

Drawing Maps 23: The Curse of Eastern Folly Arc - February 2021

Transcriber: Luce (luce#4165)

Games Mentioned

[The Ground Itself](#)

[I'm Sorry, Did You Say Street Magic](#)

[Heart: A City Beneath](#)

[Legacy: Life Among the Ruins 2nd Edition](#)

[Rhapsody of Blood](#)

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[00:00:00] Intro

AUSTIN: Hey everybody, welcome to Drawing Maps for February 2021. I'm your host, Austin Walker, joining me today: Art Martinez-Tebbel...

ART: Oh, I didn't think I was gonna go first, I took a bite of toast—

SYLVIA: [laughter]

AUSTIN: Sylvia— Sylvia Clare...

SYLVIA: Hi, I'm Sylvia, you can find me on Twitter [@sylvibullet](#).

AUSTIN: ...Andrew Lee Swan...

DRE: Hey, you can find me on Twitter at [@swandre3000](#).

AUSTIN: ...and Art Martinez-Tebbel.

ART: Hi, you can find me on Twitter [@atebbel](#) and at the North Hollywood farmers' market on Saturday mornings buying this wacky bread.

SYLVIA: [laughter]

AUSTIN: Don't doxx yourself!

SYLVIA: You're gonna get— Art's gonna get assassinated at the faire now.

AUSTIN: [laughter]

DRE: Jesus.

ART: I'm there for ten minutes a week, I think—

AUSTIN: Now you've given them a window of time to—

SYLVIA: [cross, unintelligible] ...to the market.

ART: [cross] Ten minutes is not a lot of—

DRE: [cross] This is my— this is my favorite Hitman DLC.

AUSTIN and SYLVIA: [laughter]

AUSTIN: Ahhhh, incredible.

ART: Catch me at the place with the blue and yellow bread.

AUSTIN: Now you're zeroing in, they're zeroing in on you right now! Red dots!

SYLVIA: [laughter]

ART: This farmers' market is the smallest thing I've ever seen, if you're there to kill me, you'll find me.

[laughter]

AUSTIN: Oh my god, I hate this. You joke, but you never— oh my god.

SYLVIA: Oh, Jesus.

ART: [cross] Please don't kill me.

AUSTIN: [cross] I'm gonna tell Jess, I'm telling Jess, I'm gonna call Jess and, and tell her that she needs to protect you. And herself.

DRE: Art's getting a little reckless.

AUSTIN: Welcome to Drawing Maps. If people have not seen Drawing Maps before: in the past, this show has been about prep, but every once in a while we've dipped into a sort of mini post-mortem arc by arc, and in response to a bunch of stuff, including the recent polls that we sent out, we're changing the show, we're kind of combining it with Tips at the Table. Um, we haven't done, like, the rewriting of the Patreon page yet, but we're probably gonna move some things around, all of the core stuff just like, heads, up, one: Bluff City, Clapcasts, you know, Live at the Table, those are all enshrined, those are all gonna continue being the five-dollar-a-month

thing, that's not going anywhere, those are like, the bread and butter. Um, and then on top of that, we really like to do, I really liked this last batch of Drawing Maps that have had a conversational element, where we've talked through character creation and inspirations and stuff. And so one of the things we've of was like, why not combine— oh, also, also! We've answered a LOT of questions on Tips at the Table, and two things have happened. One is, a lot of the new questions we get are questions we've answered multiple times before at this point, and two, we just don't get as many questions anymore.

AUSTIN: Like, the Tips bucket has been increasingly dry. Even after we've been like, hey, please send us questions, it's like, very few responses these days. So, we've thought about switching it up, doing this combination show, at least for a little while. Maybe we'll rotate Tips back in at some point, but for now, for at least the season, Drawing Maps is gonna be a sort of rolling post-mortem in which we take a look at recently finished arcs with some folks who were in the arcs, probably not full casts, because getting a full cast together is very hard, even for one side, and we're gonna answer questions that you send in and talk about the arc and see, you know, how we feel about it after the fact. Um, like regular Drawing Maps, we're gonna do our best to uh, announce any sort of spoilers, so for instance, this episode will carry spoilers for the first arc of Sangfielle.

AUSTIN: Um, this is future Austin cutting in to say, uh, I was wrong about that, and that this episode does in fact carry— it's the thing I can say when I'm the only person on an episode, but with a conversation, it becomes much harder to not want to reference past stuff. Um, and so, this episode actually does carry spoiler warnings loosely for: PARTIZAN and Hieron. But I would say, and I believe that's true, but I would say just to be safe, and not huge huge ones, we're not like, explicitly... they're big but they're not— it's not like we go beat by beat, but you know, those spoilers are here for basically, assume it's possible we spoil anything before this recording. Um, I will try to reiterate before we do the next one to be very, very careful with spoiler warnings. And again, it's just, it's a couple of things, but I'd rather stay safe than sorry. I know for a fact that it's PARTIZAN stuff and it's some Hieron stuff. I believe— I wanna say maybe there was a little bit of... of COUNTER/Weight in there too, and Marielda, so like, I just wanna say — if you're not caught up on the show, heads up, there are some spoiler warnings ahead. Alright, I'm gonna go back to that other recording, which... uh, will start now.

AUSTIN: Um, and, uh, and yeah! So I feel like we can just get into it. We're talking about the uh, Curse of Eastern Folly Arc for the start of Sangfielle, where we played The Ground Itself by Everest Pipkin. Before we get to questions, I'm curious if any of y'all have any thoughts on that game, or any other, like, you know, general feelings about, about the very beginning, the pre-Heart Sangfielle. Or anything between, let's say, the last time you were on a Drawing Maps episode with us or with me, and— and now at this point. Any lingering, you know, opening of the season thoughts?

[short pause]

DRE: Hm.

ART: Sure, yeah. Why not.

AUSTIN: Um-hm.

ART: I'm— I'm like always gonna be curious of what the alternate dimension version of Sangfielle is where we went with the other game we were thinking of doing instead of Ground Itself?

AUSTIN: [cross] Ah, I see. Yeah yeah yeah.

ART: I think Ground Itself was the right choice, but like...

AUSTIN: I don't have a problem saying uh, uh, "Did Somebody Say Street Magic." That was the other game that we were considering, right?

ART: I don't think that's the right preamble.

AUSTIN: I didn't say it right. Fuck.

ART: I think it's something else.

AUSTIN: "I'm Sorry, Did You Say Street Magic".

ART: Hm.

AUSTIN: "Did Somebody Say Street Magic" should be a sequel game. I'm sorry—

[laughter]

DRE: [cross] [unintelligible]

SYLVIA: [cross] Big—

AUSTIN: [cross] Caro, Caro Ascercion—

SYLVIA: ...to it, yeah.

ART: "Did Somebody Say Street Magic" sounds like, what Fozzie Bear says when he wants to show you his card trick.

AUSTIN: [laughter] Uh huh, yeah!

SYLVIA: It's a Muppets expansion, actually, so... yeah, it is.

AUSTIN: Someone's gotta make that at some point.

ART: Yeah. These are great ideas.

AUSTIN: It's just such a different game, right?

ART: You can tune in to a new Drawing Maps for great game ideas that you can steal.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Um, it's a, it's a, it would be such a different game because— I'm Sorry, Did You Say Street Magic is so much more focused on... particular... really sketching out particular

aspects of a location down to neighborhoods and residence by name and landma— like, specific places. And we still ended up with a number of places, obviously. But, uh— and it also doesn't have the sort of... the same focus on ticking clock, things progressing over time. Not that we ended up progressing over much time. But, in fact—

ART: Yeah, that's the other hilarious bit there. Our horrible luck that we decided not to put our finger on the scale; the whole big worldbuilding game took THREE days.

DRE: [laughs]

AUSTIN: It's so—

SYLVIA: As the person who rolled the die that made it days, I stand by it. [small laugh]

AUSTIN: I do, too, thank you Sylvi, that was, that was—

SYLVIA: I think that was me.

AUSTIN: That sounds right.

ART: What if we didn't roll one three times in a row after that or whatever it was.

AUSTIN: Uh hm. Um, yeah, who— that's the thing, right, is that we could've at least gotten weeks, and instead we were still set on, on days. Uh, one second, I wanna see something, 'cause people are saying there's a buzz, and I wanna— does this fix the buzz? I turned off my AC. I think it was the AC. Yeah, ok. Now I've turned it off. Um, the... yeah, I think that was the right choice for us. And we'll get some questions that talk about game choice in a little bit. Um, and, the... I think that the, the, both the aspect of time, but also the ways in which that game... even though we ended up being set in the same basic week of, of time there, the way that game is built for "hey, this could end up tracking over centuries" — or decades, or millenia, made us think about that space, or made me come in thinking about that space in a way that represents the sort of historical stuff that we wanted to do in this season.

AUSTIN: Um, and I think even that some of that stuff comes in when it comes to, like, you think about the, the mountain and the mine and the stuff that comes out of the mine? In some ways I think sitting down and playing a game that says, a game can last between four days and four thousand years, or whatever the total range is inside Ground Itself — starts getting you to think about history and future and the ways in which those intersect, so. Yeah, I think it was good, it was a good choice. Um... let's get into some questions and... because obviously I've realized now that there's a good chance that our thoughts that we will just come up with could be good answers to questions.

SYLVIA: [laughs]

AUSTIN: So Ko writes in: "Hey friends, with the Ground Itself game leading up to Heart, did you have a skeleton of what locations, landmarks, haunts you all knew you wanted for Blackwick or was it all improvised from setting elements that players expressed interest in having nearby?"

How do you approach building a central location, like in— like Eastern Folly when the dice say that the lens is limited to a few days?" We didn't do *shit*.

SYLVIA: Did we have...?

AUSTIN: We didn't do shit.

SYLVIA: Did we have the mountain even?

AUSTIN: No.

SYLVIA: I feel like we didn't even...

DRE: No.

AUSTIN: Ah wait, that's not true. The mountain was, the mountain was on THE map, the original...

SYLVIA: I think that like, the little map drawing was literally all we had.

DRE: [hums agreement]

SYLVIA: Like, a mountain range and like, there was the lake—

AUSTIN: [cross] —but we added the lake, that lake got added in play.

SYLVIA: [cross] —and it's very, it was very simple at the time. Oh, it did! Right!

AUSTIN: Yeah! That's a thing we did, the mountains that cut— the only thing I had were- was the Ringed City, I mean, I can— I think I can pull it up, probably. Um, was the Ringed City, the five, you know, areas around the Ringed City and then these mountains because I knew the mountains existed for historical reasons 'cause it was tied to the way I kind of envisioned the, um, the way in which the, uh... war basically went? Also, I don't think— one second, I think I'm capturing the wrong Drawing Ma— I'm— I have this Drawing Maps open twice. There we go! Okay, whew.

