

Tips at the Table: High School Canon Name Generator (July 2019)

Transcribed by: @robotchangeling

AUSTIN: Welcome to Tips at the Table, an RPG podcast focused on critical questions, hopefully smart answers, and fun interaction between good friends. I'm your host, Austin Walker. Joining me today, Ali Acampora?

ALI: Hi, my name is Alicia Acampora. You can find me @ali_west on twitter.com.

AUSTIN: Jack de Quidt.

JACK: Hi! My name's Jack. You can find me on twitter @notquitereal and buy any of the music featured on the show at notquitereal.bandcamp.com.

AUSTIN: And Andrew Lee Swan.

DRE: Hey. You can find me, I guess, on twitter @swandre3000, which I just talked about using less, so I guess... [Austin and Jack chuckle] I don't know, follow me on Instagram? At andrewleeswan. I posted a picture of some potatoes and my dog today, so.

AUSTIN: Hell yeah, that sounds great.

ALI: Mmm.

AUSTIN: I gotta start living a life that makes sense for instagram. [chuckles] I gotta start living a life where I'm taking photos of things and I'm at places where photos make sense [DRE: yeah] instead of the office. You know? In the chat, heavenlyevan says, "My attention is divided between this and Fire Emblem, so we'll see how that goes." Ali, it's only a past Fire Emblem. It's not the current Fire Emblem, for sure.

ALI: Ohh.

JACK: It's Fire Emblem: Awakening.

AUSTIN: It's Awakening, or Fates.

ALI: [insincerely] Yeah, I thought Fire Emblem wasn't coming out until September 20, that's so weird.

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah, it's not...

ALI: That's so weird.

AUSTIN: Yeah, you're— *September* 20, you said?

ALI: I know! Dude, I'm gonna die!

AUSTIN: Wow, that's so far away. Wow!

ALI: [suffering] I'm gonna die!

DRE: Not even August, huh?

AUSTIN: I thought it was August. I thought the thing you were talking about was August.

ALI: [laughing] I'm gonna die.

JACK: They announced the date as—

ALI: [singing] I'm gonna die.

AUSTIN: Ali, there's gonna be an entire, like, two full orbits around the sun of discourse about this game by the time... [Jack laughs]

ALI: I know. That's why, you know, I might just like, mute all Fates stuff on Twitter.

AUSTIN: Just get rid of all of it.

ALI: Just, I don't want to know anybody's opinions. [laughs]

AUSTIN: I'll send you a list of terms to fate— or, to mute. And you can just...uh huh. God.

ALI: I just want to find my wife with that hat and just go [laughs] play the game.

AUSTIN: Yep. Good. Her name is Dorothea[doro-THAY-ah], or Dorothea[doroTHEE-ah], I don't remember.

DRE: Oh, yeah yeah yeah.

JACK: Oh, yeah yeah yeah! Not the we've been playing.

AUSTIN: She's got the JoJo's hat on. Uh huh. [Ali continues laughing] She sings, it's great. [ALI: aww] I mean, sorry, this game isn't out yet. This is what— I just know this from...the Youtube.

JACK: From the...from...from the youtube.

DRE: Advanced copies.

AUSTIN: From previews. I went to E3, and they were like...

ALI: Oh, okay.

AUSTIN: "Let me introduce you to..." Uh, you know, uh... Reggie, was that— Reggie's retired. Uh, Doug, Doug Bowser was there. [Ali laughs]

DRE: Reggie 2.

AUSTIN: And he was like— uh huh. And he was like, "Hey, Austin, I want to introduce you to Ali's wife, Dorothea."

ALI: Oh, yeah, that's nice of him. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah, it was good. It was a good first meeting. [Ali laughs] Um, we're here to do a podcast—

DRE: Did you meet her in person, or was it like a...

AUSTIN: It was a videoconference.

DRE: Was it like a hologram? Like a...

ALI: Oooh.

AUSTIN: It was not a holocr— it was not a hologram. It was just Skype.

DRE: Was it a holocron? [laughs]

AUSTIN: It was a holocron, it was a Jedi holocron.

ALI: Oooh!

AUSTIN: [laughing] Which is why she's Ali's wife.

ALI: Yeah, mm-hmm. Yeah.

AUSTIN: That's how you know. Um. How's it going. [Ali and Jack chuckle] Do y'all wanna do a podcast where we answer questions about roleplaying games?

ALI: Sure.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ALI: I'm up for that today.

AUSTIN: Me too. [Ali laughs, muffled] This one comes in from Summer, who asks a question that I think is pretty easy, because the answer is pretty simple. Summer asks:

“One of the really fascinating things Friends at the Table does that I haven't seen other actual plays do is taking names of things from the systems you use. Example: the Veil becoming another name for the Mesh in Twilight Mirage, the Blade in the Dark in Marielda, lots of little structural things in Lacuna, more recently Asterism unless the connection to Armour Astir is a coincidence.”

AUSTIN: In that case, it is totally a coincidence. It is also spelled different. Asterism as I'm using it in the Road to Season 6, and presumably in Season 6, is A-S-T-E-R-I-S-M, which is just another word for— it's not *just* another word for constellation, they're like different, but only in very weird academic ways, so.

“I was wondering, for Austin, what circumstances let you pull those things most readily, and for other players, if applicable, collaborative worldbuilding and such.”

AUSTIN: And, in that mind, I'm thinking of things like— I mean, Janine's not here, but Cybertome was on that I was insistent that she use, and she decided not to. [Ali laughs] But I'm sure other players have had things on their character sheets that are like, oh, this is this thing, but you've done different stuff with it.

“And for the players, how does that augment your investment into the story and systems?”

AUSTIN: I say that's a simple one, because in every case it's like, “oh, hey, we could do this thing.” It's never carefully plotted. It's like, “oh, hey, we should name this thing the Blade in the Dark, that would be sick.” [Ali laughs] It's like, “oh hey, these moves already refer to a thing called the Veil, so instead of me needing to, every time we say it, say ‘oh, the Veil is the Mesh, is our thing, what we call the mesh’.” Or needing to record an entire season where we say, you know, “roll plus mesh”, or when you do something in the Mesh, and then people listening open up that book and they're like, “why does this not say Mesh anywhere?” It's just like, let's just integrate it. It's not that big of a deal, I'm not too prickly. And in a lot of cases, I think that the words being used are really good already. I think about something like Lacuna and the way like heart rate and stuff worked. Obviously, like, some corer things to Blue City and stuff like that were already so evocative, that it's like...what we do with roleplaying games already is they lend us their content, their form, and their rules, and I don't like to draw hard fast lines between when something is a mechanic and when something is capital-c Content. I think that those things

blend way more readily than we might admit they do. And so I'm willing to do that blending too, you know? Especially because it's not...it's very clear where I'm getting those things from, do you know what I mean? [laughs] No one would be like, "Austin invented a thing called the Blade in the Dark." [Ali laughs] Whelp. Like, yeah, no, the game was Blades in the Dark, I said it at the beginning of every recording, so. Not sure if anyone else has had examples of this stuff in their characters over the years. Throndir uses a name from Dungeon World, I guess.

DRE: Oh, yeah, that's true. [Ali giggles]

AUSTIN: Right? That's just Throndir. Did that actually— I'm actually curious for you. Did that...so this is really behind the scenes, but you...of all the starting characters, you sent me the longest, like, "here is my backstory", and yet, you used a default elf name, and I'm curious—

DRE: I just thought it was a cool name, I don't— [laughs] That's about all I got!

AUSTIN: It is a cool name! I'm not— this isn't a drag! I'm just— going to the last part of Summer's question, here where, you know: "And for the players, how does this augment your investment to the story and systems." Was that just like, "hey, I'm really interested in the story, this name sounds cool, good enough, I don't need to come up with my own name"?

DRE: Yeah, basically.

AUSTIN: Alright, good! [quiet laughter]

DRE: I hadn't done five years of being exposed to all of our bullshit naming mechanics yet, so, you know.

AUSTIN: True. Yes, yes.

DRE: Had to start slow.

AUSTIN: Any other responses, here?

ALI: I think there's something in like...we've become increasingly particular, but we've always been pretty particular about like, thinking about the system that we're using and making sure it kind of fits what we're doing and making sure that it's as much of like a mood fit as it is just a purely mechanical fit. That like, as we're reading the book and being like, "oh, that's sick", like it make sense that we would be excited to use it in-game.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Like apply those or whatever. So. [laughs] That's how I feel.

AUSTIN: No, I'm with you completely. Like, I...we've talked about it before that the arc of any pre-production to early production season is me getting excited about some shit I've seen in a book and posting the names of things and like moves and like whole pages sometimes, where I'm like, "wow, look at this!"

JACK: Just, like heavily compressed screengrabs of black and white book pages. [Ali giggles]

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yes. Yeah. Me hitting Windows shift F and then...or whatever the fuck it is, Windows shift...I'm getting the two confused. There's one for Windows and there's one for Mac and I always get them confused.

JACK: Windows shift S.

AUSTIN: Windows shift S, yes, thank you. Fantastic quick screenshot tool, by the way, just adds that right to your clipboard.

ALI: Mm-hmm.

AUSTIN: And yeah, and so sometimes those things get in your brain a little bit, you know? I think especially with systems like Lacuna or The Veil, where they're very, very flavorful. So, thank you Summer, for that question. Summer is in the chat. They just upgraded, so they're here. Hi, Summer.

JACK: Oh, hi!

ALI: Hi!

AUSTIN: This next one comes in from @bentheread, who says:

"My Burning Wheel campaign has recently transitioned to a text-based diceless storytelling format, due to preoccupation and scheduling conflicts. I know Ali has participated in text-based RPG for a long time, and I'm curious to hear if other Table Friends have any experience with this kind of play. Do you have any suggestions for improving the quality/unpredictability of a text-based RPG format? I would also love to hear suggestions for participating in the RPG community for those of us who are forced to work with manual jobs with little energy or time left to spare."

AUSTIN: Ali, do you want to start there, with, you know, if you have any advice for this, or specifically with improving quality and unpredictability, which I think is a great word to focus on?

ALI: [laughs] Yeah, I, so...yeah, just to like... 'Cause I've had someone DM me and be like, "How do you do that? What is that?" I'm just gonna explain really quickly, which is like—

AUSTIN: Yeah, sure.

ALI: Me and my friend, Justin, for ten years, have been like typing back and forth to each other, [laughs] in any sort of— first it was AIM, now it's in Discord, for a while we were just like doing it on our phones.

AUSTIN: Wow!

ALI: Of just like, here's our OCs, [chuckles] here's a whole paragraph of what they're doing, like back and forth, whatever. You don't need a system, you basically just need like a chatroom. Or like a forum, or just whoever's down to do it. There's not like any fancy illusion or anything to it. In terms of like, quality/unpredictability, I... [sighs] I wish there was like a little bit more detail [laughs] in this question. But I think that like, especially...I'm sure there have been some kind of growing pains for your group, especially if they're going from a tabletop game to doing this. I would say that a thing that me and Justin do a lot is we'll kind of figure out what the next three or so scenes will be, like we'll have an arc planned.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: But not like the outcomes, right? So it'll be like, oh, this is a scene where we're gonna do where like, you know, these people are on trial for whatever. And then this is two people talking about it separately, because they should have the conversation about it. And then here's another thing from the fallout of that.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: And I think that makes it a little bit easier, because everybody who's there kind of knows what's going down and then just can kind of more naturally play their characters from there, because they kind of have an understanding of what the scene is, so to speak.

AUSTIN: Do you have a good idea of how conflict will resolve or what the closure of a scene will be by the time you start? Or are you working things out? There's a scene towards the end of the first season of Friends at the Table, in Autumn in Hieron, where you—famously for me, you know, it's a big deal for me [Ali laughs softly]—say that you went into the scene with one intention, and you left it having done something completely different. And I'm curious if that comes up for you in text-based RP.

ALI: Oh, yeah, absolutely. And like, if that is ever a thing that's happening, completely follow that. Because I feel like a lot of times when you're playing a character, you will definitely be like, "oh, this person's gonna do something else." [laughs] Right?

AUSTIN: Yep! Totally, a hundred percent.

ALI: And like, you know, if that is the way that you feel in the moment, just do it, 'cause you might as well, you're doing this to have fun anyway. And yeah, that's the thing, that's why we kind of like determine scenes instead of complete outcomes. We know like, oh, you know, this conversation will probably go this way to lead into the next thing, but it's never like a hard fast—it's never scripted in that way, you know?

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: The only other suggestion that I can make— I know that you're doing like a completely diceless whatever, [laughs] like a diceless storytelling format, but if you're coming from a tabletop game, and you feel like some of your players are struggling with doing that...a way to kind of get back that feeling into it is having like a text bot, [AUSTIN: yeah] or having Roll20 in the side. So like, if you're coming to a point in a scene or whatever where you feel like there would be a dice outcome, you can still do that, to kind of have it click for people, or still have that sort of excitement in it. And there's like a bunch of different...depending on what you're using to do the text stuff, there is a bunch of different ways to enter that into whatever you're doing.

AUSTIN: Totally. I feel like that was... So, I have a weird history with this stuff, too, in that I haven't done it in a long time, but teenage Austin through college years was like, I did it all the— like, nonstop. And in fact, after college even, now that I think about it. I think up until grad school. Like, I met Janine through a tabletop— or, not a tabletop, a storytelling, like a MUCK that was like an anime and gaming [Ali giggles] multidimensional themed thing. And played on that for years, and then played in forum-based stuff. I mean, it was like the— as far of a range as you could imagine, like the height of it is definitely, I was canonically a character from the card game Legend of the Five Rings [Ali laughs] in a winter where they ran an official RP forum where everyone was at the same winter court.

ALI: Oh, yeah. Oh my god.

AUSTIN: It was the fucking sickest shit, Ali. It was so dope. [Ali laughs] And years later, I randomly wound up in like a major— you remember when I ran One Last Continue? Or, I co-ran One Last Continue?

ALI: Oh, yes yes yes, yeah.

AUSTIN: The chat that that emerged from— for people who don't know, One Last Continue is a now-way-defunct site that I used to write about games for a decade ago, over a decade ago now.

ALI: [softly] God.

