

## Tips at the Table: Players Only, Baby!!

Transcribed by: Gabriel Hawke and robotchangeling

**Keith:** What time are we clapping at?

**Ali:** 20.

**Dre:** 20.

**Janine:** 20. *[clap]* Mm...

**Ali:** No, it was fine. Okay, if you listen to the Clapcasts, you will learn that any clap that Austin thinks is good is meaningless, 'cause they're all different! *[Ali and Dre laugh]*

**Keith:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Janine:** That's true.

**Ali:** And usually when he was like, "That's fantastic," it sounds horrible when I edit it. So, it's fine.

**Keith:** Yeah.

**Ali:** It's honestly fine, and I would like to shout out Janine for being the person that I usually am and being like, "Let's please start the show." *[Janine laughs]* So, *[clears throat]* welcome to Tips at the Table. *[laughs]* I was going to do the whole Austin thing, and I completely lost it, 'cause I didn't have this thing up. But it is a show featuring critical questions from you, hopefully smart answers from us, and still fun interactions between good friends. I'm your host Alicia Acampora. I'm the usual host of the show. There's nothing weird happening here. *[laughs quietly]* And I'm joined by Janine Hawkins.

**Janine:** Hi. I'm Janine Hawkins, and I'm [@bleatingheart](#) on Twitter.

**Ali:** And Andrew Lee Swan.

**Dre:** Hey, you can find me on Twitter at [@Swandre3000](#).

**Ali:** And Keith J. Carberry.

**Keith:** Hi, my name is Keith J. Carberry. You can find me on Twitter at [@KeithJCarberry](#), and you can find the let's play that I do at [youtube.com/runbutton](https://youtube.com/runbutton).

**Ali:** Cool. If you're listening to this, you probably already know to find us at [@friends\\_table](#) on

Twitter, facebook.com/friends\_table or friendsatthetable? And you can find us there. You get updates that this show is live, for instance. Also, thanks for backing us on Patreon. Welcome to this episode of Tips at the Table. I'm going to address the weird thing that Austin is not here, and he had like... he had to kind of deal with his day job, so we're running it alone today. *[laughs]* But we have a bunch of questions that are not only GM questions, and we're qualified to answer them, and it's going to be a good time. *[laughs]*

**Keith:** Should we instead only answer GM questions and just try to guess what Austin would say? *[Dre laughs]*

**Ali:** Ooh. That would be...

**Dre:** Do we have to talk in an Austin impersonation?

**Ali:** [hesitant] Mm...

**Keith:** Not required, but not forbidden.

**Dre:** Okay.

**Ali:** Okay. *[laughs]*

**Keith:** I'm just going to say it's risky.

**Dre:** Like risky standard, or...?

**Ali:** Oh.

**Keith:** Uh, desperate...something, I don't know. *[laughter]*

**Ali:** Keith, you've played *Blades in the Dark* now, or a version of it, so like you get all the...

**Keith:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Ali:** You get all the things.

**Keith:** I do. Well, I had read the book last time.

**Janine:** I think it's going to take more than a session to get all the things.

**Ali:** *[laughs]* Yeah, but, you know, the risky, standard, desperate, whatever, is the big one.

**Keith:** Yeah.

**Ali:** So, yeah.

**Janine:** Do you want to get going here?

**Ali:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Janine:** All right.

**Ali:** Janine, if you could take us to the next card? I have it up, but I'm not...

**Janine:** Yes, "Risky, Standard, Desperate, Whatever" is my...everything? That could be anything. It could be a novel. *[Ali laughs]* It could be an album name. It really...it depends on the direction my career takes.

**Ali:** Band. Anything.

**Janine:** Anyways.

**Keith:** Hey, Dre, you're nose-breathing into the microphone, by the way.

**Dre:** Oops, sorry. *[Ali and Janine laugh]* Thanks.

**Keith:** I tried to be down low about it in the Discord, but...

**Dre:** No, it's good.

**Janine:** Yeah, we tried to be diplomatic, but it didn't...

**Ali:** Yeah, I was like stalling for Dre to notice. *[Ali and Keith laugh]*

**Dre:** Nope. Mm-mm. Nope. Oh, yeah, here it is in the Discord, everybody telling me.

**Keith:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Ali:** It's fine. Sometimes your just like face is different in front of the microphone than where it is usually.

**Keith:** Yeah.

**Ali:** And our first question is about where to put your face while recording. No, it's not.

**Janine:** Mm.

**Ali:** *[laughs]* Our first question comes in from Jenny, and they say: ***“I’ve been trying to develop a character, and I’ve had an idea that she’s very superstitious, but then I realized I didn’t know how to play that in a fantasy setting where monsters and shit are real.”*** By the way, I can’t read things out loud. It’s fine. *[laughs]* ***“What do you think superstition looks like in a fantasy setting? And more broadly, how would you go about adapting real-world concepts into different genres and settings?”*** I’m super excited to answer this, and I know Janine also is.

**Janine:** Mm-hmm.

**Ali:** So I’m going to let Janine go first.

**Janine:** So, my feeling on this is that fantasy— okay, so superstition in fantasy settings can seem really difficult, because monsters are real, and we are coming from a position where, in our reality, monsters aren’t. But you have to think...or, at least, I think the sort of way around this is that you have to realize, like...well, tigers are real. Tigers are like monsters. There are things in our reality that are also monstrous, and if they weren’t in someone’s reality, they would *seem* monstrous, but to us they’re fact. So, if a monster is a fact in this reality, then, fine, find the thing that isn’t fact. You know what I mean? Find the things that are still outside of reality. Because if a monster exists in that world, that monster is basically a tiger. *[Ali laughs]* If dragons exist, the dragon is like a tiger or a bear. Like, it’s there. You know, you need to, I think, reach beyond that and find the things that are still outside of that reality. I want to say that *The Witcher* has done some stuff like this.

**Ali:** Yeah.

**Janine:** Where there are some characters that are like...clearly have some weird beliefs. Even though a lot of those beliefs are otherwise realistic and founded, there are some things that are outside of that.

**Ali:** Yeah, for sure. This question is interesting to me, because superstition has been so entwined with general faith in my family, for, like, ever.

**Janine:** Mm.

**Ali:** My grandmother is like super super Irish Catholic and like came over with all of those superstitions. And I have grown up my whole life knowing that, like, she reads tea leaves, my mom can see ghosts, and my uncle can see the future? And my childhood was just like, oh, we can’t leave yet, because my mom left the house and then came back in and she has to sit down and count for ten seconds before she can leave the house again. And just shit like that and like throwing salt over your shoulder and all of that shit, like, I super grew up with. And the way to think about superstition in games, I think, is that it’s just an extension of faith, ‘cause that’s really

what it is when you boil it down. Like, the fact that monsters exist doesn't mean that people don't believe things really strongly and that those things that they believe can be interpreted by greater culture as like kind of silly. Or like, at least by their friend group as like kind of silly. So, I feel like the thing for this is to like really think about what those superstitions are and what the rules around them are and then just follow them as if they were *Dungeon World* bonds. Like, there is a version of Hadrian that's like, his religion isn't the one that everyone else believes in, so the things that he says sound way more ridiculous. I think that like...especially 'cause I've been playing Tender, and I've recently put a lot of weird faith stuff into Tender, because we had to figure out how her powers worked exactly with the rules change, 'cause we're switching over to *Scum and Villainy*, which most people know by now, but if this is your first time hearing it, yeah, that's what we're doing, and it's gonna be really fun. And I think that just like playing a character who, at the end of the day, what they believe is the thing that they believe, is where you start with that and not like thinking about the like, "Oh, but magic is real, so superstition magic isn't the same thing," right?

**Janine:** Mm-hmm.

**Ali:** I don't know. Dre or Keith, do you have...? *[laughs quietly]*

**Keith:** Yeah. I have something that's like sort of related to what you said or maybe even mostly related to what you said.

**Ali:** Mm-hmm.

**Keith:** But like, even in a world where magic and ghosts and curses exist, it's still a world where people aren't always thinking about magic and ghosts and curses.

**Ali:** Oh, that's a big point, yeah.

**Keith:** And, so, if you have a character who is just like taking all the things everyone already believes more seriously. Like, everybody knows how to keep yourself from being cursed, but only your superstitious character is always doing that thing, because the one day you don't do it is the one day someone notices that they can curse you. *[Ali and Dre laugh]*

**Ali:** Yeah, I think a part of this is like...I don't want to speak for other's people's characters, but I think that like...

**Keith:** *[quietly]* I do. *[laughter]*

**Ali:** You could interpret pattern magic as a sort of superstition, and the way that other NPCs in the world look at what Lem does is sort of the same thing.

**Keith:** Mm-hmm.

**Ali:** Or there was even the Hitchcocks, how they were way more afraid of ghosts than everybody else in *The Six*, even though, like...

**Keith:** Yeah.

**Ali:** Castille...I'm not going to spoil *Marielda*. But, like, they had interacted with ghosts. *[laughs]*

**Keith:** I had sort of a...not a real world, but in-my-life version of this sort of thing. I've been rewatching *The X-Files* with my boyfriend. I have seen it a few times, and he hasn't seen it. And something that that show plays with is that 99% of the episodes are about Mulder saying, like, "Trust me, there's werewolves!" and Scully being like, "Science says there's no such thing as werewolves." *[Ali laughs]*. But every once in a while— and, by the way, there are werewolves. But every once in a while, there's a religious episode, and Scully says, like, "I saw an angel," and Mulder says, "Science says there's no angels." *[Ali and Janine laugh]* But there are angels. *[laughs]* So. And it's this very good role reversal of like, they both have their things that they believe in, and they are both real in this universe, but because— this is what Ali was originally saying, I think. Like, you can play with how people view what you're superstitious about just by them not believing the same things.

**Ali:** Right. Yeah, yeah, absolutely. I think there's like...superstitions on their own feel like they are a bigger thing that they are, and, like, depending on what you actually feel about them. Like, I still don't buy opal jewelry for myself, 'cause I'm afraid of bad luck, but like... *[Ali laughs self-consciously, Keith laughs]* Don't laugh at me! *[Ali laughs]*

**Keith:** I was laughing at how quickly you said it. *[Ali laughs]*

**Janine:** He was laughing at opals.

**Keith:** I was laughing at your delivery.

**Dre:** He's laughing with you, Ali. *[Ali laughs]*

**Keith:** Yeah, yeah.

**Ali:** But, like, I think it's that it's really just a...like, it's just a set of beliefs that someone has? And once you've figured those out, I don't think that it would be hard to play. Because tabletop games have beliefs systems built into them so easily anyway, that like, you should get experience every time you follow your superstition instead of doing the thing that your party is doing.

**Janine:** Mm-hmm.

**Ali:** Or when you ruin the mission because you had to, like, walk down a hallway a certain way or whatever. *[laughs quietly]* So, yeah, I guess that's the other hand is that like maybe you would want to talk to your GM about it and be like, "Well, my character's family might think this thing, but I don't want the bigger church to think it, so I kind of want to keep this as a separate, smaller thing."

**Janine:** Mm-hmm.

**Ali:** And you guys can talk about how it should be interpreted in the world, but in terms of how you play it, I don't think that it's any more complicated than just, like, "This is a thing my character believes, and how they act is determined off of that."

**Janine:** The last thing I'd say is maybe also look into the sort of dual function that a lot of people—especially women—had in history of handling superstitions but also handling fact, side by side.

**Ali:** Oh, yeah.

**Janine:** I forget—there's a specific term for it, and I was really taken with this term recently, and I totally forget what it is. I'm pretty sure I like shoehorned it into an Adaire folder somewhere, and I just don't remember. I want to say it's like a savvy woman or something, but it's... *[sighs]* It's some term that's from around when witch trials became a big, hot trend. Literally, hot trend. But it was basically covering people who both knew, like, oh, here's how you keep the devil out of your socks. *[Ali laughs]* But also, like, here's the plant you eat when you have a headache or when you're having like a difficult pregnancy or whatever. So, there are, in history— and across a lot of cultures, not just European cultures, of course. But across a lot of cultures, there have been these roles where superstition and things that I'm sure people, even at the time, maybe some people thought were fact and some people were like, "Well, maybe." Those things have intertwined in the past, and there's a lot of material there, if you want to find a way to root that character in a world where the impossible or what is commonly assumed to be impossible is a little more possible.