SYLVIA: [laughs]

AUSTIN: Uh, had to [laughs] I've advanced it now. I had the... I knew that there was a, that there was the split for Kay'va and so— and I knew that there were mountains involved in that... in that, like, historical event? And so I knew that I drew those mountains there. Beyond that, it was kind of not... anything coming in. And that means, I also mean, that the Heart landmark did not exist until after that. The Heart landmark didn't exist until the very end of the character creation episode, which I think actually got trimmed? I think if you go back and listen to the character creation episode, I end it by saying, like— and I did a bunch of stuff off mic, we were gonna talk about this off mic, and what really happened was we had like a, a conversation via text, via, in the group chat, and then, and then a little bit of conversation at the end of that character creation episode and that was, um, that is where the like, you know, the haunts that would end

up being in Blackwick came from. The doctor and the automat and stuff like that. But, but, yeah, we kinda didn't... have anything, right? Outside of what came out in that game.

ART: No, yeah, I saw someone on Twitter early in the arc be like, "Oh, Art's fighting so hard for this lake, he must have a lake-related character," and it's really just like, no, I just got fixated on the lake—

SYLVIA and DRE: [laugh]

ART: ...in the middle of the game and was a jerk about it for a little bit.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: I just, I just really believed we needed a lake.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that was good! I think that was the right call, lakes are— that lake turned out to be fun. The lake had some stuff going on with it. I've put the, the picture of the Heartland, again— it wasn't even called Sangfielle yet— up on the stream, uh, and this is all we had. And so at that point, everything was improvised around it, and I think in terms of the second part of the question of like, how do you build a central location when the dice say that the lens is limited to a few days. Places still have history, even if you don't... deliver it in the active tense? So for instance, Dre, one of the first things you did was the abbey, right? And the, the weird neck of the, of the skeleton monster, the skeleton dragon thing, right, which like instantly there's all this history there, right. Was that something that you had kind of already been thinking about in terms of... like, weird— weird bones and stuff? Or were you, was that just off the dome?

DRE: Uh... it was pretty much off the dome, as soon as we started figuring out like, ok, these are like, monster-worshipping nuns. I was like, okay, well, then their church is probably... inside of a big monster.

AUSTIN: Right, of course. What else would it be?

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Did anyone else have any, like, influence we didn't talk about going into worldbuilding, or going into The Ground Itself, that didn't come up in our character creation conversations? I'm trying to think if I even did. I feel like... I feel like I left it all on the table in terms of...

SYLVIA: Yeah...

AUSTIN: ...stuff we've already talked about, you know? Uh, but, yeah, I think we just kinda rolled with it, and thankfully that, that limited focus turned into a rolling joke, but that wasn't a bad joke [laughs] you know?

SYLVIA: Yeah. I think like, even tying it back to the thing you mentioned with the abbey, like, we did such a good job of making sure that like, we kept the thing moving day to day, but we tied it into, like, a history to the place. Like, we did the festival thing—

AUSTIN: Right.

SYLVIA: ...and like, the stuff with, like, the mummers play, trying to warn people about the curse...

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah.

SYLVIA: I think like, I think that... was why I never really felt that constrained by the timeline stuff?

AUSTIN: That makes sense.

SYLVIA: So yeah, I don't know.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: I just thought of that when the abbey came up and wanted to mention it before I forgot?

[0:14:22]

AUSTIN: No, totally, totally. Alright, let's keep it moving. We got a bunch here. So Addison wrote— wrote in and said: "I had a question about how you feel The Ground Itself worked for what you wanted for worldbuilding in Sangfielle. I'm interested in using it for worldbuilding for a campaign and wanted to know if you had any advice from your experience to make that easier since you already had some lore that changed parts of the way you played the game. Did you feel that helped how you played or if that sometimes got in the way? Additionally, do you feel that, because of the nature of the game and how most turns call for introducing a new world element, that sometimes made playing harder? Any extra advice for someone looking to use this system for worldbuilding would be appreciated." I mean, Art, you already kind of gestured that we refused to put our thumbs on the thing as hard as we could, right?

ART: Yeah, I also think that like, I don't wanna, like, be too self-congratulatory or anything, but I think one of our strongest skills as a group is rolling with changes in, like, lore, you know?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah.

ART: That like, adding in all this extra lore in before we played and then just like, digesting and contextualizing it is a thing that we are good at.

AUSTIN: [hums agreement] [cross] So you're saying—

ART: [cross] And so like, no, it did not bother—

AUSTIN: [cross] Oh, I thought you were saying it didn't get in the way—

ART: I think it's good for us, yeah.

AUSTIN: I, I... It can be very scary to look at a totally blank page, and the idea that we were like, going to... the eight people, we were going to get together and have a... just the canvas? And then whatever touchstones they brought in from our brief conversations as a group, their own research, our conversations one-on-one... I... that's... it doesn't *scare* me, but it— I am... I've

done this long enough, and I've worked in general with big groups long enough to know that there are real difficulties, or there's a risk when you do a totally blank sheet thing. Not a risk, a characteristic of playing with a blank canvas is everyone's coming at it from a different direction in a huge way, and they're not grounded across the same thing.

AUSTIN: If you can give them a shared lexicon to begin with, just a little bit, to like, get people aligned, they're still gonna come from their own directions and bring their own stuff, but having that little bit of color, and having that little bit of flavor, helps a great deal with... making sure that you don't end up having wildly different tonal elements? Um, think about playing Apples to Apples and playing it with strangers, where you don't have the same sense of humor, and someone makes a joke with it where you're like, that... doesn't fly, like that's not funny. Like not even offensive, it's just like, not funny to me.

AUSTIN: Um, uh, but if you've all like, if you're with a group that has that alignment already the game can go well, and so you can't— obviously we have a lot of overlap in our, our, you know, propensities and biases and the way that we do things, 'cause we're used to working together, but even then: it would be... imagine how different that game would be if you removed even one player. And so having just a document that got everyone more or less on the same page— also I guess we'd all read Heart, right? And so we knew we were gonna build toward something that looked sort of like Heart, so that helped also. It— even though the lore was gonna be different, we knew that there would one day be a Deep Apiarist, right, we knew there would be Train Knights of some sort at some point. We knew that—

SYLVIA: [cross] I think tying into that, um... oh, sorry, did I interrupt—

AUSTIN: [cross] No no, I was gonna say— I was gonna throw to you, I was gonna say we knew that Sylvi was—

SYLVIA: [cross] Well, yeah...

AUSTIN: [cross] —gonna play a Deadwalker—

SYLVIA: Well, yeah, but we also, like, knew that this place had to be a haven as well, right?

AUSTIN: [cross] [hums agreement]

SYLVIA: And I think part of that—

AUSTIN: [cross] —that was, yeah...

SYLVIA: —led towards us... pushing to, like, it helped us tell a sort of contained story about this curse.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: As well as setting the stage for all this stuff? 'Cause we [laughs] we were like, well this place can't be cursed when we get here.

AUSTIN: Right, or— especially when we were like, it can't be... evil. We don't— I mean... it can't be... we can't...

SYLVIA: It can't—

AUSTIN: ...want it to burn.

SYLVIA: ...like, be rotten already.

AUSTIN: Right, right, exactly, exactly. Um... uh, not that there can't be those places that we can't also come to love, but we wanted it to be a place that we want, at the top of the game at the very least, to exist. I think part of that even came from... one of our, one of my big motivations this season was... PARTIZAN was driven by personal conflict? And, and, had a lot of, like, great, you know... these characters close together end up inevitably crashing into each other in very interesting ways. But that was also a very stressful way to tell a story, because you just don't know if it's gonna work or not? And I so badly wanted to tell episodic stories here and also wanted to, like, not not worry about co— interpersonal conflict? But to start from a place of, like, ok, everyone's clicking. Everything's working. You're in this town. We're not gonna worry about if the town is evil in the first game. Maybe we'll get there [laughs]. But we... I wanted like, to be able to build the... the beginning of this as if it's a brand new season and a brand new world. As if it's Hieron starting over, do you know what I mean? We're like—

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: —no one asked, what's up with Velas, like oh, is Velas fucked up. Do you know what I mean, [laughs] you know.

SYLVIA: [laughs] Yeah.

AUSTIN: Velas was just the place you were from. And it had— it was fucked up, you know, but in different ways, so. I think you're right, that knowledge of it— and we had that conversation about the game, right, we were like—

SYLVIA: Yeah, we did.

AUSTIN: Like, many times. We were like, how do we wrap— how do we wrap this up, etc. So... It's probably also—

SYLVIA: I think—

AUSTIN: Yeah, go ahead.

SYLVIA: That's probably my strongest example of just like, a guideline that really helped shape... stuff?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: Because I— like I feel like a few of the cards in those— like, I think the one I specifically pulled was like, "the great tragedy happened," and like, I was like, I gotta figure out something

here that's like... tonally appropriate but also isn't going to fuck everything up forever. And I think we did fine at creating, like, the ominous fire-breathing cave.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Yes. We did, we did!

SYLVIA: It's like... yeah. It's still like... I don't think I would've gotten there without thinking, like, I need to... make this... not, like, a mass-scale thing to the town?

AUSTIN: Right, you didn't have... um, a... a hole open up and devour 80% of the population.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: [cross] I mean, you could've. That would just have been...

SYLVIA: [cross] Like, it needed to—

AUSTIN: That would've been a big swing that... you know...

SYLVIA: ...gonna pulled off?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Ah, we could've figured it out. We would've figured it out.

SYLVIA: [cross] I would've been fine with that.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I think we would've— that would've been sick too, actually. [laughs]

SYLVIA: Yeah. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Next time.

SYLVIA: Yeah. There will be other towns, we can...

AUSTIN: Yeah! Uh hm.

SYLVIA: Save that idea for another arc.

ART: Well, 'cause it didn't— we didn't say how long from the end of the game the first game had to start. We could've thrown in...

AUSTIN: Right!

ART: ...and it's two months later and they've built a rickety community on the end of the giant hole and— [unintelligible]

AUSTIN: [cross] Could've been ten years later, could have been fifty years later! We didn't, you know, we weren't *committed*—

ART: Well, that's cheating, no, that's cheating.

DRE: [laughs]

AUSTIN: We did that— Marielda is like, twenty years after The Quiet Year or something like— twelve years later. So like...

ART: Well, but we didn't... there weren't rules then.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Okay.

SYLVIA: [laughs]

ART: We're big time now, I don't know how to tell you that—

AUSTIN: [cross] But also, wait, we skipped- we went more than two months away. The, the, uh, the Heart starts like a *year* after. So we did over that much time. As it is.

ART: Oh, sorry for cheating, everyone!

AUSTIN: [slightly laughing] We didn't *cheat*!

ART: Come around back if you want a refund on Sangfielle—

AUSTIN: [cross] [laughing] Don't say that!

[slight audio glitch]

AUSTIN: Trying to make rent over here.

SYLVIA: Exactly! Damn!

AUSTIN: [laughs] So...

ART: If all 35 people watching this wanted all of their money back, you'd all be fine. You know that, right?

AUSTIN: [laughs] Maybe. You don't know!

SYLVIA: [laughing] Speak for yourself.

AUSTIN: Yeah, we're all very tight. Uh... Ren says, "Did Janine make this map? I don't think I've seen it before." It's in the, um, show notes for the first episode of the ep- of the season. Ah, and I made it in a thing called... "Wonderdraft," I think? I'm opening Wonderdraft to see it that's true. Yes, it's— I made it in a thing called Wonderdraft. Yeah, and if you go to the first episode, The Curse of Eastern Folly, and click through, you'll see it there. In fact, I should just say this really quick, because I was gonna answer a question, someone did write in to ask... I don't think I have it open anymore.

