

Winter in Hieron & Marielda Post Mortem

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[overlapping chatter and laughter fade in]

JACK: Oh wait... we should start recording first.

AUSTIN: Yeah, we are... I'm gonna... I'm gonna... [background laughter continues] go to time dot is anyway... I'm not gonna stop, like... We're going... we're *live*, now... we're live on the internet. This is a live...

ART (overlapping): We're really bad at projecting an image of knowing what the fuck we're doing...

AUSTIN: We're going live! [Andrew and others laugh]

SYLVIA: Are we live?

JANINE: Oh boy... [laughter continues]

AUSTIN: We are at time dot is...

KEITH (overlapping): Just remember time dot is *is* a website, and not just looking at your thing... [Jack laughs].

AUSTIN: Correct... and so, we are going to clap... can we clap at the top of the minute? Is that a thing we can try and do?

ALI and ART together: Sure...

ALI: We can try and do it...

JANINE: I think we've learned to be OK with that...

AUSTIN: We'll see. We'll see about that... [unclear background noise] Wait... is someone not here?

JACK: Sound off!

ALI (overlapping): No?

[nervous sounds, followed by multiple people clapping, almost in synch].

[00:43]

AUSTIN: Someone is definitely not here...

JACK: I was here... but I forgot to clap.

AUSTIN: Let's do a... let's do a... let's check... [Keith laughs]. Wait... [slowly]: you forgot to clap!

ART: I've never forgotten to clap! Could someone just... justify that for me?

JACK: Yeah; I can justify it, I... someone said: "Is everyone here?" and I thought that someone was missing... And it turned out that / was the one that was missing! [laughs].

AUSTIN (overlapping): Wait... but... you... hmm... OK... [more background laughter].

JACK: OK, are we ready?

AUSTIN: To clap again? Yes!

JACK: Well, I haven't clapped once... [disappointed sighs from Austin, laughter from others]
This is my first time...

ART: Do you want to clap once, and just get it out of your system?

AUSTIN (overlapping): Yeah, get... [a single clap sounds] Was that you Jack? Or was that someone else?

JACK: Yeah, that was... me...

AUSTIN (overlapping): You didn't forget this time...

KEITH (overlapping): Alright... Do you want to do it at fifty?

AUSTIN: Let's do it at fifty... let's do it at fifty; I want these ten seconds.

[long pause followed by multiple people clapping, almost in synch]

AUSTIN: Damn good clap!

KEITH: I... I know that we've gone over, like... different clap strategies before and, like...

AUSTIN: Yeah...

[01:37]

KEITH: How best to handle it?

AUSTIN: Uh-huh?

KEITH: I... What I like to do is, sort of, like... you know those fake golf swings? I went to do some fake...

JANINE (overlapping): I have bad news? Sorry, I wasn't recording...

AUSTIN: Arrrgggghhh! [several people laugh].

JANINE: I just... I did my test recording and... I just totally forgot!

SYLVIA: (breaks up with robot voice - unclear what they say, but includes the word 'sorry').

AUSTIN: God damn...

KEITH: For anyone that feels like they clap late, or clap too early, do sort of, like... a fake golf swing clap for the couple leading up to the one where you... actually clap?

AUSTIN (overlapping): Right: you, like... one... two... whoa...

KEITH: Yeah...

AUSTIN: I'm way blown-out suddenly... One second... sorry... sor... sorry! OK... OK...

JACK: We should do more live stuff, they said! [several people laugh]

AUSTIN: That is what they've said... They did say that to us... someone did say that...

KEITH: I should... while we're still figuring things out, I should retweet that we're live...

AUSTIN: We should!

[several people talk unclearly at once].

KEITH: At friends... look... social engagement is very important in this media; this game...

AUSTIN (overlapping): Oh my god...

ART (overlapping): So, we're gonna clap at forty-five?

[02:36]

KEITH (overlapping): Austin knows all about that...

AUSTIN (overlapping): I do... No, we're gonna need more time than that at this point, Art, this is a whole other ball game...

JACK: Yeah...

SYLVIA: Is Ali here?

KEITH: We should clap...

AUSTIN (overlapping): Ali?

KEITH (cont.): four minutes, and then clap.

JACK: Ali?

KEITH: Oh... Ali's muted.

AUSTIN: Ali, you muted yourself.

ALI: Oh... I've been talking so much... I... [laughter] so many words...

JACK: How?

AUSTIN: You're way blown-out now... You're also suddenly the loudest person.

ART: Back in...

KEITH: Well...

SYLVIA: Holy shit...

KEITH: As long as, uhh... as long as...

NICK: Look... I've said this before: streaming is easy, and we are professionals.

AUSTIN: We're professionals!

KEITH: Austin, if you're finding that people are blown-out, you should make sure that you don't still have it at, like... two hundred percent.

[03:17]

AUSTIN: No, I don't... I promise, I don't. I do not... and, like... you're fine, Keith, you sound great. I can hear everything you're...

KEITH: Yeah. I figured out exactly what was wrong with my thing, is why!

AUSTIN: Uh-huh? Right... Let's do this one more time. Let's do this, the top of the minute again... everyone's here?

JANINE: Hm-hmm...

AUSTIN: OK... We're sure? Everyone's here?

JANINE: And recording?

AUSTIN: And recording; I'm looking at a recording [Andrew laughs, someone shushes him].

[pause followed by multiple people clapping, out of synch]

AUSTIN: Seven different claps, at least! [Ali laughs]

SYLVIA: So...

KEITH (overlapping): It was close, though... it was real... it was a real...

ALI (overlapping): It was actually fine...

SYLVIA (overlapping): This didn't happen? But I almost went off what's going on on the stream?

AUSTIN: Jesus...

SYLVIA: Instead of what's actually happening in real life? [a couple of people laugh]. That would have been pretty bad...

NICK (overlapping): I actually did... I actually did exactly that? And I...

JACK: Oh my god!

AUSTIN: God...

NICK: And I did not clap!

[04:05]

AUSTIN: Oh my god!

KEITH: We... it's up to Ali... but we don't need to clap since there is claps for every person at each of the three other claps? So you can line it up...

AUSTIN (overlapping): Correct...

KEITH: We have enough information... there's enough data here.

AUSTIN: We can fill in the clap blanks...

KEITH: But if you want, we can do a *third* minute of trying to clap...

ALI: No! I would just love to do this... [several laughs]

AUSTIN: God... OK!

ART: Oh... we have, like... a PowerPoint! [laughter continues in background]

AUSTIN: Fucking... Art! Spoilers! Jesus Christ! So, are we done clapping? Can I present my PowerPoint presentation now?

ALI (laughing): Yeah... Yes.

AUSTIN: God damn! I swear to Christ! [pause as laughter subsides]. Welcome to Friends at the Table, an actual play podcast focused on critical world building, smart characterization, and fun interaction between good friends. I am your host and GM, Austin Walker, joining me: Producer, Ali Acampora.

ALI: Hello...

AUSTIN: Composer, Jack de Quidt.

JACK: Hi there!

AUSTIN: Art Martinez-Tebbel.

ART: Hey! Hi!

AUSTIN: Keith Carberry.

[05:06]

KEITH: Hey! How are you?

AUSTIN: Andrew Lee Swan.

ANDREW: Hey!

AUSTIN: Sylvia¹ Clare.

SYLVIA: That's me!

AUSTIN: Janine Hawkins.

JANINE: Hi!

AUSTIN: And Nick Scratch.

NICK (croaky): Hello!

AUSTIN: Hey! Hi!

NICK: I'm losing my voice...sorry.

AUSTIN: It happens... So; we are here to do the Friends at the Table Season Three Post Mortem, which also includes... the Marielda Post Mortem, so... we're gonna start with a couple of questions we got in that were really focused on Marielda, and... I guess... just broadly, to set this up, we got a *billion* questions? We got twenty six pages of questions?

KEITH (overlap): Oh my god... it was insane...

AUSTIN: Ten thousand words plus of questions? I did my best to, like... not double dip? I didn't succeed at that, so I definitely double or triple dipped a couple of times? To be fair... some people sent thirty-three or thirty-four questions! [Ali laughs] That's not... that's not... an exaggeration...

ALI: A group of people sent thirty-four questions!

AUSTIN: Oh... that's not what the thing said! The thing just said... a name... and then there were thirty-four questions underneath it...

ALI: No... I know... but...

¹ The name in the audio recording is no longer in use.

[06:01]

JACK: I sent twelve...

ART (overlapping): On the plus side, I remember... [becomes inaudible under others]

KEITH (overlapping): I'll say the name: they're all afraid of saying the name! I'll say it!

AUSTIN: God...

KEITH: I don't think we should tip-toe around saying the name. We could do it... we could call this person out.

AUSTIN: Do you know who it was?

KEITH: Was it Linda?

AUSTIN: It was Linda... [several people laugh]

ALL: It was Linda, representing...

AUSTIN (overlapping): But it didn't say that! OK, we're gonna go... we don't?

NICK: I actually thought Linda was an acronym for a group... [several people laugh]

KEITH: Sorry, yeah, it was: I, L, D, N, A...

AUSTIN: OK... OK...[laughter subsides] I'm gonna hit next, and we're gonna keep moving. Alright! This first one; it comes in from Gary, it asks: "My question is, how much of the Marielda story did Austin have worked out in advance of playing *The Quiet Year*, and *Blades in the Dark*? Did he know that the original Samoths had been - quote - killed? Did Maelgwyn even exist before being placed into the game?" Maelgwyn *super* did not exist before being placed in the game! I think, like... the entirety of what I had going into it was... there is a place that we eventually call The City of First Light; one night... I was walking home - and this was *forever* ago - I still lived in Canada when I figured this out, and I realised that Samoths and Samot had been, like... like... jilted lovers who... everything... like... the whole world fell apart around this broken, like... love affair. But that's, like... all I had? Was like... Oh... Samot is attacking the city... he eventually takes it over... because, we know that, because he's there from season one. Everything else comes out of *Quiet Year*.

KEITH: Was this one of those times where you, like... tweeted about... not tweeted... you sent something, like... in the Friends at the Table group chat about, like... "I thought of this thing! And I'm not telling you!"

[07:33]

AUSTIN: Yeah... It was definitely that, for sure.

KEITH (overlapping): Cos I think I... yeah. I remember several of those, and I'm sure that one of them was this, so...

AUSTIN: I think that's actually... there was a time when I was, like... Oh season... this is Season 3, and I linked in Twitter... I linked *Heart of Chambers* by, ummm... Beach House? Which is, like... one hundred percent lyrically, like... that's... I know lots of people have their... their... fucking... like... fan mixes of what the... what songs mean what... for characters? But just, like... "In your heart of chambers, where you sit with your picture books and your ancient wit. In that nook I found you, so old and tired. Would you be the one to carry me?" And I was, like... Oh shit, that's... that's them! OK... there it is, that's... them.

KEITH: For me... for me their song is *One Week* by the Barenaked Ladies [laughter].

AUSTIN: Of course...

KEITH: Like... everyone has their song.

AUSTIN: Yeah; I got it... I'm a fan of interpretation.

SYLVIA: Samoths does have a tendency of taking off his shirt, so... [laughter].

AUSTIN: Christ! God damnit! [laughing subsides]. But yeah, I think that, like... for me, the fact that Marielda took such a... kind of, left such a shadow over the entire season? Like... everything was, kind of, in relation to that show, or that, kind of... intro show... kind of really represents how much, umm... the game is led from... the... events of the game, so... That's really great. Anyone else have any... something here? Or shall I move on?

JACK: Other than, like... Austin sending things, like... "I've worked it out!", this happens fairly regularly... [Ali laughs]. And often, like... 'cos I'm in a different time zone, it already feels... weird but, like... you can check the time zones, and Austin often sends stuff like this at three-thirty or four-thirty in the morning, and they can say things like: "I've figured out Dwarves!" [laughter]

AUSTIN: We'll get there; that's another question! Don't... hey... hey! Let's not jump ahead to Dwarves...

JACK: Oh... [laughs] Well, my point was that, generally, two weeks later, you get another message that says: "I've figured out Dwarves!", as though it didn't happen the first time?

[09:23]

AUSTIN (overlapping, laughing)... the first time! [laughter] yeah... Fair... that's fair... But, I mean... just as often, it's... I don't know who the fuck this is... I need someone to be an asshole, it will be this guy, what's a name... let me Google around... Oh, Maelgwyn means, like... dog... son of... something. Like... good enough! Fucking... dog-son... like... good: the cult of the Dog Son. Yeah... exactly! Alright; moving on... This is from Shaun, and this is an important one? Cos, I wanna make sure we're all on the same... that we're all working off the same information. Shaun asks: "So... this might sound like a really silly thing to ask, but I was wondering if you could clarify a little bit of the timeline of Hieron? Where does Marielda fit into the overall storyline? Is it pre- or post-Erasure? And if it's post-Erasure, how much time has passed between the Erasure and the events of Marielda in the present day? Shaun." It's definitely pre-... by an... indefinite amount of time? Do people have a working... like number in their head? Not like...

JACK (overlapping): A thousand years, maybe?

AUSTIN: Yeah...

JACK: Like a couple of thousand... like a *long* time...

KEITH: Yeah...

AUSTIN: In my mind, I always just jump to one thousand, but that's not the canonical answer, it is probably way more than that? I don't know... what were you going to say?

KEITH: A thousand years is representative of just... a long time.

ART (overlapping): I thought I asked you once...

AUSTIN: Art, what were you gonna...

KEITH (overlapping): Like a biblical forty days.

AUSTIN: Right.

ART: I thought I asked you once, and you said ten thousand.

AUSTIN: That might be right...

JACK: Oh my god...

[10:18]

AUSTIN: Sure... [Ali laughs] like, totally! I mean, that doesn't... I found... the other day, I found the first notes I ever made for a Dungeon World game I wanted to run? This game was originally going to begin as a game for Janine and Ali, actually, like... not on-stream at all. And the last... note on... it's like, a completely different game, right? There's like... there's still, like... bits of it? Like... the first few notes are: bronze; pastel; rust; etched; picturesque; city states. And a lot of those still work, right? But then there's all this stuff about, like... a mage city, a metropolis that holds a heritage that it cannot grasp... alright... that still sounds pretty Friends at the Table! [laughter] But there's, like... it's a way more populated world, it's not post-post-apocalyptic. But the last final thing; the final line I wrote here, for like... this was, like... 2011, or something... "There is no conspiracy, no cycle. Yes; the world has fallen before, many times, but not because something else was crushing us, we are crushing us." And that is, like... Yep! Uh-huh! That is why we need there to be... a thousand, or ten thousand years between what we call The Erasure and the present day, because... yeah... there's been rises and falls over-and-over again, but not because of some... magical cycle, so... so yeah. Next question comes in from... TheRyne10. "Hey everyone! So... we know that the Original Pattern was broken. Was this caused overtly by the death of Samothos to Maelgwyn? Or was it much later, when the *Book of Life* was removed? And was the placement of the book, mirror, shield, guitar, etcetera a stop-gap to mend the pattern?" I'm really curious what players think about this? I think, Nick, you had a suggestion, which was, like... sometimes the players should answer lore questions? Just to see what their interpretations are?

NICK: Yeah... I just thought that would be interesting...

AUSTIN: Yeah... So...

NICK: Are you asking me to answer this?

AUSTIN: Yes! [laughter] Now it's on you... This is one of the... you've been hoisted!

NICK: [pause] No... I don't think... I think the Original Pattern is something way older than...

AUSTIN: Yeah...

NICK (continuing): than Maelgwyn...

AUSTIN: Yeah... I guess; other people, what do...?

ALI: Yeah... the Original Pattern is, like... something that I don't know that I ever picked up, and I don't know that we were supposed to?

AUSTIN: There's a lot of those things...

[12:42]

ALI: I'm curious if that's something Jack knows...

AUSTIN: Yeah...

JACK: Oh, god no! [laughter]

AUSTIN: I think you do... I think if you actually... I think Jack knows. Maybe not...

JACK: This is one of these things where... now what we're doing is a quiz [laughter]. I don't know, I... People ask the about The Pattern a bunch? And... kind of, specifically, like... what it is? And... I don't know if I have an answer, or even a, kind of... conceptualization of... of...

KEITH: It seems hard to answer questions about The Pattern, because The Pattern is, like... comically obtuse? Like... actually comically obtuse?

ALI (overlapping): No...

AUSTIN (overlapping): There are variations on that...

JACK: I mean, yeah... like... there was a... there was a... this is going to be one of those answers that is not going to help at all? So it might as well be from an Archivist... But, like... there was a map that was doing the rounds a while back that was... it was a live map of the wind in North America.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: And it was comprised of hundreds of thousands of tiny white lines on a black featureless map of North America. And the lines were flickering and moving, and influencing each other. And I looked at that and I thought... "Yeah... what I'm looking at here is some leaves moving in Seattle."

AUSTIN (laughs): Right.

JACK: And... you know... it's someone stepping out, and their hat coming off. But it's also someone in a boat, going... you know... in the water, and... it being a really bad day for them. So, I think the pattern is something on that scale, but also something on a very small scale. And I think that that's why, in a lot of ways, it appears, kind of... bullshit? I think a lot of that stuff does appear bullshit!

[14:24]

AUSTIN: Right; cos if you told me that the hat... that my hat coming off when I step outside is - *in any way* - connected to the rain in Missouri today, I'd, like... shut up! No... Like... [Ali and Andrew laugh]. That's not true... Or, you know... like...

JACK (overlapping): Or, it is? But...

AUSTIN: But it is! So, I think that that's the case... I will say that I... like... *in the text*: whenever I say "First Pattern," or "Original Pattern," I am just talking about Samol?

JACK: Yeah, yeah...

AUSTIN: And, like... when was he broken? He got old. He got old...

JANINE: Yeah...

JACK: And something happened to his shoulder...

AUSTIN: Well, that's a specific thing.

ALI (laughs): Yeah!

AUSTIN: Fucking... wizards did that shit!

JANINE: By the end of this season, I had started thinking of Samol and the Original Pattern as, like... we have this old ship clock on our wall in the house? And... the way it sits against the wall, the crank that winds it can't spin? It just... because it's, kind of... flush against the wall? So... to wind it, and actually make it work, you have to take it down off the wall, and wind it, and put it back up... (Austin laughs quietly). And it's really heavy; and it's also really loud. It's just a thing I'm not interested in doing. And I, kind of... was in the habit of thinking about the Original Pattern...

AUSTIN (overlapping): Uh-huh?

JANINE: As something that, like... you know... a clock on Samol's wall that, like... still works?

AUSTIN: Right...

JANINE: But is, like... really inconvenient... in a lot of different ways?

[15:44]

AUSTIN: Totally... I... you know... I think I've been pretty open... maybe I haven't... I guess... to... to this group here: like... we started Hieron in a year... well, we didn't start it... I guess Marielda is probably the year that I lost, like... three or four people in a row to cancer. And it was, like... "Oh! OK..." The first half of Marielda is Samol and... Or, is Samot and Samoths fighting over something. The second thing is: their dad is dying. And that is, like... a super...

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And then... like... obviously... the second part of that is the Heat and the Dark stuff, and just, like... "Yeah man! Some stuff is big! Some stuff is big..." And it's... there isn't a quick and dirty solution to it, so... All of that stuff predates Marielda... like: all of Marielda is a response to that? And, in some ways, I think: all of the major A-plot of Hieron is also a response to that stuff, right? So, it's like... What did people do in Marielda day to try to address that stuff? And *now* what are people doing? And... whooh... people make all sorts of decisions! So... Alright! We're gonna keep moving... This one comes in from US_Camera: And, just... I am just... this is another quick lore answer? Which is... they say... "Hello Table Friends! Were we ever told when and why reconfiguration stopped?" And there is a quote from Samol from *The Killing of the King-God Samoths by the Traitor Prince Maelgwyn Part Four*, [Ali and Jack laugh] And... I'm not gonna read this whole bit? But... if you're looking for it, what I'm gonna do in this moment, is shout out the amazing team that runs the Friends at the Table wiki? The... The New Archives, for the Hieron section, that just includes all of the major-major narration around stuff. You can go look that stuff up. It's a really fantastic resource for, like... "What the fuck did Samol say in that narration? What was he saying about ghosts? There are two types of... what? What the fuck is he talking about!?" And going to look that stuff up really helps, so... shout outs to that amazing team. And the answer - briefly-briefly is: Samoths was, like... "Yo! If anybody ever really fucking kills me, and stuff went real bad? Then I have a tomb set up that will magically drain the ability to reconfigure." You know... God of Inventions, so...

JACK: You know, like... a magical tomb!

AUSTIN: Totally... yeah! Like you do, like... a *magical* tomb... [Andrew laughs]. Uh... Ely writes: "Would it have been possible that Maelgwyn had used the other sword, or had not killed his father, or was that inevitable?" And that's the sort of question we got a bunch from a billion other people. So... again: I'm kind of curious, as the players who were in that scene, did you feel when you were playing that that could have gone differently?

ALI (laughing): Yeah?

SYLVIA (overlapping): Yeah, totally.

ANDREW (overlapping): Yeah...

[18:12]

ALI: Yeah!

AUSTIN: What do you think would have happened?

SYLVIA: I think... [laughs] we'd have had to figure out a lot of different things?

AUSTIN: Yeah! Right? [Ali and Andrew laugh]

SYLVIA: But honestly... At the time, I was just, kind of... the way I always do stuff... and I'm... just speaking personally is, like... I always go with, like... "What does my character want to do here?" And so, like... if everyone else is doing that too, then, like... depending on how things shake out, Sige could have won that scene.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: Yeah, easily...

AUSTIN: Totally. I mean... it looked like he was for a second! That was one of my favourite moments of the whole season, or the whole... last year... was Sige getting, like... after *a season* of, like... people missing stuff, over, and over, and over again? Sige just went on this roll of, like... you know... heavy success; hard success; hard success... No one can fucking make a dent!

ANDREW: That was the best I've *ever* rolled; ever [Ali laughs]. Ever!

AUSTIN (overlapping): It was incredible!

SYLVIA: I fucking love Sige... [Andrew laughs].

AUSTIN: Yeah... totally.

ANDREW: I... I've kind of always, like... wondered what would happen if... cos I think the last thing I did with Sige in that scene was to yell at Samothos to, like... you know: "Hey! Do something!" instead of trying to attack Maelgwyn one more time? And I've kind of, like... thought sometimes, like... I wonder what would have happened if I had, like... you know... done more of a hard move at that point?

[19:22]

AUSTIN: Totally. I... so... I think the thing for me... the answer from the storytelling side of it? Is that... there are rules that I have in place for what the world is, and how the world functions. And so... I honor those rules when they come up. And we'll talk a little bit about that later with, like... certain... when a roll does a thing, and it references some other thing from six months ago when we recorded, and then it happens again... like... Oh! But the same rule applies; that is the state of the world. So, in this case, it was just, straight-up, if Maelgwyn... if anyone kills Samoths, with this one sword, at this moment, this is the thing that will happen? If something else had killed Samoths, he wouldn't have died forever, he would have done the thing that always happens with reconfiguration, which is: he would have had time to... rebuild himself. Or; maybe the other thing that would have happened there, which is: no: that wouldn't have happened, but the void would have eaten him, The Heat and the Dark would have eaten him, because Tristero was already gone. But he wouldn't be in the sword, you know? So there are all these different things that could have happened. Or he could have won: he could have totally won that scene and figured out how to beat The Heat and the Dark. Like... The Heat and the Dark didn't become a Capital V - Villain, so to speak? Until the end of Marielda, when it became clear that I could... that they had... or that that force, I guess... had sort of... had a victory? In the death of Samoths. And then I was able to move... to configure the rest of the season around The Heat and the Dark? And suddenly, a lot of the other threatening parts of it? Became that much more threatening. Like... it went from being a sort of lingering threat? Where Hieron in the future could have just been a reflection of what The Heat and the Dark had already done? To being, instead: Oh... this is the stakes... the stakes are: The Heat and the Dark is coming... which is a different thing. [Ali laughs].

ART: Good job, Marielda team!

AUSTIN: Yeah! [Jack laughs]. Way to do it!

ALI: If we can stay on this for just a second?

AUSTIN (overlapping): Totally...

ALI: I remember asking you recently, like... did you mean for The Blade in the Dark to be in the show to, like... end up to have Samoths there? And you were just, like... "No!" [laughs]. I wanted it to be...

AUSTIN (overlapping): No! Yeah! That was just, like... Go ahead.

ALI: I wanted it to be Hella's sword but, like... I thought some guy would just kill a bunch of mages?

AUSTIN: Yeah!

[21:26]

ALI: And... [laughs].

