Transcribed by: @robotchangeling

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

KEITH: Hi, my name is Keith J. Carberry. You can find me on twitter @keithjcarberry. You can find the let's plays that I do at youtube.com/runbutton. We just started a whole new series of Gundam games. We're gonna play 8.

AUSTIN: Eight of them.

KEITH: Eight different Gundam games.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

KEITH: It is the 08 MS games is the name of the series.

AUSTIN: Mmm, mm-hmm. Also joining me, Janine Hawkins.

JANINE: I'm Janine Hawkins. I'm @bleatingheart on twitter. And I have Cherry browns, I think?

AUSTIN: Mmm.

JANINE: I think those are the ones I have?

AUSTIN: I think I have red.

KEITH: The browns [unclear ??? 0:44]

JANINE: Brown's not an appealing name.

AUSTIN: Ehh.

KEITH: The browns I thought were already the quieter kind.

JANINE: Mmm…

AUSTIN: I don't know the breakdown.

JANINE: I mean, they're not the loudest.

KEITH: No.

JANINE: I got them because they're like loud in a...there's like different kinds of loud—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: And the loud that these ones are was the...it's like a, I don't know, there's some sort of like— the clickiness versus the clackiness or some fuckin', I don't know. I don't know.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I forget what I have.

KEITH: I'll say this. Your keyboard sounds plenty loud on the mic. [chuckles]

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] I think that's what she was saying. I don't think she was...

JANINE: [crosstalk] I know, that's the thing, is like, I'm happy with this keyboard when I'm not on mic, but sometimes I gotta type with a microphone directly over my keyboard. [chuckles]

AUSTIN: Yeah, I think she was not dragging...I don't think Janine was dragging you and I, Keith, though we also have loud keyboards.

KEITH: No, no, I just mean, in my head, the browns, I thought, were the quieter ones, but then like—

AUSTIN: Mmm. Mm-hmm.

KEITH: Hearing them over the mic, they certainly don't sound like they're not that loud.

JANINE: Ooh, no, no.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

KEITH: Yeah.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: The internet says that they are, "the middle of the road option, appropriate for both typing and gaming." [chuckles]

KEITH: Oh, great.

AUSTIN: Great.

JANINE: [doubtful] Mmm.

KEITH: Mm-hmm. Don't you love it when you get a gaming keyboard, and you can't word process?

AUSTIN: Oh, that's— yeah. That's why I don't write anymore, it turns out. [Keith and Janine laugh] I just got a gamer keyboard, all I do now is game.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Today we have a bunch of questions that came in, fairly recently, almost all of them, and there was like a...every once in a while this happens, where, you know, you look at your inbox, and you're like, there is a theme here. People are lined up and are having similar ideas and questions. So we got a lot of questions today about worldbuilding and like starting a new game, the beginning of a game, and changing systems and stuff like that. So we have a bit of a theme on this one, and I'm excited to dig into it. The first one comes in from Brianna, who says:

> "Hi there! Love the show! I've been really inspired to GM some games with some friends, partly due to Friends at the Table. However, I have never GMed before and have only been a player in a few GMless games and two D&D groups. I don't really want to GM in D&D and would mostly be interested in running a game in systems I've never played before, like Dungeon World or Scum and Villainy. Is it a bad idea to start GMing in games you haven't played before as a player? Do you have tips on how to do this effectively? My friends are very understanding people, but I want it to go as smoothly as possible for everyone involved!"

AUSTIN: I think we've probably all been in this place at some point. Not all, I guess, but many of us have been in this place. You know, I think about D&D even, historically, the kind of pitch for it was, alright, someone's gonna go buy the red box starter set and be the one who learns how this game works and then teach it to friends. It wasn't always that thing of like, you have an older sibling who teaches you how to play or, you know, you have a friend who knows and then you pick it up later. I think this happens for a lot of us. So, first and foremost, totally. You can pick up something like Dungeon World or Scum and Villainy and begin playing it, even though you haven't played it necessarily with other people. Janine, I know you have some experience doing this with the Dragon Age RPG, right?

JANINE: Yeah. I think my biggest piece of advice is…'cause like, when I picked up the Dragon Age tabletop game with that group of players, none of us had looked at it before. I had read the book, obviously— [chuckles]

AUSTIN: Uh huh.

JANINE: I'd like gone through it and learned the system. But also, it's my first time GMing and stuff.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

JANINE: Like that's...I've only ever GMed games for this group and no others, and that was the first one with that group. I think the most helpful thing was to really hone in on what is the core of this system, what is the thing that moment to moment is making this game work. Rules wise, mechanics wise, things like that. And in the Dragon Age game, it's tests, basically. It is a roll that you...the GM sort of sets a number and says, like, "I think this is a challenging test, so the number's gonna be a 9," or whatever. And then the players roll against that. And most of what you do, from combat to just general social encounters and stuff, is a variation on that system. So once you get that system down, everything else is a lot easier to adapt to, even if you're not super confident.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: And I'd say, like...once you nail that down, then worry about stuff like, okay, well there's also specific flight combat rules for enemies that fly and shit, and like, there's all these movement rules and things, like do we want to mess with that? Well, maybe not right out of the gate, but, you know.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

JANINE: I think it's totally reasonable and a totally valid approach to start with a very simplified understanding of a system, and then as things go on, once you start to feel more confident, introduce the more complicating factors.

AUSTIN: One hundred percent. You know, I don't know that we've ever done it that way...or, I've done it that way in terms of...in past seasons, in terms of like building out what opening adventures or missions or whatever there will be, and making sure to either leave out some of the more complicated stuff or encourage, by building out particular set pieces, very basic stuff. And not have to worry about things like...it was very far into Scum and Villainy before we started to talk about ship combat or ship rules or vehicle rules, right? Or even thinking about something like, if you go back and listen to early Dungeon World stuff, it's like, alright, I'm gonna have something that's like defy danger up top, but we're not gonna get deep into managing spell uses or things like that until we have a better grip on something. And you can do a lot of really complicated games like this. I definitely think, of the two you're thinking about, Brianna, Dungeon World is a much easier game to wrap your head around as a GM than Scum and Villainy is, and probably as a player too. But, you know, I've played in games of things like Burning Wheel, which is a fairly complicated game, with GMs who say like: alright, listen. We're just literally not gonna look at the rules for like large-scale combat or for dueling.

