AUSTIN: Welcome to Tips at the Table, an RPG podcast focused on critical questions, hopefully smart answers, and fun interactions between good friends. I'm your host, Austin Walker. You can find me on Twitter @austin_walker. Joining me today: Art Martinez-Tebbel.

ART: Hi, you can find me on Twitter @atebbel and um, yeah, One Song Only.

AUSTIN: Ali Acampora.

ALI: Hi, you can find me @ali_west on Twitter and you can Friends at the Table over on Friends_Table.

AUSTIN: And Keith J. Carberry.

KEITH: My name is Keith J. Carberry. You can find me on Twitter @KeithJCarberry and you can find the let's plays that I do at Youtube.com/runbutton.

AUSTIN: We are having a great November so far. I think people really love some of the episodes that have come out. Um, we're about to do some really cool stuff in Masks. Uh, and-

[Keith laughs]

AUSTIN: - I'm just excited for the holidays. I'm getting ready to be festive, you know? I think, after Thanksgiving, it'll all come together. Um, get in the right headspace, you know?

ART: Hold on, I have some really specific predictions about the Trump investigation to make before November...

[Ali sighs deeply]

AUSTIN: [chuckles] Oh yeah? You don't wanna like, take those to Las Vegas?

[Art laughs]

AUSTIN: Okay. I'm gonna...

KEITH: Do they pay out on those?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Oh wow.

AUSTIN: Oh yeah, definitely, right?

KEITH: I guess it's anything right?

ALI: [cross] If it exists, there's odds on it.

AUSTIN: [cross] Can you vote-

ART: You can't bet on political things in Las Vegas. You can do it in England though.

ALI: Oh!

AUSTIN: [Googling] Can you vote on Trump-Mueller? [pause] Like, who would win in a fight?

[Keith laughs]

AUSTIN: I wrote 'vote'. I meant 'bet'. I meant bet!

[Keith and Ali laugh]

KEITH: [laughing] Vote. Yeah, it's 2020: Trump v Mueller!

ALI: [sighs] Shut up! [laughs]

[Austin groans in the background]

ART: Oh my God. They would 100%

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

ART: Democrats are 100% stupid enough to nominate Robert Mueller.

KEITH: Oh yeah. I mean, listen, any guy who's in the news for one second saying something about Trump, someone will say: 'That Guy, 2020.' That dumbass lawyer who I didn't know who he was for six months...

AUSTIN: Oh my god, we're not gonna talk about that asshole. That dude sucks!

ALI: Yeah...

AUSTIN: The only thing I wanna say. The only thing, that I wanna say is that, in trying to research whether or not you could bet on the outcome of the Mueller investigation, I wound up on a site called Dawgman!

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: D-A-W-G-M-A-N. Which seems to be a CBS Sports sub-brand for... Washington?

ALI: Mmm.

AUSTIN: For College of Washington, Washington College. Um, and there's an off-topic thread here that just says: 'Unleashed'! And I love that they are leaning into Dawgman and just, they just wanna take him off the leash! You know? They really do. They really really do. Um...

KEITH: It's 2018. It's time to lean into Dawgman.

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: Finally. Finally. Anyway, that's where I get all my political news is from moosewhosails2 over on the Dawgman forums.

[background laughter]

AUSTIN: But we're not here to talk about politics. We're here today to talk about roleplaying games and the people who play them. First up, Nelson, who has a question. Nelson says: **'One of my favourite things about Friends at the Table is how vibrant the NPCs are. It seriously feels that any one of them would be a PC in any other campaign. And most of them seem to hint at a larger world and context. My NPCs have tended to be more functional than memorable and I want to really up my game. I often have sets of characteristics or quirks and names on hand to assemble on the fly. But over a dozen adventurers... adventures, only two or three have stood out. Do you have any tricks on how to bring NPCs to life or help make them exciting as characters?**' Uh, my first gut thing here is, like, it's totally okay to have dozens of NPCs and only have two or three really stick out. I think it is easy when you're listening to a show to think more of them stick out as an audience member but I don't know for y'all as players, like, the ones who stick out... maybe each of you has one that sticks out or something, but like, there are plenty of background characters who don't get any development in our shows and who aren't like, particularly dynamic or vibrant. Um, so 1: don't beat yourself up for it. Um, and then 2: I have three rules. Here's my three rules - these aren't real rules, but here's three... three tips.

KEITH: These are Austin's new rules.

AUSTIN: New rules!

KEITH: New rules!

AUSTIN: New rules!

[Ali laughs]

KEITH: That Guy, 2020.

AUSTIN: An armadillo is not an anteater. New rules.

[Keith laughs]

ART: New no-no's!

AUSTIN: New... [breaks into laughter] I forgot about new no-no's! Oh boy.

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: Can we just listen to that? That can be our tips. People should look up 'new no-no's'. Um, these are not tips in the sense of like, and then you give them this voice and then you do this. These are really broad things. Um, one is to lean into characters that your players automatically respond to. Most of the time, the characters who wind up being interesting for my players are not the ones that I would have written out and been like: 'Ah, they are really going to respond well to Primo, the dude who makes like, tools for Samothes or who helps out.' You know what I mean? Or like, um, you know, this happens all the time, right? Like, Lazer Ted is such an obvious example here which is like, I didn't even design Lazer Ted. Lazer Ted came up in play and then the response to Lazer Ted was like: 'Okay, keep investing time here.' Uh, GMs often do the opposite of this and they have favourite characters and they are like: 'I'm going to get this fucker over-

[Ali chuckles]

AUSTIN: - This is the true star of my campaign and I'm gonna push them until they fucking love it and that is the worst. So, resist that urge and really lean into characters that you see your players automatically responding well to. Let me tell you the second piece of advise, which is going to immediately make me sound like a hypocrite. Lean into characters that you enjoy playing. [chuckling] I know I just said don't do that but that's not really what I just said. What I just said was like, not to invest time into characters you think are important, or that you want to be important. When you are having a good time playing an NPC, it will bring the table on board, because you will be- it will be infective. Uh, infectious. It will be a situation where people will care about what that character has to say because you are there, you are embodying a character in that space. Even if it's someone they fucking hate, right? Even if it's Ibex, even if it's Arrell. It's the sort of thing where like, if you're having fun being that asshole, you will get a rise out of people. Whereas I've played plenty of villains who have nothing going on really and that I didn't really feel that close to or I didn't really have like, a great connection to. And so, the first

chance I could to move on, and put that camera somewhere else, do it. My last thing is, make them say 'no' for a good reason. Um, the thing that makes NPCs feel dynamic is that they want things. They have their own agendas and they have the ability to get them. And that's all good stuff, but one of the things that happens in roleplaying games all the time is that characters who should not be interested in being dragged around the world on an adventure are all too happy to do that. And so when you look at characters like, uh, Morning's Observation or Devar, or Orth, a lot of them are characterised by their unwillingness to be part of some fucking bullshit.

[Ali laughs]

KEITH: Who's uh, god, who's the guy who we went to the archives with? What's his name?

AUSTIN: Devar.

KEITH: Oh, you said that already.

AUSTIN: Yeah, Devar was like that all the time, right?

KEITH: Same page, yeah.

AUSTIN: Devar was constantly like: "Yo! N-No! I'm not... No, we're not gonna take this undead dude with us! Why would we do that? Like, he might be a good zombie. That's chill. Awesome. Good for him.'

KEITH: 'We're gonna get in trouble!'

AUSTIN: [laughing] Yeah, like people have bills to pay. People have rent due. People have families to care about. And they're scared of things. And that injects a feeling... Two things. One - especially in campaigns where the player characters are supposed to adventurous and different - it brings them down to earth, or it can bring them down to earth. Um, and then Two: it can kind of like, help flesh out and contextualise what they're doing in a way that like, gives them a perspective character that they can see grow and change and like, can come to accept what they're doing as necessary even if it seems outlandish, which is like the Morning's Observation thing for sure. But from y'all, what about you as people who both have had run games and played in GM-less games, and also as players, what do you think makes NPCS stand out?

ALI: Um, I think it's what you covered a little bit where it's just like, to kind of make an NPC stand out you just kind of have to play as them and like, see what chemistry lands.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ALI: Because just like, just having the opportunity of letting them interact with the character and see if anything sticks is like, how you meet actual people-

AUSTIN: Right. Right!

ALI: - in terms of just like having a conversation and whatever else.

KEITH: Which is also like the other side of the coin of, Austin, your second point, which is like: you said 'When you enjoy playing a character people will get on board because you're having fun'-

AUSTIN: Yep.

KEITH: - And the same thing goes in the other direction where, when we are having fun with a character then it amplifies that character too... like, it just-

AUSTIN: Yeah!

KEITH: It gives- When we interact with a character more it gives them more time to be that character...

AUSTIN: To be developed on the screen, yeah absolutely.

KEITH: Yeah.

ART: [cross] Um...

KEITH: [cross] For me, it's like when I... Sorry, Art. Um, you can go.

ART: No no, go ahead. You *were* talking.

KEITH: Oh, um... My uh... That's true. Good point.

[Austin laughs]

KEITH: [jokingly] Okay, Art. Good point.

[laughter]

KEITH: Uh, just... If something... If a character is doing something that I think is funny, even in a really minor way, it does a lot - like, not even just like: 'is being goofy' - but um... Do you remember the name - this is a long shot - do you remember the guy who serves us juice in Twilight Mirage? The jelly juice?

AUSTIN: No, no I do not. I don't know that I remember his name at all but he was very...

KEITH: There was... I can't remember how we got to it-

AUSTIN: I know how we-

KEITH: - if you just wanted somebody to offer us a drink. Or-

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: - if we'd said something that made you bring a character on-screen...

AUSTIN: You were in the hotel. You were in the Solid Gold Club or the Pure Gold or whatever.

ALI: Lily's... The Professor...

AUSTIN: Nuh-uh-

ALI: No?

AUSTIN: - It wasn't. It was in that city. It's in Sculpture City-

ALI: Ohhh...

KEITH: Yeah, it's before that.

AUSTIN: - It's in Public Person's bar and like, grad school club.

ALI: [laughing] Okay.

AUSTIN: It was like, where they were staying in Sculpture City. They went through the bouncer, the bouncer announced them all, they go inside and this person - this waiter - takes their bags and is like: [nervous, quiet voice] 'Oh, can I get you anything to drink? Do you guys need anything to drink?'

[Ali laughs]

KEITH: Yeah, and that was just like, being offered a drink I thought was funny-

AUSTIN: [chuckling] Right!

KEITH: - so I kinda leaned into it, so... And then that is one of my most memorable scenes I think, at least of pre-Miracle was the... was just the juice joke!

AUSTIN: Just like all of that whole sequence was really good.

KEITH: Yeah! Yeah.

AUSTIN: Um, Art.

ART: Yeah, I think there's definitely something to like, let the characters come to the players, especially if it's like... someone who starts as like, a somewhat smaller figure and grows and grows. Someone that you know if gonna like, be around for a little bit can like grow into it.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally.

