

## **Tips at the Table - The Point of Saw (February 2020)**

Transcriber: Chronologist @BjarkeAL

**Austin:** Welcome to Tips at the Table, uh, a role-playing game podcast—that's what I normally say—focused on critical questions, hopefully, smart answers and fun interactions between good friends. I'm your host, Austin Walker, I'm joined today by Sylvia Clare.

**Sylvia:** Hi, I'm Sylvia, you can find me on Twitter at @captaintrash, and you can listen to my other show, Emojidrome, wherever you get your podcasts.

**Austin:** Janine Hawkins.

**Janine:** Hi, you can find me at @BleatingHeart on Twitter.

**Austin:** And Art Martinez-Tebbel.

**Art:** Hey, you can find me on Twitter at @atebbel. Go to friendsatthetable.shop for the last of the Bluff City t-shirts. We keep getting emails like, "stock is running low!" and there's like one of whatever size, but there are, like, 3 of each size on this run anyway.

**Austin:** But we have shirts for you. You can go get them. Happy... Winter.

**Art:** But if you're a straight-cut medium, I think you're in trouble. Act now.

**Austin:** Act. Now. Supplies are limited. Uh, [chuckles] all right, we're gonna get into it. Real quick, I wanna shout out and let people know, I did just record a second Drawing Maps for PARTIZAN, that'll go up in the feed, hopefully before this goes up in the feed, that'll probably go up as an audio post. And... anything else? I think we're getting ready to record our next Bluff City game, so look forward to that. Uhm, as always, thank you for supporting us, friendsatthetable.cash. Let's just jump into these.

[QUESTION ONE - 01:19]

This one comes in from Isaac, who says: "I have been a long time listener and Map-maker level supporter on Patreon. I was just curious where the best places are to find Friends at the Table fanart? You all do such a magnificent job of verbally designing intricate characters, costumes, locales, mechs, ships, and props on the show. I've a little bit of trouble creating complex images in my mind, though not to the same degree as Keith, who we just learned probably has aphantasia on the latest Tips at the Table episode. I was curious, where is the best place to find fan art online? Fan art is very helpful at allowing me to form a mental picture of what you all describe on the show. Is there a central hub where it all gets posted, or are there certain hashtags or creators on sites like Tumblr that I could look for?"

**Austin:** For me, it is just the #friendsatthetable Twitter tag. Twitter hashtag [Sylvia: "Yeah"] It's just filled with it. If you just do a search for "friendsatthetable" as a single word—the hashtag. You will find a ton of it.

**Art:** And a bunch of other weird stuff.

**Sylvia:** Yeah! The weird stuff's kinda my favorite part.

**Art:** [crosstalk] ...that's got nothing to do with us.

**Austin:** Me too. This person— there's a lot. There's a lot. Sometimes, it's a lot, and you should just know that going in.

**Sylvia:** Yeah.

**Austin:** Did you see the one that was, like, the Friends logo with like a twilight sky, and an Earth emoji, and a 100 emoji? And I was like, damn, that could be Twilight Mirage fanart right there. [chuckles].

**Sylvia:** Oh my god. I will also say, if you're looking for a specific season, if you're looking for something that like, you want a picture of to see how other people interpreted it, like for example, searching #PARTIZAN will get you some tweets about a soccer team and a basketball team as well? [**Austin:** uhuh] But you'll find stuff as well, or like pzn and then...

**Austin:** And the number.

**Sylvia:** The number, yeah.

**Austin:** #pzn03, or whatever, might get you stuff from the first Rapid Evening game.

**Sylvia:** And then like people...

**Art:** And there's— [realizes the interruption] Oh.

**Sylvia:** I was just gonna say, people tag like COUNTER/Weight and Hieron stuff pretty well too.

**Austin:** Yes.

**Art:** There's a twitter account that just tweets fanart, is that still active?

**Sylvia:** I think so.

**Austin:** Yeah... I think so? Is it? Maybe I'm wrong though.

**Sylvia:** Yes, it is.

**Austin:** Yeah, @fatt\_fanart on Twitter just retweets fanart. That stuff is all— All the fanart blows me away, all the time, constantly, all the time. It is amazing— In fact, there's stuff here I hadn't seen, which is all really good. So yeah, check those out. And then I also briefly want to shout out two other accounts that are also really good, for like, "hey I would like to try to understand what references you're making" or "I'm having trouble picturing something." There's @fashion\_table on Twitter now. Which catalogues facecasts and real world fashion references that we make. And so like, if we say, if i describe a character wearing Helen Mirren's dress in— from the 2020 Golden Globes and then the person who runs the Friends at the Runway account, just puts that right up. That is @fashion\_table. There's a much broader one, called @reference\_table, and that account digs up everything that you could imagine that we referenced. Which seems like an incredible amount of work. Because that's like, here's a 90s Marine commercial— for instance, this is great: Dre, I think said "That 90s Marine commercial that had that Godsmack song in it"; and they found that particular ad, and tweeted with that note. We got all sorts of... We referenced a mech from an anime, if someone references Riverdale, as we are wont to do. If we say "German Beer stein", and you're like "I don't know what a German Beerstein is", they will have found a German beer stein and taken— shared that screenshot to help explain. So shoutouts to that. Again those are [@fashion\\_table](#) and [@reference\\_table](#). That's an easy one. Any other locations? I know on Tumblr, there is a community there, but ever since I got off Tumblr when I got like a full time job, I just can't track stuff there anymore.

**Janine:** [crosstalk] Tumblr is weird now.

**Art:** Yeah, I don't know how anyone finds anything on Tumblr.

**Austin:** That's not a drag on people who don't have—I worked just as much before I worked at Giant Bomb, but going to Giant Bomb had me go into the office, and I'm like not gonna pull open my fucking Tumblr dashboard there.

[Sylvia laughs]

**Janine:** Tumblr is also just not what it was. It's not even just that you were out of it, Tumblr has gone through changes. And... a lot...

**Austin:** Uhuh. Got rid of the porn, is what you're saying. [Sylvia laughs.]

**Janine.** A whole bunch of that community is just on twitter now. Which is part of why so much of things like friends at the table fanart is very easy to find on twitter, because, like, a lot of the people who were doing stuff on Tumblr... Tumblr is.... [uncertain noises] so...

**Austin:** Yeah, but some stuff... I just went over there now and did a search for Friends at the Table, collapsed, as if it were a hashtag, and found some stuff from PARTIZAN I haven't seen yet, including a very good Leap, Clem and Millie, so, there's stuff out there still, that doesn't make its way over here. So, look around. People just use the tag though, mostly.

**Sylvia:** Instagram as well. People also post some stuff there.

**Austin:** See, I'm off Instagram. I need to get back on Instagram. I need to take photos again.

**Sylvia:** Yeah.

**Art:** Jess follows the friends at the table hashtag on instagram, and...

**Austin:** Is it also messy in a way?

**Art:** It's like the Twitter one. It's also got some weird stuff in there.

**Austin:** Okay.

**Sylvia:** But you get more cosplay on there.

**Austin:** Oh, that makes perfect sense! [**Janine:** Mmm.] Totally, totally. Totally, totally.

[QUESTION TWO - 6:41]

Uhm, all right, the next question, comes in from Jake, who says: "I am in a weekly RPG session, where I am typically the DM. About a year ago, our group was much larger, but now it's 4 of us including me. My original pitch to the group was heavily inspired by Bluff City, by playing a series of short one-shots and mini-campaigns to try out lots of different systems. It's been really fun and rewarding and has opened up my eyes so much to the world of indie RPGs and my itch.io page reflects that now. However, here's my dilemma: Having found new and interesting systems, over the the last year, I have a list of games I would love to play, and have so many ideas with, but I want to start playing games that have more time for longer, deeper characterization and longer stories with the same characters. What advice would you give to balance the desire to play longer, deeper games with the constant thoughts of 'this would be an interesting game/system to play.' In other words, how can I balance the feeling of wanting to try something new, while keeping a longer term game?"