AUSTIN: [cont.] And people will still fight with swords, like, you know, you can still do a swordfight without doing the rules in the book that say, "these are the swordfight rules," by using kind of the more generic resolution mechanics. So, yeah, Janine, I think you're totally on point, there. Keith, do you have any thoughts on this? I know you've run D&D. Had you already played D&D by the time you were running it?

KEITH: Uh, so I ran 4th Edition when it was really new.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

KEITH: And so no one that I played with, including myself, had played it before.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: We had played other...we played Pathfinder and other editions of D&D before. And in my first games— ope, someone drop?

AUSTIN: Janine did. She blue-screened, so we're gonna see exactly how good Zraig is at keeping our files going.

KEITH: Okay. [laughs] Alright, alright, that's alright.

AUSTIN: For people who don't know what we're talking about because it got cut from the pre-show, we're now using this thing called craig.chat to try to streamline some recording stuff. And we expected that this might happen, but, you know. I will text her back. But you can continue what you were just saying, there, Keith.

KEITH: Okay. Yeah, so, my first experiences with tabletop games, our GM had GMed plenty of times before. And that wasn't a good experience, so I think it's... [Austin laughs] One thing to remember is don't...don't discount a lack of experience as something negative, because plenty of experience can also be a negative. But like...I don't know, I feel like...like you said, Austin, a lot of gaming situations are like, "We all want to play this game, who's gonna GM?" and someone has to be the one that says, "I'll GM, even though I've never GMed before."

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

KEITH: And I feel like that's really common. But the good news is that it's probably easier than ever to GM a game that you've never played before, because you can go online and watch or listen to other people playing it. I mean, I don't want to assume, but if you're thinking of games like Dungeon World or Scum and Villainy, you actually probably have a lot of experience with those games, even though you've never played it or GMed it.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

KEITH: Like, being able to use other people's games as resources is, I think, a huge leg up over like...the first time that I GMed, it wasn't like the internet didn't exist, but actual play wasn't...a thing that I—

AUSTIN: A big thing, yeah, totally.

KEITH: It wasn't a big thing, and it wasn't a thing that I knew about, so I didn't have any...I didn't have and I didn't know that I had a way to go online and watch other people play this, [Austin chuckles] to be like, okay, what does a game like this look like and sound like? And you already know what a game like this looks like and sounds like.

AUSTIN: Totally. The...that's my other big advice, though, for sure. I think about something like...Dungeon World, I definitely went and listened to actual play podcasts as soon as I could when I was prepping. For Scum and Villainy, I watched...thankfully, I watched two of the designers play the game, actually, before getting into it. The Sprawl I don't think there were any other APs for, but at that point I'd played enough Dungeon World, enough PbtA, to be pretty comfortable jumping into that system. Likewise for The Veil, though I would have loved to have...I probably should have sought out some stuff with The Veil, just to see how other GMs focused on the emotion stuff and some other stuff there. The...I'm trying to think if there's any other examples of that specific thing. I actually pulled up— I watched some Beam Saber before our Beam Saber game recently. The other thing I do is just like...read through the book a couple of times, look for stuff that I'm confused by, and then see if people have had that conversation online. The most frustrating thing right now, if you're a new GM, for me, is that I can't direct you to Google+ anymore. Because that is gone, and all of the posts that were there are gone, and there were SO many places where a GM or a community would like figure out some rules confusion. And all of that stuff is gone, and it fucking sucks.

AUSTIN: [cont.] But, you know, there are still sites like The Gauntlet, or like, you know, Forge, or now Itch has some RPG forums. All of the…da da da da da da...not all of the Blades and PbtA stuff have their own unique forums, but those forums do exist, same thing with Burning Wheel. A lot of sites have that stuff. And likewise, you can check on just sites like Twitter. You can do a search to be like: hey, has anyone looked up what's up with like group damage in Dungeon World? And you just do a search for something like, "damage Dungeon World" or "group damage Dungeon World", and there's often a chance that you'll stumble into a conversation. So don't be afraid to go to a search engine and just put in the question you have, and try to see if you can find a solution beforehand. But also don't get caught up on that stuff. Learn the basic resolution mechanics, jump in, have a good time with your friends, and do your best to like roll with it. Take notes when things come up that you don't understand, to be like, hey, how do boats work in this game? But don't worry about getting it right in the moment. And then after you've done that first session, or the second session, whatever session it is where you have a question. Then make sure you allot yourself an hour or so between sessions, at least, to look over those notes and get some clarity on stuff that maybe you didn't know in the moment.

AUSTIN: [cont.] But just let it roll, and, you know. It is, you know, just as we always say, like, oh, actual play, sometimes the dice roll one way and you misread them or you apply a rule wrong. You know, kind of let it roll, go forward with it, let the story kind of unfold the way it did. Janine, welcome back from the crash.

JANINE: Hi.

AUSTIN: Did you...Zraig says Janine 2 has connected, which is interesting.

JANINE: That's...weird.

AUSTIN: Uh huh.

JANINE: Yeah, it's a good thing we have Zrai— Zraig. I hate it still.

AUSTIN: Uh huh.

JANINE: 'Cause Audacity refused to recover my file.

AUSTIN: Great.

JANINE: I mean, also it's on…

AUSTIN: It's on Youtube, yeah.

JANINE: So whatever. But, it did totally refuse to. It was like, dang, your line is wrong, so.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm. Two great notes from the chat, here. Thomas Whitney says, "I would also say a big thing is touching base between sessions to get feedback from your players. Always ask specific questions of your players, because otherwise they'll trend to say things like, 'I don't know, it was fine.'" Huge, yeah, absolutely.

JANINE: Mm-hmm.

AUSTIN: And then Nich Maragos in the chat says, "I got some good answers to Forged in the Dark questions I had on the Friends at the Table Discord, too." That's totally a great thing. I'm actually now part of the Beam Saber discord, also. After I ran that, I was like, I want to be in that place just to soak in some of the answers and questions that people have, and that has been really, really rewarding. So, look to see if a game you want to play has a fan Discord. Or, again, there are lots of gaming communities out there that you can look at and try to get some tips from. Let's move on. This one comes in from "Tired of D20", who says:

"I hoard RPG systems, and I'm very frustrated that I barely get to play any of them. Every time I try to shop a system around to my friends, either people seem interested but they don't have the time because they're in multiple other games, or they express disinterest at trying an unfamiliar system, and we just end up playing D&D or Fate. How do I get people more interested in the systems I want to try, so I can stop feeling so much like a dragon lying on their hoard? Also, how have you dealt with packed schedules in the past and present?"

