear of coming across as like, orientalist and weird, uh, Blossom Ar- Blossoms Are Falling is definitely that, but also is really cool. It's really- it's really cool. It takes place between... It takes place at the very, very rise of the samurai class, before...

Art: It's like, late Heian, right?

Austin: Yeah, it's late Heian period. And it's like, I don't know. It's just like, the coolest setting. Also, the full name of the game is basically as excerpt name. It's um, [laughs] 'In this shimmering spring day, Ah, with ever anxious heart, the blossoms are falling.' And like, what a good name for a fuckin'-

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: -role-playing game. Like, ughhh.

Janine: Or robot pilot.

Austin: Or robot pilot, Heart. That's- [laughs] I'm gonna put this in. Just gonna copy this down. I normally don't like doing referential stuff, but I think I'm gonna let myself have one excerpt named something- named Shimmering, maybe? I don't know. I'll- I'll get there.

Janine: Ooo.

Austin: Um, yeah. It's so good. Anyway, we did a bad job of trying to sell them on that, and partially we did it because- we did a bad, and I think this is- this is- part of it is like, the same way anybody who tries to sell their friends on anything indie is like, 'This isn't like those other games. This is different.' And... that appeals to people like us because we've already decided we are over that other thing. But lots of other people are still like, deep in love with those other things and for decent reason, at least. Like, they have- there's appeal there, and there's familiarity there. And it feels good. And starting off being like, 'This cool thing is better than the thing you know about' is like, not the way I should have done that. It's not the way that you should have done that, Art, except with me because you knew immediately that that is exactly how to appeal to twenty-year old Austin. [Art and Janine laugh]

And like, so yeah. Try to- try and set defined um... alike things to what they already know. Try to find like, 'Oh, you know how in blank, you can do this? Well, in this game, xyz...' Or like, 'You know how in D&D it like, sucks when you fail a roll? Well, in Burning Wheel, like, doing things your going to fail at is part of how you get better.' Like, 'Oh, wow. Cool.' Or like, 'Oh, you know how in Skyrim, the way you get better is by doing things? Well, in Burning Wheel, that's how it works.' And just don't even mention that that requires like, very careful note taking, a spreadsheet, all of this other stuff that's very complex. Burning Wheel is really cool, but also, I'll never run it on this show because it's just too- it's just too complicated.

Art: Oh, it's so crunchy.

Austin: I love it. I really love it. I love playing it, but it's so crunchy. And I'm not... I'm not familiar enough with it even as someone who's played it now a bunch to like, actually make it good. Let's get a couple more in here.

Janine: I would-

Austin: Go ahead.

Janine: I would just say also with that last one, um, again, just from my experience of being the really hesitant person...

Austin: Yes.

Janine: -the thing that did it for me and that may still be useful is like, pick out the friends who are most interested in it, run it with them-

Austin: Mhm.

Janine: -and word will probably maybe spread to-

Austin: Totally.

Janine: -other people who then kinda want in on it cause it sounds really cool.

Austin: Don't be afraid of running a game with one or two people. Like, I've had lots of-

Janine: Just pick a game that suits it.

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: Don't try and force it.

Austin: Yes, exactly. I've had lots of people say, 'What's a good one player game? What's a good two player game?' And like, there are problems with trying to run certain games with way more than that, but like, you can actually get pretty far with one or two people and have a decent time. And it's better to try it than to not, so... You know, give it a shot. Torchbearer's really good. People should play Torchbearer. Shout-outs to- shout-outs- [laughs] Also, shouts out to my roommate who made Torchbearer. Um...

Art: It's like, we don't have time for it now, but one of these Tips at the Table, I really just want to drag D&D fourth edition for like, twenty minutes. It's not for now, but like- [Janine laughs]

Austin: I kinda like D&D fourth edition. I don't- Like, I wouldn't play it again on this show ever in my life. [laughs] I wouldn't let you fix my car ever. But uh, I would... play it at a- at like, a- not a family reunion- at like, a... If we ever Hofstra University gamers reunion, that's the sorta game I would want to play. Where it's just like, 'I don't know. What do my fuckin' spell cards say I can do?' You know?

Art: Sure.

Austin: 'Magic missile? Sure, I do a magic missile.'

Art: I don't know...

Austin: [laughs] I'll let you-

Art: I'm not goin' to that reunion. [Art laughs]

Austin: [laughing] Aw, we ran that club! For a while.

Art: Yeah.

Austin: [groans] Speaking of that club, Sam asks, ‘**What do you when you have a backseat DM or GM? And conversely, what do you do when you have a DM or GM who railroads very badly? What if they are the same person and also your only connection to the other players?**’

Janine: Ohhh, someone’s havin’ a good time, huh?

Austin: Yeah...

Art: Start interacting socially with the other players.

Austin: Mm.

Art: Like, you know these people now. You can start talking to them.

Austin: Yeah, like, make sure your friends on the internet. That’s-

Art: Yeah.

[1:15:00]

Austin: That’s a quick and dirty answer, but like... Try to- try- I guess, one it like, have that conversation. The adult answer is probably like, ‘Hey, [exhales] this is hard to say, but... I really wanted to have this experience with the game last night. I really wanted to play and like, there was this moment where I really wanted to know what was inside that house, and I know that like, the story that you had prepped was like, going to the next town, but like, I really wanted to know what was inside that house. It’s not a big deal. Like, I don’t want to go back and open that door, but like... next time, if I’m like, “Oh, hey. Can I check behind that door?” It would be really cool if you just like, let me do that. Or like, could we- could we at least see if the rest of the group wants to do that?’ Et cetera.

The other side of that, of like, when the GM is just saying, ‘Oh, do this’ that’s a hard question because that’s like, such a character trait of a person who like... they want to- I don’t know. It’s hard to- I don’t want to like, shit-talk someone I don’t know, but when I’ve done that as a GM, it’s because I want to be playing with action figures. I want to be playing a video game. I want to be writing a story. I don’t want to be playing a tabletop role-playing game where I’m surprised. And that’s a harder conversation to have with someone, which is like, ‘What do you want to be doing here?’ And so, for that, I think Art’s sort of right at least in so far as like, try to find a group that fits your needs.

Art: Yeah, cause those people often- It's not that they don't want a change, but that's- they think good work is- people think like, 'To be a good DM, what I have to do is come up with a really involved story with twists and turns and all of this, and I just have to like, let these people like, stumble through it. And if they try to get off course, I have to guide them back.'

Janine: Like a flock of sheep.

Austin: Yeah.

Art: Yeah.