**Austin:** Uhm, this for me is like one of those ones, where like... just do it? [chuckles] I don't know— Part of the thing here is I don't know how often you're running a game. And that's actually really important, because you're running a weekly game, it's really easy to just go 'Oh, let's start doing a campaign every other week, and then bounce between the two. Or— sorry, but if you're running once a month, it ends up being a lot more difficult, because you'll lose that momentum of game-to-game campaign work. If you're splitting, just like, all right, well, January, February, March, we'll do a campaign, and then April, we'll do a one-shot. Actually, that even sounds fine. Maybe still do that? [laughs] Uhm. I don't know if anyone else has thoughts here?

[a little silence]

**Art:** This is, like, the dilemma of playing tabletop, right?

**Austin:** Yeah, and broader than even roleplaying games. Right? Like, I think about something—the way Legacy games have taken off in the board game space, is similar here, right?

**Art:** Mm, sure, yeah. John Wick made a game that was supposed to solve this problem. John Wick the game designer not John Wick the Keanu Reeves character that kills people.

[Laughter]

**Austin:** [Talks while laughing] That's weird— I hadn't, I had never put that together until this moment, Art. Art and I are like devotees of John Wick the game designer, in our college years. And, I hadn't even— that's very funny.

**Art:** Yeah. John Wick, the Baba Yaga of game design.

[Sylvia and Austin laughs]

**Art:** Some time ago, and— I don't remember the name, and so, I'm probably gonna struggle to help you here. But he made a game system that was about playing many different games. And like, instead of having a character sheet you would have character binder. And when you switch systems, you would get a new binder with a new character sheet. But like, the idea was that your character would remember things, through the thing.

**Austin:** Oh, wow, that's wild.

**Art:** So the thing you could do was pull moves from past versions of yourself.

**Austin:** This sounds like it rules.

**Art:** And like, say that, yeah, oh we were playing— I mean this is designed in 2004 so we were playing Vampire the Masquerade, and now all our characters are...

**Austin:** Samurai.

**Art:** Samurai. Or Legends of the Five Rings 4th Edition characters, but I remember how to turn myself invisible.

**Austin:** That rules. And you should find this for me, to look at.

**Art:** Okay.

**Austin:** I don't want to do anything with it, this'll go in the pile of things I would like to fuck around with.

**Art:** I mean, you can just back-make all of the Bluff City characters into this, right?

**Austin:** I know but, like, eh [shrugs]. [Art laughs] I guess Action Movie World does something similar, right, because you can level up your character and add your actor in Action Movie World in a similar way.

**Art:** So go find that game I can't remember the name of, and that would be a good solution to your problem!

**Austin:** There you go. Um, anything else? Any other thoughts here?

**Janine:** Um, the thing I would say—this is based on like, so I was running that Dragon Age thing for a bit, but it got very busy as I transitioned out of very sporadic freelancing into very consistent freelancing. Um, and I kinda regret, sort of, it's fumbled. But, like, the original intention of that game, and something we got sort of part of the way into doing, was to divide things into arcs—or not even arcs really, but sort of missions, I guess. And then in between missions do a smaller game that sort of sets up something for the next game. [Austin: Yeah.] Or some sort of something that's going on in the background in the world. So, you know, a game of The Quiet Year to establish, like, this is the next village we're going to, but this is what it was like when it was founded, hundreds of years ago. Or, you know, things like, uh, God Save the Queen? Or For the Queen?

**Austin:** For the Queen.

**Janine:** For the Queen.

**Austin:** Yes.

**Janine:** A lot of games like that I sort of set aside with that intention of like, well, I can use this to define—I think For the Queen would be really interesting to do a campaign, or to do a sort of vignette in Rivain in the Dragon Age universe. Because they have a very matriarchal, sort of mystical society. Um, so, a lot of that stuff—it's easy then be like, to just carve out that sort of middle portion, of like, we have this big thing, we have our main characters on that. But, what about this side character, what about this character that we already met, what are they doing? Or, what is this character we're going to meet, where did they come from? And that also gives you some limits in terms of like, it kind of forces you to do both, because you... it compartmentalizes things. Right? Like... [Austin: Right.] It measures things out, it gives you a very specific, like you know, ok we're gonna do this many sessions in our, in our sort of main campaign, and then we have a session for this, or whatever. So you can kind of prioritize a little better, and figure out which systems, specifically, are going to work for what you want to do and contribute to your main campaign even when you're not actually playing your main game. Um, and that's... for me that's the part that's helpful, because otherwise it's easy to think like, I just want to do all of these things, I want to show all of these games to people, and um, that is where things can extremely go off the rails. It can be tricky to...

**Austin:** Yeah, totally. Um, the name of the John Wick game that Art was talking about is called "The Flux". Um, [begins reading aloud] "The Flux is an idea I've had for a long time, a multiple reality role playing game where players don't jump from world to world, but instead the worlds jump to them." Et cetera. I have it now, I bought it. it's 3 dollars on DriveThroughRPG.

**Janine:** Wow.

**Austin:** So. Yeah, uhuh. It was 5 dollars, it's on sale.

**Art:** Oh, get it now!

**Austin:** [Away] Uhuh. [moving close] Uhh, A— phoof, apologies. Sylvia.

**Sylvia:** No worries.

**Austin:** Do you have any additional answers?

**Sylvia:** Uh... No, I think I would kind of just be retreading what Janine said. Like, my idea is basically, keep stuff in your back pocket in case it makes, like, sense to pull that out narratively for your game, to switch things up. Also just like, if you really like a mechanic from a game you've played. You can probably find a way to make that work in the thing that you end up doing a longer campaign in. Like, that's not gonna work for everything, but like, I feel, if for example you wanted to take the base stuff, like the base building stuff, from a Forged in the Dark game, [Austin: True.] you could find a way to mod that into a, like, a Powered by the Apocalypse-game.

**Austin:** Yeah, and also there's a lot of space for— the hope there is that you've played enough games at this point that you have a pretty good idea of what your group wants? Like, one of the things that doesn't come up, Jake, in this question is how your group feels about it? My guess is that they'd be down? [chuckles] Um, but my very pragmatic thing would be to start with just talking to them about what games they liked the most, of playing all these different things for a year. Because the last thing you'd want is to be like "Hey everybody! Let's— I'm ready to do a game! We should play DungeonWorld!" And they all go at the same time "We should play Masks!" [Janine laughs] And then you're like, "Oh shit, okay." So definitely, like, take the temperature there. And yeah, if you see like, 3 or 4 people— you know, 3 other people or two other people say, "You know I really like the base building stuff in Forged in the Dark", like Sylvia said, you could totally figure out a way to bring that into another system. You want to— It might be janky, it might not work perfectly, but there are ways to hack some stuff together. In fact I have another question about that in just a little bit. Um, ready for the next one?

[Silence]

[QUESTION THREE: 15:43]

**Austin:** All right. Timewarp writes in and says "I've GM'ed two Blades in the Dark campaigns and I'm in the middle of a Beam Saber campaign, and I might be starting another Blades game soon, and one thing I've struggled with throughout is making downtime interesting, and not just a rote series of 'everyone goes around the table and does an action.' Your downtime episodes are always so fun, even if they don't have a specific fictional frame that they sit inside. Any advice on making an engaging downtime? Because my strategy so far has been "rush through to get back to the fun stuff", doing vignettes where needed." Uhm... I'm gonna— I wanna toss this to Art and Sylvia first, because they just did one of my favourite downtime things ever together, which was the cut loose stuff at the... the most recent Rapid Evening PARTIZAN game. Um, y'all have any thought about what makes those segments work for you?