AUSTIN: [chuckles] Two big good questions.

JANINE: Yeah…

AUSTIN: Yeah. I will say that I've been fairly lucky to be with people, playing games with people, who *generally* want to try new stuff, or at least have some subset of people who want to try new stuff. You know, I spent college playing D&D a lot, but also...or like, there was a handful of games that basically were our main games. D&D, Call of Cthulhu, Legend of the Five Rings. But then, like every semester, someone would be like, "Hey, I really want to play a game in the Buffy system." "I really want to play a game in a system I made." "I really want to play something that I found at a con that seemed really cool." And, in general, we kind of just found a good way of being like: we're gonna keep doing our main game, but we're gonna, maybe, you know, every other week or once a month we'll try something new. Or: hey, maybe not the whole group will stop playing this to go play this other thing, but, you know, maybe some people want to play a separate thing on another day that week. And so that helped a lot in terms of trying to do that. I know now as like an adult that is a very difficult prospect, to juggle multiple groups or something like that. And so, for me, at this point, what I do is kind of...I think about, how do I make a pitch to the group to try something new. And it's often like, hey, look at this really cool move. I think about going back to when we were prepping for The Veil and how often I was just like, [excitedly] "Yooo! Look at this cool class! Look at this cool thing!" based on what the interests I knew players had already were. And that helped. But I don't know, are there any other tips, here, for getting people excited for a different system?

KEITH: I have something that's sort of related to that last bit, Austin. It's usually tough to compare video games and tabletop RPGs, [AUSTIN: mm-hmm] because of how much more limited video game systems are. But I think that actually helps in this case, 'cause it's like...when you play a video game, it's really easy to get in and figure out how everything works in the game, and you can just go in and do it. But the scope of the things you can do in the video game are pretty much always severely limited.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

KEITH: And so, yeah, there's gotta be some way to get someone to be interested in a different way of playing than the way that they can in the game that you're already doing.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

KEITH: 'Cause it's like...it's such a bigger thing to get someone to like, read a book, and spend who knows how many hours playing the game before it really clicks and it starts to feel second nature. It's sort of what we were talking about at the end of the last question, where it's like...how long does it take before you're comfortable in a system.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: But, like, there are definitely ways to sell to your friends, like...here is the cool stuff we can do in this game, that I want to do, that we can't do in our current thing.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

KEITH: Because it really is like...you know, you're rolling dice and you're talking, but the way that different games present themselves and how they ask to be played are so hugely different sometimes that like, you really can get a lot out of just switching systems. Even like, from one 2d6 system to another 2d6 system.

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah. Totally. I think that that makes a pretty big point. Janine, again, I know that you kind of were trying to get players for your Dungeon World— or, not Dungeon World, your Dragon Age game. And you didn't just jump right into Dragon Age. Was part of that like, "Hey this is a more complex game, and we should start with something a little simpler"?

JANINE: Um, yeah, I mean...a lot of that was that I wanted to...I've mentioned before, I sent out like a questionnaire to figure out what people were most interested in in the actual Dragon Age setting, because that was obviously what I wanted to focus on. But, you know, we started with Fall of Magic, because I wanted to see how people played. And like, every person I think, especially people who really like stories and storytelling, they have their little things. They have their little things that will always kind of hook them. And like, Fall of Magic was really good in terms of like, it made a lot of those really obvious in my players, a lot of like, okay, I know this player really really really likes knights.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

JANINE: And things like that. That sort of knight-squire-lord dynamic. So I can totally play to that. Things like that. Every player has shit like that, that if you can find it…

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: This sounds really manipulative. [laughs]

AUSTIN: No, this is flags, this is the...yeah.

JANINE: You know, if you can find it, you can...yes, it totally is. But you can figure out what in this book is going to speak to this person.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

JANINE: You know, the example that comes to the top of my head is, for me, I really like a lot of...I like games and characters and things that are like, that kind of interact with the natural world, and like…

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: I don't mean druids, but I mean like alchemists.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

JANINE: I mean like, people who have to gather things and craft things. A lot of my characters end up being very...having like a handiwork kind of side to them, even if I don't intend for it. But handicrafts and that kind of thing end up playing this role. And so, to appeal to me as a player, I think it'd be very easy if you know that, to be like, "well, in this system, there's this crafting mechanic, and when you get stuff, you can do this," and like, okay, I'm listening.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

JANINE: Every player has something like that. Even if the thing that player's really into is number, dice roll, combat stuff, you know?

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

JANINE: But everyone has a thing. And if you can find that thing and appeal to them...not just in terms of what the character's doing, but in terms of like the mechanical things that they as the player will be engaging with.

AUSTIN: Totally. I think part of that, too, is you're going to end up with a group where maybe you have four players and there's something in a game for two or three of them, but maybe not all of them. Or you can't see it right away. And one thing is to...ideally, you want everyone to read the book ahead of time and let you know if there's something cool there. And the other thing is: don't set out to play a super long campaign, right? I really— especially if you're first trying to learn a system. Like, hey, what if we took a break for one arc, and we did a side game in the same setting, or a different setting, who even knows, in this other system. Just for a month, you know, maybe three or four sessions. We'll just like make some characters, or I'll make some pre-gens, or whatever you want, like we can...be really flexible as the GM, and say, "Let's just

try some stuff out." It's one of the reasons I love the live games so much for us, it's just like, hey, let's just try this out.

JANINE: Mm-hmm.

AUSTIN: Like, we don't need to commit to doing this for a year. [chuckles] And maybe we'll like it, maybe we won't like it, maybe we'll see a version of it we would like. Or like, hey, this is neat, but, you know, it's not necessarily what we would want to play long term. Or, maybe you'll play something and be like, "Shit. I can't stop thinking about that game. We should do this." And that will also just get them in the habit of wanting to try different things out, you know?

JANINE: Fan modules also.

AUSTIN: Yes, yeah.

JANINE: Or like fan-developed classes.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

JANINE: There's some wild shit out there for stuff like Dungeon World.

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah. Totally.