AUSTIN: Like... When that sword was in the... was in the game... it was, like... someone in *The Yellow House* had it? And I was, like... “Ah! Cool! They had Hella’s sword!” It was this, like... dope, stupid, like... ridiculous fantasy sword that, grows as it kills people. And they’re called, you know, *The Yellow House*, and they worship The Dark and the Heat, and like... sometimes a sword is just a cool sword? And doesn’t have a destiny, right? Which is, like... which I think has come up this season a lot with things, which is, like... Things can be super powerful and magical, and... in some ways, that power gives them a certain sense of destiny, or fate, or something? In that... because it’s powerful, people will want it, and want to do something with it? But it’s not predestined. And there’s a, sort of, difference there cos, like... there are pressures on the world once something... it’s like nuclear weapons! Like... [Jack laughs] Before nuclear weapons existed, we could not kill every human: it would be implausible for humans to kill every human on the planet. There are too many of us; we are too small. Now, that is not the case anymore: we could all be dead in a week, like... that is a feasible thing to happen now.

SYLVIA: Jesus...

AUSTIN: And... [Andrew laughs] that is what happens when you introduce new technology. And that, for me: that’s how I like to treat magic in games like this, like... “OK! What pressure do they put on the world? What new possibilities do they open up?” But I’m not here to be, like... “Oh! This is... that weapon could have stayed in a stupid chest underwater forever! You know? It just could’ve...” So... so, yeah...

JACK: I think... also, super briefly before we move on, in terms of, like... the story being set? There’s... sort of, stylistically, at least? There was a sensation that I got, coming to the end of Marielda... I think... also... after, Austin, you... explicitly told me to name a track *The Killing of... Samoths?*

AUSTIN: Hm-hmm... [Ali laughs].

JACK (laughing): There was definitely a sensation of, like... “Well! We’re going here now...”

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: “We’re in it,” right? This is a train that is... going into the station.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: And... What exactly would happen there? I wasn’t sure... but there was a very clear and palpable sense that something was going to come to an end?

[23:32]

AUSTIN: Whatever that was... Yeah...

JACK: And I think that's one way in which we had to finish the season... but... but... descending into Samoth's palace, there was definitely that sense of, like... "well... this is it!"

AUSTIN: Someone's gonna pull a trigger. Yeah... Totally.

JACK: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah...

AUSTIN: Alright... From Alex... I'm... I'm not going to read this whole question? But it was a really great question that was, kind of, like... "Hey... like... why is... Samol the God of Exposition? And, broadly, did we know that ahead of time? Or what?" And, like... No: I just kind of liked the voice I was doing at the top of that season! [laughter] I did the Marielda intro, and naturally... realised I had this, like... Carolinian, like... you know... American gothic tragedy, like... voice going on. And I eventually, I was like... "Oh! That's who this voice is!" Because I liked being able to say at the top of things... things that an omniscient narrator would have. So, I was just, like... "Yep! This works... This one just works!" So that added up nicely. And then... I think there's a key moment about three or four episodes in where it becomes clear that I realise who it is, so... I'm a big... a big fan of when that happens. [Ali laughs]

NICK: I, uh... I just want to say that Samol is my absolute favorite Austin characterization... I love...

AUSTIN (overlapping): Thank you... that means a lot. I miss him...

NICK (overlapping): I love Samol? But I don't know if I would have loved him as much without, like... he's such an irascible old bastard! [laughter]

AUSTIN: Yeah: he really is! Fucking asshole! I... it is... [laughter subsides] I missed him a lot in season three, because he let me editorialize from a perspective? Instead of being, kind of... like... he's an omniscient narrator, but that doesn't mean that he's not an unbiased narrator, right? Like... he is a god who knows everything, and also has fucking thoughts! [laughter] And so... [pause for laughter to subside]. So yeah... I'm a big fan of him, and I miss him so dearly... He's not dead! To be clear: I didn't kill Samol off screen! [laughter]. Alright, so... I think... and this... speaks back to the stuff we were just talking about. "In the final arc of Marielda..." this is from Virtuasphere... "it was set up so that the player characters were in direct opposition to each other in terms of their goals and motivations: some of them wanting to save Samoth's, and others wanting to kill Samoth's. How did it feel in the moment to be working together in the same party, going to the same place, but for opposite reasons? If you were to be in the situation where the player characters were in opposition to each other again, is there anything you would generally like to do differently?"

[25:52]

[pause]

JACK: It was the best feeling... It felt so...

ALI (overlapping): Yeah, it was really fun! [laughter]

JACK: It felt very, very... very unsettling? And very unsettled? For me, at least? But like... like... extremely exciting. And...

ANDREW: Yeah...

JACK: And... I... kind of felt like... Austin and I stumbled into something... accidental and good when we realized that... umm... Ethan wasn't... didn't know why he was in the palace?

AUSTIN: Yeah; we had no idea... That was definitely a moment of, like... "Oh shit! Like... you... Oh man! No!"

JACK: You asked me who was in the room during a certain conversation, and I... just, like said... "Oh yeah... you know: Ethan's not here." And then... we realized that it would be fun to start playing my own characters off against each other? [Ali laughs]. And with that happening... and feeling the rest of the party kind of collapsing... around us at the same time? [Andrew laughs] It was just the most fun... And like... you know... the question says: "If you were going to be in a situation where the player characters were in opposition to each other again..." I want to get there again!

AUSTIN: Yeah...

JACK: Let's do that again! That was great!

AUSTIN: We're close! Listen! [general sounds of agreement] [laughter]. You hear the end of this last season? Jesus Christ!

KEITH: Yeah... [laughter continues]

AUSTIN: So... [laughter subsides]

ANDREW: I distinctly remember the moment when... Jack called Sige on lying, and like... my stomach dropped, cos I was, like... "Oh shit! I don't have to think about how I interact with NPCs, I have to think about, like... everybody's player character special powers now as well!" [laughter] And like... yeah... it was so tense, and such a different experience, and I felt like it really, like... It felt like I had to be, like... *super-on*...

[27:36]

AUSTIN (overlapping): Right...

ALI (overlapping): Uh-huh...

ANDREW: The whole time stuff was going on...

NICK: As a... as a listener of all that I, like... I knew better, like... you know, obviously, part of me knew better? But the front of my brain was, like... "Oh no, they all hate each other now!"
[laughter]

AUSTIN: Right, right! [laughter continues] they're very convincing actors, aren't they Nick?

NICK: Yeah... they're very good! [laughter subsides]

AUSTIN: Oh, it's so good... Alright! We are done with Marielda stuff; obviously, Marielda stuff is going to keep coming up, because Marielda... for all of our intentions of it being a completely stand-alone series, still ended up being a thing that... you didn't necessarily really need the background to get into it? But it's so heavily connected to Hieron... So; here is the Hieron map as it is at the end of the season! [several gasps, laughs, and groans] I think this is the first time that the public is seeing... this amazing... Roll20 mess... [Keith laughs loudly]. Janine, before... Janine... before the next...

KEITH: I am so disappointed that The Heat and the Dark expanded to ruin what looked like... one of the aliens from *Space Jam*?

AUSTIN: Uh-huh? [Jack laughs] God... Someone actually did that drawing! Where it...

KEITH (overlapping): Oh, really? I didn't see that...

ALI (overlapping): Really?

AUSTIN: You, or somebody else *did it*, and we were like...

KEITH: Yeah... no! That was me!

AUSTIN: You did it?

KEITH: I thought you meant that there was some fan art, and...

AUSTIN: No... *you* did it...

[28:49]

KEITH: I did a side-by-side of the map and the alien...

AUSTIN: Yeah...

ALI: God...

AUSTIN: So... The purple is The Heat and the Dark, and the white is the white Star Stuff that is holding it in, just barely... so... you know...

JACK: Yeah...

ALI: Those are, like... arches, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah... those are arches.

ALI: OK...

AUSTIN: Or crevasses...

JACK(overlapping): Or buttresses or something...

AUSTIN: Yeah... it's, like... the little wiggly ones are crevasses in the ground; the big white and purple, like... big arched ones are arches. Yeah! It's great... Sometimes you're just rolling a game, and you're, like... I don't know... fucking... it's a big, purple mess! Who knows?

JACK: Yeah, and listeners will also notice that this map is brought to you by, uh... is sponsored by question marks? [laughter]

AUSTIN: Totally... totally... And yeah, I guess, like... The Grand Tour: I almost clicked and held to do a ping, but this is not... not actually Roll20, so that didn't work... [pause for laughter] Yeah... The Grand Tour isn't there anymore: we know that... we know The Grand Tour is actually out in the West? And... it's a whole thing!

ALI: Yeah...

AUSTIN: It's a whole thing... Kanton: I thought we would get to this season, we did not. That's OK... things happened.

JACK (overlapping): The Dwarves are from Kanton, right?

ALI (overlapping): Was Kanton another... ?

[30:06]

AUSTIN: Kanton's, like... the big Dwarven city on the... on the surface that no one saw.

ALI: The surface? Oh...

AUSTIN: It just didn't go that way; it's just, uhh... That was a thing, like.... We'll figure this out and... eh... we didn't get to it, so...

JACK: I remember Kanton sounding really cool.

ALI: Yeah...

AUSTIN: Right. Right-right-right. Someone in the chat says: "I thought the lighthouse and stuff was all in The Buoy?" It was! And also, deep-deep-deep-deep-deep-deep-deep underground on a lower strata, it's there... that's where... when... Hadrian climbs up to the top of the lighthouse? That's where he shows back up. In a deep, empty, like... darkened strata and lamina... when he looks to the East, he can see the light of the City of First Light and the volcano, and to the West, he can see another landmass? And he, like... floats over the water? That's where it was.

ALI: What?

AUSTIN: So, yeah...

JACK: Someone in the chat is asking: "where is Nacre on this map?"

AUSTIN (overlapping): You were in that game! I drew this at the time! [Ali laughs]. Nacre is on Samol's nose, to the North-West.

JACK (overlapping): Don't ping it...

AUSTIN: It's where the nose is? On the face to the top-left? So...

JACK: Oh my god! It's all the way over there?

ALI: Just... north of those trees.

AUSTIN: Yeah; just north of those trees, which are, like... the beard on Old Man's Chin. And yeah, it's got a big tower on the far East. Alright! Questions! From Alex: "For Art-slash-Hadrian," though anyone can answer this if they want: "What was the hardest character decision you had to make this season?"

SYLVIA: Jesus... [Ali laughs]

[31:05]

ART: I mean... I guess it depends on what we really mean by 'character decision'?

AUSTIN: Uh-huh?

ART: If we mean, like... the decision the character had to make, it was... I think it's pretty obvious it was... it was about the ring and Hella's hand.

AUSTIN: Yeah... Wait... really? More than Benjamin?

ART: Yeah!

AUSTIN: Huh...

ART: I mean... if only because, like... we just did that over lunch [Ali and Jack laugh].

AUSTIN: That is... one of the rare instances of us...

SYLVIA (overlapping - laughter continues): Jesus...

AUSTIN: Figuring out a thing... [Ali continues laughing] off-mic.

ART: I had a beer, and a burger, like... that wasn't hard at all! I'd just got married...

ALI (overlapping): That was a really nice day!

AUSTIN (overlapping): That burger was nice! That was a nice day!

SYLVIA (overlapping): I'm just seeing, like... a change... Hadrian's barbecuing next to Arell putting his son in a bubble...

AUSTIN: God damn it!

SYLVIA: He's got a 'World's Best Dad' hat on...

JACK: That was a good day... it was a good time; it was a nice place! I had an umami burger.

ALI: Yeah...

AUSTIN (overlapping): Yeah... That's the name of the place! [Ali and Janine laugh].

JACK: Yeah...

[31:56]

AUSTIN: Unbelievable!

ART: Whereas I had to decide whether or not to break Hella's hand just, like... in my room, like...

ALI: Uhh, that was really tense... I really wanted her to still have that hand! But, like... had to understand if you did otherwise?

AUSTIN: Uh-huh? [Andrew laughs]

KEITH: That's a real Friends at the Table sentence: "I really wanted that hand still!" [Ali, Austin, and others laugh].

SYLVIA: Tell me about it...

JACK (sighing): Oh god...

AUSTIN: I'm just gonna briefly skip... way ahead? This is supposed to come in a section that's all about general just... General Friends at the Table Questions. Uhh... uhh... Amateur Doolahan says "Here's a question! What's up with Austin's hatred of hands!?" [general laughter].

KEITH: Very influenced by Star Wars...

AUSTIN: Very influenced by Star Wars... there is, just... this is a serious answer in that I hate that I do it so much? It's very easy? It's a very easy, cheap way to show, like... Ah! Meaningful, long-lasting physical damage is done... which is... cheap. Right? And, like... also, it's... the sort of damage that you can immediately see how a person who has, for their whole life, had two hands start to live life in a different way, like... it's a very quick and dirty way to communicate loss of something you had. And that's, like... I'd like to get away from it? But also, somebody already lost their hand at the top of... next season...

JANINE (overlapping): It's also, like... really... it's so emblematic of, like... especially for season three, with what season three is about, like... how much can you affect?

AUSTIN: Right...

JANINE: And the hands are, like... our direct, like... this is how we affect things around us. So the idea of losing a hand is, like... a really...

AUSTIN (overlapping): Potent...

[33:31]

JANINE (overlapping): Blunt symbol... yeah...

AUSTIN: Yeah... yeah... totally. Yeah. So that's why I say, like... I want to get better at not doing that so often? But also, it's good when it happens? It's such a hard... difficult... ughh... [Ali and Andrew laugh]. It's hard to do that stuff... Anybody else have...?

KEITH (overlapping): It's cos, like... the solution is either: lose a different limb, or like... maybe the character's dead.

AUSTIN: That's the... your limbs are your limbs, right? They're out in the world; further away from your body that, I think, we kind of all... or at least I've kind of... naturally assume that the center of a body is... the heart of the body, in some sense, right? I just used the word 'heart' in this analogy... And so... if you're *really* wounded, you get it in the chest, or the face where your brain is, like... we have all sorts of hierarchies of ideas about what's important for a person's identity? And so losing your hand does not mean you're a different person, but it does mean something's been taken from you in a way that, like... getting shot in the shoulder doesn't... you know?

JACK: Yeah... Someone in the chat mentions... WeAreAPrincess mentions... doing a nose once? We did Thackery's nose?

AUSTIN (overlapping): That was good!

ALI (overlapping): We did do that...

ANDREW (overlapping): Oh man...

JACK: But, like... that, like... And I mean, like... [pause] we can get way into, like... theory of body, here?

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah, yeah...

JACK: But, like... that served, like... a different narrative purpose, right? That was... supposed to be... the petty and unpleasant conclusion to a duel?

AUSTIN: Right... And also...

JACK (overlapping): And specifically *petty*, and... and... like... needless.

[34:53]

AUSTIN: And also wounding the... the... kind of... togetherness? The presentation of a person whose shoes are always shined, right? Like... “Hey... I’m going to wound you by... now I’m categorising you, in the world, as something grotesque.” Which is not me, Austin, saying that people who have no noses are grotesque! But that is the story bit that we were doing, which is... which... again; is a weighty thing, so...

JACK: And I think it was important to me, early, to... you know... we said that the Hitchcocks were ex-cavalrymen? And they were also swindlers? And I wanted to make it clear off the bat that these weren’t, like... the nicest people? It’s kind of a petty... It’s kind of a petty and unpleasant slight to do. And I... again, that served... it’s interesting talking about... yeah... it’s interesting talking about embodiment in... in combat, specifically... in improvised combat.

AUSTIN: And... especially in a game that we play with our voices, and with words, and dice... and not with hit points on a screen? Like... yeah... you have hit points, but like... you’re not... we’re not playing a video game, where I can see that Geralt now only has, you know... two hundred and fifty hit points instead of eight hundred, or whatever.

JACK (overlapping): Two hundred and fifty arms?! [laughter]

AUSTIN: Two hundred and fifty arms! That’s what I’m saying... hit points! Hit points!

JACK: It’s my favourite bit of *The Witcher*...

AUSTIN: That’s my favourite Witcher character to fight; you have to get the right oil to cut off all the arms. OK... This comes in from Gil_Dear, for Janine and Sylvia...

NICK (overlapping): No... wait, hang on... No, no, no... we can’t move on from getting hands chopped off...

AUSTIN (overlapping): Oh! OK... Yes?

NICK: Without talking about a time when a bunch of us did this video game streaming thing. And there was a game we were playing called Dwarf Fortress?

AUSTIN: Uhh... No! We’ve got to move on! [laughter] Don’t worry about it! I... the thing that’s amazing to me is that people think that that’s... alright... so listen... OK... [laughter subsides] Dwarf Fortress is a wonderful game, that we don’t need to talk about at all. You can read about it; there’s a good *New York Times* profile on the people who made it. Uhhh... I might? Uh... Nick, do you want to say what happened?

[pause]

[36:54]

NICK: Austin chopped off a little kid's hand! [laughter]

AUSTIN: Not in real life! In... Dwarf Fortress...

NICK (overlapping): In Dwarf Fortress...

AUSTIN: I was... I don't remember what character I was even playing? But I got into a *huge* fight...

JACK: A Vampire, Austin!

AUSTIN: I may have been...

KEITH (overlapping): Oh! Well that makes sense then!

AUSTIN: Thank you...

KEITH: That's fine...

AUSTIN: Thank you...

KEITH: Like... A Vampire can chop off someone's hand.

AUSTIN: Hey! Hey, hey, hey, hey, hey! Someone says "Austin murdered that child." I don't think that was confirmed... we don't *know* if that kid died... [laughter]

ANDREW: Yeah...

KEITH: There... you can live a long life with only one hand.

AUSTIN: You absolutely can!

NICK (overlapping): Nah, that kid died...

AUSTIN (overlapping): Look at any character from *Friends at the Table*! [laughter]

ART: All of whom have lived at least eighteen months!

AUSTIN (laughing): Yeah... Who knows? Anyway; I think my obsession with cutting hands off in RPGs goes way before... I think Art could probably come up with at least two examples of it happening in college when we were playing, like... L5R or something.

[37:43]

ART: That game was very easy to cut hands off in...

AUSTIN: You got katanas and shit! Like... Hands get cut! So...

ART: Yeah...

AUSTIN: Alright, I'm gonna move on... We don't know if that kid died, I'm gonna say it again. Uh... Janine and Sylvia! [Keith laughs]. "What was it like bringing new characters..."

KEITH (overlapping): If he did die, it's fine: you were a Vampire.

AUSTIN: I was a Vampire... Janine and Sylvia: "What was it like bringing new characters into a group that's already so well established? Any specific fears about not fitting in, or being rejected by fans?"

SYLVIA: Umm... it was scary... honestly...

JANINE: Yeah...

SYLVIA: Personally speaking... cos, like... with everything before that, like... we, like... Janine came on for Quiet Year, and that was something new.

AUSTIN: Hmm-hmm...

SYLVIA: Then... when I came on for COUNTER/Weight that was still pretty fresh. I'd missed world-building, but what I was doing was basically also world-building in that show. But here... one... I was making a new character that was going to interact with established things, and two, in my case specifically? He was a high-ranking official [Ali laughs] and a Very Important Thing! [others join laughter]... in this established world?

AUSTIN: Uh-huh?

SYLVIA: And I... didn't really think about that until we started. And I was, like... "oh shit!" So it was intimidating...

AUSTIN (overlapping): Listen... Sylvia, you were piling on the, uhh... the titles when you were making that character.

SYLVIA: Oh no... completely! Totally! Literally right when I was done, I was, like... "wait a second... this means things! These aren't just fun words!" [Austin laughs] "These mean things... oh no!"

[39:08]

SYLVIA (cont.): Umm... so it was, you know... a *deal*... a big deal! [Ali laughs]. And I was... I was legitimately pretty worried that people would be, like... "Who's this new... who's this new Fire Boy..."

AUSTIN: Who is this n00b! Right?

SYLVIA: Yeah... who's this weirdo? Get out of here! And... but... everyone was super-supportive and super-nice, so...

JANINE: Definitely the, like... jumping around in someone else's established world thing is... scary. Especially cos, like... there is a degree of player authorship involved in Friends at the Table? And, like... when there is this big thing, even... like... I listened to the first season... two and a half times, I think? Before we started season three? And I still felt like I knew nothing! (laughing) I still kind of feel like I know nothing? So that feeling of like... "OK: now you're in this, and you're doing stuff..." for me, it's, like... there's always going to be... like... when someone joins a podcast, there's always going to be, like... an adjustment period for fans, and like... I've been in that podcast, of like... listening to them, I mean... and being not sure about the new person and...

AUSTIN (overlapping): Right...

JANINE: And that's unavoidable. So for me, the big thing was, like... "Oh, I don't want to disappoint my actual... like... my friends, who make this really cool thing, and have let me in on it... and... I don't know what I'm doing, like... this was the first time I've done tabletop stuff. Like... I think Quiet Year was, like... literally the first time doing that [chuckles]. So that was scary shit!

AUSTIN (overlapping): And then you immediately... right... first time doing it... and like... twenty minutes in, you're like... "Weavers! I got this!" [general laughter]. So... I think we're pretty...

JANINE (overlapping): And even that was safe. Like... Quiet Year, I think, was a good introduction, and I kind of... I think this comes up in another question, but... I think I forgot some lessons that I should have learned from Quiet Year.

AUSTIN: Hmm...

JANINE: But... I think Quiet Year was a really good starting point for me? But yes... It was absolutely very frightening! [chuckles]

AUSTIN: OK... This one...

[41:02]

ALI (overlapping): Before we move on... wait...

AUSTIN: OK, sure...

ALI: Cos... Sylvia, am I misremembering? But did you have, like... A Friends at the Table OC when you were listening to season one as...

AUSTIN (overlapping): Oh buddy...

ALI: Like... a fan? [Andrew and Janine laugh].

ART: Whoa! I can't believe Ali just did that!

AUSTIN: Wow... wow... [others join laughter]. You know... uhh... Ali: we are live on the internet... you can't cut that! [Ali laughs]

SYLVIA (incredulously): Did I?

ALI: I thought I remembered reading about it!

SYLVIA: I might have talked to you about this? I don't care! [Ali and Austin laugh]. It's basically Aubrey...

AUSTIN (overlapping) Aww...:

SYLVIA: Like... I'll be honest...

ALI (overlapping): Oh, Sylvia!

SYLVIA: Yeah! Like... I turned that into a character.

ALI: I'm glad...

AUSTIN: My hands are over my heart! [Ali laughs] I am... they're... it's good.

SYLVIA: I don't care! Like, this is, like... OK... you know... I'd feel worse if it wasn't, like... someone who I know who's a season six character?

AUSTIN: Right...

[41:54]

SYLVIA: And, like... I feel like I cannot be harmed by any words from Ali when it comes to weird OCs...

AUSTIN (laughing): Ah-ha! We'll get there! Hey, hey, hey! We'll get there! [Andrew laughs] Don't worry about it... That said, I do want to know, Sylvia, do you have any, like... do you have any OC material that I could use for something later? I mean...

SYLVIA: Uhh...

AUSTIN: Just to show people later, maybe? If there was a cause to show people... You know, I mentioned original Dungeon World stuff; if there was a reason I could show old, pre-recording stuff...

SYLVIA: Legit: I think the only thing I have, is that I have, like... a Word document full of characters for COUNTER/Weight, umm... The Faction Game, that I never used.

AUSTIN: Gotcha... that's... you should hold onto some of those.

SYLVIA (overlapping): I thought you were fishing for me to say something about my Sonic the Hedgehog OC...

AUSTIN (overlapping): No, no, no, no, no... That's not what I was fishing for...

SYLVIA: But that was my sincere answer, that I do have a bunch of, like... original characters that I never used.

AUSTIN: Hmm-hmm... OK; I'm gonna move on. Did I already...? Oh, here it is. This question is for Sylvia: "In Marielda, you played a character that became very devoted to Samot, but Ephrim seems to mirror Maelgwyn and Samoths. Was this an intentional choice?"

SYLVIA: Umm... so in designing these two OCs, ummm [Art laughs]. It was a very intentional choice. [Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: Uh-huh?

SYLVIA: [background laughter continues from a few people] Not so much when I was making Aubrey; the Samot thing kind of happened naturally? And I'm not addressing the OC thing: I'm just going right through...

AUSTIN: Uh-huh?

[43:08]

SYLVIA: With Aubrey, the Samot thing just kind of happened naturally, but with Ephrim, literally when I was making this character, I was, like... "How can I make a character who's far from Aubrey as possible, without them being just, like... evil?"

AUSTIN: Right...

SYLVIA: So Aubrey's whole thing was that, like... she was very, like... focused on helping other people, and like... non-violent, and... Both characters are naive, but in different ways? Is what I wanted to go for? And with Ephrim, he's... at least for this past season, he was very self-serving... he was trying to further his own means instead of trying to do, like... what's good for everyone?

AUSTIN: Right...

SYLVIA: And... so I wanted to purposely try to have those play off each other, cos... I didn't want to just play something super similar...

AUSTIN: Totally.

SYLVIA: One after another. That make sense?