**Ali:** Yeah, that's a really good point. 'Cause, like, I think that superstition especially just grows out of survival tactics.

**Janine:** Mm-hmm.

**Ali:** I think that if you...like, a lot of people believe that if you put your purse on the floor, the devil's gonna steal your money. But on the other hand, if you put your purse on the floor, someone is gonna maybe steal your money, 'cause you're not keeping track of it. *[laughs]*

**Janine:** Yeah, that's totally another big part of it, is like, things like superstition—and even a lot of religious beliefs, especially early on—come from this want to control things that we don't

necessarily understand or can't necessarily control. So if you find the things in your world that you...or in your character's world that feel like someone might want to be able to control them or might want to understand them when there's no necessarily, like, logic to understand them, that could also be really helpful.

**Ali:** Yeah. Yeah, for sure. Keith, Dre, did you have anything else, or are we gonna move on?

**Keith:** Uh, no.

**Ali:** Okay. *[laughs quietly]*

**Dre:** I feel good about moving on, yeah.

**Ali:** Fair enough.

**Janine:** Okay.

**Ali:** Our next question comes in from Sam. Did anyone else open this thing so they can read instead of me?

**Janine:** I have it opened. *[Ali laughs]*

**Dre:** Yeah, I'll open it.

**Ali:** Thank you.

**Keith:** Oh, I was just waiting for the slide to change.

**Dre:** Do we want to take turns? Do we want to treat this like elementary school? We all have to read a page to the class?

**Ali:** *[laughs quietly]* I would love that, 'cause the reason I know that I'm not good at talking out loud is because I was always horrible at it in school, and instead of a teacher being like, "Oh, you should take a special speech whatever," they were just, like, "Oh, that's fine. You're doing good otherwise."

**Keith:** Is there somewhere where I can find the questions in order so that I don't have to search around to read them?

**Ali:** Yeah. I mean, I linked you that doc, and that's just a powerpoint that they're all there in.

**Dre:** It's in the Discord, yeah.



**Keith:** There's a powerpoint?

**Janine:** I can read this one, this next one.

**Keith:** Oh, it's in the Discord. Oh, I didn't see it. Okay.

**Ali:** *[laughs quietly]* Anyway, Janine, yes, thank you.

**Janine:** So, this one is from Sam, and Sam asks: *“How do you deal with the anxiety of correcting someone/everyone at the table when a rule has been misinterpreted or ignored? Mostly, I don’t think it’s very important, and I don’t want to be a rules lawyer, and I just ignore it. But sometimes there’s a very cool or very important rule that is being ignored, and my anxiety gets in the way of letting everyone know that they are doing it wrong. Does this matter, or should I find a way to speak up? I am also a very rules-oriented person, in that I need to know what they are and understand them so I know when to follow them and when to break them, and I know not everyone is this way, which is another reason I ignore the rule changing, but then I feel I don’t understand how to correctly play the game anymore because we’ve deviated from the established rules.”*

**Ali:** *[laughs quietly]* Sorry, we were just telling Keith...

**Dre:** Yeah, we're just dunking on Keith real quick. *[laughter]*

**Keith:** I couldn't find it. I was like, “There is no doc here,” and it's because I was scrolled up like one inch is all.

**[0:15:00]**

**Janine:** Hmm.

**Ali:** Does anyone feel like they have something really strongly to start here? ‘Cause I can, but if people are more...

**Dre:** Oh, man. I just empathize with this a lot.

**Keith:** I was a little busy, so let me re-read this real quick.

**Ali:** *[laughs]* Dre, go ahead.

**Dre:** I mean, I'm very much that person who, like, when I'm learning a new game, I get caught up in like, “Okay, what's the... how do I play this? What are all the rules?” And I get very anxious if I don't like read through a rule book before I start playing something.

**Ali:** Okay.

**Dre:** But I think it... *[sighs]* I think, in the end, I think the core question here is “Does this matter?” and I think it just depends. It’s like, is that instinct that you think people should be corrected on this rule because it will make the gameplay better or because it will make the stakes higher or make things more interesting? Then I think it’s worth bringing up. Or if, you know, that’s just the game you’re playing. If you’re playing a game where, you know, it’s important for the system to work and you all like the rules to be like crunchy and technical and stuff like that, then yeah, bring it up. But I don’t know. Like, I think if you’re somebody who is this worried about being rules lawyery, you’re not going to be the rules lawyer. Like, every time I’ve played a tabletop game, the person who’s the rules lawyer has no compunction or no worry at all that they’re talking too much and they’re interrupting other people. *[laughs]* Yeah. I guess it’s hard to give specific advice without knowing like, you know, what circumstances prompted this question. But I think, in general, if you’re interrogating yourself about is this thing worth me talking about, it probably is.

**Ali:** Yeah.

**Dre:** Because if you have the self-consciousness to ask yourself if it’s worth talking about, then you’ve probably done the work on your end to be able to bring it up in a way that’s not half-cocked and disrespectful or something.

**Ali:** *[laughs]* Yeah, for sure. I’m glad that you started, because I feel like I’m the exact opposite way when it comes to rule books. Like, when we switch to another season, I usually have an idea of what that season’s going to be, and I kind of just get my ideas from there, and then I’m just like, I want to know the class, I want to know the basics of the system, but I’ll get too tied down by what all the rules are, so I’m just going to play and assume that people will tell me what they are when we are playing, and it’s worked out so far mostly. And I think the most important thing with this question is remembering that games and what we’re doing when we play them is collaborative, so if you have a thing that’s important to you, and you think that it’s— especially if it’s the thing that appeals to you about the system, it is absolutely worth talking about. There are probably case-by-case...cases when you think to yourself, like, “Oh, you know, that’s not what the rule is, but it’s not going to change the scene at all, and it’s not really going to change the outcome of whatever this is,” and that’s probably worth just being like, “Okay, this person is going to break it. I’m fine with that.” But if it is a thing that changes one of those things, it’s absolutely worth saying. I definitely get the nervousness around saying it while people are doing the thing and talking, and the GM and the player have a good rhythm going, and interrupting sometimes feels really shitty. Again, this would probably be something you can talk to your GM about afterwards, just to be like...especially if it’s a specific rule that you were really...like you said, that you thought was really interesting, it’s worth saying like, “Hey, I don’t want to tell you how to do your job, but in that case where we did this thing, it should have been this other way.” And, I think, in most experiences that we’ve had with Austin where we’ve misconstrued a rule, how they respond is going to be the important thing there. Because your GM is either going to

be like, “Oh man, I wish that I had known that then, because I completely didn't know, 'cause I have all of these other things to juggle, and it would have changed things a lot.” Or there's sometimes when it's like, “Oh, we didn't do this right. Eh...eh.” And like, both of those answers are fine, but I don't think that being that person at the table to be like, “Hey, wait a second, we should revisit this,” is such a shameful, horrible thing that you shouldn't feel like you should do it. Because, I mean, that's what this is. There's a reason why we don't just sit down and write a story together. *[laughs quietly]*

**Janine:** Yeah.

**Ali:** Yeah. But, Janine and Keith, if you...yeah.

**Janine:** I was going to say, a thing that really stands out to me with this question is the line, “but then I feel like I don't understand how to correctly play the game anymore, because we have deviated from the established rules.” I think...you know, being a rules-oriented person, I understand that. I understand wanting to have that rigid structure, but I also think that the correct way to play these games is the way where everyone enjoys it, you know? And if the rules changing is getting in the way of your enjoyment, then that's totally a thing to bring up in general. But also, if the thing that you're getting hung up on is just the rules, but you're still kind of having a good time, maybe that's a thing to think about, like maybe...it's going to depend on every group and every player, but some games have a lot of rules, and sometimes you kind of just do want to tell that story with a relatively good framework, but you know, like Ali said, there are also situations where the GM has a lot on their plate to keep track of, especially in those real heavy systems.

**Ali:** Yeah.

**Janine:** And other players maybe are kind of new to systems or are focused on other areas of it because that's the part that interests them more. So, I think a general attitude of flexibility is really helpful, unless that is the group's priority to play something very strict and sort of operate within that strictness, because that can be fun too, but that's the thing everyone has to want to do, I think, right?

**Ali:** Yeah, for sure. Yeah, I think that's the biggest thing is determining how much it's keeping you from being able to enjoy a thing. Because I don't want to ignore the fact that this person...when other people break rules, it makes it harder to figure out how to play the game.

**Janine:** Mm-hmm. Yeah.

**Ali:** And even though being vocal about it is a thing that you're nervous about, I don't know that like, if you were acting out a scene or saying like “Hey, I want to beat this guy up,” or whatever. *[Ali and Dre laugh]* If you said, like, “I know this might be against the rules, but I want to do this,” or “I know this is different from how Sean just did it, but I want to do this the way that the book

says it.” If you're playing with the right group of people, and if you feel comfortable with those people and they realize that tabletop gaming is such a collaborative thing, they'll be like, “Yeah, sure. Sorry that we forgot it last time,” or whatever. And I think that that's kind of an easier way to be like, “Hey, that was wrong.” *[Dre laughs]* Even though that's...I'm saying it out loud, and it seems a little bit passive-aggressive, but I don't think that it would be, if you were like, “I want to do a similar action, but hey, by the way...” It's like, I mean, I don't know. Like, it's weird. When I think about this question, I think about doing *Destiny* raids?

**Dre:** Oh boy.

**Ali:** *[laughs]* Which is the weirdest way for my mind to go.

**Dre:** No, but I totally think I get what you're saying, though. *[laughs quietly]*

**Ali:** There is a synchrony at which people need to do things, but within those grounds, there's deviation there, and there's different things that people like and different ways that people want to play. And being able to recognize those and talk about them and be really open with the people that you're playing with is going to make that experience so much more better, so yeah. *[Ali and Dre laugh quietly]*

**Keith:** Um...

**Ali:** Yeah?

**Keith:** I have one quick thing which is that most of playing tabletop games is like, whenever you say something, I feel like people are ready to be countered with something that someone else says. Everything that you say has someone that's saying something back to you, and a lot of the times that thing is like, “Well, why are you doing this?” And so I think it's not a big stretch for having either other players...it's not a big stretch to have other characters questioning you or the GM questioning you or those characters responding to what you're doing in character, to just having you as a player being like, “Oh, you can't. I don't think you can do that. I don't think you can do that thing.” *[Ali laughs]* It's not like people— like, that happens all the time. Like, all the time someone's like, “That's not— oh, you can't do that thing, because there's this thing that you're forgetting about.”

**Ali:** Yeah, yeah.

**Keith:** And usually it's a narrative thing. Usually it's like, “Oh, you can't do that. That's locked.” But in this case, it's, “Oh, you can't do that, because you are...this rule.” I don't know, I can't make up an obscure rule to a game, but.

**Ali:** *[laughs]* Yeah. I think like especially just being...telling someone, especially not as the GM, like, “Hey, you can't do that,” is probably the most stressful thing that I think most tabletop

people can think of.

**Keith:** I would say maybe reframe it as...

**Ali:** Yeah. No, no, no. Like, don't say that.

**Keith:** Don't say, "Hey, you can't do that."

**Ali:** Yeah, but I think definitely saying, like, "Oh, by the way, I don't think that you can do that because of this thing," is either— like, again, it's going to be up to the GM to be like, "Yes, you're right. Thank you for telling me," or "No, it's all right." And then also, like...again, that's definitely something you should look to the GM to, because, at the end of the day, they are going to be the ones choosing which of those rules are most important.

**Keith:** Yeah, the one line in this question that is concerning for me, I guess, is the "Sometimes there's a very cool or a very important rule that is being ignored." Maybe you just have a group that's naturally rules-averse. Because I can count on one hand the time there was a major thing. Like, in all of the roleplaying history that I've had, I can count on one hand the times there has been a major thing that people were consistently ignoring that was important or really cool.

**Ali:** I mean, I—

**Keith:** It's usually just like, "Oh, you're forgetting about this little thing."

**Ali:** *[laughs]* Yeah, I understand that, but I don't want to assume anything about the system that they're playing with. I don't want to assume anything about this person's relationship with that system.