AUSTIN: Um, one, "How do you spell Drakkan and Kay'van?" Drakkan is D-A-R... uh, D-R-A, sorry, D-R-A-K-K-A-N, and Kay'va is K-A-Y-'-V-A, and Kay'van is just K-A-Y-'-V-A-N. And all of that stuff is in the show notes. We- for the last- since PARTIZAN, I've been doing this very... long, like, encyclopedia on every episode with anything relevant to that episode, as long as it's nothing like, you know, I don't do them for the main party characters, I don't have entries for the

PCs at this point. I think recently I've stopped doing the entries for like, the core cultures, because at this point, if I say Aldomina, I hope people know Aldomina is the big empire that— of devils, right. Um, but like, even like this past episode that just went up, I have like, you know, the Caravan of the Coin, cursed by Ribbadon, Frog God of Wealth, these traveling merchant clerics, never arriving at a destination carrying what they expect, right. So there's always a little something like that. So please— please use those shownotes, because they, they- they take the most work, besides the intros, of the post-edit, posting-an-episode thing, right. So like, from the time at which Ali hands me the MP3 to the point it goes online, the intro takes the most work on— for my final touch, and then writing this whole thing out and, and looking for my old notes and finding versions I can produce. So— so please know about that.

ART: Don't wanna be your eleventh-grade teacher here or anything, but you could... start doing that before the edit was done.

AUSTIN: No, 'cause I have to listen to that. What's actually the longest thing is, I listen through to make notes of what is in the episode. And then write the thing when it's done. And I can't write and listen at the same time. You know? ...Um, anyway. Uh... The other thing I do want to say about this, Addison, is: (and this is like, a larger... games-as-games thing?) A thing that's happened, since Marielda, is: people say "The Quiet Year is a great worldbuilding game. The Ground Itself is a great worldbuilding game." Um, this is true. Also: they are good games, period. I... am happy, I'm thrilled with the way that we've used The Quiet Year over the years, as a way to both do worldbuilding and to... you know, sometimes work as epilogue or punctuation on something? But I also hope that the, the... many of these games ought be treated— and there's something... There is something being sanded away when even we use them to build something for later consumption in this way.

AUSTIN: I really— but The Ground Itself especially, I mean, actually both of them, right — The Quiet Year ends and the part of the thing that's so good about The Quiet Year is there's no resolution. The Frost Shepherds arrive. The fucking end, right? [laughs] Except, in Marielda, it's not the end, it's the beginning of another ten episodes or something. And so, there are ways in which... I'm not— I don't feel *bad* about it necessarily, but I hope that people are willing to play these games in modes that are not just... building out a big world because that's how they were— that's how *they* were designed. The designers, you know, Avery with The Quiet Year and Everest with, with The Ground Itself, imagined these games as whole experiences. And so this is like, a petition to hope that people will try those out in, in that way. I... again, I don't feel bad about using them the way we've used them, I think we've done good work with them and I'm happy to, to show them to new people, but I... I ruffle a little bit, even at myself, for when I have in the past said, "Oh yeah, they're great for worldbuilding." [laughs] You know. I think that they're more than just that. So, worth— worth saying. Any other thoughts on The Ground Itself or can we go on to the next question?

SYLVIA: I'm ready to move on.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Okay. Rescue Ranger has a thing I've never heard of before, have any of you heard of this?

DRE: No.

ART: Nah.

AUSTIN: [cross] "You peel an orange, by hand. Then you try to flatten the peel on top of a sheet of paper. That's the shape of your map. It works better if you're bad at peeling oranges."

SYLVIA: [cross] What??

AUSTIN: "Have you ever done the orange peel trick or something similar before?"

ART: I have so many immediate follow-up questions.

SYLVIA: This would be, uh, an archipelago if I did it, uh...

DRE: [cross] Hold on, let me see if I can find an orange.

SYLVIA: ...I feel like I always rip that shit.

ART: Hold on, I'm gonna see if I know what archipelago means.

SYLVIA: It's a bunch of islands.

ART: Okay. Well, that's the thing – is it, is it the whole peel is your map, or is the first piece of peel that comes off is your map?

AUSTIN: So you're– you're both saying to me, you've peeled an– when you peel an orange, more often than not, you don't get the whole peel off, you get...

DRE: Who needs the whole peel?

SYLVIA: [cross] No, but– yeah...

AUSTIN: [mishearing "needs" as "eats"] Wait, no one's eating the whole peel, what?

SYLVIA: What?

DRE: No, but how do you get a– no, how do you–

SYLVIA: You can peel an orange in one thing, like you can get it off in one piece, I just... I tend to rem– I like, I like my oranges cold, I keep them in the fridge, and that makes the skin a little harder, I find? And so...

AUSTIN: Sure.

SYLVIA: ...it rips easier, is all I'm saying. I don't know. That seems cool...?

ART: No one's saying you're bad at this.

DRE: [cross] I think I'm saying I'm bad at it, apparently.

SYLVIA: [cross] I'm not bad at anything.

DRE: I think I suck at peeling oranges, is what I've learned.

ART: You've never gotten it in one piece?

DRE: No!

AUSTIN: Ever?

ART: Hm.

AUSTIN: Huh.

SYLVIA: Okay, I've done *that*.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Um...

DRE: I'm gonna go. [laughs]

AUSTIN: No no no no no, please, this is a very Virtue-Chine energy here, honestly.

SYLVIA: [laughs]

AUSTIN: It's hard, it's hard to get it in one piece. I tend to get it in... three or four big pieces.

SYLVIA: I thought you just said "It's hard to get into One Piece" and I was like, it is.

AUSTIN: [cross] It's hard to get into One Piece! It's too long—

SYLVIA: [cross] ...long as fuck.

AUSTIN: [cross] ...it's long as fuck.

DRE: ...it starts in one piece, is the thing.

[laughter]

[0:28:30]

AUSTIN: Um, the— the— yeah, I tend to do like, big... I almost think of them as continent — now, in this world — continent-style, like three or four big chunks of, of the peel.

SYLVIA: [cross] Yeah!

AUSTIN: Do you know what I mean?

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: But, but I do like it when I get it all in one go, it— it takes— it takes effort because what I tend to do is like, I'll do a third of it, or, you know, half of it or whatever, and then I'll do another, like, twenty five percent, and then I— but I won't pull it all the way off, I'll like, let it hang at the bottom of the ora- you know what I'm saying, right?

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And then, and then—

ART: All of my one-piece maps would look the same though.

AUSTIN: [small laugh] Right, you've the Grand Line in the middle going east to west, and that's separating the north—

SYLVIA: Yeah. [laughs]

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah, uh huh. This is...

[laughter]

AUSTIN: Is that what it's called, Sylvi, I don't know anything about One Piece.

SYLVIA: Yeah, no, you got it.

AUSTIN: Phew, okay. [laughs] One Piece is an anime about pirates, and a manga about pirates. Uh... yeah, this is cool!

ART: Yeah, I— we all knew that.

AUSTIN AND SYLVIA: [laugh]

AUSTIN: I would fuck with this! I would try this.

ART: I know all the mangas!

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: What's your favorite one?

ART: You know, the good one.

AUSTIN: Mm, the good one. Yeah, classic... classic.

SYLVIA: Same here.

AUSTIN: Not me, I only like the bad ones. [laughs]

DRE: Yeah.

ART: [laughs]

AUSTIN: Um, this is cool. I like this— I don't think I've done anything like this before. I don't think I've done any, like, "here is a creative way to... generate some raw information to then map something cool onto," you know what I mean?

DRE: Just gonna smash a bunch of garlic cloves.

AUSTIN AND SYLVIA: [in unison, fascinated] Yeah...

SYLVIA: [laughs] I feel like my problem with this question is that most of my tabletop gaming is done online?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: Like, I've never played like, The Quiet Year in person or anything?

AUSTIN: Sure.

SYLVIA: And so, usually, if I'm, like, we're generating a map, I think I remember using like, some, like, fractal map generator thing?

AUSTIN: Mhmm.

SYLVIA: Which is less interesting than peeling an orange, if you ask me.

DRE: Yeah, so you peel the orange, and then you smash it on your iPad...

AUSTIN: Uh huh?

SYLVIA: [laughs]

DRE: ...and...

AUSTIN: Now we're good. Um, I didn't read this from the chat here: tobacco— tobaccosaveslives in the chat, which I don't think that's true. Uh: "My mom used to get them— my mom used to get them in one and her teacher got upset because he thought that the peel was an intact orange when he tried to steal it."

SYLVIA: HUhhh????

AUSTIN: Why was he—

DRE: Wait—

AUSTIN: —your mother's teacher trying to steal her oranges?

DRE: Yeah!

AUSTIN: Get fucked. Bad teacher.

SYLVIA: No oranges in school.

AUSTIN: Alright, there's that law. I forgot about that.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: They said no oranges in school.

SYLVIA: It's been like that since the sixties, come on.

AUSTIN: Yeah... No, this is cool, Rescue Ranger, I love this. This— this, to me, feels the most like a Jack de Quidt thing. Like, I feel like Jack has done this six times.

SYLVIA: [laughs] Yeah, it does have their vibes.

AUSTIN: Totally. Um... Micah [pronounced like “my”], or Micah [pronounced like “me”], I'm not sure, apologies, says: "I've seen other folks speak the various francophone-esque variations of Slumbous, or I guess the francophone-esque one, Slumbous [pronounced like Slumboo], on Twitter, so I'll leave that to them. To add to that pile though, I saw the name on Twitter before I had time to listen to the episode, so my preferred Slumbous pronunciation ends in "-ous", like bulbous, gibbous, tenebrous, glabrous, etc. – slight emphasis on the first syllable." So I guess that would be like...

AUSTIN: [cross] SLUM-bous?

SYLVIA: [cross] SLUM-bous?

AUSTIN: SLUM-bous?

ART: Oh, I love this.

AUSTIN: Ay, Slumbous here! It's me, Jimby— Jimby Slumbous. [laughs]

SYLVIA: [unintelligible]

AUSTIN: ... and I'm here to sell you some fucking candles, huh?

SYLVIA: Virtue might have a new way of pronouncing this.

AUSTIN: Ohh, just to get under everyone's skin.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah. [Jimby] Slumbous is from Staten Island, a hundred percent, in my mind.

SYLVIA: God.

AUSTIN: It's your man Staten Island Slumbous here, and we got the deals.

SYLVIA: Do we have— do we have a agreed-upon pronunciation for this name?

AUSTIN: I think it's Slumbous [rhyming with hose].

SYLVIA: Okay.

ART: Slumbous [rhyming with hose] is the first one.

SYLVIA: I... for some reason, my brain's always like, the last S is silent. And that's not how that works.

AUSTIN: So you're doing Slum-bo [last syllable like bow in bow and arrow]?

SYLVIA: I've been doing Slown-bo, the whole time.