Austin: [laughs] Uh... okay. This is the opposite question. 'How-' uh, **'Hi, friends. I run a D&D game for a group of friends who are new to it, and we have fun, though I'm still learning how to run a game. One thing in particular I'm not sure how to encourage is people to role-play as their characters. It's easy for players to just drift into what they think they should do rather than trying to develop a character. I don't wanna pressure people in case all they want is a simple, fun game. More like, gently encourage people to get more into the role-play spirit when running our games. I adapted love letters into D&D for when people miss a session, and that works great. Do you have any other suggestions? Thanks for the help and all the amazing casts. Gary.'** What helps- what helps y'all? Because I think you both do a good job of this, and I'm curious like, do I ever do anything that actually helps push you to that or is that just experience and thoughtfulness on your parts?

Art: I mean, yeah. It's our- I do just want to say it's because- because we're perfect people who [Janine laughs] don't have... [laughs] um, that problem. But it's not true. Like. [Austin laughs] I think it's because like, it's- it's implicit consequences, right? If I was like...

Austin: Mm.

Art: If we were all just like, looking at our character sheets and just tryin' to do moves all the time, one, most rpgs are about, you know, hurting people and breaking things, and... then no one likes you if you just go around hurting people and breaking things, [Austin and Janine breath quiet laughs] so we wouldn't have anyone to talk to. We'd just be in the woods by ourselves, like, I don't... I don't know.

Austin: I- I think part of that might actually be that it's D&D... Eh, maybe that's- I don't want to drag D&D here. Like, that's- I don't know fifth enough to do that. But the games that we play do give the GM lots of power to... introduce consequences when people aren't playing their characters, um, by encouraging them- by showing what those results look like. Like, if you are playing that game as the sort of person who just kicks down a door and kills everybody inside, like, that's not gonna go well for you. Whereas, there are ways to play like- You know, the D&D that I've played the most of is three-five, and there are ways to play three-five where the GM is never encouraged to like, in the rules- like, in the just pure mechanics of the rules to stop you from doing that or to punish you outside of just like, some rules about- or some- some

encouragement in the GM's guide about like, how to deal with problem players. 'Ask questions,' says uh... [???] Vid- Vidharcha8. I've definitely mispronounced that. Oh, there's an 'L' in there. Vildhijarta8 says, ask questions. Which is a huge, huge, huge perfect answer to this.

Janine: Mhm.

Austin: I've tried my best to get better at this over the last like... six weeks, seven weeks. Like, the end of the last season into this new season is just like, 'Hey, you're the expert in this field. You tell me what this is.' You know, 'Hey, you are the character who understands the, you know, the architecture here. Tell me what it looks like.' You know, asking Jack to talk about what the Archives looked like, at the end of um, the mountain party game. Asking Ali to describe what the Mesh looks like in the Veil because she was playing the Architect, and she knows what the Veil looks like. Asking people those questions will immediately get them into- not necessarily into character- but at least into the fictional world, and then being in character runs from that, for sure.

Janine: Um, another thing I would say is that based on- based on my experiences playing Dungeon World and my experiences playing- since we've just started playing the Veil, a thing that I noticed that is actually really helpful, as long as I don't get in my head too much about it, is not getting really deep into that move list.

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: Like, the thing is there are so many- [sighs] Or maybe it just feels like there are so many moves in the Veil, but there's like- [Austin laughs softly] our list of things that we can do even condensed is just like, header after header after header after header. And when I'm trying to listen to what's going on, I don't really have the time to focus on what each one of those individual moves are. Whereas with Dungeon World, I am very aware of what my options are at any given time.

Austin: Right.

Janine: Like, I've got- I know all those moves. I know Hack and Slash. I know Volley. I've got all that.

Austin: Right.

Janine: So, not knowing all those moves often forces me to think in terms of just like, pure story-telling, 'What would this character do?'

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: Rather than focusing on a strategic like, set of options.

Austin: And you can encourage that.

Janine: Like, it's not like an- like, you know, like an MMO with like... all your hotkeys.

Austin: [laughs quietly; overlapped] With all your hotkeys.

Janine: Like, here's all your stuff you can do versus, you know.

Austin: 'What's my rotation?' Yeah, exactly.

Janine: Yeah, exactly. 'What's my rotation?'

Austin: If you... And you can encourage that as a GM across by, you know, this is like, 'What do you?' is such a powerful question.

Janine: [overlapping] 'What does that look like?'

Austin: 'What's that look like? How are you feeling when you do that?' Those questions-

Janine: 'What's the scene?'

Austin: 'What's the scene?'- Yeah, tell me what-

Janine: 'Where's the camera?' [laughs]

Austin: Yeah, 'Where's the camera?' Like, that stuff all helps sooooo much. And when I think back on... playing those games in college, even in playing three-five, those are the moments that... resonate where it's like, I have successfully rolled the hit, and then our GM said like, 'Alright, you tell me how that happened. Yeah, you hit this monster. You destroy this violin that is stuck in the orc god's tusk or whatever, but what's it look like when you do it?' And like, having that ability to collaborate as a player immediately made me buy in so much more cause I just immediately was like, 'Oh, what's the other cool shit I can do?' Or like, 'What's the other sad stuff I can do?' All- Even like, 'Oh, let me tell you how I fucked up. Let me tell you how I- I rolled a one? I got an idea about how this goes. You let me pitch you this terrible, critical failure really quick.' Um, so yeah. That's definitely a big thing. And then- and then... I'm tryin' to think if there's anything else.

Art: And your players could still fight through that, right?

Austin: Yes.

Art: Like, you can do all of that, and your players can still be like, 'I don't know. I hit 'em.'

Janine: Mm.

Austin: Right.

Art: Like- [Janine laughs] You know, you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink.

Austin: Yeahhh. I- Uh... [???] AshJess just says, 'Play a game that mechanically rewards role-playing through beliefs, goals, and bonds.' Yes. Absolutely. It can still be so hard. Like. [sighs]

Janine: Yeah, those can be gamed in a way that can be rough.

Austin: That can be, and some games are built for it. Like, I think Burning Wheel is actually built to be like, 'Hey, game these a little bit.' One of these should be the thing that is just like, your artha engine. Like, you just say, 'Never trust a person who wears a fancy hat,' and every time that you like, shout at somebody who has a fancy hat on, like, 'Collectin' that artha. Give it to me.' Like, that- that is... it is... useful in a sense there because it still encourages you to play as that character, even if you're just gaming it.

The Veil is actually kind of similar when it comes to emotions that way. Where it's like, 'I have a plus two in mad, that means I'm always gonna be mad.' And like, 'Yeah, okay...' Like, 'Cool. You can- You're always gonna play the character who is mad. That means you're always gonna-' I'm gonna constantly be like, 'Well, why are you mad about this?' And then you're gonna have to answer me, and like, guess what? I win. Now you're characterizing your character, jerk. Uh, like... awesome. So, it does help to pick a game that encourages that stuff. But it can take a lot of work to get to things that you're happy with. Janine, you and I went back and forth on Signet's stuff so long. Like...