**Janine:** Yeah. Or even what system they're used to.

**Keith:** Yeah.

**Janine:** They might have switched systems and not...

**Ali:** Yeah.

**Keith:** That's true.

**Janine:** And are still kind of playing one way, and, you know.

**Ali:** Yeah.

**Keith:** I just mean, like, consider that maybe the people that you're playing with have... Like, try

playing with...if you're able to, try playing with another group and being like: do these people play the same way that the people that I play with play? Are they sometimes ignoring rules also, or is it like... *[laughs quietly]* Are the people you're playing with being like, "Okay. Well, I can't climb up there, so I guess I'll just fly." *[Ali laughs]* And you're like, "You can't fly," and they're, "Ugh, whatever, man!"

**Ali:** I would hope that that's not the situation that Sam is in, but I think that that's maybe a good kind of throughway to thinking about this. Like, obviously, just talking to people is the easiest answer, but even suggesting that people do a one-shot instead of your usual thing would be—like either getting a really rules heavy system or a really really light system like *Lasers and Feelings* and playing that and feeling if the dynamics of the game are any different or if your overall enjoyment improves so much because these rules are so little and you don't have to worry about which ones to follow and which not, or people still break rules and you're still a little bit uncomfortable with it, and then that's a bigger conversation you have to have with your group and obviously a bigger conversation that you have to have with yourself, in terms of like, maybe these...if these people cannot follow this one page of rules, maybe they are not providing the thing that I want from this. And that's going to be hard to confront, because I think it's hard to find a group of people to play with. But, again, just talk to people. *[laughs quietly]* If this is important to you and the game is important to you, you're going to be important to the people who are playing it, because they also really like playing it, so don't feel anxious or weird by saying, "Hey, this is the part of this that is important to me, and the way that you guys are doing it is making it harder for me to enjoy it." You know, end of the line.

**Janine:** Yeah.

**Dre:** Yeah.

**Ali:** Okay. Are we good to move on?

**Janine:** I think we're good to move on.

**Keith:** Stop forgetting about the death mechanics, you guys. *[laughter]*

**Ali:** Okay, this next one comes in from Nervous Nelly, and I'm going to get Keith to read this one, because he should have it up.

**Keith:** You got it!

**Ali:** Thank you.

**Keith:** *"I live in a kind of small town, and while there's a local gaming store that runs tabletop games, it's often the same group of people attending and DMing whatever game is being run. I've played a few sessions down there, and while I can get along well*

*enough with this regular crew, it's not what I'd call an ideal situation for a bunch of reasons. I've considered playing games online, but I'm worried that not sitting directly in front of the people/the learning curve of using sites like Roll20 and understanding the social landscape there, etc. being limiting factors when it comes to playing with strangers. Do any of y'all have feelings about the difference between playing face to face and playing long distance? Have you dealt with breaking the ice with strangers—especially when it comes to doing an "orc voice," AKA making yourself nerdily vulnerable, I suppose—when others may not be on the same page as you?*

**Ali:** Yeah, does anyone have any strong answers that are coming to them? Because I could talk about this first, but if anyone else...I think Dre highlighted this.

**Dre:** Yeah. I mean, I definitely think that like...I would say, first of all, don't worry too much about the learning curve of Roll20.

**Ali:** Yeah.

**Dre:** There are things that Austin does in there that I'm pretty sure are just magic and other people can't do. *[Ali laughs]* But I've played plenty of other Roll20 games without the wonderful, intricate, cool things that Austin is able to create in Roll20. And, you know, I don't want to discredit the awesome work that Austin puts in, *[Ali laughs]* but it doesn't make or break the session, right? You don't have to have like really intricate Roll20 layouts and stuff to have a good session on Roll20. And I think that playing online offers you an opportunity to kind of escape the kind of situation that you're encountering, because I had the same thing. I have some local friends that I play tabletop with, and I have great local friends that I really enjoy doing lots of other things with, but I just don't enjoy playing tabletop games with them, mostly because they're really interested in like D20 and *Pathfinder* and stuff, systems that I don't really enjoy playing anymore. Like, no shade to people who do, they're just not what I like doing anymore.

[0:30:03]

**Ali:** Yeah.

**Dre:** And so, I play games with the couple of friends who are more interested in different systems. But like, you know, I tried—when I first came back here to Louisville, and I tried going to a couple of either comic stores, or there's a really good kind of local...they call themselves Nerd Louisville, and they do lots of cool stuff, but for whatever reason, whenever I try to sit in on some their groups or join in, like...I think similar to this person, I would get along with them well enough, but I would just kind of just bounce off the couple of sessions that I tried, and I think that going online lets you, one, just meet like more people. You have access to way more people, and depending on like where you're meeting people, especially if you all are in— if you're in like a community that's already focused, like, I don't know, like I guess the fan Discord for Friends at the Table or something, there might already be a kind of like underlying common language and

stuff? or at least like maybe a common interest, and you can like, I guess, more easily have those conversations of, “Hey, I’m interested in playing this kind of game with this type of theme and this type of content and this type of system,” and hash that kind of stuff out. And as far as breaking the ice, I mean, again, do what’s comfortable for you. Like, do you need it to be over voice instead of over chat? Would it be better if, you know, you all were all on...don’t use Skype, but some other thing that lets you do like webcam talking and stuff? *[Ali and Janine laugh]* You know, whatever. And definitely, like I think the biggest thing with like, I definitely get the making yourself like vulnerable stuff. I recently GMed for the first time in a long time a couple of weeks ago, and like, trying to do like different NPC voices and stuff like that was weird, *[Ali laughs]* ‘cause it’s like, “Oh man, I don’t do this. Am I gonna look like a big dummy when I try to do like this weird voice for this character?” But I think it’s one of those things where you kind of just have to do it, and it’s going to come with time, where that kind of thing eases away.

**Ali:** Yeah, for sure. I think like looking into the Internet communities that you’re maybe already a part of is a big thing, ‘cause like, we started as a bunch of people who streamed video games together, and there was definitely like, we all liked video games, and we all liked doing bizarre shit for an audience, so that’s why the podcast works. *[quiet laughter]* But like, I had never had any experience with tabletop gaming. Keith kind of did. Dre kind of did. Jack didn’t at all. Art and Austin obviously have this big history, and Sylvi<sup>1</sup> and Janine came afterwards, and then Nick had like sort of also a little bit of experience but had never played with Austin or any of us really. And we also didn’t have that kind of relationship. Like, we would do funny stuff online, and we would talk really often, but it was never like, “My name is Hella, and I’m evil, and I’m crying on Skype with all of my friends right now.” So it was like, it’s definitely—

**Dre:** And Ali is making the rest of us cry by being Hella, yeah.

**Ali:** *[laughs]* So it’s like, for any...especially the orc voice thing. For anything that is going to be an adjustment, there’s gonna be a change in the dynamic of your relationship when you are sitting down to play a tabletop game. But like, I don’t know that like... *[sighs]* I don’t know, I do this online so much that, like, I don’t know that there is a meaningful difference between playing with people versus online? Like, I bet people have their preferences, and they’ve had better experiences one way or another. But like, if you’re not getting the thing that you want out of your like small town gaming shop, finding it online is not gonna be worse or like a harder experience. Like, especially with the Roll20 thing. If you’re not GMing, that’s not a thing that you need to know how to do. Like, you’re just gonna log in. You’re gonna type some stuff about your character. Sometimes you’ll hit a button. If you don’t know where to hit that button—‘cause I literally never do it; I hate doing it—you’re just gonna type “/roll” and then what you’re rolling, *[Dre laughs]* and you’re gonna ask your GM four times what your rolling, and it’s fine. *[Janine laughs]* Like, it’s totally fine. Roll20 is not hard. But yeah, I don’t know, maybe you’re part of a message board. Maybe you are in the Friends at the Table Discord. If you aren’t, you should probably go in there, ‘cause people are looking for a group kind of often, actually. But yeah,

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<sup>1</sup> The name in the audio recording is no longer in use.



especially if you've already like tried it with this local group, and you just know that it's not the thing for you. Like, don't let "Oh, internet is weird," hold you back, 'cause it's not really a meaningful difference.

**Janine:** Yeah. The thing I'd say is also: if you're not sure about playing online, look at how a lot of people do it. Like, everyone...so, you know, Ali mentioned this was sort of my first time—Friends at the Table was like my first time doing a lot of tabletop stuff, so I didn't have a lot of exposure to how anyone else was doing it, and then through this other Discord that I'm on, someone posted like a screenshot of their tabletop session that they're doing online with someone, and like, their GM had— it was so wild. *[Ali and Dre laugh]* It was like a whole setup where like the GM was on webcam, which like I get, fine.

**Ali:** Mm-hmm.

**Janine:** Makes sense. But then they also had this like 3D...it looked like Neverwinter Nights or something, *[Ali laughs]* this like realization of what was happening with like the characters in like a place on the screen.

**Dre:** Yo!

**Janine:** And like all this UI stuff, and I was like, "What the fuck?" *[Ali and Janine laugh]* It was so much, and I think, honestly, way too much for me. Like, I don't think I want that. But it was something where I could totally see people who maybe weren't sure about doing something entirely through text and voice and in their heads, like who wanted some more visual stuff, who wanted that connection could use that and could see that. Like, Divinity: Original Sin II has some like built in DMing kind of stuff that I could see used in a very similar way, and I could see that being a really helpful aid for people. The other thing I would say is that like if you are trying to find an online group, probably maybe start with like a one shot instead of being like, *[Ali: "Yeah"]* "Hey, let's launch into this huge campaign and make all these preparations for this thing that maybe after a couple of sessions we'll decide we don't want to do." Something like *Fall of Magic*. *Fall of Magic* was so good. But something you can complete in like a couple sittings to see how the chemistry is and see also if you like doing stuff online or if there are things you'd like to change about that experience better than committing to something huge.

**Ali:** Yeah, I think worth mentioning, I think Roll20 actually has its own like built in looking for group thing, and like, I think that that's really good, 'cause you're also gonna be in the same position with a lot of people who are just like, "I just want to find a group of people that I kind of jive with," and like, the anxiety levels and kind of like strangeness is going to be the same for everyone, that you don't have to feel like, "Oh, I just joined this...you know, I've been on this message board for like three years, and I'm deciding that I want to go into like the tabletop threads and like join in on the games," or whatever, which is an option, but like I get that penetrating an established group might be a weird thing, so finding other people who are just

like strangers might help too. Keith, Dre, you have any more to add to this?

**Keith:** I'm just generally a pretty nervous person, *[quiet laughter]* but every time that I've been forced to— “forced.” Every time that I have been in a position to do roleplaying stuff with strangers, it's always been the same sort of thing where it's been like, it's not my favorite thing, but I didn't die during it, and then games are fun by themselves. So if you could find people that you know that you would get along with, I think playing online is a really good opportunity or alternative to playing in person with people that you don't really like. I'd much rather play— Roll20 is easy, like Ali said. It's not easy, but it's like, it's not a huge obstacle.

**Ali:** It's not an obstacle, yeah.

**Keith:** It's not a huge obstacle. It has a learning curve, but it's not that bad. I would much rather play online with people that I had shared interests with than strangers that I didn't.

**Ali:** Right. Yeah, I think that was maybe the bigger point that I was trying to make before that I didn't make, which was like: you might be surprised by the communities that you're in, by the people that you will find who also want to try this. If you've done tabletop gaming and they haven't before, you might have to hold their hands a little bit or like offer to GM the one time. But like, if you're like on a forum— if you're on NikeTalk, so to speak, let's just say. That's the only forum that I can think of that's not already video games. But you post on there everyday because you love sneakers, but there's like a gaming section, and you type like, “Hey, does anyone want to play a tabletop game with me?” Like, there's probably gonna be one or two people who are like, “Yeah, I'd love to do that.” Because like, I think that there are a lot of people who are like sort of interested in this thing and just haven't gotten into it yet or haven't been invited to it yet, so like, look at the communities that you're already in. We wouldn't be doing any of this if like Nick and Austin and been like, “Oh, we should think about doing this.” And then a week later, they were like, “Yeah, you know, we should really think about doing this,” and then eventually we just did it. You know, after weeks and weeks of being like, “Yeah, you know, we should make time for that.” So if it has to happen more organically than like looking for a group on Roll20, you can try that, but also that option is there. So, yeah. *[laughs]* I think we're good to move on?

