

Tips at the Table 03: Production Chat

Transcriber: Kai [0:00:00-0:17:11]; meko

AUSTIN: Welcome to Tips at the Table, a Q&A podcast focused on critical question asking, uh, some hopefully smart answers, and fun interaction between good friends. I am your host, Austin Walker. Joining me today, Alicia Acampora.

ALI: Um, hi, my name is Alicia Acampora, you can find me @Ali_West on Twitter and on the podcast you're listening to.

AUSTIN: And also Jack de Quidt.

JACK: Hi, you can find me on Twitter @notquitereal.

AUSTIN: I'm gonna turn off this fake laser pointer.

JACK: And also on this podcast.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Uh, alright, so it is September, our third episode of Tips at the Table, so at this point we now have three questions that recur. Jack, it's your first time here so you have to answer this question that came in from Alex. For every friend at the table, what has been your favorite character you have played in a non-recorded RPG and what made them your favorite?

JACK: I've had a lot of time to think about this.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: And it's, uh, probably—I wanna say it's a two-way tie but I don't think it is.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JACK: When we were in Los Angeles we played a game of something like Ten Candles?

AUSTIN: Ten Candles, yep.

JACK: Which was a haunted house game. Haunted house game? It was a post-apocalyptic horror game.

[Austin and Ali laugh]

AUSTIN: You know, a haunted house game.

ALI: You know, a haunted house [laughs].

JACK: And in it was a virus that was spread by talking, because the aliens traveled through words. And my character realized this early on and I had to stop talking.

AUSTIN: You didn't—Your character didn't realize that Jack, you—because of the way the game worked you came up with that fact.

JACK: Oh yeah.

AUSTIN: Because the way that game works is that every player comes up with something for another player there, including one player needing to come up with an element about whatever the creatures—the aliens, the monsters, whatever they are, in the dark—some fact about them and the thing that Jack came up with was, of course, that they traveled through language, which just made him a very—that character was great. Because they knew a lot but couldn't say anything!

JACK: She was just this very no-nonsense—she was like a pathfinder who wore, like, walking boots and a coat, and was just, like, this very forthright—she knew where she was going. She was in, like, her mid-fifties and then suddenly a third of the way through this game she just couldn't say anything at all.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JACK: And had to sort of be carted around by the other characters who didn't understand what was going on.

ALI: Oh yeah...

JACK: But I think my favorite, my honest and true favorite answer was the first time that Austin and I really realized The Tower was a game that worked.

AUSTIN: Mhm

JACK: We played a game set on a Mississippi river boat.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: And this river boat moving down a river and encountering a bunch of people, so I guess the answer to the character there is just this whole cast of characters in The Tower, various people onboard the river boat, people in bars—

AUSTIN: But you were the boy.

JACK: But didn't we draw—didn't we both come up with characters at different points?

AUSTIN: Yeah of course, of course, I think so.

JACK: So I guess the boy who—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK:—the boy, the weird sports day on the boat, and the wedding party.

AUSTIN: [laughs] I forgot about the sports day! I remember the wedding party, I forgot that we had like boat, like, riverboat Olympics. That was incredible!

JACK: Yeah it was like the boat captain was like "You know what we're doing today? We're gonna do, we're gonna play deck quits, we're gonna do running races—"

AUSTIN: Yeah. That was fantastic because one, riverboats are a good setting [Ali laughs]. Two, it's cool to be a little kid on a riverboat who's doing, like, odd jobs and probably shouldn't even be on that boat.

JACK: Mm-hm. Yeah that was a stowaway.

AUSTIN: Yeah, he was definitely a stowaway. Three, my favorite thing about that character was that he had no idea who his god was.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: You were convinced as a player that your god was a goddess of entertainment.

JACK: Yeah, yeah, yeah!

AUSTIN: But she was actually a goddess of historical—like, historical level tragedy.

JACK: Famous historical tragedy, yeah.

AUSTIN: From the future. Inevitable future tragedy. Because the thing she was giving you, the reason you thought she was an entertainment goddess, was because she gave you a picture of a World War I era film star or something, and so you thought "Oh, she's seeing into the future of history that's, like, entertainment!" And you built all these laws about entertaining people and putting on a good show.

JACK: Yeah...

AUSTIN: And then you started getting other things like shovels from World War—like trench shovels and, um, a fire axe from 9/11 and, like, stuff from just terrible tragedies in human history and war and it was just one of these amazing—it was just a really great story, I liked that one a lot. I wish we had recorded this, Jack.

[Ali laughs]

JACK: We can play that game again, is the thing.

AUSTIN: I know...

JACK: We just have to, like, work on it.

AUSTIN: We can't, that was one the right one, you know. It was. We did it once.

JACK: Yeah, that was a good game.

AUSTIN: You and I have only played that game like five times maybe. The first time was actually—

JACK: Yeah, including Animal Out of Context.

AUSTIN: Right, exactly. One time you were an ox, one time you were that riverboat boy, and one time you were like a vaguely Pilgrim-esque, Puritan-esque, girl who was in a very—

JACK: Who ran a farm.

AUSTIN: Yeah, had a farm, and the adversary was a nice guy with a tractor. He had a tractor.

JACK: Oh yeah, that was great. I forgot about that!

AUSTIN: There was a good lighthouse scene. That was a good scene—that was really good.

JACK: That game we, like, extended that game across a year. Not in play but the—each, uh, each—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: —I'm trying to remember the name we had for them. Each meeting with the god was a different season on this farm—

AUSTIN: Yes. Yes.

JACK: Showing how the farm kinda grew and that was definitely a time where we realized the extent to which we could make the setting agnostic.

AUSTIN: Yes. It was very important that we picked something—

JACK: Like, play with scale.

AUSTIN: —that was, like, okay, there was going to be a touchstone for faith here, so we picked something that was like vaguely New England

JACK: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Like I think about something like The Witch fits into this, this game really nicely, and that setting specifically.

JACK: Yeah, yeah, yeah!

AUSTIN: Uh, we wanted that but we didn't want like...Mesopotamia. Like, we didn't want Moses. We didn't want, uh, Abrahamic faith. We obviously still did Abrahamic faith but we didn't do like old Testament prophet you know? We did this other notion of Pilgrim and, uh, it was good. Okay, so I think that's it because Ali, you've answered this question now, right?

ALI: Um yeah, I mentioned—

AUSTIN: Last time. Your—

ALI: I mentioned Ace Ten—

AUSTIN: Yes. Yes.

ALI: the Jedi that I have played for, like, twelve years.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. I've mentioned a number of characters at this point, including Smith July and Xanatos Woodshim. Uh, have I mentioned—

JACK: How is that name spelled?

AUSTIN: Xanatos?

JACK: Woodshim.

AUSTIN: It's the word "woods" and the "word" him back-to-back.

JACK: [laughing] Oh, okay.

AUSTIN: It's just straight up: Woodshim! Uh, Woodswho? Woodshim.

JACK: Austin, you seem really quiet.

AUSTIN: Am I?

ALI: No.

JACK: Yeah, like—hmmm. Oh.

AUSTIN: I don't think I am.

[Ali laughs]

JACK: Alright. On my end Austin just, like, faded out.

AUSTIN: Weird.

ALI: It was just the Woodshim, you know, like—

AUSTIN: Woodshim.

ALI: [softly] Woodshim.

AUSTIN: I think I just got quiet thinking about Xanatos Woodshim [laughs].

ALI: [softly] Woodshim, Woodshim.

AUSTIN: And I think the last one that I'll shout out on this episode because I've done a lot of these...is...it was fun to be...hmm, what are other characters I've played...I really, really liked Basil. I played a character named Basil the Bastard who was a philosopher and a bastard noble who betrayed his family and killed the previous—who led a revolution against the previous noble class in a game of Burning Wheel run by Adam Koebel. You can go look that up. That was a really blast—it was like a blast. Heavy, but fun, so. Alright we should get into real questions now. Oh no, wait, we have one more—

ALI: We have two more.

AUSTIN: Oh, we have two more for Jack because Jack's never done these before. Wow. That's exciting.

[Ali laughs]

ALI: You know, Sylvia's¹ gonna get front-loaded the next episode.

AUSTIN: Oh, Sylvia hasn't been on one of these yet.

ALI: Yeaah.

AUSTIN: Uh, Jack, this question's for you and this one comes in from Matthias if I remember that's what that name is...Mattias maybe. What's improved about your play, where would you still like to improve?

JACK: Um. I think realizing that, uh, kind of putting words to the fact that a thing that I'm interested in is the dramatic irony in these characters—

AUSTIN: Mmmm.

JACK —was really useful to me and a lot of that came from, and guided a lot of decision-making, I think. Decision-making as characters and decision-making as a player, someone invested in telling a story.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JACK: And I think, beforehand, it's sometimes hard to make decisions on the show, um, narratively. To have a sense of where you want a scene to go, where you want a story to go, what would be most interesting and how to get it there. And you know, I'm an English student so I've come across dramatic irony before—

[Austin laughs]

JACK: But hearing someone talk about it with reference to a thing you could do on a tabletop podcast—

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: Was really interesting and kind of came to solidify a sort of working practice that I think about a lot which is about hidden information and conveying information.

AUSTIN: Right.

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

JACK: Information I have and information that my characters have and information that other characters have. And a lot of this was kind of—was really cemented by Art's great line of, like Hadrian doesn't know he rolled a one.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: Which was one of the best lines I've heard on the show just from like a—it's one of those things that I heard someone say and just immediately went, like, "Oh."

[Austin laughs]

JACK: "—Right. That's a way of thinking about this."

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Which was really good. I think in terms of a way I want to improve, I think as easy as it is to be like "Oh, I want to play different characters," actually making those decisions and making those decisions appreciably is difficult and it's something that I want to work much harder—work much harder at.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JACK: And I think having just come off playing Lem definitely feels like a bad habit of having spent so much time with that character.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: And so part of what I'm trying to do with Fourteen is just throw myself into the deep end as often as possible with different character archetypes. Thinking of each of the body swaps as an opportunity to play a different sort of player character.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: And work out ways that they sort of—they reflect each other and ways that they can push me into having different narrative voices and telling different stories.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's really interesting to me because by the end of Lem's stuff in Winter you were also throwing yourself into things but in a way that is less about "Oh I'm gonna come out of this and then get to play a different character and see a different perspective of who this character is" and more about "Hey, I'm doubling down because at this point Lem doesn't care about what the consequences are for other people."

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Whereas Fourteen is very much the opposite, of like "I don't care—there are no consequences for *me*", which is incorrect.

[Austin and Jack laugh]

AUSTIN: Unfortunately for Fourteen Fifteen.

JACK: Yeah, and like I think briefly there as well, Lem in the, uh, at the Stoneworks—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: —was definitely a moment of "Oh this is where I want this character's resting place to be"

AUSTIN: Mhmm.

JACK: Not in terms of their life but in terms of where this character is. This action is a very important action for me in terms of setting the tone for this character. And I don't know if I've necessarily hit that with Fourteen yet, which is fine because we're still working out our new characters and everything like that but that's a moment that I'm really excited to have.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I think every character gets that at a different point in each season. In each—both in each setting but also really in each season. And I think there's a different point of that for Lem season one than in season three.

JACK: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: I think there's a different point of that for all of your characters inside of a different season. I think about, you know, Aria shooting up into the sky and saying "The bells are ringing" is fairly early in that season and I'm like "Oh, I know who Aria is." Whereas as I don't know if I really know who Cassis until maybe mid-season.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I know like, okay they're a medic and a soldier and they're this exiled heir to the throne or whatever. But I don't really know who Cass is until maybe like the determination to fight against some major threats. You know until it's like "Oh no, it's time to go"—

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And Cass is here for it. Or like maybe you know what it is? It might be "I love it when a plan comes together". Like once that happened it's like, oh Cass is the one who is there to pick up the pieces when things start to fall apart. And even though that was just a move, that was

Cass. And that's—I like that about the way we do seasons is, like, oh this is—I love seeing you all come into your characters. And frankly same, for me. Knowing when I had Ibex was like a really great moment. Knowing when I have...even smaller characters, you know, in my head in a way that's meaningful is a big deal in terms of being able to conceptualize what the—there's a recording we just did in which I had to do a scene, a pretty good scene with kind of a character who hasn't been on screen much at all named Alekhine and I felt myself finding his voice—like, he's just up until now he's been like "Oh yeah also there's this guy on a spaceship named Alekhine
[Ali laughs].