AUSTIN: Yeah; totally. I'm glad that... I didn't know, like... as your GM, I didn't know for sure if that was an intentional thing or not, but it definitely worked, I think. Ah... This one for Janine from Kurt says: "It seems like every character is marked with some powerful magic, and/or relationship to a higher power, except the little thief with the pocketful of poison. What keeps her around now that she knows how deep and dangerous everything is, when she usually..." uhh... "when she is usually looking for the greatest profit? Her words: in episode twenty six." This has so little to do with her...

JANINE: Umm, I think... this... this answer is probably gonna be very different, like... first episode of the next Hieron season? Because there's, you know... there's some shit that's deeply... *deeply* gonna change her? But I think the big answer to draw on is... what came up in the Moth village... in Old Man's Chin, which is just, like... you know... she stuck around for that because Red Jack is the kind of person that you want to owe you a favor.

AUSTIN: Right...

JANINE: And I think that's very much the same thing with, like... Hella and Hadrian, and even... even Samol; is like... you can leave, and then you get nothing for your trouble. Or you can stick around and take the risk? And...

[45:20]

AUSTIN (overlapping): And then one day...

JANINE (overlapping): Maybe down the line... that pays dividends.

AUSTIN: Right. Right... Which is what happens with Lutz... with Chancellor Lutz. Where... we set up that you had a contact in Rosemerrow, and it was someone who ended up being The Chancellor. And... and you could call on that favour. It was, like... this is why Adaire has... knows people; so that, one day, you can make that call. Yeah... that's really good.

JANINE: And, like... the other side of that is that, like... she... that's how she looks at relationships. Like... that's how we... that's how the road of her life leads to that Lack. It's that... that's how she weighs... she's doing math in her head all of the time of, like... "Is this worth it?"

AUSTIN: Right. Totally.

ART: What is Adaire going to do when she realizes that Hella and Hadrian can't do fucking shit for themselves? [pause for general laughter from everybody]

AUSTIN: Good question...

JANINE: Honestly... they can't do shit for themselves, but it hasn't worked out *terribly* on Adaire's end, like... not great?

AUSTIN: She lives in a sword now! [Ali laughs]

JANINE: OK... well, there's that... but...

ART: It's nice in that sword...

AUSTIN: It's pretty nice!

JANINE: Yeah...

AUSTIN: Uhhh... god... OK. I am gonna go to the next... next slide. So it's from Alex for Jack: "what was your favourite music you composed this season?"

JACK: It's a... it's a... it's a three-way tie? Between *Red Jack*, umm... *Hadrian and Benjamin*, and *The Warmth of Love*? Umm... for, kind of, three different reasons... *Red Jack* was fun cos I was, like... "I'm gonna rearrange the *Marielda Theme*."

AUSTIN: Right.

[46:58]

JACK: I... you know... I knew we were going to be going back to Marielda, and... I know we've kind of articulated this a bit? But I feel really weird about repeating music? Or... re-using music? If we're gonna re-use music, why not use the time to develop a theme? Or...

AUSTIN: Or re-com... in the same way that you re-composed... umm... *Eve's Light's Parade* couple of times now for different scenarios, like... The Heat and the Dark reveal in Marielda.

JACK: I'm so... I'm so interested in... in... rearranging things, and it... especially in season three, which... has just, kind of, been a season of... of... constant rearranging, and constant... attempting to find new things in these themes that we've now had for, like... two and a half years? Umm... and so I thought: "Yeah; I'll just... I'll rearrange the *Marielda Theme*." And then, like a fool, I just decided to do another *Marielda Theme*?

AUSTIN: Yep. [Ali and Jack laugh].

JACK: Or just something that sounds like Marielda, but is completely different. Uh... and that was fun: I wrote that in three separate places on two different clarinets because mine wasn't where I was, I've been travelling so much. And it was just a case of, like: "Oh my god, this thing just came together so well!" Umm... I really like *Hadrian and his Son*, because I... was struggling with [pause] I found the Hadrian and Benjamin plot really moving? And I was struggling with trying to get it right. And I just put the microphone on the floor next to the piano, and played it in one take, and was really worried that the pedal would come through? And then as soon as I heard that the pedal *had* come through, I was like (chuckles) "Oh! This sounds really..." And I was really happy with how it sounds.

AUSTIN: Which was the thing that we used, even, throughout the remainder of the season, here or there, right?

JACK: Keeping... keeping the... you know... I think the closest that I get to The Pattern in my daily life, is music? And is working with music in a very sort of, like... frustrating, granular way? Of just like: "Aggh, the instrument isn't sounding like this!" Or: "This is... this is working like that," or whatever...

KEITH (overlapping): I also love to read Jack's tweets about how bad... about how much he hates Logic. [Ali and Austin laugh]

JACK: I compose in Logic? Which also sounds like a... thing? Ahh... Logic is... I think that it's, like... every professional tool? You use the one that you find first? And then, umm... and then you stick with it for better or worse!

[49:46]

JACK (continued): But no! Uhh, so... As the season continued, it became clear to me that... that music - and specifically the presentation of music - was something that was important to me to convey narratively. You know... this is a show in which the Earth... Hieron... is and has always been portrayed as a musician.

AUSTIN: Right...

JACK: So, something that was... one of the ways that I've tried to carry that through was making sure that physicality came through in the music constantly. You know... make sure that we could hear the sounds of breathing when a clarinet is being played, or the... the... keys moving... and so; bringing in the sounds of the foot pedal... And I think that's why it was... realising that the last thing I wanted in the whole season... was the sound of someone's foot lifting off a sustain pedal? And just bringing it into the sound... was really important. I think also, I want to say, was that this season has just been really difficult to compose for, for a combination of, like... constant travel, and also... coming off Marielda? Which felt so, kind of, like... alive...

AUSTIN: Right...

JACK: And fun, and surprising... To go back into this world where I'm, like... "I know what's here! I know what's here... It's a guitar and a piano, like..."

AUSTIN (laughing, overlapping): Right! I mean... I actually don't know if there's another question that speaks to that specifically, but... I'm completely with you, in like... a very similar way. Like... I obviously didn't compose any music for this season, but... especially coming off of Marielda, I knew what the instruments were; I knew what the instrumentation was for Hieron. I knew what was on the palette. And... that... it's a different thing to return to a palette than to find a new one.

JACK: It's such a different thing! Especially cos we went into this knowing it was, like... with it being, for want of a better word, a 'full-length' season?

AUSTIN: Right...

JACK: So I knew I was looking at about eighteen or nineteen tracks of music? And I was, like... "What does this look like?" And it's so easy to romanticize a lot of this stuff, when... I mean... we made a show about this, and it's called COUNTER/Weight. [Ali laughs]. You know... when what it ends up with is a lot of just, like... just sitting and working. And I think the example for this is; I was just really running up the clock this last week, and uhh... Ali sent me... Benjamin coming out of the sword?

AUSTIN: Right...

[52:10]

JACK: And it was...

AUSTIN (overlapping): Or out of the Bubble... out of the Arrell Bubble.

JACK: That's right; out of the Bubble, yeah. I mean... they're the same...? No, it's fine...

[Ali and Austin laugh]

JACK: And like... it was moving... it was genuinely moving to me in a way that was... the show has never been before? And the story that I want to tell is that... I sat down at the piano crying, and wrote it in one take? And actually what happened is that I sat down at the piano crying, botched it for an hour and a half... [Ali laughs] gradually got increasingly sick of the audio files of the piano...

AUSTIN: Yup!

JACK: It was really hot... I got up and went outside... I began to run out of time more and more and more... I needed to work on the outro... And in the end I didn't... that... that sequence didn't get any music. Like... that's the other side of the physicality of music... the physicality of production. It's just, sometimes, it's gonna fuckin' suck! And, like... you know...

AUSTIN: It is... often... that I catch myself about to ask you something that I would be... *infuriated* if anyone else on the cast asked *me* to do? Of just like... "Oh! Well can't you just do this basic thing where you just loop this twice, and then... it's done?" [Andrew and Jack laugh] Basically just: "What are you doing? Just play this sequence twice!" And then I'm like... well... if someone told me to do that with an Intro... or with an NPC... "What if we just had," uhh... [intermittent laughter from various others from here] "What if we just had Lazer Ted again as a different NPC? What if this new game just had Lazer Ted again?" I would fire... you're not allowed to play with me anymore! We're done! Like... that's not what this is! And so that's like... [laughter ends].

JACK (overlapping): The last...

ART (overlapping): Someone's been reading Twitter these past few days... [laughter]

AUSTIN: Yeah, I bet... Christ...

JACK: The last... the last two notes on the clarinet in *Warmth of Love* were... uhh... took thirty six takes... the last two notes. And I say that, not because I was looking for some Kubrickian, flawless...

[53:45]

JACK (cont.): “Ahh... you’ve got to convey it in thirty six takes!” It’s just like... I wasn’t breathing right, or I wasn’t sitting right, or... I ended the recording too soon, or I ended the recording too early...

KEITH: It’s... that’s... it’s just a *really* hard instrument to play too! [Ali and Austin laugh]

JACK: Yeah, it’s like... really hard! I’ve played it for thirteen years, and I’m terrible at it! [several people laugh]

KEITH: It is really hard...

AUSTIN (overlapping): Spectreboy says “Wasn’t that just Snitch Nightly?” No! Snitch Nightly had an empty heart!

JACK (overlapping): Snitch Knightly is not Lazer Ted!

AUSTIN: He would have fucking killed everyone in The Six in a second! Lazer Ted is a good boy who loved everyone! There’s a huge difference...

KEITH: So... I just, really quick, just to add on to what Jack said. That... I bought, like... a shitty clarinet for a very specific reason, like... two years ago? The way I used it...

AUSTIN (laughing, overlapping): Wait! Were you unlocking...? Wait, wait wait! Did you have some sort of magical box that could only be unlocked by playing clarinet? [Ali laughs]

KEITH: That’s exactly what it was...

AUSTIN: OK, got it...

KEITH: No, no, no... I... so... I uh, like... when you go on YouTube and you go, like... “Hey! How do I play a fucking clarinet YouTube?” And they show you... the *first* scale that they show you? Is harder to do than any other scale that I’ve ever learned on any other instrument? [Austin and Jack laugh]. It’s like... impossible. The first scale involves... “OK; you play these first four notes, and then you have to go from holding none of the buttons to holding all of the buttons, all at once.” And it’s insane! It’s crazy that anybody can make any music out of a clarinet [several people laugh].

JACK: Sometimes people tell me that they play the *Marielda Theme* at, like... one-point-five speed, or two-point-five speed... And I just... I feel sudden and profound anxiety? [Austin laughs] Because, I can tell you that the *Marielda Theme* is *really* fast? And I have to play it live?

[55:22]

AUSTIN: It seems hard...

JACK: It's a capricious tune...

KEITH: The only worse thing for you, Jack, is if you were trying to do it on an oboe...

JACK: Oh my god... I've been playing the saxophone recently, and like... That's me done!

AUSTIN: Alright! From Matt: "Simple question for everyone: what do you think was the best or most interesting failed roll throughout this season? There were a number of great ones, but I'm curious as to what stood out to each member in particular."

KEITH: I fucking destroyed a whole bunch of the world! [general laughter]

AUSTIN (overlapping): Yeah, you did do that... That did happen! So... we should talk about that, cos that was definitely one where the response was, like... "Austin, why do you hate Keith so much? Why did you make that happen?" [Andrew laughs].

KEITH: Yeah! That was established...

AUSTIN (overlapping): And... that was... well, one; obviously.

KEITH: That that would happen...

AUSTIN: That's the thing, right? That was a rule that I put in place literally at the end of season one, right? Like... I had notes about what people would, kind of, carry with them into the next season of Hieron? And like... what things would pop up based on failed rolls, and based on the condition of the world. And *yours* was; if you failed a roll while trying to transform, you would still transform into the thing, but the rest of those things would, seemingly, at least, go extinct, or be removed. And that happened once at the top of the season? Timed perfectly...

KEITH (overlapping): With the wolves..

AUSTIN: Yeah, with the wolves... Timed perfectly because it... it was also the case that in another recording we'd made, I'd already given one wolf to Art in a... to Hadrian, in a *Guidance* roll? So it was...

JACK (overlapping): You've given a wolf to Hadrian... [Ali laughs, others join]

[56:52]

AUSTIN: I've given a wolf to Hadrian... [laughter subsides]. If we were still in season one, that would be an episode title... And so, it was perfect, as like... "Oh... OK... here is... Samot is the Last Wolf Alive, obviously..." And that rule got set up? And then... that rule was still *true*... right? Just cos it didn't pop back up in the course of that game, that rule continued to be a true thing.

KEITH (overlapping): Yes... It's been referenced in, I think, the first question today.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: Talking about, like... the rules that you set up are still rules, whether or not they come up for ten episodes, or they don't.

AUSTIN: Right. Which is weird, but like... it was there.

KEITH: It... I mean, that's just how, like... playing inside of a world works.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: Like... there's no... you can't... just because you don't think about gravity, doesn't mean it's not still happening all the time [Austin laughs]. Like...

JACK: Yeah, Hadrian: sorry... (correcting) Hadrian? Fero: The Pattern? Fero? [Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: Yeah...

JACK: Just because you don't think about The Pattern Fero... [Ali and Austin laugh]

KEITH: So, I... [Jack laughs] It's also... it's specific because... I think, uhh... I don't, you know... I don't know what goes into everyone else's thought process when they play the game? But... I try to react to stuff consistently as, you know... a version of myself that is a person in this weird world? And because of that, I end up forgetting a lot of stuff? [laughs] And I end up, like... not knowing character names? Cos I'm very invested in being in a specific moment? And so... I had literally forgotten... and I think that's a quality that you can ascribe to Fero, like... If Fero knew that this was happening?

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: He probably might have still forgotten [Jack laughs]. I think the idea of turning into sand... was such a powerful impulse for me and for Fero.

[58:39]

AUSTIN: You've written about Fero on Twitter, that he is this... he doesn't think about turning into birds; he has an impulse, and then he is a bird.

KEITH: Yeah. Right; exactly. And so... which is... a really great... for me; I think... it's a really great way to explain, like... to gamify just... the thought process of being a player that's playing a character?

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: Is like... you have these ideas of, like... how you want to react to things, and you don't think about the world around you when you make decisions - which is how people make decisions all the time, every day - you're just... you're just being alive. And so... when I turned into sand, and Austin was like: "By the way, you just destroyed all of the fucking sand..."

AUSTIN: Well, the first thing I asked you was, like... "Which sand did you become?" Because there was a world in which you'd become...

JACK (overlapping): You know you can't beat an ontological battle, right? [general laughter]

AUSTIN: That's true, I did do that... That is true... that is true... But then I asked Fero: "Hey... are you... are you... what sand are you?" Cos that could have been the mountains of The Archives. And we would be having a very different show right now! None of the *Twenty Two Birds* stuff would have happened; none of the going to... you know what I mean? It would have been, like... "Oh! I've destroyed the sands and rocks up in the mountains..."

KEITH: If I... right. Yeah... I could have... If I'd answered differently, I could have destroyed the place that we were at.

AUSTIN: Right. And then we would have gotten, like... you all fleeing, and re-uniting, and... I don't even know what game looks like, but that could have happened, totally, if you had said the other thing.

KEITH: Yeah, for sure. Yeah.

AUSTIN: On the other hand, we then got this really great image of The Heat and the Dark bursting up through, and then the Star Stuff... So like, in that way, it's one of those things that's like: "OK... this is now a catalyst for... incredible, like... momentum for what's happening in the world and the story, so... it's pretty good.

[01:00:22]

JACK: And I think it's also worth saying that, a thing that... you know... we talk about a lot, but it bears mentioning whenever we get an opportunity to. Which is, sometimes people ask us: "Well, you like telling stories, why don't you just ditch the rules? Why don't you just ditch the dice-rolling?"

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: And the answer is: the dice lead to amazing things. Do what the dice say, always, and you'll get to... you will be forced into making... really interesting decisions that can inform, you know... not just the mechanical story, but the narrative one, you know... We got *The Heat* and the Dark bursting out, but we also got Fero and Lem just hypnotised, looking up out of the window at this thing happening in Rosemerrow. And I think that that's important to mention again.

KEITH: I think it's an important part of Fero that is, like... there's a way to read, you know... I guess, any character that I'm playing as, as thoughtless or reckless? But I think that what I try to bring to the characters that I'm playing... because my biggest deficiency is bringing, like... total alternate perspectives? That's my deficiency, like... I can't play a character that is, like... way different than how I am normally? But the thing that I try to bring is, like... the spontaneity of acting in the moment and... and having the consistent worldview of someone who is only ten-to-twenty percent different than how I normally am.

AUSTIN: Right... Uhh, Nick - you were gonna say something?

NICK: I was just... on the subject of rolls.

AUSTIN: Right.

NICK: Like, there's a whole history, going way back, of the intersection of randomisation and art creation.

AUSTIN: Right.

NICK: There's... that was *basically*, the entire shtick of the Surrealists.

AUSTIN: Totally.

NICK: The whole... *Exquisite Corpse*, and...

AUSTIN: Right.

NICK: And that kind of stuff...

[01:02:22]

AUSTIN: Like... "Where do the rules of this game that we're playing lead us?" is something that far predates even... you know... the most story-driven... the earliest super-story-driven tabletop RPGs, totally.

NICK: Yeah. Which has always been, like... that's my favourite part of the whole process. Like... that's the magic of tabletop RPGs.

AUSTIN (pause while coughing in background): Excuse me!

JACK: You OK, Austin?

AUSTIN: Dying, actually... actually that's what's happening.

KEITH (overlapping): SpecialBoy...

NICK (overlapping): Austin keeps coughing for me...

AUSTIN: Yeah...

KEITH: SpecialBoy, in the chat? Says that my character in the Holiday Special was pretty different?

AUSTIN: I think that's true...

KEITH: That was something that I did very intentionally to try to, like... to try to do a character that really was thinking properly about things? But also still didn't understand the situation... like... I think Fero is always trying to... is often trying to do what he thinks is the right thing, but is only ever thinking in the moment, and... and... I can't even remember that fucking character's name... Winston?

AUSTIN: Walligan...

JANINE (overlapping): Walligan!

KEITH: Yeah...

JANINE: I liked Walligan!

KEITH: I'm not good with names... yeah... I liked Walligan too.

JANINE: I think you did a good job with Walligan.

[01:03:30]

KEITH: I... I also think I did, but it was really hard to... to... talk, like...

JANINE (overlapping): Yeah... that's how it goes.

KEITH: It was really hard! And... but it's not... what I mean by 'hard', is that it was not a natural performance for me.

AUSTIN: Keith... Keith Carberry doesn't believe that, like... a party will smooth out tension between racial and class differences?

KEITH: No, no! I've never even wanted to *be* at a party, let alone throw one... [Ali, Sylvia, and Austin laugh]

AUSTIN: How many Laundromats so you own?

KEITH: Zero!

AUSTIN: OK...

KEITH: None... I've never even done laundry.

AUSTIN (overlapping): Wait... uhhh...?

KEITH: That's not true... [general laughter]

AUSTIN: Uhh... briefly; any other failed...

JACK (overlapping): I've never heard of laundries!

AUSTIN: Any other failed rolls before I move on?

JANINE: Do we have to...

JACK (overlapping): Umm, like...

NICK (overlapping): Oh... yeah. No, I just wanted to mention... Oh; sorry, go ahead Janine.

JANINE: No... I was gonna... I was gonna say, like... there's a *bad* failed roll... is this the time to mention that?

AUSTIN: I don't know... which one?

[01:04:24]

JANINE: Uhh... in Rosemerrow... Blake versus Mother Glory.

AUSTIN: Ohh... What was... that was... that was a... mixed success though, right? That wasn't a failed roll. You had to pick one...

JANINE: Well... It was a mixed success, but like... I definitely went into that encounter, like... "OK: I'm definitely gonna save the character that my character has a connection to and a reason to save; and I'm also gonna save the one that I, as a player, am very invested in, and it's gonna be great. Everything will be fine; we're gonna solve murders!"

AUSTIN: Right...

JANINE: And... that super didn't happen. And... there... you know... people were upset; I was upset. There was some upset-ness.

AUSTIN: Yeah...

JANINE: But also, like... there was *no other* choice for Adaire to make there, cos she didn't even know Mother... Had she even met Mother Glory?

AUSTIN (overlapping): No, I don't think she...ever met Mother Glory. Just a name on a sheet...

JANINE (overlapping): A person she's vaguely heard about, who was probably important... some people here seem to like them... I don't know... I like Blake more. And... So it's not technically a failed roll, but like... man... that was a call!

AUSTIN: Yeah... Definitely... We'll talk about that more in a bit, cos that comes back up. Keith?

KEITH: Real quick: I just had a sort of... mostly tangential thought, mostly about failed rolls though? Which is, uhh... one thing that Austin does I've never... that I've never done as a GM, and have never had any other GM do? Is: failing a roll where the thing that you want happens, but the thing that... ends up... the result of the roll ends up actually terrifying in that... like... I can't think of a specific...

AUSTIN (overlapping): Like Uklan Tel... That just happened, right?

KEITH: Yes... yes; that was a very recent one.

AUSTIN: So; you wanted to spur Uklan Tel on to do something instead of being just an academic?

KEITH: That's right! Exactly; yeah...

[01:06:02]

AUSTIN: And you failed it, and I was, like... "Oh yeah; you got it! He's, like... let me tell you!" And the last shot we see of Uklan Tel is... in the whole season... is him in the La... The Archives... Not The Archives... the... the Last University... studying... *carefully* studying The Heat and the... *Obsessively* studying The Heat and the Dark, and the Star Stuff.

KEITH: But it being the *wrong* thing for him to do.

AUSTIN: Correct. Or not even... or; he's doing it the wrong way. You might have been right... I don't know. Cos if Fero... If Fero had succeeded that roll, he would have been doing the same thing, but maybe more safely, or... maybe in a way that was just about supporting another person, or something. But, like...

KEITH: That is the thing... you've done that... that sort of thing a handful of times over the last seasons? And it is always... every time it happens, like... no one's... I've never seen anyone do that before; it works so well.

AUSTIN: Shout-outs to... That's all Adam Koebel, who I've played in games with now for the last couple of years, and who is very good at... making... separating... player action from player intention, if that makes sense? Or kind of... "What's your intention?" Umm... "And what's your action..." Or... "What's the outcome you want? And how are you going about it?"

KEITH: Right... It's such a better thing to do than like... "Oh... you tried to make water, but you failed! You forgot how to make water..." But like... "You made the water, but it's in the wrong spot," or: "there's way too much of it." Like...

AUSTIN: Right...

KEITH: "Someone was there who you didn't know was gonna be there..." Or a bunch of other stuff...

AUSTIN: It's one of those things where, like... you can... that's the other end of "Make a move as hard as you want." Is: sometimes, you make a very soft move. Sometimes... sometimes half of the Western Seaboard disappears, and sometimes you've made a person... an academic... maybe... step outside of the realm of safe study and into something that could cause big problems in two years when we return to this setting. Or in a year... I guess, a year from now is when we'll come back. Yeah... Any other... tough rolls? Bad rolls? Good rolls?

JACK: Super-quick; mostly cos, like... I think it's something that we want to address later? But I kind of want to flag it up here, is, umm... that... the seven-to-nine that led to Lem flooding the Stoneworks?

[01:08:05]

AUSTIN: Yeah...

JACK: Or more specifically, that led to the researchers staying when Lem flooded the Stoneworks, was, like... a moment that was really important to me, and I'm really glad that we got to that point? Probably for reasons that we can talk about later... Like; realising what we were gonna do there, and how that was gonna go... was good fun.

AUSTIN: Right...

ART: I would just like to say that Hadrian has never failed an important roll, and... [general laughter]

JACK (under continuing laughter): Never one!

AUSTIN (under continuing laughter): Never once! [laughter subsides]

ALI: Yeah...

AUSTIN: Umm... someone in the chat... I've lost it... uhh... where did it go? Someone called... Oh; there it is. Herman SL says: "Yeah... the Blade in the Dark Castille roll changed everything..."

JACK (laughing): That was good...

ANDREW and NICK (together): Yeah...

AUSTIN: That was one of those instances. Which is, like... Maelgwyn's like... "I think I should use this sword..." and Castille's like... "Yeah, *definitely* use that sword..." [Ali laughs]

JACK: Yeah...

NICK: I was gonna bring that up as my favourite... of, like... in a show full of amazingly-failed rolls? [Austin laughs]. That roll...

KEITH: That's...

NICK: Oh my god! It's so good! Because, like... the players know...

AUSTIN: Right...

NICK: And the players are, like... "Oh god..." But then the *characters*... don't... and... ah man!

[01:09:13]

ALI: Yeah... she... [laughs]

NICK: And it's not, like... a... it's not, like... a failed roll that is like... it's really easy to have a failed roll that's like... "Oh... I tried to hit this guy with a sword."

AUSTIN: Right.