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: Character creation isn't- wasn't a thing-

Janine: We did that with Adaire, too.

Austin: Totally. Oh my god.

Janine: With her alignment. That a nightmare. [laughs]

Austin: Adaire's alignment. Jesus Christ, it was a nightmare. But it was like a nightmare that produced something. Like, I think if you added up all the time-

Janine: It's like, 'How do we define evil? How do define neutrality?'

Austin: Neutral, yeah.

Janine: 'How do we define in- how do we define it vis-a-vis Dungeon World's actual written stuff versus-'

Austin: Totally.

Janine: '-personally versus in this story?' Like. [lightly laughs]

Austin: Yeah, like, I don't know how many hours we spent on that stuff, but way longer than you might think, chat.

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: I- I'm just gonna search for 'Neutral' in our- in our private chat and just see... how many days. It's a lot. Cause it start-

Janine: Yeah...

Austin: Oh my god.

Janine: I was- I mean I was originally- She was going to be Evil.

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: Adaire, she was- that was the thing was like, my- my understanding of the rules and of... morality, I guess, was that a character who's primarily self-interested should be Evil.

Austin: Right.

Janine: But when you look at what Evil is Dungeon World, that's not- like, she's not gonna smash a priceless relic just cause it's fun or whatever. Like.

Austin: [lightly laughs] Right. Which is its own whole thing, but the alignment system in-

Janine: Yeah. Yeah.

Austin: -Dungeon World is complex and maybe not... the best way. There's a lot of fiddling, and there's a lot of like, 'Eh, is this really what we mean by Evil?'

Janine: It's complex and like, sometimes it- sometimes it feels um... contradictory almost.

Austin: Yeah, yeah. Totally.

Janine: Like, there are some things that don't feel like they fit together perfectly.

Austin: But we got there. Um, we got there.

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: I'm really happy with what we got to there.

Janine: The other thing-

Austin: Op, go ahead.

Janine: Sorry. I was just gonna also say, it sounds silly, but like, pinboards.

Austin: Mm.

Janine: Like, giving people a cause to... look at elements of their- of their characters.

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: Like, some people- some people do character building a different way. Like, it's hard to do character building purely when you're sitting at a table with your friends sometimes.

Austin: Yeah, totally.

Janine: Sometimes it's like, I mention it a lot. I have folders for Adaire, and I have a folder for Signet, and I have- Signet's folder is broken up into a bunch of other folders of like- of like, uh... fashion ideas and aesthetic ideas and object ideas and like... just little bits and pieces where I can just glance in and sort of immediately get a sense for where that should be going or what that should feel like.

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: And having stuff like that, like a pinboard, is a really quick and dirty way to-

Austin: Mhm.

Janine: -to just get a sense of that stuff.

Austin: Um, luckydicekirby says, 'Adaire and Hella being Evil buds wouldn't- wouldn't have been interesting.' And I actually think it still could have been interesting, but it would have resulted in a much different game. I think that's a game where the soul of Hella would have been much more central to what this season was. Like, I think when we first pitched- when you first pitched me Adaire, that was kind of the thing you had noted was like, 'Hey, it's clear that Hadrian pushing Hella to be better is going to be key this season. What if I'm the devil on her shoulder?'

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: And that didn't really happen because you didn't end up being Evil-

Janine: No.

Austin: But an Evil character doing that would have- could have been very good, so I- I...

Janine: Mhm.

Austin: I definitely think it... but it wasn't Adaire. Like, we'd already figured who Adaire was.

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: And Adaire was not Evil.

Janine: Adaire, in general, was originally going to be like, a thing that I came back to a lot was the skeleton scene with Hadrian of just like, [Austin laughs] I kinda wanted- I- [sighs] Every time that meme comes up or came up at the time, I wanted someone in his corner.

Austin: Mhm.

Janine: And... eventually I think what we realizes with Adaire was like, there are other ways to kind of- I don't know- hash that stuff out without just falling into easier answers, I guess.

Austin: Yeah. Yeah. I think a bigger point there is like, if you ever feel like you have the note of like, 'Oh, that wouldn't be cool,' and I'm not just dragging luckydicekirby here, I promise, who says, 'Ooo, I didn't think of that. That push and pull would be so cool.' I don't know that they meant to rhyme that, but here we are. [Janine laughs lightly] Um, if you ever have that feeling like, 'Oh, there's nothing interesting about this,' like, pause, stop... turn on your heel, find what's cool about that thing because I bet you there's something interesting-

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: -that a preconceived notion of what is cool and what isn't is like, halting you. And you might do it and be like, 'Mmm, yeah. That's kind of interesting, but I still have more interesting ideas,' at which point, discard it or put it to the side for later or let it percolate a little- a little bit more. But so many of the good ideas that have come up in Friends at the Table have started as being like, 'Eh. I don't like that.' And then like, three days later, five days later, or five months later being like, 'Oh, shit! Like, this is a good idea actually.' [Art laughs lightly] So...

Janine: Mhm. Even just the concept of neutrality. Like, neutrality is...

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: -by nature just like, a middle ground, and it became such a... key thing for several characters.

Austin: Mhm.

Janine: In the last season. Of just like, it seems- it seems like neutrality is boring. Like, that was my big reason for not wanting to be Neutral was like, 'Well, that's boring.'

Austin: Right.

Janine: 'That's just- that's just nothing. That's- You're not Good or Bad, you're just there.' And that's not what it is at all-

Austin: Totally.

Janine: -if you look at it a certain way.

Austin: Alright. So, this comes from **Jack** who... [laughs] is trying to play games with people from far away. I don't think this is our Jack; I didn't check the email address, but [**Austin** and **Janine** breath a small laugh] '**Hey, team-**'

Janine: It says, 'Cheers.'

Austin: It also says, 'Hey, team,' so maybe this is Jack. '**You're all the best.**' Aw, thanks, Jack, in case you were wondering. [**Janine** laughs lightly] '**What would you say are the biggest challenges that arise from playing rpgs over the internet? My friend is moving to Tokyo in a couple of months, and we're hoping to transition our in-person game to online play. Any advice would be appreciated. Also, bonus question, how on earth do you schedule your play sessions? As I get older, I find this to be increasingly the most challenging and frustrating part of the experience for me. Tips, please.**'

Janine: What's that website? What's that website Ali uses?

Austin: Time.is?

Art: No.

Janine: No, the one that's like-

Art: The scheduling one.

Austin: Oh, Doodle-

Janine: Bloo- blooper? Bleep... Doodle.

Austin: What was the one that you said? Blooper?

Janine: [laughs] I said Blooper.

Art: Blooper. [**Austin** laughs lightly]

Janine: I was gonna say Blipo, but that's- they sell like-

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: -cute stuff.

Austin: Okay, um... Doodle. We use Doodle for like, 'Hey, what days are people free this month?' Um, I think we're gonna-

Janine: If you're kinda free.