AUSTIN: I know. [laughs] And the people who started that with me included someone who ran a chat room for people who read Kotaku back in the day. [Ali laughs softly] Again, twelve, thirteen

years ago or something I was in this chat. And one of them had coincidentally also been in the L5R winter court with me, who I worked with! I like, he was in my clan. [Ali laughs] He was like a monk in the clan I was in, it was wild. So that's like the highest level. When I was like fourteen, I was also absolutely in an online E federation wrestling sim [Ali laughs, claps] RPG thing where I would cut promos in the forums, and then we would resolve the games via Fire Pro Wrestling G, which was an imported Japanese Fire Pro game. I had to buy a special device called a DexDrive that let you upload PS1 saves to the internet, [Ali laughs] so I built my characters in that, roleplayed them in the forums, and then we sent them to the referee, who would record the matches— it was like two people, one of them had the ability to record matches and import it, like literally record it on a VHS tape, then import it in like shitty 420— like below 420 video and upload it. Or the other person would just take screenshots, or take photos, I guess, and show it back. And was like, that was— I'm gonna tell you, all of this is so influential on Friends at the Table. [Austin, Ali, and Dre laugh] Still doing all that stuff. But what I will say is, to build on what Ali said around this question of like unpredictability and quality, one of the things that across all of this stuff was true was scheduling is a weird and important thing.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Because you think diceless, you think text-based, you think asynchronous. And it's true that you can do some asynchronous stuff, I've done asynchronous forum play stuff. But, sometimes like— alright, we gotta both— okay, let's clear an hour. Like, we're gonna have this fuckin' scene. [Ali laughs] We're gonna do this scene right. We all need to be there, both of us need to be there. Let's still put some time aside for it. I know that that seems like it goes against the whole thing of, oh, there were scheduling conflicts, to do the tabletop thing, but you will find that there is some degree of flexibility in comparison to getting four or five people to a table, being able to be like, oh, me you and you are gonna be online at the same time. Maybe, you know, we're watching TV at the same time, or maybe I'm playing a video game, but like I'm still, I will be attentive in a way that I won't be during my work day. I think that's a huge part of it for me, or was.

ALI: Yeah. I mean, I've seen it done a ton of different ways, so I think finding what works best for your group makes sense. Because it's just been me and Justin for so long, like we'll— it's just a chatroom that we're in, so like—

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: I worked at Best Buy for years and years and years and would be typing [laughs] fucking paragraphs between customers, like that's just a thing that I did. I think that if your group doesn't really have the structure right now to be able to be like, okay three of us are gonna be online for an hour or texting each other or whatever... I think that like kind of the forum format really works, and especially if you're doing it in Discord or something, because the way that those typically get set up is like, they'll start a thread that's like "this is the start of this scene in this setting, [AUSTIN: yeah] I am the person who is kind of starting it." And then like people as they

come in will kind of respond to that post or whatever and just kind of go through it. And I feel like that works, and especially if you're like rotating from a scene like once a week or once a night or whatever, or even setting up— I've also seen people set up different forum channels or different chats that are like, here's where the castle is—

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

ALI: [laughs] And here's the like garden behind the castle, and here's the town square or whatever.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: And like, as people are moving from location to location, they can move between thread or chatroom or whatever.

AUSTIN: Totally. That is exactly how I think about like when I was playing the MUCK with Janine twenty years ago or whatever the fuck. It was very much like, alright, here are the locations, right?

ALI: Yeah, mm-hmm.

AUSTIN: It's basically a chatroom that's connected by typing north, south, east, or west, you know. [Austin and Ali chuckle] But that was it, one hundred percent. And that helps, because you can feel like you're coming into a space, or like, "hey, what's going on in the castle interior right now?" you know?

ALI: Right, yeah, exactly. Yeah, I mean, it's super fun to do. It's probably gonna take a little time to find what's right for your group, especially since you're having the added difficulty of adapting it.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: But, I think being willing to be really flexible with that structure as you guys are getting used to it is gonna help kind of make things flow nicer.

AUSTIN: My last piece of advice for that adaptation is to think about Burning Wheel and about how the tone of that game is inscribed in the rules and to think about ways that you can purposefully bring that forward, and I have some like big picture suggestions. These are not tested, these are not like...but these are the ways you should be thinking and testing stuff yourself. So like Burning Wheel is a game, for instance, where the only way you get better is by failing, right? You...for people who don't know, in Burning Wheel, you need to get a certain number of— you need to roll dice a certain number of times with a certain degree of different challenges. It's like, to get better than what you are, right? So let's say that you are like pretty

good with a sword, right? The only way you get better at being pretty good with a sword is by failing at being pretty good at a sword a few times, succeeding sometimes, and then, especially, failing at trying to not just be pretty good but by trying to be excellent at a sword. And think about ways that you can bring that forward. Write down, you know, a set of questions you might ask yourself when big conflict happens or when the outcome is unknown. Write down questions like: is my character skilled enough to do this? What does my character learn from this? Does this improve...does this alone improve my character's ability to do this? And it's not that you have to, like, try to convert those rules one to one, but it's about producing a sort of state of mind in which you are not moving from something like Burning Wheel, which is fairly— I don't want to say "realistic", but it's very concerned with the material cost and distance between kind of being able to do something and being able to do something well. It's materially concerned with change and the cost of change and the time it takes for anything in the world to change. Try to bring that forward, and try not to move from Burning Wheel to Berserk, you know what I mean? [Ali chuckles] Not that Berserk doesn't have its own, you know, ideology when it comes to material change and stuff like that. But, you know, try not to move from one genre to another. Unless the whole crew wants to do that! You know, in which case, fuck it, go have fun. [Ali chuckles] I think the second part of this question is harder, for sure. I'm curious if Jack or Dre, one, have any answers for the first part, but especially the second part, of just like: how do you play RPGs when you have little energy or time?

JACK: Oh, god. I don't know that I would be able to offer particularly meaningful advice, here. I think that, you know, based on what you and... I have little experience playing games like this...which isn't quite true, because I think when I was about nine or eight, [Ali giggles] my younger sisters and I would sit in the garden writing letters to each other, which we would seal inexpertly [Austin chuckles] with, you know, cellotape, and in a sort of Bennet sisters conversation, move through slow and [laughs] strangely written arcs of some kind of Georgian or Edwardian parlor writing. Which is basically what you two are describing, but played by nine-year-olds. [Ali giggles]

AUSTIN: Right. Right.

JACK: In a garden. And so there's very little advice I can—

AUSTIN: In a British garden, yeah.

JACK: Yeah, there's very little advice I can give here, because I don't think we played super well? Or we took the advice necessarily that you just gave, but I remember it being a great deal of fun. And I think...you know, I don't know that we had much quality or...you know, or unpredictability, because, again, we were nine. Or, the unpredictability and quality that we acquired came from, you know, receiving a letter from my sister that I opened and said, you know, "Oh, my dear brother, I have died!" [Austin and Ali laugh] And it's just like, oh, well shit, okay! [laughs] But like, it's very difficult to want to exist in these spaces and to want to tell stories like these with your friends and balance that against time. I would recommend looking at starting

with smaller and smaller scopes, and whatever scope you're currently thinking of, make that smaller, and then make it smaller again. And begin in that space and feel out, you know, the capacity that your time allows you to have in that space. Also, whenever I think about stuff like this, I can't help but think of...is it called Firebrands?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: Yeah.

JACK: The like unbelievable game that we play sometimes in finales?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: And I love Firebrands specifically because it prompts these very, very focused short-term questions, [AUSTIN: mm-hmm] and lets you play very focused scenes. And if we're talking about adapting one game to another format, I don't think you could go much wrong by looking at the kind of questions that Firebrands asks and the kinds of interactions that Firebrands asks for you, and seeing whether or not that might be suited to the amount of time that you have? I don't know if you feel the same way, Austin.

AUSTIN: [hesitates] I think it would be really interesting. I think it's like, those... I think thinking about those sorts of questions is probably the right way to frame it, right? Because when you look at a game like Firebrands, those questions, specifically the way that they frame stakes and they encourage you to get into trouble, and the ways in which they encourage, like, questions around consent, but not just questions around consent in the way that a section of the manual talks about consent at the start [JACK: right] as a safety mechanism, but in a way that recognizes that consent is a productive quality, not just a safety mechanism. Which, please take into your love lives, also. Like, consent is a productive positive thing, it is not just a step you need to go through. But it understands that through the entire game, that play is about taking and giving and requesting. And so, I think that there are ways that you could definitely incorporate those ideas, even if you can't necessarily or you don't have the ability to look over at the rules while you're at your workplace typing out a quick response, do you know what I mean? [Ali giggles]

JACK: Right. Yeah yeah yeah. Absolutely.

AUSTIN: But, yeah.

JACK: I think, mostly the space I was thinking of, you know, you kind of got to the center of it by talking about like getting into trouble, [AUSTIN: yeah] and making trouble, which is often what I think of when I think about unpredictability, and I— [sighs] I'm trying to think of other games that have very interesting simple frameworks for getting players into trouble.

AUSTIN: [sighs] I think that like some of Fall of Magic does that around simple demands. So things like: change a trait.

JACK: Mm-hmm.

AUSTIN: Right? It's like, alright, well, okay, what happens for me to erase one of my traits? And that comes out in a different direction, obviously. My other big question, here, for bentheread is just like...do you have a GM still? [chuckles] Is this completely freeform? Like, is there someone who is kind of refereeing this play, and all of that stuff. We could do this topic for an hour trying to find it, you know? Because, until we know more, it's kind of hard to zero in, I think. Dre, again, even if you haven't done— the thing I really want from someone, here, is this last thing, which is: how do you participate in the RPG community if you're exhausted at the end of your day? [Dre laughs] Besides doing a text-based. And I say this to you, because I know that you're exhausted at the end of most days, like me!

DRE: Yeah. Um... You know, maybe this goes against the first part of the question, where it's talking about scheduling conflicts and stuff, but like. With my local group, we basically plan out when we're gonna play like a month in advance.

AUSTIN: Mmm.

DRE: So that we can...and we usually only meet like once a month, 'cause that's the amount of time that we can all manage to get together, [AUSTIN: right] and it doesn't feel like a burden to get together because of other— like, it doesn't feel like we're ignoring other things we have to do. But it's also enough time to where there's still like a feeling of momentum [AUSTIN: yeah] and continuancy. It's not like every time we sit down everybody's like, "Okay, how do we play this game, again? Who are our characters? What were we doing?" I mean, even just using things like a shared google calendar or doodle polls, which is a website where you can literally just make a poll and say like, [Ali chuckles] "who's available on X day at Y time?" [Austin chuckles] Because yeah, everybody's super busy. It's something worth doing, 'cause if you enjoy it, you're gonna feel good after you do it, and you'll be glad you made the time for it, so. Just be realistic with the amount of time you *can* make for it, but then make it enough of a priority that you do make that time for it.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Two things here, for me. One is the... The first thing is to think about— it actually goes back to something Jack said, which was about scale and scaling down. Think about playing games that are in campaigns. Burning Wheel campaigns are some of the most time intensive campaigns you can do. The first Burning Wheel campaign...you can see me play in a Burning Wheel campaign that Adam Koebel ran a few years ago, and all of the first five weeks, six weeks, was us effectively coming from a forest into a town, then moving into a castle, and then having an interaction with the lord of that castle, and then resolving. Because we were focused at such a micro level and because the game is so detail-oriented. And even played faster and looser, campaigns in general are big investments. One way to stay invested in the

like broader RPG community is to go to Itch and find small games and play them. Something like the sad mecha game jam, the Emotional Mecha Game Jam, is a great way to be like, hey, what is happening in the world of RPGs right now? I think about something like, you know, we're doing the Road to Season 6, right? And like, what have we played for Road to Season 6 so far? Dialect, a game that came out this year or last year, about the death of language. Armour Astir, a game that's still in development, that's like Escaflowne and about giant robots and the gravity that pulls us together. Ech0, a great game about children [laughs] and war and history. And especially about children. We played Riley's from dusk 'til...what is it, what is the— or it is from— [sighs] I always get it wrong. I always get it wrong.

JACK: Is it Dusk to Midnight?

AUSTIN: Dusk to Midnight, yes. Which is about the cost of war and about the slow ways in which the camaraderie and belief and hope can drain away when challenges and crises reveal how heavy they actually are. Did we only play two for that mini-game one? Because then we went to Beam Saber, I know. Did we only get through two? I think so.

JACK: I think so, yeah.

[TIMESTAMP: 0:30:14]

AUSTIN: And then we played Beam Saber, Austin Ramsay's game, that's like a Forged in the Dark game. And like, oh yeah, I'm gonna do a one-shot of Beam Saber, it's like, oh, okay. Between that and Armour Astir, it's like, oh wow. Here are two more traditional tabletop roleplaying games, not Dialect, not Dusk to Midnight, just like, hey, you have a character who has special moves and you fight stuff. And yet, even there, you get to look at what is happening in the world of Apocalypse World, like things descending from Apocalypse World, Powered by the Apocalypse games, what is happening in Forged in the Dark games. These are two emerging, or emergent already, subgenres of an independent scene that has blown up over the past few years. And like, being able to just like do a one-shot, learn the system, and move on. Or something like, again, we played For the Queen in Road to Season 6 too, and that game is really fucking cool and takes a day to play. Takes— not a day, takes three hours to play through a full game of that, and will leave you feeling like you have a better feeling of what's happening in the broader community than if you were just like playing the same one campaign. Now understand, I love campaigns, I'm not saying don't ever play campaigns. But if your goal is to stay connected in that way, that's one way to do it. The other suggestion I have is: don't be afraid to find the Discord for a game you think is cool. I have been— speaking of Austin Ramsay and Beam Saber, I've been hanging out in the Beam Saber Discord for the last like month and a half. And being in a place where lots of other people care about a game that's being made, where people are brainstorming new ideas...there was just this incredible moment last week where there was this breakthrough about a new mechanic for that game that completely kind of radicalizes what the focus is. And I say "radicalizes" on purpose, because it's literally about removing cash and the idea of like the goal for the player is to obtain more money so they can

retire from the game. It's like, get rid of that. [passionately] That is not what matters. What matters is you play— mecha stories are about wanting to change the fucking world. [Jack chuckles softly] And seeing the entire community there come together to build that mechanic, or to kind of pitch it to Austin Ramsay and like, everybody kind of contributing a little bit here and there, like that was the most I'd felt connected to, quote unquote, "the RPG community" in a long time. And so like, those things happen in small spaces. There is no one monolithic RPG community, or if there is, what it is is D&D. Like, in terms of raw numbers. In terms of raw numbers, D&D is so much further the most played, most worked on tabletop roleplaying game in the world. And I think your time is better served, instead of trying to touch the RPG community, *finding* an RPG community that you care about. Whether that's your local group, or whether that's a game that's in development or a series of games, or something like, you know, a larger collection of games. Again, something like Powered by the Apocalypse or...what is the mechanic/genre sub-description of Dream Askew? That I'm blanking on right now? Uh...