AUSTIN: Slumbo was a clown, Slumbo the clown! Yeah, uh huh. These are all aspects of Slumbous, right? These are all true, depending on who you talk to.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

ART: Yeah. And in twenty years, they're gonna cast the Netflix Sangfielle show and people are gonna be real mad about who they cast as Slumbous. They're like, it can't be a clown, and we'll be like, it was always a clown.

AUSTIN: Always a clown. Slumbo. Y'all are pronouncing it Slumbo? Quick, delete that episode of Drawing Maps where we talked about this. [laughs] Um, Micah adds: "It just feels right that way, like knowing just when to blow out the candle." Slumbous [pronounced like Micah's suggestion].

SYLVIA: Yeah!

AUSTIN: I'll bring this up to everybody else to see what Ali thinks.

SYLVIA: I do like that 'cause it sounds like— it sounds a little— it's like, slumber with an S.

AUSTIN: Oooooohhh. Yeah.

SYLVIA: You know?

DRE: Yeah!

AUSTIN: Sure, sure. That makes sense.

ART: I remain just flabbergasted at how that— how that caught on.

SYLVIA: How? It's like—

DRE: It's awesome.

SYLVIA: ...the exact perfect thing to catch on. It's a esoteric miner god with a very silly gimmick.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Uh hm.

SYLVIA: Like...

[following ones all pronounced like Micah's suggestion]

AUSTIN: Slumbous.

SYLVIA: Slumbous.

AUSTIN: Slumbous—!

ART: Slumbo.

AUSTIN: Slumb- Slumb-bmb. Slumb. It's a silent O.

DRE: Slumbo.

ART: Slumb.

SYLVIA: Slum-buse.

AUSTIN: Slumb.

AUSTIN: There's a lot you could do here. We also didn't even get to, like, Sloombo. [laughs]

[laughter]

SYLVIA: Sloombo is the evil clown!

[laughter]

DRE: "Ay, I'm at the deli, can I get a pound of Sloombo?"

AUSTIN: [laughing] Sloombo!

[laughter]

ART: You want a [??? 0:34:04] or hard?

AUSTIN: I want a hard Sloombo! [laughs] Hard Sloombo, PARTIZAN season 2 character, for sure.

AUSTIN: Next question! Heidi writes in – I don't know why I'm yelling like I'm on sports talk radio [laughs]. "The Curse of Eastern Folly was an amazing worldbuilding game in a long line of amazing worldbuilding games from Friends at the Table, and one of no doubt countless games you've all played elsewhere. My question is, how do you know when an idea you've played before or game you've played before is worth playing again? Do you ever find yourself wanting to bring ideas or characters back, and how do you make those ideas feel fresh?"

SYLVIA: Uh, on a larger scale, I feel like I'm constantly recycling ideas? Um... I— like, there's a lot of repurposed Ephrim stuff in Virtue, if I'm being honest?

AUSTIN: Oooh, sure.

SYLVIA: Like, real early, like, pre-session character creation stuff?

AUSTIN: Yeaah.

SYLVIA: And like, some more of the ideas I had of that character when he was-

AUSTIN: I mean, Ephrim was supposed to be an asshole. Right, exactly! Yeah.

SYLVIA: [cross] I-

AUSTIN: Like, very self-centered and very selfish, right?

SYLVIA: For sure! And like, I think the arc he has where that sort of becomes a little more sanded off is good, I really like how Ephrim's arc turns out. But I'm definitely, like... wanted to commit back to like, what if I just drop the shittiest person I can be into this community...

AUSTIN: [cross] Yeah.

SYLVIA: ...and see how people handle it?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: [laughs]

SYLVIA: I'm know that's awful, like that's not [unintelligible].

AUSTIN: They're gonna love this, is the answer, what are you talking about. They love you so they're gonna love it.

SYLVIA: Yeah. But it's just like, I don't know. I'm also getting all the evil out for the future, just to give it a tease to the thirty five people watching. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Yeah, this is true. This is- this is true. And more people will be listening to this, by the way. This is gonna go out to all \$5 people.

SYLVIA: To more people, that's-

AUSTIN: [cross] Yeah.

SYLVIA: Look, get excited for like, two years from now.

AUSTIN: [cross] Uh huh. Wait, what's in two years?

ART: [cross] If you didn't watch this live, you pretend you didn't hear that.

SYLVIA: [cross] Oh, I don't know how long Sangfielle is gonna be.

AUSTIN: Ah, okay. Probably not two years. We gotta- we gotta start thinking about- about building the Road again soon, is what I'm gonna say. [as in, Road to PARTIZAN]

ART: Are you already almost done, are we— are we wrapping? Are we...

AUSTIN: No! But— no, we're not— but like, this— the thing we do is fucked up, is what I'm gonna say. Right? Because... where are we at right now? [typing sounds] How many episodes in are we?

ART: [cross] We're around 10.

SYLVIA: [cross] ...like, 10.

AUSTIN: [cross] We're at 13, no! We're at 13 in the season so far.

SYLVIA: 13, yeah.

AUSTIN: We—

ART: 13 is like 10, I'm— I'm gonna die on that hill.

AUSTIN: [cross] Okay, fair. But there's a whole other arc already recorded, right, which gets us to 16 or 17, then we do the other half of that arc, that gets us up to low twenties, then we do another downtime, then we do two more arcs on each side, and that's over 30? This shit is— we release an episode a week, and it still feels like... things just go forever. It's wild— like, compare that to Winter. Winter in Hieron had 29 episodes.

SYLVIA: God. What the fuck?!

AUSTIN: This is what I'm saying, right? Uh, you know, Autumn had 28 episodes. And so a lot— I don't know, this is not me saying that's the thing, right. COUNTER/Weight only had 43.

ART: [cross] Well, if you say tomorrow that we're gonna do three seasons of Sangfielle and you wanna wrap in two arcs, I think it would be different, right?

AUSTIN: But— I don't know, do we wanna do three seasons? We don't know. Like, I— I— I want... We've done a lot of worldbuilding here, and like PARTIZAN, I've- we've done that in a forward— forward-looking way, so that I think it could flex to be longer, if people like it enough and if we like it enough? To even do a different game, other than Heart, somewhere else in the world down the road, right. Heart itself has a timeline, because... it is... and this is the thing that's weird is, our Heart game is, one, that's gonna go longer 'cause I'm playing softer in some ways? So that it could go longer. I'm not... no one's died yet, which already separates it from most Heart games. Um... [laughs] uh, two, you're gonna get to Zenith abilities at some point, and those end your characters, right.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And you'll have to decide, we'll have to decide, do we wanna end this story or do we wanna play those Zenith abilities out? Uh... 'cause one or the other's gonna happen. And that's interesting and like, that's a timing thing we've never had before. And so we could come back to this world, I would like to— I would already... I like this world enough that I would like to come back and see it in different ways. But it's also— we're running it as an episodic... non-big-plot-arc

thing. I mean, there's some, some stuff— some stuff started happening on the— at the end of the most recent episode that released, the worldbuilding ep, or the, uh... sorry, downtime episode, there's some, like, big plot stuff got pushed, a little tiny bit. But, uh, but I don't have, even at this point, I don't know that I have what you would think of as... the grand vision that I had towards the end of Autumn in Hieron, right.

ART: But when do you think you had that in Autumn?

AUSTIN: Early.

ART: Okay.

AUSTIN: I mean, is it time already, was sea— was episode 1?

ART: Hmm.

AUSTIN: Like, we made characters— I didn't fully know what the— I didn't have... you know, I didn't have Spring in my head in Autumn. Otherwise we would've called it Autumn instead of calling it Seasons of Hieron or whatever we called it, right? I think it was maybe just called Hieron at the time.

ART: [cross] Well no, if you told me—

SYLVIA: [cross] ...was just called 'Dungeon World.'

AUSTIN: It might have been, right? Yeah, totally. Right?

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Like, in the—

ART: [cross] I wouldn't have believed you if you told me this is where we would be eight years later, is that what we're at?

AUSTIN: Seven.

ART: ...seven years later—

AUSTIN: Yes.

ART: Yeah, I mean.

AUSTIN: Seven years in September.

ART: It's mind-blowing.

AUSTIN: It is, absolutely. So... um, so yeah, there is— it's hard to know that, but you know, here's the other thing about the Road... thinking about Road to whatever we end up calling the second season of PARTIZAN which probably won't be PARTIZAN, it'll be called something else. Um... if that's one—

ART: [cross] Sword.

AUSTIN: Huh? Sword, PARTIZAN Sword.

ART: Sword.

AUSTIN: Yeah, Sword. Not a special type of sword, not saber–

ART: Just Sword.

AUSTIN: Sword.

ART: Nope, Sword.

SYLVIA: Stay tuned for part three: Gun.

AUSTIN: PARTIZAN Sword Gun.

ART: Whooooaa.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Mixin' it up. Um... lives are once a month, and also there are other lives we wanna do? Like, we still haven't gotten the right group together to do our second Quest game, six months later? And I'd like to do that still? And so... if we wanna start going down that road, we're gonna have to... to take off soon. I already know what all of the games are for it, which is fun. There's a clue in the world about what all of the games are, is what I'll say. Uh, someone else–

SYLVIA: We finally did the ARG!

AUSTIN: Yes, we did, it's out there. It's out there. People could– could go find the full– not the actual games, but what the premises are for each game, I think is out there.

ART: What? Where?

AUSTIN: [cross] I'll message you, Art.

ART: Okay.

AUSTIN: I'm gonna– I'll put it here in, in our scheduling chat, tag you really quick, uh... [typing sounds]

ART: But it's like, it's so hard to like, know how things are going? And I guess that was a freedom we had in... um... the beginning?

AUSTIN: [cross] Right.

ART: When we didn't know that anyone cared what we were doing? It's like...

DRE: [laughs]

ART: But now, like, people... do care, and it matters?

AUSTIN: Uh hmm.

ART: And like, I don't know if people are liking this season. And like, all the indicators we have are really lagging indicators? Like, it takes a long time—

AUSTIN: Yeah, it's hard to know.

ART: ...for your download numbers to go down. It takes a long time for people to get mad enough to cancel their Patreon, you know.

AUSTIN: [cross] Yeah. [laughs] We've seen some of that already, I mean.

ART: [cross] No one's yelling at me in the street.

AUSTIN: Yeah, yes, right. Exactly.

ART: Don't yell at me in the street.

AUSTIN: Please don't yell at Art.

ART: [cross] If you don't like what's happening in Friends at the Table, I don't—

AUSTIN: Even though you know where Art's gonna be on Saturdays 'cause he already said. Please don't use that as an opportunity to go yell at Art. I mean the thing is, there's lagging indicators and there's doubly lagging indicators, like, I would say Twilight Mirage is our most contentious season, right? That was the, that was the lowest I've felt making this show— [reconsidering] ahh, I hate— I hated making Winter, I like, feel— have— but, but— I know everyone else liked Winter a lot? So... but in terms of feeling like the audience by and large didn't like what we were doing (because of how severe the criticism was of it) Twilight Mirage is probably the lowest I've felt. It's also... it or COUNTER/Weight is the most popular season we've ever made. In terms of raw numbers. So it's like, who even fucking knows what works and what doesn't? Who even knows what's good— what people like and what they don't, it's so hard to know.