Austin: Yeah, exactly. And like, what time even, right? Cause it's not just days. It's like, she does- what? She does like, three, five, and seven PM basically? Eastern time.

Janine and Art: Mhm.

Austin: And it's tough. Uh, I think we're gonna also start a google calendar now that we have way more things to record per month. Just to like, keep track of it all. Uh... but... Ali does a really good job of making sure we fill all that out. We kind of stay on each other on discord to be like, 'Hey, are we all gonna be here that day?' Yeah, it's-

Art: It's you guys pointing out that I haven't done it for this month yet.

[1:30:00]

Austin: [quietly] This is- this is... Yeah, you should do that, Art. Uh, we live busy lives, and it can be tough because we're often- I'm often out of town or... people are visiting family out of town, or like, Art, you were just away for a week, right?

Art: Yeah, visiting family out of town.

Austin: There it is. And like, that meant we couldn't record a planet game, so now we're like, 'I gue... We gotta re- we gotta sneak a recording in. Next couple a days.' And that's important. Uh.... so like, being flexible definitely helps when you're like, 'Okay, this, this, and these are the sorts of days that I can make it, and also maybe I'll stay up a little late.' Jack does that a lot for us. Is like, being willing to be up until three AM to make recordings work. But also, like, finding the day that is the easiest. We basically record games on Sundays, right? That's obviously changing a little bit with Bluff City and the Live show, but like, we basically record on Sunday-Sunday evenings. And being able to be like, 'Who is free this coming Sunday?' is so much easier than like, 'Uh... when is anybody free in the next six days?' So that- that's the big one, I think. Any other tips? Shared google docs?

Janine: Uh-

Art: I think that's it.

Austin: I like Roll20 a lot. Uh... Mm. I like Roll20. There are some things I wish Roll20 had that it doesn't have. But we've done so much good work on Roll20 that I'm so familiar with in and-

Janine: The plug-in stuff is so helpful.

Austin: The plug-in stuff is so helpful.

Janine: Like, just being able to plug in different games.

Austin: Yeah. Like, the fact that I was able to spend a couple bucks and get us a copy of... uh... The Quiet Year that we just played through Roll20, like, in Roll20's own marketplace was really cool. And let that happen in a way that would just have not been as fun if we had like, 'Alright, I have a pack of cards here. I'll just tell you how this goes. But you don't get to see the stuff.'

Janine: I'm gonna trust you with the dice, and...

Austin: Totally. Totally.

Janine: -put a camera on them.

Austin: Yep. Um... yeah, I think those are the big ones that we... we definitely hit. And then like, in terms of how do you schedule it, in terms of like, 'I'm an adult now' is to have that conversation with yourself about your priorities. What is the thing you would not want to do? Like, what is the thing that is a lower priority to you? And make sure that you account for the fact that because we live in the world that we live in, you're going to think that playing a game with your friend is not a high priority. Let it be a high priority. It's socialization. It's creative. It's all these that are fantastic and that on their own, we would say are important qualities of a good life. But when you go like, 'Oh, I'm gonna play a game,' it's so easy to be like, 'Uh, that's the least important part of my week. I'll cut that out, and instead I'll go do this other thing that's important.' And I'm not saying games are the most important thing in the world, but like, make sure that when you're doing that calculus, you account for the fact that we've been taught that they're unimportant, that these sorts of games especially are unimportant and try to- try to adjust. Okay.

Art: And then it's like, some of it's about managing other things in your life like, you know-

Austin: Right.

Art: -you know, Jess is very patient with us, and me especially, because I'm always like, 'How long are you guys gonna be recording?' and I'll do a guess. And I'll be wrong by a lot.

Austin: Uh huh.

Art: And it really makes her mad.

Austin: Mhm.

Art: And I'm not getting better at guessing. Um- [Art and Janine laugh lightly] for example, my guess for how long we'd be going tonight was like, 'I don't know. An hour? Ninety minutes?' And we're at...

Austin: Uh, we're at-

Art: We're comin' up on two hours.

Austin: We're comin' up on two hours... Maybe we'll do one more, and then we'll call it. We still- I pulled a lot of questions.

Art: That was not me passive aggressively tryin' to get us to stop.

Austin: Alright, Art-

Art: I was not doing that.

Austin: Fine. We can be done right now, if you want to be done right now. [**Janine** laughs] [amused] God damn.

Art: This is just me going over my own limitations as a person.

Austin: [laughs] No, I do the same thing. Like, I hit a point a few years ago where I stopped agreeing to things... that I didn't think I'd be able to do. And I've started falling back on that a little bit, in a bad way. I've started to like, agree to things, and then having to drop out again. And it makes me feel like a huge flake, and like, I want to get back to where I'm not ever saying yes to something that I know, in my heart of hearts, I might flake out on. [**Art** exhales a laugh] Um, but here we are. Alright, so these come in- This is two questions that are both about leaving blank spaces, so I'm gonna put them up at once.

Morgan says, 'I'm a new GM, and I've only written basically kind of railroad-y one-shots. I'm working on a new campaign, and I'm hoping to leave more room for exploration and choice and fun story development. I guess my actual problem is I'm sort of nervous about improvising. I don't always feel confident coming up with stuff on the fly that makes sense that is interesting. Any tips on this kind of impro- improvisation?' And then [??] gyrus says, 'I'm writing with a question for the Tips at the Table episode you're preparing. Do you have any advice on leaving blank spaces? As a GM, I have trouble sometimes with the balance of allowing players freedom and having narrative that feels connected. When preparing a scenario for the player, how do you know when to flesh out an event in advance, and when to leave an idea open?'

These are really good questions. For me... um, I guess... [sighs] It's- it's.... definitely tough to make that jump from, 'I know everything that's gonna happen, and I'm leading my crew through a fun hack and slash adventure or a fun detective game where I know what all the answers are.' The first step I take is to do the thing that someone suggested before and ask questions. Have a general idea of what's gonna be there. You know, I knew that the Archives were where the Archives were. But then I said, 'So, Jack, what's this look like?' That's a very, very on like- on the spectrum of shared collaborative world building and kind of collaborative, you know, improvisational story-telling, that's a very low... very, very bias towards the GM still having the big picture things, but it's a really good way to put on training wheels and start getting better at- at improvising and then using what the players have improvised.

So, say like, 'Hey, what sort of food is served in this town? What's like, the specialty in this bar?' And I promise you, like, three hours later, you're gonna make somebody cry cause you talked about goose nog or whatever the fuck. And like, it... it helps to let them fill in those- the kind of margins, even if you have the body kind of filled out. That's definitely a... a very again, like, training wheels-y- very like, first steps into opening up in that way. Have there been examples in the show, y'all, that- where you see we've done this the right way? Or the wrong way? [lightly laughs]

Janine: Um... a thing I would say is that this is one of the things that I love most about this show, but is also one of the things that stresses me out the most.