JACK: No dice, no masters?

AUSTIN: No. A game of Belonging Outside Belonging. Which is like, hey, that is a collection of games that assign themselves the sort of title or the genre breakdown "A game of belonging outside belonging", that is broader than "this is how the dice work", right? And so like, cue into those smaller scale communities, and I think you'll find yourself energized and you'll find yourself able to actually address the community and not just kind of have it wash over you when you're exhausted at the end of your day. Alright. I'm gonna advance. Dre, you insisted I add this. I pitched it, and you were like, "I'll answer that", so. [Dre laughs] Logan says:

"I wanted to start a Bluff City inspired campaign where me and my friends play a series of games all set in the same location. I wanted to capture the feeling of Riverdale, [Austin chuckles] small town setting but capital-d Drama, with supernatural influences from The X-Files, Sabrina, Twin Peaks, and Buffy. Do you have any recommendations for this? I think Monster of the Week would be a great fit. What are some tropes or pitfalls I should avoid or be aware of going into this? Put another way, what are some genre shortcomings and clichés that can be problematic? Do you have any advice for how to play multiple games all taking place in one campaign, rather than one game over a long period of time? Bonus question, if you were an NPC in Riverdale, what would your name be, and where would you hang out?"

AUSTIN: I'm not giving you one of those. Those are not— I'm not— that's extra. [someone snorts] No one just gets an NPC out of me like that. [Ali chuckles] Dre. Tell me how you would run a Riverdale game.

DRE: Ah.

AUSTIN: A Riverdale with supernatural influences.

DRE: Let's see. Well, as far as game recommendations, besides Monster of the Week...

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

DRE: Probably...Bubblegumshoe.

AUSTIN: Mmm.

DRE: Maybe...is Monsterhearts the high school one?

ALI: Yeah. Yes.

DRE: Okay. Tales from the Loop?

AUSTIN: Mmm. Mm-hmm. Sorry, I'm eating a donut.

DRE: No, it's good.

AUSTIN: Tales from the Loop I think is a really good one for that feeling of like, moving the sign, you know— moving the sign to the side revealing a hole in the chain link fence that goes into the, you know, old estate that has been abandoned, or the old laboratory, or whatever, you know.

ALI: Uh...

AUSTIN: Alright, so, one, you gave me some game recommendations. Or, Ali, do you have more?

ALI: I have a recommendation for the Final Bid?

AUSTIN: Mmm! Mm-hmm.

ALI: Which is like...I don't know if it would work for— well, it might not work for— I haven't played it, but it might not work for an entire campaign, because it's like made to be played in— it's like going through different genres and it's a one session thing. But if you're doing something like Riverdale and Riverdale's always a fucking different genre [laughs] every week anyway, [AUSTIN: mm-hmm] you could probably keep playing it but use different playbooks or systems or whatever, I don't know the game super well. But I do know friend of the show...oh my god, what is his name? from Six Feats Under, did a exclusive backer kind of Riverdale-inspired playbook?

AUSTIN: Oh, really?

ALI: Yeah. [softly] What the fuck is his name...

AUSTIN: Now I'm gonna look into this.

ALI: The GM from Six Feats Under, which people should listen to. Is it Grant? Who knows.

AUSTIN: Did you say Grand?

ALI: Grant.

AUSTIN: Oh. No, are you—

ALI: Yeah, it is Grant, yeah.

AUSTIN: Oh, is that— I don't know what gen— I know him as Ironicus, [chuckles] so.

ALI: Yeah! [laughs]

AUSTIN: Like, I don't know what his real fuckin' name is.

ALI: His Twitter name is "My name is Grant", so.

AUSTIN: Okay, well. [Ali and Austin laugh]

ALI: But yeah, gen_ironicus actually sent me a copy a little bit ago, but I haven't had a chance to look at it. But yeah, he wrote a specific like Riverdale-inspired thing, if you want to take a look at that.

AUSTIN: That's incredible.

ALI: The system seems super cool, though, so. Check it out.

AUSTIN: Awesome. The tropes and pitfalls thing is not a thing that we should answer for you. That's a— I mean, one, that's like a... You should do the work of investigating the genre space that you want to. And I say that as someone who is like in the middle of doing that in a big way ahead of Season 6. And if you're like, "yeah, okay, Austin, you're watching mecha anime", like, yes, I am, and if that sounds cool, it is. [Austin and Ali laugh lightly] But also, it is me taking notes on what is working and what isn't, what is like— you know, reading responses from people, thinking about stuff like... I'm rewatching Iron-Blooded Orphans right now, a Gundam show that I think has a lot of great stuff and also really swings and misses on things like trauma, sexual violence, disability...like, poly relationships, all sorts of stuff. And it's like, okay, what can I learn from this? What have other people already written about this stuff? There is probably a ton of incredible writing, believe it or not, about Riverdale out there already. And probably a lot of

bad writing too. [chuckles] And I really think that part of the job of the GM who wants to run a game that is conscious and thoughtful is to do that legwork. And not to just be able to be like, “well, I asked this crew of people who I trust, and they said ABC.” The other reason I say it’s not for us to answer is because it’s for your party to answer, it’s for your team to answer. It’s for your players to answer. When...I could sit here and be like, “I think this is a really bad trope.” And I could make a really good argument for why it’s a bad trope. But if your entire group of players including you is like, “Hey. We all agree that this fuckin’ sucks. But, we think it’s an important part of the genre, we know that we’re gonna play with it critically, we’re gonna think through the fact that we’re doing it, and also we are...there’s something about it that is interesting to us, like there’s something about being in that space, and we’re gonna do our best to be healthy around it, and we’re all consenting to play in this very trope-laden space”, like, me wagging my finger at you, one, is not going to stop you from doing that? Two, is not an actual engagement with what would be happening at that table. And so like, these things have to be conversations with your players, first and foremost. And research on your own part about what that space— and the part of your players, right? If everyone’s coming together to be like, hey, I wanna play a thing that is inspired by— that is Riverdale meets X-Files, Sabrina, Twin Peaks, and Buffy, like...those influences have a lot of overlap, and they also have a lot of disconnect. The distance between Twin Peaks and like, even Sabrina, is pretty vast.

ALI: Mm-hmm.

AUSTIN: Even though you would think both of them play in similar spaces, they’re both interested in gender, they’re both...they do some wildly different things, and so having that conversation at the table or ahead of time is so important. Any other thoughts here from Riverdale fanatics? [pause] Okay.

ALI: Um...

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm?

ALI: If it’s good, you’re doing it wrong, probably. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Yeah, uh huh.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah, absolutely. This is part of my thing around tropes and pitfalls, right? Is that like...Riverdale is not good. [Ali continues laughing] I love it. But it’s bad! And I’m not... Bluff City is already [ALI: mm!] certainly Riverdale-touched, you know, and we do our best to avoid things that we don’t like, because that’s what we do. But also, like, yeah, wow, Riverdale’s bad. [Ali laughs] There’s that whole scene where they were like, “Red! Hood!” Or is it black hood? Are there two different scenes? [Ali sighs] Where it was like, “Black! Hood! Black! Hood!”

ALI: Yeah, there's two different gangs that get...

AUSTIN: Yeah, uh huh. [Ali laughs] Did you see that Watchmen joke? The Watchmen red hood jokes?

ALI: Oh, I don't think so.

AUSTIN: It's just the two images. It's just— here, I have it right here. I'm just gonna put it on the fuckin' screen.

ALI: I'm good, maybe. [laughs]

AUSTIN: It's fine. Boop! There we go. Watchmen official tease, and then the next screen [laughs] is just Archie in front of all the red hoods. [Dre and Ali laugh] Same show. That's Archie, right there. Right in the middle.

ALI: I did watch the trailer for that Watchmen show and be like, I'm not gonna do this.

AUSTIN: You're good. You're alright? Yeah.

ALI: I don't need to do this in 2019.

AUSTIN: No, no, you're alright. [Ali sighs] Alright.

DRE: And very important news, breaking news.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: I have taken a BuzzFeed quiz?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Mm-hmm.

DRE: And a quiz on this website called Rum and Monkey?

AUSTIN: Yep.

ALI: Hmm.

DRE: So I've got my Riverdale character name.

AUSTIN: Great.

ALI: [softly] Oh boy.

DRE: It's Andre Cade.

AUSTIN: Oh, that's not bad!

ALI: Ooh, that's fantastic.

AUSTIN: Could you link me? Wait, link me to these things.

DRE: And according to this BuzzFeed quiz, my best friend in Riverdale is gonna be Betty Cooper.

ALI: Ooh.

AUSTIN: Interesting.

DRE: So there you go. Okay, hold on, I'll link this.

AUSTIN: Is this "It's Time to Find Out Which Riverdale Friendship You Are and Your BFF"?

DRE: Oh, I don't know.

AUSTIN: Oh. Well, which BuzzFeed quiz is it?

DRE: I just linked it!

AUSTIN: Oh. Oh, yeah, okay, it's a different one, okay.

DRE: No, it's "Create a Character on Riverdale and We'll Tell You Who Your Best Friend Is".

AUSTIN: Oh, wow. Oh, this is good.

ALI: I feel very strongly that I'm just like the illegitimate child of Veronica Lodge and Cheryl Blossom. [laughs softly]

AUSTIN: Wow, okay, good.

ALI: And that's just who I am.

AUSTIN: "Why is your character important"...gotta be a rival. Uh huh.

ALI: So, I bet they would be my best friends. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Gotta be a serpent. Uhh, falsely confesses to a crime.

ALI: [laughing] Are you just taking this test?

AUSTIN: I'm Snitch Nightly, shit, sure. [Ali sighs] Oh, what is their order at Pop's. You can't do this! You can't do food and then shakes!

DRE: I know! I picked strawberry milkshake for mine.

AUSTIN: I'm gonna pick a chocolate shake.

ALI: Okay, wait, now I'm doing...

AUSTIN: Now everyone's taking it. [Dre laughs]

JACK: I'm doing the high school canon name generator.

AUSTIN: Alright.

JACK: Because I haven't watched Riverdale, so I feel like [laughs] the first quiz would be...

AUSTIN: No, you should take it anyway.

JACK: Okay, alright. I'll finish this high school canon name generator really quick. If I were an animal, what animal would I be? Um, I'm gonna pick...

AUSTIN: [softly] Did the wave. Aw, hell yeah. Best friend's Jughead. There it is.

ALI: Good for you. I'm happy for you.

AUSTIN: Thank you. And then what's the other one? The high school canon name generator? Alright, here we go. Millennial, okay.

JACK: So, my high school canon name generator—

AUSTIN: Wait, I should— go ahead, no, you go ahead.

JACK: My high school canon name that has been generated for me is Jackson Kilpatrick, which I— [Dre and Austin laugh] Kilpatrick is a surname, but I feel like it's an injunction.

AUSTIN: That's a sportscaster. That's a— you work for ESPN.

JACK: [imitating a sportscaster] Hello, I'm Jackson Kilpatrick, and we've come here today to watch the Eagles face off against the... [hushed] what's the Riverdale team? What are they called?

AUSTIN: The Golden Deer. [Dre laughs]

JACK: They are not called the Golden Deer, [Austin laughs] Austin, and you cannot mention the name of this unreleased game.

DRE: Yeah, you're breaking embargo.

AUSTIN: Embargo, yeah.

DRE: What *is* the Riverdale mascot? The first thing that popped into my head was Vixens, but no, that's just the dance team/cheerleading team.

AUSTIN: Boom.

ALI: My high school canon name is Adeline Carl...Carlises? [laughs]

AUSTIN: How do you pronounce this last name? I was— my friends encouraged me to do so, there we go.

ALI: Adeline...Carl-isle?

AUSTIN: Carlisle.

DRE: Carlisle.

AUSTIN: Carlisle.

DRE: Like from the Twilight vampire family.

ALI: Carlisle?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: But there's an S in there.

AUSTIN: Yeah, it's silent.

ALI: Like isle?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Wait... [laughs]

AUSTIN: Like isle?

ALI: If you were saying island, but then you were like, oh it's the isle of whatever.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Carl-isle. I don't like that. I'm disappointed. [laughs] For people who [unclear ??? 45:02]

AUSTIN: That's the closest...Oh, what type of animal would I be?

JACK: [amused] What dramatic thing does my character do? Throw something important into a river.

DRE: That's what I said. [laughs]

AUSTIN: No, I don't wanna...okay, I'm still— okay, no. Losing my life one day at a time. Do I have a bucket list...

DRE: Did you pick generation alpha, Austin?

AUSTIN: No!

DRE: Okay.

ALI: Oh, I don't know any of these songs.

AUSTIN: Me either. It doesn't matter. [chuckles]

DRE: You know these—

AUSTIN: Should I put my whole name? I'll put my whole—

DRE: You know one of those songs.

AUSTIN: Maybe.

ALI: Do I? Which one do I know?

DRE: You probably know that Lorde song.

AUSTIN: Fuck off! It gave me the name Alistair Walker. [Dre and Jack laugh]

ALI: Oooh!

AUSTIN: That's just like a cousin I don't know!

JACK: Did you put in your full name, or did you just give them Austin?

AUSTIN: Yeah, I put in my full name.

JACK: Oh, okay, right.

AUSTIN: Should I not have? Should I not have? Oh, I have to redo the whole thing.

JACK: I just put in Jack.

AUSTIN: Uuughh.

JACK: Apparently my— so, I, again, I have not seen Riverdale. Apparently my best friend is Josie McCoy.

AUSTIN: Yeah! Josie and the Pussycats.

ALI: Oh, yeah yeah yeah!

DRE: She's the musician.

ALI: Oh, yeah.

AUSTIN: Uh huh. I'm gonna quickly take this.

JACK: I have a very good gif. She's wearing what looks like cat ears.

DRE: Yeah.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: The Pussycats, Josie and the Pussycats.

JACK: Great. I don't know what that means!

ALI: Ohh.

AUSTIN: You don't— Josie and the Pussycats?

JACK: No!

AUSTIN: Okay. The classic Archie comics/cartoon thing.

JACK: It's a name that I know.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: And it's good to know that I can put a face to their name, but.

AUSTIN: Okay, now it says Alistair Easton. Sounds like a rich asshole.

ALI: My best friend is Veronica Lodge, which is...I'm glad.

JACK: Oh, hey!

AUSTIN: Perfect.

DRE: There you go.

AUSTIN: Perfect. [Ali giggles] Alright, well.