AUSTIN: He's like the guy on the Myriad who is the diplomat who's kind of has decision-making power. And that's kind of it, and he's had one quick scene with Echo about the snake and that is it so far. And then like, you know, he was also in the episode we had to can so I've had like a number of chances to find his voice and figure out who he was on screen. And I got a scene that will be out in like four weeks or something, three or four weeks, where I'm like "Ohhhhhh that's who Alekhine is! Awesome! Cool." So, look forward to that. Um, okay. Last one that is for everybody and Ali, you also got this one, right? Because you were on the last episode?

ALI: Uhhh, I believe so, yeah.

AUSTIN: Okay, so this is from Jenny. "Hey all, I love the show that you—I love the show and that you don't stick to one system but switch it up even within seasons. Of the many you've played on Friends at the Table, which tabletop RPG is your favorite or least favorite or most challenging or whatever you find most interesting to answer? Additionally, what is the balance between envisioning a world and picking a system that fits and picking a system and allowing it to create or shape the game you play? [pause] Also for you, Jack.

JACK: I think that's definitely Blades in the Dark for me.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JACK: Um. [pause] There's kind of like three different sorts of reactions that I have to systems. One is that I read through it and I go like "I don't understand this and I don't understand how I can use it to tell an interesting story." That's one and that's the worst one.

[Ali laughs]

JACK: And luckily we haven't hit any of those but I've read a few.

[Ali laughs]

JACK: And then the second one, the second one is like "Oh, I don't understand this yet. But I know that if we poke at it enough it will get to a place in our response to it where we can bring

interesting stories out of it. And then the third one is one where like I just look and the list of the mechanics and go "Oh, right I see how this is gonna—this is gonna be good for this, or this is gonna be good for that." And Blades in the Dark was just absolutely one of like, everything on my character sheet, even all the unfilled-in boxes and the harm indicator and—

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JACK: —trauma and vices and things. [Pause] Like the first time I saw those was definitely a moment of like "Oh, right! I see what this season is gonna be. I see what—

AUSTIN: Mm-hm!

JACK: I see what the stories we're gonna tell from this are gonna look like." And it's just the most fun working in that space. Not that it isn't fun working in others. In fact, a thing that's really great is the moment where things click and you begin to realize "Oh I see how we're gonna tell the story here."

AUSTIN: Totally.

JACK: But in Blades it was, it was immediate of like knowing where we're going and knowing what we're gonna be doing.

AUSTIN: Yeah! Man, I miss Blades. I'm thinking about Blades a lot lately.

JACK: Blades is so good!

ALI: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: Um....cool. Okay. Let's get into the new questions. As always, we try to pick some questions that are built for the people on this—on the cast, and Ali went through and kind of highlighted a bunch that were really good for us! Because we produce the show; we have a chat in our Discord that is production and it's Ali, Jack, and I. And whenever Jack is in town Ali and I and Jack go to like...family restaurants [Ali laughs] like Uno's Pizzeria and Outback to have like, family meetings and also production meetings.

[Ali laughing]

AUSTIN: Because it's, you know, as you know from Friends at the Ta—or from—I said was Friends at the Table, what I meant was Fast and the Furious. Uhhh

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: It's all about family, here you know?

JACK: It's all about family.

ALI: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: It's all about family. If you have questions you can send them to Tipsatthetable@gmail.com. Gonna move this window away from that other—I had this like over here and it was just bumping into the window. Alright, move that over.

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: Alright so, first one comes in from Eanon who says "Hi Austin/the gang. I recently started GMing a Dungeon World campaign inspired by Hieron and the other stories from around the Friends at the Table fandom as well. It's great fun so far, but it's stuttering a bit due to players being unavailable. What have you found is the best way to preserve momentum when unavoidable long breaks happen? Alternatively, how can I get my flaky friends to commit to a dang schedule? Thanks for all the stories and that, Eanon. P.S: Is Friends at the Table a strictly Austin GMed endeavor or will we see anyone else at the helm?"

The last one is easy which is, like, yeah, I think Live at the Table is a space where we definitely want to start doing games that are not GMed by me. We have to figure out what the right fit for that is for the first one, 'cause it's gonna be a lot of pressure for that person given the history of the show, I think, but I'm way into that idea. And, you know, we've also just dipped our toes into it in terms of playing GM-less games like Kingdom and Skeletons and Quiet Year and stuff like that where I kind of act as facilitator instead of GM. And I'm really looking forward to it because—partially because I think everyone on the show can tell a great story and partially—and be a great GM. And partially because it will make those GM-less games better once people have experience as GMs. Because there actually—I get frustrated with games that are called GM-less games sometimes because it isn't that there's no Game Master, it's that everybody is a Game Master. And—so it doesn't mean you can sit back and play your character. What it means is, like, we all have to contribute to the narrative pacing and figure out a direction to go and antagonize, you know, our char—the elements of the story and each other in important places. Like, I think about the Kingdom game during COUNTER/Weight and how until Ibex was there, no one was causing shit with anybody. And I can't wait for a couple years from now when we've all played—when we've all GMed a bunch—and everyone is like "Ooh, I know what the best way to cause shit—to stir shit is in this GM-less game." [Jack and Ali laugh]

JACK: Uh—

AUSTIN: But I think we'll get there, so. Oh, Jack, I thought you were gonna say something.

JACK: No, no, no, I was just excited about the prospect of an entire cast [Austin and Ali laugh] participating—

AUSTIN: Of shit-stirrers.

JACK: —in the right way to cause shit.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Ali, how about you as someone who's, like—how do you preserve momentum in terms of long breaks, in terms of organizing us and keeping us on track and getting us to commit to schedules?

ALI: [laughs] It's tough 'cause I feel like this question is about a different thing—

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ALI: In terms of how to keep people interested in the story.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: Because on the scheduling side it's really just, like, continue to ask people when—

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: —they can do the thing. And making sure that you know when people are usually unavailable.

AUSTIN: Yes.

ALI: Like a thing that I have to do constantly is, because Keith works weirder hours than the rest of us—

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ALI: Like, people will be like “Oh, we can all do this on Saturday!” and I have to be the one who remembers Keith usually works on Saturday, we have to figure out something different now.

AUSTIN: Right, right. Yeah.

ALI: But in terms of just keeping general interest, or like, “where's my character at?” or stuff like that, we have the Discord.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: Where we just have a little—where we talk about the show [laughs].

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah.

ALI: And like, oh, someone draws a fanart of a thing and we're like "Oh, we love that scene!" And, like, you know—

AUSTIN: Right. That helps a lot.

ALI: Or [laughs] a picture of a cat and some lady, and being like, "I love Tender and Signet!" and then [Austin laughs] we'll start talking about what the next episode should be, or whatever [laughs].

AUSTIN: Right, right. The, um, I'll say the one thing that came up recently for us, you know—it was the two of you plus Janine—was in the Contrition's Figure arc we had to take a pretty big break and not only did that break the momentum but it meant that there were key details that I knew well 'cause I'm looking at notes for what the thing is but that the rest of the crew doesn't, not because their characters wouldn't know but because it's been three weeks since we recorded. So things like "What's up with that white cloud?" were things that I tried to communicate subtly in the first half of that—or, not the first half but the second third of the arc, and in the final third, when we went back to it, it was like "Well, it's been three weeks since we talked about it."

And so there should be—the kind of learning from that for me was, like, spend the ten minutes ahead of time. Don't put that on the episode even, because for listeners they would have just heard the other episode the week before, but for players being able to say, like, "What are the assumptions that I am working with with you? One: the white cloud has been doing this specific thing, remember that. Two: this is how this technology works. Three: here are the stakes." And you'll notice that for almost every new recording of the ground game I say "Here are the three things that you're here to do."

[Ali laughs]

JACK: Mhm.

AUSTIN: "You are here to: spread the Mesh, to locate the missing—the rumored Divine, and to find a home for these refugees, basically. And that is the thing; those are the three things, basically. And being able to keep the players' eyes on the prize in that way—you know, they don't—everything doesn't have to go back to that thing exactly, you can still go off and find, perhaps, a weird horse [snorts, Ali laughs]. But you can also, you know, focus on what those are and keep everyone's heads in the game, so to speak. So one thing I'd say is spend the time for that when you lose long breaks. Two is the opposite, which is don't be afraid to just jump into the action.

ALI: Yes.

AUSTIN: My favorite thing—you know, going into season two of Hieron, like months before we started recording I was like “This seasons opens with an arrow in the air. It opens with an arrow going through a wooded area, and it’s snowy, and it’s just in the air already, and they’re in the middle of a fight scene. And it won’t be a big-stakes fight scene but it’ll be a fight scene, and they’ll be on their way to do a thing and here’s—we’re there.” And then developed from that was “Oh, and there will also be this chase scene on the rooftops of Rosemerrow.” And don’t be afraid to jump in media res to something, because that will help generate momentum immediately. And from there, you can also do things like ask your players questions. I don’t know how your players are, if this has ever happened to them before, but one of my favorite things to do is to be like, you know “Across the room, a man stands up from a table and draws his blade and points it at you. Why?” And, like, okay, I don’t—what did you do to upset him?

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: You know, or whatever, and that is a really fun way to quickly build new momentum instead of trying to like, “Okay, after we finished that last adventure, where were we?” It doesn’t matter where you were after that last adventure; what matters is where you’re at now. If you’re playing with players who are into that; as always, take the caveat which is, like, maybe this doesn’t work for your group, but give it a shot.

ALI: Right, yeah, if it’s the type of game where you come back—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: And you have a big map and all of your little icons are all in the same place [Jack laughs], and you want to know where you are, that’s like a thing?

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: But I think that recording you mentioned was really the first time that we’ve ever been like, “Okay, this is exactly—this is what my priorities are, this is what I’m confused on.”

AUSTIN: Mm-hm. Yeah.

ALI: Like, in a very open way. Which helped a ton.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Totally.

JACK: I think—

AUSTIN: And it wrapped nicely because of that, I think.

ALI: Yeah.

JACK: Also, when I'm struggling with that, I try and apply similar stuff that I do when I'm working on any long-term project that I'm struggling with.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JACK: Like when I'm writing or when I'm playing Dark Souls [Ali laughs]. Which is very much to...leave myself good and easy work to do. Or good and interesting work to do.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: You know, when I'm writing, I try not to end a workday by closing a book or closing a sentence. I try and leave it so that, like, oh when I open this up tomorrow, I have to write this and that thing is fresh in my mind and I'm excited about that. Or in, you know—

AUSTIN: That's a good idea.

JACK: —in Dark Souls 2, don't leave myself fighting a Tower Knight or something. Beat the Tower Knight and then know that when I go back into it, I've got that corridor to explore or whatever.

AUSTIN: Riight.

JACK: And definitely in tabletop podcasts, there's like—at the end of the Bluff City 1 recording I was really worried about maintaining momentum for the second—

AUSTIN: Yes.

JACK: And that way that I tried to feel better about that was, like, that night, have an idea for how I wanted to second recording—like, what I wanted that first scene to be, 'cause it was my scene.

AUSTIN: Yep.

JACK: And being able to go to sleep going like, "Alright, I know [Austin laughs] where we're gonna be when the camera comes up."