Austin: Mm.

Janine: -as a player. Of like, I really want those moments to help shape things, but also, doing it on the fly makes me feel like I'm going to fuck up.

Austin: Mm.

Janine: So, there- I mean the way that I deal with that is also a way that might be useful for someone who has to do it more of just like, I try and figure out the things... the things that I want to 'um' and 'ah' about the least and just have... some words, you know? Words that are helpful. Like, names are a big thing here. Names are... I think Austin and I, we both have name lists.

Austin: Right.

Janine: Like, I went into our Buff City recording with a name list because I knew I was going to need some good Mid-Atlantic names real quick to keep that stuff moving. So, I just had a little list of like, possible first names and not a- not a list of like, these are the characters I'm going to use or like, theses are who these people are, but just a list of random names thrown together. And then in the moment, being able to pick the ones that felt right and adjustments and then throw them out much quicker than I would have if I had to just one hundred percent sit there and do it. And that's not gonna work for everything. Like, you can't just make a list of cool objects

people might find and what they do, and then just like, plop them in necessarily. That seems a little... rougher.

Austin: Right. Yeah.

Janine: It seems like that's how things are gonna feel broken up, but... even just having little footholds- like, little tiny bits and pieces that you can like... a lot of the names that I had written down I didn't use as is. I adjusted them.

Austin: Totally.

Janine: And then they became someone else as-

Austin: [interjecting] And then they-

Janine: -as suited the moment.

Austin: And then they- [overlapped] were that person.

Janine: But having that stuff helped.

Austin: Like, that's the thing is like-

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: -they can be... I do the same thing with a lot of this other stuff, right? Which is like, how do you go from being someone who has... a railroad-y one-shot into someone has a big-something that feels like a big open world where players can say what's behind that door is instead of having um... I stopped trying to design the whole world. Like, instead I know what types of things are in the world. I know what could be behind a door. When I design like, a new-and this is a thing I actually want to get better at doing is while we're playing is listing out certain qualities of a place.

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: Or like, on this screen for you all to remember. So like, in the current- in the episode of Twilight Mirage that went up last week, y'all go to Composure's Coliseum which is this place where huge, virtual kind of reenacts of historical events that are related to the Divines are played out, and in that place, it's like, okay, I wish I had written down on the screen just like... hyper-populated, densely populated, right? And then like, private boxes for viewers, right?

Janine: Mhm.

Austin: And then huge glass cube. Like, all of the- uh, you know, rafters. Like, things like that that would help y'all be able to pull from that stuff and then- and go forward with it. But like, when we started that game, I had no idea that Fourteen Fifteen would go to the place that... that

they eventually did. I guess I had- I knew that there would be a character that would be in the general vicinity. But I didn't know- I didn't know what was... which characters were down in the place that they eventually go to that I'm trying not to spoil cause that episode literally comes out today. [Janine laughs lightly] I knew enough to know that there would be threats and that those threats would do xyz.

There's a moment when a door opens and then there's a character behind that door. And like, I knew from understanding the world state what sorts of characters could be behind that door, but I didn't know the specific character that would be behind that door. And so, starting to think in that other way about the rules of the world and the logics of... like, the setting and what factions want will help guide in that direction. I'm trying to think of a really good example from something we've already played. Um, that isn't just like, 'Oh, now it's pira- undead pirates' again. [sighs] What's a- what's a time that this has come up where it's been like a big pivot or like someone goes- Oh! You going to... Adaire going to talk to Chancellor Lutz. I had no idea we were gonna do that. Right? Like.

Art: Mm.

Janine: Mhm.

Austin: Until, I think you may have given me like, fifteen minutes of heads up because you knew it such a big weird thing. Where you were like, 'Oh, I have a really good idea for this game.' And I was like [groans a question mark].

Janine: Yeah. I was- I was in planning mode at that point still.

Austin: Yeah. Totally. But- but you told me that, and... you... were like, 'Oh, I really want to go talk- call in favor basically.' And so, I was like, 'Okay. [sighs] What... the fuck is going on in Rosemerrow right now?' And I had an answer even though I had never written out what was happening in Rosemerrow because I knew in my heart what Rosemerrow was up to. And I knew where the game was going. I knew that, 'Okay. The Chancellor is going to show up in Rosemerrow because I think I want to do a murder mystery there. And okay, how do I tie this together? Okay.' And that is so much easier to do when you are always in that mode of like, 'Let me put pieces down instead of in the mode of like, let me draw a map. Let me- let me put the- not just put pieces down, but put them in their ranks.'

Janine: Mhm.

Austin: It's so much easier when you're just doing those broad strokes. And it's hard. The other thing is someone noted that like, the Marielda- Marielda opened with this really well, and that's just cause we were playing The Quiet Year. And The Quiet Year is a game that encouraged- there's no GM in The Quiet Year. Everyone is just playing that game together. Play some of those games with your friends. Do the thing where you do what we do where like, 'Okay, we're gonna be in the same setting, but we're gonna pivot to five hundred years earlier. Fifty years

later or whatever. And we're gonna play a completely collaborative game where I am not the GM. And you are just- we're all players, and we're all gonna collaborate.' And some of that will rub off and will carry with you back to the main game. That's my... advice.

Janine: That's- Yeah. I think that kind of... that's one of the things that we do fairly well, I think, is everyone has stakes in the world-

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: -and there's a lot of like, you know, it's a- it's a fuckin' punchline of how long we've been sharing hashtag season six like, [Austin and Art laugh quietly] aesthetics and like, ideas and-

Austin: Yep.

Janine: -and just like, throwing them together and like, a lot of that... admittedly sometimes I do that as a joke. [laughs] It's like, I'll throw something in there that I'm not entirely serious about, but that still kind of like, tickles a thought that I'm having or whatever. But like, a lot of that stuff slowly over time contributes to... not quite aesthetic consistency, but it helps everyone be closer to on the same page. And I think that can also help people feel more confident in having authorship down the line when they kind of know what's going on with the world.

Austin: Gotcha.

Janine: Does that make sense?