**Dre:** Yeah.

**Keith:** Yeah.

**Janine:** Oh, that term I forgot earlier? It was cunning women.

**Ali:** Ooh.

**Dre:** Ah.

**Janine:** Cunning folk. Yeah.

**Ali:** Wow. That's a good term.

**Janine:** They were a kind of combination white witch/medieval social worker.

**Ali:** Oh.

**Dre:** Hell yeah.

**Ali:** Same.

**Janine:** Yeah, it was pretty cool. *[Janine and Ali laugh]* Anyways.

**Keith:** Yeah.

**Ali:** Okay. This next one is from Kita??? and I'm gonna have Dre read it.

**Dre:** Sure. Kita writes: ***“I am absolutely abysmal at drawing, both by hand and digitally. I'm a first time GM trying to start a Dungeon World campaign with a bunch of first time players, and the biggest obstacle for me right now in starting the campaign is creating maps. We're going to be through Roll20, and I'm struggling to create maps that aren't laughable. I have attached the map I created for the first quest for reference. It took about two hours to make, and I can't say it's particularly good. Do you have any tips for creating maps that players can take seriously—even if you're artistically challenged—and any tips for creating a good overworld map?”***

**Ali:** I included this question because I knew Janine would be here and should have some suggestions. *[Janine huffs quietly]* I know that you're not super familiar with the Roll20 part of it, but I'm sure you have some guidance, so I'm gonna look up this person's map while you're talking.

**Janine:** So—

**Keith:** Because my answer is gonna be less helpful, can I go real quick in front of Janine?

**Ali:** Sure. *[Ali and Janine laugh]*

**Keith:** Janine's is gonna be good, and so I want to get the other advice out of the way.

**Ali:** Yeah, mm-hmm, by all means.

**Keith:** I have done plenty of games. I am abysmal at drawing. I can barely draw stick figures. It's so bad. I have GMed plenty of games that had no maps, and it was plenty of fun, and everybody had a good time. The other thing is there are online map generators that you can use that will make a map for you based on parameters that you input, and those are less than good, but they work if you feel like you really, really need a map.

**Ali:** Okay. While we're saying really quick things, I'm just gonna say I've linked everyone to this map. I'm taking another look at this map, and like, it's fine.

**Dre:** Yeah!

**Keith:** Yeah, it's fine.

**Janine:** Yeah, I totally...yeah, this map's really fine.

**Ali:** *[laughs quietly]* It's completely fine.

**Keith:** I think something that I had to get over when playing and mostly GMing games before we started Friends at the Table and something Friends at the Table I think never had a problem with, is like, one of the least interesting parts of roleplaying for me was always like the idea of having to physically represent actual traversal, like actual movement both on a larger scale and on a smaller scale. Like battle maps, right? Like, we don't use those on Friends at the Table. I used to use them when I played in high school, and then like I sort of grew out of them, 'cause it was like...I don't mind that I don't know exactly how many meters I am away from something. *[Ali laughs]* It's not a big deal, and it makes things actually move a lot smoother.

**Janine:** Yeah. Okay, so a thing I'll say, like right off the bat, is if you're not that particular about the qualities of your map, like aesthetically or geographically, like if you just need a place that looks like a tangible place, I think that map generators are probably one of the better ways to go, just because: one, a lot of them are very, very good; two, they're all very, very fast; and three, if you don't like what you get, you can just redo it, and it's also very, very fast. Like, it's so painless, and some of them are legitimately like...some of them I sort of look at with a lot of envy, because it's just like, oh, this just looks nice. This just looks nice, and it would take me hours to make anything that looks even half this nice. Although, they do...the downside of that is that you don't get a lot of like landmarks and things. You still have to kind of fill those in yourself, usually. But the other thing, you know, if you want more customized stuff, if you want those landmarks and stuff, going in and doing it yourself is the way to go. But the biggest thing I have to say about that is kind of the thing that I say to a lot of people who in general want to do art things but feel bad about what they come out with, because that used to and still often is me. Even though like, *[laughs quietly]* I do our postcards, and people seem to really like those.

**Ali:** They're great. They're great.

**Keith:** They're really, really good. *[Ali laughs quietly]*

**Janine:** I still feel weird about like the idea of my art being art or a thing that is good, that people like. *[quiet laughter]* So, there's like a really big gulf of confidence sometimes, and the thing that has helped me most, especially with regard to the maps— and, you know, to be clear, I've only done a handful of maps. Austin generally does the like per-session ones.

**Ali:** Yeah.

**[0:44:37]**

**Janine:** I occasionally do a nice big, quote, unquote, “polished” one. But the thing that has helped a lot with that has been looking at old maps, and I mean like old maps. I don't mean like...I don't mean like exploration times maps of, you know, when things were kind of filled in and stuff. I mean like medieval maps. I mean like early-ass fucking maps, because a lot of them are really bad. *[Ali laughs]* A lot of them are like embarrassingly bad. I have a book that is just maps from like 1000 plus years ago, and most of them are butt. They're just butt, and they look entirely achievable is the point. And this is the broader sort of art thing, is like, if you can start looking at art that you might normally just be like, “That's good. That's a good old piece of art.” If you can start looking at stuff like that and looking at it the same way that you would if you had made it, like kind of picking it apart, being like, “Well, the line width isn't really consistent, and like the spacing here is kind of weird,” things like that start feeling very achievable, and it also becomes easier to look at your art from a detached perspective of like, “If someone else had done this, how would I feel about it?” And that's a big thing with maps, because we have such a strong idea of what a good map looks like, and we have so few references for what maps—especially in like fantasy settings and stuff—would actually look like. We have these—everything we sort of imagine for these is very clean and like very, like, fold-out *Lord of the Rings*, like, map of whatever, Middle Earth and stuff. *[Ali laughs quietly]* And like, that's not really what it would look like in practice. That's not what a person who was in that world would make. So I think, like, looking into those early maps and looking into how they succeed and how they fail can be helpful, both in terms of what you're actually going to produce for your players and for your campaigns and also in terms of like your self esteem about what you're doing. Yeah.

**Ali:** *[laughs]* Yeah, I think that's like all really valid stuff. I just want to say like, again, this map is good. And like, if you don't believe that it's good, it's like completely serviceable. Like, for a game like this, really all you have to worry about is how well the map is communicating the thing that you want it to to the players.

**Janine:** Mm-hmm.

**Ali:** And like, I feel like if I was playing this, like, I know where the peninsula of this whatever is, and like, I know where there's a forest that I like can't go into 'cause it's really thick, or like, if I needed to escape from this like Northwest part, I can, you know, there's gonna be a clearing eventually, but then there's all these rocks, so I shouldn't keep going that way. Like, in terms of just...and I'm glad that we're entering this like as just players, because we can kind of talk about it as just players. Like, this is...I mean, Keith and Dre can chime in a little bit more, but like, in terms of what I need when I am looking at a map in a game, like this is...I don't know that I would ask for more. Unless like, obviously, if like someone's in a building and there's like a big hallway and like whatever. *[laughs]* Like, you would want to really sketch that out really quickly. But in terms of like having a world map, like there's nothing here...unless there's something here that you didn't draw that's like important to the plot or to the mission, like there's nothing here that's like, "Oh, I need to understand this more." So.

**Keith:** I think something that Janine said was important, which is when she said that like, Austin does the, you know, the mission-to-mission maps during, and then they get translated into polished maps.

**Janine:** Yeah.

**Keith:** Like, sometimes Austin will spend hours and hours being like, "I made a thousand little boxes and arranged them in a way that made a dope looking map," *[quiet laughter]* and then sometimes he'll draw a box and be like, "This is a hallway."

**Janine:** Mm-hmm.

**Ali:** *[laughs]* Yeah, mm-hmm.

**Keith:** So that's the...he just did that the other day. *[Ali laughs]*

**Janine:** Yeah, I was just gonna say something to that effect too, where it's like, a lot of the best maps that I think come out of Friends at the Table in particular are the maps that get done before or after something.

**Ali:** Yeah.

**Janine:** But the nature of play is that things happen during. Like, other landmarks are going to have to be put on a map that, you know, you might have the basic ones, but then your players are gonna turn left instead of right, and you have to put a city somewhere that you didn't expect or something like that. So there's a degree of like, the in-progress map is never going to be a perfect, beautiful thing, especially if you're working within Roll20's tools, because there's some... *[Dre and Ali laugh quietly]* You don't have a lot of different like brush types and stuff you

can really get into there. So, being aware that like, if you want the pristine map, that's going to either be a prep thing where you're like really laying stuff out in advance, or it's going to be a thing that, once you've explored that area, you come back to when you want, as maybe like a keepsake, like the Marielda map. That's sort of how I think of that, is it's not really...it's not as functional for players as those in-progress scribbly MS Painty-looking maps are. It's just like a nice thing to look on and be like, "Okay, this stuff's in the north end, and that stuff's in the south, and there's a dinosaur there. Okay."

**Ali:** *[laughs]* Yeah.

**Janine:** Yeah.

**Ali:** I think like, in terms of...I know that— there's another question about maps that Austin is probably going to answer the next time, and you can get more in depth information from him, but like, I think that worrying less about how the map looks and whether it looks like a beautiful piece of parchment paper, and there's like the weird dragon in the thing that like all the medieval people used to do, and like, there's a compass, and it's gorgeous or whatever. It's just like: is this saying the thing about the world that I want it to? Do my players understand it? *[laughs]* And am I going to be able to edit it during play easily? are just like the three most important things that you need from a map from a tabletop game.

**Janine:** Mm-hmm.

**Ali:** This is not...you're not playing *The Witcher*. You're not playing *Mass Effect*. You're not playing *Dragon Age*. It's gonna be fine. Does anyone else have anything else to add before we move on?

**Dre:** I'll just shout out my favorite like town map generator. You can find it on Watabou's itch.io page. They spell their name or their username W-A-T-A-B-O-U dot itch dot io, and they have a great town generator that's called Medieval Fantasy City Generator. It's quick. It's stylish. It's free. I've used it for campaigns I've run if I just need to like gen up a town map really quick. So, check that out.

**Ali:** Perfecto. Thank you. We're gonna move on to a question from Tomas. And Janine, you want to get this one?

**Janine:** Yeah.

**Ali:** Awesome.

**Janine:** *"How do I promote in-character interaction between players? My players tend to gloss over roleplaying interpersonal communication in favor of acting on their own or*

***making forward plot progress. This leaves me as a GM wishing they could have a more clearly defined rapport. Beyond direct nudges from me, for, say, a player to speak in character rather than say, 'I tell those discern realities answers to the others,' how can I cultivate a proactive habit within my players for them to communicate with each other?'***

**Ali:** Again, if anybody wants to go first, you can. I can kind of take this one here, but I'm gonna close my door, because there's drilling happening in my living room, *[Dre and Ali laugh]* so someone else take it.

**Dre:** Hmm.

**Janine:** I think this is an interesting question, because we have had these conversations with Austin relatively recently about him trying to encourage us to interact more between players but also with NPCs. Like, that became kind of a thing with *The Veil* of him pointing out, like: if you want a scene with someone, ask. And for a lot of us, that was really difficult, because I think, to some extent, we do look to Austin to guide a lot of the interactions and stuff. And, you know, largely because...for a lot of reasons. For one thing, it's a story that he's often like— we have a very strong hand and a lot of control in it, but it's a story that he is largely building, and we also all have limited time, and so we don't want to squander a session doing things that Austin or that other people might not find worthwhile. So there can be some hesitation to actually be like, "I want a scene where Signet and Tender are making pancakes *[Ali laughs]* and talking about maybe Signet should get rabbit ears or something." *[Dre laughs quietly]* Like, asking for stuff like that sometimes feels weird. And I guess the smaller side or the narrower side of this is the like making people act out conversations, and...the other side of it is I think, like, "I tell those discern realities answers to the others." I think that's...personally, I don't find that the interesting interaction. I don't find me having to rephrase a thing that the GM just told me an interesting way to engage with the other characters. I would much rather have the sort of downtime scenes where it's like, okay, you know, we're in Tender's like coffee shop space, and like we're just in a bit of a lull or whatever. I think maybe that's the way to come at it, instead of...it's difficult to make people get really involved with things that are much smaller, because then it feels more like you're wasting time or more like you're putting something else off, if that makes sense?

**Ali:** Yeah.

**Janine:** You know what I mean?

**Ali:** I think a big part of this— because like, I definitely want Austin to revisit this, because I'm sure that he's been *[Janine: "Yeah"]* with groups that aren't so willing to do this, whereas like, with us, we know we're making a show. Me and Janine mostly came from like text RP, which is very conversation-based, at least it was for me, over like rulesy stuff.