**Sylvia:** Well, I think something worth noting about that one in particular is what happened there is we all sort of talked about what we wanted to do, and you gave us sort of an event to like, chain of all our ideas together, and having— You don't need to always have a, like, funeral prom planned for your group's downtime, but having, like, an idea of something that's like, going on in the world, that could sort of spark more player to player interaction, would be my big tip. Because, everything about downtime gets better when the players are doing stuff in character with each other. And that doesn't need to be restricted to cut loose. Like...

**Austin:** Yeah, I shouted out, during Drawing Maps yesterday, one of the things I brought up, was the fact that Jack— there was the bit about, ya'll were debating whether or not you could use, or— I raised, like, "oh, are you going to share supplies so you can do upkeep as the free downtime action thing", and instead of talking about that out of character, Jack immediately dropped into Clem's voice, and was basically delivering a, you know, a speech about how she had allowed, or approved, the use of resources and blablabla, and immediately that's a scene and it's not just math. Um, I definitely on the other hand know that sometimes it's so much math that it can be hard to sit in to your character, and like, in that mode. But...

**Sylvia:** Yeah, and I think another, like, smaller scale one, too— or not a smaller scale one but an example of how to work it into a turn is, I think it was a long-term project that Leap and Sovereign Immunity started working on together, or something? Or, they were involved in the scene together because the things lined up in a way. And just making [Austin: Right.] paths cross when the actions of your players makes sense to have their paths cross, would, like, help with this. I don't know how to— You can't force them to do that, but just encourage them to.

**Austin:** No. I mean— I will say that there was a rule that I completely forgot about until... I wanna say a week ago, that I saw, is that you can just help each other during downtime, and just give an extra die, without it being a thing. Um, I think I mentioned this in one of our PARTIZAN chats, but like, let me see if I can find it. Um, I don't think I have it up right now. But yeah, if you just take, if you just say—yeah, here it is: "If a pilot or cohort assists with a downtime activity, describe how they help and take +1 D." That can just be "yeah, I'm also helping you fix up your mech. Yeah, I'm also helping you case the joint" or whatever. But, those



are moments where you can have that character interaction, for sure. Any other thoughts here, from Art or Janine?

**Art:** I think part of it is like— yeah, I think that was a lot of it, you just have to let yourself have more fun with it, and, like, that isn't necessarily gonna be found by everyone goes around the table and does an action. Like, your players and you have to be trying to pull those threads together. **[Janine:** Mhm] And it might be easier in a game like this, if everyone kinda just wrote down their actions ahead of time, and then you could try to figure out how to fit them together a little better **[Austin:** Mhm]. Because, like, we're very good at drawing each other into our stuff. But if that's not your— the instinct of your group, you can try to make it happen a little more.

**Austin:** And I do... we do— you know, before downtime, I do say "hey, try to have a thing or two in mind before we start, or message me. Let me know if you have an idea for a scene. If there's something you definitely want to do." Because it's often the case that if I know that stuff ahead of time, I can prime the downtime for that. I mean, the other thing here is just, we let downtime be a recording by itself, most of the time. Sometimes we do the math at the end of a mission, or something but we don't try to— we just know who the fuck we are, and so, when you set the stage that way and give yourself the time to prep in terms of knowing the world state and knowing the stuff that's happening, knowing the stuff that could be cool to draw people into. So like, in the Rapid Evening stuff, I knew that there had been, I knew that there'd be a week— a funeral— I didn't expect them to go— I knew that they would go one of them. I know, in my head, I was like, at some point they will be at some sort of function. They're gonna show up, [chuckles] they are going to arrive at the function. The question is which one, and under what circumstances and how. Um, but knowing that and being able to paint that fact in the world early on, meant that there'd be an in for that stuff. Janine, do you have anything else here?

**Janine:** Yeah. I feel like a big part of the issue here is the perspective of "rush through it to get back to the fun stuff". **[Austin:** Yeah.] Because, like, if that's what you want that's what you're gonna do. And like you said, a thing that we do and a thing that like— part of it is we have to do it, because we all do— we are all on the same page with regards to downtime, and we all want to do a lot of stuff in that downtime. So I don't think it would be feasible to wrap it into another recording. But giving that space ensures that we don't feel pressed to just kinda do whatever is mechanically the most efficient and then move on. Having a whole thing saying, like, this is the downtime episode, this is the episode where— everyone is entering into that with the mindset of "this is where I can exercise my agenda in some way." Because, you know, I can— as much as I want, I want a scene with so-and-so. Or during the main campaign... Or during the main... sword— "swordies" I guess [snorts].

**Austin:** Yeah, when you're in a forest in a mech, or on top of a robot.

**Janine:** Yeah, when I'm in a forest in a mech and there is like, some sort of broken car over here, and there's also a bunch of soldiers really far away. And it's like, well, my character needs to go deal with these soldiers, but the character I want to spend time with, they're the only person who can repair this car. So, this is just how it has to go, because I'm not going to

prioritize my scene over us doing anything sensible. Uhm, and downtime is where you can kinda fudge that a little. where it doesn't really matter if it's fully sensible, because it's just kinda... you're acting for your character's story, more than the story at large. Like, you don't have to necessarily weigh practicalities and things like that, the stakes are not really as high. You can kinda just mess around and have fun, but you need to enter into it with the intention of doing that. With the.. uhm, understanding that, as a player— and this is the thing that I think is more on the players than the... um, GM. I think the GM can set the stage for this, but the players need to be on board in terms of like, this is the moment for us. Where we are sort of in control of the story, where we get to decide, um, where we get to decide how these characters are passing their time because they are not reacting. They can be proactive, they can, you know, follow their own agenda. Yeah.

**Austin:** This is the— to some degree, I'm gonna be the person who's like "that's still on me as the GM", because that's the, I guess, that's the narcissist I am. but there is like—

**Janine:** it's on the GM to relax... to relax. [laughs]

**Austin:** And to originally offer inspiration [**Janine:** Yes. Yeah yeah] or direction, so that the player can then run with it.

**Janine:** To say specifically, like, "This is, you are leading this story, like, I am facilitating this, but you need to..." I guess it's not relaxing so much as communicating to the player that you have relaxed, or that you are—

**Austin:** I just wanna say, I just want to rewind even a step before that, because there is a moment where you're not relaxing. Because the way that you get there is to get— for me anyway, is to ensure that all at the table have something they care about. And sometimes players arrive at the table with that thing fully formed, and they've been thinking about it for six months, and they say "Ok, I know this is the character I have", but part of the job of being a good GM, especially for systems like these, is to ensure that when someone writes something down for their drive clock, that they actually care about that thing. That that isn't just a thing that they felt like... "uuh, yeah this. this is fine. Fill this in for now, I don't care." Because if they do that, and they get to downtime, and they don't care what happens during downtime. They're not excited about pursuing their agenda because they've never developed an agenda. And you can do a downtime episode that is... sounds like the one that Timewarp describes where your players just don't care, and even, no matter how much Timewarp would say "hey, this is, you know, your time to shine, what do you want to do?" the answer might be, "um, I'm gonna do enhance twice and then I'm gonna train my whatever skill once." And, you go like, "oh, okay, so you're done?" And yeah, that's it, all they care about is advancing in terms of mechanical progression. And at that point the GM should be like, "Ok, what's that look like? blablabla etc." But even if you're at that point, I feel like there's other conversations you should've had by then, that are about "what's your life look like outside of play?" And in terms of Beam Saber, the history-tragedy-opening stuff. "Oh, hey, what's up with the people you knew from when you were in the history phase of your life? Can I introduce one of those to make something more

interesting? What would you be doing if you were not deployed to the front line?" In *Blades in the Dark*, you know, "what are you saving up money for? What are you working on?" Think about Sige working on that boat. You know, that's just Sige working on a long-term project, but that's such an important part of what Dre was trying to communicate with that character, and that comes from all of the world-building before, where like "Oh, you can't leave. You cannot leave this fucking city because of the weird lava water." Um, and so to me, part of what the GM's job is, is to provide a palate for— a palate so that then the GM can relax and let the players paint. So, I'm not accusing Timewarp of not having done that, but those are the conversations you might want to do if you're seeing the problem of players playing downtime like a board game, instead of being invested in what Janine said, which is all of their own shit that they're super excited about pursuing, you know?