ART: But for like, for single-use characters, you want to swing for the fence with them. I think you need to like kind of go with a little bit of improv-y-ness and - if they have a thing that's interesting about them-

AUSTIN: Yep.

ART: - you have to get it out quick. Because if it's... if you're like: 'I have like, this character I wanna do for the shopkeeper' and then you don't do it right away, there's a chance it's like: 'Okay, one dagger. Bye.'

[laughter]

ART: Like, you to...

AUSTIN: [laughing] Yeah, totally! My favourite Friends at the Table scene is the dagger-shopping!

[Ali laughs]

ART: You need to like... If you have a thing, it needs to come quick before they just like, walk away from that person.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah, totally. Especially if you're playing in the sorts of games that it sounds like you're playing in or like, you have lots of NPCs, you only have brief moment to get those across and I would say like, there's something in a line... There's something between what all of you have said that I think does this too which is just: think about ways to communicate their character and who they are before they open their mouths by... Through descriptions of things they're doing. I do lot's of like: 'Okay, this person's looking through a bunch of paperwork when

you show up' or 'This person is cleaning glasses at the bar' or whatever it is. Again, very improv-y right? Like, what is the action that is happening that communicates who they are? Um... Which episode of Masks is up? Did they go to the fucken...

KEITH: 2. Part 2's up.

AUSTIN: But 0 was part 0?

KEITH: Oh...

AUSTIN: So there's definitely been the roller carts? Roller carts, are we...

ALI: Yeah. Yes yes yes.

AUSTIN: Okay. So I think about like those people, when I described the roller cart place, I think I did my best to like, set that stage and describe what the dude who runs the roller carts place was wearing, right? Um, and describe the way he spoke. And get it out so quick, like Art said. And I think it's that combination of like, describe what they're doing, describe what they're wearing and then, you know... It doesn't have to be like, a funny voice necessarily right? But make them sound like a person who is confident in the way they sound or who - if they're not confident - is the way they sound, is genuinely the way they sound. Um...

KEITH: Um, I think there's something to be said like, you know, it's a roleplaying game and so, we talk about roleplaying a lot-

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

KEITH: - but there's something to be said for remembering that you're acting. Uh... Like-

AUSTIN: Hmm, yes. Yes.

KEITH: - or like, remembering that you're trying to be convincing about what you're doing.

AUSTIN: Yeah. It's so funny because this is uh... Keith, one of the conversations that's come up multiple times with you. I think Art. All of us have had, at some point on a Tips question, someone has said like: 'Hey, when you were mad on the show, were you really mad? Were you actually mad?

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: Um, and... You know, I think - on the spectrum of responses - we've been all over the place, right? Like, there've been people who have been like: 'No, I'm just really in character' or like: 'This is how my character would've responded' to like: 'You know, I could feel my blood

pressure going up. I could feel the pulse quickening and when I'm embodying my character, I'm embodying my character' etc. etc. etc.

KEITH: Yeah man, when you yell - even if you're faking it - like, you're body-

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: - is like reacting to that.

AUSTIN: And so, for me, when I think of the moments when I got close to that, it is with some of my favourite characters. It is with... It's the first Morning's Observation talk in Twilight Mirage where it's going between like 'really vulnerable, weird, talk about what his history is as being like, as being convinced to join the military' to basically shouting at you and insulting you. Um, and it's Three Conversations. It's Ibex talking to the party in Counter/WEIGHT. And that conversation was especially - that *long* conversation at the centre of that episode - was this thing were it's like: 'Okay, I'm going to be this character for 20, 30 minutes. I need to buy in. And in order to buy in, they have to want things the way people want things. They have to be like, willing to be confident that they are right and the party is wrong. Or that the party is right and then they're there to support the party. Whatever it is, like, they need to... You need to be able to anticipate what a realistic or at least a dramatic response would be from those characters. And the way to do that is to have a really good understanding of their headspace. But that's for session 7, not for session 1, you know? Morning's Observation was: he had a laser-sword and a ray gun and a trenchcoat and was a hacker, right? That is Morning's Observation on episode one.

ART: There's this idea that like, if you're gonna be a successful GM, you have to have like, all these character voices! And all of this work.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm

ART: And that's just not true. You need to do way less than you think to convey these different characters because like, most people you meet are not, you know, the over-the-top Italian... you know-

AUSTIN: [cross, unclear] Push-cart. Yeah, uh-huh

ART: [cross, also unclear] - It's a shop[?] man, you know and everyone's not like: [extremely Italian-American accent] 'Eyy! What's-a- What're ya doin' with the dragon ovah there!?' You know that's...

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: [making the 'stop' noise]: Mm-mm mm-mm mm-mm! Jonah Hill gif. Nah, nah nah nah. [laughs]

ART: But I think you should sort of like, have your SNL audition in the back of your head-

ALI: [maybe ironically] Mmm.

ART: - you know that like, famously that to um... To audition for SNL, you need three characters...

AUSTIN: [laughing] Sorry, IceCreamJones in the chat just said 'Italian Elon Musk' and now I'm just laughing. Is that one of your three-

[Keith and Ali laugh]

KEITH: [Italian Elon Musk voice] These batteries! Ayy!

[laughter]

AUSTIN: Art, continue.

ART: That like, you should have like the: 'These are the three different ways I can sound.'

AUSTIN: Mmm.

ART: And if you cycle through those with your like, different character point of views you'll get there.

AUSTIN: Yep. For me, it's like 'Southern', it's 'higher-pitched' and it's like 'Iron Bull from [laughs] from uh, Dragon Age'. No, it's... And that's the other thing is like, you will eventually have fun finding those characters. I do a lot of walking around my neighbourhood and trying on voice, but not because they're silly voice - because I want to know what the cadence is more than the voice, you know what I mean?

ART: And because you want people not to talk to you on the street.

AUSTIN: Also, it'd be nice is people left the fuck alone! I'm busy!

[Art laughs]

AUSTIN: Alright, you want to hop into the next question?

ALI: Mm-hmm!

AUSTIN: Okay, this one comes in from Jenny who says: **'How do you approach role-playing characters with different skills than you. I realised with a slight panic between my character creation and our first play session that my D&D character is super high in charisma while I am possibly the least charismatic person on the planet! So that is going to be an interesting challenge. Some stuff is more concrete though, like Art designing mechs despite not being - as far as I know - an artist or an architect. Obvious, mechanically, if you rolled it, you did it. But how do you make something you don't know how to do narratively satisfying as you all consistently do so well?'** Thank you, Jenny. Turn that over to y'all first. Maybe Art, even, since Art you were asked here specifically with Grand Mag stuff.

ART: Sure. But Keith knows that um, I did a bad job answering this... I was looking at this question before we started-

AUSTIN: Oh, okay!

KEITH: Yeah. Um, Art if you don't mind, can I do a joke that I wasted on- before we were recording?

ART: Yeah yeah, get that joke out here!

KEITH: Let's pretend that... Okay, here's- this is my- Let's pretend that this is the first reaction to this: [clears throat] Uh, I actually can do everything all my characters can do... up to and including turning into animals.

ALI: [impressed] Hmm!

KEITH: There we go.

AUSTIN: That's a good way to do it I guess.

KEITH: Mm-hm. Yeah, so just maybe only play characters that you can do and make sure that you cultivate some skills like turning into animals.

AUSTIN: That's the big one, right?

ALI: Mm-hm!

KEITH: Or magic-casting, casting magic. Um, or being like the best swordsman.

AUSTIN: The best one.

KEITH: Can you just be the best swordsman, you know, the best one.

AUSTIN: Well listen, Jenny is already the best 'Least charismatic person on the planet'.

KEITH: Oh yeah! That's actually-

ART: Oh my god!

KEITH - a really great angle for a character! Sometimes the least charismatic people are incredibly charismatic.

AUSTIN: That's what I think, in my opinion.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: IMO.

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: [cross] Jenny, I'm sure you're not the least charismatic-

KEITH: [cross] It's fascinating how uncharismatic some people can be [laughs].

AUSTIN: Um... Alright, it's a good bit. Jenny, I'm so certain that you are not the least charismatic person on the planet. Uh, But also...

ART: Yeah, it's such an audacious claim that it's...

AUSTIN: In it's claim...

KEITH: It's a charismatically...

AUSTIN: Right! That you would even say such a thing proves...

[Keith laughs]

ART: Yeah, the least charismatic person in the world is like, pretty confident of their charisma-

AUSTIN: Is the one who says they're the most charismatic person!

ART: Yeah!

AUSTIN: Italian Elon Musk! The least charismatic person in the world.

ART: [Italian Elon Musk voice] Eyy! I tell you about my day! We...

[Ali sighs]

AUSTIN: This is bad. This isn't good.

KEITH: [Italian Elon Musk voice] Unions Smunions!

AUSTIN: Alright. Yeah. Uh-huh.

ALI: [laughing] Tonight's episode is so political!

[Keith and Ali laugh]

ART: [Italian Elon Musk voice] I put the unions in the pizza and I eat it!

AUSTIN: It's not good! We all have to stop this!

ALI: Um, so...

AUSTIN: Ali, thank you!

ALI: Hey. Hey! So...

KEITH: Yeah Ali, what's your Italian Elon Musk?

ALI: [laughs] Uh... This is difficult because I definitely need to research a bunch of boat stuff. And then there was a second thing that I was like: 'Oh, I should look this up!' And I've forgotten what it was so I'm gonna be bad at that when that comes up. I think something for this- there's two things. Um, roleplaying is a conversation and sometimes it's okay to like, just let the game be a conversation again and just like, try to describe what's happening instead of like-

AUSTIN: Mm-hm

ALI: - 'I'm gonna try to talk to this person' [laughs] 'and it's gonna go really badly! Because I don't know how to be charismatic. That's a time where you can hit a switch and be like: 'Okay like, you know, the scene in this movie where someone's charismatic and they do this thing.'

AUSTIN: Yep

ALI: Like, that's a great way to do it!

AUSTIN: That's the thing that happens. Yeah.

ALI: Or it's just like talk through what this scene actually is, instead of trying to do the like, 'Okay, we're roleplaying right now' sort of thing. Um...

AUSTIN: One of the things that happens in movies a lot is: you don't hear the conversation and music is playing. And you just get like, a shot from across the bar and you - the viewer - goes like: 'Oh, this is seduction happening!' But it's hard to write good like, sexy seductive dialogue. And sometimes you don't even need it, you know? You just need 'Okay, seduction is happening.' And so, when you roll that charisma, you don't necessarily need to be zoomed in all the way. Uh, Ali...

KEITH: Back before they had dialogue or music, they would just write on a little card: 'Seduction is happening.'

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: That is what they did. Uh-huh! That happened right in between. That was the silent movie era, yeah. Um anyway, Ali, sorry. Continue.

ALI: Oh, I think I was done.

AUSTIN: Oh, okay.

ART: Alright, so I was looking at this question before we started and I was sitting here in the room with Jess and I was reading this question. I was like: 'I really don't know how to answer this question. Just pretend you know how to do the thing.' Because I am not always good at talking about my process [laughs]

AUSTIN: Uh-huh!

ART: Um...