JANINE: Where, maybe if you put the book in front of someone, it's just like, yeah, thief, whatever, I've heard all this shit before. [Austin chuckles] But then you look at the fan-made stuff, it's like, okay, con artist is a class, like.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally.

JANINE: Things like that.

AUSTIN: There's a Reddit post that has like the complete list of Dungeon World classes, including all of the fan classes, and there's just like really cool stuff out there for it. A lot of it is extra, or for purchase, and some of it isn't necessarily balanced particularly well, but that's okay. Try to have a good time, find stuff that makes your players interested, and roll with it. You know, and something that makes you interested too, 'cause like...I will say the worst thing in the world would be for you to be like, "They finally found a system they like that isn't D&D or Fate, and it's terrible." [Janine laughs]

KEITH: The monkey paw curls.

AUSTIN: Right, exactly. Totally, totally. That's why I really advocate like, get them in the habit of trying new things, and doing the sort of, "hey, what do we like about that, what didn't we like

about that" conversation, because that'll help in the long run to eventually find something where you're all on board. Uh…

KEITH: Um…

AUSTIN: Ope, you have one more answer?

KEITH: I just had this idea right now. What if...maybe one way to get people who seem more interested in playing the same game you all are used to, is to introduce playing some board games. Like, hey, let's learn this board game and play this today, [AUSTIN: mm-hmm] instead of doing an RPG, and then eventually you're like, yeah it's fun to learn new games and then have fun with the new games. Like, definitely a smaller bite-sized thing than learning a whole RPG system.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Maybe slightly less effort than like...than doing like, "Today we're doing Fiasco!" or whatever.

AUSTIN: Right. Yeah, totally. Alright. This one's fr—

JANINE: Also, this…

AUSTIN: Oh—

JANINE: We didn't really answer the schedule thing, did we?

AUSTIN: Oh, no we didn't.

KEITH: There's no answer. [laughs]

AUSTIN: There isn't.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: No one's ever scheduled anything, ever.

JANINE: It's hard! [Janine and Austin chuckle] There's a reason this is such a like...tabletop group meme.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

JANINE: Of just like, we found a system, we all made our characters, we played one session, and we haven't talked in three months, like. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Yep. About anything! Ever! [Austin and Keith laugh] We just, we were avoiding each— we work in the same place, we don't look at each other at lunch. [Janine and Austin laugh] The answer there, for me, is just like: don't be afraid to use scheduling tools. Don't be afraid to have a spreadsheet or a shared calendar. Don't be afraid to send reminders. Don't be afraid to just check in. And if you're in a game and you're like, "I can't make it this weekend", say that as early as possible. And if you're in a game and you're like, "I just don't want to do this anymore", be honest about that and don't drag yourself to it, and don't…

JANINE: Mm-hmm.

AUSTIN: It should never feel like an obligation in that way, and the sooner that you're able to be honest around that stuff, the better it will be for everybody.

KEITH: And, this is something that we brought up on one of the first tips, which is like…it's easier to get people to all show up, if when they show up…whoever's hosting, if it's like a nice relaxed time, and there's like food that people can have. And, you know, people are conscious about breaks. Like, if every time you show up to play an RPG and it's like five hours in a row with no breaks and no food, people get kinda grumpy. [chuckles]

JANINE: Mm-hmm.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

KEITH: And so, if you're the one who's really pushing to schedule more frequently and more often, if you're able to, like, say: you can come to my house, and we have this couch or we have this place that we can do it, or I found this place we can go, and maybe I'll buy pizza or something. That always helps to like…

AUSTIN: It does.

KEITH: Turn it from like, oh we have to do this 'cause it's our campaign, to like, oh rela— you know, a five hour vacation of like, ugh, I want to go play my game, I don't wanna…

AUSTIN: [empathetic sound]

KEITH: 'Cause sometimes playing an RPG feels like work!

AUSTIN: It really can, yeah.

KEITH: And, you know, so you have to push against how difficult it is to actually play these games for any extended period of time, and how inconvenient it can be also.

AUSTIN: Totally. Alright.

JANINE: There's also a degree to which—

AUSTIN: Oh, nope. Gotta go back. [Keith laughs]

JANINE: Sorry, sorry, this is the last thing. [chuckles] Here's the last thing I'll add, 'cause this is the thing I'm sort of dealing with now, with my group. We're playing...you know, we've been playing The Quiet Year for a while now, since before Christmas, basically. We did our first Quiet Year session like I think in...early December? And then we just did our second one a couple weeks ago, because schedules have been so wonky. But the thing that does help with that is I have kind of...you know, we're playing it in seasons, and I've made sort of notes between seasons. And in one season we had one player who wasn't able to make it for the second season, and someone who wasn't able to make it for the first was able to make it for the second.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: So like, I, again, made sure that I have notes that are very detailed and up to date about here are the things that have happened, here's what's going on on the map, so it is easy to catch up. I made sure everyone can read those notes, 'cause I wrote them in cursive originally, [Austin laughs] and turns out someone in the group can't read cursive, so I redid the notes in type, so we're all good there. But another thing I did is, because it's so difficult to schedule this group, I have sort of structured the main campaign in a way where it makes sense if people need to sit an arc out or something like that.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

JANINE: Where, you know...and also, you know, I didn't do this as well as I should have in the first sort of arc that we did, but making things...making sort of individual excursions bite-sized enough that if someone is able to be there for one but not another, it's not like they just disappeared in the middle of a scene kind of thing.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: It's a lot of planning. It's not always going to work out. But if you know that's a thing, where some people can want to participate but can't participate regularly, structuring things in a way that can account for that.

AUSTIN: Totally.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: The last thing, there, that I want to say that is like, another way to deal...you just reminded me of, in terms of notes, is a thing I have access to because we record these is recordings. And if you're playing online, that is a thing you can do even if you're not publishing a podcast. You can use something like OBS to do a local recording, and just have that to refer to in case you need to. Clear it with your players first, [JANINE: yeah] first and foremost. Just because some people are just like, I don't want a recording of me, period, which is totally, totally acceptable and fine.

KEITH: Like, even if you put a phone on a table you could do this.

AUSTIN: Right, yeah, totally. Yeah, you're totally right.

JANINE: That's how I make my Quiet Year notes, is I have an OBS recording with the map and all that stuff.

AUSTIN: Yep. Totally.