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JACK: Was really helpful in terms of staying excited for that, and keeping in the mindset of telling that story.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I think that's a huge thing. The third thing I'd say is, like, in terms of players being unavailable, we are very precious in terms of not playing games without a player. When I was in college, that was not the case. We had a cutoff rule, which was like "Okay, we're playing with five people. If three of them can't make it, then we won't play this game. But if two people miss, it's okay, they'll pick it up. They'll be able to come back in, you'll brief them on what happened." Not every game needs to be this thing where the entire cast is totally checked in. I, at this point, wouldn't want to go back to that other style of play. But in terms of, "Oh, it's a weekly game—"...That's not true, I said I wouldn't do that, but I've done it, right? There've definitely—when I was playing Apocalypse World with Adam and when I was playing Burning Wheel with Adam, I definitely—there were weeks where I was like "I can't play this today, I have a work commitment, I have a life commitment." Stuff like that.

You know, there are times when you're not gonna be able to get everybody together and, you know, that needs—that should be in your daily life an okay thing. Unless it gets to the point where you're like "Do you even want to be playing this game?" And if it is, then, like, that's okay. You don't have to play the game with the whole—with everybody. They can—you can do other things to hang out with them another day, or whatever. So. Being conscious about what everyone's realistic ability to commit is such a big thing, and can be a hard conversation, but it's a conversation worth having for sure. Um, okay.

Next question. From Motel, they say: "Hey, I've been wondering what the circumstances around the production and inserting-slash-editing of music for the show are. I'm sure it varies lots, but when in the production timeline do you all decide there'll be music, and how do you get it to line up so well with the scenes [Jack and Ali chuckle]? It seems like Jack wouldn't generally have the edited scene pre-scoring and likewise, Ali probably doesn't have music before starting editing. The music and editing in Friends at the Table work so harmoniously together to complement the GM-ing and character play and I'm really curious about how it all comes together. Thanks so much for all your work." If you—this is for you two.

ALI: Yeah.

JACK: Mhm.

ALI: So—

JACK: I mean, Ali has the audio first.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ALI: I do have the audio first. And I tend to give—like, if there's a scene that we know is gonna have music, I'll edit just that scene and give it to Jack.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ALI: And be like, “Hey. Do your thing.”

AUSTIN: Yeah. That’s like Four Conversations.

ALI: Right, yeah.

AUSTIN: That’s like the end—

ALI: Four Conversations was such a different beast [laughs].

AUSTIN: Oh yeah, totally. Totally. What else? Animal Out of Context, a lot of that stuff was like—

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: “Here, we need this scene scored.” [laughs] Stuff like that for sure.

JACK: And there’s different kinds of scales for that, right? Like, sometimes Ali will send me a—I know I’m in trouble when I see the file size.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JACK: And sometimes it’s like two megabytes and I’m like “Nice, this is gonna be between forty seconds and a minute-and-a-half.”

[Austin chuckles]

JACK: And then sometimes [laughs] it’s like a hundred-and-thirty and I’m like, “Oh no [all laugh] what is happening here?”

ALI: Well there’s—

AUSTIN: Well that’s like the—

ALI: Oh. Go on.

AUSTIN: Go ahead.

ALI: Okay. Well, ‘cause there were—especially towards the end of Hieron, there were a lot of times where it was like “These four scenes in this episode could use music.”

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yes. Yeah.

ALI: And, like, I—especially in Seasons of Hieron—or Winter—felt really weird [laughing] about asking Jack to do music—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: —and do it in a way that was like, “Hey, can you listen to this and just, like, let me know what you’re inspired by?”

[Jack laughs]

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ALI: Which, like, doesn’t work, we should just tell Jack when to put music on our show.

AUSTIN: Yeah...I mean, there’s times—

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: One: Jack’s super busy, so that’s part of that.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Two: there are times when it’s like, what do we prioritize here? No one has infinite time. Yes, I would love a show where every episode had original music. I think there’s a scene in every show that could have original music. But we don’t have the time for that. And frankly, there is something powerful about having this—when new music hits, people are like—

JACK: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: “Oh shit. This is an actual—this scene means something.” [Jack laughs] The hair on the back of your head stands on its end and, like, it’s time to go. And sometimes you get a bunch of scenes like that in a row. Like, I think about the Corsica Neue moving into the life or death roll in Winter in Hieron—

JACK: Oh God, yeah.

ALI: Oh yeah.

AUSTIN: Which is, like, there’s three songs there or something, right? That is—That is—I—*Broken Branches*, or *the March of the Unstill*, and *Spring’s Light* back to back. And that’s, like, really a cool sequence. And is—that’s the sort of thing where it’s like, okay, Jack has decided

both of these are priorities. We both—we wanted music for that whole scene and Jack figured out a way to get two songs out of it, so [chuckles] nice work.

[Ali laughs]

JACK: I think that, like, definitely towards that and towards the end of—like in the finale in Winter where that ending is four or five scenes together, all of which have equal weighting in terms of needing music on them—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Um, it's really weird and difficult. Because as tempting as it would be to do something like Four Conversations where it's like one uninterrupted [Austin and Ali chuckle] stylistic chunk where everything flows into [Jack laughs] the next—especially in Winter in Hieron, like, I've spent a whole season making a series of well-intentioned but sometimes difficult choices about how themes fit together and how motifs fit together.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: And so when you get kind of five scenes like that, or even just three scenes together, I'm essentially looking at three tracks. And then the question becomes “Well, how do these tracks fit together [laughs] practically?”

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: And in the finale, Ali sent me a much longer file than the one I eventually used and I went through it two or three times writing sketches for the whole thing. And bits of the music were just boring or didn't work.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JACK: Or felt very much like I was trying to fill time between other scenes that needed music. Which is the last thing that I'd want. So what I ended up doing was recutting bits of that ending and just going, like, “Oh this scene, I cannot afford to have music here.” Stuff like Throndir going and meeting the Golden Lance—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: —was a really cool scene, and a really important bit in the ending. But when I looked back through my notes for that season, I didn't have any motifs or themes for the Golden Lance. I mean, there's one in Marielda—

AUSTIN: Mm, yeah.

JACK: —but, like, it wasn't referenced in this season so it didn't warrant being in the episode. It would have felt really weird and false for it to show up. So that was definitely a case of going like, "Right, I have this amount of hours. I can cut that whole bit out and not worry [laughs] about that and move on to doing something else."

AUSTIN: I will say too there's another thing that happens sometimes, Jack. Which is, we finish an episode and you say "I can't wait to score this scene."

JACK: Yes.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And then you already have a sketch for it immediately.

JACK: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: Like the sequence of Morning's Observation showing you where their culture is from and where their home is. You were immediately excited to score that scene. Which was incredible to me, because I didn't think that—that was one of those moments [Jack laughs] when I was like, "[softly] Why would you score that scene [Ali laughs]? Okay, I guess that's a big moment?" And then I heard that sequence when you put that music, and one: I had no idea what to expect from the music for that scene because we had only talked very broadly about what Earth sounds like in Twilight Mirage.

JACK: Mm, yeah.

AUSTIN: And so to hear it was, like—completely bowled me over, made my week. I still think that's one of my favorite songs you've done so far for the show. And it's from a scene that, like, when I had it was like, "Oh, this is a scene I need to have, not a scene that I'm, like—" That was not a, you know, the revealing of the Big Bad in COUNTER/Weight. That was not the Ibex and, you know, Maryland on September scene, or anything like that. Do you know what I mean? That was just—

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: A scene in which I did some exposition and you turned it into this really powerful thing. Because you found a strain there that I hadn't really—you found something there that was powerful and completely emphasized it, which was the rhythm and cadence of the back and forth. Which is, you know, partially a thing that Ali helps create by making sure that there's, like—the pauses are the right length.

JACK: Mm-hm.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And that the downtime between words is appropriate and that there's crosstalk when there should be crosstalk. And that's so there because the—if people go and listen to that scene, that has been some of my favorite work that both Ali and Jack have done is the ways in which that conversation flows between Morning's Observation giving regular detail, like, you know, "This is where I'm from, this is what it's like," and then another character, a player character, pushing back on some bullshit he said, and then him getting really angry and going [pitches voice up] like this, and the music blows up in that moment...it's so good, I love it so much. I'm gonna listen to that scene when we're done recording [Jack and Ali laugh]. I'm just so lucky to work with both of you who can bring together—

JACK: Aww.

AUSTIN: —what to me is often a really interesting scene and turn it into something that's really memorable and not just another moment. So, thank you.

JACK: Thank you.

ALI: Thank you.

JACK: There's definitely, like—there's two ways of that happening, right? Where like—it was so much fun in Marielda where you would begin describing a heist—

AUSTIN: Mmm [laughs].

JACK: And immediately I would be half-listening to the heist and half [laughs] just taking notes [Ali laughs] as I was going, of like, "Oh, alright, this is what this sounds like," or "this is what it's gonna get close to sounding like."

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: And then sometimes I get scenes and I go "Oh, what? I have no idea." Like [laughs]—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: This—it feels very much like—and I think it's similar when writing or when you sit down to write an essay for school, or you sit down to write a project or whatever, and you have this idea in your head that is completely shapeless and has no words in it—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: But you're like, "Yeah, I think I've got some sense of how this is gonna go." And then sometimes you sit down and everything you think falls like a lead brick.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Yep.

JACK: Just completely plummets, and that's definitely times when I just, like—like I think there's a Benjamin scene with that in Winter in Hieron that I've talked about before where I really wanted to find music for that scene. And I just sat down and played the piano for forty minutes over it, like, looped—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: —and absolutely nothing happened. But then sometimes stuff like the intro to the Detectives game, the one where the theme is played on the flute.

AUSTIN: Ohh, yeah!

JACK: Just took forever and was just me smashing my head against the music for ages, and I think turned into something good. But the best ones for me are definitely when Austin or Ali or another character starts describing something and I'm like, "Right, this is the music! [Ali laughs] Here we go."

AUSTIN: Right. So Zoey in the chat says "I've definitely wondered whether the Twilight Mirage theme was written for the "setting fires" intro or the other way around." We go back and forth on that often.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: But that case was definitely built after I did the intro, right?

JACK: Yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: But then—except but then I kept tinkering with the intro this season.

ALI: Mm-hm. [Jack chuckles] Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: Which is interesting. This has been, for me, the hardest intro to write intros for, the hardest intro song to write intros for, because it's so dynamic.

JACK: Yeah...

AUSTIN: Whereas Marielda was the easiest. Which was, I have an out, I know I have until—one: you gave me a loop of the intro guitar, which means I could make it as long or short

as I needed it to be [Jack chuckles]. Two: I knew that the second that the clarinet came in, I was out; I had to have it done by then. Whereas as in Twilight Mirage's opening theme, there are a number of places where I can leave. Most of the time I leave right before the final big, it's like "BrRRa" that whole noise coming together, the kind of climax of that song, after the sort of quiet-loud-quiet-loud-quiet-loud moment, but I don't have to do it there. And it's like that because the original script that I gave you was like that, with the original recording from me, but it doesn't always have to be that way.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So, sometimes it goes the other way where—there have been times—you know what it was? It was Bluff City, was the opposite. Where it's like, "Dude, I have no idea what the intro—what does the intro to this sound like?"

[Jack laughs]

ALI: Oh yeah.

AUSTIN: And you were like "I dunno, what's it sound like? Give me words." And I'm like "I don't have the words—"

JACK: Yeah. Oh God.

AUSTIN: "I don't have an intro!" And then you just wrote twenty seconds, fifteen seconds, of music, and I was like "Oh, I got it." I literally—

JACK: It was like a bass riff, right? Of the—

AUSTIN: I should find it really quick.

JACK: The thing I sent you?

AUSTIN: Because—both the thing you sent me and also the way I typed back what it would be.

JACK: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah [laughing].

AUSTIN: Because I—this is for me one of these great moments, of just, like—oh, here it is, here it is, here it is. This is super fun. Alright, so I'm gonna play, this is—heh. I'm just gonna read from this whole exchange and then [Ali giggles] I'm gonna play this track really quick. You say—so we've gone back and forth at this point a bunch, because one of the big questions that we had was like "How important is this?" Or "Is there a Bluff City theme?" Or is this—

JACK: Is this canonical? Yeah.