AUSTIN: So you're doing it now is what you're telling me.

ART: No, I'm about to tell you that Jessica answered this question for me.

AUSTIN: Oh great, shout outs to Jess!

ART: [laughing] Um, Yeah. Well, she was like: 'That's not true. Here are some thing that you do.'-

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: I hear this in her voice so clearly!

KEITH: Yep! Yup!

ART: - 'You talk about things that you don't know how to do using the language of the things you do know how to do.'

AUSTIN: Hmmm. Mm-hm!

ART: That like: 'You talk about building a mech the same way you talk about doing the stuff you do. About writing. About, you know, doing Friends at the Table. That kind of stuff. You do have a common groundwork and it's important to just find your common groundwork wherever that is.

AUSTIN: I mean, that is 'Animal out of Context', right?

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Like, that whole conversation that we have in that episode is a *lot* of: 'Alright...' Like, you know, I can't say for sure off the top of my head. Um... But I'm pretty sure the way that that conversation goes is like, you start by saying: 'Listen, I have no idea what it's like to be an exile prince. But...' And then you build from that and wind up with... We get to 'Animal out of Context', right? We get to talking about the Japanese Emperor. We get to talking about 'What's a lion look like?' Blah blah blah, 'to someone who's never...' And you know, that stuff works. And so yeah, I think grounding it in skill sets that you can talk adequately about, especially when it's common things that you know that other people at the table either know about or that they are common enough that you can make that bet, you know? Cooking metaphors go a long way.

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: A lot of people have driven places, you know? A lot of people have... And it can sound really silly, but like, you know, describe yourself as an aggressive driver. Describe yourself as someone who's added a little bit too much spice to the soup, right? Say that like, you know- or you added just the right amount of spice to the soup, you know? Those things - those metaphors - can do a lot.

ART: Well, charisma is a lot of things, right? You've known charismatic people who are very outgoing and very big and the centre of every conversation. You've known charismatic people who are less like that - who are aloof and kind of played back and draw you into them, and that's also charisma. You've found people charismatic in your life that have had, you know, honestly mediocre personalities but have been insanely attractive.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ART: Like, charisma manifests in a lot of ways, and you can probably pick one of them to be your style of charismatic. Don't pick the last one. That's boring-

[Ali laughs]

ART: - for a roleplaying game. I just wanted to have like, a third thing. It's really important for me.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's why you're charismatic, because you know the rule of threes. [laughs]

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Uhh, Keith. Do you have any thoughts here? Oh - you already told me you can do all the things your characters can do, but imagine you couldn't.

KEITH: Yeah, sorry I have no... Imagine I couldn't. Hmm.

AUSTIN: But you know what?

KEITH: So I guess that that would have a lot to do with the answer to the question, right?

AUSTIN: It would! It would in fact... The thing I remember is, one time, you said - we were playing a game; it was called Lazers and Feelings - and we were like: 'You should play the sexy doctor! Or sexy whatever the fuck- captain?' Whatever you were.

KEITH: Yep.

AUSTIN: I haven't listened to that game again yet. And...

KEITH: And I said 'No!'

AUSTIN: You said no! 'Cos that's not- 'I'm not a doctor!' is what you said. 'Or a captain, or whatever it is that you're trying to make me be!' And I said: 'No, you should do it!' And then what you said was...

KEITH: It was 'sexy'. That was the one that I didn't want to be.

AUSTIN: Okay, well, you did it and I think - I remember thinking - you did a very good job. And I'm curious - going into that - after you were, uh, peer-pressured into doing it [laughs] Uh, what was your process like to try to get to 'sexy doctor'? Were you looking- were you thinking about TV shows? Were you like...

KEITH: Umm... Well the problem is that I recently re-listened to that and feel like I did not do a particularly good job. Um... Doing anything except being like, pretty funny.

[Ali chuckles]

AUSTIN: Matthew Guzdial in the chat: 'Keith did an incredible job.'

ALI: Yeah, you did great. That was great

KEITH: I... [crosstalk - unclear]

AUSTIN: [cross] But also, but also, but also. This is an important thing, right? Which is like, for Jenny, who's listening: you might feel like you're doing a bad job. People around you might think you're doing an alright job.

KEITH: Yeah, that's true.

AUSTIN: And that's a tough thing to like, deal with. Because we all want to take our own words on everything, you know?

KEITH: Mm-hmm. Yeah. So I think my real answer to this question is like, um... I mean, it has a lot to do with what Ali said, which is like, if you feel like you can't do- like, you personally can't convey in real time the thing that you're meant to convey, then you can stop and like, go slow and pull back. But then the other thing is that, specifically, um, like... Everybody has things that they feel like they can't do like: 'Oh, this is like a...' Like, you can't always just be like: 'Hey, you should just act charismatic.' Because, like 'Oh, I don't even know how to act charismatic.' But, as a... So, I have a part time job as like, as a waiter. And that involves going up and like, talking to strangers all day long. And, I am not good at doing stuff like that. At work, it is super easy to go up and talk to these tables and ask what they want and joke around with them. i still can't it like, at a party.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: That's not... That is still like so not my zone. So...

ART: Have you thought about asking people at parties what they would like to eat for dinner?

ALI: That would kill.

AUSTIN: That would... Oh my god.

ALI: [cross] That would kill at a party.

KEITH: [cross] That would go over really well. But I would have to have that stuff ready to go.

AUSTIN: [cross] Have you thought about saying: 'Would you like anything to drink? We have this jelly juice. It's incredible.'

[laughter]

KEITH: But that... So... I guess like - while you're, you know, tempering things with pulling back and making sure you get across what you're trying to get across by like, by slowing things down - charisma is one of those things like, not just in movies but also in interviews, actors have made a career of being not particularly charismatic but pretending to be-

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: - All the time, you know? Like it's- and it's a hard thing to do, but you can learn - even situationally - 'here's how to be a charismatic person.' Or, 'here's how to do the charisma thing.'

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: Um, and it might not make you a charismatic person. Like, I can't talk to people at a party the way I can talk to people when I'm doing my waiting tables job, but it might help at the roleplaying table. So that's, I don't know, something.

AUSTIN: Totally. No, that makes perfect sense. And I'll say a lot of this, also, a lot of the NPC conversation we just had before, actually applies here too. Think about - and this goes back to what Art was saying - there's lots of ways to be charismatic. Figure out the way yours' is - and it can feel campy to say this - but like, figure out a category of actions that your character does to produce their charismatic uh, actions or like, the category of charisma that they're in. And, I'm not saying: 'Come up with a list of like, ten ways to be charismatic or whatever.' But like, is it smouldering? Is it different looks they can give? Is it, uh, the witty comebacks they do? Is it the way that they smile? Like, whatever that is, think about that and then go to that- return to it a couple, multiple times because it will eventually become your character's like, go-to signal in a sense, right? Where it's like, 'Oh shit! Jenny, you know, is rolling charisma! What's gonna happen. And you roll a success, that when you describe what happens, you're like: 'I break out a special grin. Like, I know you've seen me grin before but you've never seen me grin like this.' And that will- That *will* kill at the table, I promise.

[Ali chuckles]

KEITH: Um, I have one more thing for this-

AUSTIN: Yes!

KEITH - that I just remembered. The other thing- so like, the idea behind being charismatic is that you're- is that like, upon meeting you, strangers have like, positive feelings towards who you are, right? That's- or maybe not even directly positive, but like, just having some sort of... We all know what charisma feels like. The good thing about playing a tabletop game is that everybody that's with you already knows you and likes you.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

KEITH: And so it's really easy to pretend to be charismatic because you've already sold them on you. They're already your friends. And so, if you're out there trying to be charismatic, it's not going to be like: 'Who's this stranger trying to be charismatic?'

[Ali chuckles]

KEITH: It's like: 'Oh, this is my friend, Jenny, who I like already.

AUSTIN: I will say, as someone who's played in other groups, and not been as lucky, sometimes you end up with a motherfucker with a high charisma score who is not someone you like. And that...

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: The best you can hope for is- and vice versa, you can be the person at the table who has the highest... I played a bard in college. I know some of them didn't like me.

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: Uh, and the best you can do is like, hope that the social contract of the game holds up [laughs]. Because the last thing you want - and this is a threat - is like, someone who you do not like...

KEITH: Hold on, wait, this is a threat?

AUSTIN: This is- [evil voice] And this is a threat... Jenny.

[Laughter]

ART: Listen up, Jenny!

AUSTIN: [laughs] We are very punchy today. I like it. We um... is that somebody can just try to call your bluff on it and at that point like, it just really needs to be the GM has- needs to be able to remind people, like - this goes out to you, GMs - if somebody at your table has an 18 charisma, remind the party that they have an 18 charisma sometimes, you know? Like, 'Hey, no,

for real...' This is part of the Lem King thing, right? Which is like, Lem has a really good charisma, which is why he gets away with so much bullshit.

KEITH: It's also the sort of flip side of the Fero thing, which is: Fero does *not* have a high charisma.

AUSTIN: No, not at all.

KEITH: And no one treats him like he does.

AUSTIN: No, he's constantly being stonewalled.

ART: Although we're sort of in an interesting point with that, right? Because part of Lem's reception I think somewhat by the players, and certainly by the audience, is that Jack is very charismatic.

AUSTIN: Has very high charisma. Totally. Totally. I mean, I think that's part of making a radio show and needing to deal with that. it's tough. Because Jack is not playing... It's weird, because like, I think Jack plays Lem as very charismatic because we've seen Jack playing characters who are a little less that, right? Audy- Audy still has high charisma because Jack does, you're right! But, we don't- there's no expectation that people in the world of Counter/WEIGHT should like Audy, right? Whereas, it is hard to conceive of people in the world of Hieron not responding well to Lem on first blush because 'Ah, it's Lem! Ah, Lem King.' You know? Um, alright...

KEITH: It's only once you get to know him...

AUSTIN: That's- that's the time.

[Ali chuckles]

AUSTIN: When you learn about like, all the shit he's gotten up to. Alright, next question. From Nathan: **'Something that often comes up in tabletop games - at least for me - is the pause after the GM says: 'What do you do?' or something similar to the group. I feel the need to break the awkward silence but I worry about always being the first to speak. I worry people will think I'm trying to make myself the leader of the group, or that I think my character and ideas are more important, or that people will just think I'm being rude. Is this a problem with me as a player? Is this just my anxious brain being an anxious brain? Have you ever had problems with players putting their characters over others? Does the idea of leadership positions ever come up in Friends at the Table parties or groups you've played with outside of the show?'** Um...

KEITH: Hi, I have the first answer!

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: Okay.

KEITH: Yeah, you should be worried about that I think. I worry about it and it's because I have a problem speaking first. I do it too often.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh! But you know that-

KEITH: I'm a big talk- I talk a lot.

AUSTIN: - and we talk about it. Yeah.

KEITH: Yeah. Um, I do my best. It's always in my head. If you... I'm sure there are plenty of people who are worried about this and they don't have to be. But there's not a real problem with worrying about it, even if you don't really need to be.