ALI: I'm gonna read the line that my character is most likely to say, which is: "Life gave you lemons, and I'm your sugar." [Dre and Jack laugh, muffled] Thank you.

AUSTIN: What? Okay. Wow, I love it. I love it.

ALI: [laughs] That's what it says!

AUSTIN: Fantastic.

DRE: Personally, Ali, "I don't want a rainbow if it means walking through a rainstorm." [Austin and Ali laugh]

JACK: That's such a great line. Goddamn.

AUSTIN: It's very good.

JACK: I don't want a rainbow if it means walking through a rainstorm.

AUSTIN: God.

JACK: What does that mean?!

AUSTIN: Well, it means like, there's no reward good enough for a bad day.

ALI: Yeah.

JACK: Ah, it's great.

AUSTIN: Alright, we're gonna keep moving. [Ali laughs] Thomas writes in, and says:

"I recently started GMing my first game in the offweeks between a regular game we've been playing for nearly a year. We're playing the same game, D&D 4th Edition, as it reduces the pressures of learning to run a game if everyone already knew how to play. I was thinking of hacking in Forged in the Dark style downtimes, and I was worried about a couple of things. First, I was worried about it seeming too much like a criticism of the other game, where the pacing has been very reactive, falling from disaster to disaster, always having something blowing up. It's not been bad, by any means, but I'm worried it (running these downtime sessions) might be taken that way (as criticisms of the other game). Second, I'm afraid the opposite might be true—that too much of an episodic structure may fail to keep my players' interest."

AUSTIN: Any thoughts here? As people who've played games with downtimes, without downtimes. Dre, especially, as someone who I know has been on both sides of the GMing table. Any thoughts about this table dynamic situation?

DRE: You know, there is a rule that I hear a lot on fantasy football podcasts. And it says that if you're gonna make a...if you are a person who is running a league and you are gonna make a major change to that league, then you need to have people vote on it, and it has to be a unanimous vote. And I think that is a similar kind of premise here. Like, if you're worried about them taking it as criticism, make sure you frame it as "I think this would be cool", you know?

AUSTIN: "Yo, wanna do this?" Like.

DRE: Yeah, "You guys wanna do this?" [laughs]

AUSTIN: Right.

DRE: And then people will say yes or no. Or they'll ask you: "Okay, well, what can I do with it? Why do you want to do this? What's gonna be different?" But yeah, like, I ran a Blades in the Dark one shot for some friends, and one of them was GMing a D&D 4E game that had been

running forever. And he took the flashback mechanic to that D&D game, and everybody thought it was the coolest thing ever, so.

AUSTIN: Nice.

DRE: Like, this works! Like, this can definitely be done.

AUSTIN: Right, right, right, totally.

DRE: Just, yeah, just ask people.

AUSTIN: Here is my... I think you're right. I think the answer here is like, "Hey, I was thinking about doing a session where we just like are in town, and we just get to see like what we do in between adventures" is a great framing. The other way of doing it is to do it soft, and just do it. Like, you're running the adventure, you clear out the dungeon, and then you on your side prep like, okay, well, what's downtime look like for them? And instead of it just being like, "alright, everyone buy up your potions, we're gonna go back out and adventure again", talk to them at the table about what they get up to. And maybe talk about them ahead of time, in a sense of like, let them be prepped for it. Like, I think maybe that's the biggest benefit of getting buy-in, is that people start thinking, like, well, what is your downtime like? But even just being able to be like, so, in between missions, what are you guys— or, between adventures, what do y'all get up to? You know. "Jim, what's your— where do you stay in this town?" You know? And that stuff will, I think, very organically just reveal to you if they like that sort of thing. In a way that sometimes giving the big pitch can put people off, because they're like— and you'll know your group better than me. But like, my fear is always, or was always, when I think about like college groups I was in, was like...when I show that the thing I wanna do is different, people are like, "Well, I like the thing we do. Why would we change it? Why would we do a session where I don't get to fight goblins?" And it's like, I promise— you would enjoy the session. [Ali giggles] I know you, you would enjoy the session. And so, there are times where it's like, alright, I'm gonna run a session that has most of what they're used to, but I'll introduce a little bit of, you know, what else there is. One way to do that with a game like this is to just run the adventure such that it breaks pretty early, or pretty close, rather, to the end of a dungeon, instead of ending at the end of the dungeon and then needing to do a full downtime next time. So that you start, you finish off a dungeon, you finish off a fight, you finish off a situation. And then you're back in town or wherever, and you're like, alright, cool, for the rest of the next two hours, we're gonna be here, what's going on? You know. And I think that could be a good way. The other real note here is to like...really think about ways to make 4th Edition do downtime, because as it's built right now, I don't know that it hacks in really cleanly, so maybe google around and see if there are like...cool, you know, house rules for stuff like this. Because when I think about one of the reasons downtime works in Forged in the Dark, it's because of the way resources get regenerated. It's a lot about upkeep and cost, right? It's about like, hey, I have to get rid of this stress. Hey, I need to— I'm gonna spend some of my money, I'm gonna try to create a long term project. Hey, I'm gonna— I need to work on expanding out our base of operations. Or, it's:

someone comes calling, right? There's an entanglement. Our relationship with another faction has gotten so bad that someone kicks down our fucking door or we're at war or whatever. And those things are not built into 4th by default, and so like, you can definitely start to hack that in, but thinking about ways to do that soft and via narrative and conversation more than giving yourself the job of building a million new spreadsheets and tracking faction reputation and all that might be another way of going about it. So that's my other suggestion there. [Ali inhales as if to speak] Any other thoughts? Ali?

ALI: Yeah, I feel like there's a lot that goes into downtime that you were mentioning that feels like it isn't in there, because I think that the way— at least the way that we kind of present it is very kind of...not seamless, but I think that we do it kind of clean because we come in kind of knowing what we're gonna do during downtime.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah, totally.

ALI: So it makes it feel way more organized than it can be. Especially if it's something that you're...like, downtime relies on all the other Blades in the Dark stuff, like a lot.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: But I also think—

AUSTIN: We did downtimes in Dungeon World, for what it's worth, but...you know.

ALI: Yeah...

AUSTIN: It's different.

ALI: But not like as mechanically as this is.

AUSTIN: Totally.

ALI: Like, we didn't really ever— I guess we— did we ever do an engagement roll?

AUSTIN: No. No, no, no.

ALI: No, yeah.

AUSTIN: The closest that we got was Ephrim had moves that were about interacting with the area. Do you know what I mean?

ALI: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

AUSTIN: Interacting with the settlement or whatever. And that was like sometimes but not often.

ALI: Yeah. But like, I think downtime owns and you should do it. [laughs] You should do it as close to what you can with it as you can, but I think that there's also kind of...a lot of the questions that we get for the show especially are always in the gradient of like, figuring out if your party *really* likes the game that they're playing or they really like the characters that they're playing. And, you know, it's not gonna be the same for everyone, and it's gonna be a tough adjustment. But if the thing that they really want to do is get more into their characters to have this downtime time that's awesome. But if they're more invested in the dungeoning aspect of it, of like going to fight a goblin, going to figure out what the treasure at the end of that goblin fight is, there are still ways to incorporate that into downtime. I feel like you can use a downtime to make the upcoming adventure seem so much more significant.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: That as they're using D&D to do these crazy moves and all of the [laughs] weird magic that D&D has, that like, oh, this feels important because we just had this thing where I got into the argument with the guy who sent us here or whatever.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

ALI: So I feel like just kind of getting the pulse of your table and how they really feel about it in terms of integrating it into the campaign that you already have is a super good idea. Just 'cause you'll sort of have the idea of what the best way to do that is.

AUSTIN: Totally. We haven't talked about the first bit here, the bit about it feeling like it might be a criticism of the other game. For me, that's because I wouldn't worry too much about it, because presumably you're still playing the other game and having fun. I think if you are that concerned, it's worth just saying it straight up.

JACK: Yeah. You'll be like this is what I was [unclear ??? 55:45]

AUSTIN: Hey, just to be clear— yeah. "I'm not, you know, I just want to try this. This seems fun. There's this other game that does this thing, this seems cool, do y'all want to do this" I think is probably the right way of doing it, because that way there's no...I mean, Dre, this is what you were saying, right?

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: There's no way to misunderstand— or, there's not no way, right? But it's harder to, there won't be as much of a chance of a misunderstanding, [JACK: yeah] if you say straight up, "I really love this, I really love the game we're playing right now. There's this other game I really like that does this cool thing around downtime in between sessions, or in between adventures.

I'd like to try that, just 'cause I wanna try it. Does that sound cool to y'all?" Is totally a viable way of doing this.

JACK: And if we're not feeling it, then we don't have to keep doing it.

AUSTIN: Then we won't do it! Totally.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Totally. Absolutely.

JACK: Yeah. I'm firmly on team...the game's still running, so I wouldn't be too anxious, but...especially if you feel that that anxiety is going to bleed through into the experience, have that conversation.

AUSTIN: Mmm. Mm-hmm.

JACK: Yeah. Put it all on the table.

[TIMESTAMP: 0:56:45]

AUSTIN: Totally. Alright. This one comes in from Brie, who says:

"While this question is mostly for Austin, I'd love to hear some player thoughts on it. A lot of the way you talk about Winter in retrospect has resonated with me a lot. I ran a year-long campaign for my group that was supposed to be semi-surreal, mostly on the lighter side; a fantasy game. While I was doing well while planning, I was in a very bad place emotionally for most of the year running it, and the game took a much darker turn than expected. Some of this was because of decisions my players made, but looking back on it, I also know that I have a lot of responsibility for how I leaned into the darker stuff and escalated the stakes. While I'm very proud of the story we told—some moments will stick with me for a long, long time—it's hard for me to separate it in my mind from a really rough period where I was absolutely projecting some of my depression and anxiety into the world I created. I'm doing much better and have started plans for a sequel game in the same world, this time trying to capture the tone that I didn't last time. However, I can't help but worry that the same thing will happen, and I really don't want this game to go down the same path. Is there anything you learned moving on from Winter that you found helpful when returning to Hieron in the Spring? Just generally, do you have any tips for not letting your mental health completely screw up the tone of your games?"

AUSTIN: I think the first thing we are required to say is none of us are mental health professionals or, you know, experts. We are experienced with our own mental health. We can

speak to our creative process, but first and foremost is just like, that is what we are doing. We are speaking about our experiences, not giving any advice that comes from a place of deep knowledge. Part of that is not just about our own expertise, our own limited expertise, but also because mental health is not a monolith either, and that my depression and my anxiety does not map cleanly onto other people's. In fact, as many people know, one of the biggest anxieties that comes from having, you know, mental health concerns, is like, hey, why does my depression not look like other people's? Why does my mental health experience not map cleanly? Not only am I anxious, I'm anxious about my anxiety. So that's— I'm gonna start there. The second thing I'm gonna say is that, in my experience, there's a two-step movement here. The first is, has been for me, to...kind of confront and engage with the fact that my mental health, broadly, in the kind of more macro scale, and also day-to-day, will always influence the work that I make. It is going to be part of me for as long as my brain is part of me, [chuckles] for as long as my mind is part of me. And that is true. And because of that, the second movement is, for me, it has been about creating practices by which I actually take steps to see if the kind of goals and output are aligned. For me this past year, that's meant listening to more of the show than I have in the past, looking at my notes after and taking better notes immediately after a session about how I think things went, about what I want to do the next session, about...speaking with other players about whether the tone is being hit and about whether themes are coming through, whether or not we're hitting the right touchstones. And actually doing the work. In the same way that, like...one, all creative work requires work. Two, all work around like, hey, how is my mental health impacting how I'm doing today, requires work. It requires you to take steps. Those things are tough. And so like, the kind of biggest piece of advice, here, is if you go down this path, and you start going down it and you're like, "I actually am feeling really bad again", I want you to know that it is always acceptable for you to take a step back from it. And that that should not make you feel bad or defeated, that you should prize your...the way you feel and the way that doing this work makes you feel. You should value that and actually listen to yourself and let yourself have that space if you need to take a break, if you need to play a different game, if you're just not in the place to GM. All of that is totally fine. But for me it has been, thinking about the difference between Winter and Spring, partially it's the experience of Winter allowed me to dig into Spring the right way. But partially it has been about creating a set of practices by which I can know that the things that I'm making have been influenced with where my head is at and check to see if they're in the right place. It's also meant things like shorter sessions. I don't want to say that we didn't have any five-hour sessions through Spring, we certainly did, but in my heart of hearts I feel like we had way more three- and three-and-a-half- and four-hour sessions. And that is better. Like, straight up, that is so much better in terms of letting my mental— there were way more times when I was like, "We should end today. We should end now." than I have been in the past, and that prevents me from getting into a really bad mental health space that then shows in terms of interpersonal interaction, in terms of choices I make as a storyteller, stuff like that. I don't know if anyone else has any thoughts on this, as we've all done creative work, here.

DRE: Yeah. Now that you've provided me indemnity, Austin—

AUSTIN: Yes!

DRE: I feel I can talk on this. [all laugh] I will say— and again, as someone who is a mental health professional, and I want to be making sure that I am toeing a line of giving that perspective, while also not...

AUSTIN: Speaking in a professional capacity?

DRE: Well, and not even that, but like, assuming to not know [AUSTIN: right] Brie. Or Brie [rhymes with dry].

AUSTIN: Brie.

DRE: Brie. You know, the thing—

AUSTIN: The note said “rhymes with dry”. That’s the only reason I know this, is because the email said “rhymes with dry”.

DRE: There you go. No, that’s good. The thing that has helped me a lot, in my own personal processing, through my own mental health stuff with depression and anxiety, is looking at my kind of process when I’m depressed and anxious, through like a kind of intra-psychic cycle. So basically like, what are the steps that actually happen when I get anxious or depressed. ‘Cause I think, usually—

AUSTIN: Mmm, yeah.