**Janine:** There's also something that... [Laughs] Yeah. There's also the idea that like, what you're doing at the table as the GM in those things as— I don't think you necessarily have to respond to every individual move. **[Austin:** Sure.] Something that you reminded me of with that is, if you find someone has said very little and they are very mechanically focused, and you ask "what does that look like?", and they're like "I open a book and I read the book" [Austin laughs]. You know I don't think there's anything wrong with being like, "what does this character's life look like in this space? Let's just take a moment and figure out how these people live together?", like, it doesn't have to correspond to a move, it doesn't have to have a mechanical follow-up. But just, like, have those pictures paint, and just be like "what is actually happening here?", other than these people sort of on their own, doing whatever. Uhm, what does this actually look like as a functional group? Like how does this— you know, if we're saying that this two days of time, what do these two days actually look like, not just mechanically.

**Austin:** Yeah, definitely. Um, you know, I think it's very easy to forget that *Forged in the Dark* games actually have 3 phases. It's like "Mission, Downtime, Freeplay" and then that wraps back around to Mission. It's not just Mission-Downtime-Mission-Downtime. That Freeplay segment can be as long or short as you need to be. The world obviously keeps moving, the factions keep pursuing their goals, etc. You need to spend money to keep your shit good. Like, obviously there are pressures there for not letting Freeplay extend indefinitely. But you shouldn't feel like the only room for characterization to happen in, is when you pick one of your downtime moves. Even looking at the last *Saber* mission. The mission didn't start until the talk with an NPC happened, where they got where they're going. Everything before that was just kinda like, "hey we're all on a train, we're talking about what to do next". Like, all that lead-up stuff was post-downtime, in the middle of this other thing, where if the players have said "hey I wanna go do this other thing first, we would've just done that other thing." Um, and that, keep that stuff in mind too, because the last thing you want to do is to feel— is to let the game's structure feel like a straight-jacket for your players, and disincentivize, or suggest to your players that you don't want the door open for them to go do the shit that they want to do, because the only modes are Mission and Downtime. So, hopefully that all helps. Any other thoughts here before we advance?

[Silence]

[QUESTION FOUR - 30:00]

**Austin:** All right. Chris writes in with a longish one. Um, Chris says: "I am now a first time GM, just getting started in a campaign of Blades in the Dark. I am incredibly excited about this setting and after two sessions I've had no trouble at all being the fans of the PCs. They're all quirky, awesome in the best kind of fashionable, and get themselves into all sorts of trouble. My only concern is one particular player character, who I find hard to integrate. The player wanted to play a shy, socially anxious young woman who hides away in an abandoned part of town, spying on and following along with the crew, and helping along from the shadows. The one time I introduced a character who might know her identity, in order to potentially complicate things, she tried to kill her off straight away, resulting in her being in a deep coma since killing got X-carded. [Austin chuckles] I think there's a lot of potential for interesting storytelling here, and since everyone around the table is cool with it I'm happy to have her play this way. My problem is this: Since she hardly ever openly interacts with anyone in the world, I find it really hard to give this character screentime. We had a downtime episode where all she did was sit at home drinking tea that she stole as part of indulging her vice." [stops reading] Big Mood. "I'm really struggling to come up with ways of engaging her character in action without potentially compromising her hidden away nature, which seems to be important to the player. I tried to bring it up to the player, but she just hand-waved it away, and said that the character prefers it this way. I should note that this is one of two players who has previous tabletop experience. Maybe she just needs time to get used to the group and setting, but if you have any advice on how I can let this character shien on her own terms, that would be amazing. Chris."

**Austin:** Any opening thoughts here?

[Janine makes a hesitant noise]

**Austin:** Uhuh. This seems like—

**Art:** [crosstalk] This is really hard.

**Sylvia:** [crosstalk] Yeah...

**Janine:** [crosstalk] I have some thoughts about this one.

**Austin:** Mhm?

**Janine:** This is one of those things where... for me, the thing here is it's impossible for me to separate this from the storytelling aspect of playing games like this. Where like, if the story you are telling is driven by character and not events in particular—but it's also true if it's driven by events—then, the thing that you do, you don't just have a character who behaves the same way throughout the entire story. That's not how you tell a layered and interesting story. Like, the thing that you want is that you establish the character's status quo, you establish what are they mostly

like, what are they like under normal circumstances. Like, what is this person's day-to-day. And then you say, and then you ask yourself "what disrupts this?" What is the factor that can alter this? And like, that's a thing that... you would obviously need to actually talk to the player about, like, what is the thing that would disrupt this behaviour. And then that's, you know, that's the thing that you sort of draw on to— but if the player is super hostile to that and is very firmly set on like, this is the one note that I'm playing. At that point I don't know what you do. Because it just feels like such a— yeah, it feels like a really core part of storytelling, even if you're telling a story that's very much about this kind of character, that's like really deeply rooted in certain habits, you need to have a factor that can change that.

**Austin:** This— I think this question hits— like it really clearly illustrates the ways in which playing role-playing games is such a distinct way to tell a story, compared to writing a book or a screenplay or anything else that you do by yourself. Or even being in a writing room. Because if— Let's say the four of us were in a writer's room right now, and we're like, we're gonna write a book— we're gonna write a TV show together. And we pitch, there was a character that came up, who was a character who just hid and watched indefinitely. Constantly. And I guess interacted and helped people but that was it. What if Tuxedo Mask showed up to save the day, but then, never was a character otherwise? Didn't interact with anyone else, was not— I didn't want to spoil who Tuxedo Mask is, so I'll hold my comment [Sylvia laughs]. But, you know, there was no degree of interaction there, with any of the primary characters. Um, the writer's room collectively would go "well what do we do with this character?" without it necessarily being something a single player owned, or it overlapping with the needs and the play-desire of one of those players. And it's definitely a much more complicated thing, kind of, in terms of the sociality of it, because... You can't just go to this player and be like "listen, you gotta tell a better story!" [Laughter] "Listen! Stop fucking up!"

**Art:** "Ratings are down!"

**Austin:** Ra— exactly. Like, honestly, there's no... there's nothing. If the table is happy with this, it's good! But, Chris, you don't seem— you say here, "I'm happy to have her play this way" but also you wrote us a really long letter that makes me feel like maybe you're not happy to have her play this way. Which is fine, it's fine to not be happy— because, what— It feels to me as if you feel like you are failing the table by not being able to integrate this character, and have her be part of the core group. It might be the case that this is fine. That she can keep doing this and it won't ruin anything. And maybe it never goes anywhere, but she has had a fulfilling time at the table, hanging out, it's low pressure for this player, it's low stakes, but you know, you get to roll dice sometimes and throw a rose at a bad guy, or whatever it is that you do. And if you're— if you can genuinely be okay with that, I think it's probably worth rolling with it for another 3 or 4 sessions and seeing if anything else sparks, kinda organically. But it's also okay for you, or even the other players to go, "Oof, I really want to interact with another character, I want this person to be part of the group." In which case I think you actually have kind of a difficult conversation to have, that is about what expectations are, and what— I wouldn't use that word, I wouldn't be like "we have certain expectations here for interaction", um, but I would say, I'd be willing to go to

this player and go "hey where do you see this character going? I'm trying to do some prep, I'm trying to figure out, like, what's something that would make them excited? Or mad? Or what's something that they care about besides the party? What else is going on in their lives?" In a way that you're not saying "I need you to come up with these answers", necessarily. You're saying it from a genuine place of curiosity, you're saying it in a way like "I want to add texture to this world, I want to know who they were, I wanna know who they are now." What's their long term goal? Are they gonna screw the party over? Are they gonna like, are they trying to score a big heist for their own, like, what's their long-term goal here?" And maybe you get nothing. Maybe this player says "ehh, you know, I kinda just wanna hang out and keep doing this." And then you're in this weird vibe where you just kind of have to let it roll, or say— have that hard conversation where you say you don't want that, but I feel like that's just— aah, I don't think I could do it. I don't think I could be like "you need to have a character who comes—" hmmm. [stops and rethinks.] I think i would've already said no, is the actual answer here. And maybe that's part of the lesson here, is the lesson of setting expectations up top. And saying, here are the types of characters I'm looking for in this game. And I think back to when I was literally— back when Art and I were in college, and I know we tell lots of these stories—the way, do you remember this Art? How game recruitment worked?