JANINE: And then I just watch it at 2X speed and jot everything down.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally. So like, consider doing that. It helps sooo much. Alright. For real. Next one. [Janine chuckles] Josh says:

> "I recently started a game of Dungeon World with five friends. To start off, we played a game of the quiet year to build the town they would start off in, [Keith laughs] and then we dove into the game. Most of the players are new/mostly inexperienced, and none have played Powered by the Apocalypse games before (including myself, I've just DMed Dungeons and Dragons several times), But with the start in the quiet year, they've all gotten comfortable with the collaborative aspect fairly quickly. I want to encourage the players to help build the world and explore it, but many times they just suggest things out of nowhere that are usually kind of goofy. I don't want to be a stick in the mud, but I'm more interested in exploring the world in play than having the players add random details off the cuff or joke about killing NPCs. I feel like part of the problem is just having five new players, which leads to people getting sidetracked when they're not actively playing, and occasionally interrupting. I don't want to be a huge stick in the mud or chastise players for goofing off sometimes, but I'm not sure how to softly shut down the wall of suggestions that don't make sense while encouraging contributions that add to the world."

[TIMESTAMP: 0:30:07]

AUSTIN: One way for me here, is that a thing that I try to do more than just being like, "Anyone can shout anything!" is ask specific questions and get them in the mode of answering to describe that stuff. If everyone's already in this sort of shouty mode, that might be a really hard thing to move to, but even if you just supplement it with that, it will ensure that you get the details that you want and need their collaboration on. And the other half of this is to be like, okay, is to dig down on that stuff until it hits the ground. Like, they might have an idea that is floating way off the ground, so to speak, right? You know, you go into a...okay, we're in a new town. And someone says, "And the new town is...everything is painted pink!" and you go like, instead of being like, "Uh, no, that doesn't...this is like a town of serious industry." what you should say is, "Interesting. This is a town of serious industry. Why is everything painted pink? Where does that come from?" And they may continue to just be goofy, and if that's the case, then there may just be a disconnect between the kind of game you want to run and the one that they want to play in. And that is a tougher thing to do, because it means you might have to rethink where you're at [chuckles] and like what you want from the thing. But, at the very least, those are some techniques I've used to try to get people back into the lane that I was hoping to be in.

KEITH: Mostly because you do ask so many questions, as soon as this started…

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

KEITH: The questions that are being asked, I was like, oh, ask questions. I was like, oh, that's like the way to— that's what Austin does! That's the way to do it. [Austin laughs] And then the other thing that I would suggest is also like, maybe try, you know...if they're saying the stuff, like if they're talking about the town that's all pink...I would maybe suggest you making connections for them, like if they have accidentally said some bullshit, [AUSTIN: yes, totally] then you can connect to some other bullshit that they used to say, and then you can make those connections and create a more grounded world, without them even having to help.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

KEITH: Or, they helped by coming up with the nonsense. But, you know, if they are interested in playing the sort of game that you're interested in playing with, helping make a grounded world by connecting the dots for them might give them the chance to see what you're trying to do. But, again, they might just want to play a goofy game where they kill the guard, [Austin chuckles] 'cause the guard's there, you know?

JANINE: Mm.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

JANINE: Yeah, this is on my mind, 'cause I just did...I literally, a few hours ago, was doing the thing I mentioned earlier, watching the recording I'd made of the last Quiet Year session that I

played with my group and making the notes for the next session. And, a thing that I noticed I was doing that I wasn't really thinking about in the moment, and was one of those things of like, I need to interrogate if this is actually effective or what...is this appropriate for this kind of game? It's a thing that I think is better for a system like Dungeon World, than I think it is in terms of a habit for Quiet Year. But, whenever someone at the table was kind of, had forgotten a detail about the world as established or was sort of slightly off from what the card was actually asking, I would do the thing of like, is that *because* XYZ?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: I don't think that's great for Quiet Year, because quiet year is a much more open thing. But for a game when you're actually GMing to kind of nudge things back on track, I think it makes a little more sense to be like, okay, well, the townspeople are now okay with this thing they weren't okay with a little bit ago, is that because they think they can return the bones to the rightful descendents or whatever now? Instead of just reburying them to placate the spirits or whatever.

AUSTIN: Yeah. For what it's worth, I definitely think there is a place for that sort of "is that because" in a game like the quiet year, it's just that I want that from every player.

JANINE: Yes.

AUSTIN: I think there's a—

JANINE: Yeah, that's the problem, is it's a group where we don't...this is the...well, no, I mean, we played fall of magic, that's also GMless. So they've played GMless games before. But I think the instinct is still to respond with, "if I propose something, then it's correct", and that's not what I want? [chuckles]

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

JANINE: But that's, I think, the current of the group, or the way that things tend to fall, so that can be tricky, depending on...so yeah, that's the dynamic of that group in particular, that's not gonna work for everyone.

AUSTIN: The...yeah. It's one of those things where, if you can establish it, you can even carry it forward. I've been going back and listening to some COUNTER/weight stuff recently, and Jack has been doing that too, and they actually mentioned that one of the things that was happening a lot in mid-game COUNTER/weight forward, is players asking that to each other. Was like, you know, Mako would do something, and then Art would say, "Is that because...*blank blank blank*", you know, or whatever, blah blah blah.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And that is, like, if you can get that feeling at the table, then that's like, *swish*, like that's ideal.

JANINE: That's the thing. That's, I think, where it came from, is I will also sometimes do that as a player. And, on the one hand, I get worried about being too pushy at the table as a player, but it's a completely different dynamic when you're the GM, because it feels...I worry that it's less of a suggestion.

AUSTIN: Yes, totally.

JANINE: But it is...when you're just at the table with everyone else, it's supposed to just be like, here's an idea that I'm throwing out.

AUSTIN: I will also say that there is value in...and again, it feels manipulative, but sometimes you know where things are probably going to go, or you know the cards you're holding. And there is a degree of like Inception-style, like hey, I'm setting up a thing that you will like, and I want you to get there. And there is a way in which those sorts of like, "hey, is that because blank", where what you don't want to do...sorry. Where you say, "Is that because you feel this way about this NPC?" or "Is that because of the secret obligation that all members of your family have to this, you know, secretive mysterious organization?" or "Is that because *blah blah blah blah blah*." That stuff can start to do the frame that then you get to— or, the setup that you get to pay off later. What you don't want to do is say, "Is that because of the secret obligation all members of your family have to that mysterious organization?" and they go like, "No, I just think this guy's a dick." [Janine laughs] You shouldn't then be like, "but really, it was because of the secret obligation all members of your family have to this mysterious…"

JANINE: [imitating reasoning] The obligation makes him a dick.