AUSTIN: Right, in other words, if you're worried about it and you don't need to be, it's probably still okay. As long as you're still being talkative to some degree at the table, right?

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Like, that's- As long as it's not keeping you from speaking.

KEITH: Yep. But this is a problem I've been dealing with since I was five years old. Um, it's been 26 year. I mean, 16 years. Um... 21 years.

AUSTIN: How old are you??

KEITH: I'm 26.

ART: Are you 21? Are you 19? How...

KEITH: [laughing] I am twenty- I *am* 26. And then I- so I said the years that I was alive-

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: -and then I remembered: 'Oh, I said five!' And then did some bad math.

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: Gotcha. I want- I need you to know: I at one point thought you were 31 and at a different point thought you were 21, so...

[Keith laughs]

KEITH: Yeah, so, you know. I think being worried about it is a good sign. I try to mentally keep track of how many times I have gone first, and it's not that difficult of a thing to do.

ALI: Yeah. I feel like that's my rule of thumb is that like: If there's been a pause- If there's been like, at least five seconds before anyone has talked, you have fair game.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: If you've talked the first time for three times, just check, you know? [laughs] Like,

KEITH: I would even say, there have been times where there's a five second pause and I'm still like: 'Well, I had the last three things so, I will wait for ten minutes if I have to!'

[Ali laughs]

KEITH: And I can't. But I do think that I should try.

AUSTIN: This is also something from the GM's side. Um, here's a tip again for GMs - GM's at home, listen up. When this happens - when this happens when you hear respond first three times - frame a situation that only one person can respond to and make it not be the person who's responded three times in a row. Or, even, just say: 'Uh, Ali, what are you doing?'

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: I know Keith is here, but I'm asking Ali: 'What are *you* doing?' I wanna see on the screen what Ali is doing right now. That's my prerogative as the GM, is to ask a player what they are doing. And it puts them in a spot, but it's like teacher calling on a specific student: sometimes you know a student good but they're afraid to say it. Um, and you pull it out. You go like: 'Okay, let's- I'm giving you the spotlight! Like, say the damn thing cause I know it's good!' Uh, and it'll be good! And so that is like, on the GM's side, like, be willing to put your players- to pass the spotlight around. And to do that actively. You are not a neutral observer to the party. you're the director of the show you're producing, even if you're not making a real show. Um, so that's partially on you to make that that stuff's fair, you know?

ART: Um, I think I really started being a better player when I was just like: 'I'm never gonna speak first again.'

AUSTIN: Hm.

ART: And I don't know that I've succeeded that. In fact, I almost certainly haven't. But like...

KEITH: Sorry Art, what did you say? I dropped for a sec.

ART: Oh, I thought you were doing a bit.

AUSTIN: Me too.

[Ali laughs]

KEITH: No no no, I really didn't hear you!

ART: I was like trying to figure out how to do that bit back at you and was really struggling.

KEITH [laughing] No, not a bit!

ART: Um, which is that... Oh, I said that I think I really started to like, grow as a player when I decided that I was never gonna try to speak first again.

AUSTIN: What led you to that decision?

ART: I mean, I definitely think it was a problem I had.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ART: I think I was the kind of person who always wanted to go first. And I think that there's like, something to being patient.

AUSTIN: Right. That's my real question, I guess, is like: when did you- what did you get out of it in this way, in terms of like- how did it improve your skill as a roleplayer?

ART: I think it like, lets- it lets your character be less... I wanna say like: 'It lets your character be less impulsive' but I've impulsive characters and still don't want to talk first.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ART: Um... I don't know what it is. I guess it's just like- And maybe that's like a part of this, just like: I don't wanna be doing that... I want to say: 'I don't wanna be doing that work'. I don't think it's like a- I don't think it's laziness that compels me to do this.

[Ali and Austin chuckle]

ART: Um, I don't know. But I think there's something to just like, having that- to just letting other people go, and then whatever you say sounds a little more considered-

AUSTIN: Yeah. That's 100% true.

ART: - even if it isn't. Which is why I think it's important sometimes to be like: 'I'm gonna pitch this idea and I know it's bad.'

[Ali laughs]

ART: Um, but yeah, just like, giving yourself just all of the beats. Giving- none of like, giving yourself a beat, giving yourself time for a person to do their whole thing-

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: - I think is like, very valuable.

AUSTIN: Um, Ali: what do you think here?

ALI: Um, yeah I mean- Like I said, I think like, if there's been a pause already, you're probably good. But you should probably like - again, if you think you think you've done it like three times in a session, like either try to sit back or-

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: -be like: 'Oh, I have an idea but if people want to think a bit first', you know? That's a good one too because I feel like a lot of times I'll be at the table and I'll like, have half an idea-

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: - And need the other half. And like, just speaking in that case is fine. But like, if I was A: trying to speak first, and B: not open to be like: 'Hey, I, you know, I need help with this thing that I wanna do, to talk through this idea that I have-'

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: - Um, it would be harder and messier and less fun to play.

AUSTIN: That hits something else really good, which is that you don't have to be the first person to act, just because you're the first person to speak. You can - and people at this table have done this before, and I'm always really impressed and happy when it happens - is when, there is clearly the awkward pause because no one has a good idea and someone - someone else at the table - says: 'I'm not really sure what we should do.' Or like, um: 'Hey Keith, what do you think?' You know, 'What's Hadrian doing in this moment?' 'What's Hella up to?' Like, who can actually be the person who does that instead of the GM, or says like: 'Ooh, I have a kind of okay

idea but I'm not sure', like you said, Ali. Or... Even just like: 'Oh, I fucking hate this guy', right? Because that disperses the energy and gets us back to: roleplaying games are a conversation, right? That doesn't mean- conversations are not dialogues. It is not - shout outs to our incredible transcription team, to the volunteer- they're paid but... To the people who are volunteering their time- not volunteering. People who are giving their time. This is hard.

KEITH: People who are volunteering to be paid [everyone laughs] for transcribing.

AUSTIN: For transcribing. Shout outs to the transcribers. But, not everything said- not every single thing is a clean transcription in the sense of like: 'Hella says blank. Hadrian says blank.' And then, and then 'Samothes says blank.' Is is - and this is part of their job, right, as transcribers is like: 'No, okay, there's a side-note here where Ali says something, that's absolutely not what Hella is saying.' And like, that is part of what that is, right? And so, roleplaying games are not just characters talking back and forth or describing their actions. It's players having a loose conversation, often talking over each other, often... So actually what I mean is *apologies* to the transcribers [laughs] who have to deal with our fucking crosstalk and out-of-character talk and every other thing, right? Um, so just like, if their anxiety of the void of sound is too high, you can say something that is not what your character is doing and that is okay. Um, the other thing I wanted to say here is - I thought about it while everyone else was answering - and I remembered in- just after Counter/WEIGHT or towards of Counter/WEIGHT, um... This was actually, maybe it wasn't towards the end. It was actually towards the beginning of Counter/WEIGHT now that I'm thinking about it, I started playing in other peoples' games again, for the first time in forever. I was playing in - at the time - Adam Koebel's Apocalypse World game with some other folks, who were great. And it was the first time I'd been playing in a roleplaying game that I wasn't running in probably a decade, right? At least in five years, because I was in- it was my last year of being at Western University and the last time I'd played in even a one-shot that I wasn't running was when I was working at a comics shop and games store in Jersey before I moved to California five years prior. And I immediately... Part of being the GM is like: you can take the microphone whenever you want, even if it's a bad idea. Um, and so my immediate gut was like: [self-confident voice] 'I need to be talking all the time!' Like, 'Hell yeah! I got good ideas! I wanna frame scenes! I wanna talk in the way I talk as a GM but as a player character. I'm a good- I'm a good player.' Um... And then I learned that no one cared about that. And so, what I realised was: one of the best ways to make your scenes mean something and to make your voice mean something is to listen a lot - is to listen to what other people's ideas are, to build on those ideas quietly. To support other player action. And to kind of, choose your moment to strike and choose your moment to take the spotlight. And be the punctuation instead of the verb. And then when it's time for you to be the verb... Shit. Like, alright. It's time to go! Like, when it *is* time to go first. When you *do* decide to take the spotlight... You've already spent all this time setting up other people's stuff and helping them get what they want, and letting the camera hang on them, that it can mean a lot more. And also, it will just be better informed, because you will have been being a *very* active listener. So when I think about playing characters, in Adam's games, whether that was, uh, Basil the Bastard or uh, Swift July. Any of those characters... They were always- they *became* characters who were very quiet until

they were very loud. And who always knew when it was time to be the first one to speak, and to recognise that that was mostly not all the time, right? Very charismatic characters often are characters who - I know this is a different question, but like - are characters who are not the first ones to speak when a duel is offered, or when someone breaks into the bar. They are the people who are ready to deescalate things once it's really ready to go, or are ready to capitalise when an opportunity presents itself. You're not always the first one to speak, right? And so if you want to be a leader. If you want to be a character who helps the game move forward, there are ways to do that without being the first person to speak, so... some fun, uh, some fun tips from a GM who turned player briefly.

[Ali laughs]

ALI: Um-

AUSTIN: Ali.

ALI: Just one more thing-

AUSTIN: No, totally.

ALI: - I think that there's a good flip side to that, especially where like - it's going over what you said again - but even just in player- as a character, being like: 'Okay other character, what do you think?' Like, if you're sensing this is a thing at the table where other people are anxious to talk first, you can pull them in just as easily as the GM could.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

ALI: And to take opportunity to do that cause like, then those people will be... more comfortable [laughs] you know? To kind of, be in their own shoes there. Um, Yeah.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm. Um... Agreed. Okay, next question. This one comes in from Stephanie: **'My friends and I have been playing DnD for about a year and a half now, with multiple different campaigns due to total party kills or the DM getting bored with the game we're currently playing or scheduling conflicts**.' Can I just say pause? Pause, Stephanie, sorry! I'm gonna interrupt. [Whispering] I walked out. Hm. I have to be quiet. I walked out into my living room a few nights ago and I saw a bunch of character sheets from my roommate's Torchbearer game that were impaled on like a pencil-

ALI: [Also whispering] What...

AUSTIN: - because there had been a total party kill the night before.

[Ali gasps]

AUSTIN: And in that moment, I was like... [normal speaking voice] How dare anyone say I'm a mean GM?

ART: Hmm.

AUSTIN: I'm not out here making trophies! I'm not out here like, celebrating! Um, and it clicked as I walked out earlier to like, go to the bathroom the night before and I'd overheard someone say like: 'Yo, at least we all died in a new way this time!' [laughs]

KEITH: Oh, rough!

AUSTIN: And I was like: 'Oh man, your experience of this is just not the same thing as what I do. Uh, which is fun. Um... They have fun! They- this is what they want to do. They're not- no one is being tortured there. This is fun for them. They're allowed. Anyway-

KEITH: Or they might be being tortured, but it's still fun for them.