DRE: Especially when I’m looking at anxiety, to me, the way I used to think of it a lot, was: X happened, and now I’m anxious. But, once I started doing some more kind of structured work on myself, I realized that there was usually a step in between there, or multiple steps, where it’s like: X happened, I started to feel the way that I normally feel when I’m anxious, [AUSTIN: right] I had the thought of, “Oh god, here we go again”, or “Oh no, I can’t believe I’m anxious again”, you know, something along those lines, and then, you know, my anxiety would start peaking. And, kind of what finally clicked for me, ‘cause I’ve been doing various forms of therapy and medication since I was like thirteen—and CBT kind of stuff never really worked for me, because it very much felt like this, you know, you learn your trigger, and then you learn how to deal with the trigger. For me, what actually worked was reforming my thinking around that moment in time where it’s like, “Oh no, this is making me anxious, that’s bad, because now I’m going to be anxious.” And taking a different perspective of, you know, if something is making me anxious or making me depressed, it probably is okay, because it’s probably something that is important to me or has significance to me, and it’s okay to be affected by things that are significant to me. Like, I think it is okay for Brie, for you to feel anxious when you’re thinking about this game, because—I mean, you talked that, you know, already these sessions that you’ve had, you said there’s gonna be moments that stick with you for a really long time. Obviously this is something

that is really important to you and your players. So I think it's totally okay for you to be anxious and to want to make sure that you're hitting the mark that you want to land. And so I would say, you know, just check in and see: are you getting anxious because of the thing or are you getting anxious because you're telling yourself, you know, I'm feeling X kind of way and I'm worried that that means I'm going to take this down this road. Because that doesn't have to be the case.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: It's okay to care, basically.

AUSTIN: Totally. Ali or Jack, do you have any thoughts here?

JACK: Not particularly. I think both of you have given really...well thought out answers that I don't know that I would have anything to add to.

ALI: Yeah, I feel like the only suggestions I have are sort of the busywork of GMing to kind of separate that stuff.

AUSTIN: Mmm.

ALI: Like, in terms of just...really thinking about those moments that you think worked during that time and moments that you think didn't, and figuring out storywise like, oh here's how we get out from here, or looking at your grim portents or stuff like that to just sort of be like...just do the busywork of looking at it as a whole. That's probably gonna be hard to do. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: That's probably gonna suck to do for a little bit, but like... I always think of my specific mental health issues as being kind of stuck in a well. [laughs] And the experience of doing that and climbing yourself out is like, really having to just like, "Okay, well, I want to keep doing this so I have to keep doing this, so how am I going to be able to think about this in a way that's actually productive?" And whatever thought organization works out for you. I'm very much a list person.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: And I feel like GMing is a lot of notes-taking and doing stuff like that, just in terms of like, okay, here's really what I think of all of this, and here's what I kind of want to do for this next thing, but I should make note so like, when I'm in the moment or when I'm revisiting the outcome of that scene that is kind of upsetting for me, you already have the bridge to where you want to take it. And it's not like, oh in that moment you're thinking like, "Oh, wait, that sucked. And now I'm out of ideas because I'm thinking of that instead."

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: [laughs] It's not the most practical advice, but I'm sure it'll help in some form, however you're able to organize it for yourself.

AUSTIN: No, I think that's...just on the side of just like...making the task that is GMing...identifying what the steps are and finding multiple things to work on, so that if you're like, "Hey, I only have two hours this week to work on this thing. And I can't put my attention on this part that is causing me anxiety right now, but I do want to work on this right now." And I've been in that place, where it's like, hey, this is— it's what Ali just said. I do want to climb out the well. I do want to do the thing, I don't want to just— I don't want to spend the time doing something else. There have also been times, to be clear, where I'm like, I do just want to spend time doing something else. And the healthy decision then is to go spend time doing something else, and that is okay. But, in those times when it's like: hey, I want to work on this, but I don't have it in me to write an intro. I just don't have it in me to figure out a complex session, you know, a set of obstacles for people right now. And in fact, what I do want to do is write something. And figuring out what the list of things you could work on is...you have no idea how many times I've been like, "I need to work on Friends at the Table stuff this weekend. *I can't*. Alright, I can get together a mapmaker update. I can go take screenshots, I can put them into a file, I can write up some copy, and I can hit post. And like, that is where my brain is at today. It cannot do the creative work, or if it does, I don't trust myself to do it well in this moment. And like, having multiple things to work on, in terms of just like— same thing, in terms of just like gameplay stuff, where...there have been times when it's like, "I cannot think of plot right now. I'm going to look at a list of monsters. [Ali and Jack chuckle] I'm going to pull them out. I'm going to look at what their names are and what their abilities are—"

JACK: Invisible dog.

AUSTIN: Yep, exactly. Here is an invisible dog. I would like to use this invisible dog. Its name will be Barbello. [Austin and Ali laugh] And that stuff...seriously, being able to compartm— not to compartmentalize, but to kind of divide out what that work looks like.

JACK: Yeah. This is—

AUSTIN: The other half of this— you go ahead, Jack.

JACK: This is something I hit all the time writing music for the show, especially, you know, when I'm working on these big multi-track, sort of multi-part tracks. Where I'll sit down to work, and I will say, "I cannot write this melody line today."

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: Not even like...or I might have gotten it written, but I'm not going to be able to play it to the level of quality that I need. And it really is a case of just like, [breathes] "Okay. I'm gonna write one guitar part. I'm gonna just get something into the project file that I feel good about. That I feel like I am able to accomplish." And, you know...it's not necessarily like this is a problem for me for another day, you know, this is a problem that I am putting off, so much as...I do not want to give myself the pressure of working on this thing in this moment.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: And if I want to be working on this thing—which, yeah, like you, sometimes I don't, but just as often I do—I can say, "Alright, you have to play four notes on the piano. That's it." Let's try and make them sound nice, but if you can get that there, if you can parcel out your task into these little chunks, and one of these chunks is, you know, doing handclaps, [Austin and Ali chuckle] and then that's it, that's the end of that thing. I mean, handclaps fucking suck. That was a bad example.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Yeah. The last thing I want to add here, and I think maybe...I can only speak for myself, but the answers from the rest of the crew here, I think, also helps color this, is like...none of Friends at the Table was made when I wasn't depressed. None of it. [Ali chuckles] I've been dealing with depression since I was a child. Like, I've been in therapy on and off my entire life, like since I was ten, eight? I guess I was probably in second or third grade the first time I went to therapy. That has been nonstop. I've been on and off medication for most of my life. Or for most of my adult life, is what I would say there. Like since college. And...I say that not to be like, "look what I did when I was depressed." [all laugh] I say that to be clear that like...you're not alone. A lot of people have diagnoses, and also don't have diagnoses but are dealing with their mental health. And are...not like...it doesn't mean you can't do it. That like, living with mental health— and I will say one thing is like, I am in a much better place in terms of having techniques that work for me now, than I was when we started Friends at the Table. [chuckles] But like, it's always been a process. It's always been a thing that's influenced the work. And if you like Friends at the Table, if you're like, hey, I think Austin does a great job— I'm not doing that because my mental health is like spick and span perfectly clean, you know what I mean? Like, it's not like... It is all coming through a mind that has been dealing with the same stuff that you're talking about here, for decades now. And you're capable of doing incredible things. You're so capable of running a game with your friends that has, you know, an incredible impact. And the reason I know that is 'cause you told us. You said that some moments will stick with you for a very long time. And you're gonna be able to do that again. I have nothing but confidence in your ability to do that. And so I hope you're able to do it. And I also think that the best way to do it is to do it in a way that makes you comfortable and that gives you space and that lets you feel like you could stop at any moment and that you could step back, and make sure that that is something you let yourself prioritize. Next one comes in from Morgan. It's a dilemma I have all the time. Morgan says:

“Do you have any thoughts on pitching people on a weird idea for a campaign? I have two campaigns I want to run. War and Peace in space with ghosts, but it’s—” Oh, sorry, that’s the first one. “War and Peace in space with ghosts.” Great, good. Already a great one. “And, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead, but it’s okay because Malvolio and Dogberry are here to help with the power of friendship—or, more readably, an Interstitial game about minor Shakespeare characters in the margins of other plots. But I’m unsure of how to sell these weird ideas. Am I doomed to just have to write a book instead of playing these ideas as games? Or, how do I sell my ideas in a friendlier fashion?”

AUSTIN: I’m gonna start with asking y’all, [Ali giggles] because I’m the person who sells ideas and who probably oversells ideas and who like...I would rather put this on y’all first, and then I can come in and be like, “Here’s what I’ve learned over the years.”

JACK: I think there’s an art to selling weird ideas. And I think that, in my experience, there are two ways that I like to go about it. The pitches that you have given here are... A) they rule. Both of these look cool as hell. [Dre chuckles] B) they’re quite...you’re describing quite a broad, weird plot. When you talk about War and Peace in space with ghosts, what you’re talking about is quite a big, weird idea. So I think if you’re interested in pitching weird ideas, I find it interesting sometimes to pitch very small weird ideas. Where it’s less, you know, War and Peace in space with ghosts, and it’s more sending an image of a lizard to Austin in Discord [Dre laughs] and saying—

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] I’m gonna pull that lizard up. I’m gonna pull up this lizard.

JACK: “Can we make a season that feels like this lizard?” [Ali and Dre laugh]

AUSTIN: Here is the lizard in question. It is a mini blue dragon, a.k.a. a Mexican alligator lizard. Great.

JACK: Where it’s like—

AUSTIN: Great lizard.

JACK: The weird idea—

AUSTIN: Jack, real quick, just— great lizard.

JACK: Uh huh?

AUSTIN: Fantastic lizard.

JACK: Thank you. I saw this lizard, and I was like— well, first I said, “Is it okay if I show you a picture of a lizard?”

AUSTIN: That is what you did.

JACK: 'Cause sometimes they're a bit snakey, and, you know.

AUSTIN: I appreciate it.

JACK: And so, it's sometimes easier to start working with small weird ideas. When Austin gives us small weird ideas where he's like, hey, what if...um... [chuckles] "What if we introduce a faction in Hieron that has laser guns?" that is a much more, sort of...palatable weird idea for my brain to grapple with, than if Austin came right out and said, "There is a strange paramilitary organization from goodness-knows-where, [Austin chuckles] they move in teams of two, they have these strange ideas about justice, [AUSTIN: uh huh] they're the only people that are armed like this." Beginning by saying, "What if we give some losers laser guns?" is really compelling to me. The other way to go about it is to go in the other direction, I've found, and take your weird idea and explain it in the most broad, normal way possible. Recently I've been reading the Ancillary series by Ann Leckie, which is a series of books that has been recommended to me over and over again by people giving me the weird pitch for those books. And I've always bounced off it, because my brain hasn't quite been able to sit with the weird ideas in a way that makes me want to read it. I hear the weird ideas, I hear someone say, "The main character is a spaceship", and I go, "Oh, that, yeah, sounds cool as hell. I don't know if I could read that thing."

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

JACK: But, when I realized that Ancillary Justice is a story about, like, a brave person trying to untangle a galactic conspiracy, I was like, "Oh! Okay, cool, yeah, I could rock with that, that's fine."

AUSTIN: Yeah! [chuckles]

JACK: And then they follow up with saying, "And they're a spaceship."

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: And then I'm in. So, you know, I feel like you get halfway there by saying "War and Peace in space". And then you complicate it slightly further by saying "with ghosts". So maybe one of the ways to start having conversations about the weirdness that you want to include is by broadening out and by making your ideas less weird in the pitching, if not less weird in the execution.

AUSTIN: Yeah. On that note, real quick, I mean, I think I can...the best and worst pitches I've ever given were both to...I guess one of them was to Ali and Janine, which was my initial

Dungeon World pitch from 2013 before we had a podcast, when it was just like I want to run Dungeon World for my friends. And that was a...three-page document? [chuckles] That was a thousand words, it wasn't that long. It was only— nope, it was three pages. There's a lot of spacing here, but it's a thousand words. And it was like, here is some prose that is setting the tone, here is...it's shit that you would think, this all comes from like an alternate Hieron. Like a hundred percent, when I look at it. Like literally, Dungeon World notes: bronze, pastel, rust, etched, picturesque, city-states. And there's just a huge set of just like...the two sets of islands that people would be from, like very, very over-detailed. The reason that that was a bad pitch was because it was overwhelming. And it was doing the opposite of what I was kind of promising the games would do, which was put authorship in their hands. And instead it was like, "Here are ideas I have." And in that moment, what I really needed to communicate was, "Hey, we should play Dungeon World. It's cool, do you know like Dragon Age? You could be a mage in this also, and we could just have cool adventures. And like, I have some loose ideas, but what do you want to do?" Framing it around questions, framing it around their impulses, your players' impulses.

AUSTIN: [cont.] The best pitch I ever gave, I was just in a coffee shop yesterday that's in my neighborhood, and I remembered suddenly that almost a year ago exactly, maybe a little— no, that's not true at all. It wasn't a year ago. It would have been like...sorry, not a year ago. God, phewh. Twenty months ago, maybe, let's say? I took Jack and Ali there, and we sat down with coffees, and I said, "I'm gonna blow up something. [someone chuckles] I'm gonna make— I'm gonna blow a thing up. I wanna— here's my pitch. I wanna blow a thing up." [Jack chuckles] And, if you've listened to Twilight Mirage, [Ali laughs] you know that midway through that season, something blows up, in a sense. And I gave them the pitch for that. And I opened that pitch with short, cl— like, okay, what are you talking about. And then walked through it. But that pitch was not about, here is a world, here is a game idea I want to run directly. The real part of that pitch was like, I want to change the world of Twilight Mirage so that what we can start running is more in line with what I know you're already interested in. I want you to chase people through a marketplace. Because you want that! Because you've pitched me that. I want there to feel like there's more hijinks. And so incorporating the ideas that people already have and the interests that they already have, and selling it back in a way that is wrapped up with whatever your big picture idea is, but in a way that's evocative and not already complete.

AUSTIN: [cont.] The reason that that second pitch was great was because by the time we left the coffee shop it was different than what it was when I came. There was no amount of conversation with Ali and Janine in 2013 that would have shifted some of the ideas I'd written down already. Those were facts about the world that I was presenting to them. Because I was bad at this. [chuckles] And because that's how it had always been done with me, do you know what I mean? The GM said "Here's the world. The end." Whereas now, I...and it is a process, right? Literally before I read this question...but also last week, through the last week. I've been listening to The Cenotaph, which is Austin Ramsay's Beam Saber actual play stream and podcast, and it's been really great to hear other people build a world and start characters and all that stuff. And because of that, and because of this question then, later, I was like, oh, I need to

make it super clear to y'all that when we get to Season 6, everything I've written: I don't give a fuck. Like, throw it all out. If everybody else has a cool idea for a different type of game, that's what we're gonna do. And that should be... [sighs] It's always a negotiation between what you want to do as a GM and what your players want to do. Will always be one.