**Janine:** Mm-hmm.



**Ali:** But I think a big thing that Austin does, and like a big thing that would be useful in a GM is like, when you want a player to have a conversation about something, remind them why their character would. Like, there's definitely been times where it's like, you know, Hadrian, you know, says this thing, or like Hella, you know, goes and tells this thing to this person. And like, the player can say that, but when Austin is like, "Well, no, I want to hear what that sounds like, because Hella has this belief that XYZ, and this person is doing this this thing that's like Y through..." I ended on Z and didn't have any more letters. *[laughter]* But like, as a GM, when you're controlling the pace and the tone so much, to be like, "No, this is a thing that I want to zero in on, because this reflects a bigger thing about this character, this flag that I know that is important to you, this bond that you wrote." And I think that like, as that happens more, as you make those suggestions that aren't just like, "I tell the information that I just got to people," because usually that's not the most interesting conversation. It's usually about a thing or on the way to a thing or in response to a thing. What was I saying? No, okay. *[laughs]* I think that when a GM is able to like put the camera on that thing and make it feel important, and then when a character comes out of that interaction being like, "Oh, that was really cool. Like, that definitely was an opportunity to show this thing about my character that I wasn't sure how to otherwise," they're going to start wanting to do it more. Like, when I came into doing this, I know that I didn't do that a ton. Or at least I don't think that I did, because I didn't talk at all in season one. But then there was like the Hella-Calhoun scene, and I was like, oh, this is the type of roleplaying that I'm used to, and I like doing this, and I just have to tell myself that I like doing this. *[laughs]* And I think that like—

**Keith:** You're strangling Calhoun, saying, "I like doing this!" *[all laugh]*

**Ali:** Yeah. Yes. Yeah. *[laughs]* But like, I think that when...yeah, yes. *[laughs]* I just think that when you're able to have a character or a player have a positive response to something, they're gonna do it themselves more. I'm gonna hand off to Keith or Dre to respond a little bit more. *[Ali, Dre, and Keith laugh]*

**Keith:** I think a big thing for me, for the first half of the most recent season, was it was the first time where the characters in the party were consistently split up and alone. And it wasn't until most of the way through the season—or most of the way through that half of the season—where Austin was like, "Hey, we should be doing more scenes with each other," and I was like, "But we're all in different places," and then he was like, "Yeah, but just like, say, 'Hey, let's be in the same place,'" and I was like, "Oh, okay, that makes sense." But for the most part, I feel like I have a...I don't want to say an unfair advantage. I have like...I play a lot of characters that will just say fucking anything.

**Ali:** *[laughs]* Yeah. *[Janine sighs]*

**Keith:** And so it's really easy to stay in character, because there's a lot more stuff, that for a lot

of people's characters would be out of bounds, that for characters like Fero or Mako are not out of bounds.

**Ali:** Yeah. Austin isn't here, so I'm gonna say this very quick spoiler, but Keith definitely told a like 17-year-old kid to fuck off in the last session that we did, so. *[laughter]*

**Keith:** They deserved it! They deserved it!

**Ali:** They did a little bit. Have fun with that one.

**Keith:** They 100— okay, fine. You'll hear it. *[Ali laughs]* You'll hear it. It'll come out. It'll be, what, like a few weeks, probably?

**Dre:** *[laughs]* The truth will come out.

**Keith:** Yeah.

**Ali:** *[laughs]* People can make their own decision about that scene.

**Keith:** People can make their— yes, they can.

**Ali:** Yeah. *[laughs quietly]*

**Keith:** But yeah, I think when characters aren't roleplaying with each other— that's the wild thing. I mean, actually, both of them, for me, is like: Hey, we're playing this roleplaying game, and the characters aren't roleplaying. And I get that sometimes there's a problem with people staying in character, or even it's sometimes not a problem, but like when people are consistently skipping out on the roleplaying part...like, to me, that is so much more the fun part than the other parts. So I guess, like, yeah, try to talk to them about it? And then, if they don't talk about it, give them opportunities that they can only get if they are roleplaying. And then when they start missing opportunities because they haven't been roleplaying, maybe they'll just realize like, "Oh, I should be roleplaying," and then roleplaying's super fun, and then they'll do it more.

**Ali:** Yeah. I think stuff like love letters, stuff like being able to put a pin on downtime and saying like, "You're about to go do this thing. Talk about how you're going to do it," helps.

**[1:00:07]**

**Keith:** Yeah.

**Janine:** Yeah.

**Keith:** You could also be like prompting it. Like, when...

**Janine:** Mm-hmm.

**Keith:** When you have a character that says something, when you have an NPC that is saying something to one of the characters, instead of just saying the sentence, you can say, like, "And what do you say?" Or what does does, like, if your character's name is Hank, like, "What does Hank say? What does Hank do?" *[Ali laughs]* 'Cause I don't—

**Dre:** He sells propane and propane accessories.

**Ali:** Yes.

**Janine:** Mm.

**Keith:** *[laughs]* 'Cause I don't think your characters need to be talking in the first— or your players need to be talking in the first person for it to count as roleplaying. There's a lot of times when I do, and then there's a lot of times when I don't, and I don't feel like it's a problem for me or for anybody else. So like, prompting them in that way, even if they're like, "Okay, well, Hank says this," like, that is a good start, I think.

**Janine:** Yeah. I was gonna...that's sort of the thing I was gonna say also, is that like, *[sighs]* making room for it is important. Like, if it's a priority for you, then making sure that there is room for it, even if like— I go back and forth a lot between talking first person and third person with my characters, and I also think I do go back and forth on it because I don't really think it's that important, personally. Like, I feel like it still accomplishes the same thing, whether I say the thing or whether I say, "Signet says the thing." But sort of to a larger point, I feel like making room for players to do stuff, like giving them moments where, you know, if you find that they're really, really focused on acting on their own or making forward plot progress—as it says in the question here—then, you know, the thing to do is maybe give them a window where like there's not much else they can do. You know, like in Winter in Hieron, there were scenes with Ali and I, with our party, where it was like, "Okay, well, nothing's happening until the morning, and it's night, and you're in this camp. What are you doing?" *[Ali laughs quietly]* And like, things like that, it's an opportunity for people to, if they're really, really committed to doing some kind of action on their own, do it. But it's also...it gives them space to be like, "Well, I think I'd actually like a scene where Adaire pretends to be helpful to talk to Hella about something," or, you know, like, giving them room for that, but also like...so, there's there's making room within the system you're using, and then there's making room with a second system. Like, we often dabble in other systems with characters that we have— I was gonna say we have birthed in other systems, *[laughs]* and that's awful.

**Ali:** No. *[laughs]*

**Janine:** But you know, doing things like playing *Downfall*. I think that's what it's called, right? Where, you know, systems that are very much just like, here are your characters, and every scene is one character interacting with another character, to some end, but it really does force your hand. I think *Fiasco* also does this pretty well.

**Ali:** Yeah.

**Janine:** Where it's like, you know, you need to interact with people to make that stuff work.

**Ali:** *Follow* is good for this too.

**Janine:** Yes. Actually, I think *Follow* was the thing I was thinking of, not *Downfall*, but... *[Ali and Janine laugh quietly]* There have been a lot of systems.

**Ali:** Mm-hmm.

**Janine:** So, you know, if it's a thing you're struggling with and that you really want your players to try more of, I think introducing a system like that for just like a special thing—you know, doing your own little self contained holiday special—might be a good a good thing to consider.

**Keith:** Another thing is it says in the question that they'll gloss over roleplaying, Tomas's players will gloss over roleplaying in favor of acting on their own or making forward plot progress. Maybe try to make forward plot progress really, really difficult unless your characters are roleplaying. *[Ali and Dre laugh]*

**Janine:** Uh...

**Ali:** Mm...

**Dre:** Or reward them when they do roleplay with like forward plot progress. *[laughs]*

**Keith:** I mean, I guess like, but think of—

**Janine:** You encounter a magical door that only unlocks when two people are talking to each other about intimate secrets.

**Ali:** *[intrigued]* Yeah. *[Dre laughs]*

**Keith:** But like think of something like when we were— like *Sherlock Holmes: Consulting*

*Detective*, right? Like, think about beating that or think about finishing that game without roleplaying. Like, that...

**Ali:** Yeah. I mean, there's ways around it. That game is made to just be a bunch of people sitting at a table. Like, that is not a—

**Keith:** Not the way that we played it. *[laughs quietly]*

**Ali:** I know, but like, that game is just... *[laughs]* Like, that game is like *Sorry* or whatever, yeah.

**Keith:** Right. But the way that it was set up for us.

**Ali:** Yeah, yeah.

**Keith:** What I'm saying is like make it a way where roleplaying is an essential part of what the— like, if there isn't something to go kill, then you can focus what your players need to do around talking to people and figuring things out and talking to each other.

**Ali:** Yeah. That's a really good point, 'cause like, if the forward progress is always like, "I'm gonna go to this castle and go defeat these orcs," like, *[Keith: "Mm-hmm"]* sit down, the next like arc of your story is gonna be about a murder mystery, and they're gonna have to talk to all these people in this town, and they are going to have to talk to all of those people in that town to get answers.

**Janine:** Mm-hmm.

**Ali:** Also, just like, I'm not sure the system that you're playing, but like, if your system doesn't already have a bond system in it, which some don't, which is like, my character feels this way about this person...

**Dre:** Mm-hmm.

**Ali:** Just hack it in there. You just have to write those sentences down and then make sure that your players follow them.

**Janine:** Yeah.

**Ali:** Like, it's really easy to just put those into a thing.

**Dre:** Yeah, it...

**Janine:** Making mechanics or including mechanics that make you think about that stuff as a tangible part of the system is not a thing that I thought too much about before playing *The Veil*, but afterwards, with the sort of emotion-driven stuff, I weigh that stuff a lot more heavily now. Like, that's, I think, a really good...that and bonds and things that make you think about your character in order to actually use that character effectively—not just have fun with that character in a roleplaying setting, but to actually act with that character well—are really, really powerful, like really, really good for this kind of situation.

**Dre:** Yeah.

**Ali:** Yeah, for sure.

**Dre:** Yeah, have your...like Ali said, either look at the beliefs and bonds that are in the system, or just like make them be there if the system doesn't include them, and use those as kind of like your flags as a GM to be like: okay, if my players have this bond or this belief like written down, it's probably important to them, and if I can use this as kind of like, you know, the carrot to kind of dangle in front of them to get them to engage in the kind of roleplay and the conversations that I want, you know, it's kind of a win/win for both of you all.

**Ali:** Yeah, and even if it doesn't have bonds, which it should, and you should put those in there, *[quiet laughter]* but like, even if they're not the like... *[laughs]* Even if they're not the like most inspired ones, even if the players that you're playing with are not like the people who want to do this sort of thing, but you kind of want to get them out of their like comfort zones a little bit because it's important to you, I think that there's definitely just being like, you have so much more control over it as the GM. You can structure a mission that's around a relationship around two characters. And like, I know that...I mean, there are ways that that can fail. I think that there have definitely been situations with Tender and Signet this season where I think that Austin was maybe picking some stuff up, but like me and Janine were distracted by other things, so they haven't interacted a ton.

**Janine:** Yeah. It can be hard to pick up on that stuff sometimes.

**Ali:** Right. Yeah, yeah. Like most answers to Tips at the Table: if it's really a problem and they're really having a hard time with it, just tell them like, “Hey, in this next session, I really want you to be able to call out conversations that you want to have with people, and I also want to see you do that more.” Like, just saying those words are easy enough. There's definitely like the sideways ways that you can hack it into the game and make it easier for them, and you are definitely in the position at the table to make it easier for them, but like, just saying, “Hey, a way that I usually play with players in a way that I— a thing that I really like is when we see how characters feel about each other and not just like this dragon.” *[Keith and Ali laugh]* So, don't be afraid to also do that thing. So, yeah.