**Art:** Um...

**Austin:** At the beginning of every semester...

**Art:** I mean, it was some technology that I don't recall..

**Austin:** Well, I don't remember the technology version of it, I remember the pre-technology version of it. Which was— I guess there was some sort of site you could use. But at the beginning of every semester, GMs would print out their, like, a pitch sheet, like a one-sheet for their campaign they wanted to run that semester. And post them physically down in the game room. On like, a long board, on one of the walls. And there'd be a dozen of these things up there. And there'd be a website thing, it was probably just tied to the clubs', like, interface...

**Art:** I think it was a Yahoo group.

**Austin:** Oh! It was a Yahoo group! It was a Yahoo group, you're totally right! And you'd go there and like, read more about what the thing was. And on those, you'd often find, like, campaign pitches that were, like, "I really only want elves, half-elves and gnomes in this game" [Sylvia makes a discomforted sound] "I... have a story about the gnome— a war between the gnomes and the elves, that's the story I want explore. That's what I'm looking for. I'm not anti-half-orc. [Sylvia: Okay.] There's other campaigns to play half-orcs in." Um, or, you would say, "Hey I'm running a game about mech-pilots. There's gonna be two parties. [Austin chuckles] One of them is gonna be a bunch of prisoners, one of them is gonna be some sort of amoral mercenaries." That's the kind of general vibe, and when you set that expectation up top, what you're doing is saying "hey, this is the sort of interaction I'm hoping for at the table." Um, obviously even with whatever that heads-up is, you can always find an example of someone who wants to be the

exception to the rule. And I say you can find that, because I was almost always that, I was almost always the player who's like, emailing the GM and being like "ok but what if I'm the one Dwarf in this elf-gnome town?" or whatever. But having those conversations up top and saying "I think is gonna be a game about a tight crew that does heists together, like Fast and the Furious, except in the Dishonored universe." Like, that is a thing that sets certain expectations around what types of characters to make. And I know that's not a useful thing for this current situation, but going forward, that should be part of the conversation that you have at the top of every campaign, for sure.

**Art:** And I think the thing we're not getting to is, like, are they having fun? Are the other players having fun? Are you having fun? And if the answer to any of those is no, something has to change, necessarily. Like, you shouldn't keep doing a game where someone isn't having fun.

**Austin:** Yeah. I think that that's the difficult thing here, and I think this is one of the things I'm sort of thankful for, is that we have now been running games long enough, it would be easy for me to be like, "yo, I'm just not having fun with this anymore. Can we switch it up?" But I do think it— it's worth— I just want to say out loud to Chris, that I get the stress around this, because the situation where you're not having fun, the other three aren't having fun, or the other two players aren't having fun, and then this player is having fun being this kind of background character. That's a really difficult situation to be in, because you have to bring to bear the weird power dynamics of being the GM, being the voice of the majority, and telling this person, who's technically not breaking any rules or harming anyone, that their style of play— that her style of play is getting under your skin, you know? I don't... I'm deeply sympathetic to what that would feel like. Um... Yeah, I don't know.

**Janine:** Do you know what the nightmare scenario is here?

**Austin:** What's that?

**Janine:** The nightmare scenario here is that— you know I was thinking about this in terms of Signet. Like, the stuff I was saying earlier about, if you're gonna have a character who's largely very consistent then you need those moments where their shit gets shaken up, and it's like, what does this, what is the effect? And Signet isn't Signet without, you know, the bad dinner, and without the kind of almost cruelty that she shows to Tender, during the ritual and stuff... You know, Signet isn't Signet if she is just a universally liked, kind matronly like, whatever. It's a very different character. Um, but the like, nightmare scenario here is that the player has a pivot in mind, they have a reaction to something in mind, but they want it to be a surprise to absolutely everyone including the GM. **[Austin:** Yeah. God.] So they aren't communicating it, which means that it will probably never actually happen.

**Austin:** It will never come up.

**Janine:** Or it will be shoe-horned in, in a really awkward and forced way.

**Austin:** Yeah. Yeah. Totally.

**Janine:** That's the nightmare scenario [laughs].

**Austin:** Yeah. I— that's a particular thing worth raising then for this player, Chris, is you should say to her: "Are you sitting on anything, because I don't want to not give you the opportunity to do your big, cool thing. I need to know what that is." Um, Thomas Whitney in the chat has a great way— approach to this also. Um, saying "I think one way to frame a conversation is that if your character doesn't interact with the others, it's extra work on the GM to essentially plan and run two separate sets of character stories. Which is totally true. I think in this particular case, I think that this player's response is like "Oh, I don't need a character story, don't worry about it. I'm just gonna keep doing my own thing in the corner."

**Janine:** Some people don't want to play a protagonist, I guess. Like that's... It is low pressure.

**Austin:** It is low pressure! Like, the thing here is that the thing that the player wants, is totally a thing I've done in table-top games, but those games have tended to be more like DnD, where it's like, "yeah I'll show up and roll some fucking dice! Like, I'll show up and— I'm not gonna talk much, but I'm gonna show up and roll to smash some shit. That sounds fun!" you know?

**Sylvia:** "I'll use Cleave!" That's a skill.

**Austin:** That is.. That is exactly right, I was just a couple of weeks ago telling Janine about the advanced, the aD&D game that Art and I were in, where we played a pair of rangers that were just the best characters.

**Art:** Yeah, that class was busted, I don't know what was happening.

**Austin:** [laughing] That class was busted! That class was busted completely. And that cha— I was— the only time in my life where I've played a character who was explicitly, like, could not tie two words together, could not finish a sentence. Was just distractible and focused on smashing stuff. And had a best friend in Art. Um, and that was the best... Adele [???) was your name, I think?

**Art:** That's correct.

**Austin:** Yeah. And I was Garth? Was it Garth? Or was it Gary?

**Art:** Gareth. I think it was Gareth. There's no way it was Garth.

[Austin laughs]

**Janine:** Garth and Adele sounds like a dream team.

[laughing]



**Sylvia:** Yeah.

**Art:** There was no way that Anthony, who made me do homework to play an elf—

**Austin:** True! "You are an elf, you have to read this book about elves at D&D."

**Sylvia:** [flabbergasted] What?

**Austin:** It was the best. It was a different time.

**Sylvia:** Ok. Sure. I'll take your word for that that was "the best."

**Austin:** God... It ruled.

**Art:** I had to read the complete elf book.

**Sylvia:** What the fuck...

**Janine:** I was just hoping it was just Lord of the Rings or something.

**Austin:** No, elves are just really sad, in D&D, is the thing, right?

**Janine:** They're sad in Lord of the Rings.

**Art:** Yeah.

**Austin:** True. Well, that's the thing, aD&D was way more like Lord of the Rings in that way, at that point. Um, and so, yeah, that was fun. Anyway! in that game it was totally fine to do that, that game was built for that, but if you're Forged in the Dark. If you're playing anything like, of the sort of stuff that we play, you kinda do want a little bit more. Anyway, I hope you work this out. Please write us in and let us know. Where this goes. Because I'm just hoping it resolves. Any other final thoughts. Sylvia, did you have anything else here?