AUSTIN: [cont.] Even if it's a negotiation that it feels like one side is dominating, it remains a negotiation. And for me, the best GMs lead with asking players what they're interested in. Or make an evocative pitch and then find ways to shape that pitch around the players and what they are interested in doing. The alternative ends up being a situation where you hit a lot of road blocks, and you hit dead ends, because while you might have a million good ideas— like, the Shakespeare pitch here could be great! Also, if you have a player who doesn't know anything about minor Shakespearean characters, that's gonna be a really anxiety-inducing game for them. [chuckles] That's gonna be a game where they're like...alright, I gotta read the fuckin' Wikipedia about these characters before we start, 'cause I don't know them. And that is, I think, one of those things where you really have to think about that stuff. And my other half of this is to shave away the parts that are hyper-specific and find what is at the root of your interest more than anything else. So Twilight Mirage was definitely a show that was gonna be about giant robots. And then it wasn't, because it didn't...that wasn't what the bulk of the players ended up wanting to do with their time, and I couldn't just be like, "And now you get into a gi— you're gonna get in! You're all gonna get into robots and fight!" and like smash the players together like action figures. [chuckles] That's a bad game. And so like, I don't even— I think even in the second half of the season, everyone just got into their mechs maybe once, and that's totally fine, [chuckles] you know? Dre and Ali, any thoughts here on pitching campaigns?

ALI: Yeah, it's tough from the like elevator pitches in this question, I don't...know [laughs] one hundred percent what they mean.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: So I would be like, "That sounds cool, I like Dungeon World." [Dre laughs]

AUSTIN: Right. Right.

ALI: And that would be really tough for me. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: I think that there's...but the other half of that is that I love seeing my friends excited about a thing.

AUSTIN: True.

ALI: So I think that, you know, if you're trying to appeal to a table you can try to find the things that will appeal to people within that...within the gradient of the thing that you're pitching, right? Also, I think...we've said this a lot, but I think that another way is to kind of just lean on other media that you're taking inspiration from. Like the experience of sitting down and watching a movie with your friends is really fun, and then also being able to do that and then be like, "What if we played that?" [Jack and Ali chuckle] is really exciting, especially if they really like it.

JACK: Yeah.

ALI: 'Cause like, especially if you have such a specific idea, being able to have footholds and then also being like, "Well, you know how cool Han Solo was in this movie, what if you were like that but from a different place or whatever," definitely would increase the engagement and excitement about that sort of stuff.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm. Totally. It's been very tough, or like, very— it's been a great learning experience for me, because I cannot...actually, it's gotten easier, as like Dre has watched more Gundam. [Austin and Dre laugh] But like, when I pitched COUNTER/weight, the only person in that group who had watched *any* Gundam was Ali. [Jack and Ali laugh] And so like...

JACK: I watched my first Gundam this year.

AUSTIN: Did you finish 0080 yet?

JACK: Austin.

AUSTIN: Uh huh.

JACK: Austin.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: I have one more episode to go.

AUSTIN: Oh my god, Jack!

ALI: Oh boy.

JACK: Now, can you maybe, can you guess why I have not watched it?

AUSTIN: Oh, it's really good. It's fantastic.

ALI: I don't think I've ever watched 0080 not all at once.

AUSTIN: Right? That's exactly what I do, a hundred percent. [Ali laughs]

JACK: So, here's what I was doing. I was watching it one episode a night—

ALI: Ohh.

JACK: And then, as we got towards the back end of the season, I watched like, two on one night.

AUSTIN: Uh huh. [chuckles]

JACK: And then I got to the end of five, and I was like, "Gonna...gonna play some Animal Crossing now! [Austin laughs] Gonna take a little rest here!" But the thing about not having watched Gundam when I started COUNTER/weight, was that...you did pitch it a bit by saying "we're gonna do Gundam." [chuckles]

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: But you also took the time to convey to me why I should be interested in this. Outside of the framework of Gundam.

AUSTIN: I may have just shown a little bit of Gundam 0080 by mistake. I was checking to see if I could tell you something nice. [Jack laughs] Which is, I think there's a really cool montage in this episode.

JACK: Okay, I love a montage. I love a montage.

AUSTIN: Yeah, there's a fantastic montage in this episode that has nothing to do with giant—well, it has a little bit to do with giant robots.

JACK: Maybe I'll watch it tonight.

AUSTIN: But it's just a great montage. There's music playing, it's great. That's all, the end. You're safe, you can watch it. But no, I think you're totally right. It's like, how do I...part of doing a good pitch— This is also just, any time you're pitching anything, in life, is how do I...how do I find, in the thing I'm referencing, the thing I really mean. [chuckles] Like, "War and Peace in space with ghosts" is great shorthand for you, the person who is writing down...that thing.

JACK: Yeah, right right right. But do you mean [AUSTIN: right] imperial drama, do you mean conversations in costume?

AUSTIN: Right. Yes.

JACK: Do you mean like a discomfoting blend between hard sci-fi and the supernatural?

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: Do you want to talk about haunted spaceships haunted by the ghosts of people wearing, you know, high Russian dress? Like...and the same with this, with Shakespeare characters. What is it about this that you are interested in?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Is it telling a story about people who are not just marginalized by nature of their identity but marginalized by nature of the form?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: You know, by the space that they fill in their original stories. And how can you communicate that to people who might not know...I know who Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are, but I don't know that I know who Dogberry is.

AUSTIN: It's a dog, I'm pretty sure.

JACK: Yeah?

AUSTIN: Yeah, Shakespeare had a dog. His name was Dog—

JACK: [chuckles] Shakespeare had a dog, his name was Dogberry?

AUSTIN: Named Dogberry. Yeah.

DRE: Uh huh.

JACK: Yeah, he gave him a full soliloquy and he didn't say a word.

AUSTIN: Not one. Barked a lot, though. Dogberry, apparently, very famous for his malapropisms, which are sometimes referred to as dogberryisms. [Dre chuckles]

JACK: Yeah, dogs do make that mistake a lot.

AUSTIN: Yeah. "Malapropisms, sometimes called dogberryisms..." I've never heard them called that.

JACK: [laughs] No, I have never heard them called that. I think Wikipedia's making that up.

AUSTIN: Absolutely. But no, yeah, I think you're totally right, right? Like that is... I mean, the other half of this is, once you get people on board, you are in a great place to be like, "here is like, cool touchstones for you."

JACK: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm!

AUSTIN: For me to be able to be like, here's a six-episode Gundam series, that speaks to a little bit of what I like and what I want to achieve, is a huge part of getting people on board for doing a mech season. In the same way that like...you know, there have been other touchstones. Jack is currently reading a book that is important to what this season might feel like, and it's like, there is a degree to which— and that book is Ancillary Justice. No, it was actually— I mean, it *is* Ancillary Justice, but it's also Pride and Prejudice.

JACK: [laughs] Yes.

AUSTIN: And having a bunch of different things on the table, or, you know, at hand, to be like, "Oh! Here's a thing that could be a cool touchstone. Oh, *here's* a thing that could be a cool touchstone!" Like, obviously the Season 6 chat right now is a lot of mechs, but it's also, in the last day, fashion. It's architecture that we think is really cool. It's...

JACK: Oh, that brutalist, that piece of brutalist architecture.

AUSTIN: Oh my god, it's so good, isn't it?

JACK: It's amazing.

AUSTIN: But like, immediately for me, it's like, okay, let's talk about why— like, let's talk about if brutalism exists in this world.

JACK: Sure.

AUSTIN: Let's talk about art— which we will do, at some point, right? Like that— I didn't just send it, I sent it with a note about us being conscious about architecture. And so finding those ways to reach out and be like, "hey, here are other touchstones" once you have that general first step is really useful.

JACK: The other thing I want to add really quick is I don't think you're necessarily "doomed" to have to write a book. "Doomed" is a... [chuckles] I'd been wanting to make a game for years and years and years until I suddenly realized, like a few months ago, that it would work really well—it would work way better—in a different medium than the medium that I had thought that it was going to exist in for the longest time. And that was very freeing! Because maybe the answer to this is: yeah, maybe there is a book here. Maybe the ideas that you're interested or excited to explore would work better as a book. Adaptation to another media, or finding that an idea that

you are interested in works better in another media, is not always a last resort. It might just be a refocusing.

[TIMESTAMP: 1:31:58]

AUSTIN: Yeah. Totally. Alright, we're gonna keep moving. Andrew writes in, and says:

"A campaign of two years is starting to head towards its conclusion. I like where the campaign is at now, and I am excited about going forward, but the trouble is it's very, very big. It's unwieldy enough at this point that I'm worried about threads that I and my players care about getting lost in the shuffle. I love how y'all do finales. Zooming out a bit, shaking things up, and not getting bogged down, while still touching on the important stuff. My question is: how do you prepare for that? How do you make sure you're breaking the campaign down in the right ways, making sure that things don't get missed? What are some ways I can pare things down/what kind of pacing usually feels right? Do you feel it's necessary to change to another system, or is there a way to shift the narrative flow by simply doing zoomed out RP and then zooming into the action when it feels necessary? Anyway, this was supposed to be a short question, so I apologize. [Austin chuckles] But regardless, thank you as always, and the help is greatly appreciated."

AUSTIN: No worries. As always, the first answer is just like, there is no universal answer to this stuff. There is no, what is good pacing, because it depends on the group and it depends on the game. I do think you can do it without switching systems. I think there's something nice about switching systems. I like switching systems, because it helps...it's a vector by which you can indicate change. But that only makes sense when change has happened already. It does not...it's not a necessity, right? Marielda did not switch systems at the end. But that was very much a finale. [chuckles] My other notes here are...two things. One: you can go through with your friends and list out NPCs you want to check in on. You can be like, "Oh, what are the things that are most important? Let's go around the table, everyone name a thing that's like really important to them." And it's probably worth doing that. The other thing is: it is okay if you don't check back in on a character. It is okay if the fate of a city goes unremarked on. We are deep in thinking about the end of things right now. [chuckles] I recorded what could be our last pickup today, with a player. Probably not, 'cause I will probably— that's not true at all. There will be more pickups. [chuckles] I've just remembered another thing we need to do. But there will not be real full play anymore for Spring in Hieron. For any— for Hieron in general.

AUSTIN: [cont.] And so, I've been thinking about this a lot. And the thing that I think is most important is to remember that stories aren't encyclopedias. It is often the case that the frame of reference, that the camera moves away from something. And sometimes it does that in a moment without resolution. Sometimes it lingers long so that there can be resolution. Trust in your instincts and in the prep that you do to hit the things that are very important to you. And if you fail to hit something, it's okay. There is nothing stopping you from DMing your friend to be

like, “Oh, shit, what...whatever happened to so-and-so?” You know? I think about something even like...I think COUNTER/weight feels like a show that ended so cleanly, with no hanging threads. But that’s just not true. [chuckles] There are so many characters who came up that we just never see again. That we don’t know what went on, what happened with them in the end.

AUSTIN: [cont.] “In the end”, right, because there is no such thing. And stories almost always choose to, at the end, slowly focus in on one perspective, or two perspectives, a small vision of the world. Don’t be anxious about needing to have the aperture as wide as possible. You don’t need to see everything to tell a good story. You really— what you need is the feeling of...a breath drawing in. And that’s it. You can leave the table and be like, “yo, that was pretty good,” and that’s it. And I’m very clearly [chuckles] speaking from experience here, so. That is my thought on this. I don’t know from y’all, if going into finales you’ve had other feelings around like, “hey, I have to make sure I hit ABC before we wrap,” you know.

JACK: Sometimes we’ll talk about...we’ll make sure that we know what is on the table. Which I think is very different from making sure that we tie off every plot thread. And, you know, we’re never sitting down with big documents that are like, “here is every beat that we’ve hit”. But I remember during the Feast of Patina, which wasn’t a finale but definitely had finale energy.

AUSTIN: [chuckles] Almost was! I almost was like, “That’s it! That was it, the end.” [Ali laughs]

JACK: Almost was!

DRE: God.

JACK: I remember we prepped for that episode, [chuckles] which is still the most intense episode I can recall—

AUSTIN: Oh, yeah.

JACK: By writing a list of who is involved [AUSTIN: we did] and who is where. Almost like a... [chuckles] you know the beginning of old books where it like introduces the cast? By being like, you know, here is who is going to be here. So that we had this pallet that we could look to.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: So that we...we didn’t want to put ourselves in a position where something didn’t come up because we forgot about it, rather than because we made a decision not to find that. Or just because the story didn’t take us in that direction.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Which I say not to encourage a kind of desperate panic to find every plot thread—

AUSTIN: [laughs] Right.

JACK: Which I don't think is the right way to go at all. But if you are worried about this stuff, it might be worth having just a very, very loose—and, I stress, very broad—document of just like, hey here is who I might be interested in having scenes with. Or here is who I might be interested in seeing stories resolved. And then whether or not the story takes you to those places and resolves those things is up to the actual play, but at least you've gone into it with some kind of sense of what you want.

AUSTIN: Totally. Dre or Ali, do you have any thoughts about finales, wrapping things up, making sure you hit all the stuff you want to hit? [Ali laughs] I know this is all very tender stuff right in this moment.

DRE: Well, I guess one of the things I—

ALI: You know...

DRE: Oh, go ahead, Ali.

ALI: No, no, no, you go. I was just gonna say it's hard. [laughs] It's hard to do.

AUSTIN: It is hard. It is!

DRE: It is. It is hard. One of the things I really appreciate that you do, Austin, is you do a lot of check-ins, especially around finale time. Like, "Hey, are you cool with this, are we doing everything that you're looking for? Is this still keeping you checked in and reeled in and focused, or do you feel like this is going away from what you imagined?" Yeah. And I think, too, I wish that I had done what Jack had said for myself in this finale. [laughs] Have a nice document. Fortunately, I had the opportunity—I mean, there was literally a point in chat during the finale, where I was like, "aw, shit, I forgot to say something that I really wanted to that was kind of important."

AUSTIN: But you said it, right? We did get you to say it?

DRE: Yeah!

JACK: Mm-hmm.

AUSTIN: Yeah, okay. Okay. Phew!

DRE: Yeah, we did. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Okay.

DRE: No, 'cause you said...I mean, you basically just like, very smoothly transitioned into getting me to say it on recording. [laughs]

AUSTIN: [relieved] Okay, good.