NICK: There's... *so much* in that scene, and in that roll.

KEITH: It's having to play the rest of the time, knowing that the information your characters have to work with is wrong.

NICK: Yeah. Totally.

KEITH: And... it sort of reminds me of in, uhh... What did I...? Shit... I lost my train of thought. Never mind... Austin, you go.

AUSTIN: When I was a... when I was younger and played in games, I was, like... the asshole who... "OK; I don't know it now, but how do I move the world such, that I do find out the truth, and then I can make the right decision based on..." You know what I mean? Like...

JACK: Solve X for Samoths.

AUSTIN: Right! Exactly! And you are all very, very, very good, and I'm fucking *blessed* to have players who are like... who do the opposite thing? Who rub their hands together at every little... drop of dramatic irony that comes in? Like... "Ah yeah! Turn that fucking faucet on!"

ALI: Yes, baby! [Andrew laughs].

JACK: We should... we should talk about dramatic irony later, when it comes up, I think... probably.

AUSTIN: Sure.

JACK: That's, like... a whole well... there's, like... a whole well of stuff to talk about.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: We've also been, like... going for an hour and fifteen minutes, and we're, like... one third of the way through your PowerPoint [laughter]

[01:10:29]

AUSTIN: OK... OK, OK! OK, well then...

KEITH: I have until... I have until nine o'clock.

AUSTIN: Nice...

KEITH: That's... two and a half more hours.

AUSTIN: Alright... well, this one...

JACK: Here, it's eleven.

AUSTIN: This comes in from... there's gonna be a bunch of these that say, just... "From Linda..."? Umm... [laughter] And they're not from Linda, it turns out.

KEITH (overlapping): No; they're from LINDA

JANINE: They're from a coalition...

AUSTIN: Uhhm... "Tell us about the scene with Adelaide you mentioned in this tweet. You said to remind you for the Post-Mortem." And Maddie says: "not enough Adelaide content, for sure." I said: "When it's time for the Post-Mortem ep, remind us to tell you about the very good Adelaide scene that almost got released, and then didn't..."

JACK (overlapping): This was in April!

AUSTIN: Yeah... Tlme... time is long. [Ali and Jack laugh]. I'm gonna... I'm gonna mute everybody for a second, and I'm just gonna play this scene.

KEITH: OK...

AUSTIN: So... I'm just gonna turn down Discord.

JACK (overlapping): Why don't we mute ourselves?

AUSTIN: OK, yeah... everyone else can... how about that: Everybody mute themselves. [pause]. Tell me... hmmm... that's not gonna work. Type when... type when you're mu-ted. When you're... what was that?! What was...? Why'd I say mu-ted? That's not how that works... Alright... I think everybody's muted. OK... I'm gonna play this now.

[01:11:37]

AUSTIN (in OUTTAKE recording): Four, Ephrim. You see a... uhh... How did I describe it? The throne room? Marble? Marble, with lots of red and gold? Marble, and ivory, and uhh... pearlescent, additional... featurettes throughout the... throughout the throne room. And there is the Queen, Adelaide, with her legs crossed, on her throne. And... when she sees you there... you're in the same pose Jeremy always took? With his knees... on his knees, with your head bended down, and you can't move... and... she, like... stands up, and like... walks - leg-over-leg - towards you. And then, like... lifts your chin up with a single finger. And says:

AUSTIN (as ADELAIDE): I caught one of you... I've got a great deal... a great deal for you.

AUSTIN: And then, like... lifts your whole body up with her finger. And we'll find out what that deal is, next time. (OUTTAKE ends).

AUSTIN: OK... [Sylvia and Jack sigh]

ALI: Hi; we're back. I'm back.

AUSTIN: We're now back. I'm back too [Ali laughs]. Uhh... so that's a scene were we just fucked up. We just fucked up... And... and... so that's a scene where Ephrim gets killed with, uhh... Ordennan bolts... Ordennan Steel...

KEITH (overlapping): I'd forgotten about that!

AUSTIN: Uh-huh? Yeah... And...

KEITH: I'd forgotten... I'd remembered that that was wrong...

AUSTIN: It was wrong! I went two weeks with that recording, and then...

ALI (laughing): Yep!

AUSTIN: I was figuring out what the deal that Adelaide was going to offer Ephrim would be, and then... I was like... "uhhhh... no! Ordennan Steel? That's the whole thing it does!" [Ali laughs]

KEITH: That's uh... That's like one... there's not... like... one drawback of this just... medium in general? Is, like... how much stuff happens just from, like... a bunch of fucking people talking?

AUSTIN: Yep... [Jack laughs]

[01:13:35]

KEITH: Austin writes a lot of stuff, but pretty much all of the things that happen are just people saying bullshit for four hours at a time [laughter].

AUSTIN: Because, like... and that's the thing: we talked... again... the world has rules, and we play by those rules, and sometimes the rules are, like... "OK... like... that's OK; that's one of the rules..." And then it's... 2am, and we've been going for way too late at night, and we haven't eaten enough dinner, and we're exhausted. And then it's the... we know it's the end of the session, and then Ephrim gets shot twice with Ordennan Bolts, and then he dies. And then it's, like... "OK... well... we should wrap up. What's a really good fucky scene with Adelaide?" And then... it happens... and then it's, like... "OK... we'll be back." And then that's not the thing that should have happened. So then we have to scramble to be, like... "Oh, shit!" Alright: the beginning of this new recording, we have to re-do the end of the previous one.

JACK: This is, like... this is something that's also worth mentioning, which is, like... we screw up in ways that... we screw up in ways that it's good to hear on a recording, quite a lot, and we put that on the recording. And then we screw up in ways that actively goes against the recording? Or breaks the story? Or is bad radio? And sometimes, we'll just get rid of that stuff.

AUSTIN (overlapping): Right...

ALI (overlapping): Yep...

Keith (overlapping): That was...

JACK: There's a bunch of stuff that you're hearing, like here, and that's the good stuff. There's *bad* stuff that we cut, and, like... we've talked about it before, but i remember some stuff in COUNTER/Weight where Austin would just deliver a bunch of exposition, and then, almost immediately, go: "Ah... no... actually..." [Ali and Jack laugh]

AUSTIN: Bad... yeah...

JACK: And we just cut it...

AUSTIN: There's a bit in The Faction Game of COUNTER/Weight where Natalia Greaves is like: "Ah! I know what Rigour is!" And then explains what Rigour is. And, instead of that, what you got was *An Animal out of Context*, which is the best episode of anything... it's the best thing I've ever made in my life. And so, like...

JACK: Also, like... Yeah... shout-outs to [musical theme plays in the background]... OK... Mario, maybe? [general laughter]

[01:15:29]

AUSTIN: Shout-outs to Mario...

JACK: Shout-out to Mario, maybe? I love that fact that he's maybe been possessed by a hat his whole life... [Ali and Austin laugh] Umm... Shout-out to Ali...

AUSTIN: Fact!

JACK: Who does... god... we talk about how Ali is a very good Producer a lot. You do the episodes that we hear... we make a good show; but we also sometimes make a show that is, like... [pause] you know... [Austin laughs] and then Ali does work on it, and it's amazing! [Ali and others join laughter]. I've heard episodes, and turned off the recording and gone, like... "whoof..." And then heard the episode and gone, like... "god... that's really good!" [Ali laughs]. So Ali does... Ali does... Ali does *amazing* work that you do not hear. It's brilliant.

AUSTIN: That is true...

ALI: Yeah...

AUSTIN: At the same time, just for the record... Does not cut as much as people think? In terms of... fun banter, or like... stuff that... we get a lot of requests from people to be, like... "Hey... bring back the old stuff where you just... Google dogs..." Let me tell ya... if you listen close...

ALI (laughing): Yup! We're still Googling dogs...

AUSTIN: Still there. Still in there. [general laughter]

ALI: That is there...

AUSTIN: That is right there.

NICK (overlapping): I...

ALI: You just don't need to know, like... when Discord fucks up. Like... who wants to know that? If you're caring what this group is doing...

AUSTIN, JACK, and NICK (all pretty much together): Yeah...

AUSTIN: I'm supposed to click on...

NICK (overlapping): I learned about, uhh... I learned about traditional English Hobby Horses. [Jack laughs, others join].

[01:16:51]

AUSTIN: True! That's true!

ART: That was terrible! You should have cut that! [laughter]

ALI: No...

ART: I was... walking my dog, hearing that... [Ali laughs] nowhere to hide! [Jack laughs]

KEITH: I mean... you didn't have to... you weren't looking at the pictures. *That's* the real... the real part that was scary was...

JACK (overlapping): All of you...

KEITH (overlapping): That they looked so terrifying.

JACK (overlapping): All of you motherfuckers weren't chased into a sea by one! [Keith laughs].

ALI (laughing): This is true!

NICK: Oh man...

KEITH: Yeah... yeah... good point.

AUSTIN: God... Sorry; I'm now looking at hobby horses. Tradish... Traditional?

KEITH: Can I just say? Some of the shit that the UK does still, is insane! Like... every... like... everything from, like... hearing Jack talk about hobby horses, to hearing about how, like... I saw a news story about how, like... their, like... the Speaker of their Parliament has to, like... pretend not to want to be the Speaker, or something? Like... he got dragged up, like... like... everything is some weird show; it's insane! [Ali laughs].

ART: Did you see all those tweets about whether or not The Queen was, like... sending coded messages in her hat this week?

AUSTIN: Shut up, no... what?

KEITH (overlapping): No... what!?! [Andrew laughs]

ALI (overlapping): I saw it was, like... transported in a different limo... I saw that! [chuckles]

AUSTIN: The hat was?

[01:17:59]

ALI: Yeah... her crown had its own car to, like... sit, and...

ANDREW (overlapping): Aaagggghh!

ALI (overlapping): do shit, and... [cut off by a lot of laughter]

AUSTIN: What? What's wrong? [Sylvia and Keith laugh]

KEITH (laughing): That's the worst!

AUSTIN: That's a hobby horse!

KEITH: I thi... yeah; it is. And I think it was Jack... Jack; I think it was *you* that told me that, like... when there's a new Prime Minister that they have to, like... pretend to take over the Government from The Queen. It's like... everything is a fucking [inaudible under Jack].

JACK (overlapping): Now here's what I'll say.

AUSTIN: The pattern is very old!

JACK: Let's put this to rest... We are an *old* country [Austin and Keith laugh]. And: we are also a bad one. [general laughter]

KEITH: Hold on... you're talking to a bunch of people that live in *America*!

AUSTIN (laughing): Yeah! Uh-huh?

ART: A younger bad country! [Austin laughs]

KEITH: A younger... a younger *worse* country.

AUSTIN: Uh... alright... Aruesmith says: "Around the table; name two NPCs you remember or enjoyed." I like remember, here! What are two you remembered? [Ali and Andrew laugh].

JACK: Oh my god... umm... I'm gonna start. Umm... Red Jack!

AUSTIN (overlapping): Yeah, Red Jack. Red Jack's also one of mine.

JANINE (overlapping): Yeah...

[01:18:18]

JACK: Red Jack is so... *good*. I've told this story on CuriousCat? But I'm going to take the opportunity again to tell it... with my human voice? Instead of with a keyboard? Umm... I heard the first episode of season three when it went up on... when it went up live; I didn't hear it beforehand. And... I heard it, like... a day after it went up, which meant the first thing I saw from season three was, like... a piece of fanart by, I think, Cody Simpson? And this fanart, just... completely out of context was just this blue, snow-bound forest, with this horned silhouette in the distance, standing next to an armored horse. Uhh... and I was, like... "Oh! Right! We're back! Yeah, cool; I've got no idea what this is! This is frightening!" [Ali and Austin laugh]. And when I listened to the episode, Red Jack arrived, and it was just the most... the most... the most exciting thing. And I was a big Red Jack fan before I got a chance to be him, and... [Austin laughs]. Cos he's... cos he's... he's good! Red Jack's really good; I'm a big Red Jack fan.

AUSTIN (overlapping): And, of course...

JACK (overlapping): And also, the...

AUSTIN: Go ahead.

JACK: Oh... go on.

AUSTIN: Uh... Red Jack is a season one character, is another thing. Like...

ALI (overlapping): What?

AUSTIN: Red Jack is... If... if... uhh... y'all had not taken a boat, you'd have met Red Jack three years ago, or whatever... like... that's one hundred percent the case. Like... That whole... that whole thing with Red Jack, in another town that *he* was protecting, and there was a human town... or, at the time it was a human town, now it was a halfling town. All of that was if you had taken a land route to the Southern Tower, in the first season.

KEITH: I... I don't regret a second of Friends at the Table?

AUSTIN: Uh-huh? Except?

KEITH: Uhhh... [Ali laughs] but... no, no, no! I was gonna say: but... for a second, think about how different it would be if people had listened to me when I begged us to not take a boat? [Ali, Andrew and Nick laugh]. People... people point out, like... the moment when I made a joke about zombie pirates a lot?

AUSTIN: Uh-huh?

[01:20:51]

KEITH: Like... "Oh! A lot of stuff changed because of a joke..." But the thing before that is, like... even more stuff changed if we didn't take that fucking boat! [Austin laughs].

ALI: Yup!

ART: Am I the last one to notice that... every Holiday Special, Jack just picks the character from the first half of the season that he liked the most and plays as them? [general laughter]

AUSTIN: Huh...

ALI: Yep?

AUSTIN: Huh...

JACK: Look... there's no rules against it [Ali laughs].

AUSTIN: He's got you there... so... Yeah, that was... definitely one of my favourite... I'd probably say Mother Glory is probably my second favourite.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Oh no! Hmm... no? I'm gonna... I love Mother Glory. I *really* love Mother Glory... but figuring out Corsica Neue? Was actually my favourite moment [murmurs of agreement]. Because... because... normally, when I make new characters, I situate them in my mind as representatives of a certain... thing in the world? I say: "OK... what is Rosemerrow made up of? It's made up of bureaucrats, so I'll have some bureaucrats and merchants, and there's the spiritual stuff, so there's going to be a priestess..." that no one went to visit, at all, during the Rosemerrow game! Ah... "and there's going to be some... artists, and some performers, and there's going to be these different factions, so they're all going to need a representative." And I do that... I did that with the three branches of Ordenna, where you have the... the... Impetor, who's the head of the military; you have the Vicerine, who's, like... the civic and spiritual person... I did the *opposite* thing with Corsica Neue. I realized that there could be a person in this world who was undead, and who understood it, and who was not *from* that part of the world - was not from Nacre - and so... did not... you know... did not have a flowing dress and a pearlescent sheen, but *did* understand how to wrap her undead wounds well. And she was someone who would exist in the world, and be as heroic as the heroes are? Like... I think I've told you this a couple of times, Jack, when you were writing the theme for her, that she's a Bethesda protagonist, right?

JACK: Yeah... yeah.

[01:22:26]

AUSTIN: She's been to Ordenna, that's... you know; that's why she has Ordennan armour. She is... uh... an Orc Goddess, even if she isn't an orc, which... no one knows if she's an orc or not. Like... she's done things in all the places of the world; she's a force of nature; and then, instead of being the... protagonist of her game, she then says: "OK... I'm going to start a faction."

JACK: Yeah...

AUSTIN: One of the things you can do in the Powered by the Apocalypse games is: at a certain point, you can, kind of... send your character off into the sunset, and be, like... "I've done my thing, and now my PC is an NPC." And Corsica Neue is definitely *that*, for me. So... that's... that was... figuring her out, and figuring out how to make her impact The Archives, was a big deal for me.

JACK: Getting to... I really struggled with Corsica's music? At first... because... you know... we've got a character that is a Bethesda hero, and we already have music for all our heroes? So... what does this sound like? But the more I conceptualized her as almost, like... a [pause] I wanted that music to feel like a spaghetti western?

AUSTIN: Right...

JACK: Like... the whole scene on the hill... this... this... stranger, riding into town, who actually has this army behind her. And getting to that point felt really good.

AUSTIN: Who else stands out this year, people?

ART: Alyosha?

AUSTIN: Yeah... I wanted more time with him, and so much of him lived on in the... intro text? Or in the... episode description text? Which there's a question about; which we'll get to.

KEITH: A lot of people don't know that those are really good, by the way! [Ali and Austin laugh].

AUSTIN: That's part of one of the questions; I promise, we'll get there.

KEITH: OK, great.

AUSTIN: I promise... Anyone else?

NICK: Uhh... I just wanted to shout-out to the, uh... the nervous tour guide boy in the inn?

AUSTIN: Ohh.... [Andrew laughs]

[01:24:46]

ALI: Yeah...

AUSTIN: I was really... I, like... real talk? I was actually worried about him. He was so nervous!

ALI (overlapping): Clement?

AUSTIN (overlapping): Clement, yeah.

ALI (overlapping): Clement. I was too, yeah... when I was editing, I was, like... "I hope people don't..."

AUSTIN: Right! So... so I had written that character as someone who, like... this... this might sound ridiculous in that I... run a show where I speak into a microphone - and most of the people who know who I am know me because of me speaking into a microphone - but I was, like... a *terrible*, like... I didn't... I had the *worst* social anxiety for the majority of my life. And was like... digging deep into a part of me that was nervous, especially around people who seemed to be more important than me, when playing that character? And I wanted... I really wanted him to come off as someone who... could grow? And also who [pause] his lack of confidence was not a moral judgement. Right?

NICK (overlapping): Right.

AUSTIN (overlapping): Like... I wasn't saying this person is a bad person for being this way; I was saying there *are* people who are this way, and who - for whatever reason, because they want to do better - put themselves in situations where they end up talking to people. And I *didn't* want that to come off as an insult to anybody who *did* feel that way, and I was a little worried about that, for sure.

ALI: Yeah; Janine did a lot of heavy lifting there.

AUSTIN: Yup!

ALI: To like... make sure that that scene went alright? It was both of you, but Janine's reaction also really helped characterize him.

AUSTIN (overlapping): Totally.

SYLVIA (overlapping): Uh... I'll mention Devar before we move on.

JANINE (overlapping): Hang on... so you... oh yes!

[01:26:15]

AUSTIN: Oh, Devar was so fun and good! Fuck!

ALI (overlapping): Oh my god, Devar!

NICK: I had a question about Devar...

AUSTIN: Sure!

NICK: Is, uhh... maybe one of the inspirations for Devar, a character named Dwayne Wayne from a sitcom called *A Different World*?

AUSTIN (overlapping): It's... yes! It's Dwayne Wayne; it's Argyle from *Die Hard*; it is, like... a very specific version of late eighties, early nineties, like... cool black kid in... pop culture.

NICK (overlapping): Yeah...

AUSTIN: Who is, like... confident, but grounded; and, like... aware of the world and smart; but also, kind of... like... not interested in anyone else's bullshit? Uhm... and... it was really good to be able to play a character who could have that... like... like: Devar is the Adaire of Mountain Party, in some real way. Who's just, like...

JACK: Yeah... yeah, yeah...

AUSTIN: "OK... OK! Sure! Let's go and do this bullshit!" Like... [Ali and Andrew laugh]

JACK: Devar, umm... the moment where, like... I realised that the... the game would allow Devar to come with us? Was like... "Oh! Devar comes too? That's great! We've got a new party member! Fantastic!" [Ali laughs]

KEITH: I... with Devar, I also like, umm... literally every NPC from The Archives?

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: I feel like... The Archives was, for me, like... I just love any character who is... just their entire, like... position is to be, uhh... a sort of mild impediment? [several people laugh].

AUSTIN: Like... the person who was trying to get the bed situation?

JACK (overlapping): Yeah... the person who took the bed away?

[01:27:55]

KEITH (overlapping): Yeah, that's exactly it. Like... cos being in The Archives was being surrounded by people to whom their *very specific* way of life was, like... obvious?

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: And to anyone else was incomprehensible?

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: So, like... for Fero to go in and be, like... "Hey, can we do this thing?" And like... "Yeah, to do this thing, you have to do six *other things* [Jack laughs]... talk to this guy, and wait, like... three business days."

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: And that was a lot of fun.

AUSTIN: Well, my favourite there, with Devar specifically, is that he knows how to move through that world, but also still sees it as being kind of ridiculous?

SYLVIA and JANINE together: Yeah...

AUSTIN: That was the balance for me, for that character, going into The Archives especially. And also, going into the undead stuff, where, like... I needed a character... coming out of Rosemerrow, I realized that we had not set up... we had not seen why Ordenna was afraid of the undead. And so I wanted there to be a character who was likeable and cool, but also who was, like... "Man, I do not fuck with this undead bullshit!" Like... no!

JACK: Yeah... their arms are falling off and stuff.

AUSTIN: Right! Exactly. So, to have a character that had seen that stuff first hand? And who was, you know... genial about everything, but also was, like... "Nah... that? Nuh-uh." It was very important for... for this... for the pacing of the game around that stuff, I think.

JANINE: The thing I wanted to shout-out about Devar is that one episode description that he figures into, where you get this nice, like... very fancy, sort of... Archives-standard letter, and Devar was just, like... "Look..." [laughter] "I'm not down with this!"

AUSTIN (overlapping): "Why are you like this!?"

[01:29:29]

JANINE (continued): I like that it's very much, like... you get a lot of characters like that speaking that way, and then you don't really think about it written. Like... you don't think about formality written when faced with formality.

AUSTIN: Right.

NICK: Yeah.

JANINE: And... having those things presented just, like... on the level, like... on the same level, and Devar is not, like... Devar's not, like... the fucking intern or whatever really?

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: Right?

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: It's just... on the same footing. Some people are more formal than others, and it is still that... they can still have their discourse.

AUSTIN: Totally.

JANINE: That makes for an important, sort of... facet.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I think, especially, because so many of those letters are people playing with each other. Or people...

JACK: Yes!

AUSTIN: Putting on a voice specifically to... be performative of a certain sort of formality and, like... because that's some sort of flirting; or that is about authority, and, like... who is in charge, and "you will listen to me..."; or because they like the poetry of it. And, like... Devar does not have time for that bullsh... he *could*... like, he... remember, he's, like... what his focus is, is novels. He is the most literary character there is in the world, but he doesn't need to, like... put that on, right? Like... that's not who he needs to be when he's trying to ask you: "Yo, what's up with this thing that's happening?" Like... "Just tell me the thing that's happening!" Anyway...

KEITH: I also... I also loved Mother Glory as one of my other favourite NPCs, and it's not... there is no failed roll, cos this... this is something I was thinking about during the failed roll question: there was no failed roll involved in, like... Fero and Mother Glory, but it is still... it did still *feel* like a failed roll.

[01:31:02]

KEITH (continued): Like... the biggest... [pause] the biggest “what if?” that I have in all of the Friends at the Table universe is, like... what if I was playing a different character, and Fero was in Rosemerrow?

AUSTIN: Which is another thing we should say we considered. And again, I think...

KEITH (overlapping): Yeah. I spent, like... three...

AUSTIN (overlapping): I'm just going to peek ahead and see if the next question... No...

KEITH: OK...

AUSTIN: No; the next question is not the one that I thought it was.

KEITH: OK... I spent, like... three weeks deciding... “Do I keep playing Fero? Or does Fero stay in Rosemerrow, and I have to be someone else.”

AUSTIN: We will get back to that, for sure, so let's wait until we get to that question.

KEITH: Sure.

AUSTIN: “How much of what happened - characters, places, events, was pre-written, and how much came up on the spot? Was there ever a time you wished you had pre-written something?” [pause] A lot... so... there's, like... two answers here: one is, very little of it is *pre-written*, in terms of what happened, right? Like... so many of the solutions to things are... from players deciding to do something I could never have intended. But, at the same time, there was definitely a sense for me this season, to go back to what we were saying before... of having a palette that I already was familiar with. Marielda set stakes that I had to finish with this season, that I had to address, like - what's up with Samoths and Maelgwyn? - had to be a major thing. And so... or, like - what's up with the sword? Those were things I had to find answers for, that were in the world, waiting to be brought to the forefront whenever anyone did a certain roll, or failed a roll, or asked a certain question. And so... those were not pre-written in the sense of, like... I'd pre... it's not like I'd pre-written the visions that Hella got when she saw the green... you know, the inside of the sword with the green hills and all that, or the, like... the history of Ordenna and the four images of the different points in time, and stuff like that. But I *knew* those things, in my heart, cos I'd written them down in a sort of broad timeline sense, and, like... “Who are these factions? Who are these NPCs?” And so, in that sense, this season was probably more written in terms of more devel... more of the map was filled in. Which made certain things way better? And it also made certain things, like... way less interesting for me, as a storyteller. Like... it's really cool to not know the answer, and to be able to say, like...

[01:33:17]

AUSTIN (continued): "Hey; you tell me what's here." Like... "I don't fuckin' know! Whatever your answer is is going to be as good as mine, so you tell me..." And I've tried to do more of that - more, and more of that - but, like... it's such a double-edged sword to fill out that map, you know?

JACK: I think, also, you know... from a player perspective?

AUSTIN: Yeah...