**Sylvia:** Yeah. I... I think just like, if you want to... [sighs] I don't know how to say this without feeling mean. But, like, if you want to make it so you're almost forcing their character to interact a bit more, or at least have the option of the other players interacting with her. Um, it's like, being sneaky is hard! Make them more obvious.

**Austin:** Yeah! Yes. Yeah.

**Sylvia:** Make every roll have a consequence of, like, "yeah, but there will be a clue left behind."

**Austin:** Let me tell ya, I used to have a player who turned invisible all the time. And figuring out how to make Fantasma engage in those situations was really, really important. And Sylvia's right, that you can go at that style of play directly, in a way that this... and it sounds like this

player might even like that! Like, to some degree, in that you're engaging with them, engaging with her on that level, you know? I don't know.

**Sylvia:** Yeah.

**Janine:** I have another idea.

**Austin:** What's that?

**Janine:** Give them a Morning's Observation. Or someone. Give them, like, an NPC—

**Sylvia:** [in the background] Yeah.

**Austin:** Give them a Rix and Rowe.

**Janine:** Yes exactly. A Rix and Rowe, like, a character who is like, also kind of in the background, also kind of doing similar stuff. And is also kind of like, big shit-eating grin energy.

**Austin:** I agree with this. This is good. And also will get her into trouble.

**Janine:** Mhm.

**Sylvia:** Also, like, this is like a gentler way to do this, but you could have a way for the other party— it feels weird to say the other party—but the rest of the party—

**Austin:** But that's the point!

**Sylvia:** Yeah, I know.

**Austin:** The fact that you want to say that speaks to the problem.

**Sylvia:** But you could have the rest of the party communicate with her in an indirect way, that at least sort of starts to bridge that gap, to the point where you actually can get this character out of that shell.

**Austin:** [exhales] What does this character get out of it? I was gonna say like, does this character have a calling card, that they can start to recognize? Then I was like, wait, what if she says "no, I don't have a calling card." Then I wanna note, what are you getting out of putting your life at risk to help these strangers, I wanna know the answer to this question!

**Janine:** I keep picturing Tharja.

[Sylvia laughs]

**Austin:** Yeah, yeah, me too. A hundred percent.

**Janine:** From Fire Emblem.

**Austin:** That's totally it.

**Janine:** Tharja and Bernadette<sup>1</sup>, and that girl from Breakfast Club with the long skirt.

**Austin:** Sure. Yes.

**Sylvia:** Ok.

**Austin:** Uhuh. Yeah. Good character type.

**Janine:** Yeah.

**Sylvia:** I'd play that character!

**Austin:** Uhuh! Uhuh. Put that in your back pocket, you never know... in the future.

**Sylvia:** Oh yeah, that's there.

[QUESTION FIVE - 48:25]

**Austin:** All right, next question. Comes in from Enn, who says: "I have a question for everyone, about giving control of NPCs who are part of a PC's life, before the game. Uh, and having them be handled by the GM. I have a player for a game, I'm planning on running, who developed not only the player character, but the family they were adopted into." [Pauses] Excuse me. "I asked if they would be comfortable if I voiced their family if they appeared on screen, and they were less than enthused, so we moved on. I want to be clear, I am not looking for total control of their character, but I want to have them involved in whatever story may come about, because they're obviously important to that character. Be it that they have information that's needed, or in a position of power that could be useful. And to be able to have those interactions and emotional connections without it being 20 minutes of the player talking as both their PC and their Dad. To be specific, I'm thinking of characters like Hadrian's family, Ballad from Twilight Mirage, or even potential exes like Open Metal. Is there a way I should go about convincing my player thoughtfully, or do you all have other ideas for how we could move through those kinds of situations smoothly." There is a little extra context here which did not fit clearly on the page for me, but um, this is a group of players who have previously done a lot of text-based RP, where these style of characters—

**Janine:** Ah. [crosstalk] That makes sense to me now.

**Austin:** Yeah, see. That little detail completely shifts it. A hundred percent. Um, where this style of character— [begins reading] "for context we all used to do text RP, where it is common to

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<sup>1</sup> This is likely a reference to Bernadetta from Fire Emblem: Three Houses.

play your main character, but also their family if they came up. I'm unsure if that would be as effective with traditional tabletop role playing games and using voice." [sighs]

**Janine:** So, I just wanna— in the context of text based role-play, that's a courtesy almost. When you play—

**Austin:** Oh, yeah. A hundred percent.

**Janine:** When you play characters that are affiliated with your character, that is a burden that you're taking on yourself, because you have to write more, have to keep track of more. [**Austin:** Yes.] But it's a thing you're doing because expecting the other player to pick that up is super rude.

**Austin:** It's so rude! And it's like— "I didn't sign up to be your dad! My guy! [Sylvia laughs] I don't know who your dad is!"

**Janine:** Yes, but in this context it's completely different because all interactions happening on screen is happening, you know— there is a mechanical reason for it. It's not gonna make sense if a player is playing themselves and also their dad, and their dad is making them roll to get information, or whatever— Like. It's so much harder to separate that stuff. Because there are other factors that have to— because of games? [**Austin:** Yeah. I—] Like you're text-roleplaying you're just purely going with what you feel like doing and what feels right. And the complications that you involve are complications that you are electing into. There is no aspect of randomness or chance or whatever. There is, you know, the only incentive to create conflict is purely for the story. And so there is like a real— it feels like it basically, by them not being willing to relinquish control of those characters, it just means that those interactions are not gonna really mean anything, or drive stuff forward, and are purely gonna be flavor. And like, that limits how useful they are in the story...

**Austin:** Yeah. That's totally it, right? They're actually lowering the degree of... worth those characters are going to have in the story. They're going to be more meaningless characters because you as the GM cannot use them as a vector for storytelling. Outside of threatening them, which is not a particularly novel way of doing it, you know what I mean?

**Janine:** [crosstalk] No, that sucks. That sucks so much.

**Austin:** Yeah. So, I.. I think this is a hard convers— I would just have this conversation with the player. And I would probably have it in a way that is pretty cut and dry. Which is not a tone that I use that often with y'all. Except for rules stuff. I'd use my rules voice and like "No, actually, sorry. The way the game is set up, I have to play all the NPCs. You all have *your* character, unless you have a move or something else that lets you take control of a secondary character, or you have a cohort or something like that. These are characters that I'm gonna voice, primarily. Maybe there'll be a scene here or there where dadadada, but... yeah.

**Janine:** You know what actually might help here is if— I guess there's only so much we can guess and speculate because we don't know the relationship the character has with their family and stuff, but the compromise here might be, "ok, this character has a really strong relationship with their mother. Them and their mother, they're like kindred spirits, they're always on the same page" or whatever. But they have this brother and... the brother is just on a completely different wavelength. And it becomes this thing of like, well, if you know, in scenes where it makes sense for the mother to be around, then like, it makes sense for that player to play it, because the mother is not going to be a factor in the same way that the brother would be, but the brother would be the character that the GM is interacting through. Because it... it depends... it depends so much on what the actual background that they're envisioning for these characters is. **[Austin:** Mhm.] But, like, if there is a real divide in terms of personalities, that might be the thing to lean on, and then sort of... If you can't win this entire thing, then to like pick your battles and be like "well, these characters who might be actual road-blocks, it makes more sense for me to play them versus the characters that are gonna, reasonably, agree with you." And so on.

**Austin:** Yeah. I was definitely— one of my other big ones, if this is how they feel, and they're not gonna budge on this, those characters are just not gonna be interesting, and it's your job to then introduce new characters who are important to this player, from your own gallery of characters, that from the jump are under your control. Trust that you will be able to do this, and you'll probably be able to do this. And let those NPCs, the family, kinda fall in the background.