AUSTIN: A dick, yeah, no. Like, at that point, the thing you should start doing is like, alright, well, let me look at the cards I have back here. I guess I don't have the things lined up that I thought I did. There were so many times—

JANINE: If that player is interested in the secret obligation, they will pounce on that.

AUSTIN: Totally! They'll be like, "Yes, absolutely, that makes a lot of sense."

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Go listen to Twilight Mirage. There is so much of this. And I don't know why this comes to mind, but it's a lot of stuff with Dre, where I'll be like, "Hey, is that because this?" and he'll just jump on it in that exact way. I think some of the stuff Even, especially with one of his— whatever his rival was during the Scum and Villainy game. I remember a lot of that stuff— not a lot of it,

but some of it being like, me suggesting a thing, and then him either being like, "No, that's not it." or being like, "Yes, that is exactly it." [chuckles] And it feels good. The other thing I do want to say here is to go back to the other thing which is: they may just not want to play a game as serious as you. They may not want to do detailed worldbuilding. They might want to kill guards and collect, you know, baubles that are magical and get +3 swords, and...or just be random and be whatever. And there's a degree to which you can start to corral some of that stuff into some sort of logic, it's just gonna be a cartoon logic. You know, I…

JANINE: Some of it's just gonna be Duckburg moments.

AUSTIN: Some of it's gonna be Duckburg moments.

JANINE: Where like...I don't think anyone really wanted that town to be named Duckburg, but get it on the table, like, get it put out there.

AUSTIN: Yeah, take— make the joke.

KEITH: Don't speak for me, please. [all laugh]

AUSTIN: People wanted it to be called Duckburg. [JANINE: mmm, yeah] This is why we don't call it Duckburg, because now Velas is in a different place, and I think it's important that we know it as Velas and not Duckburg. But, but. I think that's still a good example. Where it's like, everyone has the joke, and then you go, "We're not naming it Duckburg!" You don't go like, [overly strict and serious] "No. Duckburg is off the table. [chuckles] This is a serious game." [Keith laughs]

JANINE: There are no ducks in this world!

AUSTIN: [chuckles] I burned them all!

KEITH: I mean, and the other thing is that these are your friends, and so ostensibly you like them—

AUSTIN: Alright, slow down, we don't know. We don't know that.

KEITH: Oh. Okay.

AUSTIN: I'm looking for the word "friends", ope, it does say friends. It says "five friends". You're right, you're right, you're right.

KEITH: Right, yeah, so—

JANINE: Five enemies.

KEITH: So, ostensibly you like them and enjoy spending time with them and think they're funny probably, or, you know.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: So, maybe you can have a good enough time playing their goofy nonsense cartoon game, and then when the game is over, you can say like, "Okay, now let's do one that's more serious."

AUSTIN: Yeah. Totally.

KEITH: And just like, have your fun here, and say like, okay, we got that out of the way. Or not we got it out of the way. [Austin laughs] Let's do one where things are like, we're doing a real story this time or something.

JANINE: Also, they might just like...I always make the joke about the beach episode, but they might just want the beach episode outlet of just like...you know, you have this very serious thing, and then sometimes it's just like you just want your characters to eat ice cream and get up to some shit.

KEITH: Mm-hmm.

AUSTIN: Yeah. The other thing I want to say is just, in general, as a general tip for this, is: come to the table broad, don't come tight. Come with like a lot of possibility space. The reason that we say like...I mean, the reason we say "draw maps, but leave blank spaces" or "leave blanks", is because that's a principle inside of the Dungeon World book. But, the reason that I like to apply that really to a lot of games and in a really...in a way that isn't just about the worldbuilding but is about the tone and the aesthetic, is because there will be dissatisfaction if you show up and you're like, "Here is the thing I want to play." And I think that that, part of the reason that can happen is because everyone's idea of what that thing is will be a little bit different from everybody else's. I've said it before, but I think the beginning of Twilight Mirage was like, eight people who had eight different ideas about what that game was going to be. Whereas the beginning of COUNTER/weight was like, we're pretty much on board, because we don't fuckin' know! Because like, I guess I know the name of these planets, because we did that worldbuilding game, but that's kind of it. Or Hieron, if you go back and look at like my initial pitch for Hieron, that includes stuff like, you know, Adventure Time. And it's not a very Adventure Time-y game? You know, I guess some of the more serious Adventure Time-y stuff would be parallel to it or somehow related, but it's not a...it isn't a game of like bubblegum princesses, you know? But it could have been.

JANINE: What, you don't remember the episode where Jake chokes out the flower queen? [Keith laughs loudly]

AUSTIN: That could have happened.

JANINE: Three times?

AUSTIN: That could have happened. I don't know enough about Adventure Time.

KEITH: I've seen enough of that show to know that when it goes dark, it goes darker than you think they would be allowed to go.

JANINE: That's true, yeah. Mm...

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally. But, not that dark. [chuckles]

KEITH: No, not choking out the same person three times dark, I guess.

AUSTIN: But there was still stuff...that specific thing of like, "hey, it's goofy, but I know there's this line of melancholy inside of it too", was as close as I wanted to get with my prescriptive nature of what this world is, right? Was like, hey, here are some touchstones. Here is a playlist that I want to have to help evoke it. And that's also a way you can do this, right? I think a lot about how adventure games, and especially text adventure games on PC back in the 80s and 90s, used to come with things called feelies, little...like the box, you'd open up the box, and besides the disc there'd be like, printouts from whatever the spy organization you were joining in the game was, or—

JANINE: Oh my god, is our postcard tier— are we just making feelies?

AUSTIN: We're making feelies. Yeah.

JANINE: Huh.

AUSTIN: I think that like the—

KEITH: I've always said that about Friends at the Table.

AUSTIN: We're always making feelies! [chuckles]

JANINE: [laughs] One way or another.