JACK: Something that I would... say is, like... the most important thing I've learned doing this show, is that you shouldn't... it's so tempting to go into a session going, like... as a player, like... "I want this to happen... I want to say this cool line..." you know? "I wanna..." like... "I wanna be in the great place and say the cool line, and the good thing happens." And... luckily, we've gotten to a place in the show where I think we all know that that's not the way that we tell this story?

AUSTIN: Right...

JACK: Because when you do that, the words turn to ash in your mouth.

JANINE: Hmm-hmm...

JACK: And the moment falls; and it... it rolls down a hill and goes in a lake [Austin laughs]. And, like... It's a hard thing to get rid of! Especially because, I think, a lot of tabletop... you sort think to yourself: "I'm going to go in, and I'm going to be this character... I'm gonna... I'm gonna do these things." But that doesn't mean... find a script and stick to it. That doesn't mean say the good line you want to say. I guess an example would be like, when we were talking about flooding the Stoneworks, I had, umm... I had this mental image of Lem sitting... sitting... cross-legged in the Stoneworks while illusory water moved around him?

AUSTIN: Uh-huh!?

JACK: Knowing that he wasn't in any danger, and you know... (sound file silenced at this point, which cuts out the end of what Jack says) [Austin laughs]. And I thought, like... "That's a cool image, let's move into that scene like that!" And we ended up in this place where, like... what happened was the exact opposite of that (Ali laughs), and it was really frightening and exciting.

AUSTIN (overlapping): I... one hundred percent, thought you were gonna die. A hundred percent thought Lem was gone.

JACK (overlapping): Yeah; I would've been... that would have been... a big moment.

[01:35:02]

AUSTIN (overlapping): I fully did.

JACK: So, yeah... that's the advice I would give. Is, like... don't go in with a script; it's gonna be bad!

AUSTIN: Yeah!

ALI: Yeah... Would...?

AUSTIN (overlapping): Totally. For me, it's... go ahead.

ALI: I was gonna say... there were definitely, like... parts in this season when me and Art were, like... "should we... figure some stuff out? Before... like; do you want to talk about this?" And I think we did *before* the season but, like... never during?

AUSTIN: Yeah...

ALI: And I'm... I'm glad we never got to it, cos the place that we ended with Hella and Hadrian was so much different than, like... what I thought was gonna happen. And I think what a lot of the fans happened (sic)? To the point that I was, like... before I started... edited the episode, and I was, like... "this is the best we've ever done, ever!" [Ali, Austin, and Jack laugh]. And I was, like... "I think fans are gonna be kind of disappointed that there wasn't more of, like... conflict here."

AUSTIN: Right...

ALI: And if we had pre-written that they were gonna get into this big argument and, like... whatever's going to happen...

AUSTIN (overlapping): That would've been bad...

ALI (overlapping): That would be so much worse?

AUSTIN (overlapping): So corny, and so bad...

ALI: Yeah... The...

KEITH (overlapping): It's... so hard to, like... understate how all of the moments that I think shine from Friends at the Table end up being, like... incredibly spontaneous. Like where either one character thought... thinks of something, or where several characters think of the same thing at the same time?

[01:36:21]

KEITH (continued): Or where two characters think of totally opposite things at the same time? Like...

AUSTIN (overlapping): And then commit to both? Yeah...

KEITH: And... right! [Ali laughs]. And then... none of that happens when stuff gets written out. And I'm sure that other...

AUSTIN (overlapping): No... totally. And I like writing, a lot, and I...

KEITH (Keith): Yeah.

AUSTIN: I find a place for it. But even then, I do my best to ask. So, like... the finale of the Mountain Party had a great deal of me just, like... narrating? But with each of those things I was, like... "Hey... what's the thing you're doing?" So, like... the opening one is just, like... "Fero; do you just walk off to the West?" And, like... "Yeah." "OK," and I can build a scene around that. Like... with Ephrim's thing it was, like... "OK... what's the picture you want to give people?" And, you know... Sylvia said "I want Ephrim to be... one; kind of cautious about using the... fire that... he still has access to, but doesn't want to use; and two, I want to be fucking... burning the Samoths icon off of something." Yep! Alright; cool - I will totally do that! And those... that sort of collaboration is just so good... I'm gonna keep moving because we do not have a lot of time... Also; I'm very early in my presentation (Ali, Andrew, and Janine laugh). Wait, did I skip one here? No... this one comes in from our friend Paul... PCsegal: "Red Jack's children grew up very quickly once they were taught to do things like working and fighting. Was Red Jack sheltering them from adult responsibility? Was he intentionally keeping them from growing up?" I'm gonna answer this very quickly, cos we actually got a couple of, like... "What's up with Red Jack?" There's another one later... Ah... yep! And this is an answer that I'm, like... I often don't like to give world building answers when I... think one day maybe I'll be able to get them? But I get so many questions about Red Jack, and like... Are there... like... why are all of his children, like... men? Weren't there any little girl Red Jacks? Uhm... they're all Red Jack... they're all Red Jack... there's one Red Jack, and it's Red Jack? And he's, like... he has spores more than he has children. And... he doesn't want any of them growing up, ever, cos then there are two Red Jacks? And there can only be one Red Jack... And that is not a thing he *ever* wants to have to face again. So... [pause].

JACK: What is he?

ALI: *What?!* [laughs]

AUSTIN: That's what he is... [Sylvia laughs]

[01:38:27]

JACK: Yeah, but like... I mean, like...

AUSTIN: Uhh... so when... when Samol... no, no, no... when Severia was rescued from Samot, she filled the world with all sorts of strange and amazing creatures. That... he's one of them. [pause]. Julie says... [Ali and Andrew laugh] mostly for me and... and Nick: "How far ahead was Arrell planned, and and how did Nick having to leave the group change the story you intended for him? Did Austin and Nick collaborate on what would happen, or was it mostly Austin's idea? And would Arrell still have shown up as a character and interacted with the party if Fantasma was still part of it?" The bottom one is easy: yep, absolutely. The top one is... a little bit harder, in that... it was... not hard; it's just longer. The story completely changed. *Completely* changed. Like... Arrell was the leader... when I wrote that character out, again... a couple of years ago, Arrell was the leader of The Disciples of Fantasma. He was a student of Fantasma's? Who... took... kind of... took from Fantasma... hidden signals? He did the thing that people did with The Queen's hat, and was like... "Ah! Fantasma was telling us something secretly, because of his demeanor." And built this *whole school of thought* around, kind of... refusing to be part of the world; refusing to go out into the world and actually face things. And instead, developed The Disciples of Fantasma, modelled after The Disciples of Samot, from forever-ago; that was the original plan for Arrell. Completely gone... Nick; once you decided...

NICK (overlapping): I didn't know about any of that.

AUSTIN: Totally. Yeah; cos I... once you'd decided to go, you and I were like... "Ah fuck... how do we do... what do we do?" Because... that character was there *for* Fantasma to interact with, right? Was, like... in some ways; Arrell is the sand for Fantasma, like... every character had a thing this season that was, like... "here: confront something about yourself and your character and... and... how the world reflects you." And so Arrell was this thing that was, like... here is how you are, except; you're going to have to look at it? And it's a little bit younger than you? And, like... is... a hyperactive passivity. Like... refuses to fix the world, and instead retreats from it, the same way Fantasma always does. But then; you said you were gonna leave, and I was, like... "Alright; let's figure out this Arrell stuff..." And I thi... I wanna say you, really... came up with a lot of, like... the Arrell fix. I should have dug into our chat...

NICK (overlapping): Uhh... no... that's not true. I dug into the chat before! [Austin and Nick laugh]; earlier today. And it... it was... I remembered this, but also, I remembered it when I dug into the chat earlier today. It was like... "Hey Austin; I gotta go. I've gotta take off." And you're like... "Ah, crap... OK, uhh... We gotta think about this. Hang on; let me go to a coffee shop." And then, like... six minutes later, you're like: "I'm in the coffee shop, and I got it." [Andrew, Austin, and Janine laugh].

AUSTIN: That sounds right! [Nick laughs]. God... I remember so...

[01:41:44]

KEITH (overlapping): Austin does all his best work in a coffee shop.

AUSTIN: I do...

ANDREW (laughing): That's very true!

AUSTIN: I wish I could work full time out of a coffee shop, it would... my whole... everything I do would be better!

KEITH: When you're there, do you buy, like... scones or whatever? Or do you just sit?

AUSTIN: Sometimes. Depends on the day.

KEITH: I just know that, if I was in a coffee shop, working for, like... four hours? I'd like... every hour, I'd be, like... "I need a drink, I need a donut..." or whatever.

AUSTIN: Yeah... I... as long as I'm drinking something, I'm OK. So: this is it, right Nick? Was you had said: "What if Fantasma was the victim of this killing?" And I was, like... "Ahh, yeah, yeah... I already figured out the victim of the killing... the victim was this other person."

NICK: Yep...

AUSTIN: And here's who the *killer* was supposed to be; the killer is... the quote-unquote-killer was supposed to be Tutor Arrell, and then... the big reveal that we realized was, like... "Oh shit! Arrell is Fantasma..." But you definitely still helped me figure out a lot of the stuff around what Arrell was, and what he was actually doing, and all that is based on who Fantasma was anyway.

NICK: Yeah... we talked a lot about the themes that I wanted to explore with Fantasma. And, uhh... and you just... frankly... there's... I'm sorry; this is going to be a little sappy. But you just dovetailed *perfectly* on what I had built with Fantasma.

AUSTIN (overlapping): I really... super-appreciate that.

NICK (continued): On all of his scenes... in exactly the direction that... not even necessarily that I would've gone if I had, like... full power? But in... I... I'm *completely* satisfied with where Fantasma ended up.

AUSTIN (overlapping): I really, I'm... very happy to hear that. And I will say, like... there was, actually, a super-key thing: you're being way too modest... because you're the one who figured out that Arrell learned about Christopher and The Disciples of Samot, and, like... all of that stuff. So, like... So even before the Fantasma-Samot *Charm* spell stuff? From the first season...

[01:43:45]

AUSTIN (continued): Arrell had already become... not infatuated, necessarily? But, like... you sent this message to me where you were, like... "I think it's like someone finding a book by a long-dead author, and it just being one of those things of, like... 'Where has this been all my life?' and then, maybe, letting that enthusiasm sweep you away a little too much." And that is, like... exactly the way that I imagine Arrell going from, like... kind of bitter, and lonely, and afraid, and suddenly deciding: "this is the thing that will unlock the world for me." So...

NICK: Yeah...

AUSTIN: Even since then, you and I have talked about what's coming up forward, and happening with Arrell, and what might happen in the next couple of seasons... or the next season of Hieron, so... So, seriously, thank you so much for, like... figuring out what the fuck that was going to be with me. Cos I was... it was going to be a disaster if, like... "Also; Fantasmio's not here, but this other NPC is." Alright. From... I'm gonna call that (ed: @mthsblgr) Mouths Blogger? Maybe it's not, maybe it's Mouths... Blouger...

ART (overlapping): Bloojer?

SYLVIA (overlapping): Blougger...

AUSTIN: What ambitions do you all individually have for the future of Hieron; your character; your play in this setting?

[long pause]

SYLVIA: That... hmm... [Ali and Andrew laugh]. That's hard to answer without, like... giving a lot of stuff away.

ALI (overlapping): That's. Like... big-stuff-plot... Yeah.

SYLVIA: And also, like... that changes so frequently?

AUSTIN: Interesting... OK.

ANSI: Like... I can't really go into Ephrim's without, like... spoiling a lot of what I have in mind for him? [pause] But, like... that ambition changed a ton...

AUSTIN: Totally...

SYLVIA: In the last episode...

[01:45:28]

AUSTIN: Is there anyone who *does* feel that they can answer this?

JANINE: I totally have an answer.

AUSTIN: OK.

ANDREW: Yeah; me too.

JANINE: The... [sighs] the thing I want most with Adaire is to f... is for her to figure out what she actually wants. Because... I don't think she actually knows what she wants.

AUSTIN: Huh... yeah...

JANINE: I don't think, like... I don't think the things she has been reaching for this season are the things that she wants.

AUSTIN (overlapping): Do you mean things she's just reaching for from habit? Or...?

JANINE (overlapping): And I know is definitely going to... that's... I think she has, like... an idea of what she needs? Like... to live?

AUSTIN: Right...

JANINE: And that idea is wrong. Because that idea comes from... from what she needed in the past.

AUSTIN: Right... Dre?

ANDREW: Umm... I mean... I think that... that... the... all the 'thes'! That encounter - the showdown with Arrell at the end where...

AUSTIN (overlapping): Yes...

ANDREW: I think the first time that... I mean... Throndir has engaged in plenty of violence throughout the show? But that violence was, like... personal and vindictive in a way that, I mean... even six months ago I never would have thought that that character would have gone?

AUSTIN: Yeah... Hold onto that, cos we are about... we are... going into a question about that very shortly.

[01:46:56]

ANDREW: But, yeah... I mean; the next season of Thrandir is, like... what happens after that point. And you and I have talked about, like...

AUSTIN: Yeah...

ANDREW: Alignment changes, class changes, like... cos that's a major thing.

AUSTIN: It totally could be. And there could be a lot of alignment changes next season; let's see [Andrew laughs].

ALI: I kind of have an answer...

AUSTIN: Sure.

ALI: In terms of, like... cos with Hella, the tough thing for me this season is, I think, going to have to continue next season now, is that, like... I wanted to be careful about doing a, like... redemption arc with her?

AUSTIN: Yeah...

ALI: Because I know she's already, kind of, well-liked, and, like... it's tough to be, like... "she's the worst! But, you know; she did a good thing, and now it's OK..." And I wanted that to either feel really earned, or, like... if she *had* redeemed herself, to still be living with the consequences of her actions?

AUSTIN: Right...

ALI: Which is why, like... this season was really fun for me with all the, like... undead, and Adelaide stuff. But now that she's, like... essentially fixed that? I have to, like... super go left somehow in the next season? I have to figure out that...

AUSTIN (overlapping): You've got a lot of time to think about it, so...

ALI: Yeah...

AUSTIN: Alright.

KEITH: I... I think Fero wants to keep from being consumed by The Heat and the Dark [Ali laughs].

AUSTIN: Fair! Fair.

[01:48:09]

KEITH: I think Fero wants to not die and for the world to not die.

SYLVIA: Yeah; that's probably pretty relevant to my whole situation too [Ali laughs].

AUSTIN: Definitely... Uhh... This next one is from JD. It's basically: "Hey, I get really nervous every time a character almost dies. Would you have plans for what happens?" And my answer, very quickly: No. We'll figure it out! Like... it's always figured out, and there is no silver bullet single answer for any of that stuff. Gil_Dear again; everyone: "One thing this group is super good at is making bad, but interesting decisions; playing with flaws in their characters. Art, in particular, excels at it, but everyone does it now and again. Does anyone have any decisions like that that, in hindsight, they would take back? Also, does anyone have a bad decision they lament *not* going with?"

ART: I regret nothing [Ali laughs]. I would do it all again the same way.

JANINE: Should have blown up Twinbrook [Austin laughs].

ANDREW: Yeah. Hell yeah! There it is.

KEITH: I think Fero probably does this the least, of anyone.

AUSTIN: Make bad decisions? [Andrew laughs]

KEITH: Yeah... So... sorry; bad, but *interesting* decisions.

AUSTIN: Ah.

KEITH: Specifically... like... I think, uhh... I think that one of my weaknesses as a player is not leaning into dramatic irony stuff... harder? But; I think it works, because we have a lot of people who *really* do [Andrew laughs].

AUSTIN: That's fair. I moved... I moved my microphone so I could blow my those, and then didn't... didn't...

ALI: Ohhh!

KEITH: That's fine.

AUSTIN: Alright... umm...

KEITH: But I... I do... I said this before; I do regret the Mother Glory thing.

[01:49:48]

AUSTIN (overlapping): Hold on...

KEITH: I don't know if this is still coming up.

AUSTIN: Speaking of that; here we are!

KEITH: OK... Perfect!

AUSTIN: It's from Andrew, who says "I've been really enjoying your podcast for a while, but recently, I've been finding it kind of stressful. It seems like every major event since Rosemerrow has either moved the world closer to destruction or briefly averted disaster, without actually improving the overall situation. It looked like things were going to turn around with the Samol talk, but then the most recent episode happened, and it looks like that information will come mostly too late." Uhh... this is actually two Andrew questions, but I'm just going to hit the top one here because of time, and the notion of how dark it got.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Which, I think... one; reflects a thing I said at the top? Which is, like... yeah; cancer fucking sucks! Like... I'm not making a game about cancer, that is also a game about... light-heartedness, to some degree? And it obviously will have light-hearted moments... it's not *about* cancer, or *about* global warming, or *about* one specific... like... *about* disenfranchisement of native peoples, like... all those things come up in it. I... you know... this goes back to the Walligan thing too, like... the bloc party isn't going to save the day.

KEITH (in agreement): No!

AUSTIN: But I think that *really* came to a head with Mother Glory, which was the thing that was, like... I said at the time we were recording it: I didn't even want to show that scene.

ANDREW (in agreement): Hmm...

AUSTIN: Did other people here feel that sort of, like... dread about this season?

KEITH: Umm...

ANDREW: I mean... yeah... especially towards the end. But, I don't know. To me it goes back to, like... kind of towards the ending of COUNTER/Weight? Where it's, like... in COUNTER/Weight, people... *won*, like... we beat Rigour, but it was, like... but it was hard! And people died! And it was sad! And, like... a lot of awful things happened! Like, I... I don't know...

[01:51:36]

ANDREW (continued): I like that we play in a story in a world where we, like... embrace that, like... things aren't always great, and there's not easy, quick solutions for things that are big, and hard, and scary.

ALI: Yeah... I think, like... knowing your motivation with the cancer thing too, like... meant, like... we were also sort of respectful? And, like... never went into the game, like... "Oh... Hella has the answer..." Cos we know that those characters don't.

AUSTIN: But I... there is definitely a feeling of... I did want it to still be a world where people are trying to stop this thing. Or, or... or at least buy time, or at least something... you know?

ALI: Yeah, yeah, yeah... for sure.

AUSTIN: But it is a game really interested in finding subjective value, I think, in life, even in terrible... like... finding subjective *joy* in life, even in terrible situations. I... to this moment, did not expect Mother Glory to die in that sequence... in that game. Like... that was not a thing I... going into it? It was, like... such a... it was a complete shock to me. So even though I know we get dark, that was one of those ones that was, like... "Whooah! We're here, huh?"

KEITH: So... there's something about, like... someone bought up COUNTER/Weight... the end of COUNTER/Weight?

AUSTIN (overlapping): Yeah...

JACK (overlapping): Err... someone also asked that we don't spoil COUNTER/Weight in the chat?

AUSTIN: That's fair...

KEITH: I won't spoil COUNTER/Weight.

AUSTIN: OK...

KEITH: So... For *me*, like... the most terrifying thing, personally, for me, about anything that's happened in Friends at the Table was... the conclusion to Mako, at the end of the last episode?

AUSTIN: Yeah...

KEITH: Which, I think, is both a logical, like... conclusion for Mako to have ended up at, and also, like... existentially terrifying for Keith the human being person?

[01:53:25]

AUSTIN (chuckles): Right...

KEITH: And... I think that Fero has a lot of the same... attrib... like... a lot of the same things that are terrifying to me, which is, like... what happens to a version of me that's, like... that is... aloof and unwilling to communicate properly with their friends, and unwilling to form, like... solid personal attachments to other people?

AUSTIN: Right...

KEITH: And so the decision to, like... not go to Mother Glory *sooner*, was a specific... not wanting to deal with problems...

AUSTIN (overlapping): Right...

KEITH: Thing, for... that that character has? Which is... which I think is tied directly to season two with Mako?

AUSTIN: Hmm-hmm.

KEITH: And so... and then, like... so that... that's what made that a really hard decision, like... a sort of character-based decision? And then the idea that, like... Gnolls needed Fero's help to save themselves; and then Fero thought that he needed to *leave* the Gnolls in order to save them and other people? And because, I remember specifically a line, where you were... "Well, The Heat and the Dark, that's... away. Our problems are here and now."

AUSTIN (overlapping): Right; that was like...

KEITH (overlapping): And Fero...

AUSTIN (overlapping): That was definitely me riffing on the *Rogue One* line of, like... "Some people don't have the luxury of politics." Right? Was like... we don't fucking have...

KEITH (overlapping): Which also happens to be very Walligan.

AUSTIN: Right, totally. For the Gnolls it was, like... "Yeah, The Heat and the Dark, that's... great, like... what-the-fuck-ever! We have been suffering for hundreds, and hundreds, and hundreds, of years..." You know?

KEITH: And... so, the... I think, for me, the most understated bit of irony that this season had was that Fero decided to leave, to help the Gnolls in an abstract way? From The Heat and the Dark? And ended up bringing The Heat and the Dark *to* them...

[01:55:26]

AUSTIN (overlapping): Closer than... right...

KEITH: Both justifying that it was a legitimate threat, and being the cause of it...

AUSTIN: Right... at the same time.

KEITH: At their doorstep.

AUSTIN: Yeah... Totally.

KEITH: So that... I don't know if I have any more thoughts on it besides, like... laying it out cross-season for people to hear me say? But I think that's a very significant, like... stressful darkness that this season had.

AUSTIN: Totally. Any other thoughts about the stressful dark...? Also; Donald Trump got elected this year, and like...

ART (overlapping): Yeah, it's been a stressful dark six months...

AUSTIN: It's been a stressful dark six... and we'll talk a little more about that, I think, in a few minutes too. But, like... do know that we were all in a fucking stressful, dark place... and there were moments of incredible joy, like... you know... Art Martinez-Tebbel got married and is now Art Martinez-Tebbel, and that... being able to go out and see Art for that was a real high point, and I think gave, at least me, a lot of joy, and a lot of energy to finish up this season in a place that is... you know: I don't know that you should read the end of this season as, like... optimistic, necessarily? Like... Spring is better than Winter, but Spring comes right before Summer, and Summer ain't good! So... But! But... Not in such a dark place? Just... more of a *hot* place...

ART: I was also happy at the end of that weekend, I just wanted to say... [Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: That's good... [Sylvia laughs]

ALI: I just want to say this quickly, like... I tried to... cos it was a dark early season, but I think we found a lot of time to make moments that were really human? And, like... people interacting and enjoying each other? And we had a lot of endings that were that way too, and I did that specifically cos, like... the shot in Rosemerrow of the camera slowly panning out as, like... Fero and Hella eat ice cream?

AUSTIN: That scene is so good... that whole sequence is great.

ALI: Yeah... letting our show still be around that and have that stuff in it, and highlighting those parts of it was really important to me, like... while everything else was happening.

[01:57:26]

AUSTIN: Totally, so...

JACK (overlapping): Yeah...

AUSTIN: This comes in... oh; go ahead Jack.

JACK: Oh... I was just going to say, from my perspective, with the music? I'd known, for a long time, what I wanted the inside of the sword to look like?

AUSTIN: That's just a... we should note that, actually: you're the only one who ever knew that there was an inside of the sword.

JACK (laughing): Oh, really?

AUSTIN: Yeah! Like... up until...

JACK (overlapping): I knew that...

KEITH (overlapping): Like... didn't we... *all* know that? From season one? I just *assumed* that...

AUSTIN; Oh, sorry... he's the only one who knew that there was a...

JACK (overlapping): Well, we knew that there was...

ALI (overlapping): We found that out in Nacre...

AUSTIN: that a party would be going *into* the sword... at some point this season, like...

KEITH (overlapping): OK, OK...

AUSTIN: That was on the table? Because... At the very beginning of the season, I was, like... "Oh! The phrase for this season is 'For every inside, there is an outside'." And that goes back to Marielda; I teased that in Marielda, and... you were, like... "OK...What's inside sound like?" [Jack laughs]. And I had to think... "Oh! OK, well... *very broadly*; you know the sword? Well... here's what's going on inside that sword..."

JACK (overlapping): It's heaven in there!

AUSTIN: And you had some peeks of it... Right! Heaven... it's heaven in there! It's... really good in there.

[01:58:25]

JACK: Yeah... like... we'd used all of these, like... very broad, open, sort of Copeland-style chords? Piano chords? And I tried to use them to... represent a sort of peacefulness before? And we saw this with Hadrian and Benjamin. And I knew that I wanted to try and replicate this sound using the instruments that I did in Marielda? Which... I think of the music in Marielda as being... being exciting, and being vibrant? But also as having something sinister about it. There's lots of half steps; the scales are unsettled, among themselves; the clarinet is a capricious instrument; and that's, like... deliberate. That's supposed to come through. And so, a challenge I set myself with getting to *The Warmth of Love*, that I'm really happy with... how it ended up? Was: take these instruments, and take this space, and use it to try and make something very genuinely peaceful and settled.

AUSTIN (overlapping): Right... which is not...