ART: Well, Winter was so easy 'cause it was like, coming home to like, a character you'd already played before, and you knew that it wasn't gonna be the end of it, so you knew you could just kind of like, play around and have fun—

AUSTIN: Yeah...

ART: [cross] And then, when given the chance to—

AUSTIN: [cross] This is why people...

ART: [cross] ...do that again in PARTIZAN, I was like, fuck you, gotta get rid of this guy.

[laughter]

AUSTIN: Um...

SYLVIA: Yeah:

AUSTIN: The... the... thing with Winter for me was... it was coming off of COUNTER/Weight, which was... very successful. Coming off of Marielda, which I felt like we'd hit this, like, really good stride, and then I also was launching Waypoint. And so I was getting *no* sleep, I was... also, this is like, 2016– late 2016, so we're just post Trump election. Um... I'm, like, falling apart at the seams as a human being *and* we're making a dark season. We're making a season of just... that is purposefully very dire. And so being in that mode that whole season, I was just like, ugh. And I felt like I was just like making mistakes etc., which is just like, that's the job. The job is to just do it and keep rolling with it, you know? So... so we'll see. Anyway, none of this is the answer to Heidi's question even a little bit. I guess it was a little bit, but–

ART: I'm [??? 0:43:46]

AUSTIN: I don't know, I– yeah, go ahead, Art.

ART: I find myself playing with the same ideas over and over again and because I don't want to do it, but know I will without intending to, I try to clamp down on using old ideas when I can.

AUSTIN: Interesting.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

ART: I've made a lot of dads by mistake, you know?

SYLVIA: [laughs]

AUSTIN: Damn.

SYLVIA: Yeah. I mean like, I made a lot of girls by mistake...

AUSTIN: [laughs]

SYLVIA: ...and look at, looking at it... um, it does tie into it a little bit though, I mean, me mentioning like, reusing stuff because like, I came out at the beginning of PARTIZAN and that, like, gave me a lot more... like, clarity on some stuff that I was trying to do with Echo and their mech, back in, like, Twilight Mirage–

AUSTIN: [cross] Yeah.

SYLVIA: –stuff like that. And I feel like having a better... handle on a lot of the shit that was swirling around in my head, let me put it onto, like, paper better. Which is good, because now I feel like I can kind of move past that one idea of like, the big monster mech metaphor thing?

[0:45:04]

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: And like, can focus on new... like, newer stuff and like, different, like, takes on these things.

AUSTIN: It's so hard to know when something slides from "This is an idea I'm— I'm fascinated by and wanna keep working through" to "This is an idea I'm done with"? And it can happen in the middle of a season. It can be— it can be like, I'm ready to move on? And that can be weird? And it can happen between seasons, in a way for us, or between campaigns, where we're like, it— you know, one of the things that came up a lot, I think, in PARTIZAN, was... what are the ways in which Motion is like Rigor, for instance, right. What are the ways in which this is still about capitalism. And me and my brain are like, I'm not telling a capitalism story this season.

AUSTIN: Like, the es— capital— like I'm a Marxist, so you're gonna get some class relations on screen. But that's not fundamentally what it is, but, at the same time, how many of these are old ideas about being compelled forward to keep working and to keep expanding and to keep, you know, performing whatever it is that is being demanded of you, how horrific is that? It turns out deeper than just my fear of capitalism, you know. So I don't know, I like coming back to ideas. I like turning things over and returning, I don't think that you... I think you do yourself a disservice to think, I can— I can— I can hit the ball once, you know what I mean? A pitcher puts a fastball over the plate, you swing at it. And, and... sometimes you get a home run, sometimes you don't, but keep swinging. Dre, do you have any thoughts on this as, as— we have a specific question coming up for you—

DRE: Yeah!

AUSTIN: —specifically; I wanna push to just jump ahead to that one to put it into conversation with this immediately—

DRE: Yeah, sure.

AUSTIN: ...do you wanna hear— do that?

DRE: We can do that.

AUSTIN: I'll just jump ahead to it. "Dre," says Ko, "a majority of your characters explore acts of consumption and transformation, energy, technology and literally anything. What draws you to that in general and what excites you about playing it in a horror season?"

DRE: Okay, so when we say "majority"...

AUSTIN: Yeah?

DRE: This is Even—

AUSTIN: Nope.

DRE: —and this is Chine—

AUSTIN: It's also— it's also Throndir.

DRE: I guess so. But that was like–

AUSTIN: [cross] Throndir turns into someone.

DRE: [cross] That was like, an accident.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally. Yes, you're right. Yes. Though...! Though–

DRE: Not an accident–

AUSTIN: Though!

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: What's Throndir's original pitch in difference from the rest of the snow elves, is... that he–

DRE: That's true.

AUSTIN: He retains energy in a way, and livelihood in a way that they're not, right? So even that far back we have... it's not the same about consumption, but– but Throndir marked a transformation– like, this is the core pitch of the character, this is not a spoiler. A transformation in elfhood at the beginning of Hieron even, right, so...

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: But yeah, so it's– who else was on that list, Even? Valence?

DRE: Yeah. Mh hmm.

AUSTIN: And now, yeah.

[small boooop sound]

AUSTIN: I think that's what– I think that's what Ko means with 'energy' here.

DRE: Yeah yeah yeah okay. Yeah yeah yeah.

AUSTIN: There's a, there's a transfor– you know, it's not– it's not the same. It's not the same as Even–

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And Chine, so.

DRE: Yeah. I think of Valence very differently from that.

SYLVIA: I think... the Figure [in Bismuth] could fit–

AUSTIN: [cross] Yeah! Totally. Totally.

SYLVIA: ...under transformation though, right?

DRE: Yeah no, that's definitely– yeah.

AUSTIN: Totally.

DRE: Huh.

AUSTIN AND SYLVIA: [laugh]

ART: Sorry, Dre.

AUSTIN: [laughs]

DRE: No, it's– it's cool. It's cool. Um... I mean, you know, 'cause I think... I guess the first thing that comes to mind is that Chine is the first of these characters who that consumption is a core part of their conceit from the jump?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: Um...

AUSTIN: Even–

DRE: Just like, from a mechanical perspective.

AUSTIN: Even... didn't do that, right away, right, that turned into a thing? [cross] I mean, Even had the parasite.

DRE: [cross] Yeah, and that didn't happen until after we did the, like the time shift, like, uh– not the time shift, but like the game–

AUSTIN: That's not true. We're gonna talk a little– we're gonna talk a little bit about Twilight Mirage midseason spoilers. You're eating kew glass before the, the–

DRE: That's right! Yeah, that's right, that's right.

AUSTIN: I remember 'cause you didn't have as many bullets–

DRE: [cross] It's been a while.

AUSTIN: [cross] –as you needed at the end of that one arc because you'd eaten some of them, huh.

SYLVIA: [laughter]

DRE: Yeah, no, you're right, you're right, you're right. Huh.....

AUSTIN: Twilight Mirage rips, the fucking...

SYLVIA: [cross] It's cool.

DRE: [cross] [laughing] Yeah.

AUSTIN: Fuck.

DRE: [laughing] It was a weird fucking game and it's awesome.

AUSTIN: What a good game that was.

DRE: Um, you know, what draws me to this is probably not even... it's not a super deep answer-

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: But it's— it's that usually, those are tied to things that I find mechanically very interesting within games? You know, I think one of the things that I've talked about before, like we've said in the answer— the answer— [laughs] in, uh, Tips, is that a lot of the times I start from a mechanical perspective with characters?

AUSTIN: Right.

DRE: You know, I'm like, what sounds fun to me, or what sounds interesting or disruptive or whatever to me from a mechanical perspective? Uh... and so usually, you know, a mechanic that lets you turn X into Y at the risk of Z is always fun and interesting to me.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I think that that makes sense. It— it retrospectively makes me wonder how you would've played various other classes in games we had, like what's Dre's druid look like in Hieron, what would your version of the empath had looked like in The Veil, which is all about moving things...

DRE: I gotta stop eatin' things.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Disagree. Disagree. Um...

DRE: Why don't I get, like, hypnotized this week and see if I got something going on... [laughs]

AUSTIN: You need to get some deep... yeah.

SYLVIA: God.

AUSTIN: Um... Phil writes in and says: "I hope you're well, I had a couple questions for you. I was wondering how you go about choosing a new system. Do you come up with a general idea for a campaign and try to fit a system to match it, or do you read new systems and think, I need to start a game around this? I was also wondering how you keep yourselves organized in terms of notes, and how you keep those notes handy during play. I've been running a campaign of Lancer that's been going really well, but I frequently find myself so overwhelmed by tracking all the various stats and maps and tokens that I sometimes miss crucial plot or character beats that are lost elsewhere in my notes. Thanks as always for being super cool and telling thin— telling really thoughtful stories. Thank you!" Um, there's also an attached question here, which is... from Ian, who says: "How did you decide on using The Ground Itself as your worldbuilding game

for the season? More broadly, how do you decide what game is appropriate for any given season?"

AUSTIN: Um... whew. Uh... we already talked a little bit about choosing between The Ground Itself and I'm Sorry, Did You Say Street Magic?. But we also had a lot of options for this season writ large, right.

ART: Yeah, I was really into that game we didn't use.

AUSTIN: I'm happy to say all those games, 'cause I'm gonna shout— I'm happy to shout them all out. We had— we— you went deep on reading one of them, but if I open up our season 7 group scratch doc, which is not even... that's just a group one, that's not my own one. At the very bottom of it, I've done big writeouts on what the season is. "Season 7 basics: dark industrial fantasy meets gothic cosmic horror, which is vampires, alchemists, old gods, surreality, people that are monsters, monster hunters with cool gadgets and techniques, lots of focus on flair and specificity. Two, intersecting frontiers, unexplored places between the various settlements of people, places of great beauty, unpredictable magic and some political dispute. Episodic mysteries, themes of contradiction, uncertainty, and community. Here are some touchstones: blablablablabla", and then under that, I had this whole list of games we could theoretically play. Um... I— so in this specific case, I knew we wanted to do... spooky adventures. Right? Spooky episodic adventures. I knew Sylvi wanted to play a vampire, for instance.

SYLVIA: [laughs]

AUSTIN: I knew— I've said this before that— that I really wanted to capture this one bit in Bloodborne where a, a dude you sort of rescue turns into a monster and then calls all hunters, you know, bloods are beasts or whatever, you know, kind of like... points the mirror back at you. I knew... and like, that sense of transformation, but retaining the self in that way was really interesting to me. I knew I wanted to deal with notions of history and frontiers and... the— the frightening potential future marching towards you. And, and the idea of places being pilfered and also being un-settled?

AUSTIN: I probably— you know, at some point, I thought a lot about what it means to be unsettled. The word 'unsettled', right? Um, you could say, like, oh yeah, it was really unsettling, right, but like, you can start to pick that word apart, you know I love homophones because of all the critical theory I took and that means that like, I like playing with what is the... you know, ulterior meaning or the unintended meaning of having... I know what it means when a person is unsettled, what's it mean when a place is un-settled? It— does it mean that it is literally unsettled? Can you de-settle a place? What does— how does it intersect with decolonialism?