**Janine:** Yeah.

**Ali:** If anyone has...unless anyone has more, we're gonna move on. That sounds like a no. Okay. *[laughs]*

**Janine:** Okay.

**Ali:** Janine just did that one. So, Dre, you're gonna take this one from Angelina.

**Dre:** Sure. ***"I don't know if we're allowed to ask questions like this."*** I guess you are, 'cause we're reading it. *[Ali laughs]* ***"But I noticed as I was listening to the finale that Fero got so much angrier as the season went on. [Dre laughs] Was this because Keith was like super connected to Fero and was angry himself or was it just capital A acting? How much of what you guys do is acting and how much of it is what you actually feel? Does it come from a real place?"*** Hey, Keith, how mad were you at me at the end of Hieron? *[Ali, Dre, and Keith laugh]*

**Keith:** Uh, I wasn't mad at you. *[Dre laughs]* Here's the thing.

**Janine:** Really? 'Cause that was a weird laugh.

**Dre:** Yeah, really! *[laughter]*

**Janine:** That was a...hmm.

**Keith:** No, no, I wasn't. I think— well, 'cause here's why. Because when you yell at somebody like that, even if you're just acting, you do a whole lot of feeling also. It's hard to separate the two. That's like a whole section of like acting theory is how, like, doing a scene that is a really difficult scene to do can like actually affect your real emotions, and it's hard not to. Like, if you have to get yourself worked up enough to go yell at your friend in a scene, then that's like real— like, your brain doesn't know that you're joking, you know? So, I think that that's also the best way to do scenes like that is to try and feel it as much as you can, and I also think that's the best way, for me, at least, to play my characters, is to play them in ways that come from real places. So, like...I don't think Fero would have decided to get all yell-y if I was totally satisfied with what was happening in the story, but I'm also not mad, 'cause we're just playing a game. *[Ali laughs]* But I also am...it also is like real. It's like a real-ass rush of adrenaline when you yell at somebody, even if it's a joke, you know? *[Ali laughs]* So, it's like, it's not that it's acting or feeling, it's that both of those things are both of those things, for me.

**Ali:** Yeah, like, I don't think that like the genuine feelings that you're having during a session are something that you should shy away from. I feel like, especially in the more like text roleplaying that I've done, where I've had like an idea of what's going to happen in a scene beforehand,

because me and Justin have talked about it, there's always like the thing that I think is gonna happen, the thing that actually happens, because that's so much separate from like what I'm feeling and what I feel like my character is feeling in the moment, and like, I feel like that bleed is gonna happen. On the flip side of that, I think that I've had a lot of trouble like playing Tender this season, because there's a lot of things that I felt strongly about and like the things in the system and in the game that have been interesting to me, but like, I've been like, "Oh, I don't know how strongly she feels about this," or "I think that maybe this scene is more interesting if this other character talks during the scene, because maybe they feel stronger," and like don't try to suppress those feelings, *[laughs quietly]* 'cause it's going to be harder to like invent things to speak up about in later sessions, right? if it's not something that you're generally like emotionally attached to versus like what you think that that character feels about. Because there's going to be some overlap there. It should not be a Venn diagram that is a circle, obviously, but like identifying the ways that that overlaps and being able to like lean into it when you want to is like a very good thing and like a very fun thing if you know when to do it correctly. I don't mean like "correctly." I don't know what I'm trying to say, actually. *[laughs quietly]* I do a little bit, and then shit like, I didn't really enjoy...like I said before, I didn't really have a handle on how to do this until the Hella-Calhoun scene, and that like was the most emotional I've been in this show. *[laughs]* And like, I really liked Calhoun, and I like...that was definitely like—

**Keith:** Yeah, we all really liked Calhoun.

**Ali:** *[laughs]* I like very specifically...there was like a month in between when we recorded the session when Tristero was like, "This is the thing you're gonna have to do," and then we actually recorded the thing, and I was like: I know what the plan is. Like, Hella is gonna try to make a plan. *[laughs]* Hella's gonna walk into that room and try to get alone with Calhoun and try to figure out a plan with him, because he knows his father better than she does, to like figure out why he wants him dead and like, I don't know. I don't know. That's what that conversation was gonna be, and then I felt really nervous playing it, and then Hella came across as really nervous, and then she just did the thing, and...I don't know, I feel like if I hadn't leaned into that, that character wouldn't have been as good, and like, that scene definitely wouldn't have. *[laughs]* Or maybe it would have. I don't know! Maybe people are listening to this now and are now really mad at me. *[Ali and Keith laugh]* Which is genuine. But yeah, I don't know. I don't know. I like... *[sighs]* I don't know, like, especially Keith and Art and I think a lot of us are able to do the like improv thing pretty well, even if we don't think that we're doing it. Or like the ability to like know when we're doing a bit and know when we're just having a conversation is like a skill that we all kind of have. But like, I don't know, *[laughs]* if you feel strongly about a thing, and if you think your character does, there's no reason not to lean into that. But also like, I don't know, like...Keith is able to— *[laughs]* someone in chat is like, "I had a friend who was convinced that the party swap in Winter happened because Keith and Jack refused to work with each other," and that's not true.

**Keith:** That's absolutely not true, no. *[Ali and Dre laugh]* Tell your friend they're super wrong.



**Dre:** No, it's because Art and I could not work together anymore. *[Keith laughs]*

**Ali:** Yeah, mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

**Dre:** That's a joke.

**[1:15:00]**

**Ali:** I'm glad that you guys were able to settle your differences when we moved into Twilight Mirage.

**Dre:** Yeah. Mm-hmm.

**Ali:** *[laughs]* But I just rambled a lot, so if anyone else has something to say, by all means.

**Janine:** So, for me, acting has— I've always been like a really artistically inclined person. Like, you know, I know how to play an instrument, and I can kind of like do visual art stuff, and like I write, and, you know, I've always sort of...not prided myself on those things, but I see myself as an artistic person. But acting has always been— like, acting and singing are the two things that I always see myself as just like 100% no competence, do not even attempt, *[Ali laughs]* in spite of the fact that I did both of those when I was little. So it's one of those things that like, I have a hard time thinking about even attempting to act when I'm doing Friends at the Table. *[laughs quietly]* There was one occasion when I tried to do a character with a voice, and I thought I was doing so good, and then I listened to it, and it just sounded like my normal voice. *[Ali and Keith laugh]*

**Ali:** Aw!

**Janine:** It just sounded like me just doing me. So, that was not—

**Keith:** Which voice was this?

**Janine:** *[sighs]* Tisk, when we were playing that game.

**Keith:** Oh, no, that was a voice!

**Ali:** Tisk was great. What are you talking about?

**Dre:** Yeah, that's a voice.

**Keith:** That was a voice!

**Ali:** *[laughs]* Tisk has a great voice, yeah.

**Janine:** In hindsight, it did not feel like it felt in my head at the time.

**Ali:** *[laughs]* Okay.

**Janine:** So that was a little discouraging. A lot of what I what I do end up doing is like really artificially constructing a mindset. Like, I've mentioned that before, where I sort of decorate my notes for the session in a certain way, and I add like little key phrases, and I'll usually listen to some music that is relevant to where that character is at, and like sometimes I will...like with Adaire, I prefer drinking coffee. With Signet, I prefer drinking tea or just something cold. I feel like I have to like engineer things to get into a headspace, and even then, when stuff goes bad or when I feel like I get more emotional, the thing that makes me emotional is usually not what's happening to the character, but it's like me feeling— I made a joke tweet once that was like, “Sub drop but for podcasting,” *[Ali laughs quietly]* because of the way I often feel at the end of a session, which is just like, “Oh, that was terrible. Everything went bad. I'm miserable now. The rest of my night is just gonna be me sulking.” So it's never that the character mood sticks with me. It's never that I feel that. It's always that there is just another layer as a player that sticks with me where I think my performance was off or something like that, so it's a little weird. I do hope I get over that at some point and do get to a more acting-centric way of thinking about it, because I think the strongest players in our group tend to be like that, and it's something I admire about them. Art in particular, I think, is pretty good at getting into a character's headspace and making those calls.

**Ali:** Yeah.

**Janine:** Yeah.

**Ali:** We should have him answer this as well, probably. *[Ali and Janine laugh]* And probably Austin, 'cause I feel like they've kind of had the widest length of experience with this.

**Janine:** Mm-hmm.

**Ali:** I bet that when they were playing these games at Hofstra that they were not super— like, Art was not like, couldn't switch the Hadrian thing on. Or maybe he could have. Art is a great guy. But yeah, I don't know.

**Keith:** *[sarcastic]* Yeah, only great guys can switch the Hadrian thing on.

**Ali:** *[laughs]* Like, up to the Hadrian level, right?

**Keith:** Yeah. No, no, no, no, no. Yeah.

**Ali:** Like, there's a dial with different characters on them, and Hadrian is the one at the end, for sure. *[laughs]* I think Austin is in chat now saying that he always could. Dre, do you have anything to say to this? 'Cause I think you're kind of the one we haven't heard from yet.

**Dre:** Um, I'm kind of in the same boat as Janine, where like, for me, the part of the show that is that is weird for me is the thinking of this being acting, because yeah, that's something that I don't consider myself good at, even if I do feel I'm good at other things that are kind of more artistically inclined. But I was actually like, as much as I was joking with Keith, like, "Oh, man, were you mad at me?" I thought Keith's explanation was really good, and I was actually like thinking back to that scene, and I remember like, Keith, when you said, like, you do get an adrenaline rush when you yell at somebody, even if you're like acting and you don't mean it.

**Keith:** Yeah.

**Dre:** Like, I remember *[Keith: "Yeah"]* coming out of that scene feeling like, "Ugh," like physically amped up and stuff like that.

**Keith:** Mm.

**Dre:** Because you're right, like, I knew it's like, no, Keith isn't mad at me. We don't like hate each other in this scene, even though our characters are disagreeing. *[laughs]* But like, when you get into that mindset, yeah, *[Ali laughs quietly]* your body just kind of responds and pushes you forward.

**Keith:** Yeah.

**Ali:** Yeah, you mean when you get into that mindset 'cause someone is literally shouting at you. *[laughs]*

**Keith:** Yeah, yeah. No, fucking like, that's the other...that's the other thing. It fucking sucks to get yelled at too, also, even if it's a joke. Like, no one...

**Dre:** Right. *[Ali laughs]*

**Keith:** Like, 'cause I wasn't yelling at Dre as a joke. I was yelling as Fero at Throndir for fucking real.

**Dre:** Yeah.

**Keith:** As a character, and so like, it wasn't like a funny joke yell.

**Dre:** Right.

**Keith:** It was a real-ass yell.

**Dre:** I think that might be like the maddest— one of the maddest I've ever heard Keith's voice. Like, again, not saying Keith was mad, but yeah.

**Keith:** Honestly, it's one of the maddest I've ever had to get. *[Ali laughs]* So. Like, I don't normally get—

**Dre:** I'm believing less that you weren't actually mad at me now. *[Dre and Keith laugh]*

**Keith:** I was not and I remain not.

**Ali:** I'm glad that we've set the record straight there.

**Keith:** Yeah, yeah.

**Ali:** Yeah, I don't know. Like, I think the final word for this is like, I don't know that any of us really think about this as acting primarily. But like, don't resist the urge if that's coming towards you, right? *[laughs]* Like, if you feel like, "Oh, this is the scene where I'm really gonna get into this," then fucking do it, 'cause it's gonna— everything is gonna be better for it. Anyway, if nobody else has anything else, we're gonna move on to our final question. That sounds like a no? Okay.

**Keith:** Yeah.

**Ali:** So, the next one from Virginia, I'm going to have Keith read for me. Thank you, Keith.

**Keith:** *"I have trouble sitting still and usually end up doodling or knitting during tabletop sessions. I know you folks record for a long time. Do any of the Friends have activities to pass the time during play?"* Oh, boy. I have the same thing. I cannot sit still. I'm really, really fidgety. I usually have like a toy in my hand that I play with. I have like a little...like one of those little Swiss Army knives, and I'm just constantly opening and closing the screwdriver on it. I do that a lot. It's good, 'cause it's silent. It's the same sort of action as like clicking a pen but without the clicking of a pen, 'cause there's microphones.

**Ali:** Thank you.

**Keith:** No problem. *[Ali laughs]* I do have...sometimes I'll tear— what I used to do, I used to do this a lot. I used to have a napkin, and I would tear up the napkin into a bunch of little pieces.

**Ali:** Ooh.

**Keith:** And then just like put them into different shapes. Sometimes I will take...uh, this is the worst one. Don't do this one. Sometimes I will take a little piece of paper and just set it on fire. Don't... *[laughs]*

**Dre:** Yeah, don't do that!

**Keith:** Don't do that!

**Ali:** Don't do that.

**Keith:** Don't do that. Uh, let's see...

**Ali:** I do get the impulse to idly set things on fire, though. I feel like that's a thing I do when I have a candle on my desk.