AUSTIN: Exactly.

JACK: To which the answer is no [Ali giggles]. There's bits that I'll—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: —that I'm carrying over, but there's no theme.

AUSTIN: So I'm like—right. I'm like, I've been trying to figure out what that is because it's also the introduction to Bluff City as a campaign. Is it a narrator voice? Is it a collection of shots? Is it—and I say “Is it the opening shot of a film? Or the opening shot of an anthology?” The thing is that the—things like opening shots of films don't have dialogue. We've gone back and forth for a while [laughs]. [quoting] “What is your plan for Bluff City intro music? Is this Bluff City or is it Bird Heist?” [Ali laughs] And you said “This is Bird Heist, incorporating the Bluff City theme for the first time. The theme will get rearranged for each oneshot.” And so finally—also, Ali interrupted with something, which is notes from people watching the show about how good the show is [Ali chuckles]. So thank you for that, people who said how good the show is [Jack chuckles]. And so I think, hours later, you come back and you say “I've got twenty-nine seconds for you.” And I'm like “Okay,” and so I'm gonna hit play on this. Do you want the links so you guys can listen too? Or are you good?

ALI: Yeah!

AUSTIN: Alright. I'm gonna put it here.

JACK: I'm curious about what this was.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I'm gonna hit play. You want me to count you in?

JACK: Okay.

AUSTIN: You ready?

ALI: Mm-hm.

JACK: Nearly. Okay.

AUSTIN: Three, two, one...

[Music (Bluff City demo track) plays]

AUSTIN: And you say “I like the idea of a bassline that’s distinctive and that we can reuse elsewhere, those skittering drums and that very sharp snap on the offbeat. I like how the Wurlitzer isn’t quite settling on the notes you’d expect, but I recognize that’s trickier for a theme. None of this is, like, ‘Oh, this is what the theme should sound like,’ so much as ‘Here’s some toe-dipping into what it could sound like.’ I also like how modular this is—thanks, jazz—[Ali snorts] which would let us do some real fun stuff with layering narration in the same way that we used to match the Marielda intros to cool moments when the piano bass came in.”

And then Ali’s like “Oh, I like this. I usually have less direct criticism of music stuff so I’ll wait for Austin to pitch in but I really do like this direction.” And then you also had some other notes about stuff. And then I say “Oh, yeah, I’m very into this. I hadn’t thought about it as an electric keyboard. And I like this whole direction. I can work with this.” And this is what I literally wrote; I’m actually gonna copy-paste it into a Notepad and bring it over to the other side. I wrote: [narrating] “Bluff City: one, two, three, four, five, six. [Ali laughs] One, two. One, two, three. One, two. One, two. Bluff City. There’s a thousand sides to the word, word, word. Something, something. Something. A bird, a boxer, and a third thing.” And that was it.

JACK: [laughing] A third thing?

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: And that’s the narr—that’s literally where it goes, right?

JACK: What is it? It’s a bowling alley, a boxer, and a bird in the original.

AUSTIN: Right, that’s literally where it goes.

JACK: [laughing] Which is, yeah, that is actually the intro.

AUSTIN: Yeah!

JACK: [softly] Oh my God.

AUSTIN: And that’s—I say this a lot about names in *Friends at the Table*, like I say it *a lot* about names in *Friends at the Table*, that it’s always about sound before it’s about meaning. I like having names that have some—that evoke something. I think *Maryland September* evokes a specific thing; I think that *Aura Antigua* evokes a certain thing. But, first and foremost, they are *Maryland September* and *Aura Antigua* [Jack chuckles]. That is first and foremost what they are. And so, like, rhythm of this is the whole thing. And so being able to hear that—I’m just gonna do it again with the music playing [Ali laughs]. Like, literally it was me sitting, [Music begins playing] being here and being like [narrating] “Bluff City: one, two, three, four, five, six. One, two. One, two, three. One, two. One, two. Bluff City. There’s a thousand sides to the word, word, word. Something, something. Something. A bird, a boxer, and a third thing.” Like, literally I did that at

my desk at work to figure that out. So sometimes that's how it works [laughs]. Sometimes Jack does send me the music and I find the cadence from that. It's very important and good. So, thank you, Jack, for finding that incredible theme.

JACK: Like—[laughs]. Thank you.

AUSTIN: [conspiratorially] Which I still don't know who the narrator is to the next—

JACK: Also, this is the other thing. While I've been here, I've been writing the music for the next Bluff City arc, which is a new theme.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JACK: And I haven't a word of intro from then. I mean, I've heard the episode. But like—

AUSTIN: I don't know who that char—I don't know who the voice is.

JACK: Yeah, yeah, yeah, Like—

AUSTIN: It might be the same voice, it might not be. We don't know yet.

ALI: Yeah...

JACK: Definitely on that one, it's just kind of going on trust. It's so much easier, obviously, being in the same room as Austin and Ali.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: But just going like, okay, I've done enough themes now that I can get a sense of roughly how one would match to an intro—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: —and I know Austin can cut around that. So, like, let's see how this goes!

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Let's see what happens here!

AUSTIN: Sometimes I'll also record a ninety-second intro and cut it down to sixty. So, like you said.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Sometimes it's about cutting and sometimes it's about building around stuff.

ALI: Right, right, right.

AUSTIN: Alright, next question. This one comes in from Word, who says: "How does Austin organize information, like when the protagonists walk into a room and he lays down ten details about the room, how is that organized? If the answer is "All in his head" then how does he organize it there, or how could someone else organize it on paper to otherwise emulate Austin's—the Austin Brain?" [laughs]

[Jack laughs]

AUSTIN: I also want to expand this more broadly about how you two organize stuff. How you take notes, Ali, how you organize files, stuff like that. But briefly, the quick answer for this is: it depends on the place. If it's a place I'm surprised to be, it isn't—there's nothing written down. I don't have a clue and I'm just, like—I'm building off around what's around it that I do have a clue from. Or sometimes I'll borrow a detail to add to a place. You know, there were times in COUNTER/Weight where someone would go to a place I was not expecting at all. And I would have to say, like, "...Oh, okay. What do I know about your character, what's interesting here? What else is in this nearby area? What does that look like? What are the fictional influences that we have to help explain what this place looks like?" And that can help. But the other things very much are, like, I'll have a list of a few words that are, you know, very—either I'll have a very specific description...I feel like stuff like the ships in Kingdom I had a really good idea of what they looked like before we started playing, stuff like the basement where you hooked into the Kingdom game I had a very clear description of what those places looked like.

JACK: Mhmm.

AUSTIN: But other times I will literally just have, like, "Here are, you know, ten words about a place." Or about a—ten—Fate does this, actually. This is a thing I picked up after we played Fate for the first time over on Six Feats Under. Was that in Fate—the system, there's a system called Fate—in Fate games, places have traits that are, like, these are the things that can actually produce effects. And obviously, things like that have been in Dungeon World and have been in other stuff like that, but for whatever reason Fate was the one that made me start doing in, where I would start taking down notes during production—during pre-production—of an episode so that I would know, like, "Okay, I have to remember that this room, you know, the—" A good example is the arc where Aria and Jacqui end up fighting above the concert; I had a list of things in that room that I could—or in that big concert venue—like the weird pressure-wall things that put out physical force to help create this VR and physical space experience and I just had six or seven of those listed down.

Or when you go into a city, like in this past episode of Twilight Mirage, when they go into Sculpture City, I have a list of things that are in Sculpture City. Both in terms of “Here are the big, weird panes of glass that are layered throughout the city,” but I also just have, like, “Hyper-saturated color” written down, stuff like that. That is like—I can use in different ways. A thing about the Veil that I really like is it has a thing that’s like, “What are the cultural and societal aspects being introduced? What are the technological aspects being introduced? Write down some tone and colors that you want to use.” So, you know, I have things like “Layers of tan, brown, and red,” for the desert area. I have “Dark being lit up” for Sculpture City at night, things like that. That is all stuff that I can do that will be applicable, even if they decide to turn left instead of right once they’re in a general place. So that’s the big one. That sort of preparation but not for necessarily what specific room they’re in, but for the sort of room they might go in.

And that honestly goes the same for a lot of NPCs, who are just like, “Okay, there will be a doorman; okay, there will be a hitman who’s coming for you. There will be a, you know, a queen, or something.” I basically know who they are, I know details about their lives but when it comes to “What is their tone like?” it’s like, you know, I have a few notes, maybe I have a picture of a person, maybe I have—I think about the Primo voice notes that I had forever ago [Ali chuckles]. About it being like, God I don’t even remember what it was but it was like...Aziz Ansari’s New York uncle or something, right? Like those sorts of things are kind of very broad notes that—and maybe this is similar to you, Jack, that like—when you’re taking notes during a scene about what the music should be like. Just like, tonal, you know, maybe one key piece or another one, a phrase I want them to use, you know. I write down if a character is going to call somebody “kid” or “boy” [Jack chuckles] or something demeaning like that, or if they’re gonna be sweet. Like anytime someone calls Fero “little bird” or something like that, that’s ‘cause I’ve written down “Speak in this way to this character,” things like that, so. How ‘bout for you two, how do you organize the information that’s part of what your jobs on the show are?

ALI: Um, I have a lot of it to organize.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: ‘Cause I have the files for...all of it? All of it.

AUSTIN: You do.

[Jack laughs]

ALI: The biggest thing that helps me is that I have on my desktop a file just for the things I’m working on currently.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ALI: And I've taken to on the first—'cause we're doing the Patreon now—I've taken to the first of every month, I'll move, like, September's Bluff City onto my external hard drive.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ALI: And then start a folder for October's. And then—so I know where to put October's files when I eventually have to go get to it. And then, because Twilight Mirage is per arc now, everything in that arc will be in there. So I know, like—

AUSTIN: Ohhh, nice.

ALI: So I can, like, I have this planet recording and then if I need to mend it into this other planet recording—which is something that I did this week, I don't know if anyone noticed [laughs]—

[Jack laughs]

AUSTIN: Hm.

ALI: —I have all of that there. And then I—

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: The other thing that I did that was really important was that I have a file there that's specifically for Art, 'cause sometimes he'll just be like, "Where's that thing that you made for the Patreon?"

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: And I'll have to give it to you or for music. 'Cause I keep—I keep the recordings separated by file, 'cause typically the one recording will end up being two episodes. So everything for that recording is just gonna stay in that file 'cause it's gonna be two episodes, it's gonna be a mess anyway.

AUSTIN: Right. Right.

ALI: But, like, if I put the music in one of those files, I'll have to go back and try to find which episode it was, and then try to find which recording it was, and go find it, which was a mess during COUNTER/Weight. So I just have all of the music for the current season also just in a folder that's always accessible. 'Cause—

AUSTIN: Ohhh. Yeah. I do not. That's—I should do that.

ALI: You really should.

AUSTIN: I just have it in my Downloads folder, with all the rest of the...everything.

ALI: [laughs] I—oh, that's the real thing that I did, is that I stopped having downloads automatically go to my Download folder.

AUSTIN: Ohhh.

ALI: 'Cause that killed me.

AUSTIN: I bet.

ALI: And then the thing for COUNTER/Weight that was really tough is that I had had the music per episode in the episode folder that we—we used music a lot in that series—that season—[Jack chuckles] more than we do now with the ones now and it was just like—it was the worst. Just going to find the Rigour scene, I think I bought the music through Bandcamp like forty times.

JACK: Oh my God [laughs].

AUSTIN: Oh yeah, same. One hundred percent. One hundred percent I did that.

[Ali laughing]

JACK: You don't have to do that! I can—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: You don't have to do that. I mean, I know it's free, but also—

ALI: But if it's, like, 3 am Eastern time zone—

AUSTIN: Yes.

ALI: —And it's 6 am for you.