AUSTIN: But also, what does it mean to be unsettled in the, the horror sense, be scared? Is it good to be settled, and, and to feel safe in that way, so you know, ah, in the sense that something startling you shakes you out of something. Is it good to be shaken out of something. So playing with all of those ideas, I wanted a game that could do that. And so, what I did is, I wrote underneath all those, like, big theme ideas I had a list of— one, two, three, four... potential games with high-level pitches, any amount of hacking that would be required, pros and cons, all

written out. And this is like, five– five pages or something like that? Maybe four pages, of just these notes. And the top– and, this doesn't even count all of them because... so what you got deep into reading, Art, was Legacy: Life Among the Ruins, right?

ART: Yeah, I think I read most of the core book and, and some of a second book for that.

AUSTIN: That would make sense to me, yeah. Um, and that game is fascinating, and I– we had a whole other different pitch for that internally, in terms of like, there being two parties on the opposite ends of a map that would end up being... maybe not opposed, but not necessarily as together, and then we were gonna pl– like, that Legacy, for people who don't know, is a very cool game that is designed to be kind of generational in– in design, where you're not just playing your character, you're kind of playing your character's whole... family, if that makes sense? And you're–

ART: You're playing your character's Crusader Kings save.

AUSTIN: Yeah! That's right! That's– that's correct! Yes. And that seems really– it seemed really cool, I really really loved it, but I also don't know... I don't know that it was... I mean at the end of the day people chose this over that, right. One, it didn't fit the sort of episodic storytelling thing that we were looking for, two, it would've been very weird with two different groups that could theoretically end up working at two different timescales, where one group wanted to advance by years and the other group was like, really focussed on the weeks thing.

AUSTIN: But we really looked at that, we looked at Rhapsody of Blood, which is– both of those games are by Mina McJanda, who actually just started working at Rowan, Rook and Decard full-time, I believe. Where– as part of the core team, so there's some overlap there. Um... and her designs are great, so we looked at that, we looked at Rhapsody of Blood, which is like, a kind of dungeon-delving Castlevania version of Legacy in which you're going generation by generation of monster hunter, basically, and like, again, that game seems cool, I couldn't figure out how to do it with eight people.

AUSTIN: I couldn't figure out how do this– and also it was– that game is incredible for that sense of dungeon-delving and boss-fighting – there are systems in that game for fighting bosses that have all of these unique moves and the kind of– weaknesses – is so fucking cool, but like, I didn't... there wasn't enough there for non-combat RP built into the game? Which is– isn't a, a fault of it, that's just like not what it's built for, it's built to be a really kickass Castlevania game. And it is. [laughs] And in some ways that made it the opposite of Legacy – which was like, so zoomed-out and abstract in places – that it was not going to be the sort of embodied character thing that we've done and that players wanted to do?

AUSTIN: There's also Shattered City which is another Legacy side-game which would've required a ton of hacking because it's based on– the world of a board game. But it did update the core Legacy design in some cool ways. There's another PbtA Castlevania game that we looked at called Beneath A Cursed Moon, which is just like– it's... it's Powered by the Apocalypse plus Castlevania plus, you know, werewolves and, and Draculas and whatnot. It's by Karrius–

ART: Yeah, I mean a fun rule in that is that all character names have to be another word spelled backwards.

AUSTIN: Correct, yeah, you can't have— you have to pick a word and flip it around, right.

ART: [cross] Uh huh, yeah, it helps if it sounds okay, but, you know, don't—

AUSTIN: [laughs] Um, and that game was like, the appeal for that for me was like, 'oh man, we just— could just jump right into this.' This is— you roll two dice, two d6, plus, plus your stat, and you do the move? Ok, cool. And that system has some really cool unique things also, including lots of really great monster designs and a bunch of different good playbooks and some fun investigation ru— moves and stuff like that. Again, I almost went with that, then the third one that we didn't choose — and I'll get to why we— but it seemed like the biggest, most compelling thing about Heart was (besides, I think Heart is really cool) we also did Songs for the Dust! Or sorry, Dusk, not Dust, Songs for— for the Dusk. Which, I guess if you don't know, is a Kavita Poduri and Quinn Vega Pb— or not PbtA, uh, Forged in the Dark, FitD, Forged in the Dark game that draws on things like Destiny? And has this very coo... like, I was just like, basically I did the thing that I think a lot of people do, which is like, why the fuck isn't there just a fantasy Forged in the Dark game?

SYLVIA: [laughs]

[0:59:59]

AUSTIN: Why isn't there one. And there are things that are in development from various people that I'd looked at that were like, pretty good, and then I read Song— Songs for the Dusk and I was like, this... the, the flavor on it is science-fantasy, but it has all those great rules, especially in the contemporary— like, the current version of it that have great, like, community-building rules. It would be a version of this season that has this hope at the center of it? And even though some of the rules that feel like they're a little bit more... scifi than fantasy, that reskinning isn't that hard. It's not— it's not that hard to turn a medical bay into an infirmary or into a, you know, a dusty sawbones clinic, you know? It's not that much work to turn some of the, the sort of pseudo-magic powers in that game— or pseudo-scifi magic powers into, you know, gothic... magic powers, right?

AUSTIN: But underneath all of that, there were people who really didn't wanna play PbtA or Forged in the Dark 'cause we'd done so much of it. And Heart felt like a cool new thing we could learn. And I think because it's our first new new thing there was some extra weight behind that idea— or at least for me, of like, let's start fresh fresh. Let's play a game we've never played before, really separate out and try something new. And Heart's abilities are all so cool. I think you read— you find a class that speaks to you in Heart, and it's like, 'yo, this st— I cannot wait to do this shit.' And, um, it's— even if you're not using the world, the, the characters have such strong identities that it's hard to say no to.

AUSTIN: So we talked that out over... [laughs faintly] you know, a long time. I don't know if anybody remembers this period of like, sending PDFs around and all that?

SYLVIA: Yeah, kinda— I— I do kind of, I remember also getting pretty deep into reading Legacy stuff, but I feel like most of my, like, looking at these from like, 'what should we take', like 'what should we play' perspective was, like, where can I build the most interesting character?

AUSTIN: Sure.

SYLVIA: And I felt like... one thing, with Tales for the Dusk I was mostly just like, 'oh, but I don't want to ditch the science fantasy stuff'? [laughs]

AUSTIN: Right, 'cause it's good!

SYLVIA: It's really cool! But the with the other- with like, Beneath the Cursed Moon...

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: I felt like I had a lot of trouble just finding, like, a character concept that I was happy with.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: Legacy was a little... Legacy I had like a family idea, which I kind of was able to hang on to, and then with Heart the... every single class I read just like, gave me sick ideas, so I was like behind it right from the get-go? Not to mention just the, like you said about the system stuff. Because it's been really nice getting a change of pace.

AUSTIN: Totally. I mean, think about the groups that we ended up with, in terms of like, the Telluricist union for Ali and all the stuff Ali's talked about with the knife-sharpeners and bla bla bla, all of that is built for Legacy. Like, some of that conversation came from us thinking we were gonna play Legacy, and so a lot of work went into thinking about groups in that way. I know, again, Sylvi, when we were thinking about Legacy there are— one of the things with Legacy is you can— you don't just have a character playbook, you have a family playbook. And we'd looked at a bunch of expansions for that game that had sick fucking families, and there is one that is absolutely like, super vampire royalty shit that would have been extremely sick.

SYLVIA: [laughs]

AUSTIN: So...

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Art or Dre, do you— do you remember any other system conversation stuff that I've failed to summarize?

DRE: [laughs]

ART: No, I mean I think we had kinda gone into it at the beginning that I got really into the... the stuff there and I was gonna be the family that, that took care of an inn somewhere but they were also gonna be that, that like, eldritch horror thing and I really liked that idea. I sort of like the potential idea of playing a game that's like, less locked in time?

AUSTIN: Uh huh.

ART: Like, I would love to someday play–

AUSTIN: [cross] Same.

ART: –something where we can go forward and backwards like that–

AUSTIN: [cross] Yeah.

ART: –and not just like, flashbacks, but like, ok, now let's see what happened twenty years ago here?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: But it's sooo– I mean, I'm tired just thinking about it.

AUSTIN: It's a lot with eight people when you don't–

ART: [cross] Uh huh.

AUSTIN: –have... when we have to deliver all this other stuff also. Um, and–

ART: Yeah, maybe it's for like, our post-Patreon life.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Yeah, we'll get there one day, I'm sure.

ART: I mean, it's a– it's a distant dream now, but I hope it exists.

AUSTIN: [a little resigned] Yeah... Uh [laughs], um, Heidi in the chat says "Are there any other Forged in the Dark games where the Squad playbook is just a town you build up?" Again, I think... it's not the Squad playbook but... well, maybe it is, actually. Songs for the Dusk literally does have you – at least the last version of it that I read – building out foundations in your community? And like, that is what– that's part of what levels up. That was one of the, the "levels up," quote unquote. Uh, but like, you're meeting different community members, you're– you're giving them connections to the various foundations of, of your community. Those are all represented mechanically.

AUSTIN: All that stuff was like, so cool to me and like, this idea of... community being core to one of the ways in which respond to... you know, one of the earliest things I pitched was that Sangfielle, before it was Sangfielle, one of the core things was how do you define yourself if you've obliterated meaning. I mean, actually what it starts with is like, well, we know meaning is obliterated. We know that there is no objective truth. We, we live in postmodernity. So how will you define yourself with that in mind, where– where does, where does the power of that also become terror if, if your identity can be stripped from you or if your selfhood can be stripped from you. Because you no longer can tie it to something quote unquote "objective," how do you then insist on that. Or how do you find it to begin with?

AUSTIN: And, uh, for me one of the answers is community, right? It's, it's affinity with people that you, that you love and care for, that you see yourself in, that you want to model yourself after or that you can be a model for; that you want to model yourself against, right, in some cases. Both antagonistically but even just kind of agonistically in a sort of like, not aggressive, competitive mode sometimes.

AUSTIN: Um, and the way that Son— Songs for the Dusk built that at the core was like, that would be a very hopeful season in so many ways. Despite being grim. And so, that was really, really attractive to me, like that was the thing I was, I was thinking very heavily about. Until we ended up going with Heart, and Heart still, we still have that, but I think that you can tell in the game like, it's not as... y'all work for this town, you know what I mean? And, and, as we've played, it becomes... it's interesting to see who player characters end up being connected to and who they don't, who I as a GM end up framing, um... you know, generously versus... ungenerously? You know, turns out that... fucking, Dayward Eve seems like an asshole. But when I made y'all meet the big Ojantani councilmember for the crew who went into the, the church, uh, the ruins, the basement, a lot of the audience immediately was like 'I don't like— I don't like this guy.' I think y'all also were like, negative on the dude with the- the big buffalo man with the middle part whose name I forget? Why did I forget his name.

DRE: Oh, ah...

AUSTIN: I have to look at my notes.

SYLVIA: Oh, the guy who led us to the, uh, the...

AUSTIN: Yes. Yes.