**Dre:** Uh... *[laughs]*

**Janine:** Mm...

**Keith:** Yeah, I like twist a—

**Ali:** And it's just like, I have this candle. I have this straw. Let's get it going. *[laughs]*

**Keith:** Yeah, yeah. I'll light a candle, but that's one and done, so that's not as good.

**Dre:** I think a candle's different than lighting paper on your desk on fire. *[laughs]*

**Keith:** Yeah, yeah. I mean, I do the candle thing too, but I'll take like a straw wrapper, and I'll twist it up, and then I'll light it.

**Ali:** Yeah.

**Keith:** And then it'll take like 20 minutes to burn all the way down, and I'm satisfied for the entire time that that's burning down, so that's something. *[Ali laughs]* I have...let's see. Oh, I have this. I do have a pen thing that I do. I have one of those Uni-Ball ballpoint pens that you twist out from the cartridge, and mine is broken, so I will just like pull it out and push it back in, like

through the screws. That's something that I do. I have a lot of wires here for like soldering and stuff, and I'll like braid the wires. I have extra knobs. I have like a lot of knobs, and I'll spin those like they're tops.

**Janine:** What?

**Keith:** Yeah, yeah, like—

**Janine:** Oh, just like loose knobs?

**Ali:** Oh, of course Keith does.

**Keith:** Loose knobs.

**Ali:** How are you surprised to hear this?

**Janine:** I don't know. *[laughter]*

**Ali:** Of course he does. Of course he does!

**Janine:** I sounded— I heard myself sound surprised, and then I was like, “What the fuck are you doing? Of course he has knobs, just loose.” *[Janine and Ali laugh]*

**Keith:** I have a keyboard next to me. Like a music keyboard, not a computer keyboard, although I do also have that. Those are silent, so I will like sort of fiddle around on the keyboard with one hand. There's like, you know, there's no noise. I'm not playing music. I'm just like touching the keys. Um, what else do I do? I've been drinking a lot of tea, so I'll like brew tea. I have an electric kettle, so I'll like brew tea in front of me while I will record. That has been a recent thing.

**Ali:** Oh, well, your brewing system is a whole system with different cups and you pour them into other cups. *[laughs]*

**Keith:** Yeah, yeah. Well, that has slowly grown. That's slowly grown over time, and so yeah, now it's a whole thing. *[Ali laughs]* That really does help, because it's very relaxing, and it's one of— it's the same sort of thing as like tapping a pen, like it's so simple that you can concentrate really well while you're pouring these little cups.

**Ali:** Yeah. I feel like the thing that I do a lot and I like fear that other people notice and are like, “What the fuck, Ali?” is that like, I'm sort of also on Twitter a lot when we're playing games.

**Dre:** Mm-hmm.

**Ali:** Just because I— *[laughs]* wow, that was very disapproving. I'm sorry, Dre. *[Janine laughs]*

**Dre:** No, no, I was like— I was agreeing, but I'm disapproving of myself.

**Ali:** Oh, okay. I thought you were like, “Yeah, Ali, I've seen those retweets, and I'm very offended by it.” *[laughs]*

**Keith:** Yeah. I've got to not have Twitter open, 'cause I'll use it.

**Dre:** Austin, don't listen to this.

**Ali:** Yeah.

**Keith:** I have to close Twitter. It's really bad. Sometimes I forget, but because I'm better than you guys, I don't do it as much.

**Ali:** Wow!

**Dre:** Whoa. *[Keith laughs]*

**Ali:** No, we all have different coping mechanisms. What I was gonna continue to say is that...yeah, keep laughing.

**Keith:** At least I'm not reading stuff! I'm not reading a book.

**Ali:** *[laughs]* Twitter isn't a book.

**Keith:** It is booklike.

**Ali:** Twitter is— no.

**Dre:** Mm-mm.

**Ali:** Follow better people. A thing that I...like, I grew up around my brother who would constantly be watching a TV show and playing a video game at the same time, because like he needed to be doing both of those things to focus on one of them or focus on anything that wasn't just like, “I'm really depressed and anxious,” and I'm sort of the same way, *[laughs]* so having like two things instead of just the one thing really helps. And like, Twitter is getting harder to do that with, because sometimes you'll just see a tweet that just makes you really upset, *[laughs]* and that happens more and more often, so I should be using it less as a coping mechanism. But it's like

a thing that isn't going to pull me out of it too much but like is also just a second thing to think about, so the second thing that I'm thinking about isn't like, *[nervously]* "This is bad. I'm bad. I'm nervous. I don't know what to say. *[laughs]* I don't know how to care about this. I don't know what's happening." So I think that part of it is a big thing. I think for a while I was like begging Sylvi to get a fidget spinner, because I would be able to hear, every time that she was talking in-character, she would be like either clicking her mouse or like tapping her knee on her desk.

**Dre:** Mm.

**Ali:** And I was just like, the roleplaying you do with so good. *[laughs]* Like, just do literally anything else with your hands, *[Dre laughs]* 'cause people should be able to hear the things that you're saying. Sylvi has since gotten a way better mic, and it's not a problem anymore, but like that was also a better thing.

**Janine:** And they got a better mouse too, right?

**Ali:** Oh, yeah, yeah.

**Janine:** They got a silent? Yeah.

**Ali:** I believe so, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. But yeah, just having something on your desk that your hands can deal with is a huge thing.

**Dre:** Mm-hmm.

**Ali:** And like, it isn't a thing that you should be ashamed of, obviously. Like, no one at the table should be like, "Hey, Virginia, stop knitting. We're about to go fight this dragon." Like, you can fight the dragon fine. *[laughs]* But yeah, if anyone else wants to chime in here.

**Keith:** I just want to say, real quick.

**Dre:** Yeah.

**Keith:** Someone in the chat talked about fidget cubes and fidget spinners. Fidget cubes: too loud. Fidget spinners: they're not too loud, but they can get picked up on microphone.

**Dre:** Oh. Uh oh.

**Janine:** Yeah.

**Keith:** So, you know, keep them away from the mic.



**Ali:** Yeah, I—

**Dre:** Ali, have you heard my fidget spinner before?

**Ali:** No. Nope, nope.

**Dre:** Okay. I keep it under the desk, so. *[Ali laughs]*

**Keith:** I have edited videos where Kylie<sup>2</sup> wouldn't put down a fidget spinner, and I can definitely hear it. Some fidget spinners are quieter than others. Some of them are intentionally loud. Like, that's one of the things they do is that they make a whirring sound or like a slight buzzing.

**Dre:** Mm.

**Ali:** Yeah.

**Keith:** You know? So just, you know, careful.

**Janine:** There's actually a tradeoff with fidget spinners where the better they spin the louder they are.

**Keith:** Mm-hmm.

**Janine:** The quieter they are, the worse they spin, because you have to add oil to the bearings to make them quieter, but the oil sort of counterintuitively provides friction in there, *[Ali: "Oh"]* so it makes them shittier spinners if you want them to be quiet, which sucks for our purposes.

**Ali:** Oil doesn't work as like a lubricant that just makes that keep spinning?

**Janine:** You would think, but they're already like so...

**Keith:** They're so good, yeah.

**Ali:** Hmm.

**Janine:** They're like specifically tuned in a way that like the oil kind of slows them down. That's what I read, anyways.

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<sup>2</sup> Name has been updated since the recording.

**Ali:** Hmm. All right.

**Keith:** Yeah.

**Ali:** Yeah, the...

**Janine:** 'Cause I had a spinner, and I like made it— I noticed it spun well, but I was like, “This is kind of loud,” so I oiled it a bit, and it turned into a shitty spinner. And also, every time I used it, I had a habit of like accidentally hitting something with it while it was spinning. *[Ali laughs]* So it'd be totally silent, and then it'd be like, *whap whap whap whap whap*, so I had to stop doing that. *[Dre, Ali, and Janine laugh]*

**Keith:** I just, I hope anybody that is nervous about how much moving and tapping or knitting and doodling that they do, that my fucking *Lord of the Rings* novel of stuff that I do at my desk... *[Dre laughs]*

**Ali:** Oh, yeah.

**Keith:** That helps. *[laughs]* It's not weird, trust me.

**Ali:** The fact that you are not literally setting a thing on fire at your desk, I think, is something that your other players appreciate. Or like, knitting is the like most low impulse or like lowest, you know, bothersome thing that you could probably be doing. Again, going back to like Austin's Hofstra days and being like, someone at this table is just playing their DS.

**Janine:** Mm.

**Ali:** Like, we spent three hours talking about how we were gonna play this game, and as soon as we went to go play it, someone opened their DS. Don't do that. Like, don't play a different video game while you're doing this, but like... *[Ali and Dre laugh]*

**[1:30:09]**

**Keith:** Mm-hmm. Yeah. I've played games with people that have, like, in system, also watching just like cable TV while playing, and it's just a— that's so bad. *[Ali laughs]* Like, don't...like, I understand the impulse to like try to keep your brain occupied, but it's about trying to keep it occupied so you stay focused, not 'cause like you're fucking bored and you want to watch a rerun of *Law and Order*. *[Ali laughs]*

**Janine:** Yeah.

**Keith:** Fuck that person. I'll type who it is in the chat, in the Discord.

**Ali:** Okay. *[Dre laughs]*

**Janine:** Things that I really like...I really like those silicone squishies, like specifically not the ones that are foam, because I feel like they make a sticky hand sound when you let go of them. But the silicone ones are like really soundless, and you can kind of squish them and pull them, and they're very satisfying to play with. I also have a couple of like gashapon toys that I keep around my desk. One of them is like a girl who's like got a ball gown on, and you can pop the ball gown in half, and then she's got like a slinky sort of mermaid tail dress, and it's just fun to just kind of fiddle with that. I've also got this chicken, and its head spins around, probably like 340 degrees, not all the way. So like, moving it back and forth is quiet and fun. But then there's also my notes, which I often do totally doodle in instead of actually writing full notes. Sometimes the doodles are of a thing that Austin is describing, and they're very helpful doodles. *[Ali laughs]* Other times...as other people were talking, I was going through my Winter in Hieron notes, and I found a...I guess it's supposed to be like a jellyfish, right? It's got like a round part on top, and then it's got like these sort of squiggly tentacle parts, but the squiggly tentacle parts are actually the sort of downward elements of the word "ugh." U-G-H-H-H, and all the H things are sort of like- the G curls down, but then the sort of second stem of the H curls down into like little tentacles. This wasn't going well, this session, I don't think. *[Ali laughs]* If I'm looking back, this was one where I was having a rough time. I also drew like that weird double tree thing? Remember that in the Anchor? That was weird.

**Keith:** The hotel? Oh.

**Ali:** Ohh.

**Janine:** There's like a double...yeah.

**Ali:** Wait.

**Janine:** Another thing I do with Signet is, because I always put in photos or, you know, pictures and stuff like that to kind of set the mood, a thing I will often do is like color in the lips, like *[laughs]* give the picture different colors of lipstick and then erase it just to kind of give myself something to focus on, or I'll like color the hair in or like draw a crown on or weird shit like that. Totally keeps me busy and is fun. It's a good time.

**Ali:** Yeah. Yeah, I like, definitely when there's like...I don't know, audio processing is such a thing, and like having a conversation with someone is such a thing, and like doing a thing for four hours straight is such a thing that I don't think that like...

**Dre:** It's rough.

**Ali:** Yeah. *[laughs]*

**Janine:** Yeah.

**Ali:** You don't have to. If this is the thing that you want to sit down and do, and four other, five other people also want to sit down and do it, just being like, "Hey, I'm going to knit" is not a deal breaker for anyone. And, going around the table, is like, you know, a thing that everyone kind of, at least here, sort of needs. So, yeah.

**Janine:** Yeah, and as long as you're paying attention. Like, if it's your turn, and you have to be like, "Wait, what are we doing?" then that's probably not great. I mean, there's some situations where like people have a hard time retaining things that they're only hearing, and like, believe me, I get that. But also, you know, you want to make sure that while you're doing your thing that the other people at the table don't feel like you're keeping busy kind of at the expense of their experience, you know?

**Ali:** Yeah. Also, a thing that I want to say while we're talking about this: take breaks. Take breaks.

**Janine:** Yeah.

**Ali:** When you need to take a break, take it, and take breaks. *[laughs]* If you don't need to take a break to pee, you just like need to stand up and like walk down the hallway and come back, like...