AUSTIN: It'll make you feelies. But like, those games would have all sorts of little cool props with it. Maps and, you know, tchotchkes, and stuff like that. And that stuff isn't just a bonus. Those aren't just preorder bonuses. Those existed to help bring you as the player into the world of those games, into the tone of those games, into the vibe of what that space was that you were

going to enter, and like help get your imagination on the right track. And so, for me, I have not— I have a Bluff City soundtrack, or Bluff City spotify playlist, and I have a Season 6— not Season 6. I do have a Season 6 one that I'm working on, but a Spring one. But at this point, I haven't felt like I've needed those so much. I will send those around at some point, Keith and Janine. But, for COUNTER/weight and for Twilight Mirage, it was super important for me to send those around. And, I know, also super important for players to build their own to help do that. And like, it was a good way...same thing we always talk about sending around, you know, inspiration pics and stuff like that. That stuff helps a lot with getting people on the same page. So. So yeah. Lean into that stuff. Uh, ready to move forward?

KEITH: I do have one thing that I'd like to add, which I think applies to a lot of questions that we get.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm?

KEITH: And it didn't occur to me until somewhere between the last question and this one. But something to remember is like, what you bring to the table by having listened to the Friends at the Table backlog. [Austin chuckles] And like, how that changes your expectations for how a game is going to go, and the things...and how listening to Tips at the Table episodes [AUSTIN: mm-hmm] gives you the idea of how different players want different things and gets you even thinking about, maybe for the first time, I know that playing in Friends at the Table got me thinking about for the first time the things that I want out of a game and how that's different from what other people want. And the people that you're playing with probably don't have those ideas [AUSTIN: mm-hmm] in their head yet. So, it's important to like...when you do find advice from this podcast that speaks to you, to remember that the other people at the table probably don't have that advice.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah.

KEITH: So, remember that.

AUSTIN: That's a huge point. And that you shouldn't have that high expectation. Or that particular expectation, rather. Not high. But like that specific thing that they should be onboard with all of that. And you're thinking about ways to like breach these subjects as organically as possible, and like, try not to be didactic. Don't think about the way we play games as like, the right way to play games. Don't think about the way that like, some other podcast does as like that's the thing. You can be like, "hey, I want to capture that energy, I want to capture that experience" to some degree, but like, doing something else isn't wrong, and if you're having fun doing that other thing, you're...I mean, probably not wrong. I guess there's other—

JANINE: And also—

AUSTIN: There are ways in which you could run a game, and I'd be like, "mmm, don't do that," but. [chuckles] Inside of this, what you've positioned in front of us, Josh, not so much.

JANINE: It makes— also, just. On a very similar note, like, if you're aspiring to the energy and the storytelling and whatever of your favorite actual play podcast, it took them maybe several hundred episodes to get to that point.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

JANINE: A lot of them start bad or start in ways you didn't get to see because they didn't save those episodes or didn't even record them. It can take time for that kind of tone to really spin up in a group.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm. Even with us!

JANINE: Mm-hmm.

AUSTIN: I don't think we will ever do a season where before episode 5...that's not true. I think Spring in Hieron has been fucking great off the ground. But I can't imagine us doing a new *system* and a new season where the first five episodes are just...everything is just perfect. Everything is just really running.

KEITH: And even Spring was the first one that started off really, really good.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Agreed.

KEITH: Winter didn't, I don't think. It wasn't *bad*.

AUSTIN: Winter had its moments, but no. Uh, you know what, Winter had like Red Jack right away and Mother Glory.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I think Winter...Winter's my least favorite season that we've done, right? But that's mostly because it was a drag, and because I was in a bad, dark place, and because...having gone back to listen to it, I made choices I wouldn't make today as a GM. But the…

KEITH: Have you said which ones?

AUSTIN: Mmm...not really. And I don't think I will. I think those are like private notes about how to do better with a particular group, more than like, universalizable notes. But also, I think it's important I made the choices I did, does that make sense? It's like…

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: It's like when you...it's like going through a breakup and you're like, "Mmm, I handled that wrong. But I'm still glad we broke up!" [all laugh] Like, I don't...mmm. There still was not—this was not it. But, maybe I could've done this this and this differently. But I do think you're one hundred percent right that like...it's still a lot of, "hey, do we have it yet?" Even Marielda, which I think is also a really good, strong season. There's a lot of us just like, not getting the systems right. There's a lot of us stumbling over rules and trying to figure out who these characters are. Spring is definitely the one where I feel like out the gate we fuckin' had it, and hopefully the end is similar. [chuckles] We'll fuckin' see!

KEITH: Honestly, some of my favorite stuff that we've done was the bouncing back and forth between Aubade and uh…

AUSTIN: Yeah. The University.

KEITH: The University and Fero and Samol.

AUSTIN: And Samol. Yeah, me too. I mean, that's part of the reason...part of the reason why I think we did so well at it, or the reason I'm happy with it, is because it was a pretty high concept thing. It was the sort of decision we would make at the mid or the end of a season, not at the beginning.

KEITH: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

AUSTIN: And we could only do that because we've played these characters for hundreds of hours now.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: You know? Because I've been sitting on that Samol Fero stuff for two years. We've been thinking about what that could be.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: That isn't how people… So like, this is why I get when people say like, "Oh, what you do isn't actual actual play. You know, it's actual play, but it's not real play. It's not truly the way people play games." I get it. We've been thinking for years about what that conversation might look like. Though, I will say when I think about like...my roommate Tor plays in Burning Wheel games that have lasted for a decade. And it's like...and has jumped between characters. So, that stuff exists, you know? I think about...when I was in college, I played in a game with someone who had been running the same world and the same setting for decades, over various versions of D&D. So it does happen, but.

KEITH: And you think about the functional difference between like...we just got a question about scheduling, scheduling's really hard. It's not weird for a game to not meet for six months, [AUSTIN: yeah, sure] and for you to be thinking about that game for six months.

AUSTIN: Sure.

KEITH: And like, is there a functional difference between real play six months and our show two years? Probably not really.