SYLVIA: ...to, like, who gave us the first job?

AUSTIN: Who gave you the first job.

SYLVIA: I mean, I didn't think he was bad, I was just trying to be a bitch about it, like—

DRE: [laughs]

AUSTIN: Right, I know! Totally, but I think part of the audience that I saw responded negatively because... just 'cause he was representative of the—

SYLVIA: [cross] ...my power.

AUSTIN: Your power. It's because you were so negative, honestly...

SYLVIA: [laughs]

ART: Sylvi moves the audience in a lot of ways.

SYLVIA: [laughs harder]

AUSTIN: This is true, this is...

DRE: No yeah, very true.

AUSTIN: It's very true.

SYLVIA: Oh my god...

AUSTIN: Uh huh! I see that CuriousCat.

SYLVIA: [laughing] Fuck off!

AUSTIN: [laughs] Uh... AkashiWolf, thank you.

ART: Not what I meant!

SYLVIA: [laughs]

AUSTIN: [doubtfully] Hmmmmm... Not so sure that's true.

SYLVIA: Oh my god.

AUSTIN: Um, as to the second part of this question– unless, Dre, did you have anything on the... game system stuff?

DRE: If I did, it left my mind.

SYLVIA: [laughs]

AUSTIN: Okay, good. Um, yeah, the, the... in terms of notes and stuff I– I am the worst person to ask for this. One, we don't play games... we tend to not play games that require lots of stats and maps and tokens. And so– and that's a choice, like I choose to play these things 'cause that's because I'm more interested in keeping my notes on crucial plot or character beats if I can– if I can help it. Um... and so I'm still in– I'm still in Google Docs. I'm still just looking at– I still have one doc per arc, and have all of my NPCs ID'd in that doc, have a basic outline of, at this point, Delves, have a list– have a space to just kinda write scratch notes if something happens or changes mid-session, etc. But I don't have a, sadly don't have, like, a good answer for this because... it's just not how I've been as a... I think I was better about it back in Hieron days, partially 'cause my schedule wasn't as packed and partially because I had... I would often, I would often have an iPad at the desk as a third screen and could keep that on something, but my current desk setup just doesn't have the space for it. And so, I just have been using a two-monitor setup now for a while and have all my notes on my screen and then have the Roll20 on the other one. And it's fine, it's not the end of the– it's not the end of the world.

ART: Can I ask you a complete non-sequitur question?

AUSTIN: Yeah, always.

ART: What does having two monitors do for you that having a bigger monitor doesn't do for you?

AUSTIN: Um, a lot. Uh... I— I can have something in fullscreen on the right monitor, like a TV show, while I have nothing but my notes on the left, on the left one.

ART: [pensively] Hmm.

AUSTIN: And that's like, a focu— the difference between needing to turn my head to look at something and uh, being able to just focus on the whole page or on looking these notes is big. Also, it is just—

ART: Okay.

AUSTIN: —and let's be clear, my other monitor is a TV. So it's a huge screen. And it's mostly a display screen, like that's where, if I'm listening to music, my music player is on. That's like my, I don't have to look at this to do work page. Or in this moment for instance, I mean here's an instant answer, I've captured that whole screen to then broadcast to OBS, right? I captured a whole full screen presentation instead of having to just capture a small part of the screen. And then over on this other screen I'm looking at chat. Do you know what I mean?

ART: Alright.

AUSTIN: I have this- I have this in presentation mode instead of needing to do a crop of just a tiny part of the screen, basically. Um... Likewi— Again, it's a huge thing for video g— for streaming video games where it's like, I want the whole screen to look at a game but then also I need a screen to look at the chat, so. That is a huge part of it. Uh... we asked— we answered this one from Ko, Ko sent a whole bunch in. Some of them I'm saving for future stuff, Ko wrote me a question about why I always use flower monsters, tune in to a future thing for—

SYLVIA: Oohhh.

AUSTIN: —an answer for that 'cause I have a really good answer for that. Tune in to the next one, I don't wanna— I don't wanna burn through it yet.

ART: That's a great tease, Austin, I'm...

AUSTIN: Yeah, uh huh. Um...

ART: ...intrigued.

AUSTIN: ...Sylvi—

SYLVIA: Uh hm?

AUSTIN: "Virtue is already vamping up in full 'drive it like you stole it'-- as a full 'drive it like you stole it' kind of character. How did playing a high lethality game like PARTIZAN affect how you— you approach a season where you are playing a character that literally beat death twice and is looking for a third round? How is that complicated by Zenith moves in Heart being explicit in their lethality?"

SYLVIA: Okay, I'm gonna... go down the line with this.

AUSTIN: Yes.

SYLVIA: The big thing PARTIZAN did for me was get me more comfortable with putting my characters in danger?

AUSTIN: Hmm.

SYLVIA: I had already done it before... like, I know that they're... like, Ephrim died, um... [laughs] Like they're... those moments like, have happened where I've pushed it, but with Milli specifically I felt like I had, like, a clear motivation behind why she was doing all that stuff?

AUSTIN: Uh hm.

SYLVIA: Like, she wanted, like, to get free of this thing that, like this war that she was trapped in. With Virtue, it's kinda similar except I'm kinda taking that attitude of like... it, it's like [quick laugh] I'm taking... I'm internalizing my own attitude of like, it's... like, fine if these characters die, that's just like how this sort of thing works?

AUSTIN: Uh hm.

SYLVIA: But, um, with Virtue I'm coming at it from a different perspective of she thinks that she is still the most powerful thing in the world?

AUSTIN: Right.

SYLVIA: Like, there is an arrogance to her pushing herself and being in those situations? While with Milli I was trying to have it be more from a place of like, desperation.

AUSTIN: Sure.

SYLVIA: Um, and I think those are connected and like... like, I don't think I get to the comfortable place I am doing things with, like, Virtue, though without playing Milli that way?

AUSTIN: Uh huh, that makes sense.

SYLVIA: But yeah, the— the— I think one reason why it's worked so well for... um, for Virtue is that she's both like, it's kind of a contradiction where she's both like, not afraid of death because she doesn't think that it's gonna come for her but at the same time it is like... [laughs] the motivating factor behind everything that she's doing. I think the Zenith moves... I don't wanna, like, tip my hand towards anyone in particular—

AUSTIN: Uh hm.

SYLVIA: —but I think that they actually really helped me solidify a lot of um... like, what I wanna do with Virtue? The fact that they are explicitly lethal and the fact that, like, you cannot really reach, like, reach your Zenith without your character dying in some way?

AUSTIN: Yeah... yeah.

SYLVIA: And like, I think... yeah, I don't know. I— I can't— I don't wanna, like, show too many cards here 'cause I've thought a lot about the way some of these moves, either with luck or like... would be, like, could be implemented or like, what they would mean. Like, obviously it's all subject to change—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: —which is another reason why I don't wanna mention it?

AUSTIN: Of course.

[1:15:00]

SYLVIA: ... but yeah, no, I actually think that Heart, like, the Zenith moves' lethality... um... almost helps push you towards being like "well, if the end goal for this character is going to be dying anyway..."

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: "... it doesn't matter really when it happens." Which is like kind of a callous way to look at things—

AUSTIN: [cross] No! That, that's...

SYLVIA: —but also... you know, I'm playing a bad person and that makes it easier too. [laughs]

AUSTIN: [laughs] I'm curious if— if Dre and Art, if you— if either of you have thoughts here on death and, and Zenith moves and like, thinking about the characters in, in this... not *disposable* way, but in this way where... get these on the table, at all points.

DRE: Hm...

AUSTIN: Actually, wait. Let me read this next one. "Hi from AlBearAngry. Enjoyed your show for a couple years now, but was always kind of curious about your thoughts on player character death, especially now—"

ART: Hey!

AUSTIN: "—that you're exploring the Heart genre, where death is much more commonplace. We've never really seen a permanent PC death midseason in Friends at the Table—"

SYLVIA: [hiccups, also sounds like a short huh?]

AUSTIN: "—at least to my knowledge—" ...that's not true—

SYLVIA: [laughs]

AUSTIN: "—and I was wondering if—" I mean I guess, not to AlBearAngry. Get ready! "—if it's on the table this season."

SYLVIA: [laughs hard]

AUSTIN: "Has it ever been *off* the table?"

ART: Sorry, AlBearAngry!

AUSTIN: Eh. "Any details you'd be willing to share on why, if yes?" It's never been off the table, ever ever ever ever. I mean, we've— we've had— go listen to Autumn in Hieron, go listen to Winter in Hieron. In both cases— and Spring in Hieron, someone gets to a death check, and then solves— and, and succeeds on a death check. If tho— those dice go the other way, they're dead. Like...

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Those characters are dead. Um, there is not a... they make the check, you know? I don't... I don't have *any* problem... we would figure it out, you know what I mean? We would figure out that death.

SYLVIA: [cross] We got really lucky with that!

AUSTIN: We did! We did, but it could've, from season one, broken differently. From— not even— like halfway through season one, there's one. And, and it could've gone differently.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: The... there are games where it's quote unquote "off the table" in the sense that *players* have more control over it. Um, and where I would have to push very hard in order to get there. Heart is actually pretty much in the player... like, I can start stacking major fallouts on you if you fail rolls, and I can also do that by combining minor fallouts into a major fallout? And then can threaten it for— to go to critical fallout, which is kinda your, your death-level fallout if you get multiple majors.

AUSTIN: Um... but even this book is pretty clear that the players should be part of that discussion. It's not built for a game where I just [snaps fingers] snap my fingers and it happens to you. And that— that's important. And Forged in the Dark games are very similar in that way, where... you can always stress. You can always stress until you leave the scene? And take some sort of scar, right. And at that point, the character can retire if they get all the way through their scar, you know— in PARTIZAN, for instance, if a character had gotten through all their scars, they could've chosen to, to retire their character safely, off-screen effectively. Or they could've chosen to say, "you know what, this is the moment." And so that is... uh... that changes the dynamic but I don't think at any point has it ever been quote unquote "off the table." ...I don't even think we've had moments where it's been like, "oh no, you're getting too close to death, it's time for me to pump the brakes" outside of, like, "this fight is boring" or some— you know what I mean? Or like, "oh fuck, I've— I've misbalanced a fight—"

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: But even that just hasn't happened, I don't think...

SYLVIA: Yeah, I feel like most of the time when we're at risk of dying our– the show benefits from it in a lot of ways?

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally!

SYLVIA: I'm thinking specifically of that sort of like, last–

AUSTIN: [laughs a little]

SYLVIA: –last couple PARTIZAN arcs?

AUSTIN: Yeah. The Auspice one, where everything is just–

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: –falling apart? Yeah.

DRE: Uh hmm.

SYLVIA: Yeah, 'cause like, I expected Milli to die in that one until we got through it. Sorry, spoilers.

AUSTIN and SYLVIA: [laugh]

AUSTIN: We're in it now, I'm gonna delete the thing up top where I say no unmarked spoilers and instead I'm gonna say–

SYLVIA: [laughs] RIP.

AUSTIN: "–there are some spoilers for (blank)." [laughs] No, it's fine.