AUSTIN: And I'm like, "What was the name of that song? Is it dot-dash-em dash-comma-[dot-dot?]" [Ali and Jack laugh] What's the SOS thing that just spells Rigour?

JACK: Mm.

ALI: God.

AUSTIN: Christ.

JACK: That was a fun season.

AUSTIN: The SOS thing, that's what you call that, like—

JACK: Morse? Morse.

AUSTIN: Morse Code? The SOS thing.

[Ali and Jack laugh]

JACK: You can only send one message with it, and it's really easy to decode, so really it's not—you know.

ALI: The other way that I organize my files—I'm just gonna send you a screencap really quick, Austin. And you can just kind of—

AUSTIN: Sure. I'll pull it up.

ALI: I'm gonna try and describe it but this is gonna be easier just to look at. Like I said, one recording is typically two episodes, so I'll have an OBS that's of the entire recording and then I'll split that OBS. So I'll know—I think you guys see it when I send you files and you don't understand why my files have so many numbers in them [laughs].

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ALI: But it's because there's, like, "Planet 2", which is the recording, then there's "Planet 2 1", which is the first episode from Planet 2", and then "Planet 2 2" is the second part.

AUSTIN: Ohh, that's good.

ALI: Yeah, and then—

AUSTIN: What's "Planet 2 2 hyphen 3 1"?

ALI: [laughs] That was—because Planet [Jack chuckles]—this episode had a little bit from "Planet 3", which was a completely different recording.

AUSTIN: Ohhhhh.

ALI: That is "Planet 2 2" plus "Planet 3 1".

AUSTIN: So what's—what's "Planet 2 hyphen 1 1"?

ALI: "Planet 2 hyphen 1 1" is actually a thing that I don't do really often and really should, 'cause I spend a lot of time figuring out how to line up the music to the episode. It's like, it's the finished .wav with the intro with the ending.

AUSTIN: Gotcha.

ALI: And I usually never save those and I should [laughs].

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Because sometimes it's like four different parts of things—

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ALI: Like, especially if there's a new song for that episode. That's gonna take me like an hour to do [laughs].

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Awesome. Jack, what about you? How do you organize, like, in that scene—in a scene where you're like, "Oh, I'm writing down notes for a song for this scene—"

JACK: Mhm.

AUSTIN: And then you leave the—we stop recording and then, you know, a couple days later you sit down in front of a piano and you've been thinking about it...what is it like to sketch out those ideas and how do you organize them in a way that leads you from 'here is maybe what a melody might sound like' to doing that melody and then maybe even not using that in the end and maybe coming back to it later?

JACK: So I think the first thing is, like, melody always comes last for me

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JACK: Like, absolutely, a hundred percent. The Marielda theme was the last bit of that track. And just because it's so intimidating to—it's very, music is very visual, for me, and working with music is very visual, and it's much easier for me to kind of get a sense of the shape of a track if the melody has something to kind of rest upon.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: Otherwise it just feels like it sort of falls through the track [laughs]. There's no—it's like a mattress without the slatted bed things underneath.

AUSTIN: Gotcha.

JACK: And, like, bedsprings.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: So I'll sit down at the piano, it's lots of work with chords. The opening piano part for the Twilight Mirage theme kind of came instantly, that's something that sounds exactly as it did when I played it for the first time. And I'll work with that, I'll have a recording that's ten or fifteen minutes long. And then I'll bring that into Logic, which is the program I use to compose, and I will begin to try and replicate what I wanted the mess of the piano to sound like in my head when I sat down.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JACK: And whether or not that's starting with what I consider to be the most...meat-and-potatoes sort of sound; you know, the sound that is gonna be the easiest to anchor, which is usually some sort of accompaniment instrument. So in Twilight Mirage, it's a piano or a synth, and in Marielda, it was a guitar, and in Hieron, it's a guitar, and in COUNTER/Weight, it was the piano.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: And then I just start adding—just start adding bits. Like, adding bits and pieces and taking bits away, and eventually I'll get a sense of what I want the shape of the track to be. Like, I want the—something to change halfway through or I want to move into a B section or whatever. And once I've got that sounding pretty good, I delete all of it.

[Austin and Ali laugh]

JACK: [chuckles] And then—and then I—

AUSTIN: And then you start over!

JACK: I walk around and I start over, but I don't start over from scratch; I start over trying to replicate the arrangement that I've just made.

AUSTIN: Mhmm.

JACK: 'Cause then it becomes a completely different thing. 'Cause it's like doing the maths problems and screwing up at step one, and by step ten you find that you're in a completely different place.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: If from the beginning I'm not, like, thinking very hard about tempo or thinking very hard about whether stuff is in the right key, or whatever—if I neglect that at the beginning, it's fucked. And I don't want to be thinking about that when I'm writing the song.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: So I try and get a very hasty draft done, and then scrap it and replicate it exactly. And then eventually I'll just get to a point where I want to put a melody on it. And sometimes that's really easy—the Marielda theme came kind of pretty easily.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JACK: But sometimes it's really difficult. The Red Jack theme took, like, forever. Of just, like, miserably playing a clarinet into a microphone [laughs].

[Ali laughs]

JACK: For hours, over and over again, looping the accompaniment that I have and going “Is this good? Fuck no, it's not good [Austin laughs]. Is this good? No, this is not good.”

AUSTIN: I mean that's—I think we've all down that stuff in terms of, like—Ali, I know there's lots of times when you and I are just like “Where does this episode end? Nope, this is wrong!” [Jack chuckles] Like, we've been ready to go to print with an episode, so to speak, ready to hit publish. And like, “No, it's wrong. Start—we can't end on this point. This is the wrong point to end on.” Or “this isn't a good...whatever.” The intro, like I mentioned before, the Twilight Mirage ‘setting fires’ intro. I think I rewrote that three times and I did the thing of—and I'm curious if you do this, Jack.

There was a point where I had to go back and listen to COUN—I was ready to go on the one that we recorded, and I went back and listened to the COUNTER/Weight intro. I was like, “Listen, I know I'm not gonna recapture lightning in a bottle. I know I'm not gonna have anything as strong as that, I knew that when I was writing this intro, but this still isn't right. This is not good enough, this is not to the level that I need it to be for me to be happy with it.” And so I ended up doing what you do—and I didn't know that you did this; I didn't know that you threw stuff out, or deleted it and rebuilt it knowing what you know, and maybe keeping certain key elements but still finding the—rebuilding that foundation. I did that exact thing of “I need to throw

this out; I need to get to Seance.” There was not a place in the name of the original—the first recorded Twilight Mirage—

JACK: Mhmm, yeah there wasn’t, was there? We didn’t know what that thing was called.

AUSTIN: No, I jumped right into “Here’s the world” and so it took a long time before I was like “Oh, the city-ship Seance,” or whatever the first lines of ‘setting fires’ are—is now. I didn’t have that even a little bit and it is a relief to know you [laughs] go through the same process, likely.

JACK: [laughs] Well you definitely, like, when I’m listening to—if I have a, I have just music, if I have the Mountain Goats on, when I’m on a bus or whatever—

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JACK: I’m listening on to it and I’m like, “Fucking yes, I could do a Mountain Goats song.”

[Austin and Ali laugh]

JACK: “Like, I could just—let’s let this song finish and I’ll just flow right into a Mountain Goats song.”

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: And I’ll go back in to listen to Marielda and be like “Yeah, I want to put new harmonies on these tracks; I’m like fuckin’ ready to go with Marielda!” And then I pick up the clarinet to do the Red Jack theme and just go like “I have forgotten everything. This is just—”

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JACK: “This is just disastrous.” But again, it’s just a case of trusting the process. Trusting that you’ve done work writing and Ali’s done work editing and I’ve done work practicing instruments and, like, you get to a point where you hope that if you smash your face against it enough times—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: —eventually, eventually something will happen. The new InSpectres, the Bluff City thing—

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JACK: —doesn’t have a melody yet.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: And I need to—but I'm not worried about that. Like, it's not good to hear with my ears right now but come whenever that episode goes out I'll just be able to, hopefully, get to a point where that sounds fine and I'm happy with it.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JACK: Also, again, stuff doesn't have to be perfect all the time. We want to be, as often as we can, but sometimes things aren't gonna be as good as other things, and it's important to get to that place.

ALI: Yeah, for sure.

AUSTIN: Yeah, coming to that realization is just, like, you can't hit a homerun at bat every time, but if you hit enough enough singles your team will still win.

[Ali giggles]

AUSTIN: Right? Like that's one hundred percent—

JACK: Right, yeah [laughs]. Yes.

AUSTIN: You have to do that. I think I've said this before, I said this during the Ask Me Anything, the AMA I did for Reddit back six months ago or whatever—which was a whole fuckin' process [laughs]. That was a fun note to get in my email from someone in the Comms department [Jack laughs]. It was like, "Oh, it'd be a good idea if you did an AMA!" Okay, yeah, okay, I'll do an AMA [Ali laughs].

Was I wrote about, like, what did I learn from every—someone asked me what I learned from everybody at Giant Bomb or, like, what were my memories or whatever, and I said the best thing I'll ever learn from Jeff Gerstmann was, like, it's not about, you know, having each piece that you write be the one true piece. What's important is cadence. What's important is, like, every time—that people know that they can come to you for something decent and that you do it regularly enough that you become, you know, a tight part of their daily, you know, internet existence. That you are right there for them, every time, on time, that they know that they can look forward to your words, you know, or your video or your podcast or whatever, and that you just keep hitting that. It's one of the reasons why I'm really fairly insistent that we don't skip too many weeks, even in between seasons and stuff.

JACK: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Is, like, having that cadence is a huge part of what makes us successful, even as we do more complicated storytelling. We could not be doing Twilight Mirage if we were an every other week podcast.

ALI: Yeah.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Like, it—we couldn't. The stuff we do is too esoteric at this point. In fact, I don't know—I think Twilight Mirage is going to be really fucking good when we're done and you can just listen to five episodes in a row.

[Jack laughs]

AUSTIN: And just like—seriously. Like I think it's good now, I really like it a lot—

JACK: Yeah, I hope so.

AUSTIN: But I definitely can compare it to something, you know, that is a little headier and a little more out there conceptually and, you know, is something that would benefit from being able to just hit play on the next one and get the whole arc together. And, like, "Okay [relieved exhale, Ali laughs]. They got through that prison stuff and it didn't turn terrible." You know?

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Or just like "Oh okay, *this* is what they were pushing at." And I know that from week to week with Twilight Mirage that can already seem pretty tough, but if we occasionally missed a week it would be extra—it would be extra rough.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Because you just start losing confidence from people, even if they don't—it's not a mean thing. It's not like a "Fuck this podcast! They missed a week!" [Ali laughs] It's so much more insidious than that and so much more...calm, and just like "Um, yeah, I'm just not looking forward to it as much as I used to," and, like, that happens so quick. So it's definitely important for us, to like—again, like you said, Jack, not everyone needs to be—can be the best one. You're not gonna always be able to win. But, you know, do a decent job and do it often enough, and every now and then you'll surprise yourself by doing something really fucking cool, so.

JACK: Right [laughs].

ALI: Right.

AUSTIN: Um, next—

ALI: I think—

AUSTIN: Go ahead.

ALI: —as like an addition to that, really quickly, is a thing that we—a mantra of the production team at this point [Austin laughs] has been “Trust the process.”

AUSTIN: Trust the process!

JACK: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

ALI: Because I think the three of us have been together enough—

AUSTIN: Yup.

ALI: —hating what we’re doing.

[Jack laughs]

AUSTIN: Yup.

ALI: To know that in two weeks it’ll be fine.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: It’ll be fine.

ALI: It’ll get there.

AUSTIN: Yup.

ALI: It’ll get there however we do, and like—

AUSTIN: Yup.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I think for us—so when did you start editing? What was the—did you start editing at the Sprawl or the end of MechNoir?

ALI: I—we just had this conversation.