Austin: Yeah, yeah. Totally. Alright, so these are the last two. And these come from in from John and Miguel. And I've kinda grouped them even though they're not specifically super grouped because I feel like they're both about taking... themes and influences from outside of what would you traditionally think of as a theme or- or influence for these sorts of stories that we're telling. John writes, **'Hi, I'm a big fan of everything you've been doing with Friends at the Table since season one.'** Thank you. **'Glad to see you guys thriving on Patreon.'** Maybe light spoilers here. **'I wanted to ask, how do you apply a theme to your game? Is it simply putting objects in the game space and seeing how things unfold? Or do you expect certain things to happen, like Jack's character Audy in season two of Counter/Weight being broken? I wish you all the best. I'd love to hear your thoughts.'**

And then Miguel kind of just zooms in more on a specific theme that we put in Counter/Weight, which again, spoilers here. **'At some late point in Counter/Weight, you spoke through Grace about the Fukuyama thesis.'** For people who don't remember, there is a... a theorist who- named Fukuyama, Francis Fukuyama who posited this notion of the end of history kind of at the height of the- the kind of... neo-conservative, neo-liberal uh... rise of the West in the late eighties, early nineties, I think is when he proposed this. That was basically like, 'Oh, this is it.' Western democracies- Western capitalist democracies are the end of history. There will still be events, but there won't be history. This is what- this is what societies will

continue to look like. There won't be any more struggles over- in a big way- over the general structure of society.

[1:45:00]

And Counter/Weight pushes hard against that and specifically Grace is a character who is like, 'Oh, we've reached the end of history. We've reached stabilization.' And then like, 'Nah. [lightly laughs] Actually, there are things you could never account for.' Miguel says, **'I'm curious as to how close you think the fictional Milky Way got to an end as it were, and whether you think there's such a thing possible in real life. Obviously for the Diaspora and arguably for post-cold war capitalism, the idea was born from some degree of arrogance. But in Twilight Mirage, it does sound like that in those thirty thousand utopian years, the Divine Fleet did find a system that just worked. Although I don't know if there was still- if there was still broad external ideological conflict that we just haven't heard about yet.'**

Um, so the first thing here that I just want to mention is like, if you're running a game, try to find inspiration from sources that your players might not know about. And that you wouldn't traditionally think of as inspiration for genre fiction. My favorite moments of... all of our games, in terms of like... [sighs] parts of the setting, have been me trying to figure out how I can bring in something I know about history or something I've read on a website like Atlas Obscura about history or a weird place in the world. It's been me thinking about political and social philosophy. It's been a player introducing something that I had not ever even considered to be part of it.

Like, Marielda I had no notion that there would be anything like a horror element in it. Until Janine was like, 'Oh, what if- what if Junji Ito was here?' Um- [everyone breathes laughter] 'What if- what if we had weird tree people?' Who ended up not being so horrific in the end, but like, in that moment, it was like, 'Oh, shit.' Like, 'I thought we were doing like, slightly more magical eighty days, but you've brought to bear something that is not at all in the like- in the general wheelhouse that I thought was here.' And I love it when that stuff happens. And I want to encourage all that to happen more and more and more. I have mixed feelings about Ian Bogost as like a philosopher and critic, but the thing that he says about people who write about video games a lot is like, 'Please read stuff that isn't about video games.'

I'm going to say that about- about uh... you know, kind of role-playing games and fantasy and science fiction. Read things that aren't fantasy and science fiction. Play games that are inspired by things- You know, start games. Play tabletop games in which your primary inspiration is like, something that you know about music, is something that you know about technology, is something that you know about- about an art or a craft that you love. Like, tell me what a magically system that's based on baking is actually like. I bet it's dope. And it'll be really cool, and it will be yours because it's about something you already hold close to your heart. Let yourself- let those ideas mingle in a- in a really important way, I think. That's- that's my thought on this.

Art: Yeah, um... it's- This is like an aside, but like, for a good long while, out here in L.A., I was really involved in the improv comedy scene-

Austin: Right.

Art: -and I was not great at it, but I think it's really gotten me better at doing this, so you know...
[**Austin** laughs lightly] You know, there's always a plan, I guess. Um [laughs] but one of the things is, you know, people got really obsessed with it.

Austin: Right.

Art: Because like, it's fun, and you're meeting people. And people are laughing and, you know, it's- there's like a- there's a rush to it. And the- I forgot what teacher said this to me, but like, what they did when someone came to them and said like, 'I've been taking all these improv classes, what do I do next?' The answer is like, 'Go do something else.'

Austin: Yeah.

Art: Like, go spend-

Austin: Go do anything else.

Art: Go spend two months like, learning about something else, and when you come back, that will make you better at doing this.

Austin: Yeah.

Art: Because you will have things to pull from. Like, you'll do scenes about something instead of just like, the eight improv scenes everyone's seen a hundred times. Like, you need to be a person outside of the thing you do.

Austin: Right. Totally.

Janine: Mhm.

Austin: All of my favorite characters that I've ever had on this show come from a larger pop culture or... you know, non-fiction background, right? Like, they come from me thinking about historical assassinations or from Riff Raff or from... you know, like, television in the 1990's or from fiction from the eighteen hundreds, right? Like, stuff that wouldn't traditionally be your key influence in story-telling, in like, a fantasy setting or a cyberpunk setting. But like, figuring out that stuff is really important and helps.

And the opposite is also true, which is sometimes let yourself just lean into the genre trope because- not just cause they work, but because you're familiar with them and they're a good foundation. Like, Counter/Weight is... anime as fuck. It's cyberpunk as fuck. And once I had that stuff under my feet as a- as like, a world-builder, I was then able to be like, 'Okay, how

do we fuck this up?’ Like how do we go from big robots- how do we go from ‘We could have built them to look like anything, but we made them look like us?’ to talking with Sylvia¹ about- er was it... Who ended up playing Socrates the most in the faction game? Was that Dre? Dre, was that you? It’s been so long.

Um, in the faction game where Integrity- I think it was Sylvia- ended up being this like, nightmare thing that like, was embedded in Socrates’s flesh. You know? Like out of a fucking um... Cronenberg film or something. And like, once we had that basic- the basics down, we were able to then go, ‘Oh, yeah. Cronenberg belongs in here.’ And that helps a lot. So, also let yourself have that good foundation. Socrates was Keith in the Kingdom game, but not in the faction game. The other things here, and I don’t want to give too much away, is when thinking about the Twilight Mirage and this notion of post-history, I... have already gone on record as saying that this new season... is different than Counter/Weight in that I’m willing for something to exist that feels magical in a way that the things in Counter/Weight did not.

Because I think fundamentally, Counter/Weight was me trying to say- and I hate that I’m explaining my own like, goals here necessarily- but like, it was me trying to say, ‘The world is material. The world is physical, and that means that the things in it are, too, and that we can affect them if we put like our, not just our minds and hearts to it, but if we do the work, we can make the world better. We can overturn things that seem impossible to overturn.’ And Twilight Mirage is me saying, ‘Okay, but the world, the real world, is exhausting. The real world makes us hate ourselves and makes change seem impossible.’ And so, if when we frame things in that world of reality, it can limit what our dreams can be. It can make us say, ‘I can’t imagine a world that’s better than X. I can never imagine X plus one. I can never imagine... Y. I can never imagine Z. I can never imagine a thing that is dramatically different.’