DRE: But yeah, no, for sure. So, I guess, too, if you are doing something where it's not, you know, turn by turn, dice roll by dice roll, encourage people if they feel like they left something out or forgot something to just speak up and you can pop back to that moment in time.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Totally. It is not...it's people in a conversation. We forget things all the time in regular conversations. How often are you telling a real story, and you go like, you get to the crux of the story, and you go like, "Ah— I forgot to talk about Helen, let me go back and talk about Helen real quick, [Ali laughs] because she's super important for this part of the story. So, Helen and I used to work together, and...da da da da da da." Like, that is a thing we always do in stories anywhere, in storytelling, in conversations all the time. So don't feel bad about doing that, about being like, "Wait a second, what happened to Helen? Is Helen still in the city with all the fishermen? Yeah? Okay, okay, cool. Okay. Everything's good? Helen's good? Yeah, okay. Okay, good." Like, that can be a totally okay thing to do if the moment strikes you, you know? And, as people in the chat note, you are totally allowed to write your own fanfic about your own games. Ali, did you have something else there, or are you good?

ALI: [sighs] It just ain't easy. [laughs]

AUSTIN: It just ain't easy! It just ain't.

ALI: It just ain't easy!

AUSTIN: Had there been one—

ALI: Be kind to yourself. Do your best.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Figure out what's important to you. I think— especially since we're really talking about Hieron here. I think that the thing that made it a little bit easier for me is like, once we were kind of...we knew Spring was gonna be the thing, so once we were kind of heading towards there, it was easier to think of like the arc of her life, [AUSTIN: yeah] and what I wanted that to mean, and yada yada yada. And being able to do that really helps. But in terms of just like being in the moment or forgetting a thing or making sure that it's perfect or it's right is just like, you know, just be nice to yourself, just do it, just have fun. [laughs]

AUSTIN: You also just won't know.

ALI: [with feeling] Yeah.

AUSTIN: You just won't— this is the thing. It's just struck me like the wind striking— like a warm, like a hot wind striking my face. You have no idea what your story is gonna be. It will end in a place that will probably not match what you would have written down the place to be, before you start doing the game. And that's a good thing. But like, leave yourself that space. Maybe, you know, you say, "Oh yeah, I really want to do— I *really* want to have these three or four conversations, I really want this big confrontation." But boy, you will not know. [Ali giggles] You will not know where it goes, and then it will hit you. And you'll be like, "This game is done. Okay!" Ahh. God damn. People don't even know. It's amazing. Get ready. Get ready for what I think is some really good stuff.

ALI: Ahh..

AUSTIN: Ahh.

ALI: I don't even know how many episodes are left.

AUSTIN: I don't either. [Ali laughs] What I've been saying is probably September, when it's over, at this rate.

ALI: You know, we're gonna see.

AUSTIN: 'Cause we're skipping this week, right?

ALI: Mm-hmm.

AUSTIN: And then there's only four weeks in August.

ALI: Yeah...

AUSTIN: I *guess* it could be four episodes? [Ali laughs] I guess there's a way you could do four episodes. Those are long episodes, Ali. I think it has to be—

ALI: All of the recordings are like five hours. There's...

AUSTIN: No, there's a three and a half in there. I checked today. I checked today because of the pickup.

ALI: Mmm.

AUSTIN: There's...it's like four, four, four, four, five and a half, or something. It's fine! They'd be very long. I think we will be in September safely, it's what I've been saying.

ALI: We are gonna see.

AUSTIN: Uh huh. Or we could just be done. We could just never release that. [Ali laughs] What if we're done? What if that was it? We could decide this right now. There's four of us on this show, on this podcast.

ALI: I'm deciding it right now. I'm not doing it. [Austin laughs]

JACK: We have another pickup that says, "And someday, we will draw its map." [Ali and Austin laugh]

AUSTIN: [laughing] Yeah, can we go retroactively... "One day, sometime well after Gen Con, when we've all slept a bunch, we will draw its map." [Ali and Dre laugh]

JACK: Pickup three.

AUSTIN: Pickup number three.

ALI: No, we're fine. I'm gonna listen to all 25 hours of the...whatever.

AUSTIN: It's not 25 hours. It is not.

ALI: Oh my god, it's completely 25 hours.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: No, it's not. Is it? [Ali laughs]

DRE: Wait, what number do you think it is, Austin? Because it's probably—

AUSTIN: No, I think it's closer to 20. I thought it...

ALI: It's probably closer to 20.

AUSTIN: I'm checking.

ALI: I don't know though.

AUSTIN: I'm checking. I'm checking.

ALI: [laughs] Okay. Sure. Fact check me.

AUSTIN: I'm gonna— I'm not— listen.

ALI: Anyway, I'm gonna listen to it before Gen Con, and we're gonna be fine, and the music is gonna be great, and it's gonna be edited well, it's gonna be released, people are gonna like it...

JACK: Sorry, what was that about the music, Ali? [Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: Don't put more on Jack's plate. Jack just did a good job. Let Jack live!

ALI: Well... [laughter] Jack has to write at least one song for the...! [laughs] There's gotta be at least one in there.

JACK: No more music! [Ali laughs] In fact, I'm gonna remove songs from the soundtrack going backwards.

ALI: Wow, just delete them.

JACK: Yeah, one day we're gonna do a season where I release the full soundtrack at the beginning, and then as the season goes, we cut a track from it every episode. [Austin and Ali laugh] I'm gonna call this album a bad idea.

AUSTIN: I'm rounding here—

ALI: I'm so mad.

AUSTIN: I'm rounding to the nearest 30 minutes here. It's not. It's not that long! It's not 25 hours, is what I'm gonna say. That's all I'm gonna say.

ALI: Well, all I'm gonna say is that I do know that it is...jesus.

AUSTIN: A million gigabytes?

ALI: Give my computer a second.

JACK: [unclear ??? 1:45:0] gigabytes

ALI: We just hit 80, it's still going up. 82.5 gigabytes. [chuckles] So it's a lot, it's enough, is what it is.

AUSTIN: It is. It is almost exactly 20 hours of material.

JACK: Titanfall 2 size, fuckin'. [Austin and Ali laugh]

AUSTIN: Just the audio of Titanfall, yeah. God, remember Titanfall? [Ali sighs] Great game. We should play Titanfall.

JACK: Season 6.

AUSTIN: Season 6! One more— yeah, Season 6.

[TIMESTAMP: 1:45:27]

AUSTIN: Last question. Here we go. This is it. And I'm only asking this because I need answers. [chuckles]

"I'm wondering how y'all manage having different teams/parties in different parts of the world operating simultaneously without it becoming a logistical clusterfuck, [JACK: HA!] and/or risking contradicting yourself."

AUSTIN: Why'd you "HA" me? [Dre laughs]

JACK: Ah, just, different parts of the world.

AUSTIN: Uh huh!

DRE: Ahhh.

AUSTIN:

"Is it careful clocks management, stuff going on behind the scenes, a combination of both/neither? I much prefer having multiple views of the world through parties of two or three people at a time, versus trying to manage one party of four to five, but I'm constantly worried that the timelines will get way out of whack. It doesn't help that I'm doing it for an actual play podcast—I guess, AP, an actual play—"but, I feel like this would come up at home, too, when the parties were able to reconvene and discuss things. Would love any insights or tips you have!"

AUSTIN: My tips are: it mostly doesn't matter.

ALI: [softly] Yeah.

AUSTIN: Who said "yeah"? Who whispered that?

ALI: I did. I did, I did.

AUSTIN: Thank you, Ali. Ali, can you expand on that?

ALI: [laughs] Well, because I feel like I...when we first started doing this and when it was the COUNTER/weight thing of like, every time there's a session there's a month that you lose, was the most frustrating thing in the world for me, and I feel like we didn't...by having it be so tight and specific didn't work, with the—

AUSTIN: Oh, in the sense that there was offscreen downtime?

ALI: Right, yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Every time we did like an arc of COUNTER/weight, then we went back to Dre and Sylvia¹ and then we came back, it was like, you lost a month. [laughs] We don't know what happened to those characters in that time.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: And the first time we did it sucked. And like, as we did it more, I think we kind of found the way to be flexible around the timeline, and...

AUSTIN: We just stopped doing it, is actually the thing that happened, right?

ALI: Yeah. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Is like, eventually we found so much momentum, that we stayed focused, but like.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: It was definitely framed as like, Cowboy Bebop style, you do stuff in between sessions, but who cares? It doesn't matter to me, the GM, so why should I put a camera there? And what I was ignoring was: people want to know what's happening there.

ALI: I cared.

AUSTIN: Yeah, of course.

ALI: I cared. [laughs]

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

AUSTIN: Well, I didn't know that, Ali. I didn't understand at the time. Now we play games with explicit downtime built in.

ALI: Yeah, yeah. [laughs] But I think the more that you're able to be willing to do what works for your party over like, "oh, this is the chart that I have," is better, because— especially, looking at the last arc of Hieron, I think a lot of that stuff worked because we were able to be like, okay, one person leaves, but then...you know, we had this kind of time where people were still at the place where they were.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: And then, you know...people got to do the things that wanted to do, essentially, and I think making sure that people are doing [laughs] the things that they want to do is a huge, huge part of it.

AUSTIN: Is the most important.

ALI: Yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: You can retroactively make it fit, right?

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I think about the previous arc, the Alcyon arc. Where it's like, alright, they are at this place when it's happening—when some stuff is popping off back at the University. And they can— there is evidence of what's popping off back at the University, in clear view for the people at Alcyon. Do those two times line up? They do now. They do now! [Ali laughs]

JACK: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

AUSTIN: Right? Okay, they left at the right time for that to line up nicely.

ALI: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

AUSTIN: That is just— you can just do that. This is so fundamental to a shift in the way game design changed in the late 2000s. Or ways in which conversations shifted, right, like I am not here to relitigate the divide between simulationist games and story games. But, one of the things that through...and I just want to underscore like, real discussion and debate and experimentation, people trying new stuff for the first time, was that like...tabletop roleplaying games don't need to try to simulate the world in a physical sense, right? We don't need to count days. You don't need to...you don't need to count the number of arrows in the back of Throndir's quiver. What you need to know is: hey, is it interesting in this moment, if Throndir doesn't have enough arrows to fire? And there are ways to mechanize and still simulate sort of genre rules in

that way, and I think that is when it gets to its best. Just like, when the mechanics are leading you in that direction, but you don't need to track days, you don't need to have a calendar set up. Unless your whole table's really excited about that!

ALI: Yeah. I think the only other point that I wanted to make, as an extension of the thing that I was saying is that like...especially if it's something where the cameras are different places...the subtle being able to show one thing from one party to the other side. Like every time there's a scene in a movie where like someone unrelated is in a place and like [AUSTIN: mm-hmm] there's a news report that happened about the last scene, that owns. [laughs]

AUSTIN: It does! It so owns.

ALI: [laughing] You can do that as often as you want!

AUSTIN: Yeah, it's the best. It's so cool. I actually had a conversation with someone in the fan discord about this pretty recently, who really liked— we were talking about Twilight Mirage. We were talking about...so, Twilight Mirage opens with two parties who do not speak to each other at all for most of that— you know, for the whole first half of that game, right? That's not even, I'm not even gonna call that a spoiler, like that is— the pitch of the game is: there are two groups of people who are doing two completely different things, and eventually their paths intersect. I, like Michelle, really love that in a story, like Ali, because of the ways that those two things can interact, but also because when you have that split party setup you can see the world from different perspectives that have different agendas and different priorities, that really— it's like, as a storyteller, it's like as a painter having a different pallet, right. You're both painting the same building on fire, but one of you is paying attention to the colors of the curtains and one of you is paying attention to the colors of the flames. Because that's what you have with your pallet. And that is really powerful as a storyteller. And the thing that's great is if you're doing that for an actual play like you're doing, your audience can feel that too. And I think that we hit that some in Spring, like especially at the start of Spring, where we had three different perspective characters— or, perspectives, right? We had Fero, we had the crew at the University, we had the crew in Aubade. Like, those three perspectives were colored so differently based on what was happening and where they were, and I think having that stuff was really rewarding for all of us and helped set the stage really well, so. I think it's worth doing it and like that. For me, again, it's not clocks, it's not spreadsheets. It is: risk contradicting yourself. It's okay to contradict yourself. It is a conversation. You can fix a contradiction by saying you have fixed the contradiction.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Jack and Dre— yeah, Jack, go ahead.

JACK: That's the other thing, right? Sometimes...sometimes you're gonna goof it up. And unlike instances where we can say, "They left at the right time," you will find that a piece of continuity straight up does not work.

AUSTIN: HA! [Jack chuckles]

DRE: When does that ever happen, Jack? I don't...

AUSTIN: Aaaaah. Jack wasn't even in that! Jack wasn't even there for the thing that we had to do.

ALI: Wait...

AUSTIN: The thing you're gonna release as a Pusher update, Ali.

ALI: Ah! [laughs]

DRE: Oh, I'm thinking of something that happened back in Winter.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Oh! Wait, which was...oh, the Ephrim bit?

DRE: No, where Jack and I had to have our characters teleport.

JACK: Yeah.

ALI: Ohh. [Dre laughs]

AUSTIN: Oh, that was really funny! That was sooo funny. I forgot about that!

ALI: I can't believe we had to do that. [laughs]

AUSTIN: That's the biggest, best one. Oh my god.

JACK: But the answer to this is...

AUSTIN: Make it— yeah, go ahead.

JACK: It's fine— that was fine! It's fine! The continuity problem was fine.

AUSTIN: It was great! [Ali chuckles]

JACK: You're gonna fix it.

AUSTIN: A mirror broke, a dog barked. It was sick!

JACK: You're gonna fix it. And like, sometimes the way to fix it is...no one is going to come knocking on your door [AUSTIN: right] and say, [deep voice] "Listen, Jack. I have some bad news for you. You broke the rules of your own story, and now I'm going to have to take you away."

AUSTIN: [small voice] "No!" [Ali laughs]

JACK: You're gonna just, it's the story—

AUSTIN: Sorry, that was rude. That's not how you sound to me, I wanna be clear. [all laugh]

JACK: It's just going to...you're just going to say...you know, okay, that doesn't happen. [chuckles] It happens differently. Or, in the best possible scenario, you're gonna say: we're gonna fuckin' break two mirrors and teleport two people, one from the depths of a lamina up to the surface, and the other one down there.

AUSTIN: Totally.

JACK: You are going to make mistakes, and then you're going to fix them in fuckin' amazing ways you weren't predicting.

AUSTIN: Totally. For people who don't remember the Winter thing, there is a moment in the...towards the end of Marielda [JACK: oh, jeez] in an intro, where I name some characters, that require at that point that those characters be in a place where they might be named.

JACK: And this is one of these hard and fast things. Where we couldn't, at that point, just say: and now so-and-so is in the room.

AUSTIN: Right. Because of the situation.

JACK: That would be unfair storytelling!

AUSTIN: Yep.

JACK: It would be uninteresting storytelling.