JACK: Which is: what does Marielda sound like, when we pull all of that sinister energy out of it?

AUSTIN: Totally.

JACK: And it sounds like *The Warmth of Love*.

AUSTIN: Briefly, Kimberly in the chat says: "History is *long* is the season five run line..." That's a good... that's, like... that one... it would be up there, if it wasn't already "Why should there be something instead of nothing?" Uhh... Ethan and Christine have very... not similar questions? But... they connect. Christine wants to know if there's anything I hoped to make clear in this season that I worry didn't come through? And I actually made a really, like... long post on the Waypoint forum thread about this? Which you can get to by going to discourse-dot-zone, and then looking for the Friends at the Table thread?

JACK (overlapping): It's so good! [Keith laughs]

AUSTIN: Shout outs to Civil Twilight for setting up *that* redirect. Umm... and yeah; there were a bunch of those, including this one, which is: "Are we ever going to find out how Samaantine came to be? I remember, during Marielda, Samol talking about divine impulses that caused the other gods to come into existence, but it struck me that he didn't mention what caused Samaantine to be. Also: why does Samonta/Severia have two names, and which is more correct?" And Samaantine also is Galenica now? I would say... more and more, I lean on those other names? On Galenica and Severia? The... a thing we set up in the first season was that the 'Sam' names were a hold-over from a kid of unification of a church? Where it's like "We're all unified now, around the... Samtheon," as a lot of the fandom calls it. And specifically, in the modern Hieron that, and you know... Hadrian can talk to... Art can talk to this... The Church of Samoths was doing everything in its power to slowly bring in other, uhh... faiths. By saying:

“Yeah, yeah, yeah; this is... you’re... it’s all part of the whole... it’s a version of Samothres; don’t even worry about it.” And so...

[02:01:03]

ART (overlapping): It’s like the... it’s like the Catholic lists of saints that have The Buddha on them.

AUSTIN: Right; exactly... exactly [Ali laughs].

KEITH: Or, like... there’s a feast for every day, and they’re always, like... weird pagan feasts.

AUSTIN: Right, exactly. And so that’s definitely the... Samaantine was probably, like... Adamantine or something, once. And they’re, like... “No, no, no, no, no... you’ve... actually, it’s Sam? It’s Sam. Samaantine. It’s just a *version* of Samothres; don’t even worry about it.” So I, definitely, now default to Galenica for them, and Severia for her... that’s a thing that, like... I definitely... I wish I had hit harder, earlier? And with Galenica, there’s, like... Devar kind of explains it in the book that he references; in the book that you all... that Mountain Party *goes to*; you pass through the doors and wind up in that jungle. There... instead of, actually, coming from the divine impulse of the gods, they came from the divine impulse of people. The people needed someone to protect them in the North-East; and Galenica came from that. If you go and re-listen to that scene with that in mind, I think that will be a little clearer. But, you know... it’s a bunch of things, and it’s tough because... there are a lot of things I don’t ever like to get explicit about - because the fiction I like doesn’t get explicit? But as... as Janine often points out to me, like... listening to a podcast is not like reading a book. So I’m at, like... a weird crossroads with all that sort of stuff? So like... a key example of that is the, quote-unquote, *curse*, ummm from Nacre, right? Adelaide’s Curse, which... for a lot of listeners, understandably, believed it to be a curse in the sort of, like... magical plague sense, that the world was slowly becoming corrupt, and zombies would be appearing; because, if someone died, they would naturally become a zombie. But... if you listen to the end of Marielda, and if you listen to Adelaide’s plan at the end of season one, it is... the thing I was *trying* to get at was: “Oh no; Adelaide is in a position where *she* decides who lives and who dies.” She decides who gets to continue living; and she wants a world where everyone gets to live forever? That is her ideal world? But that sometimes means she makes decisions to make that happen more quickly, or more slowly. So, that’s something I thought about a lot at the *top* of the season, when, like... “OK... who would Adelaide let permanently die?” Right? So, like... with Ephrim, that was going to be a situation where, like... she wants Ephrim around, cos Ephrim can help spread that... *disease*, by unifying people around a church, and putting them in close proximity, and etcetera... I think if Hella had died this season, Adelaide would’ve been, like... “Yeah... you’re done. Like... no.” [Ali laughs]. Like... that would have been *it*. And that was, like... one of those things where... because no one died, and because I hadn’t shown a sequence, or a scene of what the - quote-unquote - curse looked like in the world, I couldn’t ever communicate to listeners that that was how the ruleset worked. You know?

KEITH: And the... the other part of that is that it's, like... despite calling it a curse, when we were first in Nacre, we saw, like... a very explicit scene of someone deciding to die?

[02:04:09]

AUSTIN (overlapping): Totally; right.

KEITH: And unless... so, you're saying that, unless Adelaide had a specific reason why...

AUSTIN (overlapping): That would not have happened.

KEITH: Right...

AUSTIN: Right. Exactly. Like... because she wants that to be... Or who knows? Maybe eventually she would've? It depends on who it is, right? Like... I would actually really loved to have had a scene of someone dying; of one of our player characters dying, and them saying: "No. Let me fucking die." Like... "Let me just move on. I don't want to be stuck here anymore." Like... that would have been really interesting, of just, like... "I've served a really good life; I've helped people; I sacrificed myself; I don't wanna come back as a zombie! I don't want to! Or a ghost! I'm good!" That would have been a really interesting scene. So there was a lot of little things like that, that are tough, because... I put a lot of work into a lot of those things; we all do, and it can be, like... "Ah... I don't want to just say it out loud, because that, kind of... cheapens it... but also: I want us all to be on the same page, so that it's clear..." You know? Like... a lot of the Adelaide stuff is in an interesting relation to what Arrell wants for the world, which is in relation to how the sword works. And all of the beauty of geometry is lost if you just don't have one of those puzzle pieces, so... I'm definitely going to be more... going to do my best to straight-up just say things? Or ask the players: "Hey; are we all on the same page here?" going forward, so...

KEITH: So... just to be, like... a hundred percent, like... just to say it in a sentence...

AUSTIN: Yes...

KEITH: The curse isn't that everyone has to live forever, it's that everyone's death is subject to the whim of Adelaide.

AUSTIN: Yes; exactly. Which is no longer the case though, now. That's over now, because Adelaide's in the sword. I don't think it will... I don't know... we'll see: I don't know what happens if she comes out yet; we'll figure it out. Shit... Alright; next question. "Hi, hello. I was mostly wondering," this is from Dustin, and then Ronnie, "if Jack would let us know how Lem is, indeed, not-a-softboy, because Lem seems like the softest boy in the land [Janine and Jack laugh]. Thanks, Dustin" And Ronnie says: "I am super-interested in the changes Lem went through in the last few episodes of the season. Does Jack mind elaborating on what brought Lem to actively go against his alignment, and aggravate Samol? Does Jack think this will stick, making

his the first character to make alignment? I'd love to hear more from Austin and Jack, but also anyone with thoughts on the matter about their revelation that neutral characters are actually the worst..." I think Janine maybe has some words there...

[02:06:32]

JANINE (overlapping): No...

AUSTIN: "because that sounds awesome." No? You've got no words on how...?

JANINE: Neutral characters are the worst!

AUSTIN: Oh yeah; that's all! That's what I'm saying, yeah!

JANINE: Those are my words.

AUSTIN: Those are all your words. Yeah, and then... I always forget... was it... Ali, was it you? Or was it Jack? Who, like... a few... I think it was you, Ali. Like... a week or two ago, after... finishing the final episode, you were, like... "Yup! It turns out that this season was just, like... a deconstruction of..."

ALI: Oh! Yeah, yeah! You had done it as, like... a joke. You were, like... "Did we... deconstruct softboys?"

AUSTIN: Yup!

ALI: And then I listened to it, and I edited it, and I was, like... "Yes; we did. We absolutely did."

AUSTIN (overlapping): We totally deconstructed a softboy [Ali and Sylvia laugh]. Yeah! Totally...

JACK: Yeah...

AUSTIN: So, Jack? What do you...?

JACK: I think, like... the broader point I want to make, and have tried to make across this season, isn't that Lem isn't... a softboy? It's that there's a lot of stuff that needs to be talked about, and talked through with the conception of what a softboy is? [Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: Yeah...

JACK: And how it intersects with both masculinity, and also with, like... how you behave? How one behaves?

AUSTIN: Yeah...

ALI: Hmm-hmm?

[02:07:33]

JACK: So I want to go on record: I think Lem *is* a softboy... and I think he's a good one! You know... we talk about... Lem is neutral, and people ask me, you know... "Is Lem actually evil?" No! Lem's neutral. Neutral's *bad*! Neutral is the person who says... "Nah; I think we'll be OK." Or, you know... even more so, like... "I'll make a decision like this, cos it'll work out fine." I had no... doubt in my mind, or question in my mind, about whether or not Lem would kill those researchers? At the Stoneworks? That seemed like the sort of thing Lem would do. And I think a lot of this stems from my... *distaste* for how Lem was in season one.

AUSTIN: Hmm...

JACK: Which was a, kind of... toothless, blythe, wanderer, who stumbles into things, and kind of goes: "Ooh! Wow! That's interesting! How interesting is that?" And something that I'd known, that I'd really wanted to do, from the moment we finished season one, and from the place Lem ended up in, like... What does a neutral adventurer look like? And the answer is that it looks like they suck. It looks like someone [Janine and Keith laugh] who can walk into conversations, have a super-nice time, and say, like... "Oh, I'm Lem, and I'm really... I'm with The Archives. And I'm, like... awkward..." and Lem blushes, and, you know... Lem can be nice! You can hang out, and you can have a good time with Lem; I'm not saying Lem's, like... hasn't... got goodness in him...

AUSTIN: Like softboys.

JACK: Like softboys. But also... [Sylvia sighs] is...

AUSTIN (overlapping): Uh-huh? I heard that Sylvia! [Sylvia sighs again].

JACK: Unwilling to engage his own actions, and to take responsibility for his own, or other's actions. And that is something that I try and... work on in myself as a person. And I... I want to be clear... I'm not treating Lem as an analog for me? I'm not...

KEITH (overlapping): You're not Fero! [Austin, Jack, and Keith laugh].

JACK: Not going through this stuff personally?

SYLVIA (overlapping): Wow!

JACK: It's more, like... a broader... a broader problem that I have. When we look at someone, collectively, and when I look at myself, and I say: "Wow, what a *nice* person!" You know... what are we talking about?

AUSTIN (overlapping): What are we *saying* there? Yeah...

[02:09:51]

JACK: And so... Lem, being neutral, and Lem, being a softboy, and Lem, being deeply... damaging and concerning is... something I'm really glad we've had an opportunity to talk through this season.

AUSTIN: Ummm. SlyGuy says: "I'm sorry, but, like... what is a softboy?" Uhh, a softboy is a... is a term that, I think, is used often in a lot of gaming circles; but also in wider internet kind of, like... anime... nerd-dom... just general *fandom*... that indicates a sort of, like... very *nice*... *non-threatening*... *entertaining*... boy.

KEITH: Can... Can I take a stab at it? [Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: Yeah... always.

KEITH: I think... so... I think that a good way to describe a softboy to someone who feels like they've never heard the term before? Is it's, like... the new, sort of... gentler, socially acceptable version of, like... the man-child. [Austin laughs] So, like...

AUSTIN (overlapping): No, no...

ALI (overlapping): It's only used as a term of *endearment*...

AUSTIN (overlapping): Of *endearment*, right... So... safety: it's also about a notion of safety...

JANINE: Protection?

KEITH (overlapping): So... so... when people turn...

AUSTIN: Protection; right. Protection.

KEITH: When people turned on man-child as, like... a thing that was OK to be? Where, like... it was, like...

AUSTIN: Wait... Was that a time? Wait, wait... Was there a time, when...?

KEITH: Absolutely! In, like... comedy movies and stuff?

AUSTIN (overlapping): Like... the Billy Maddisons...

KEITH (sulky voice): I'm just, like... a hapless guy! I can't function! I just don't know... I'm just like a little kid!

AUSTIN: Right...

[02:11:17]

KEITH: Like... I feel like the softboy is, like... the sort of self-preservation evolution of *that* guy...

AUSTIN (laughing): Right! And I think that that's... we, in season one, I think a lot of characters: Thrandir, Fero, and Lem all, kind of... came across in that way? Of, like... "Aww, they're so nice and kind!" Because... honestly; I think that you three are good people. Not nice *boys*; not softboys, but *good people* [Andrew laughs]. Who are fun to listen to? And there's a... there is a distinction there, when we... I think, all of us, independently realised, like... "Oh; but maybe that's not the end of the story..." because with *real* people it certainly isn't.

ALI: Uh-huh?

AUSTIN: With *real* people, like... there is a whole mess of that. Cos... being someone who... people feel safe around, can often lead to an abuse of that feeling. Or, can lead to... uhh... you know, using that relationship to get access to something you normally wouldn't, or... just be a... people don't live up to that image, often. And so, I think that we got there this season. Unintentionally: again; we didn't sit round a table, and go, like... "Hey, yo... fuck softboys!"

NICK (overlapping): I did...

AUSTIN: But what we did... OK... [Ali laughs]. Well... you did.

KEITH: And I kind of did, just now too...

AUSTIN: Yeah... yeah, yeah... Totally.

ART: Also, by the way...

KEITH (overlapping): But also, in the *show*...

ART: Ali, Art, and Nick: not fun to listen to. Just... [Andrew laughs]

AUSTIN: That's right! That's what I meant, of course...

ALI: I actually was just going to say, like... I think that those characters came across that way in season one cos, like... the stakes were what they *were*, and we had really good foils to Hella and Fantasma.

AUSTIN: Right...

ALI: And, like... who were just the worst! In, like... really interesting ways. And then... you find them a year or so later, and the world is crumbling apart way more than it was in season one, and like... you have to figure out what is going to push a person to act...

[02:13:06]

AUSTIN: Right...

ALI: You know... in a way that's, like... not good!

AUSTIN: And sometimes it's not about pushing. Sometimes it's about there *being an opportunity*. Sometimes it's about, like... suddenly you're in a situation where this other part of you is revealed to have always been there, right?

ALI: Yeah... yeah.

AUSTIN: There's a difference, I think, between... you know... what... Hadrian, at his darkest, did. He was *pushed* there by his faith, right? And what Lem did when someone said: "Oh, yeah... a way you could do this is... you go to this place, and you've got to flood this thing." And, like... he wasn't, like... in an emotional state while doing it; he just did it. He just went to it, and was, like... "Yeah, yeah: you guys should clear out. Nah? Three of you is OK, [Ali laughs] if you all get caught up in this illusionary flood... And then also this regular flood..." So...

JACK: I'm a bit... like... [creaking in the background] Umm... there's a strange noise in the background! I think that, like... something that, in a broader sense there, that was interesting to me, in The Archives, was Austin and I... talked quite a lot about what we wanted that episode to be, and where we wanted that episode to go, kind of... structurally? And...

AUSTIN: Specifically... specifically in terms of what pattern magic looked like. In that it shouldn't just look... it should not just look goofy; it should also be scary.

JACK: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah... yeah. And I think, running along that, was this... this idea of, like... a thread that we wanted to develop was... Lem being hesitant to use apparitive magic, or... illusory magic. And then gradually just sort of falling into it more and more? And the revelation of what we could do in The Stoneworks? Was, umm... felt like the natural conclusion of that. And again, it's so easy... I don't know... I think that, like... It's so easy to think of The Archives as a place that's, like... a soft... you know: they read books, and they do all that sort of stuff. And I think something that was important to us, in depicting The Archives, like... actually on screen, was, like... this place is unsettling.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: And my favourite example of this was the desk-chair scene? That just got... it started out silly, and it got... the desk-table scene, I guess... started out silly and got sillier and sillier... and then gradually got kind of sinister?

AUSTIN: Hmm-hmm...

[02:15:21]

JACK: And so working on The Archives, and working on an understanding of what neutrality is, and working on how, you know... I'm less interested in being sweet than being good. That was really important to me.

KEITH: I also think it's important for Lem's neutrality, like... how close Fero and Lem were at the beginning of season one?

AUSTIN: Yep!

JACK: Hmm-hmm!

KEITH: To how... the tougher, and tougher things got, the more and more the two sort of... rejected each other's way of doing anything?

AUSTIN: Yeah... Totally.

JACK: Yup.

AUSTIN: Briefly; I just want to note... we had this great conversation about apparitive magic, or... illusory magic, or... kind of... how those interacted with The Pattern. Could you do an illusion, and then build a pattern around it? And I think, for a while, at the top of the season, you're like... "Oh... who knows? This could...?" And it was you, and it was a lot of the audience... and for me too, for a little bit, it was, like... "Hey... will this all fuck up?"

KEITH (overlapping): Sorry Austin, you cut out for a second...

AUSTIN: Oh, weird...

KEITH: I missed the important thing there...

AUSTIN: At the beginning of the season, there was some question about whether illusory magic... how it intersected with patterns.

KEITH: OK...

AUSTIN: And... The thing that we got to that was actually the scariest? Was that: it works.

JACK: Yeah... yeah!

AUSTIN: It's scary if breaks... if it's fake, and it's paper thin, and like... "Oh... actually, illusions all, like..." No... you didn't... they didn't figure out, like... a shortcut that falls apart?

[02:16:39]

AUSTIN (continued): They figured out how to split the atom. And that's way scarier, for the reasons that I mentioned earlier in this episode... like: it opens up new realms of possibility for what pattern magic can do and be? And that is way more interesting to me than, like... "Oh... shortcuts lead to trouble!" Which is a story that I've heard a thousand times [Ali laughs].

JACK: Yeah...

AUSTIN: I really like this question, but we're so low on time! "What was Alyosha's Lack? And for those who didn't get a chance to explore their own characters' Lack, what do you think it would have been?" Briefly: Alyosha's is scepticism.

ALI: Aww...

AUSTIN: Like... he's just too naive...

ALI: I was really upset that Hella didn't get asked this between... when she knew Hadrian was gone, and when she found him?

AUSTIN: Ohhh...

ALI: Because it would have been accountability? [Ali and Austin laugh]. I was really psyched to say that, but...

AUSTIN (overlapping): That's really good! Anybody else?

SYLVIA: A home...

ALI, ANDREW, and AUSTIN together: Aww...

AUSTIN: Buddy...

SYLVIA: Yep... [Janine chuckles]

AUSTIN: Lem?

JACK: Umm... probably something like... conviction? Or... [pause] and sense of a, sort of... consistent moral compass? [Austin laughs]

AUSTIN: Fair!

ART: That's a long answer to a question that's, basically: "How are you doing?" [several people laugh]

[02:17:57]

AUSTIN: Fero?

KEITH: That's tough! I don't know. I think that there's, like... several different ones. I think that, for Fero, Fero's Lack was respect. I don't know what, for me, his Lack was.

AUSTIN: Wait... in that, the world didn't respect him? Or that he didn't respect the world? [Ali and Janine laugh]

KEITH: It's... it's both. I think it might be that... for Fero, it's that people didn't respect him, and for me, it's Fero didn't respect the world.

AUSTIN: OK... Umm... Who else wasn't in that scene? Was Hadrian not in that scene?

ALI: No...

ART: No; Hadrian gave, like... two different Lacks, I think.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I think that's true... Right; that was the Lack *House*, was the thing that was about, like... actually kind of... making you confront your thing.

JACK: Storing?

AUSTIN: Yeah... Is there a different one? Or are you... do you stick by the ones that you gave at the time?

ART: I think I wanted to stick by those.

AUSTIN: Fair. Anybody else? Or is that it? I think that might be it... alright. "Do we all discuss how to handle in-game sex?" No? Sort of? But not really? Like... certain games have moves around intimacy, right? So that will come up at the top of a season? But not... but generally not, which is probably something... there's a space for it, like... I always say up front: "Hey, do you want to have a talk about these things? Or do you just want to continue to move on with the established set of rules that we set up forever ago?" And we always just, kind of... move forward as is? Umm... Lem and Emmanuel hooked-up, is all... a thing I'll say. This is, like... actually; I'm gonna go back. "For Austin: Is there anything you'd hoped to make clear in the

season you worry didn't come through?" Lem and Emmanuel hooked-up. That's a thing that happened! And sometimes we fade-to-black.

KEITH (overlapping): Yeah; I was *there* and I missed it!

AUSTIN: I noticed! I noticed...

[02:19:37]

JANINE: OK but... define hooking-up?

AUSTIN: I don't know? Like... *you* define hooking up? Right? You fill in the blank! Listen... a plus-one boyfriend-bonus isn't cos, like... they fucked, necessarily. But it's... they had some moment of intimacy that is, I think, whatever is appropriate for who those characters are. It's not that those things can't be interesting? It's that we record this podcast by being on the phone with seven other people [Andrew laughs]. And... I *promise* you; Jack and I, improvising a sex scene while six people listen? [others join laughter] It wouldn't be a *good* one... it just wouldn't be a *good* one? And... let me tell you: it could... like... I could write that scene alright. But... [several people laugh] it's a different thing, right? Like...

KEITH: Ah, man... yeah. It would be so... *weird*; it would be bizarre.

JACK: Yeah... and like, like...

KEITH: Even if it worked really well? And it... it would still be bizarre.

JACK: I don't know, like... I want to be super-clear: don't get me wrong. Sex can be, like... awkward and silly, and it doesn't work; and stuff isn't communicated; or stuff, like... is like... you know; it's not, like... *clean*. Sex isn't, like... sex scenes in movies, or whatever. But I guess that the thing that's... that you don't want to hear is six of your friends attempting to improvise one over a live mic.

AUSTIN: At one AM, when you're exhausted, also!

JACK: Yeah... that's not good.

AUSTIN: No, no... Alright. Talked about that already... Uhh... Vampire Cops... We have to hussle, cos we're already at two-fifteen, I'm sorry... Here's one we can do briefly; we basically had a number of questions about transition, and trans characters in Hieron. Nora wants to know: "How would gender transition work in the setting of Hieron?" And I... the answer that... and I've thought really hard about this, and I thought about it before, is that: the same way it works here, but also more, because it's a fantasy setting. Which is to say; there are a *bunch* of ways in which transition works. Right? Like... There are surgeries, and there are *not* surgeries. And there are people who... seek magical aid to do it, and people who... don't feel that's necessary

for what their situation is, right? Like... For as many people there are, that's how many ways that transition happens. And that's true for Hieron as it is for the earth. And I think that is... something that can be, like... I think it's an important answer. I don't ever want to play a game in which it's just as simple as: "Well, everyone transitions in the same way!" cos we figured it out in this world? Because that flattens a very complex and... kind of complicated thing, to say: there is a simple and easy way to do it.

[02:22:24]

AUSTIN (continued): Not to say that there shouldn't be a world in which it is *accessible*? But even in a world in which you can, kind of... access the methods of transition, should still offer a variety of methods, because there's a variety of people. That's my super-quick answer. [pause] "Was character conflict in a physical sense ever on the table? Relationships have been strained this season (those bonds though!), and there seemed to be a few times where lines seemed to be about to be drawn in the sand. I know Dungeon World does PvP poorly, but did Austin have a plan for it if it did happen?" We definitely spent time at the top of the season going over Dungeon World PvP rules because we thought it might come to it. And then it didn't, and you know... I think, like everything, we would just roll with it? Art? Is that...? You and I were the ones going over those rules.

ART: Yeah, I mean... I was ready for it; it didn't happen; I'm *pretty* happy it didn't happen. Umm... Yeah...

AUSTIN: Yeah...

ALI: Yeah...

AUSTIN: Hella?

ALI: I, like... I don't know... I kind of... it wouldn't have happened unless it was, like... super-super-right for it to happen? Cos I, like... kept wanting to have Hella as someone who had learned her line? And that line was: "I've killed my best friend. And I know not to do that anymore."

AUSTIN: Right...

ALI: So, like... yeah; it could've happened, and we would have just used the, like... combat rolls, I guess...

AUSTIN: And figured it out... *Aid and Interfere*...

ALI: Yeah...

AUSTIN: It's not ideal, but...

ART: But yeah; Hella and Hadrian, as friends who made it through this, are more interesting than the Hella and Hadrian who beat each other to death... [Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: Totally...

[02:23:59]

KEITH: In the chat: RegretCarousel says... quotes Fero, saying: "Everyone in this room is a motherfucker!" [Andrew laughs]. I just want to say that; through... both of the times that Fero exploded at his party members, I don't think that... I ever even envisioned that coming to blows.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: Like... it might have happened, if, like... Ephrim, or Throndir, or Lem decided that it would happen? But I don't think that that was ever somewhere that I thought that that would go.