SYLVIA: [laughs] But like, yeah, and I think that like, lended itself to the atmosphere of that a lot and like, when that episode ended up resolving it was really cool and like, really rewarding, you know?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah, totally. Um... any other death thoughts here? I guess again, for Dre– Dre and Art, who I guess... yeah, I'm– I'm curious... both in terms of Heart and, and how you're thinking of playing your characters with relation to death and even more broadly in story– in terms of stories that we– that we do here.

ART: You wanna go first, Dre, or do you want me to go?

DRE: Yeah, I mean, as far as like, you know, kinda combining this last question, this current question–

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: –um... I can't remember how much of this we've put on screen but definitely a lot of the Clever Lord discussions we've had behind the scenes, Austin, has been shaped very heavily by the Zenith moves.

AUSTIN: Yes, yes.

DRE: Again, I don't wanna say more than that 'cause I don't think we've talked much about that on screen yet—

AUSTIN: No. Uh uh. But I get what you mean.

DRE: Um... yeah yeah yeah yeah. Uh... yeah, that's the only thing I can think of as far as like, kind of, you know... I will say as far as like— again, I've never felt like PC death has been off the table but I do feel like... you know, I feel like we do a pretty good job of being like, "hey, this is— like, if you do X, you are risking Y."

AUSTIN: Yes. I do always do my best to make it very, very clear, you're right. That's true.

DRE: Uh...

AUSTIN: I never want someone to walk into it— walk into it unintentionally, do you know what I mean?

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: In terms of... I— I don't want— I never want a character to do a thing... my mind is very much shaped by a thing that happened in, in college where I was playing a game— Art, I don't think you were in this game but it was with people you know. I'm not gonna say their names. Uh... it was a... it was an All Zombies— what's the name of that game? "All Zombies"...

ART: [cross] "All Flesh—"

DRE: [cross] —gonna have it—

[unintelligible]

AUSTIN: [cross] "All zombies go to heaven, All Flesh Must Be Eaten" game. All Flesh Must Be Eaten is a game is a, a zombie post-apocalyptic game from the late 2000s. I guess, you know, again, kind of... pre-contemporary small press indie thing, but— I guess, Art, you were in that Buffy game in Unisystem, didn't you, that was Unisystem too, wasn't it?

ART: [agreeing] Uh hm.

AUSTIN: In college. So we played a bunch of Unisystem stuff at the time—

ART: It was hot, back then.

AUSTIN: It was! It was. Damn. Weird. Weird how time works, right?

SYLVIA: [laughs]

AUSTIN: The... and in one of those games we were playing— I was playing with a friend of mine who, who liked to run very... um, horror-focused games. Played lots of rule— lots of Call of Cthulhu, played, again, lots of All Flesh, and in it, you're doing like a contemporary game with

Unisystem, with All Flesh Must Be Eaten, where we were, like, noir zombies plus some magic vibes. We were detectives trying to figure out some supernatural mysteries in a modern-day setting. I— you know, Dresden Files— I've never read Dresden Files but that's my understanding of it.

AUSTIN: Um, and... there was a character who was being played by a friend of ours whose... who was like extremely stereotypical, we were all very young, he was playing a character who was like, "my wife and kid got killed by a monster and now I want revenge against monsters." That type of thing. And we got to this big final confrontation— *not* final confrontation, it was clearly— it was actually not the final confrontation, it was a, a confron— it was like a, an investigation at the docks, and we'd realized that the local supernatural cult or whatever was working with a global conspiracy and they were bringing stuff in on the docks. And the whole thing was like, "just go identify who those people are."

AUSTIN: But the— and the GM set up a situation where my friend's character saw the person who had killed his family. And he... threw his character into a rage. And this person who he was— who we'd seen was like, a powerful warlock who had like, telekinesis and some other stuff. Um, and it was dark, which meant in that system— there was a bunch of negatives that we had, like we were not in a place to go have that fight at that point, right. It was just like, who's involved here, what's going on. And... this player was like, "I'm gonna pull out around the corner of these... these, uh, these shipping containers and I'm gonna open fire with my twin pistols."

[beeping sound]

AUSTIN: And, uh, hmm [laughs loudly] Art, did you figure out who it is?

ART: I knew, but I wasn't sure until right now—

AUSTIN: —until right this second. Uh, and...

ART: I went from 90 to 100.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I bet! Uh, and... the GM was like, "if you do this, you're putting yourself up against someone who is way more powerful than you, your character is smart enough to know this could get you killed." And the player said, "this is what my character would do." And... the warlock immediately dodges these bullets, he doesn't take any damage 'cause that's how this character is statted out, fi— you know, counterattacks and disables the, the player character with telekinesis and does some gruesome, you know, horror movie shit with stuff that's in a dock. And then, and then— hits him with a fireball. Hits him with a fireball, kills him. Right? End of that fight was, the fireball hits him and kills him. Player character, the player, flips. And is like, "I didn't think I'd DIE!" And the GM is like, "I just said you might die if you try to fight this guy!" And he goes, "yeah, but I thought I was far enough away that I'd be safe!" And the GM says, "but... he is a warlock, he has magic." And the player character, the player says, "that's not how fireballs work." [snorts]

DRE: [laughs]

AUSTIN: And it is drilled in my head that I need to remove all possible alibis— which, that's not—the— he didn't know the system— it's not like he was saying that's not how fireballs in this game work, he was saying fireballs in life require line of sight, and that darkness would have prevented that. And that's just not—it was not a system conversation, it was like, 'this is how I imagine magic to work' conversation. And I was— since then, have been like, I need to be as explicit as possible about what the stakes are when someone is walking into their death. And just be as... not just, "are you putting yourself at risk?" but like, "you could die here." And if I don't say that, I will not feel good about it. I'm not looking to claim character sheets, do you know what I mean? I'm looking to tell a good story? And if I say, "you could die here" and someone says like, "damn right I could", then I'd be like, "alright, let's go." Like, "let's— you're into it too? Alright, let's roll." [laughs]

AUSTIN: But otherwise, it doesn't feel right to do it, you know? So... Ugh... haven't thought about that story in quite some time. Let me tell ya, the— the back cafeteria at Hofstra was loud that day.

ART: Why, you didn't know that I've put that memory in my head, is that not how magic works?

AUSTIN: Yeah!

ART: And I don't— and I wasn't there.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's not how magic works! Yes.

ART: That's not how magic works, okay.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Ahhhh... college. Alright. Any other death thoughts or can we wrap this one up? [laughs]

ART: Oh, I find the Zenith moves for my particular class like, not particularly compelling.

AUSTIN: Ah hmm.

ART: So I'm gonna really need to get there.

AUSTIN: Yeah! Well, we got some time, right?

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: It's fine.

ART: I mean, they don't feel compelling now, it's— it's a long...

AUSTIN: It's a long thing.

ART: It's either a long way or next week.

AUSTIN: [laughs] One or the other.

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I think it's more than that, I have a, I have a— I don't have a structure for th— structure is a funny word. I don't have a general direction for the, for the— or shape... hmmm. Hm. I— [laughs] hooo... I don't know how many more episodes there are gonna be in this season. I don't know how many arcs are gonna be in this season. I have a— general vibe for what the next main beat is, but I don't have a... I've no idea. And it's just, we do a weird thing now. How long do y'all wanna go, you know what I mean? Like... what is— what is your feeling on this at this point?

ART: I feel like we've barely started, despite the evidence you've shown me that we're halfway through the end of Seasons of Hieron. [laughs]

DRE: [laughs]

SYLVIA: [faint, in the background] Yeah...

AUSTIN: And I'm not saying I'm ready to wrap up, I just wanna be clear about that, I'm not like, let's wrap this shit up.

DRE: Yeah.

SYLVIA: I feel like the comparison to Winter in Hieron is a little different, just because that... had all so much worldbuilding already done?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: And so this feels a lot earlier because we're still sort of fleshing out so much of it?

AUSTIN: I also think we're better at it now??

SYLVIA: Oh yeah, definitely. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Like...

SYLVIA: It's almost like, like half a decade ago.

AUSTIN: Yeah! I feel like we get more worldbuilding done per episode than we've ever done before? Everyone's characters are so character-ful, and so world-ful, there's so much about the world in your characters, I've been able to hand over the— and that's also the other thing, the— I mean, I'll say this outright is that: I— I— you know, I've done a lot of work for Sangfielle, I did a lot of research, I did a lot of reading, I did a lot of, like, prep. I know everyone did that to lesser and greater degrees. But this is much lighter work for me than... PARTIZAN is. In terms of... the parts of my brain that I need to work. And I knew that coming in, it's part of the reason I wanted an episodic game where I'm not, like, too worried about metaplot, was 'cause I really needed to rest my brain a little bit after PARTIZAN? [laughs a little]

AUSTIN: And because I wanted to capture some of that early Hieron energy of just like, I want— I want— you know, there's a moment at— towards the beginning — and maybe multiple times in this downtime where I was like, "I'm gonna shut the fuck up and just let y'all talk." Because I want to give you space to start sketching these characters out. And that's kind of... I'm, I'm like kind of doing that writ large this season in some ways where I want prompts but I don't want to...

I don't want to... I'm not looking to tell a story, particularly. I'm looking to frame some stuff. And there are stories to be told and there are places that I think have interesting histories, but... And we'll get to that in future Drawing Maps episodes!

AUSTIN: Because, because we got some questions about that, which, by the way, please send some future Drawing Maps episode questions to [tipsatthetable at gmail dot com](mailto:tipsatthetable@gmail.com). Use the subject Drawing Maps, I'll know when I read it what to put it to. But we're gonna do one, probably next week on the first arc, the one that, that Sylvi and Dre were in, the... what was the name of that arc? What did we call that? That was... The Hymn of the Mother-Beast. Um, and then the next week we'll do one for The Secret Ledger of Roseroot Hall, and then we'll maybe just do a midseason check-in with the, the downtime episode? Um... which I thought went up, why is it not... oh, did I not tag it Sangfielle? I meant to have tagged it Sangfielle. I should go do that. Um..... and, and, and then so on, we'll keep doing those and we'll probably go back and do one for, for Tales from the Loop also. A lot of Sylvi and Dre things in the near future, it sounds like.

SYLVIA: [laughs]

DRE: Hell yeah!

SYLVIA: [cross] The dream team!

AUSTIN: [cross] The Tales from the Loop– the Tales from the Loop arc is so good, I'm so excited people to start listening to it. I guess the character– the character creation ep is up, I need to find an intro for the next one so that we can release the next one, I've no idea what that intro is yet.

SYLVIA: It's so good, that arc was so much fun.

AUSTIN: That arc was SO fun. That arc was SO fun. So... I hope people like that and then we have to record another Bluff City and then we gotta keep doing some Lives and some other stuff so... stay tuned for all that, and again: [tipsatthetable at gmail dot com](mailto:tipsatthetable@gmail.com) is the address to send your, uh, your Drawing Maps questions in for all that stuff I just said. Um, thanks for joining us, everybody! Again, [tipsatthetable at gmail dot com](mailto:tipsatthetable@gmail.com). We will see you soon, hopefully, I hope everyone has a good remainder of the weekend! Peace.