**Janine:** Literally move away. Everyone gets on a boat, and goes to another continent.  
[chuckles]

**Austin:** Uhuh. I love to run away from my family and my problems! Uh, Sylvia or Art, do you have anything else you want to add here?

**Sylvia:** This isn't like a whole thing, but it's just an addendum to what you guys were saying, cause like, this also— one of the things I really like about having those characters that are close to player characters, is when they interact with the characters they are not related to. Like, uhm, like when Ballard would show up and cause problems for the entire group. The fact that you're not able to have that option, is like really tying your hands together. And I think you could mention that to your player to sort of help smooth things along here, maybe.

**Austin:** Yeah, definitely.

**Sylvia:** That's all I got.

**Austin:** Art, you're someone who's had a lot of these types of characters. I'm curious if... maybe to put this on its head a little bit, if you have ever had an experience where like "That's not how Rosana would act!" Or...

**Art:** Never!

**Austin:** Ok, good. Phew.

**Art:** But it's because I don't feel, like, ownership over any of those characters. I mean, I-I'm not saying you couldn't have done something where I'd been like, "hey, why don't we back over that." Drown all the children? Uhh.

**Austin:** All of the younglings, oh no!

**Art:** Yeah. [Sylvia laughs]. Uh, but like, and this is where I might just be a weird impulse of mine. But what comes to me with this character is like: Make them do it.

**Austin:** [laughs] Brutal!

**Art:** Like, okay. Yeah.

**Austin:** [crosstalk] The floor is yours.

**Art:** If you're gonna control all of these characters, and guess what— It's Thanksgiving! Everyone's here!

**Sylvia:** Oh my god!

**Art:** What's going on right now?

**Austin:** The Feast of Patina but one player is playing everyone!

**Art:** Yeah! That's probably not what you should do, but that's my like, "and then they'll never do— then they'll see the point of GM's handled characters."

**Austin:** But then, how is the... your job as the weird clown guy from Saw going?

[Sylvia laughs]

**Art:** Great. Um.

**Austin:** Puppet guy. Sorry.

**Art:** It's more lock-finding than I thought it'd be [Austin: Okay.], cause you always have to have a key, and you can't... the keys can't be the same keys, they can't even look like the same keys, so, like— it's basically being the lock-buyer.

**Austin:** Wait-wait-wait. Let me pitch you something. [Art: Uhuh?] What if all the keys look like the same keys, but they went to different locks? That feels like it'd be one of those puzzles.

**Art:** Maybe, but you could only do that once or twice, right?

**Austin:** No no, because the person dies. So they're not gonna spoil it to anyone else.

**Art:** Well, sometimes the point of a Saw, is one person goes through many...

**Austin:** Right. You're right. That's how they learn their lesson about... whatever it is... being a good dad.

**Art:** Or not having cancer, I think is one of them?

**Austin:** That's one of them for sure. "You don't have cancer." That's the movie. [Janine squirms]

**Art:** Yeah.

**Austin:** Yeah.

**Art:** Chris Rock's gonna do that now.

**Austin:** I saw. And who else? Samuel Jackson? Right?

**Art:** Is that who it is?

**Austin:** I think it was both of them?

**Art:** I don't know, once it was like "Chris Rock: Hardboiled Detective" that took a lot of my attention.

**Austin:** Yeah, it's those two. It's called "Spiral". This is not an advertisement, we're moving on.

[laughing]

**Austin:** Uhhh, all right! I think that that's our best attempt at answering that one. There's... this episode definitely has a lot of these particular, like "the way the table feels is gonna be different for everybody". Interpersonal stuff is tough. You know? Um.. All right.

[QUESTION SIX - 58:27]

D W writes in and says: "Due to the Friends at the table discord,"—which is another good place to find fanart by the way—"I discovered a game called "Double or Nothing", which is basically a tabletop RPG version of the 80s anime "Dirty Pair","—which everyone should watch because is great. Everyone should at least watch the intro, I think it's the Dirty Pair intro that fucking slaps, if I'm remembering right [**Janine:** It is.] does anyone wanna back me up on this? Ok, thank you.

**Janine:** Is it like, the series or the...

**Austin:** I think it's the movie?

**Janine:** OA, ovavie...?

**Austin:** OVA. I think it's the OVA. Original Video Animation OP. That looks fucking great. Yes, it is. If you look up the Dirty Pair OVA opening, you'll see what we're talking about. It's so good. Um.. [resuming]: "there is a particular mechanic in that game, in Double or Nothing, that I really like, and would probably hack into any game if the character dynamic fit. Basically it has a competition system where the two PCs try to win some petty challenge by the end of the adventure. Stuff like "flirt with the most cuties" or "prove more people agree with you about what's the best potato chip flavor" etc. Whoever wins gains one xp. I could easily see a mechanic like that in any game where it has two PC's that are playful rivals. So my question to you all is are there any small mechanics that you've played that you'd like to see hacked into a current or future game?"

**Art:** [whispers conspiratorially] Austin. [**Austin:** Yeah?] Has Ali been doing this the whole time?

**Austin:** Yeah. I secretly set up a competition [chuckles], and that's where all her extra xp comes from. That's not true, [**Art:** Damn it!] Ali plays her characters really well. Yeah no, that's... I feel like, god. Is there one of these... is there any mechanic that I wish this was in everything? Besides clocks?

[Sylvia laughs]

**Janine:** I have one.

**Art:** [interrupting] Clocks is an acceptable answer. You're a clock man.

**Austin:** I'm a clock man. What can I say? You know what I mean?

**Art:** [sing-song] Bam bam.

**Austin:** [chuckles] Thank you. Uh, Janine did you say you had one?

**Janine:** Yeah.

**Austin:** What do you have?

**Janine:** I don't know if I'd hack this into everything. But I really like the structure of Shooting the Moon, where one of the... back when we played Shooting the Moon for a couple live things over Christmas last year and the year before, it was me and Jack and Ali. And that game is about basically two rival suitors competing for a ... suitee. And one of—

**Austin:** I think it's pronounced "sweetie".

**Janine:** [laughs] Yes. Penny for a sweetie.



**Austin:** That's a really good joke in text, by the way! If you can see it spelled out. Anyway.

**Janine:** It is. It is. Um. So, the like, core sort of structure of that is, the suitors alternate having scenes with the... suitee [chuckles], and the person who isn't in that scene introduces a complication, basically. So it's like, your scene will be "so-and-so decides"—I don't remember the actual setup of this, there's a particularity to it but it'll be like, whatever, "they're gonna go for coffee". Um, and the person who isn't in the scene will introduce a thing that's like, "the coffee shop is closed because of a rat infestation". And they can, like, introduce characters and... I'm grossly oversimplifying it here, but I really like the idea of a player who is outside of the scene, basically having to introduce some sort of kink. Some sort of, like, here is a foil in all of this that I think is interesting in the moment, and then sort of injecting their own character, sometimes, into that. Or playing NPCs who are part of that complicating factor. I think that made for some really, really interesting moments. Especially the kinds of stuff that comes out of nowhere and, like, can vacillate between really big important stuff and also kinda light, more realistic and grounded problems.

**Austin:** Yeah. Totally, I think that's a good answer. And it's like, that's a great answer because you can see us doing it in a number of other games, like, in a way where having that mechanic would have helped us know we wanted to do it, you know what I mean? Fall of Magic we did that. Um. Fiasco, it happens sometimes, where someone introduces a weird third-party character into the mix. Um, and it's like, yeah, that turns out to be a thing that's worth being its own discrete mechanic sometimes. Um, Sylvia or Art?

**Art:** I'm stealing my answer from chat. I was struggling and Morgan has my answer in chat, which is Belief and Instincts, and I think that's great, and could be easily ported into anything—especially instincts—instincts is underrated. Beliefs have taken off...

**Austin:** [crosstalk] Instincts fucking rule. Can you explain instincts? Like, beliefs we've done so many times and in so many different ways, but can you just explain instincts from Burning Wheel?