AUSTIN: Totally... Ahh... "The many gods mixing messages thing was pretty interesting." I just want to say about the way *Guidance* worked. From the jump, it was always... if it failed, you got a vague thing that... it wasn't that the symbol was vague necessarily, not only that... it was: "who is this coming from?" is vague? And whenever you succeeded, I did my best to be clearer about where the messaging came from? In general: symbols of light and heat and things like that were about Samoths; and direction and the wolves were almost always Samot. And so, that was always the way I kind of split it in my head? And the clearer it was, was about whether you succeeded or failed, not necessarily: successes came from one person, and failures came from another. Especially by the end, when there were three things reaching out to you at once.

ART: But when I failed that *Guidance* roll about that ring in Hella's hand, you were, like... "You've never been more sure in your life!" [Ali and Jack laugh]

AUSTIN: Right! Yeah! Totally! Well that was because, like... *the moment*, right? Like... that was when we had to deliver on that: "Make a move as hard as you want" sometimes means "close the book; close the chapter," you know? And... in that case it was, like... the thing that I can do to give to you is: on one hand, you're going to... I'm going to pull on the part of Hadrian that is "do whatever Samoths wants"? And I'm also going to pull on the other hand, which is: "here is clarity about Samoths, which is maybe not what you want to hear." Which forces you to make a decision about... it changes that whole scene, right? Because if I *hadn't* been clear, then there is plausible deniability. Then you don't have to answer the question: "what is more important to me; Hella or Samoths?" And instead you had to answer that much harder question: "Hella or, I don't know... is it Samoths? Or... I don't know!" And so that was a very key thing, you know?

ART: Sure.

AUSTIN: Uhh... "What was going to be at the southern tower?" It was going to be Samol. "What was the concept of the strata and lamina; when was that nailed down?" Way later than you would think! I kept saying earlier, umm... "I want to talk about how we figured out Dwarves," and we don't really have time any more, but... we struggled so hard with Dwarves! Like... three years ago, two-and-a-half years ago, whatever... we were, like... "What's up with Dwarves? I don't know... what's up with Dwarves?" We don't... we just *didn't know*... we'd thought about insect people for a while; we thought about a world in which they got, like...

[02:26:53]

AUSTIN (continued): Caved in, but then became super-sustainable because they were good at being underground, like... we tried a bunch of things...

JANINE (overlapping): Didn't I link you an article about, like... ants falling into a hole and building, like... a separate colony around all the food that fell in that hole...

AUSTIN (overlapping): Yep... totally...

KEITH (overlapping): I'm sorry... what?!

JANINE: And we were, like... "Dwarves though!"

AUSTIN: Yeah...

KEITH: If you think that Austin had a hard time with Dwarves, don't even ask him about Gnomes!

AUSTIN: Fuck a gnome. [Andrew and Keith laugh] So, umm... yeah: Dwarves... I figured that out probably... I figured them out in terms of what the... what things were down there at the beginning of this season? Cos I knew we would get there pretty quickly? And I knew I wanted to do this thing of the... once we figured out reconfiguration, is actually the answer. Once I'd figured out what reconfiguration is, and then realised that... there's a line I have written somewhere about what the strata are, and why the Dwarves live that way? Which is basically that the Dwarves and the layering of the strata and lamina is the biggest "fuck you!" you can give to The Heat and the Dark. No one should throw away their work. Keeping things, all round? Is the best way to say "fuck you! I won't give in to the entropy, and the nothing." And so, like... that is the inspiration for that whole thing.

[pause]

AUSTIN (continued): Can I lay out everything with the suns? OK... briefly: one, the suns are all physical things? The ring on Hella's hand was a sun from a lower level, and if she'd ever taken it off, a second sun would appear? So if she ever takes that ring off, there's just going to be another sun wherever she is. Samoths built suns: he built them; he made them; they're physical things in the world. The one for the second-down strata was the sword that Ephrim put

back together: that one is a... you know... is a sun now. There isn't one at the very bottom level, because there was never a sun on that bottom level.

ART: Where's the zero sun?

AUSTIN: Do you mean the top level?

[02:28:53]

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Uhh... that went away... when you failed a... Oh! Uhh, Maelgwyn took that away; Maelothes took that one away successfully.

ART: OK.

AUSTIN: That's like... his whole thing has been... so, let's speak to that: "No; we need The Heat and the Dark to come, so I can use it as, like... material to build a new world." He was confident he could do that. He's not the first one: the wizards also believed that, a long, long, long time ago. And... they weren't *completely* wrong, like... sure, a chunk of the earth is gone now, and floating off the corner of Samol's shoulder, but it did survive. So... there was some truth to that? It's just also very risky and bad. Uuhhh... OK.

ART: And the first part of that question's "no," right? About The Heat and the Dark no longer being a threat?

AUSTIN: No; very much still a threat! Ahh, right: notably, the original... the thing it was originally meant to do was not fill The Heat and the Dark with the breath and force of ingenuity alive, it was to fill The Heat and the Dark with the love... no; with the breath and *love* of ingenuity alive. And that Samoths is not the same as the other Samoths. So... [coughs]. I think I'm just gonna skip these, cos it's just more deep lore... and we are at two-twenty-five. Which is a shame...

KEITH: Honestly, I thought this was gonna go for at least three-and-a-half hours...

AUSTIN: I... I don't have it in me...

KEITH: I just know us...

AUSTIN: Eh? Maybe I do...

KEITH: We can end earlier? We can end earlier than that, but...

AUSTIN: Yeah...

KEITH: But I was preparing to do this thing? And I thought: “there’s no way we’re getting out of here before three-and-a-half!”

ART: Well, we’ve got some fluff in the last part here.

[02:30:31]

AUSTIN: Totally... So; I will... I will say I’ve just answered this top one, from Linda, but also maybe not Linda, from another... from one of the members of Linda! [Ali, Andrew, and Keith laugh]. His goal was to destroy... was to destroy that sword, so that that sun could not come back, right? Like... the less suns, the more likely The Heat is to arrive, cos it’s Dark. And then, this second one is: “Why did Maelgwyn... why did Ephrim not become Samothés?” Cos Ephrim isn’t of their line, right? Ephrim isn’t the same type of thing that Maelgwyn is. Maelgwyn did that because Maelgwyn is, effectively, a god; Ephrim isn’t. And I... I use that... I walk that line carefully? Because this is not a world in which bloodlines are important? What’s important is power? And so, Ephrim doesn’t have that power, right? That particular thing has to do with inheritance, because you were created by a god or not? But other sets of very powerful things so not come from that sort of inheritance in this world. This isn’t a fantasy world where, like... the divine kings are the only ones who deserve to rule things, you know? So yeah; that is why Maelgwyn did not... or why Ephrim did not become a Samothés.

SYLVIA: Yeah, and just to address the, like... if... the line I said?

AUSTIN: Yeah...

SYLVIA: If it seemed like... I expected that as well? I didn’t...

AUSTIN: No...

SYLVIA: That was just me saying, like... symbolic stuff.

AUSTIN: And that’s, like... well: there are different types of kings. There are the kings who sit, fucking... deep underground and work away on material and metal, and Heat and Dark, and there are kings who go to the surface, and gather people around them, and change the world. So... yeah... And yeah; Alyosha is also not of the bloodline. Alyosha picked up a hammer, and now is doing stuff with that hammer. Alyosha is not a Samothés. “Alyosha: not a Samothés.” [Ali laughs]. So, yeah... Briefly: I guess... I saw this pop up a few times, actually, Sylvia? In the chat, uhh... PN Elmatarian says: “I still don’t really follow why Ephrim did that.” Do you want to speak to that a little bit?

SYLVIA: Umm... Part of it is hearing the story of Marielda; hearing that... what happened? Like... having all that information: one, disillusioned Ephrim a lot with Samothés? And two,

made him realise that he was being used. Him *killing* Samoths was less about him finally doing what Maelgwyn intended to do in Marielda, and more about finally stepping out of his shadow? As much as Ephrim is, like... this larger than life personality, he has always felt in the shadow of either Samoths, or other people. And this is him stepping out of that, and finally taking his life for himself instead of being a servant for someone else.

[02:33:22]

AUSTIN: Totally... Umm... this one I want us to answer, cos it's really good: "What were all of the players' favorite in-character conversations they had with one another? Thanks so much."

SYLVIA: Oh... I got a good one for this! So remember in the... the most recent Holiday Special? When Art and I... when Hadrian and Ephrim were at the church? And Ephrim got really mad?

AUSTIN: Yeah...

SYLVIA: And Hadrian tried to calm him down?

AUSTIN: Yeah...

SYLVIA (laughing): And then Hadrian got really mad? [Ali, Andrew, and Jack laugh]. I *loved* that!

AUSTIN: That was very good...

JACK: I really liked, uhh... Hella and Lem talking in Samol's house.

ALI: Yeah!

AUSTIN: Oh yeah...

JACK: Just this, like... this very human moment of, like... "Oh god, where's, like... hey... it's nice to see you again! Also... what is going on here?" [Ali laughs in background] "Is this normal for you?" It was, like... it was... I really enjoy doing scenes with Ali...

ALI (overlapping): Aww... same!

JACK: And it was really good to do that.

ALI: For me, it was, like... any conversation with Adaire.

AUSTIN: Yeah...

ALI: Cos it felt like it was so easy with the two of them? With, like... banter?

JANINE: I liked the crackers?

ALI: Oh yeah! [a few people laugh together]

JANINE: When I bought you crackers!

[02:34:32]

NICK: The cracker bit is a good bit!

ALI (laughing): Yes!

JACK: Oh god; I really liked it when... who was... who was... was it Hella and Adaire who went off to poison Sol?

AUSTIN: Yes! Oh, that sequence was so good! [lots of other people talking in the background at once - cannot make out what anyone else says under Austin and each other]. That's the closest we've been...

JACK: Ali?

AUSTIN: Go ahead...

JACK: What were you going to say?

AUSTIN: I was going to say... that's the closest we've been to, like... a Fargo, or something like that, right?

JACK: Oh, yeah...

AUSTIN: It's just so... uhh!

JACK: Sol realizing he was about to get poisoned? And also realising that it wasn't, like... tremendously terrible? [Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: Right!

JACK: Thing to happen to him? And so just, sort of... increasingly begrudgingly going along with it was so funny!

KEITH: Oh man, yeah... nothing was better than Sol deciding, eventually: "I guess I'll be poisoned today." [Ali, Andrew, and Austin laugh].

AUSTIN (as SOLOMON CIDER-BREW): “Yeah... well... OK... yeah...” [Ali laughs]

SYLVIA: Another one I really liked, from Marielda?

AUSTIN: Which one?

[02:35:26]

SYLVIA: It was between Aubrey and Sige when they were at, like... the High Sunday at Samoths’... Palace, I guess is what you’d call it? And there’s, like... a moment, I think, if I’m remembering this right, where Sige asks Aubrey if they... if she has anything to tell him? Or something along those lines? And she just, like... dodges the question? And I don’t know if I’m remembering this fully...

AUSTIN: No, that’s totally it.

SYLVIA: But I remember that being a really good conversation between those two in a hallway right after they got their, like... fancy clothes... or maybe it was right before? It’s been a while since we recorded that, and I... have a lot of trouble listening to stuff that I’m on? So... I haven’t been able to go back to it?

AUSTIN: Let me tell you... you were real fucking good. That whole season had so many good moment like that, actually.

KEITH: Can... I have a quick tangential question?

AUSTIN: Uh-huh?

KEITH: During Ali’s marathon for her tooth stuff.

AUSTIN: Oh, fuck... [Ali laughs]

KEITH: Where’s that episode?

AUSTIN: Let’s come back around to that, actually. We’ll talk about that later...

KEITH (overlapping): That would be great.

ALI (overlapping): Yeah, we’ll talk about that later.

AUSTIN: Ali; you were going to say something else.

ALI: I was just going to say; if we're on Marielda really quickly? I just want to say: when Castille was super-drunk, and ran into Hitchcock? And had to remember that she was supposed to be lying to him? So clutch...

AUSTIN (overlapping): Very good...

[02:36:37]

JACK: I feel that, like... we worked really hard on that season to bring in a lot of stuff that's, like... associated with heists? With fictional depiction of heists? And some of the stuff I'm proudest of is, like... What do you call it, in gamers language? Hidden information.

AUSTIN: Yeah...

JACK: Who knows what? Who possesses what information, and how can it be traded? And stuff that... we love doing dramatic irony? And stuff like that, like... "What can we tell the Hitchcock?" was super fun.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Any other ones? [pause] Sounds like we got a good mix. Alright... Our show has... or... "Your show," says Shelby, "has a unique balance of comedy and tragedy, often tipped more towards the tragic side of things. How do you find that balance? And do you worry about leaning too far one way of the other?"

KEITH: Hi. Yes. All the time. Literally all the time [Andrew laughs]. One hundred percent of the time, I worry about leaning too hard towards comedy.

AUSTIN: As, like... an individual?

KEITH: As an individual, yes.

AUSTIN: Right, right... Umm... you know... there's a balance. It can be tough! It can be tough, because there are definitely times - and this is one of those things where I've... we've talked about since then. A couple of weeks ago, before we started the second... [self-correcting] the second... Jesus Christ... the fourth season! I was, like... "Oh! A thing we should do this year is have debriefs after every session with just us, just internally. Because; we are figuring this shit out as we go. And that doesn't mean that I don't think we are, like... pretty fucking good at it, frankly! We make a really good show, and I'm really proud of it, I really am. But also, there hasn't been guidance. And so, a thing I realized is that - if we were doing this on a stage - we would have notes. We would give notes to each other after every episode. And I'm not saying we give harsh critique? But things like: "Oh! I really want the next episode to dig more into this thing, or that thing." Or... or: "Austin, I really want an opportunity to explore this bond that I have, that hasn't come up at all. Make sure that comes up next time." And those sorts of things are huge! And I used to do them for table-top games in college. Like... Art can tell you: we used

to play in a game when... where our GM would make us, for XP, write, like... [Keith laughs] character shit down in college blue-books [Ali laughs]. He distributed blue-books! And would have us...

ART: I wasn't in the game where he made you guys make live journals, right? [others join laughter]

[02:38:57]

AUSTIN: I dropped that fucking game too, don't even worry about it.

ALI: That sounds like my dream! Can we do that? Can we do that?

AUSTIN: Maybe... Let's talk a little bit? We'll talk a little bit... [laughter subsides] Umm... yeah: that was not the person whose name we bleep out; that was a different person.

ART: Yeah; it was a different person.

AUSTIN: Who was... a very influential GM for me, and I have very mixed feelings about, for a number of reasons... A good... I think a good person? A good person. He's a good... he was a good guy, who I...

ART (overlapping): An... above average runner of roleplay games for college freshmen, and a below average friend to college students [Ali and Austin laugh].

AUSTIN: Fair! Fair...

ALI: Going back to the question...

AUSTIN: Uh-huh?!

ALI: I was going to say that...

ART (overlapping): A real 'softboy', sometimes [several people laugh].

AUSTIN: Oh my fucking... well, yeah? Huh... No... you know what?

KEITH: I, uh... I was gonna make that joke, but I don't know this guy? So I didn't...

AUSTIN: No, no... let me tell you... the appearance of vulnerability!

ALI: Umm... So, about the show?

AUSTIN: Uh-huh? Sorry...

ALI: I think that, even when I'm upset about things in the show? I am still doing a thing that I love to do with my friends? And I think, like... even if the *content* is really bad, that still comes across in the recordings.

AUSTIN: Right. Right... totally.

[02:40:10]

ALI: Or, at least... I hope it does. So I feel like we... we strike a balance with that, really easily. Cos even when, like... when we end the call, we still feel like, you know... I had fun hanging out with Austin, or whatever... so...

AUSTIN: Yeah... even when it's like... uughh! I'm so drained!

ALI (laughing): Even when I'm crying, like the three times I have in this show!

JANINE: Oh...

KEITH: I think I... I don't know... does anybody... does anybody else feel like they lean too hard towards comedy, and not too hard towards tragedy, or is it just me?

AUSTIN: No; we're all real sad [Andrew laughs].

KEITH: Yeah, so the thing...

ART (overlapping): I think Hadrian is one hundred percent tragedy.

NICK (overlapping): I am with you, Keith...

AUSTIN: Oh... OK.

KEITH: It's insane that... I think it's insane that how... funny how Art is is how sad Hadrian is! It's very, like... [lots of laughter]. Like... even... far past, like... the tears of a clown cliché? Like... Hadrian is so... so sad compared to how funny Art is. But...

SYLVIA: Comedy is tragedy plus time: give it a year or two? Hadrian's stuff will be *hilarious*!

AUSTIN: *Hilarious*! [general laughter]

KEITH: So, the thing about leaning too hard towards comedy is that, like... there's two things that I'm always afraid of. The first thing is: I'd never want to undercut the tension and the drama of a scene? And I'm always worried that I am... and I do, sometimes...

AUSTIN: Sometimes!

KEITH: Yeah...

ALI: Yeah; we can edit it out, it's fine [Andrew and Austin laugh].

KEITH: Hold on... I don't know how often that happens, but if it's pretty often, then...

[02:41:33]

AUSTIN (overlapping): That doesn't happen, that doesn't happen...

KEITH: OK... Uhh... But the other thing is, I think that... comedy is just inherently less serious than anything else in the entire world? Cos it's funny? So I do also... I do worry... this is a selfish fear, this isn't, like... worry for the show, this is worry for myself? I do fear that, like... doing the funny guy bit in the show... lends itself to people thinking that I... am not thinking about what Fero is, or what he's doing?

AUSTIN: Is that something that you... from Mathsblog, again: "What's improved about your play? Where would you still like to improve?" Is that something that you think you would like to improve on, going forward? Or is that just a thing that...?

KEITH: Ehh... I don't want to be any less funny! [Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: OK!

KEITH: But I think... [Sylvia and Keith join laughter]. I don't know: it's hard! It's hard to know about... it's hard to balance, like... it's hard to balance the fear that you're undercutting something, and that your character's being taken less seriously with the idea that the show benefits from breaks from intense drama.

AUSTIN: Right... I definitely think that there's a right balance for that stuff. And, as a GM, for me... one of the other ends of comedy is action? And that can be super useful. There are definitely moments in the game where... I think about season one in this way a lot, where it's like... "OK, what are we doing?" And it would be a Fantasma, or a Fero decision to go do a thing in a comedic way, but that still worked as a catalyst just to move? Just to get motion.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And sometimes that was, like... ridiculous, and absurd, and like... you know... would lead to a place that was not ideal. But, like... the movement was the most important thing.

KEITH (overlapping): That was common with Mako more than Fero.

AUSTIN: Oh, Mako is definitely the king of that. Mako was the king of, like... "Oh, we're just gonna do a thing now." So...

KEITH: Yeah... I would like to say; IAmAPoser says "I'd like to see Keith go super-dramatic once." I just tried that. I literally just tried that [Ali and Janine laugh].

AUSTIN: Uh-huh? True...

[02:33:49]

JANINE: I... I have a... I have a big answer for this question.

AUSTIN: Sure.

JANINE: Because, as I mentioned, like... season three and, like... Quiet Year, and... and the Dungeon World campaign were my first, like... tabletop roleplaying experiences? So the, uhh... the improving thing has been pretty substantial! I started out, particularly with Dungeon World, looking at every scene like it was a riddle that Austin had made for us. And going in, like... having thought out, like... "OK; I know what happened last time, what's the solution here?" And... I had to really... I had to realize... and this is, like... this is a thing that is, like... painfully obvious when I go back and listen to those episodes, and it's really difficult for me to for that reason... of like... there is definitely a moment - I think it's around the Rosemerrow stuff - that I realized, like... this isn't about solutions? It's about the story.

AUSTIN: Right...

JANINE: Like... it's not a riddle? And it's, like... and it's also a situation of, like... realizing that you didn't even have solutions most of the time? It was just, like... this is the situation the characters are in, and it's about telling the most interesting story with it, and not trying to put it together, like... like a puzzle.

AUSTIN: Right; and finding the... which is just, like... we all spend so much time playing video games? In which...

JANINE (overlapping): Yes!

AUSTIN: There are always solutions? One of my favorite... one inspiration for me this year has been... a game that I don't love as much as most people? But The Witcher Three has a few quests that just stop. There's the one with the Heiress who, like... you can become her dueling instructor? And it feels like it's going to turn into a tryst, of like... "Oh! It's another..."

KEITH: Oh, yeah!

AUSTIN: And then, like... "No. It's over. It's done." And it's not even done dramatically, it's not, like... a big explosive finale; lives just move on. And, like...

KEITH: I love that quest; I've never seen anybody talk about that quest.

AUSTIN: There's a really... there's actually a really good piece about it; I'll link it to you after we're done.

KEITH (overlapping): Oh? Great; that'd be awesome..

[02:45:44]

AUSTIN: It's about the thing we're talking about, which is just, like... sometimes people move in and out of each other's lives. There's my favourite scene in the Witcher Three so far, of what I've played of it: it's just... Geralt comes into a room and sees... goes to meet an important person, and sees a cat on the table, and they just, like... share eye contact. And I know that there are... cats have, like... a thing in the lore of The Witcher, and they mean something, and sometimes they're sorceresses or whatever. But none of that is stated, and instead, it's just that there's a cat, and it makes eye contact with Geralt. And... I want those scenes so much more than I want to, like... build puzzles that have solutions. And I do build puzzles that have solutions, sometimes, like... there are times when that is a fun thing to do. And combat is often like that, to some degree, where it's: "OK, let me figure out what this thing does?" But most of the stuff I want to put people in front of is just, like... "Get deep into your character, into the situation, and figure out what they'll do." And, like... have fun with that. So... so yeah. And again, for the record, both Janine and Sylvia, you've both picked this up super-quickly, so I've been very... i've been thrilled to have you both as part of the show over the last year, so...

ALI: Good job!

JANINE: Thank you...

NICK: I just want to echo something that WaywardPrincess said in the chat; what's great is that it all kind of bled into Adaire as a character with regard to plans?

AUSTIN (overlapping): Yes. Totally.

ALI (overlapping): Yeah...

JANINE (overlapping): Yeah...

NICK: In your first bunch of episodes, I didn't hear any of that as, like... you trying to game it too much or anything.

AUSTIN: Totally.

NICK: I legit just thought: "Oh, OK - this is Adaire. She just thinks about everything in that, sort of... analytical way."

JANINE: Yeah... I think it totally ended up being... part of her as a character. Also... part of her arc as, like... because, as a player, I was figuring that stuff out, while the character was realising that the problem was a lot bigger? So I think it worked out and lined up in such a way that, like... it informed that character in a way that didn't feel, like... broken? And she still got to have, like... a plan-y, manipulative approach to things that worked out, but just in a different way.

[02:47:58]

NICK: I think it gave you an excuse to establish an arc.

AUSTIN: Totally.

JANINE: Hmm-hmm...

AUSTIN: I will briefly say, just cos if I don't, people will go... will leave the season thinking it was true... that in the Rosemerrow detective segment, I do want to note that Mother Glory dying specifically was not, like... a predetermined outcome? And I'm not saying there was a solution? A single solution for saving everybody! Like... "If you'd just figured that out!" But I do want to say that there are ways in which you could have saved Mother Glory, even besides...

KEITH (overlapping): I can think of two, like... right off the top...

AUSTIN: Me too. So I... I don't want to rewrite history; I just want to be clear, that way, people - three years from now - would know that there were other outcomes on the table for that game. Umm... briefly: I'm just going to say this super-quick. People wrote in about the episode descriptions: towards the end of COUNTER/Weight, we realized we could tell stories inside of the episode descriptions, and then Jack and I pretty much did that for most of Marielda? And I think Art wrote one for this past season? Once maybe?

ART: You're talking about my monologue.

AUSTIN: Your monologue, right. Yes.

ALI: That he said on air, and then we cut it, yeah...

JANINE: We did that list, too.

AUSTIN: Oh, right! And Janine did that list. Janine actually wrote a list... one of the Alyosha to Arrell things, to get some stuff back of his. Arrell and Alyosha also an item; to be clear, if that didn't come through. Cos I know sometimes it's not... I'm very subtle. The... We realized we could tell stories there, and then it was really hard not to. Like... once you know that you have

this other thing? It's hard to not do it. Especially when I know that Arrell and Alyosha would be big deals at some part in this season? And that their... I wanted it to... I wanted to tell a version of the Samoths and Samot story again, right? Like... I wanted to tell... I wanted that mirror to be there, and that wasn't going to be able to come up in the main fiction, and it shouldn't. Like... it shouldn't be... I shouldn't use my time where the camera is on the players to develop these deep relationships between NPCs? And so this gave us a vector to do that in a way that gave them depth that... so that when they *did* appear on screen, there was a built-in, already established relationship with the reader... or with the listeners who did read those... descriptions.