And so, Twilight Mirage is, for me at least, an exercise in saying, ‘What if we pretend that we could do anything? What would the world look like then?’ And then saying, ‘Okay, now imagine a world in which anyone can say, “I can make the world look like anything.”’ And how do those things confront each other, and how do those various dreams of a perfect future align? And we’ll get into more of that as this season progresses. [Janine breathes a laugh] So. [sighs] Did either of you bring in... What are some things that were non- Like, what were some of your inspirations for Adaire and Hadrian? And Cass, too. I mean like... [Janine sighs heavily] Okay-

Janine: [overlapped] I have some- [laughs] I have some....

Austin: Janine, are you just gonna dump out your inspo folder?

Janine: Inspo... [Austin laughs] I don’t even need to dump it out. I have a bunch of patent medicine ads in there.

Austin: Oh, that’s true!

¹ The name in the audio recording is no longer in use, hence the audio/transcript discrepancy.

Janine: Like, my whole- Yeah. I read... I think I got through about half of the super famous, I forget the precise thing because of very long named thing- it's from the early twentieth century- but it's a big expose on patent medicine formula and things like that. I... My cat's here, sorry.
[cat meows in the background] [laughs]

Austin: Aw, Annie! Annie's my inspiration, personally.

Janine: I uh... So, yeah. I spent a lot of time. We didn't end up really getting much into that. Maybe we will in the future so I won't say too much, but-

Austin: Uh huh.

Janine: I looked a lot into that, and like, even that char- the stuff we did get into it that character started from, I had made maps for the show.

Austin: Right.

Janine: I had made like, a couple of maps. A real long time ago that I need to update for various reasons.

Austin: Mhm. [laughs quietly]

Janine: But I had made these maps, and I was like, 'Meh, it'd be funny if I was a mapmaker cause this is what- this is the frame through which I thought about this show' was like, 'What do the maps look like here for this world?'

Austin: Right.

Janine: Like, what- what... you know, where would the gold leaf be used, and what would the handwriting look like?

Austin: Right.

Janine: What kind of icons and... and various symbols would be? So like, I had already done a lot of that side of the thinking, and then it- so it made a lot of sense to be like, 'What if my character is that?'

Austin: Right.

Janine: 'Like, that's her... her view on the world is these symbols and... you know.' Things like that, and then also patent medicines.

Austin: Yep.

Janine: Cause I just think that stuff's fascinating, personally. [Austin laughs] That's just a hundred percent me like, in that weird stuff.

Austin: Yeah.

Art: Um, I mean I think I said this before into a microphone, but like, going into our world building episode for Dungeon World, Paladin was like, my third choice.

Austin: Was it? What was your first two?

Art: Yeah. Um, I think it was Bard and Fighter.

Austin: [amused] Huh.

Art: I think those are the two I went in like, 'These are what I'd like to play.' But like, because I was one of the more experienced players, I was like, I'll go last. Um, and we'll see what goes. Maybe it was- maybe it was Fighter and Wizard? I don't remember. But um, so Paladin wasn't on the tip of my brain so once I- once I picked it, I had to like, go and do the work.

Austin: Right.

Art: But I've always- I've always like fictional metaphysics. I think it's very interesting, so it's- it wasn't hard to be like, 'Okay, let's- let's do this now.' [Austin and Art laugh lightly] Let's- Like, some of it was just, if we go back and- I guess this might be- even be all the way back on Skype, but like, it was just like, a lot of stuff that became foundational in the world is just me like, making shit up to make Samoth's look more important. Like, I remember the forging the sun out of iron was just like, something I said-

Austin: Yeah.

Art: -either in chat or on a recording where I was just like, you know, I was just coming up with things to say after Samoth's name, and that was one of them.

Austin: Mhm.

Art: Like, it's like, just say stuff and see what sticks cause I probably said three other things in that same sentence that didn't stick.

Austin: [sighs] That's interesting.

Janine: That's actually...

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: I think that ties into that first question about the theme. Applying themes and stuff of just like, see what's sticky.

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: Don't necessarily set out being like, 'This is the theme I want for this character, this whatever, whatever.' Like, give it a little- Cause I- Themes happened with Adaire that were a hundred percent unintentional, and then it was just a matter of being like, 'Oh, this is good.'

Austin: Like what?

Janine: And then like, carrying it a little forward. [Annie meows] Well, the- [Austin laughs softly] [Annie meows again] [Janine laughs]

Austin: She's so good.

Janine: The... [Annie meows throughout] the uh... way she interacts with people, and just the very limited like- We had an idea of who she was and where she came from, and then as things went, that never really came out. And then that became the thing.

Austin: Right.

Janine: Of like, we still don't know much about her.

Austin: [overlapped] She's still not opening up.

Janine: And like, that's not a- that's not a failing of the story-telling-

Austin: Right.

Janine: -that's what this story is.

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: Like, that's what her story is. Is she doesn't... just open up and spill all that. That's not this character.

Austin: Totally. Um, I'll note, too, Art, with Cass we had that great scene in Animal Out of Context, that's where the name Animal Out of Context comes from-

Art: Mhm.

Austin: -in which you're talking about the Showa emperor. You're talking about Hirohito. And like, how do you make that pivot? And that's not even about Cass. That was just kind of about the family. And that was this moment of like-

Art: Yeah.

Austin: -'Aw, yes. Good.' Like, 'This is something... that is emerging from these little things you threw at the wall forever ago about having been from this royal family that had been deposed or had kind of like, lost its, lost its empire.' And like, we didn't touch that for a long time. Like, obviously-

Art: Yeah.

Austin: -some things popped up here or there. There was like, the faction of other ex... um, ex-Apostalisians.

Art: Yeah.

Austin: But they weren't a big deal, and we didn't work through the kind of feeling side of that that much, even in the Kingdom game. We only barely touched on it. And then in An Animal Out of Context, you just like, dropped that bomb that like, helped me contextualize not just Cass and Apostalos, but a lot of the game, which was like, all of these powers are suddenly in a place where the way they define themselves is about to be turned on its head. And how do they deal with that? How do they try to keep stable? How do they try to deal with the fact that none of them were as powerful as Rigour is? And that was really, really cool. So... I appreciate that.

Art: Yeah, it's- I know it's like, not... it's not like, what the cool- the cool Friends at the Table hipsters say about it, but I think like, Animal Out of Context is- is really one of our best episodes.

Austin: Oh, I- Yeah.

Art: I know that it's like- it's like, popular as one of our best episodes, so it's like, I don't feel like unique or special saying it, [Austin and Janine breathe laughs] but like, that's a- that's a good podcast.