AUSTIN: I know.

ALI: I started editing the—it was like the second faction game?

AUSTIN: Okay.

ALI: And then it was the last Sprawl episode—it was the last Sprawl adventure we had, where we were like “Oh, this doesn’t—”

AUSTIN: Or TechNoir one.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: So that was the thing for me, was like I think going through that with y’all and coming out the other side was, like, we had this really ambitious thought which was we should scale down the amount of factions, we should switch systems. We were early enough that there weren’t very many—there wasn’t a—it didn’t feel like there were stakes in terms of our listenership at that point. You know, fanart had come in but not that much [laughs]. We’d gotten some, you know, there were definitely people looking forward to the episodes but it felt like we could still be really experimental. And us getting through that, and then getting through the Kingdom game, and then getting through the finale, I think—by the finale, we were saying “Trust the process.”

[Jack and Ali chuckle]

ALI: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: We were saying—or, you know, by the time we finished September. Finishing September, which had—I just went back and reread a lot those intros; do you remember what we did for the intros in the finale September arc?

JACK: Nnnno.

AUSTIN: ‘Cause I bet you don’t. ‘Cause it’s—we were on some shit, man. We were like—

[Jack chuckles]

ALI: Was that the—wait, was that when each of the intros was a single scene between two characters?

AUSTIN: Yeah, and do you remember when it was set?

ALI: No. It was, like, it was in between—

AUSTIN: It was in the future!

ALI: It was in the future!?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yes!

ALI: Oh that's right, 'cause we knew that we were doing—

AUSTIN: A big finale that was gonna be—'cause we had already recorded those episodes—

ALI: [whispering] Oh my God.

AUSTIN: So we knew that we were gonna do this big jump. And so if you look at the intros to like Episode Forty and going forward, I'm pretty sure, it's like "Forty-four months after the September Incident."

ALI: Oh my God [laughs]

AUSTIN: And then it's a scene between Orth and somebody else, you know, Orth and Cass. And like, that stuff worked super well but the only way we could do that was 'cause we knew, like, "Alright, trust the process. This is gonna come out."

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: Ali, you and I had a long conversation about whether or not people would understand what the fuck we were doing if I said, you know—

ALI: Forty-four years—

AUSTIN: Forty-four months after the September Incident, you know, or whatever like that, right?

ALI: Yeah...

AUSTIN: Twenty-five months after the September Incident. That stuff was really wild and we just did it. And so once we got through that, it was like, "we're gonna be able to get this conclusion."

ALI: God...

AUSTIN: "We're gonna be able to hit the finale. It's gonna be weird; trust the process. There will be down moments but we will pull it together." And, like, that has been such a huge part.

ALI: I really feel deeply that this show was always going to be what it was because we did COUNTER/Weight [laughs]. And every—

AUSTIN: Yep. Hundred percent.

JACK: Yep.

AUSTIN: Hundred percent.

ALI: And every block we hit in COUNTER/Weight we were just like, "We want to do this! We're gonna fucking do it. And we're gonna figure out how to do it."

AUSTIN: Yup. Totally.

ALI: [sighs] Oh God.

AUSTIN: I forgot about the one with Ali's—with Aria's golden arm.

ALI: Yeah!

JACK: Oh yeah!

AUSTIN: Aria Joie would lift her arm, bright and golden, and say a few inspiring words, and the party would be hers. Like, yep, good. Yep, mm-hm [Ali giggles]. Perfect. Good show. Our good show. The other thing we say when we—[Jack and Ali laugh]. We go from "This fuckin' sucks, I can't believe we fucked up, [Ali laughs]" to "Trust the process," to Jack sending over an episode, you know, an MP3 that says, like, "I've written a good song-guide.mp3" [Jack and Ali laugh]. And then we listen to it—

JACK: Oh my God.

AUSTIN: And then because Jack—

JACK: Okay, I guess that's the other—[Ali laughs] that's the other quick—we should move on to other questions—

AUSTIN: Yes, yes.

JACK: But that's the quick answer to organization. Is the way it works is: I get an audio file, I write directly over the track, and then I send Ali three tracks. I send a guide track, which is a very rough, crappy audio cut.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: It's poorly mixed, it's unfinished, the music and the audio don't go together well, but it's just a sense of how the two should sync. Then I send a high-quality .wav file, and then I send a high-quality version of the audio that I've cut.

ALI: Mm-hm.

JACK: And then it's open season for Ali to try and make that [laughing] into an episode.

ALI: Yeah...

AUSTIN: Into an episode, yeah, exactly. And that's it's compressed the same way, and that the volume is matched right, and that it isn't too jarring, and stuff like that.

ALI: [tiredly] And that it's synced perfectly [laughs].

AUSTIN: And it's synced perfectly. Ali does a lot of good work. Thank you, Ali [Ali laughs]. Alright, we should go on because we have a couple more questions and Jack has to go soon. So. This one comes in from Emily: "How long does it usually take to produce an episode of the show? I often see Jack and Ali's Tweets complaining about technical issues messing up episode and music production for the show but I'm curious as to how much time each of you will put into an individual episode."

ALI: Uhhh, a bunch. I—

AUSTIN: [sympathetically] Mm-hm.

ALI: I feel like epi—week to week, I'm probably putting the most pure work hours in?

AUSTIN: Probably.

ALI: Just by the nature of what audio is.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Yeah.

ALI: If I—like, putting out an hour-and-a-half to two hour long episode a week is always going to take—like, the first pass of that is going to take four hours.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: It's always going to be twice however long the audio is, and it's pretty long.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ALI: The first thing that I do is I—[laughs]. I got to call the day that I sit down with all of the files and just, like, noise remove and compress them, as “Spa Day” [Austin laughs]. And I don't remember [laughs] why I did that [Jack laughs]. I think it was like I was really into sheet masks at the time.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ALI: And I was also really stressed 'cause I am often. And I was like, “This is work that I can do when I don't feel like doing work.”

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: “And I can put on a sheet mask and do this.” So I'll do that, and that itself takes like an hour, I don't know why. Like, it's just you tell Audacity to do a thing and then it does it but it takes a really long time.

AUSTIN: It's just time. Yeah. Yeah.

ALI: That's why I do it on a separate day, 'cause I never, like, factored into the work time.

AUSTIN: The proper work day.

ALI: Yeah, yeah. And then it's just listening and cleaning up the audio, and then listening and cutting down the audio, and then listening a third time just to make sure it's all cool [laughs]. And yeah, I typically do three passes per episode. So that alone—

AUSTIN: Totally.

ALI: —is like six to seven hours.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's—that's. For me it's weird because by the time an episode's at that point, it's out of my memory. Like, I often am like “What happened in this episode?” [Ali laughs] because I'm prepping two arcs away or something. You know, I tend to do the opposite of Ali, which is I do the work for an arc at the top, and that is the most I do. It's like, alright, I'm gonna

spend a Saturday and I'm gonna get to Starbucks at 11 or 12 and I'm gonna leave at closing, at 10. And that is what I'll do that day. And I'll have a broad picture, I'll have a bunch of inspiration that I've pulled into a file.

I've started using Scrivener instead of Google Docs, which has been really...cool? But I'm not in love with it one hundred percent yet. I think it might be a tool that I like a lot but that I can't use. I dunno, I think I've found the thing I need to do with it to help a little bit, but it's been really cool to help me organize characters and functions and stuff, instead of just having a file called "Twilight Mirage factions" [Ali laughs]. Instead of having a file called, like—so, like, if you look at my Google Drive for what my Hieron notes look like—I'm just gonna pull it up really quick. I won't open up any of these files, but if I just do a search here for—[muttering] how do I do this; do I just do documents? Um...I just have documents called "DW 1," "DW 2," "DW 3," I don't—can't get them all up on the screen at one point—er, together. But, like, that's all they are, and if I opened up "DW 5," inside is the stuff from the Rosemerrow game of this past season. "DW 4" was the stuff from the moth game of last Hieron season, and that all was in "DW 4." Whereas now I'm trying to use Scrivener to do that, which is kind of a long-form writing tool where you can have, like, 'This is a page dedicated to this character' and you can link out to that character. It's all very well organized but it's not as quick as just quickly scrolling down the page to where it says a character's name and what their deal is. So I'm not one hundred percent committed to it or not.

But I spend a ten or twelve-hour day on the first session prep, and then every other game I try to spend three to four hours beforehand getting stuff together and making sure I have those place descriptions and ideas, making sure that enemies—or potential enemies—have stats, making sure that I understand rules that I think might come up based on where the last session ended up. And so for me, it's a lot of early time investment per arc, and then bit by bit it gets less and less. We recorded last Sunday for the final episode of the ground game's current arc, the one that just started coming out. And that I did, like, no prep for 'cause I had it all in my head and I could just, like, "Boom. Sit me down in front of a microphone, let's go. I'm ready to do it."

And then the other thing we all do, I think, is think between sessions and between production things. So much of this visit from Jack has been Ali, Jack, and I sitting around a table thinking about what big stuff in Twilight Mirage is happening three weeks, you know, three months from now. Like, very big picture things, not even specific details or characters. But like, what are different landscapes we want to look at? What are different emotional things that we haven't hit yet that we want to hit? What is one big event that we want to make sure we do? Stuff like that. We're talking about the final Hieron season that we're gonna get to in a year [Ali laughs]. We're talking about what comes after that. You know, like, we—Ali and I have already started talking about whatever the new Season Six is, and Jack and I were like, "What is Season Seven? I don't—"

[Jack and Ali laugh]

ALI: Oh God.

AUSTIN: And, like, it's easy for us not to talk about that stuff as work, but it's work. In a creative industry, it's really easy to just dismiss work you do—

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: —as being like, “Oh, we were just talking.” No, you're doing the job which is, like, spending a hundred hours over the course of a year thinking through something. You know, so like in this visit there was a big thing that I wanted to talk to Ali and Jack for. And I prepped it [Ali giggles], I had it ready to go, we went to a doughnut shop, we sat down, we all had a doughnut and a special coffee [Jack chuckles]...and I was like, “Alright, here it is. Here is the pitch for the big thing I want to do. What do we think?” And we talked over the pros and cons; like, for me, that is all work we've done on the show. We talked about the Benjamin episode, where we all—again, we all met in person. We all got coffee—

ALI: So good...

AUSTIN: We were at—we were in LA for Art's wedding, Art and Jess's wedding. And we got coffee and we sat around outside in a nice outdoor area, and we talked through that Benjamin scene and tried to figure out what that might look like. And that stuff is fantastic and I wish we did that a little more, even. Anyway.

JACK: Just have people in the room and talk?

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Totally. Yeah, Season Five of Hieron is absolutely the final season of Hieron.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I've said it before, but, like, it's Spring in Hieron, you don't—if it's Summer, Summer means Hieron's over. Don't let it get to Summer. There can't be a fourth season in Hieron. The Heat and the Dark will come and that will be that. So—I mean, we'll see. One way or the other, that will be the final season of Hieron. Ending things feels good, that was the other thing we learned from COUNTER/Weight.

JACK: Mhm.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Was, like, being “Oh, no, we’re done COUNTER/Weight, let me hand it to you,” is the fucking best feeling in the world. It’s so good. God. Jack, did you have more to say here?

JACK: Um, I think that, like, a general rule of thumb for me is it takes between six and eight hours to do a minute of music.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: Which is ridiculous when you think about it—

AUSTIN: Yeah, yup.

JACK: Because six to eight hours is a lot of minutes, and then you listen to that and you’re like “Oh, okay [laughs].