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: Listen, my roommate makes the rent, so you know. It's New York City, so... Uh, **I've been enjoying myself when we all get together to play, but I've been wanting more character building and role-playing than I've been getting. I think part of this is because of how DnD is set up, but also because everyone I've played with has only ever played DnD. I wanna try another non-d20 system with them, but there's a couple of problems. One: I would have to GM because it's a brand new type of system that only I understand sort of because of your show. I'm a very new, not confident in my skills, GM, having only started one game of DnD and that's pre-written. And I don't know if I can actually create a campaign or world of my own, even if it's only the basic stuff. Two: I don't know that my friends who understand how to *play* a tabletop RPG that doesn't focus on combat. I don't know if they would enjoy something like that, which is hard for me because I know that I would. Do you guys have any tips on how to: One; create a world, just in general, and how to be confident in my GMing skills despite having no idea what I'm doing, and Two; how to make a campaign in a non-combat based system fun or interesting for people who are so used to DnD?'** Thoughts? I have an easy one here, which is that there are multiple steps to get towards what you want. Um, we're very lucky to be able to like, jump into the deep end here from- with people like Ali and Keith who I guess like- Ali, you'd never done any tabletop roleplaying game. Keith, you'd played DnD and then maybe a couple of other things?

KEITH: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: But like no indie stuff, right?

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Um, I was able to be like: 'Okay, I'm gonna put this in front of you and you're gonna just deal with it' and it was great.

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: But there was- You know, we had stumbling blocks early but like, we got there. But, you don't have to do that. And in fact, in some ways, we didn't. What we played was Dungeon World which - if you look at those moves - it's still very much a game about combat. [sounds of agreement from Art and Keith] Almost frustratingly so, right? Like, we kind of chafe against it in a large way. That's why we have to do things like build legal system rules and some other stuff. It isn't- it is a game where play- class moves and stuff are almost all focused on doing combat stuff. But, a game like that - what you could do is, you could take something like Dungeon World and you could take a campaign book that you haven't- you know, that you- that is for DnD and do a little work converting it without necessarily throwing out all of the world-building or all of the characters that you think are interesting or any of that stuff, right? Like, if you Google around, you can find examples of other people doing this. And you can also find examples of just straight up 'Here are some cool ways to run Dungeon World.' You know, like 'Here's a campaign setting to work inside of', right? Um, and you don't have to do it all at once. You don't have to have a whole campaign out the gate. And that's one of the nice things about Dungeon World. You start with just a simple adventure. You have a town and the town, you know, is under siege by some bandits, or someone's been kidnapped and you're gonna go rescue them. Or the Great, you know, Magical Jewel that powers all of the magical lights that keep thing safe has gone missing, and you're on a quick adventure to recover it, and everything kind of spirals out from there. You don't need to build an entire world to start playing a game, and that's one of the nicest things. Um, do y'all have any other thoughts here?

ART: Oh, your answer sounds so stressful!

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: [cross] Well what's the less stressful version?

ART: [cross] Your answer is like: 'You start with really small and a whole thing will...' I don't know. I don't know.

KEITH: I have something. And so... I don't know if this is 100% true because when I was GMing DnD 4th Edition I - and it was not elegant at all - but I did um, I guess mangle it in order to not be exactly what it was. Um, but I just think that like... I think that like, people get used to DnD and they get used to like, the way that that goes and the way that that combat is. But I don't necessarily thi- It feels to me that a game that focuses more on like, story and conversations is actually more... Not natural, but like... Conversations aren't a system.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: You know like, we all know how to do conversations. And so if you're having a game that's about talking, that's not- they have to learn the rules to the game. The rules of the talking in the game. But like, rolling- using moves and rolling dice - that's the part that is like... like a glass plate between reality and game, right?

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: Like that's the... You know? So, I don't think that anybody's gonna be confused when you're like: 'Let's tell a story.'

AUSTIN: It's tough. You know, it depends what they're... It can be tough. I will say like...

KEITH: People are resistant to it-

AUSTIN: That is it.

KEITH: - but I don't think they're literally not gonna understand what to do, you know?

AUSTIN: The experience that I've had that's really interesting is that I've had an easier time running PbtA games for people who've not played - independent roleplaying games and story games especially, in general - for people who've never played a role playing game before, or who have maybe played one once. Because when I say: 'What do you do?' They start with: 'Well, I'm gonna punch him right in the face' or 'I'm gonna climb that wall. I'm gonna jump over that wall. I'm gonna steal that tank. I'm gonna convince this giant train snake to slam into the side of Madison Square Garden to kill the rebel leader who's taken it over.' Um, they just say the thing that they want to happen, whereas a lot of people who come up through kind of, more traditional roleplaying games go 'Okay, well what abilities do I have? What spells do I know? Okay, how do I swing a sword- like, how do I roll to attack? What's my armour class?' And that can feel restrained. And so, the other thing that's really useful is like, when we did that this year, is like: Aubade had no dice in it, at all. And you can do that inside of DnD. So, here's another thing you can consider doing is like, roll- play a DnD game where you go an hour or two in a session and you maybe roll dice once. When people say like: 'Okay, I'm gonna pick the lock' and they go to roll, just say: 'Oh, it's not that big deal- the lock is open. Like, you can pick the lock no big deal.' When someone says like: 'I'm gonna try and convince this guy,' say like 'Okay, what do you say to convince him and then you as the GM say like: 'Yeah, okay, yeah that makes sense. He's just gonna buy it.' And, open up that possibility space for them and like, it can be hard to teach people to just do things in that way. Um, likewise - when someone rolls to hit - ask them to describe what it looks like. When someone, you know, decides they want to use acrobatics to get out of the way, or to escape a burning building or whatever. Have them paint the picture and get them answering the 'what do you do?' question, even in DnD. And I think

that will eventually make that transition over into PbtA games, or other types of story games, a lot easier. Ali, does this- this is interesting for you because like, you're coming at it from this other direction, right?

ALI: Yeah, I have a very specific suggestion and I don't know if it's going to work because I don't really know [laughs] traditional DnD, but I imagine it will. And I think that it's like - especially if you're nervous about being a new GM and like, having trouble getting people's headspaces to shift a little bit just do like, a side game in a campaign that you've already done-

AUSTIN: Yeah. That's good. Yeah.

ALI: - with a different system. Um, I know specifically like, if you find something that's close in terms of like, setting or if you find like a... a system with like, classes that are kind of close to what your friends play or have played in the past because like, even when we were looking at The Sprawl, I know I was like: 'God, I wish I could play Hella in this system.'

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: And like, if someone was teaching me to play the sprawl and was like, 'Hey, you could do that,' I would have loved doing that. And I think like - especially when they've had a lot of time with that character and they know kind of how that character thinks and how that character acts and how that character moves - if you say like: 'Okay, you can be this guy that you like...'

AUSTIN: God...

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: When we do... So one of the things I pitched internally a couple of times now is - in lead-up to season six, that we want to try out some systems - we should absolutely just play characters with the fuckin' serial numbers filed off. You know what I mean?

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: Like, 'This is basically Hella with a mech.'

ALI: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: [cross] This is ba- you know? Just for a one shot!

ART: [cross] Oh, that way! I was like, 'Austin, we're recording this! You can't admit to-'

AUSTIN: What?

ART: Let's just do Kylo Ren this year.

AUSTIN: There's 21 people. 20 people - someone just left! They heard that - they were like: 'I gotta get the fuck out of here!'

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: They're back. They just came back. 21 watching now. Shit! [cross] Uhm, that sounds fun. I think that's a good idea.

ART: [cross] Yeah, they went to go get their lawyer. That's Mr. Disney.

AUSTIN: [seriously] Oh shit, Mr. Disney is here! We're not using Kylo Ren sir!

[Ali laughs]

KEITH: I didn't want to anyway. That guy sucks!

AUSTIN: We're up to 22! Kylo Ren just logged on! [laughs] But no, I think that's a great idea actually. I think that that is- There's definitely... I do that in video games all the time, right? Where like, I don't know that I'm gonna play this fuckin' game for real. Let me just roll the character I always roll. And that is like, my first character. Just to like, get a feel for, you know, Dragon's Dogma. And then I'm like, 'Okay, I'm really gonna play this game. I'm gonna go back and make a custom character who I actually give a fuck about and like, is- I'm gonna care about who they and blah blah blah.' To like, learn a system, that's totally- that totally makes sense. Um, alright, anything else on this one or can we move on? Sounds like we can move on. This one comes in from Ami Kamanto - or Amy Kamanto, I'm not sure. [**I'm also not sure what the spelling on this is; sorry!**] **'Hi Friends! How are you? I'm hoping you can give me some advice on giving specific *positive* feedback. You see, a while ago, I was playing a game of Apocalypse World with some people online and, after every game, the GM would do something called 'Roses and Thorns'. I don't know if that's a standard thing for PbtA games, or is something this GM made up. But if it's not clear from the name, it's basically just the players giving the GM positive and negative feedback, where the Roses are things that you like about the session and the Thorns are the things you didn't. I found that I didn't have any trouble giving negative feedback, but even when I had a good time - which is pretty much every game, for the record - I had trouble finding good things other than 'I had fun.' I think part of the problem is that I just saw the whole thing overall as good, so it was hard to find specific positives, but any negatives stood out to me as outliers. Of course that's not super helpful to the GM, and it's also sort of made me feel like a jerk when everyone else was able to point out specific things they like and I was just left saying 'Yeah, it was pretty good.' How can I get better at noticing specific things that the GM does that are good and also just generally giving feedback. Any advice is appreciated.'**

KEITH: Has anybody seen that before? I've never seen that.

AUSTIN: [sighs/chuckles] So, I've seen - I don't know if it was called Roses and Thorns - but there's- I've seen similar sorts of feedback. Uhh like, this is the one- the one that I saw- or the one that I know... Okay, the one that I knew was a variation. So I just read this like, a couple months ago. Someone sent this to me. It was called 'Stars and Wishes', which is a softer version of Roses and Thorns.

ALI: Hmm!

AUSTIN: Or, has been criticised as thus. And the version of that is like - if I'm remembering right - stars is like: 'Hey! The GM or a player did something really cool. Take a star. Put a star on the board. You know, put a star on the homework sheet- on the test.' And a wish is like: 'I want to see this thing happen in the future', which is like an indirect way of doing negative feedback, right? In some ways, right? Or it's like: 'I really want...' Like, and this is actually super important. Ali, you gave me one of these last year. Do you remember this? This is like, maybe the most important thing that shifted Twilight Mirage halfway through, was like: 'I want to be in places where there are people.'

ALI: [laughs] Yup!

AUSTIN: Because the first two sessions- the first two arcs - or two and a half arcs - of the Beloved game was uh, in isolated places. There were NPCs to talk to and all that, but it wasn't like- it didn't have that feeling of being like, a metropolis or being like, a populated city street or whatever. And so, getting that note was *so* important for figuring out the post-Miracle stuff. It just happened to take two and a half months to get from you giving me that to note to getting to post-Miracle, because we'd already recorded everything in-between, right? Or, most stuff in-between that wasn't the holiday special. And so, Wishes I think really really help for negative feedback and just... So that's maybe one way that you can maybe not feel so much like jerk when giving that feedback, is to frame it in terms of like, future stuff that you'd be interested in. So yeah, Keith, that is what I'd seen. Uh, I did a version of this for*ever* ago. Do you remember Blue Books, Art?