AUSTIN: Yep!

JACK: And so we just had to go like, "Ah, shit, okay. How do we..."

AUSTIN: Instead, we found a reason! We found reasons that made sense, right, that were like—

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Okay. Lem, I'm gonna do this— I'm doing to retroactively find a way to get you there and a reason that you're being sent to that place.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: A reason that was poorly thought out. By someone who, it would turn out, thinks things out poorly.

JACK: Mm-hmm.

AUSTIN: As we would learn again and again. [Jack chuckles] So, yeah, I think that's a huge thing. The thing that I thought you were talking about, Dre, was Ephrim, where we recorded Ephrim speaking with Adelaide and then had to change that. Because of the circumstances that lead to that, that required that Ephrim not be able to speak to Adelaide, because of the way that went down. So like, that happens, totally. And if you're doing an actual play, get used to that happening. The most recent thing, which will go up as a Pusher update, and I think I can say it now, right? It's out. That stuff's all out there.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Is, there is a specific thing that has been a... [Ali chuckles] I'm gonna call it a bugbear, a bugbear for me, for years. Which is: the sword that Ephrim has, [JACK: *jesus*] was *never, ever* intended to be the sword of Samoths. Was *never* intended to be the sword that Samoths made that he revealed to Maelgwyn in Marielda. Never! Never was meant to be that. But then in a recording, I fucking said it was? And then we published it, because I was like, "Oh, yeah, and of course that's the sword of Samoths," which was just a goof on my part, right? But it's like, okay! That's that thing now.

JACK: Except...

AUSTIN: Except, that when we initially recorded the most recent arc of this show we do... [Ali laughs] Ali surprised— well, so I knew it was there. I knew...I didn't know it was there, 'cause it wasn't there. Where it was, was safely in Ephrim's scabbard [chuckles] back at the Last University. But in my mind, it was still in Marielda.

JACK: Wrong sword.

AUSTIN: Wrong sword. Ephrim— or, sorry, Hella, made a roll. Hella was like, “Hey, I’m gonna do a roll. I’m gonna do a roll about getting a vision of something.” I’m like: oh, you’re gonna see the cool— you’re gonna see the sword. You’re gonna see this sword, that we know has a lot of connotations, we know has a lot of specific history, and that’s the sword that you see. And you see some other shit happen. I’m gonna do my best not to get into very clear specifics, here. And we played out the whole fuckin’ thing. We played out the whole thing with it being that other sword. [Jack chuckles] And then— Katie, Katie in the chat, says, “This is why sword docs are great.” Guess. What! Sword docs are great! I was prepping for the outro— or, for the epilogue, for what’s coming next, and I was scrolling through my Spring in Hieron document, which is a real document I have that is...27 pages long. This is not even any of the session prep. This is just Spring in Hieron. Just general thoughts about the thing we do. And, I have a series of comments, and I’m just gonna find...one second, let’s see if I can get this on screen without revealing this whole document. Uh...where is it. Sword description...swordtown...ah, I can’t find it. Somewhere in here is a note to myself, where I’m like, “Hey, is this that sword?” and then another note for myself months later, being like, “Yes. [chuckles] This is that sword.” [Ali laughs] Oh, here it is. I found it. I found it. I’m going to show a spoiler on the screen. Oh, you know, I can just do this. I can just do...god. How do I show this safely? Uh...I’m just gonna read it.

AUSTIN: [cont.] There’s a thing here that’s like: ‘Character’s plans. Have character A kill character B with a blade that had been prepared, which would do a thing.’ [chuckles] And then I have in the notes: April 15 2018. ‘But instead, character C does a thing with a different sun— or with a different sword.’ And then, June 6, two months after that, three months after that: “Wait a second, is this the blade that Samothos originally prepared for Maelgwyn, [Jack laughs] or is this somewhere else?” And then, three months after that, last September, just in parentheses: “Yes. It was.” And the reason that I knew that is because a fan, fan at the table, Linda, having a document called “Facts About Swords”, which I was able to reference. Because there’s this— I just have this hangup with this fuckin’ sword! This one stupid fact about this stupid sword has been wrong in my brain for years, because I said it wrong once, but it’s on recording, and so it’s just there. It’s just the fact that that is the sword Ephrim has, instead of it just being a sun from the lower strata. And so that’s just true! And part of doing an actual play podcast, a part of running a game, is what Action Movie World and World Wide Wrestling RPG both get so well, which is: the job of the GM is to make it make sense after the fact. It’s a mess. It’s always a mess. [Jack chuckles] After it’s over, you figure out where those— you tie it all together, and you go, “This is actually intentional. This is abstract art. I did a— you missed out. You didn’t understand it. I connected the dots, and now you can see it’s brilliant, actually.” [chuckles] And so part of what we do is fix it. In this case it was: you can record a long series of pickups. Being like, okay, wait, we’re not gonna throw all this out. There’s a lot of good stuff here. How do we still get the bulk of this arc to make sense? Oh, I have a really good idea for another story I can tell here. So that is my other advice. Is, one: it doesn’t matter if it lines up too nicely. Two: when it really breaks, fix it! Find joy in fixing it. So, shoutouts to Linda and Facts About Swords. [chuckles] Katie says, “It’s three full pages about swords. Maybe Hieron has too many swords.” I have a note in my Season 6 doc that says, “include some cool spears”. So. [laughs]

JACK: Oh, spears now? [Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: Spears. Uh huh! I'm very invested. So. This is a cool note. I'm gonna put this note in here. I'm gonna put this note in the Season 6 chat for y'all to see. It's one of my good notes about spears. So, that's where my head is at right now. That's just for y'all on the call. That's just a spear idea I had.

JACK: Let's see. Let's see this spear idea. [intrigued] Ohh.

AUSTIN: You could just do that.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: It doesn't matter that it doesn't make sense. You're in a giant robot. That also doesn't make sense, you know?

JACK: That's a good spear idea.

AUSTIN: It's a good spear idea. Uh, per Katie, Linda has spoken to Katie. Linda says, "I'm happy to help." I think on that note, unless— does anyone else have any ideas about this stuff, or can we wrap up? [pause] Sounds like we are wrapping up. As always, you can send your questions to tipsatthetable@gmail.com. Couple quick announcements. One: there will not be an episode this week, because we will be at Gen Con. Two: we are hoping to record Gen Con. [chuckles] We are gonna do our best to record Gen Con. Gen Con is not great at recording Gen Con. Gen Con is not great at telling you how many seats you'll have. [Ali chuckles] Which leads me to number three: we have like a hundred more seats to our Gen Con show. No, we don't. We don't *have* more seats. The seats are the same. There were *always* going to be more seats [Ali laughs] than what was listed on that page.

JACK: Gen Con!

AUSTIN: What I really mean is, you, if you happen to be in the area, if you happen to have been already going to Gen Con, and you didn't get a ticket, there are more tickets available through the Gen Con site. You should take a look. We would love to have you. We still have like 87 or something left. Three...four. Five. Some other one. The show that we did at SHUX last year will be uploaded to the Shut Up & Sit Down youtube this week. So look forward to that. Seven...

ALI: I believe Wednesday.

AUSTIN: Wednesday. Seventeen: there is a...is this the first week that people can preorder the Twilight Mirage zine? Or is that already available?

ALI: I think it's gonna be Monday it's gonna be launching.

AUSTIN: Okay. There's gonna be a cool Twilight Mirage fanzine that has over 45 contributors. Some of the art is incredible. Twilight Mirage is, if not my favorite season, my favorite work to have done. Some of the most stressful. [chuckles] But also, I am so in love with it. And I love that it's touched people. And so I'm so excited to see the fanzine. Part of the proceeds, our part of the proceeds, will be going to charity, to...is it RAICES [pronounced race-ees]? I don't know how to pronounce that charity. I've seen it written so many times. But the charity, the kind of immigration rights and refugee rights and help center, R-A-I-C-E-S. And then the other half will be staying with the contributors. I believe that's right. Ali, if I'm wrong, please correct me.

ALI: No, that's right. If you are listening to this and are interested in the zine, you can go to...tm_

AUSTIN: [crosstalk as Ali paused] tm_ — yeah.

ALI: [laughs] It's tm_zine. And all of the information will be there and the links and stuff. Again, I believe it's launching tomorrow.

AUSTIN: Sounds good.

ALI: If you're listening to this...today is Sunday the 28th.

AUSTIN: Yes.

ALI: So it's launching on the 29th. Whenever you're listening to this, go check it out.

AUSTIN: And I think that that's all of my announcements.

ALI: Um...

AUSTIN: Is there anything else?

ALI: Yeah, I just wanna say, attached to the Gen Con thing. When we announced the Gen Con thing, I was like 25% [laughs] confident in our ability to record it. Now that we are a week before Gen Con, I am about...86%?

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Oh, you went up?! I'm...

ALI: [laughing] Confident in our ability...

AUSTIN: I'm less confident, so let me—

ALI: How are you less confident? We have a plan now.

AUSTIN: Because I've talked to people who've run stuff at Gen Con since then.

ALI: Oh, the recording stuff is all stuff we're bringing, though, so I feel...

AUSTIN: Don't believe it. I don't.

ALI: [laughs] I feel 86% confident that we are gonna have audio that's releasable. Again, that's only 86% and Austin's...

AUSTIN: 8.6%

ALI: [laughs] Austin's 8.6 brings our average down to like a 40-something, so.

AUSTIN: Perfect.

ALI: As a show, we're 40% confident. [laughs] So, that is all to say that hopefully that'll be on Patreon soon. I'll let you know...the Monday, I don't know.

AUSTIN: We will also be putting up this week the character creation for Art and Keith's characters, who are extremely good. For the game, the Marielda game that we'll be playing at Gen Con. So look forward to that, also. That'll be a Pusher tier update. I should just note, really quick, there's other really great Pusher stuff going up this week. One is, do you remember that story I just told you about swords? [Ali laughs] Well, we fuckin' recorded that whole recording of that whole pickup, and Ali is gonna upload that for people to hear, because it's, apparently, a very funny recording. Then, also, that went up yesterday, I'd held it for a little while, Jack, I don't know if I told you this, but I ended up feeling bad 'cause I felt like there were some Samot spoilers in there.

JACK: Ohh, huh.

AUSTIN: Or like close to some. And I was like, uhh, let's just not. Let me just wait until the arc is out.

JACK: Yeah. Best to wait.

AUSTIN: We released, in the Pusher update tier, a two hour long conversation that Jack and I had? About the process of writing "Tell Me", one of my favorite songs that Jack has written. A fantastic song, and kind of the cornerstone, I think, of the end of the first arc of this season. The first, like, act. Maybe it's the second act, now that I think about it. Anyway. Long conversation about it, it's influences, various demos that Jack did of various parts. It's a great conversation. There's a bunch of other great stuff at the Pusher tier. I know it's a high tier, so I do my best not to oversell it in a weird way, because I don't want people to feel like that's where the good stuff is, we're hiding all the good stuff.

JACK: The definitive experience or something.

AUSTIN: Totally. Right. But what I do want to say, and I say this every now and then, and then people go, “no, I can’t do it, I feel too guilty!” But like, it is okay to be like, “For this month, I’m going to pay you 50 bucks so that I can look through this archive of cool shit, and then I’m going to drop back down to what my normal tier is.” Like, we all would do the same thing and have done the same thing. I’m *not* saying that what you should do is go up to the \$50 tier and then drop down before you are charged for it, but like, it is okay to dip into a higher tier because your grandma sent you 25 bucks for your birthday. [Ali laughs] Like, for real. That is a hundred— and then you drop back down the next month. A hundred percent okay. There’s so much cool stuff at that tier that I would love for people to see. So, you know, maybe think about doing that. Think about doing that if you have some extra bucks in your pocket. Because, at this point, it’s getting to be kind of a lot of cool stuff. So. Any other announcements from people? Jack, the new songs are up for people to buy?

JACK: Yeah, yeah, yeah, both new songs are up for people to buy. There’s a minute and a half song that is something like seven tracks in Logic, and then there’s a five and a half minute song that is 45 tracks in Logic. Both of them are really fun. I think the five minute one, Spring in Hieron, is...the most complicated thing I’ve written. And I’m very excited for the next couple of tracks to be less intense, but we shall see.

AUSTIN: Ali, what is this video you’ve sent me?

ALI: [laughs] I didn’t send it to you. I dropped it into our Bluff City chat.

AUSTIN: Oh my god.

ALI: Feel welcome to put it onto the screen. [laughs]

JACK: Let’s see what we’ve got here.

AUSTIN: Oh my god, the pettiness. The pettiness! The absolute...

ALI: [laughs] Inspiring.

AUSTIN: So, what we’ve got here is a...we’re looking here at a... [Jack and Austin laugh] It’s amazing! We’re looking here at one of those cell phone stores, computer repair, you know what I’m saying.

JACK: Unlock, yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah. You know what I'm saying. Not like a T-Mobile. Places that will unlock your cell phone, that will repair your screen. Just like, quick, cheap. And it's called Mr. Cell. Which is my favorite Dragon Ball character. And, then the camera kind of pans over to the left to reveal, nextdoor, [laughing] a competing establishment named Dr. Cell! [Ali and Jack laugh] It's amazing!

JACK: [laughing] Ahh.

ALI: Well, who are you gonna trust? Someone who has a doctorate in cell phones, or Mr. Cell?

AUSTIN: Or Mr. Cell. That's just...that's just his name. He was born with that name! [Ali laughs]

JACK: The other person fuckin' went to school for this.

AUSTIN: Okay, we don't know that. We just know that he is a doctor. [Ali continues laughing]

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Or that they are a doctor. We have no idea that they are— that they got a cell doctorate.

JACK: [laughs] That they read the, uh, the big book that medical students...oh, this is a medical doctor.

AUSTIN: That's what I'm saying. This could be a medical doctor.

DRE: We cannot do a hot ten on Dr. Cell. I gotta go make dinner. [all laugh]

AUSTIN: Okay, what about a hot seven? [laughter continues] Alright everybody, that was—

ALI: We did a tight two. I think we're good.

AUSTIN: I think we're good. [Ali laughs] Let's do a time.is. Thank you everyone for joining us. As always, you can find everything we do at twitter.com/friends_table. Maybe do 40 seconds?

DRE: Sure.

JACK: Let's do it.

AUSTIN: Did y'all see the quote of the day today?

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So good. [they clap] The quote of the day today—

ALI: Was I early?

AUSTIN: No, I think you're fine.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: Maybe. Dr. Seuss says, "How did it get so late so soon?" Bye!