AUSTIN: Uh-huh [Ali laughs]

JACK “It’s just over and done with.” And not all of that is sitting down playing. Like, a lot of that is prep. But on something like Marielda, it would pretty much be eight hours of focus.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JACK: Which is why something like Four Conversations was ridiculous [Ali laughs]. Because I had to work very, very, very quickly.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: Way more quickly than I’m used to.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Which I think helped that momentum keep up, but was also just like—that was [laughs] a bad [Austin laughs], bad experience.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I think we’ve all been there on something which is just like, “I don’t want to do this. I don’t want to *fucking* do this [Ali and Jack laugh]” Ali, how many times have I messaged you at 5 am about an intro? When I’m like, “I’m not gonna write it. il can’t get it. It’s not—I’ve tried. I’ve sat in front of this microphone.” I mean, that’s the other last bit for me. Is like, “Oh, just write a thirty second intro!” And it’s not.

ALI: No.

AUSTIN: It’s not six hours for a minute, but it is two hours for thirty seconds [Jack laughs].

JACK: Oh God.

AUSTIN: Where it's just like "I've done seven takes, I hate them all. This isn't the character's voice; I can't get the music lined up right." And a lot of times, Ali, the last couple weeks especially, I've been like "Here's a file. [Ali laughs] Here it is."

ALI: Yeah actually, so the intros take so much time.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: More than you would think. 'Cause, like, another thing that I, especially since you've started working at Vice, is a thing that I know is that, like, I need to give you all of the information that you need—

AUSTIN: Yep.

ALI: —for doing the intro by Tuesday night, so that you have Wednesday to at least kind of think about it between meetings, or whatever.

AUSTIN: Yep.

ALI: And being—episodes release on Thursday; I have another full time job! Like—[laughs].

AUSTIN: Right. That's the other thing; Ali and I are both—it's a lot. And Jack's been in school until, like, today, basically [Jack and Ali laugh]. Until three weeks ago, or something, Jack has been in school full time. And so a lot of the stuff that we've done has just been in scraps of time. I have so many note files with just, like, character names or ideas for things. Ali, again, you've done so much work of just "Here's everything you could possibly need [Ali laughs] to do this intro," or to write the description or whatever. And it still could be hard because it can still be, like, this is—I'll write an intro and then I'll realize "Oh, this is actually an intro for three episodes from now."

ALI: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: For COUNTER/Weight, I sat on an intro. I recorded an intro and we didn't release it for ten episodes or something.

ALI: Oh yeah!

AUSTIN: I don't remember which one that was. I think it was one of the Jace—it was definitely one of the Jace academic intros. It was one of, like, "This book was written by Jace and it was about blah blah blah blah blah." And it was really cool and I'd recorded a test version of it and I

liked it but it wasn't quite right, and so I put it in my back pocket and I was like "No, this intro has to be about a different thing." So. Ugh.

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: Alright, we should get going because Jack has to go very shortly and I want to get through these questions. Next, from Patrick: I struggle with ADHD and that also engenders anxiety and depression. I want to run games by myself but it's been hard for me to simultaneously have the time, energy, and inclination to learn new games, prep, and organize players. Example: I've wanted to run *Blades in the Dark* for some time for some friends for the past six months but all I've managed to do in that time is gauge interest, find out what kind of stories I like, and reach page twenty-four of the rulebook. I've had good success in the past working with a group of DMs but part of how I made that work was thinking of it as a serious duty akin to a job rather than a fun thing I would like to do with my friends, and I'd like to avoid that level of stress going forward; I was getting DM burnout by the end of that run. Do you have tips on coping strategies or ways to tackle this hurdle?"

Obviously, we aren't doctors so, like, there's a limit to what we can do there and what I'll say is, first and foremost to actually talk to a medical professional or counselor; whatever, you know, you have in your life on that side of things, to talk about this specific thing. There's nothing wrong with going to a physician or to a therapist or to whoever you speak to and saying, like, "Oh, I really want to do this activity with my friends but I'm having a hard time focusing in any way that doesn't make it feel like a job that'll stress me out." Those are people who can give you that sort of advice in a way that none of us are qualified to give.

But what I will say is in terms of giving yourself the motivation to do it, like you've already started in the right way. Which is, you're gauging interest, you're finding out what type of stories they like, and as a DM that is already the biggest first step is like "Okay, what do they want to do? How can I help incentivize that? How can I help facilitate that?"

The second thing that I'll say is that, like, get to the point, um—do your best to find other ways to learn how the game works. I obviously read the rulebooks, you know, front to back, and I really enjoy that, but there have been times when we've had to—like when I first started running *TechNoir*, I was like "I think I understand this game, I've run it a couple of times, but let me listen to somebody else who's played it." So I found an actual play podcast that did a one-off of it, and I listened to that and I made notes while I was listening to it. Not big notes, not—I was on a bus and every once in a while they would say a thing and I would just write down a specific question I had that was like "Oh wait, how do hurt dice work?" And so then, when I had a chance, I would open up the book and look up for that specific question and in my own rules, rewrite the rule underneath my notes so that I would have written it and I could remember that specific thing. And in that way I was able to teach myself that game; not by studying the rulebook, but by giving myself a specific thing to listen to—'cause I was enjoying the story anyway—and then

being able to like, “Okay, they just said let me go find that one answer instead of needing to consume that whole book all at once.”

And I think Blades in the Dark might also be something that you could do that for. Like if you go back and listen to Marielda, you know, see if you can wrap around just the risk and whatever the other part of that is. I always want to say Risky Standard but that’s—whatever the standard column is. Um, the effect column. And see if you have a handle on that. And then once you have a decent handle on that, you should let yourself jump in. And, like, play one session. Do a one shot. It doesn’t have to be a huge campaign. Just let yourselves have a fun night. Make one little story, and see how it feels. And don’t feel like you have to do it every week. Do it every month. Like you said before, work as a group of DMs. Like everybody do one session every other month or something, you know? Be flexible on that and do the thing you can do instead of the thing that you think is only way to do it right. Um, anybody else have on this one?

ALI: Um, yeah, I think you hit a lot of them. I’m gonna say real quick that the best way to probably speak to a therapist or a doctor about roleplaying with your friends that isn’t having to explain what roleplaying with friends is is by saying that, like, “My friends want to do—we like to do a story-writing exercise together.”

AUSTIN: Mhmm.

ALI: Or like, “Me and my friends like to do improv.” [laughs]

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah.

[Jack laughs]

ALI: As kind of a shortcut to that conversation.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Like an easy mode.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: But yeah, I—the thing that gets me with situations like this where you’re trying to prep a thing and you’re afraid of getting too intense about it is like, do a one shot.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Like I hope that in these past six months you’ve been doing one shots with this group of people so you kind of have that rhythm and that comfort together.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ALI: That it's not like "Oh, for half a year we've been talking about Blades in the Dark and this is the first night we're gonna run Blades in the Dark."

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: 'Cause you are putting way more pressure on yourself doing that.

AUSTIN: Yep.

ALI: Than you would by just having a group of friends.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: It can seem—it is a lot of work to run a game; I'm not gonna say it isn't.

ALI: Yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: But try to start putting it in the same category in your head as going to movie, as going out to, you know a park, or going, you know, to a concert, or something like that, where it's like, "I'm gonna be exhausted by the time this is done but I'm gonna have a really cool memory from it." Like, something that is special but not like—if you start putting it in that category, the stakes get way lower. Where it's just, like, "oh yeah, this is a thing I do sometimes." And not "This is the one thing that I'm going to have to—" It goes back to the baseball analogy; not every one is gonna be a homerun, and that's totally fine. Try to hit a single, try to get an RBI [Ali laughs]...these are baseball terms I know [chuckles]. And, you know, have that, you know? So. Totally.

Matthias in the chat also—or Mattias—says: "Play a throwaway session or two with Blades in the Dark with zero prep. That game works beautifully with going in and having no idea what the score is about." Totally.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Like, that is—that can totally work if you're comfortable enough with the base rules. So.

ALI: Yeah, that would also be a good idea 'cause, like, if you've been talking to these people for six months about doing this game and haven't run it yet, that also gives them the opportunity to

be like “For six months, I really thought that I would want to be, like, the vampire or whatever this class in this game is.”

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: “But, like, we did it once and it didn’t really click so maybe I’ll try this other thing.”

AUSTIN: Yes!

ALI: “And, like, I should have gotten this other move.” Like, we’re gonna hit this kind of tone a lot on Tips at the Table. But, like, just kind of be casual—

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ALI: —and friendly to everyone about things. ‘Cause like, if you want to change things up, you don’t have to put the external pressure on yourself that a lot of people tend to. Um—

AUSTIN: The other one that we say a lot is, you know—I think we actually said it a lot for a while and then we stopped saying it, and now we’ve started saying it again. But “To do it, do it,” [Ali laughs] is a classic Apocalypse World principle, right, which is like, when you make a move it’s because your character makes the move. You do it in the fiction, then you do it in the ruleset or in the mechanics, or vice versa. Those two things are interlocked very closely; it is not a system where it’s like you find the move you want to do and then describe it in the fiction. And it’s not really just a system. We kind of play it leaning the other way, of just like you do the thing that your character wants to do and then you match it out to the move, but when it works perfectly it’s doing both of those at the same time interdependently. And that’s just also how we get things done period for the show. Is like, “Shit, how do I get something like the September arc together? Oh, I spend time. I put the time in; I take those notes and I do it.” And the opposite is also true, which is like “How do you do something like the Skeletons? Oh, we get on the call”

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: I read the book a little bit, it’s a short book, and then we just jump in and we just do the Skeletons for a few hours. And that’s it, and we get out. To do it, just do it. And eventually, you’ll work up those muscles. You’ll start to learn the game more and more as you do more and more of it, to where, instead of spending so much prep time being, “How does this game work?” your prep time can then become, “How do I build a unique world or a cool NPC now that I’m not thinking about what risk and effect are? Now that I’m not thinking about what the basic dice mechanic is.” So do those little ones; it will help a lot.

ALI: Yeah. I, like—as much as Marielda is top of the top as far as seasons of our show go—and even that’s debatable, but whatever.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

ALI: But I never walked away from any of our Marielda recordings thinking that we had the perfect recording of Marielda.

AUSTIN: Oh no.

JACK: Mm-hm.

ALI: Like, I killed the game and I did the best that I could.

AUSTIN: I don't think—I think I used—there's like two mechanics I never used that were super important [Ali giggles] and I just never did them. Like the—whatever—Devil's Bargain I used once, and wrong [Jack laughs]. So, like, you can make really cool things—you can go have fun with your friends without it being perfect, and that's okay.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And you can improve the next time. So, yeah.

JACK: Yeah. Yeah.

AUSTIN: This is the last one. It comes in from Miguel, and from Matt; two different people, two questions, but a little overlap. "I recently did a gaspful reread of the episode descriptions and am again amazed at how good they've always been. Do y'all read them before episodes? Does Austin assume you have or have not? Does he assume the same for the audience? [Ali laughs] You don't mention them much on the actual episodes and sometimes I forget for a couple of weeks, only to go back and catch up and marvel at them." And then from Matt: "at the end of COUNTER/Weight you begin using episode descriptions to provide another vector for storytelling before fully committing to using them in Marielda and Winter in Hieron. What brought you to using them in depth and what was your favorite subject to write about? Matt."

Um, I don't know—I don't remember off the top of my head what the thing was that was like "Oh, we have to start using these now." My guess is that it was just realizing that was stuff I wanted to say about the world that we didn't say or wouldn't say in the actual episode. And then, like, "Oh, this is a place where I can do it." But I don't know.

ALI: Yeah, I think going from Hieron to COUNTER/Weight was so much of you just stretching your arms out.

AUSTIN: Yeah...

ALI: Where like you felt so boxed in to Hieron and fantasy and what that game was.

AUSTIN: [sighs] I did.

ALI: Where, like, COUNTER/Weight, you were just like, “I’m on one, I’m gonna do whatever I want.”

AUSTIN: I’m—yeah, exactly.

[Jack laughs]

ALI: “I’m gonna have these twenty factions and then realize there should maybe be ten but whatever.”

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ALI: “And, like, I want to write all of these things about all of these factions.” And, like, you just—you went into it and I think that’s kind of where we were like we want to do as much of this as we can.