ART: Yes I do.

[Ali sighs ambiguously]

AUSTIN: Do you wanna talk about Blue Books?

ART: Nothing makes fun fun like bringing test things into it!

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah.

ART: Um, did you invent Blue Books or have...

AUSTIN: No!

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: Never in my fucking life would I have invented Blue Books!

ART: I know you didn't invent Blue Books...

KEITH: [laughs] I don't what this is but it sounds like we don't like it!

AUSTIN: Frank invented Blue Books, Art.

ART: Are we allowed to say that name?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Frank?

AUSTIN: Frank.

ART: Frank.

KEITH: Oh, someone's gonna find Frank!

AUSTIN: Don't find Frank!

[Ali laughs]

ART: Frank is online.

AUSTIN: I know Frank is online. Frank's- we're friends on Facebook. I almost said Frankbook.

ART: [laughs] We were friends on Frankbook.

KEITH: Is that him? Is Frankbook him?

AUSTIN: Yeah, Frankbook was him.

KEITH: Wow, now people are definitely going to find him.

ART: So Frank Zuckerburg, our friend in college. [Austin laughs] He had blue- He gave us blue books - like you were taking a fuckin' test - to do your gameplay in, and it was for like, notes from him to you, right?

AUSTIN: It was a mix of things. So, it was notes from him to you; notes from you back to him; notes for you to take just during the session, if you just wanna like, take some notes you had a Blue Book for it; and then, postgame, it was like: 'What have you learned?'

ART: Yeah, uh-huh.

ALI: Noo.

AUSTIN: And then like, what... Like, some specific questions. It was like a very early version - we're talking about like, early; we're in like, 2003 we were doing this - it's like pre- like, endgame session rules from Burning Wheel stuff, you know what I mean? Or around that same time at least, right?

ART: Yeah, I mean he was really good at finding stuff to rip off, so there's a chance that he knew-

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: Fuck.

ALI: [cross] Yo, fuck this guy but he rules!

ART: [cross] I'm just saying, you're willing to hang out with someone, and then you're like: 'Oh my god! This is just Game of Thrones!' He just knew that no one in 2003 had read Game of Thrones!

AUSTIN: None of us knew. None of us knew, dude! None of us knew, at all! It was even in the North.

ART: Yeah, we just didn't know, because no one would know anything about Game of Thrones for another fifteen years, or however long it was.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Um, but no. In that case, yeah, that was the one thing that we- one of the ways that we definitely did do positive feedback was that. And I think the one nice thing there was taking notes during a session. If you are having trouble identifying times that the GM did a cool thing just like, jot yourself two words when a GM does a cool thing if this is a system you're using, right? Like, 'Oh wow! That's a cool character! Oh wow! I laughed.' Note when you laughed, right? Note when you get mad at an NPC, right? That is a GM doing their job right. Um, in some ways, it sounds like you have a really good GM because - like a good wrestling

match or something - when you can not longer see the artifice is when you know the performance is good. But, it can take work to identify what good GMing looks like, especially if you haven't done it.

ART: Well, there's the other part of good wrestling where you don't know if it's- where like, there's a good wrestling where you can't see the fakeness and there's the good wrestling where like, you're like really aware of the fakeness.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: Yeah. That's not important for this though.

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: No, yeah, I get you. Ali and Keith. And also Art, who didn't really answer that question so much as talk shit about Frank.

[Keith and Ali laugh]

ART: Yeah, my biggest GM tip is find some obscure that no one knows and steal it, and then see if HBO picks it up!

KEITH: Um, yeah, I don't- I'm sure that there's people who would enjoy doing this, or enjoy having it done to them but boy would I dislike being asked to do this. I hate- I hate the idea. I don't like it! I like the idea of-

AUSTIN: That's funny cause you take notes really well.

KEITH: Yeah sure, but I also like... Like, if you don't have anything to say, you don't have anything to say.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

KEITH: And like that- and then when you're setting up a situation where everybody's supposed to say something, not having something to say - or just not feeling like saying something - goes from being a neutral state to being like, a negative.

AUSTIN: Right. Right.

KEITH: You know? Like, if I feel really strongly about something, I'll like bring it up.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally. But that's just like a conversational thing versus a...

KEITH: Right. And also like, I laugh a lot in the show and so we know when I think it's funny.

[Ali laughs]

KEITH: Like, I usually - in the show - I'll say, when I like something, I'll say it while it's happening.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm. I *knew* you liked that jelly juice bit! I didn't just learn that today.

KEITH: Right, exactly! Yeah, I don't think it's a secret what people are enjoying. And then like, just being asked to be like: 'What didn't you like?' just feels like... It feels like inventing- It just feels like a totally like, superfluous negativity about- like, it doesn't feel like an opportunity to learn-

AUSTIN: Yeah...

KEITH: - because if you have to come up with something...

AUSTIN: So, I get this. And I will say this actually reminds me of some criticism I've seen of even something like 'lines and veils' and the 'X Card', which is that - if you just have a good culture at the table, you should be able to have those conversations more naturally. You should tell people what you like. Tell people where your limits are. Tell people what you want more of. Tell people what you don't want more of.

KEITH: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: And I think - even in just Roses and Thorns - I think you and I have that relationship where like, if I think I need to tell you a thing, I will tell you a thing privately, or after the session, or in the middle of a session if it's: 'Oh hey, no, we don't want to go down this path' or 'Oh hey, that was really funny! You could tell that because I'm laughing a lot.' You know what I mean, or because I'm like: 'Fuck! That's so good!' Like, how often do people hear me in an episode like, in the middle of two PCs talking, just like marking out basically, right? Just being like: 'This is the fucking best! I love our show!' So yeah, I think that - in that case - you're totally right. But I... A big one is just like, we cannot assume that everyone has the table culture that we have. That I'm grateful that we have. And that, for a lot of people, it's really hard to... We had this question, you know, about a week ago, about how to approach a player who was stealing the spotlight, who happened to be the president of the gaming club, which sucked. But...

KEITH: Wait, sorry, what happened?

AUSTIN: [Ugh/oof noises] You'll have to go listen to the last tips episode.

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: The... And I mean, that's a great case though, right? So I will actually just give you the case. Someone wrote in saying: 'Hey! There's a player in our game that steals the spotlight all the time, who wants everything to be about him. And also, he's the president of the gaming club, so there's this-

[Keith whistles]

AUSTIN: - external power thing happening here, right? And they didn't feel like - the person who wrote in - didn't feel like they had a venue for fixing that, right? Or addressing it. Something like Roses and Thorns helps formalise that, so that those people, who don't necessarily have the confidence, or the *clout*, to just make the thing happen, still have a venue for it where it has been kind of socially authorised to have that conversation and say: 'I'd really like more of this' or 'I'd really like less of this' or um, situations like that. I mean, again, I can use a specific example from this, right? We didn't use specifically Roses and Thorns but - when I was playing Burning Wheel with Adam - we did have a five or ten minute debrief after every session which was just kind of like: 'How's everyone doing? blah blah blah' and - i've told this story before - but there was a sequence in Burning Wheel in which sexual assault is referred to, and is not depicted but is kind of, much closer to the surface than we'd agreed. In fact, I had specifically asked for it to not come up in that season. And... it did. And so afterwards, because we had that formal moment when we were able to talk about the session and what we liked and didn't like, it gave me an opportunity to have that conversation with someone, and, sure, I and Adam- you know, Adam and I speak all the time, but there were players in that game where it was the first roleplaying game they'd ever played with. There were people in that game who like, had never played a roleplaying game before, knew Adam was a big deal, but didn't know... didn't know him know him, you know what I mean? Um, and so - if I had been one of those people - I would have felt really bad if I had been like: hang up the call, go home for the night, let it simmer, feel like maybe I'm the only one who feels that way, don't feel like you can a conversation with this person you don't really know. And so, there are times - and I think this is the same thing for me with like, the X Card and lines and veils - is that, yes: those are apparati that ideally should just be part of the culture first and foremost. but they also provide an opportunity for people who do not have access to the sort of, kind of, the confidence, the experience, the language like... It can be hard to know the words to say: 'Hey, you've crossed the line here.' And so having that conversation ahead of time, or afterwards, to say like: 'Hey, here are lines that are crossed' or just: 'Here's- I don't like ray guns! I thought we weren't gonna do a game with fighting ray guns! Why were there ray guns all in this- in this Renaissance Era Fiasco game? We said no fuckin' ray guns!'

[Keith laughs]

AUSTIN: Is a good- There can be value in those systems, even if - again - we do it in a more informal way. So I don't want to ever poo-poo like, the entire notion of that sort of stuff, if that makes sense.

KEITH: Yeah, I guess my - not my worry - but the thing... I want there to be space available for like... I mean, just even using Friends at the Table as an example like, for me to not like or not- there are things in the game that aren't *for me* all the time, right?

AUSTIN: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

KEITH: And so, I want there to be space for *me* to not be interested in something, and it not be a criticism.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: [cross] Like, I don't have, I don't have...

AUSTIN: [cross] I just think you just don't have to list that, right?

KEITH: Right, yeah.

AUSTIN: You don't have to say: 'That scene I wasn't in...' [laughs]

[Ali laughs]

KEITH: But if you're being asked like: 'What's all the stuff you didn't like?', right?

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: Like, 'Oh, well I didn't like this thing', it's like, not liking something isn't exactly the same as a Thorn, right?

AUSTIN: Sure. Sure.

ALI: Mm-hm.

KEITH: Um, so I guess that where- that's most of the parts that I feel weird about-

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH - Is like, don't put to many ingredients in this soup.

AUSTIN: Yeah. There's something else happening here, which is interesting, and is probably worth talking about with your GM which is: to have a system like this is to basically be being told by your GM: 'I want you to be paying attention to this game in a certain way.' And, if you don't want that experience, that is okay, and you should be willing to talk to your GM and be like: 'Ah,

I just don't want to be tuned into this. This is like, a fun way for me to spend a Saturday. And like, I'm not- I'm not trying to like, elevate the craft here-

KETIH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: - I'm having a fun day.' And...

KEITH: 'My thorn is that I don't want to do Roses and Thorns'

AUSTIN: Right, right. And that's a conversation to have with your GM and that can be, again, a tough conversation. Anyway, Ali, it-

ART: Um,

AUSTIN: - sounded like you had. Or Art maybe.

ART: Ali can go.

AUSTIN: Both of you. Same time.