[02:50:09]

AUSTIN (continued): And again, I want to thank everybody who helped me with that: Jack, and Janine, and Art, and like... anyone who helped me with that; even like... there were times when I would come to Ali and, like... "I don't know what the fuck to write for this!" And she's, like... "Alright; let me just break down what was in this episode again..." [Ali laughs] Like... "Here are the twelve things that happened... is there anything here that can help? What if-blank-" And sometimes it was, like... all I needed, so... so yeah; alright. [pause] I'm gonna save this, cos there'll be a future time that we can answer this question? And this is the last one I'm gonna ask. And it's... this is, like... it's one of those questions that I saw, and I was, like... "I have to bring this here." From Wade; I like how Wade starts: "OK, here goes..." [Janine laughs]. "To what extent is *Friends at the Table* an ecological text? The recent season, and the sickness of the natural world, stands out to me, as does the COUNTER/Weight plot last season, and the imagery of..." or... "the Weight plot last season, and an imagery of a restored Counterweight at the end of the season. Then there's Rigour and it's terror, which strikes me as a distinctly anti-ecological one; one tied to the mechanism over the natural; work over play; concrete instead of oceans or grass. I don't want this to be seen as just asking: 'is it basically about global warming though?' but rather: are utopian - and I mean that in the good way - fantasies about the *natural* world and its goodness, it's plenty, a motivating theme across the show? And given the final image of the last episode, I guess I'm just smitten with unpacking what the ecological yearning means when it's so deeply co-mingled with the divine. I'm just wondering, I guess, what it means to yearn for lushness and plenty and wholeness, how that desire is linked to the natural world, and the numinous, or hell; maybe those are the same anyway." I actually think, briefly, that throughout this show, I've done a... not done a *bad* job necessarily, but I think... I've given a very plain... divide between technology and nature? That there is... that the natural world is higher than the technological one? That the technological one corrupts and brings us into... into conflict? The technological world is Paladine; it's Ordenna; it's Rigour, right? It's all... and even when we fight with weapons? Those things are always innately dangerous, right? And at the same time have said that they are *us*. Right? That when we look up to them and we think: "We could have built them to look like anything, but we made them look like us." And I also don't know that I've given... at the same time, I don't actually know that any of us have given... utopia... we've never *seen* a utopia before, right? Like... we've seen brief images of Weight, and Counterweight at the very end of COUNTER/Weight? But we never really got to see, like... what a beautiful world it is. And I think we got a lot of questions, or a lot of comments this year, throughout the show that were, again, "What a dreary place..." And...

there was actually a really interesting thing to pick up on, if you follow the Friends at the Table hashtag, and some of the conversation in the groups over the last, like... couple of weeks, which was: a group of fans started to try and figure out what the next season of Friends at the Table is... And one of the comments I saw there that was, like... really interesting was: "I hope they don't go back to COUNTER/Weight, because I can't... I don't know that I want to do another dystopia..." Which is fair! So many of our shows have been super-super-super-dystopic. So; it's time to talk about Friends at the Table Season Four. Everybody should go mute really quick, again...

[02:53:38]

JACK: And listen to the stream.

ALI: Hmm-hmm...

AUSTIN: Yeah; go listen to the stream. Yeah, uh-huh? Right, right! People on the call haven't heard this yet! Like... at all! This is exciting... OK...

[MUSIC - *The Twilight Mirage* begins].

[pause]

AUSTIN (narrating): Floating in the sunset-hued safety of the Twilight Mirage, The Divine Fleet hums and pulses. Its ships, bright beacons of culture and technology, in an age when both are under threat. All through the fleet, organic and synthetic citizens work side-by-side, to protect a utopia that the universe thought impossible. In the past, we convinced ourselves that our technologies were just reflections of those who made them; tools to fit our hands; robots to ease our labor; artificial beings to teach, protect, and entertain *us*. We believed that our greatest achievements, machine-gods we call Divines, were simply idols made in our own image.

[pause]

AUSTIN (continued): We were wrong. Since the first grain silo; the first cathedral; the first ship; since the first computer; the first time we put pen to page; we've always made things bigger, quicker, longer-lasting, different than us. For a long time, we thought we were building mirrors, but now we know better; we were setting fires.

[MUSIC ends]

[long pause]

AUSTIN: Friends at the Table Season Four is called *Twilight Mirage*. It takes place thirty thousand years after the events of COUNTER/Weight. Nothing in COUNTER/Weight is really going to be specifically relevant? There might be some references; obviously, Divines are there,

but it is our chance to do two things. One: it is our chance to talk about a world that is... or at least *was*... utopian. It's about a utopia under threat? It's about a utopia in decline and what that looks like, and what people in it will do to protect it. It is also our chance - or at least, my chance - to complicate the ontology of season two: the notion that we've built technology to look like us. Cos for that whole season, obviously, I'm speaking about giant robots there... but also about other technologies, and the ways in which they do look like us. But also; the stock market doesn't look anything like us, and in many way cathedrals don't. You know... there was a moment when I was walking past a building that was being constructed near the Vice offices a couple of months ago, and I took out my phone to take a picture...

[02:57:20]

AUSTIN (continued): Because I could see a person with a sledgehammer knocking an iron spike into the top of the building. And... I dropped my phone, and it broke - which was not great - but I got the picture! And what was important about it was that I realized... you know... I'd been thinking about the ways in which the Divines were not human; the ways in which Righteousness, for instance, doesn't have a body, let alone a humanoid one. And I realized, that wasn't new: the future of COUNTER/Weight, of that universe, it isn't a *new* thing that technology didn't seem like people; that was always something that we'd done, and I wanted to explore that along with this notion of what a technological utopia might look like? What does happen if we successfully seize the means, and can rebuild a world in an image that we want. And so that is what we're doing; we will have more to say about that very soon, I think... so... that's exciting. I'm, like... I should also note that this was season six? I think, like... [Ali and Andrew laugh] seven months ago, we were, like... "Start writing down some notes about season six!" Like... "That's cool... yeah... this sounds cool! Ah, boy... what if it was... huh... OK..." And then, and then...

JACK: But it's *not* season six; it's season four!

AUSTIN: It's season four...

ALI: Yeah... we should say specifically that we were talking about 'season six' right when we ended Marielda?

AUSTIN: Yeah... yeah; totally.

ALI: Cos originally we were gonna do, like... a hack of *Blades in the Dark* with robots?

AUSTIN: Yeah... we totally were... And instead, what we're doing is *The Veil*, as some people have guessed, by Frasier Simons, who gave us copies of the book when I was reading it, and I was, like... "this is really cool; we really wanna do this..." he very graciously sent us all copies of the book. It's a game about emotions; it's a game about... in which you don't roll your *strength*, or your *cool*, or your *edge*; you roll what you're feeling at the moment that you do it? And that is a very interesting thing, because instead of just saying "what do you do?" I get to say "what do you do, and how do you feel about it?" and it's... just very fun to do that, and get, like... a good

image of somebody. So yeah! So yeah... mechs... robots... spaceships... there's so much more I wanna talk about, but you'll just have to wait!

ALI: Hmm-hmm...

AUSTIN: Yeah... so that's... that's... these are our shows now. I just want to look at this art that Craig did again: you can find Craig Sheldon at shoddyrobot on Twitter, who has just been incredible at giving us just... amazing art for the last few years. So...

[02:59:48]

NICK: Yay Craig!

AUSTIN: So, so, so good... yes. Yes, absolutely. Also, I'm so curious about whether or not this table perspective thing is intentional? [Ali, Andrew, and Jack laugh].

KEITH: Wait, sorry... what's intentional?

AUSTIN: Look at where the camera is in each piece? It's *slowly* going to be a top... from under, to above... the table?

KEITH: OK; yeah...

ART: Then we're going down the other side of that table [Ali laughs].

AUSTIN: Goddammit...

KEITH: Upside down table. There's going to be five seasons where the table's upside-down [Austin and Jack laugh].

AUSTIN: God... Umm... And so that's... that's... you know, the big announcement is we're going to move right into this next season, like... I'm so excited for that, because it has seriously been the thing I've most wanted to do for months and months. Like... I've just been so stoked about trying to get here, and about trying to get to this place. There is another thing... Ali? Do you want to talk about this?

[pause]

ALI: Uhh... umm... oh! [laughs] I was hoping we were done with this?

KEITH (overlapping): No; it's no. She doesn't!

ALI: No? [Ali and Andrew laugh]

AUSTIN: OK... you don't have to! You don't have to... You can just... you can just...

ALI (overlapping): We could have just talked about this beforehand!

AUSTIN: You can just mute yourself, and I'll hit play on this video... that Sylvia made, very well, and... we'll let this video talk instead; how's that sound?

ALI (laughing): That sounds good!

[03:01:04]

AUSTIN: Alright; we'll be right back.

ART: What is this...?

JACK (in TRAILER): Fingers crossed...

AUSTIN: Oh, my friend... [Jack laughs]

[MUSIC - *Marielda* starts)

AUSTIN: You rolled a one. The door opens wide?

ALI (overlapping, whispering): Oh my god...

AUSTIN: And... there's an operating theatre.

JACK: So... I've successfully picked it?

AUSTIN: You've successfully picked it. You go inside? There is a clean, steel table in the middle? You can look up, and see that there is a... an observation room above, which is empty? And once you're both inside the room, Silas closes the door behind him? And swings his cane at your head.

AUSTIN (out of game): Hey; I'm Austin Walker, GM and host of Friends at the Table. What's Friends at the Table? Well... Friends at the Table is an actual play podcast, focused on smart characterization, critical worldbuilding, and fun interaction between good friends. What that really means is that my friends and I love telling stories together, and over the last two and a half years, we have told *a bunch* of them. Something like a hundred and twenty episodes; over two hundred and thirty hours. We've explored a post-post-apocalyptic fantasy world together; we've robbed trains in a magical city; we've looked up at giant mechs, and thought: "we could have built them to look like anything, but we made them look like us."

[MUSIC - cuts to *The Long Way Around*]

AUSTIN (continued): And I am being as sincere as I possibly can here: this show has meant so, so much, to all of us. And we want to do more. But to do more, we need more resources: we need time, and we need more RPG books, and we would love to get some better audio equipment. And you can help with all of that. Below, on this page, you'll find everything you need to know about our Patreon campaign. We've got all the good stuff: different backer levels; stretch goals... we've got postcards; we've got maps; we've also got something I am super-excited about that is pretty unique.

[03:02:49]

AUSTIN (continued): One of our stretch goals is an experimental new campaign idea. It's called *Bluff City*. We want to tell the story of a little, dwindling, gambling town in the mid-Atlantic, through tonnes of little one-off games. We'll see the same place, through the eyes of different people: some criminals on one last heist; a group of teens investigating rumours of a haunting; up and coming pro wrestlers who want to make it big, just so they can leave town. It'll be a little bit Bruce Springsteen; a little bit *The Wire*... Some *Twin Peaks*, maybe a little *Fargo*... And it's something that I really, really want to discover with you, and with my friends. But more than anything else, we just want to continue telling rad stories, and we would be honored if you helped us do that. So; check out the page, donate at a level you're comfortable with, and please; spread the word, in the way that so many of you already have. The only way we've ever grown has been through word of mouth. Even if you can't afford to support us monetarily right now, letting other people know about this seriously helps. Thanks.

AUSTIN: And we are back... Uhh... so yeah. We are...

[MUSIC cuts out]

AUSTIN (continued): Finally starting a Patreon... After years of threatening to start a Patreon [Ali, Art, and Jack laugh]. You can go to this domain that Ali set up... friends at the table dot cash!

ALI: Hmm-hmm...

AUSTIN: To go to our Patreon page. We have a bunch of stretch goals, and we also have a bunch of reward tiers. The lowest reward tier is a single dollar, and anybody who pledges that, and anything more, will immediately get access to the first ever Clapcast?! [Ali laughs]. Ali... do you want to talk about...?

JACK (overlapping): I really want to hear this...

JANINE (overlapping): Me too!

AUSTIN: It's really good!

ALI: It's very good; I...

ART (overlapping): Where's your dollar, Jack? [several people laugh].

ALI (laughing): Whoa! OK!

JACK: I'll trade you a download of the *Twilight Mirage Theme*... [Ali and Austin laugh]

[03:04:36]

AUSTIN: Ha!

ALI: Umm... anyway; yeah... so we... anything that happens while we're, like... playing the game? I try to keep, cos it should be there? But, like... the like... before recording, like... "How was your day?" "Jack isn't here yet; he went to grab some tea stuff..." is, like... stuff I've been trying to constantly fit in...

KEITH (overlapping): You had to go make a hot water bottle...

ALI (laughing): Yeah!

AUSTIN: I still don't know what that means...

KEITH: It is a big plastic bag of hot water that is surprisingly relaxing.

JACK: The size of a man.

AUSTIN: Right...

ALI (laughing): Right... But yeah; I've been trying to figure out a way to get that stuff into the show, and this is a really... good way to hold onto it? So I made a... I made a sample episode of the clips that I had that I didn't want to delete. And they're all really good!

AUSTIN: They're all very good... And then, on top of that, we also have a number of other levels. There's a level at which you will, for... for five bucks, you'll get access to some other bonus stuff I'll talk about in a second; for ten bucks there is... you get to see our Roll20 character sheets, all of our maps... obviously I try to give maps whenever I can? But there are a lot of junk maps that no one sees? Like the one I showed at the top of the episode today? When you could see all of the weird purple stuff? You would see that stuff... There will be... there's a level where you'll receive a postcard: a real, live, physical postcard? With original art and design by Janine; with original micro-fiction set in the Friends at the Table universe. One of them: one of the Friends at the Table universes? [Ali laughs] written by Jack and I? There is...

JACK: I'm so excited about that...

AUSTIN: There is a level where... you will get a behind the scenes, kind of... collection of stuff, including some of my notes? You know, things like... a thing I found the other day was the original Technoir transmission that eventually became COUNTER/Weight? That I ran for some other friends that was just a... it was, like... a cyberpunk Atlantic City? That's the sort of thing I would just totally put in one of these. Or, like... "here are all the NPCs that showed up; here are, like... the stat lines of all these NPCs that showed up this past week, or this past month."

[03:06:40]

AUSTIN (continued): Or just, like... notes on characters, like... there's definitely, remember, when Primo first showed up, all those... all that time ago; in *Blades in the Dark*, I just had, like... really basic character *voice* notes? [Ali laughs] Of, like... how to sound as him? Like... what does Primo sound like? And I... I'm trying to remember... what was it? Here we go: "low, gravelly... 'hey, uh... how's it going?' almost Canadian cadence." And I also had in here, which was, like... I think it was... "Aziz Ansari's Canadian uncle..." or something like that [several people laugh].

ALI: That was my suggestion when you lost your notes!

AUSTIN: That's what it was! Thank you... But notes like that are the sort of things that would be in that level. For those of you who are, like... and apparently there are already two of you! Who really want to support us... and we... you know... if you support us for a hundred bucks a month for six months, and then every year after that, we'll all sign a copy of an RPG book that we've played that year: send it all around to all of us, along with all the postcards, and send it all off to you. Which is rare, because we've literally never all been in the same place at the same time?! [laughing] So it's not like we can just all go over Ali's house and sign the book! We have to actually send that, internationally, three times, and then send it off...

ART: We've already hit our one thousand dollar goal.

ALI: Oh! Hey!

AUSTIN: Wow! Thank you... that really makes me... that makes me blush a lot... so...

JACK: Oh my god...

AUSTIN: Well! Good news: that means we can upgrade our audio equipment, and get everyone using the same basic recording setup, which...

JACK: Oh my god! I'm suddenly on a better mic! [several people laugh]

AUSTIN: Instantly!

KEITH: I... I do want to... I want to be clear: we're actually at nine hundred and ninety seven dollars?

AUSTIN: No; we're at a thousand-twenty-four!

KEITH: Oh! I refreshed it, and now...

AUSTIN: A thousand-sixty-one, actually...

[03:08:22]

KEITH: I'm lagging a little bit behind, I apologise for...

AUSTIN: We missed... the second thing here, is at three K, we're gonna start another bonus podcast, called *Tips at the Table*, where we'll start answering questions. You know, I... skipped a lot of questions here today; I skipped some stuff that I thought was really good, but that we could hit at a later date. And it's things like that, right? And there are a lot of questions of that type in this mix, right? There were definitely things like: "Austin, how did you balance the need to expand upon very complex metaphysics of Hieron, while also adhering to the principle - 'draw maps, leave blank spaces...' " "You know... that's the sort of thing I can talk about broadly, in how, as a GM, you can both deal with the complex rules of a fictional universe and also try to keep open spaces for your players, right? Lots of people write in with questions for players about how they decided to do this thing or that thing, and Tips at the Table will be a way for us to do that; so that is our next goal. And then, after that, is the one that I am, like... very excited about. Once we hit six K, we will start Bluff City, which is that bonus campaign that I talked about in which we will be kind of - slowly uncovering and building collectively - this small, mid-Atlantic, kind of... Atlantic City stand-in. Gambling city; down on its luck; vaguely existing in a time period from the eighties to the twenty-thirties, in my head? Like... definitely weird technology? But also just, kind of... crummy local economy? You know? It's just a... weird mix of things. And we'll do that by playing games like *Fiasco*, *World Wide Wrestling RPG*, *Tales from the Loop*... like... all sorts of games that we have wanted to play for a long time but that we have not had... we couldn't dedicate a whole season to it, right? Like... I say this of myself, as a storyteller? I don't know that I could run a season-long *Monster Hearts* game... I absolutely can run a *Monster Hearts* game set in a fictional Atlantic City called Bluff City! Like... [Ali laughs] that's gonna happen, for sure. So that is probably... for me, the goal that I'm most excited about and would love to hit. I think that's it? Is that... does anyone have anything else? Are there questions in the chat?

JACK: I guess, like...

AUSTIN (overlapping): I haven't looked at the chat in a little bit, because I've been refreshing this page and, like... covering my heart... [Ali laughs]

JACK: Thank you all so much for your support! [several people speak at once in agreement] It's, like... overwhelming in a way that is very tangible, and also very good [Austin laughs].

AUSTIN: Unlike most overwhelmings.

JACK: Hmm-hmm...

ART: Do you want to talk about the higher...? The ten thousand? The Live at the Table?

[03:11:07]

AUSTIN: I don't... oh... yeah! Yeah... we'll talk about that. Is that...? I didn't know if that was on this yet. Was this on that yet?

ALI: Yeah, that one's there.

KEITH (overlapping): Yeah, it's here.

AUSTIN: OK, sure. So at ten K, if we hit ten K, we will start a monthly live stream where we just play a system that's voted on by our Patreon supporters. You know... there are times that we want to play something that is a little goofier? Albeit, in a slightly buttoned-down mode? Back when Ali was raising money for some dental work, we did a stream together, and we played, like... *The Sims*, and some other games, and then it was late, and we were, like... "what if we just do a quick RPG?" And we played a game called *Laser Feelings*, and had a really good time? And it was really...

KEITH (overlapping): It was a tonne of fun.

AUSTIN (continuing): Buttoned-down us? And, like... it was... again; we get a lot of notes that say "I miss the looseness of the first season," and at a certain point, you want to start telling a story that is, like... really considered? And you lose that looseness because it's just not the thing that you're there to do anymore. And that's not a diss on the looseness, it's just: "Oh; I got interested in this other thing." And that other thing is still really fun, and we still want to do it; and this would let us do it, and do it live, and if you were backing at the right level, you could come watch us do that live. Obviously we wouldn't just be streaming it to no one! [Ali, Austin, and Keith laugh].

JACK: *Lasers and Feelings* we should also say is, like... coming?

ALI: Yeah...

JACK: That's going come out - I just didn't want to release an episode without music on? And I wanted to take the time to get that feeling good. Also, I was really nervous that I wouldn't be able to do synths? But, ummm...

AUSTIN: Boy! It turns out...!

JACK: Now I have to, so...

AUSTIN: Also; I am so ridiculously excited for, like... whatever music Jack makes for Bluff City? If we hit the Bluff City goal?

JACK: I'm so excited!

[03:12:53]

AUSTIN: Are you fucking kidding me? So...

KEITH: Oh yeah...

AUSTIN: Thank you all so much...

JACK (overlapping): It's gonna be...

AUSTIN: Go ahead.

JACK: Oh... I just, like... uhh... the amount of places and styles we're going to move through, in that show? And just doing one shots will just let me do some really bullshit stuff with music that is going to be really exciting.

AUSTIN: I am... I am... so happy to be doing this with everybody here, and I mean that; with everybody in the chat, but also with everybody on this call. Like... I love you all so much... we've made... I say this again - I said this in the video - but I'll say it a little longer here. I have had a very exciting few years? [Art laughs] I've had a very dramatic few years? In terms of, like... going from living in a box in, like... dealing with my landlady telling me I had twenty days to move to a new apartment? To where I'm at today, and... despite all of the other things that maybe got more visibility, or, or... where people might know me from now, like... the thing I am proudest of is building this with all of you, and telling these stories, and finding these characters, and kind of... connecting with an audience, and... just exploring all of these ideas. It has been, like... a point of pride, and a point of... I feel *most like a person* when I am doing Friends at the Table, and I want to do it for as long as we can. So thank you all so much for helping me do that, thank you all, in the chat, and those who are listening to this not in the chat, but later in the archived version. Ali, who is going to, very kindly, quickly turn this around for this week [Ali laughs]. We are... incredibly lucky. I am incredibly lucky to keep doing this: thank you.

ART: Yeah, and you hear that Gerstmann? He likes us best! [several people laugh, some applause].

SYLVIA: Holy shit!

AUSTIN: Goddamn...Jesus Christ... umm... alright! I think that's gonna do it for us. What if I just put that season four trailer on one more time, and we go out to that? How's that sound?

ALI: Sure...

JACK (overlapping): Sounds great.

JANINE (overlapping): That sounds great.

[03:15:00]

AUSTIN: You can find me on Twitter @austin_walker, and you can find the show @friends_table. Ali, where can people find you?

ALI: You can find me @ali_west on Twitter; you can find the show on @friends_table... [pause]

AUSTIN: I didn't know if you had another thing; it sounded like you had a third thing coming. Ahh... Sylvia...

ALI (overlapping): You can go to Friends at the Table dot cash!

AUSTIN: There it is! Friends at the Table dot... cash... [Ali laughs] Umm... Sylvia! What about you?

SYLVIA: You can find me on Twitter @captaintrash.

AUSTIN: Uh... Art?

SYLVIA (overlapping): It rhymes with Friends at the Table dot cash [several people laugh].

ART: Uhh... hey! You can find me on Twitter @atebbel, and Jeff Gerstmann can find me in the streets [several people laugh].

AUSTIN: Umm... Janine; how about you?

JANINE: You can find me @bleating_heart, and I don't want any conflict with anybody, thanks [Ali and Jack laugh].

AUSTIN: Andrew Lee Swan...

ANDREW: Uhh... you can find me... fucking... tearing up, thanks to Austin being a jerk...

AUSTIN: I do my best!

ANDREW (laughing): You can find me on Twitter @swandre3000.

AUSTIN: Jack, how about you?

JACK: You can find me on Twitter @notquitereal, and buy any of the music featured on the show, including, as soon as this call ends [Austin laughs], the theme for Twilight Mirage, at Not Quite Real dot Bandcamp dot com.

AUSTIN: Keith Carberry...

[03:16:21]

KEITH: Hi! My name is Keith Carberry, you can find me on Twitter @keithjcarberry, and you can find the Let's Plays that I do on YouTube dot com slash Runbutton.

AUSTIN: And Nick Scratch.

NICK: Hi, my name is Nick Scratch, you can find me at Nick Scrat dot CH... bu-dum-bomm [Andrew laughs].

AUSTIN: Thank you again so much, everybody.

NICK (overlapping): I haven't said that in a while...

AUSTIN: It's a good one! It's a good one...

NICK: It sounds better when my throat isn't dying after speaking for three hours... [several people laugh].

AUSTIN: I think... I think we've all been there. And with that; I think it is time to go back to time dot is, everyone...

ALI: Oh great...

AUSTIN: We've got to do the clap... so let's...

ALI: OK...

AUSTIN: Are we all there?

JANINE: Limber up!

SYLVIA: Everything was going so well up until now...

AUSTIN: Uh-huh?

JACK: It feels like yesterday...

KEITH: People get so scared of the clap; I embrace it.

AUSTIN: You want to do it at fifty?

ANDREW: Yeah, sure...

[03:17:08]

AUSTIN: Fifty-three fifty, to be clear! OK...

[pause followed by several people clapping at slightly different times]

AUSTIN: Pretty good clap?

ALI (lightly): Yeah... that was fine.

AUSTIN: That was a little bit like a wave, but a like a good wave, you know what I mean? Like a... good wave... [some background laughter].

KEITH: I heard five distinct claps...

AUSTIN: OK, but... let's... it's...

SYLVIA (overlapping): And if you want more claps like that; go to Friends at the Table dot cash! [several people laugh].

AUSTIN: Uhh... alright everybody; we'll talk to you in the future.

SYLVIA: Bye.

AUSTIN: I'm going to put this back on again, cos it's just so good. Everyone... everyone leave chat so that we don't talk over this. Or... I guess I could just do that. Bye.

[EPISODE ENDS]