**Janine:** That's just healthy.

**Ali:** Yeah, yeah.

**Dre:** Mm-hmm.

**Ali:** Yeah.

**Janine:** Yeah.

**Ali:** Don't feel bad about suggesting that, 'cause like, sitting down for four hours is a task, whether you're being an orc or not.

**Dre:** Oh, also, don't drink exclusively caffeine while you're playing, either.

**Ali:** Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah.

**Dre:** Like, drink water.

**Ali:** Mm-hmm. Yes.

**Keith:** Oh, another good one. A video game controller that is not on is a good one, where you just press some buttons.

**Ali:** Ooh!

**Keith:** That's good. Silly putty's good.

**Ali:** *[laughs]* Silly putty.

**Keith:** Silly putty's really good. You can stretch it. You can coil it.

**Ali:** Yeah.

**Keith:** You can press it on things.

**Ali:** I have a ton of videos...

**Keith:** You can see like, hey, what on my desk can I stick this to?

**Dre:** Make you some homemade slime.

**Ali:** Yeah, I have a ton of videos on how to make homemade slime. I will give it to you, and then you'll make it and bring it to your tabletop session. *[laughs]*

**Janine:** Just don't make crackle slime.

**Dre:** No, don't do that.

**Janine:** Stick with like a nice butter slime, or...

**Ali:** Oh, crackle slime! I haven't even...

**Janine:** You don't want to do like an iceberg slime either. That'd be bad.

**Keith:** No, but...

**Ali:** Is that the...what are these new slime trends?

**Janine:** Oh, these are all old slimes. *[Ali gasps]*

**Dre:** Oh, yeah.

**Keith:** These are old slime trends, yeah.

**Janine:** Let me tell you, these are ancient slimes. *[Ali gasps]*

**Keith:** The new slime trend is putting it under a hydraulic compressor. *[Ali and Dre laugh]*

**Ali:** Oh, man.

**Dre:** Hang out with some eight- and nine-year-olds. You'll learn all about slime, Ali.

**Ali:** Wow.

**Keith:** And trains.

**Ali:** I got into YouTube slime. I thought I was into it. Maybe there's just like, you know, vintage YouTube slime that I haven't seen yet. *[Ali and Dre laugh]* But yeah, I think, unless anyone has anything else to say about how to keep your hands busy—or about slime, because our new show is about slime—we're gonna call it for tonight. No one has anything to say about slime. Okay. *[Janine laughs]* So, I have been a Alicia Acampora. You can find me [@ali\\_west](#) on Twitter. This has been an episode of Tips at the Table, and I think a really successful one, despite Austin not being here. *[laughs]* Again, there are like probably a couple questions here that I'm going to make sure that we save for Austin. I think the one from Tomas especially should be answered from a GM perspective, even though I think like our player perspectives were really important. And also, if you have any more questions, or if you have a question for a specific person or for a specific group of people or anything, you can email us over at [tipsatthetable@gmail.com](mailto:tipsatthetable@gmail.com). We don't answer in order, so if you haven't heard your question yet and you're sweating a little bit, we are gonna get to it. We just kind of pick the questions based on the people who are actually here, and it's, you know, we'll get to it. *[laughs]* But otherwise, my lovely guests joined me. Janine Hawkins— or, do we do outros? Do I—? No.

**Keith:** Let's do it. Let's do one.

**Dre:** Yeah, let's do it.

**Ali:** Let's do it.

**Keith:** You already started it. You already started it.

**Ali:** Yeah, Janine. *[laughs]* I'm gonna go personally around the table and thank everyone for being here and give them a little bit of time to talk about the— why am I still talking? Janine Hawkins, thanks for joining me. *[laughter]*

**Keith:** Wait, how will they know what an outro is unless you describe it in detail?

**Ali:** *[laughs]* Janine.

**Janine:** I'm Janine Hawkins. I'm [@bleatingheart](#) on Twitter, where you can find a lot of my video game writing that I do across various websites. I actually, I want to say it's actually a year ago now, I saw someone's video about how to make butter slime, and they actually included butter in their butter slime as a joke. *[Ali laughs]*

**Dre:** Whoa.

**Janine:** But I didn't know enough about butter slime, so I thought that they were serious that it had to have butter in it. *[Ali gasps]* But then I started watching other butter slime videos, and no one else was putting butter in it, and I was like, "Oh, I've been had." *[Ali laughs]*

**Dre:** You gotta use that Model Magic clay.

**Ali:** *[laughs]* Yeah.

**Janine:** Ugh, no, no! Don't...Model Magic is bad.

**Dre:** What...okay.

**Janine:** It's bad.

**Dre:** I gotta get with you and learn the slime secrets.

**Ali:** Andrew Lee Swan, thank you for joining me on this episode of Tips at the Table, and what is your personal experience with slime?

**Dre:** Uh, well, since I'm in training to be a family therapist, I work with a lot of children who are ages like 8 to 13, and they all fucking love slime. *[Ali laughs quietly]* So I've learned how to make a lot of slime, and I have made a lot of slime.

**Ali:** Ooh.

**Janine:** What's your favorite activator? *[Ali laughs]*

**Dre:** *[sighs]* Oh, boy. See, here's the thing: they all know this, and it's like a nice relationship inversion thing, where they get to feel like empowered and stuff, and they get to lead the session, and...so, I don't know. What's— is it—

**Janine:** Do you use contact lenses?

**Dre:** Uh, yeah, I use contact lens solution.

**Janine:** There you go. Contact solution.

**Dre:** There we go. Yeah.

**Janine:** There you go. That's your go-to activator right there. *[Ali laughs]*

**Dre:** All right, so that's the activator. It's not the baking soda?

**Janine:** I don't think you use baking— okay, we can have this talk later. *[Ali laughs]*

**Dre:** Or baking powder? I know I definitely used— I made some last week. We used baking soda.

**Ali:** Mm?

**Janine:** Oh.

**Dre:** It came out pretty good. Yeah.

**Janine:** Hmm.

**Dre:** But I guess you can find my uninformed slime takes at [@Swandre3000](#) on Twitter.

**Ali:** Perfect. And Keith J. Carberry, I would like to say thank you as well for joining me on Tips at the Table.

**Keith:** Thank you for having me.



**Ali:** And also, do you have any personal slime experiences? *[Dre laughs]*

**Keith:** Yeah, I actually am part slime. I leave a trail of slime wherever I go. *[Ali and Dre laugh]*

**Janine:** Ew.

**Ali:** I noticed that.

**Keith:** My activator is borax.

**Dre:** Ugh.

**Keith:** And you can find me at [youtube.com/runbutton](https://youtube.com/runbutton). Please go to watch the videos at [youtube.com/runbutton](https://youtube.com/runbutton).

**Ali:** *[laughs]* And again, my name is Alicia Acampora. You can find me at [@ali west](https://twitter.com/aliwest). The show is at [@friends table](https://www.facebook.com/friendsatthetable). I'm going to find out what the Facebook is, because I'm always like, "I think it's this," and I don't know.

**Dre:** It's just Friends at the Table.

**Ali:** Is it just Friends at the Table? Okay.

**Dre:** It's just [facebook.com/friendsatthetable](https://facebook.com/friendsatthetable). Yep.

**Ali:** Slash friendsatthetable, no underscores, just the name of the show. We had the room. We took it. It's over there. And I don't have a lot of experience with slime. Janine sent me a lot of slime videos, and I would watch them to go to sleep, 'cause they were very relaxing. And, you know, that's my personal slime tale. Thank you, everyone.

**Janine:** My favorite slime videos are— sorry, are...

**Ali:** *[laughs]* No, by all means.

**Janine:** There's an ASMR girl named PPOMO who does like "Piercing Your Slime Ears," like that's literally the title of one of her videos.

**Ali:** No.

**Janine:** Where it's like, she has one of those microphones that has the ears on the sides of it.

**Dre:** Hmm.

**Janine:** And she puts slime over it, and then she like pokes through the slime.

**Ali:** No!

**Janine:** I think she also does like surgery on your slime ears and like slime brain surgery.

**Ali:** *[laughing quietly]* No.

**Dre:** Okay. Yeah.

**Janine:** Eating your slime brain. Stuff like that. *[laughs quietly]* A+.

**Keith:** Honestly, this is a stretch to call this a slime video, but I like anybody that's drowning in Orbeez.

**Ali:** Oh, Orbeez.

**Janine:** Oh, God.

**Keith:** Like, 85 million Orbeez! I'm drowning in Orbeez!

**Dre:** Wait. What's an Orbee?

**Keith:** An Orbee is a little pellet that's made of some sort of oil polymer, and when you soak it in water, it turns into a marble-sized goopy ball, and they—

**Janine:** Sometimes they have like smells, like you can buy them at like home stores, and it's like lavender, but they're not called Orbeez. They're just like scent beads or whatever, but it's the same shit.

**Ali:** Ooh.

**Keith:** Yeah, and they never shrink. Once they grow, that's it. They're permanently that size. And I do believe that Orbeez are going to cover the planet. I do believe that one day Earth will be taken over by Orbeez.

**Ali:** I'm having a little bit of an emergency here. Janine, did Pom Pom Slime delete their YouTube account?

**Janine:** Uh...

**Ali:** 'Cause if there's no Pom Pom, I'm like gonna have a problem. *[laughs]*

**Janine:** I wonder. I haven't like kept up with Pom Pom. *[Ali sighs]* They might have like made a new one or something.

**Ali:** I'm gonna have to look for this later. I was gonna Pom down.

**Janine:** I bet they were— they couldn't have just deleted their YouTube, because they were definitely making that good creepy kid content money, *[Ali laughs quietly]* 'cause all their shit was like “Learn colors,” whatever! Like, they were...

**Ali:** Yeah. When they leant into “learn colors,” I stopped watching them, because it was just like...

**Janine:** We'll have to crack that case later.

**Ali:** Yeah, yeah.

**Janine:** Should we clap?

**Ali:** Yes, we should. We should indeed. *[laughs]*

**Janine:** Okay. *[laughs]*

**Ali:** We should clap at—

**Dre:** You don't want to talk about slime for the next 20 minutes?

**Ali:** Well, like, I was gonna— I was like, “We're all still talking about slime. I'm gonna plug my slime YouTube,” and then it wasn't there, and it was like very stressful for me.

**Janine:** Plug your slime Etsy that you've been just keeping out on the down low, you've never told us about it. *[Ali laughs]*

**Dre:** Your slime Instagram account. *[Ali laughs]*

**Keith:** I want a little more credit for pulling borax.

**Ali:** True. You know.

**Dre:** Yeah.

**Ali:** Does borax work for slime?

**Janine:** Borax isn't a deep slime cut. I'm sorry, Keith.

**Ali:** Yeah.

**Keith:** Is it? I've never even heard of borax until I heard about it for slimes.

**Dre:** What, really?

**Ali:** Slimes.

**Janine:** That's like the OG activator, and it's tricky, 'cause you gotta like dissolve it in water, so I think it's fallen out of favor. It's also a little difficult to get, 'cause you have to get the like Mule Team bullshit.

**Dre:** It's toxic, right?

**Janine:** Yeah, it's also not super safe.

**Ali:** Yeah, the first time I heard about borax was there was like a way to use water and borax to make like fake snowflake ornaments.

**Janine:** Mm-hmm, yeah.

**Ali:** And I was like, "Oh, I want to buy this to do this," and my mom was like, "No. *[laughs]* It is toxic. You are not gonna touch it. If you make those ornaments, the cats are gonna eat it and die. Like, we're not doing any of this." And I was like, "Oh."

**Janine:** You can make cool crystals with it too.

**Ali:** Yeah, I think it was that kind of thing.

**Janine:** Like, you make like pipe cleaner words, and then you dip them in the borax water, and then they get all covered in crystals. It's pretty dope looking.

**Ali:** Yeah, it was that exact thing, but you shaped them into snowflakes. Anyway, we should clap at 40? Is anyone there?

**Janine:** I think we can do 40.

**Keith:** Oh, I think I accidentally closed— oh, no, I haven't. Here it is.

**Dre:** I'm there.

**Keith:** 40, got it.

**Ali:** You have some time. You got some time. *[clap]* Perfecto. We're gonna make do. Thank you, everyone, for joining us. We are no longer live. Janine, hit it!