ALI: Yeah I can say this quickly. Um, I just think- cause there's obvious like, suggestions here just like: 'Think on it more' like, 'Try to notes' or whatever else. But, from like the way that this question is written and the way that it sounds, it sounds like it's like a conversation-

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

ALI: - that all of you are coming together and you are able to hear other people's things. And like, you know, adding comments to other people's comments and going from that - and letting that conversation develop if you agree with them - is like, just as much a thing as, you know-

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: - Is going to be just as helpful for the GM as you coming up with your own original ideas. [Laughs] I... I'm in a book club now with a bunch of like, comics writers [Austin hmms interestedly] and people who work in publishing and I like the show enough- that I think of myself as an author, but I certainly don't think of myself as a reader. So there's totally that like, feeling of being like: 'Oh, I'm not speaking enough here. It's weird that I'm here. I don't think about this stuff in the same way that other people do.' But like, just being able to engage and say like: 'Oh hey, I agree with that. And *also*, yada yada yada' -

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

ALI: - is like, helpful for anybody at the table. So don't feel like, you know, it's a negative thing that you're not listing out as many things.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally, totally. Or, you know, there's a point at which - as the person getting notes - it can be useful to be like: 'Alright, is this one person who has a particular beef with ray guns? Or [Ali laughs] is everyone pissed about the fact that I happened to give...' I almost said 'Mario Andretti', who is a race car driver-

ART: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: - not an Italian Renaissance painter. 'One! People are upset I put a race car driver in the Renaissance which, you know, more power to them I guess. Two: I gave him a ray gun! And I thought, listen, he's already time travelling back. Maybe he went to the future first, you know?'

ART: I think this is a fine artistic choice.

AUSTIN: Thank you! You know what? I appreciate it! Thank you for the rose. [laughs]

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: But yeah, being able to be like: 'Okay, now the whole table didn't have that experience.' Or like: 'Oh hey! Multiple people really liked that I did this thing! Cool!' Totally. Um, Art.

ART: I also don't think you should underrate 'I had fun' as a piece of good...

AUSTIN: Yeah!

ALI: Yeah.

ART: Like, that's really important. It's really all that matters. Like, it doesn't matter like: Oh, I really liked your, you know, the thematic work in this episode' if you didn't have fun playing it.

AUSTIN: I think it does. But that's because we do a show. And not- we're having a Saturday, Funday, right?

[Ali laughs]

ART: *We* have to do that!

AUSTIN: Right.

ART: But like, in exchange, we get to...

AUSTIN: The Feast of Patina was *rough*.

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I don't think any of us had fun. But I really appreciated the thematic work everyone did!

KEITH: I think I had fun. Right? I think I had fun.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I had fun. But not like- Not this style of fun.

KEITH: It was a different kind of fun.

AUSTIN: Yes, exactly.

[Ali laughs]

KEITH: [cross] It wasn't like... [unclear]

ART: It's not 'Mario Andretti in the Renaissance with a ray gun' fun.

AUSTIN: Right. If only! If only. God.

KEITH: Last quick thing from me is um- If you still feel like you want to be giving more like, impactful, positive criticism, maybe like add to that you had fun that you always have fun, just so that they know.

ART: That feels like it means less!

ALI: Yeah! [laughs]

KEITH: What's that?

ART: 'I always have fun!' Then it's like [cross] 'so this one wasn't that great.

KEITH: [cross] No, no! Like, I mean...

[Austin and Ali laugh]

AUSTIN: 'Boy, this tasted good!' 'Oh wow, really? I like every food I've ever put in my mouth!'

[Art laughs]

KEITH: No wa- okay, hold on! If someone's asking: 'Hey, did I do a good job?'

AUSTIN: Yeah, I-

KEITH: And you're like: 'Yeah, I always have fun in this campaign. This campaign's always a good time.'

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: I don't think that that's less impactful than *'This* was fun.'

AUSTIN: It isn't, but I do think that like, if someone- if this person really does want to give specific notes or like, does want to get better at it: it is about attention and it is about like, identifying those key moments that you feel yourself being- having fun and be like: 'Oh well, fuck! I'm having fun right now! Sick! Let me just like, let them know that.'

ART: I like that we just accidentally just drilled on like, a really specific insecurity that Austin and I have.

AUSTIN: Wait, which one?

KEITH: [cross] Being told that you always have fun?

ART: [cross - **Art says something before this but it's unclear**] Both of us were like: 'Always have fun is the worst praise!'

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: It's the worst praise... Cause everyone! Of course! Well okay, like, this is a funny thing, is like... It's a funny- It's one that I've actually responded to publicly before because someone will say like, um... I'll say like: 'Man, we had a fucking great episode tonight' or 'Aw boy, this episode of Waypoint Radio is great. This episode of the Beastcast was like, a fantastic one.' Whatever it is. 'This episode-' You know. And people were like: 'Oh you're always...'

ART: We get it, you're on podcasts!

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: I'm on a bunch of- Listen, One Song Only? Have you heard that one? [Art laughs] Unbelievable. Waypoints? Uh... Be Good and Rewatch it? I didn't name that one. Um...

[Ali sighs]

[Art laughs]

AUSTIN: It's fine. It's fine. I didn't name that one!

ALI: It's fine! It's fine! It's like a 7! So it's...

ART: I always love your podcast names Austin!

[Austin and Ali laugh]

AUSTIN: Anyway...

KEITH: What's the middle section between Rose and Thorn? Is it just Stem? Ali gave you a stem!

AUSTIN: It's just... [** Austin says a couple of words but it's unclear **] Sick Stem bro! [laughs] Um... The note that you get a lot *is* like: 'Oh, but all of them are good!' And, if you make stuff, you know that all of them are not good!

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I know that from- I knew that the second I started doing anything in life! [laughs] I was like: 'Aw damn, I fucked up!'

KEITH: Yeah man, I know- I know what all the worst episodes of Run Button are.

AUSTIN: Of course you do! Of course you do!

KEITH: But here- But the thing- This actually goes back to something that I didn't say in the first question, because I feel you mostly covered it-

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: - Is like... When people- Like, the reason when you do a show that it seems like all the characters are-

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: - memorable is because there is a bunch of people listening and they all have different ideas of memorable. And so like, even though fans of your podcast like your... Even though they like you, they all have different ideas of which episode is their favourite episode.

AUSTIN: Yes. Yep.

KEITH: And the same thing with Run Button. I know that the Silent Hill 2 Let's Play - even though there's parts of it that are funny - is our worst thing Kyle and I have ever done.

AUSTIN: It's... It has some issues. Yeah.

KETIH: I *know* that about it. It was a very specific moment in time. But there's people who love it, and there's a lot of people whose favourite uh...

AUSTIN: [cross] Like episode or bit or whatever. Right. Right. Right.

KEITH: [cross] Let's Play. Yeah. Or even just Let's Play. Tons of people love the Silent Hill episodes that we've done. And I- And like... All of them are bad! [Austin laughs] None of them- 2 through 4 - none of them are particularly good Let's Plays. But, a lot of people's favourite...

ART: Silent Hill fans are thirsty!

KEITH: Yeah.

ALI: Yeah.

KEITH: Well, but that's the thing! We fucking hate Silent Hill! Especially 2 and 3, man! Like, and people... So, it's not- I don't know if it *is* the usual Silent Hill people or if it's - like, that they're that thirsty, that they even want me to trash Silent Hill 2. But like, I know that those episodes are bad because they get caught up in weird somethingawful forum politics. Uh...

AUSTIN: Yeah, it's a whole thing.

KEITH: It's a whole thing! And it made it our worst Let's Play. But people love them still! And so...

AUSTIN: The thing there though is like, I think this is getting to what I'm... So, okay, here's the thing- one of things that both of us are saying without actually saying the direct thing is that we know when we've done a good job versus when we've done a bad job. Ami Kamanto's GM might not, right?

KEITH: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: Um, we have - directly or indirectly - developed a set of skills. A certain set of skills [chuckles] that is like, knowing when we fucked up. Or knowing when we're not as funny or as clever as we thought we were going to be. Or knowing when the pacing in a season has gone bad. Or knowing when a GM- or an NPC has like, fallen on its face and hasn't really struck. Or

knowing when the table hasn't bought into a bit. Or knowing when like, you've walked around the same school 30 times and you can't find the fucking door to advance the plot...

KEITH: God...

AUSTIN: [laughs] That was Silent Hill 1, not 2. But...

KEITH: I know. Well, but, you know, but that was- And then we were expecting: now 2's gonna- they probably all that stuff we didn't like about 1.

AUSTIN: Yes.

KEITH: And the names! [growing quieter with sadness] Aw, come on...

[Ali chuckles]

AUSTIN: Um, and so - in those scenarios - the like, any feedback is going to have a limited use to some degree, right? But in a scenario where like, I'm just starting a thing, right... So, like, I think about when I first went to Vice, right? And the first thing that came across my plate was: I had to give feedback on documentary- like, early documentary cuts. I had to like, sit an edit booth and give edit notes. And I didn't know what the fuck I was doing, right? Like, I've watched a lot of documentaries and so I was giving notes that I know from like, film courses I took plus my gut about what worked and what didn't. And one of the best, most useful, things that I was able to receive- Like, if someone had just- Plenty of people were like: 'Oh yeah, you did a good job today.' That's useful. It's nice. It's a nice confidence boost. But, what something like Roses and Thorns are for isn't about conf- Isn't *just* about a confidence boost thing or giving people a place to pat each other on the back. It's ideally about craft, and it's ideally about a moment where - and this is what happened to me there, was like - getting notes that were like: 'Okay, here are the things that you said that were useful. Here are the things that you said that like, were not useful in any way in this, you know, edit suite.' And like, if I was like: 'Oh yeah, can we get another shot of *blank*?' The answer's like, 'No, we shot all of this six months ago. We don't have a budget to send someone back to Sweden!' Like, 'Oh yeah, that makes sense! That wasn't a good note that I gave!' [laughs] So getting that feedback was really useful for me. And so, GMing can be like that. Especially if you're a new GM. Especially if you're playing with a new group. Especially if you're trying to like, figure out a social system in terms of like: who is... You know, or what people like and what their humour is like and what they're interested in and like... Maybe they want more descriptions of cities and buildings. Maybe they want less. Maybe they want more combat. Maybe they want less combat. I really do think there is value in that sort of specificity. And that, if the GM is like... If you as the player are interested in that sort of high attention mode of play, then putting in the work is worth it, because it will increase the quality of that game, because everyone will be paying a little bit more attention. And if you're not interested in that then like, it might be better to play a game where you can just be a little more relaxed. And that's also chill, like that's not a problem. That's not a judgement call. You know?

Not a judgement on anyone involved. Um... Art and Keith are in the chat talking about which type of praise they need. Uh...

KEITH: I do... I don't want to make it sound like I don't need praise.

AUSTIN: Oh, okay!

KEITH: I think it's obvious that I do.

AUSTIN: [chuckles] Well, if you at home want to praise us, you can do that [Ali laughs] by going to Friendsatthetable.cash, as always. Sorry, if there anyone- does anyone else have anything on this question before we wrap up? Okay. That's a good answer - Dan Cakeshard in the chat uhh, says: 'Honestly, it takes the pressure off of players a lot *more* to ask for feedback on specific areas, instead of leaving it open-ended. It's also limiting but...' So yeah, that's definitely one thing that's like: 'Hey, was that encounter fun? Was that chase sequence fun? Hey, did that NPC work?' you know? That can help on the GM's side for sure. Anyway, yes, if you'd like to support us, you can do that by going to Friendsatthetable.cash. Um, as always, you can follow us on Twitter at twitter.com/Friends_Table. You can follow me on Twitter @austin_walker. Where can people follow you, Ali?