**Art:** Instincts from Burning Wheel... I don't remember many you get [**Austin:** 3]. It's like things were, like, this is true about you. and you can have it be anything from like, "I always have the things to make a cup of tea" to like "I am never caught without a weapon." And like, it just says something about your character, and gives you a little mechanical bump.

**Austin:** Yeah. The way... one of the ways I always liked referring to it is... as insurance. Like, GM insurance. Um, where you're just like, no my character would never fucking do this. This is just one of their most, like, clear instincts. They always lock the door when they go to bed. They always do. It's just a truth about who they are. It rules. There's a big list of these out there. That you can dig up... From... I wanna say the Burning Wheel forums. It's also in Mouse Guard, I should note. Um. But that's actually—things like "hide first, think later", um, "if there's work to be done, always offer help" because sometimes this can get you into trouble, and that can get you xp, obviously. "First thing every morning, practice something important to you", which in Burning

Wheel is a way to ensure that your character is doing the things necessary to get better at the, kind of, the rule-side of it. God. One day, Art, we'll get to play Burning Wheel together.

**Art:** Yeah. Yeah. Sure we will.

**Austin:** [snorts] Fuck.

[Art laughs]

**Sylvia:** I think my one is kind of similar, which is the Drive Clock from Beam Saber. I'm actually... I love the way that works, even though I haven't even been able to spend one yet. It's just, like, it is constantly a way to sort of ground yourself back to what your character would be doing, as opposed to what you would be doing in that situation. Because that's a problem I have a lot. So having something to remind and incentivize, like, going for things that my character specifically wants, and allowing me to do big swings related to that, when I fill those clocks, would be cool in any number of systems.

**Austin:** Yeah. Um. Also from the chat. A really good one is "Transmissions" which is something I've started to pull into other stuff. We did it for Messy Business at the end of Bluff City season 1. Even though we're not using—we're not playing Technoir which is where transmissions are from. And obviously I used the NPC part of it in the beginning of PARTIZAN this year. It's sort of like, here is a dossier on what this setting is. Here's like, six interesting characters, six interesting places, six interesting things. It's so useful at communicating to your players... and having just a deck of cards for yourself to pull from. What the world is and what the world is about, and what it's filled with. I love the transmission system. There's new transmissions available for TechNoir, new official Technoir transmissions. Jeremy Keller recently, like, released new stuff for that game. And that is super exciting to me, because I think Technoir remains one of the most slept on indies from the last decade or so. Because it's so... I think because partly, the audience wasn't there yet. It didn't blow up like the other stuff... I mean, a lot of stuff didn't blow up obviously. But, like, it's from 2012 and it was not any of the then ascending, like, indie games. And I think it kind of got lost in the shuffle a little bit. I hope people go back and play some Technoir.

**Austin:** Um. Let me just—one more thing before we wrap up here. Is... If I can play Devil's Advocate a little bit—and I don't even really mean that, because I think this is speaking to something true that I actually do feel. Some mechanics can't just be hacked that simply. I am always pro-experimentation at the table. And experimentation in your games. But you cannot just drop things in and expect them to work. If they've already been playtested ahead of their inclusion in the game you first played them in. Um. I think that like, that impulse is good. And I would rather you experiment and try to hack things in than not, but if you find that something doesn't have the effect you expect, don't be surprised by that? Games are really difficult to design. They require a lot of testing and a lot of observation in terms of how play is incentivized. I talked about this, again, on the recent Drawing Maps, but if you go back and look at The Veil, you look at the Empath Playbook there and the way Flow worked in its original 1.0 release. And

it encouraged a style of play that was not in line with the way the Empath was imagined by the game's creator, Fraser Simons. And so, like, that requires a degree of testing. And it is a great example of how you can't just drop in, the same sort of resource mechanics from one game to another and expect that it'll have the exact same result as what you expect or what you saw in another game. I think that, like, Drive Clocks in Beam Saber would probably look different in Hieron, in Dungeon World, right? Because there is no downtime segment in Dungeon World as it's written. There is no such thing as a long-term project that you could kind of track that with, very cleanly. You might find that Drive Clocks take way too long to fill up. You might find that they take way too quick and they're a little too powerful. And you'll learn that stuff by testing and trying stuff out. But, I am always a little wary in my—and here is my other difference, is we do a show. So I can't just slot a thing on and expect it will just work. Which doesn't mean we don't get experimental. I think that, compared to many Actual Play podcasts, we do our best to be very experimental. But I try, sometimes, to keep those experiments quarantined in a way. You'll find, going back to season one, where we did a murder mystery, by hacking in some stuff from a thing that wasn't even a role playing game. That was one arch of the series. Or when we played Sundered Land. That was a story being told inside of the world. Not the, like, top layer, the game itself, right? Likewise, any time we've done something like, the Kingdom game, like, in COUNTER/Weight. that was taking place in a different moment in history than with the main characters. I wasn't sure... I knew I wanted to play that game, but I didn't think I could just drop the current characters into there and hope that it would work. Ironically, I take the biggest swings around finale-time, most of the time. Um, where the stakes are high, but it's also when I know players are going to be—intuitively know their characters to play past any kinds of design fuck-ups I've made, and still find something really good and powerful, there. But, don't be surprised if you go "Oh, I'm going to hack in clocks" in a system that doesn't have them, and then find that clocks just don't work for that system, because the dice mechanics weren't built for it to begin with. So yeah, keep your head up when you try that stuff. And be honest with yourself about whether or not you think it's working, and talk to your players around it too.

**Austin:** All right! That is going to do it for us today. Remember you can send your questions in to [tipsatthetable@gmail.com](mailto:tipsatthetable@gmail.com). We'll have another one of these next month. Um, like I said, we're about to record another Bluff game soon. We've obviously got more PARTIZAN coming. Another Drawing Maps episode should go up in the feed—in the audio side of the feed soon. I think that's it? Anything else you want to shout out? Um.. I guess we have the shirts still in the [friendsatthetable.cash](https://www.friendsatthetable.cash) shop? Right? Um... Am I forgetting anything, anyone? I think that's it. Oh, post-postcards!

**Art:** [crosstalk] I mean, I'm very excited for the next Bluff.

**Austin:** Postcards are in process, in a way, like, PARTIZAN postcard number 1 is done. It looks sick. It's super sick. The big, like, uh, Hieron postcard package...

**Art:** Is paid for.

**Austin:** Is paid for. We paid all that money. Um, but when I say we, we really mean you, the listener and supporter paid all that money. Uhh, and they fucking look sick. I cannot wait for people to see this package. It's fantastic. So shoutouts. Shoutouts to everyone involved there. On the Hieron side that's Annie Johnston-Glick, who you can find on Twitter at @dancynrew, D-A-N-C-Y-N-R-E-W. So look forward to that. And the first of these PARTIZAN postcards is featuring art from Simon Sweetman, which you can find at @SiSweetman on Twitter. And also some additional help from Connor Fawcett, which you can find at @thebadbucket. So look forward to those! I think that's it, I think that's gonna wrap us up. I hope everyone has a good week. Uh, we'll be back soon with some additional stuff. Look forward to it!

[Cut to pre-show]

**Austin:** We should do a clap!

[agreement sounds]

**Art:** We sure should.

**Austin:** [disappointed] Still not a day.

**Sylvia:** [chuckles] Did you expect it to change?

**Austin:** I thought maybe they'd hear us be like, hey it wasn't a day today, what's going on?

**Janine:** [bullshitting] Between 8:30 and 9:30 is International Taquitos day.

**Austin:** There you go.

**Art:** Who owns time.is? We should just buy time.is.

**Austin:** I bet they have more money than us. [Art chuckles] Ready to do top of the minute?

**Sylvia:** Sure.

**Austin:** Cool.

[waiting]

[Four claps]

**Austin:** All right.

[END]