AUSTIN: Yeah...you know what it is? I just found it. I found the spot where I decided I wanted to do fiction in that space. I did the episode “Visions from Windows, Or: The Last Time the Bomb Dropped.”

JACK: Oh yeah.

ALI: Ohhh yeah.

AUSTIN: Which was like, “Oh, this is a twenty-minute episode of me just writing fiction. I love doing that and I communicate something different about the world than in other places.” And also the episode descriptions in COUNTER/Weight had always been kind of flavorful, like we’d always written them like anime intros—or actually, anime next time ons, which is really fun. But even back then, towards the end it was like “As the only clock that really matters ticks further and further down, the Chime blah blah blah blah blah.” And then it was “The Storm Over September”, which is *the* last episode before the finale, I have just the quote of the Chief Engineer Irene Klipsdove, who made—who made something very important in the setting—I do my best not to be too spoiler-y in these Tipscasts—reading a quote about the moment that she made a thing. And, like, “Oh wow, that’s just—I can just drop this one quote in here. Cool.”

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: And that was it for me. It was, like, “Oh shit, yes [Jack laughs]. I need to just do this. This can be another vector for storytelling. I have to, you know, use every vector. Like, if I have that vector there, I’m gonna include that there. And I write those after, first and foremost.

ALI: Oh my God, the thought of you writing episode descriptions before we even record is hilarious [laughs].

AUSTIN: Yeah...I mean, there have been times when I've gotten close in terms of plotting stuff. I know—I knew a lot of the Arrell/Alyosha stuff way ahead of time.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Because I knew what the big plot points there were. But I didn't know—I knew the color of that relationship, I knew the arc of that relationship. I even knew a couple of really important phrases. If you read the Alyosha/Arrell letters, lion's paw, dandelions, come up again and again and again. And then, of course, come up in the near-finale. Dandelions have been important in Hieron—have been secretly super important in Hieron since the very beginning. But I didn't know that, you know, Arrell would talk about needing to leave the city because XYZ, right? And that stuff reflects the recording that we do. So most of the things we do, I write a description after the recording, after Ali has sent the final episode over or has already uploaded a draft.

ALI: [laughs] Just a synopsis.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Like, "Here are all of the story beats in this episode; figure this out somehow."

AUSTIN: Yep. I almost always write the intro, like the audio intro, before writing the text description. Text description is almost always the last thing we do.

ALI: Yeah. The thing that I want to say, which I guess is kind of unfortunate 'cause you just said that you enjoy it so much, and I like that you do, but the thing that I've been trying to do is push back us getting too narrative in the episode descriptions. We've pulled back on it a little bit with Twilight Mirage.

AUSTIN: We've found a happy medium here, I think.

ALI: Yeah.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Which is like, I'm not giving it up [Jack laughs] but now it is a thing I can just do a little bit of that isn't—you know, the actual thing that won me over was someone who just said "I miss the old episode descriptions because it was useful for me to know what was happening."

ALI: Right, yeah.

AUSTIN: Like, “I needed to be able to read that and have a—be able to remember ‘Oh yeah, this is what’s going on.’” And so, we’ve gone back to including those very straight-forward episode descriptions there, but we’re still doing the Memorious and the Curiosity intro hits also, and those have been really fun to write. And I get it, I totally get why your episode descriptions should be a description of the episode [laughs].

ALI: Well, not even that. I just feel like I really feel bad for anyone who’s listening to Winter and gets up to that holiday special and doesn’t know who Arrell is, like, at all.

AUSTIN: Yeah...

ALI: Or gets up to that Arrell scene with Throndir where he mentions Alyosha and being like “Wuuuuuuuh?”

AUSTIN: Yeah. “Who?” Yeah.

ALI: And I think that—

AUSTIN: The thing that—Go ahead.

ALI: Of the three of us, I’m sort of the person who, like, has a harder time penetrating media and remembering parts of it—

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ALI: And, like, being able to figure it out so I’m more sympathetic to the part of our audience that, like, the density of our show gets tough.

AUSTIN: Yeah. You’re definitely the ombudsman of, like [Ali laughs], “Listen. These people just fuckin’ worked a full day. They’re on a bus back.”

JACK: [laughs] Yeah.

AUSTIN: “Cut them some slack, Austin.”

[Ali laughs]

JACK: There’s also, like, there’s the happy—there’s other sort of happy medium to this, which is what we’ve been doing with Bluff City. Where the Bluff City episode descriptions are, A: narrative and B: nonsense.

ALI: Ah, they're so good.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JACK: This is—there's like no—you're gonna get stuff from the world of Bluff City there, but, at least right now, there are no plans for it being narratively crucial.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: Yeah.

JACK: Or like—they're jokes; they're extended jokes.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: And, like, that's a place for those. They don't tell anything that's happening in the episode. They're tangentially related to it. I don't think they even have the cast in, do they, Ali?

AUSTIN: No. I don't think so.

ALI: No. I should—I love it stylistically.

AUSTIN: Me too.

ALI: With it just straight. But, like, people have been confused if you're writing them or if Austin is, and I feel really bad that you're not getting credited on them.

AUSTIN: Yeah. You should get that credit of those, for sure.

[Jack chuckles]

ALI: I might go back and put in your credit and then that's it.

AUSTIN: You've written some of the Marielda ones too.

JACK: I think I wrote most of the Marielda ones, right.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: They were pretty—there were pretty split. If I remember.

JACK: They were split roughly down the middle.

AUSTIN: Maybe not down the middle but there was a definitely a mix because I definitely wrote—I remember writing a lot of them because of handing off certain ones to you and being excited to see what you would do after the one that I just did.

JACK: [laughs] Yeah.

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: And also because there are things in them that I know intuitively from having written the,. Like when I reference—there's an academy I reference in Hieron, in Winter in Hieron, that first shows up in a Marielda intro. But all of those are marked with who wrote what, so.

JACK: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: That was really fun too.

ALI: COUNTER/Weight was pretty evenly split though; I did a bunch of those.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JACK: Oh yeah, you did!

ALI: Yeah.

JACK: You—it was you that we got all the anime taglines from.

[Ali laughs]

JACK: Like the “Next time on...”

AUSTIN: Yes. Yes, totally.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: This season's have a special theme.

ALI: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: That they haven't completely been done by the same—the same kind of category, but a lot of them have been [Ali laughs]. So. Crack that code and be able to improve your Spotify playlist, that's all I'll say.

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: Uh, I think that's gonna pretty much do it, right? I don't know, I think this is an open book for me—an unfinished book—in that, like, there is something about the Arrell/Alyosha story where when those characters come on the screen, for the players or the listeners who did read those descriptions, Arrell coming onscreen and saying “Alyosha” meant something.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And for those who it didn't mean anything—it didn't mean anything for the players who hadn't read it either. Do you know what I mean?

ALI: Yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: And I'm f—I'm kind of okay with that. You wouldn't get—if you've read those descriptions—I couldn't have communicated the Arrell/Alyosha story onscreen without it being shoehorned in. Without it being a cutscene [Ali laughs] where I take the camera away from the players and say “Oh by the way, also there's this love story happening behind the scenes with two of *my* characters.” [Jack laughs] That's not the place for it, in a weird way for me. Like—[mic noise] Sorry. That's not the—it's not my place for me to take the camera away from you in those sequences. So I'm gonna keep playing with this and try to find out other ways of doing it, maybe.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Obviously, what I've done this season is move it into the intro, right? It's like “Oh, it's Primary and Satellite,” and this is my two characters talking to each other back and forth and delivering, you know, lore about the world by way of that. But, I mean, that's the other thing is, there is also other stuff in the item descriptions—[laughs] the item descriptions; you can see what my influences are, Dark Souls. Which is like also—the story of that game is not in the story of that game, it's in the item descriptions.

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: But, like, it's—the Grand Tour shows up in the Arrell/Alyosha letters, right? Like, all sorts of stuff shows up there before it's onscreen, before it gets defined onscreen. And so it's a lot of just, like, I like to be evocative without explaining so that when the final explanation does come, it happens onscreen and someone who's just heard about it for the first time gets it there. But maybe there is—there might be a—the other happy medium is the thing that Jack talked about which is, like, the Bluff City or Marielda ones, which are like ‘This stands alone and is interesting but is not necessarily needed.’ Anyway.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Excited to keep trying this stuff.

ALI: Yeah.

JACK: Yeah.

ALI: I think the moving from Marielda to how we did it in Winter and then now how we're doing it with Twilight Mirage has been really fun.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: And, like, each season we're gonna do a different thing.

AUSTIN: Yep.

ALI: So yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I've already started thinking about what Season Six will look like.

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: I'm not kidding.

ALI: Ooh. I have a good idea.

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah!

ALI: We'll talk in a second [laughs].

AUSTIN: See! Right! See what I'm saying? Alright, that's gonna do it for us; I'm Austin Walker, you can find me on Twitter @Austin_Walker. Where can people find you, Jack?

JACK: You can find me on the internet at—on the internet? On Twitter @notquitereal and you buy any of the music featured on the show at notquitereal.bandcamp.com. You can't get Bluff City on there yet but it's gonna be on there and it's gonna be on there—I mean, if you're listening to this you're backing the Patreon.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JACK: But the Bluff City soundtrack's gonna be available to everybody. So that they can hear stuff and think "What is—what is happening here? Is that a cathedral organ? [Ali laughs] Why is that playing? What's that?"

AUSTIN: And then Ali?

ALI: You can find me @Ali_West on Twitter, you can go find the show over @Friends_table. We're also on Facebook over at facebook.com/friends_table, I think? We have a Discord; I don't know if everybody who tunes into the Tips stuff knows that, it was like a message to the—when you signed up for Patreon. If you lost it and you want to hop in, hit me up on Twitter and I'll give that link. We just don't share it that often 'cause it's kind of annoying and weird to say.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Yeah.

ALI: But, like, it's out there! Come hang out.

AUSTIN: Come talk about worms, I guess? [laughs] Is that what the Discord talks about these days? Fan Divines is hot in the Discord right now.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: If you're listening to this—if you have an OC Divine, let me tell you about #fanworks in our chat [Ali and Jack laugh]. That is where you should go to talk about your fan Divine, 'cause I'll find one. There're in there. Oh, these are—there's some good fanart in there also that I hadn't seen before. Shoutout to all the good fan artists. Alright. Uhhhhh. If you haven't—if you're listening to this at a friend's house and you're like "Where do I go to support my friends? At the Table" it's friendsatthetable.cash. Let people know. We obviously don't have any advertisements, we don't have anything except word of mouth. And that's another way, if you already support us to keep supporting us, is to spread the word. Oh, here's actually a thing worth saying! I just added a new intro to this show, a new Episode One to this show.

JACK: Mhm.

AUSTIN: If you go to friendsatthetable.net or if you find us on a podca—a podcatcher. A podcast app. You can find the new first episode in the feed, an introduction to Friends at the Table. The very first episode; it's marked as September 11, 2014, which is not when actually it went up. It actually went up the other day but I have it set to be there so that it's the beginning of the feed. That is like a twelve episode that introduces what every season is. Give that to people; let them know "listen to this" and that'll direct them to where they should hop onto the show. If you can do that for me, if you can just go out and do that for me, that would mean a lot. Thank you so much! Alright, I think that's gonna do it for us today. We need to time.is, don't we?

ALI: We do!

JACK: Yeah.

ALI: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: Time.is...and then, Jack, you have to hop in a cab to get across this town in a few minutes.

ALI: Aww.

[Jack laughs]

AUSTIN: Alright, let's do fifty? Let's do forty-five.

ALI: Ooh, okay.

JACK: Okay.

[claps]

AUSTIN: Let's do fifty.

ALI: I was watching the time.is—

AUSTIN: —five. Let's do fifty-five.

ALI: —on the stream, and it was like uh-uh.

AUSTIN: Un-un.

[claps]

AUSTIN: Better. Much better.

ALI: We did it.