ALI: Um, I am over on ali_west on Twitter dot com.

AUSTIN: How about you, Keith?

KEITH: Uh, you can find on Twitter @KeithJCarberry. You can find the Let's Plays I do at Youtube.com/RunButton. Just did a stream with Jack and Ali of a weird game. It does have some flashing, so if that's a problem for you, don't watch it- it'll be obvious when it starts! Um...

AUSTIN: What is the one that people should watch, period? Like, what's the- you said Silent Hill 2 and 3: not great.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: If people wanted to watch a RunButton Let's Play series, what would it be?

KEITH: Okay, so a real easy one is the full Let's Play of a weirdo game called Arctic Alive-

AUSTIN: Yep.

KEITH: - that I also did with Ali and Jack. Uh, but if you want the full RunButton experience - i.e. the two people who do RunButton [Austin laughs] - it's tough, because we only do things that last a thousand episodes.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Same!

KEITH: Uh, maybe... And we started when I was fucking 18, so I was like a- it was, you know...

ALI: Yous grow.

KEITH: You say some weird shit when you're 18.

ART: Don't watch it from the beginning.

KEITH: I don't know. Austin still tells people to watch Knuckles Chaotic which is one of the first episodes we did.

AUSTIN: It's very funny.

KEITH: It's very funny. It is really- So maybe watch that. Uhh...

AUSTIN: But you're like 12 in it, so- [laughs]

KEITH: Yeah yeah I think I'm-

AUSTIN: - if I did the math right.

KEITH: - I think I'm 18 in that. Uhh, no. I'm 19 in that.

AUSTIN: There you go.

ART: Keith is like: 'High school is so hard!'

KEITH: Yeah, uhm, we... Yeah, I mean, I've been doing podcasts now since I was 17.

AUSTIN: [sighs] That's very young.

KEITH: It's been nine years. Um...

ART: I think I was 17 when the iPod was *released*.

[Austin laughs]

KEITH: You know, I think that the Mario Sunshine Let's Play's a pretty good one. That one's pretty recent. I think it's pretty funny. I think it's a game that a lot of people don't, um... It's more of a nuanced experience than just playing like, a good Mario game that everybody agrees is good.

AUSTIN: [chuckles] Yeah.

KEITH: And uh, since everybody here's at Tips at the- At Friendsatthetable.cash, you can also go to contentburger.biz for the RunButton Patreon.

AUSTIN: You can! You can do that. Um...

KEITH: [in the background] extra long RunButton...

AUSTIN: Did I already ask Ali and Art.

ALI: Mm-hm.

KEITH: Ali went.

ART: No, I haven't gone.

AUSTIN: Art, how about you?

ART: You can follow me on Twitter @atebbel and, if you're watching this live, you might get to see Jack and I do a stream tomorrow [Austin and Ali make intrigued 'oh's] of my first foray into the Hitman games!

AUSTIN: Oh hell yeah! That's exciting.
ART: Yeah, the real- potential hiccup here is it's going to have to be on Mixer and no one knows how to work Mixer.

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: Mixer's fine. Isn't it fine? Mixer's fine?

ART: [cross] I don't know. Is it. Have you done anything on Mixer?

KEITH: [cross] Wait, why do you have to do Mixer?

AUSTIN: No, but also- yeah, wait, why does it *have* to be on Mixer? Did you get a deal? [Ali snorts] Are you sponsored? AUSTIN: Are you their Content Creator of the Year?

ART: Yeah, I'm sponsored by Mixer!

AUSTIN: You know, Mixer pays money, probably.

ART: I'm the Ninja of Mixer.

ALI: Hmmm.

[Austin laughs and there is a small pause.]

AUSTIN: [cross] We're all- We're *all* trying to find the joke and we're gonna eject because they're all bad!

ART: [cross] I don't know what he did, so I'm just going to keep saying that.

KEITH: You know what, I'll just say you don't want to be that. You don't want to be the Ninja of anything.

ART: I don't know. I hear he makes a billion dollars a day. Um, anyway...

AUSTIN: Hmm? Okay.

ART: [cross] The reason is...

KEITH: [cross] There's other people that think that are... that are also bad I guess. So, never mind...

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah! Where were you going that, Keith? They're all bad!

ALI: Talking about bad people, it's time to end the episode. [laughs]

ART: I, uh, I got Hitman on Xbox. Jack doesn't have an Xbox. Mixer has built-in multi-stream.

AUSTIN: Okay, can you still get Jack's voice into that?

KEITH: [cross] Party chat, yeah.

ART: Yeah, because apparently you can multi-stream cross-platform.

AUSTIN: Ohhh.

ART: Jack can stream from their computer-

AUSTIN: Ohh!

ART: - it'll automatically do like, a split-screen with whatever I'm outputting.

AUSTIN: Wild! Okay, cool. That sounds fun.

ART: But like, Mixer says it does that, but none of their websites are like: 'Here's how to do that!', so... You might- there might just be a fun technical difficulties stream tomorrow.

AUSTIN: That's fun. Well, here, let me just say one last thing that I learned about recently. Did you know that the Hearthstone stream that Art and Keith and a couple of very special guests did, years ago on StreamFriends, is still extremely funny? And I bet some of the people listening now don't know about it. Uh, if you do a search for: 'A Very Special Hearthstone Stream', you will find a video with Art and Keith and- I'll just say, Nick - Nick Scratch - and some other guests who show up.

KEITH: Yeah, an incredibly famous talk show host showed up!

[Ali laughs]

ART: Is the epilogue in there?

AUSTIN: I think the epilogue's in- yeah, the epilogue's absolutely in there which means Janine is involved also, which is very funny! Uhh, people should watch that. You know, we don't do a lot of promoting our StreamFriends things for various reasons!

ART: Ughhh. Don't accidentally give any of those people money!

AUSTIN: No, we turned off- No, that won't happen. That will not happen, is what we've determined.

[Ali laughs]

KEITH: Just steal the video and put it on RunButton.

ALI: I recently logged in and demonitised all those, just in case.

AUSTIN: Just in case! We never saw money from it anyway, so...

KEITH: Can we plug the uh... That Star Wars one? Or can we not plug that one, I can't remember.

ALI: [cross] What's the Star Wars one?

AUSTIN: [cross] Wait, why would we not be able to just plug it?

KETIH: I don't know. There's some that I wouldn't plug. That I wouldn't say: 'Go listen to'.

AUSTIN: Oh! Oh! I see what you- Yeah, 100%! Uh, I think we absolutely can plug 'Let's Play Star Wars: Conquest Part 01: Be A Chewbacca Or I'm Leaving'!

[Keith and Ali laugh]

ALI: Yep! Um... And the Sims streams.

AUSTIN: We need to just take ownership of the ones that are us, right?

ALI: Uh-huh.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: How do we do that? Do we get a lawyer? Can we get lawyers?

ALI: [cross] I think you just download the videos.

KEITH: [cross] Well where do you want to put them?

ART: Yeah, cause we have access, can't we export them?

KEITH: Yeah, if you can log in, you can download them as an Mp3, and then we can make another site. Uhh...

ALI: Just put them here.

AUSTIN: To Youtube!? [laughs] Another site, like a Youtube...

KEITH: I mean another... Yeah, they can't even be on Youtube anymore. It's repetitive content.

[Keith and Ali laugh]

AUSTIN: Right, that's the problem! Like, we could export it and delete it and then... Anyway, we should have this meeting privately. [Ali laughs] But people should go watch all the Let's Plays we just talked about, because they're great.

KEITH: RunButton first though! Do that first! That's the one that matters to me!

AUSTIN: Yeah. As always, if you have questions, you can send them to Tips... Yeah, definitely first! Tipsatthetable@gmail.com. Uh, and thank you so much for hanging with us on this very messy, punchy night. We'll be back next week for, hopefully, one more of these, right? It'll be our last Tips catch-up episode.

ALI: It'll be December. Yeah, yeah! We'll be good to go!

AUSTIN: It will be December for real! Yeah, totally! Um, and... I'm trying to think. Is there any other stuff popping up? Is the next Masks soon, Ali?

ALI: Umm, yeah next Masks should be Monday, *I hope*!

AUSTIN: Okay, yeah.

ALI: Um, Lacuna's coming. There's gonna be...

AUSTIN: Lacuna *is* coming. Postcards are coming! We got em written!

ALI: Oh my god, postcards are *so* close! I'm so excited!

AUSTIN: The art is so good! It's gonna be a special package, is what I will say.

ALI: Yeah, yeah!

AUSTIN: I will say that right now, which is like: Yeah, mm-hm!

ALI: I'm very excited. An email will go out if you're owed a postcard. And... Monday? Is that Monday or did we say Monday or Tuesday? Me, Jack and Janine should be doing a Live at the Table. A special one.

AUSTIN: Oh, that'll be fun! I'm so excited to see it.

ALI: Yeah, that's gonna be Monday the 10th at some time. There will be an email about it! [laughs]

AUSTIN: Awesome. Um, are there any other Patreon... I'm [**crosstalk, unclear**] a Drawing Maps.

KEITH: [cross] You know, I'm gonna do one more. I'm gonna do one more thing. If you got that money, that Shenmue let's play on Patreon is really good, for RunButton.

AUSTIN: There you go.

KEITH: That's a RunButton thing I recommend.

AUSTIN: There you go.

KEITH: If you got that money.

AUSTIN: It's *very* good! I own a shirt from it!

KEITH: Do you!? Which one?

AUSTIN: What!?

ALI: Oh, is that...

KEITH: The Fruda Grape one?

AUSTIN: Yeah!

[Ali laughs]

KEITH: That's a good shirt!

AUSTIN: I don't know where it is, but I bought it!

KEITH: Yeah, that's a good shirt.

AUSTIN: I bought a new shirt that I'm wearing today. It says: 'Sluggo is lit'

ALI: Oooh!

KEITH: Oh, you got the Sluggo shirt?

AUSTIN: I got the Sluggo shirt, yeah! Alright, we're...

KEITH: Green or black?

AUSTIN: I got it in green. Nancy looks very good here. Alright, I'm gonna hang or this is just going to turn into a Clapcast. So, we should Time.is.

KEITH: Digimon - that one's free!

AUSTIN: What? Oh, Digimon- Digimon's so long!

ALI: 40?

AUSTIN: 40.

ART: Wait- Oh, my thing must be wrong!

[sound of a solitary clap]

ALI: Hmm.

KEITH: No, sorry, Art's thing was wrong so I held off.

ART: Cause mine was at 45 when you said 40!

ALI: Oh!

AUSTIN: Whoo, that's not right!

KEITH: Oh, that's weird. What are you at now?

ART: Uh, 48, 49, 50.

KEITH: Okay.

ALI: 55?

AUSTIN: 55.

[sound of a perfect clap]

AUSTIN: Perfect!

KEITH: I was right on the money! I was perfect.

AUSTIN: Outstanding! 'Time is the longest distance between two places' - Tennessee Williams. Have a great night, everyone.