Austin: It's a fucking good podcast. I- Yeah. It is the most beautiful thing I've helped make... in the world. And- and like, [grunts] fuck. Also, Jack just made all the best music. And it just- it was one of those moments of when I could see... what it would be like to do this in a more professional capacity where it was like, 'Okay. We're gonna hit all this stuff. We're gonna do individual recording sessions around this. Jack is gonna compose a bunch of music.' It was, Jack was here for that, too. So, we played The Tower together on the- on a card table in my living room. And it was just like, it was a fever pitch to it. In the same way that there was for the finale of Counter/Weight. There was just something feverish about it that was fantastic to be- to make, and then to hear it come together was just like-

You know, Jack composed almost all of that music on this little red... like, keyboard. This little tiny- like, as big as a... like, a computer keyboard that we went to a B&H and bought- a camera shop, and bought, and maybe we- maybe we found it at a guitar center or something... like, while he was here. Like, it was just so... ridiculous, and to hear what that show ended up

coming out to be- that episode turned out to be, which was this culmination of all of these little things that we put in place forever ago, right? Like, that that whole show is Audy being broken and paying off what Audy was being broken- I didn't have a fucking clue that Audy was connected to that story in the way that they were at all. Let alone that we would do a show that was about Audy digging into their own memory and seeing all of this stuff.

[2:00:00]

Like, all of that is just... 'This could be interesting. This could be interesting. I'm gonna introduce it, and maybe it'll turn out well. And maybe it won't,' you know? And that's- and if it doesn't turn out well, chances are it'll just won't turn out to be anything. It will just disappear, and you don't lose anything by including that little detail. So... give yourself things that like, a couple of will blossom. Um, I think... I think that might do it for us today.

Art: Alright. Congratulations people listening to this live. I can't imagine Ali wants to put out a two hour and twenty minute episode of tips, so. [Art and **Janine** laugh lightly]

Austin: Well, we did it anyway.

Art: Yeah, especially-

Austin: It was the first one...

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: It was the first one I wanted to go deep, you know? We still have a bunch of rad questions that people have sent in.

Art: I think we did great.

Austin: Uh, so... Again, thank you for your support. We would not be able to do this without you. Like, that sounds silly right now, but like, it is time that we can spend because you're supporting us and letting us not have to do some other things right now. So, thank you all so much. It really means a lot. Please tell your friends if you like the show. I know that you've all been incredibly evangelists for us already. If you- if you keep doing it, it's how we'll get to keep doing more cool stuff. We just- For people who are only just listening to this and who've maybe not gotten and checked their email in a little bit, or who have not um... been to the actual Patreon page, we actually crossed ten thousand a couple of days ago. And that... is incredible. Ten thousand dollars a month. And that also means that we've unveiled two more of our uh, future goals. The first of those goals... I have to now find this post. I guess I don't need to. I guess I can just button-

Art: Just- we're talking about twenty and thirty?

Austin: [overlapped] We're talking about twenty and thirty

Art: Or are we talking about fifteen?

Austin: Oh, well, fifteen in the next one which is that I will start doing my prep- like, not all of it, but I will do a- once a month a prep stream, where I'm prep- where I'm doing preparation for an upcoming game, and I'll go over some of my NPCs I'm building. People who want to know what prep looks like- like, that fifteen K is gonna be very interesting cause you'll see like, what it means for me to build out an NPC and build out a location and think about if there is gonna be a set piece, how do I make it flexible enough that it's not- I don't have to railroad them to the set piece. Things like that. Like, figuring out that Apokine- I wish there was video of me figuring out that Apokine was where Apokine was in Counter/Weight. Like, that moment was really cool in my own prep where I kind of, like Usual Suspect, saw the pieces coming together. And I wish I'd been able to be like, 'Aw, this is a really cool idea. Like, here it is.' So, that's the fifteen K is once a month prep streams with me.

At twenty K, we'll start releasing two episodes of Bluff City a month, and based on... this last week of playing Bluff City, like... y'all are gonna want two of those a month. [Janine and Austin laugh] Like, I'm dying over the fact that that Fiasco game is gonna be split into two, but it was long enough to be split into two, so... Um, and then at thirty K, this is a big one, we will figure out how to do a Friends at the Table live show once a year. Uh, it is definitely a stretch, and we don't have a lot of details on how we would do that quite yet because it is just about triple what we're getting right now on the Patreon, but listen. Like, we didn't... we didn't expect the amazing out, you know, outpour of support that you've given us so far. So, who knows how much we could grow and, you know, as people continue to tell their friends, who knows where we'll be in a year. Or in a couple of months. Fuck. Like I- [laughs] It's been overwhelming. So.

Art: I mean maybe literally because who knows where we're gonna be able to afford to put on that show. It'll be like, 'Everyone come down to, you know-'

Austin: Houlihan's.

Art: '-rural Missouri where we found a-'

Janine: [interjecting] Well, if we- if we-

Art: '-an abandoned barn.'

Janine: Like, if we meet like, halfway between everyone, then it's in the middle of the Atlantic ocean. So.

Austin: [laughs] I think it's-

Art: I don't pull that far enough back? It's not like, just somewhere in Maryland?

Janine: Uh...

Austin: That's not go to Maryland. [laughs]

Art: We're not talkin' about that tonight.

Austin: No, we are not. Oh my god. Lotta college stories. Uh, yeah. I think Houlihan's is definitely- The Houlihan's in Minnesota. We'll be there.

Art: Yeah.

Austin: We'll rent that whole place out.

Art: Uh huh. Try the sriracha sauce; it's gross. [Austin laughs]

Austin: I'm Austin Walker. You can find me on Twitter [@austin_walker](#). You can find the show at [friendsatthetable.net](#), [Twitter.com/friends_table](#), and [friendsatthetable.cash](#) for the Patreon. Art, what about you?

Art: You can find me on Twitter [@atebbel](#). And on this show... It's fun.

Austin: And Janine.

Janine: You can find me on Twitter [@bleatingheart](#).

Austin: And if you have questions for us, you can send them to [tipsatthetable@gmail.com](#), and we will filter them into this huge list of questions that I have in front of me. Thank you all so much again for your support and for listening. We will be back on Tips at the Table next month with more. This is a Twin Peaks now. Let's go to time.is.

Art: Oh, yeah.

Janine: Are we doin' this one on... on...

Austin: Yeah, you gotta close 'em.

Janine: Spoilin' our clap? Okay. Alright.

Austin: I'm not gonna hit-

Janine: Hit on a high note.

Art: Alright. I mean-

Austin: I need them to be on OBS's.

Janine: Good claps.

Austin: Like that's the thing. So.

Art: Oh, sure.

Janine: That's true. That's true.

Austin: Ready? We're gonna do it at fifteen seconds?

Art: Sure.

Janine: Alright. Bonus clap.

Austin: Y'all get to see this one. I'll put this one up on the- on the- There we go.

[three claps are heard]

Austin: I was- I was bad on. Can we do another one at twenty-five?

Art and Janine: Yeah.

Austin: Thanks. That was me. That was me. I'll own up.

[three claps are heard]

Austin: Better. Alright, everybody. Have a good night.