AUSTIN: Mmm, maybe. I think there's an expectational difference. I am like firmly behind, I think what we do is actual play. I really, fully do, and I think that this is how we would continue to play this game to some degree if we were not doing it as a show. But I also get where that feeling comes from, that is like, there are plenty things...I'll say this. We recorded an episode a week and a half ago, right? Where it ended with kind of a big lore dump, right? And in— you haven't heard this, Keith. This is in the University side game. No one has heard this, because we're not going to release it that way. Where I was like, "Mmm, I'm not really happy with how that came out. Let's go back and zoom in on that lore a little bit." I'll use a better example of this. This happened with Rigour in season— in COUNTER/weight. Where, that was also this thing that was this lore dump by way of an NPC in a faction side game. And I was like, "Ugh, this is interesting, but it's not time yet." And like I'm glad Sylvia[1] and Dre knew that stuff for context, but it wasn't...it wasn't right. It wasn't the right moment. And the thing that we got instead was "Animal out of Context". And it wasn't even like the next episode or anything. But it was like...we got there, and it was the right time, and we developed it out the right way. And so that isn't...it's not off the table for people playing at home, and maybe that's the thing I actually want people to know. Is that you CAN run your game at home the way we run our show.

AUSTIN: [cont.] You CAN be like, "Hey, you know how I did that big lore dump at the end of the game last time? You don't know that stuff yet. You didn't— let's pause and zoom in." Or you can say like, "Hey, I'm not in love with the way that thing shook out." or "Hey, you know how we all forgot that information? Why did we do that? Let's play a side game and talk about why we all forgot that our friend was a vampire." [chuckles] Or whatever, you know? You can totally do that sort of stuff, and I think that that's an important thing to keep in mind. Because the alternative is, and is what I did for years, is like: here's my very particular idea of what a tabletop game can be. It's always moving forward, the GM knows secrets that the players aren't allowed to know, there's information that the players don't get to know between each other, there's like...all of these things that I've since gone the other direction on. And it's not that everybody knows what I know at this point. I do have secrets, but it was a much more combative way of playing that I used to play. Versus now, where I'm like, anytime that I can share a little information that gets people into a scenario where we're really playing up dramatic irony or we're having fun

---

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

developing "how did we get there" stories, instead of like…"will you or will you not do this" stories. I'm pretty happy with it.

AUSTIN: [cont.] We can stay on this forever, but there's still some more questions, so I'm gonna advance. [Keith laughs] Conor says:

> "I want to first take a minute to gush about how good y'all are at making names for characters, so much so that I've outright stolen them. For Janine, I've used Adaire and Signet both as my player avatar for Dragon Age [JANINE: (amused sound)] and Fire Emblem, respectively. And I'm currently playing a character named Highwater in my friends' Savage Worlds campaign. If my friends ever become podcast people, I will be in big trouble. [Austin chuckles] A good portion of you are writers, but honestly each of you are masterclass at coming up with names that resonate well. I'm just hoping y'all will drop some tips and tricks on your naming conventions."

AUSTIN: Janine, let's start with you, since you get this particular shoutout here from Conor.

JANINE: The Adaire thing is funny. I was thinking about this the other day. I realized that the first time I ever used Adaire for a character was, I was playing Skyrim, and I had that New Beginning whatever mod, where it was like you get to pick a sort of preset start point.

AUSTIN: Mmm.

JANINE: Instead of using the vanilla one. And I made like a Thalmor high elf spy mage lady and named her… She's like the furthest thing possible [Austin chuckles] from Adaire Adaire, [chuckles] but I named her Adaire 'cause I thought it sounded cool, and that was the first time I had used that. But before that, was a sort of spin out of a nickname I had for my Hawke.

AUSTIN: Oh, interesting.

JANINE: In Dragon Age 2. Because my Hawke in Dragon Age 2 was named Adelaide. [Austin laughs] Which is a name that is taken. [chuckles]

AUSTIN: Yeah, you can't use that. I mean, you could, [Janine laughs] we had, there's...you could, but I think that would make—

JANINE: [crosstalk] That would have been weird.

AUSTIN: —the situation, at this point? Even funnier.

JANINE: Mm-hmm. But, so I named her Adelaide, and I called her...in my head, thought of her as being called like Addie, you know, she's the farmers' daughter, like that's who Hawke is.

AUSTIN: That's good, mm-hmm.

JANINE: And that's— Adaire became...like, Adaire's original name is Addie. For sort of...and she's the farmers' daughter. She kind of spun out that way. I think I've said before that, for me, it's a lot about rhythm.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: Which is probably why I fall on hyphenated last names a lot, because they are very rhythmic. Like, Addie Kneath-Forman and Holly Whist-Hyssop.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

JANINE: There was another one that I forget. There have been a bunch. [Austin chuckles] It's hard to pin down what it is, other than there is just sort of a rhythm to it. When I was a teenager, I was really into poetry, but I only...I didn't like free verse. I thought free verse was like… [Austin chuckles] This is a very teen opinion, but I thought free verse was like cheap. [Keith laughs] Because you could just write whatever, and I was like, well, that's not fun.

AUSTIN: See, I...it's very funny, 'cause I was like literally the opposite. [Janine chuckles] Which was, I thought free verse was the only real thing, because if you were following rules you weren't trying. You have those rules to lean on!

JANINE: [frustrated] Aaaah! [Keith laughs]

AUSTIN: How are you gonna evoke…

JANINE: I like...ughh.

AUSTIN: How were we friends then, Janine??

JANINE: 'Cause we didn't talk about stuff like this.

AUSTIN: We did.

JANINE: Ehh.

AUSTIN: And you probably just put up with me. My mom was a poet, you KNOW we talked about this.

JANINE: That's true. But like, I remember I really liked the rules and constraints, because it forced me to think in that sort of [AUSTIN: mm-hmm] rhythmic way. Like, I had a friend who was applying for the school stage crew, and I wrote her application for her whoops—

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm!

JANINE: In like a short of Shakespearean...it wasn't in full iambic pentameter, but it was in a very similar sort of mimicking style. I have always really found constraints like that very satisfying, and I think that is probably what influences how I pick names now.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I definitely, at this point, am...I want to be a hundred percent clear before people start DMing me, like understand the value of those constraints, [JANINE: oh, yeah] and the ways that rules actually blah blah blah. Like, you can't listen to this show and think I don't get that.

JANINE: I understand the value of free verse now, too.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally, right? What I do now, though, is probably, for names, is definitely, like Janine said, and I've said this so many times probably at this point that you're sick of hearing it, but it's about rhythm, it's about cadence, it's about mouthfeel. It's especially about mouthfeel. It's a different thing than writing a name of a character in fiction which people will not have to say out loud that often. [chuckles] You know, you still want it to be good mouthfeel when you're writing, but sometimes there's just good eyefeel, it's a different thing. But the thing is for me, is like, if I am doing names that have to do with worldbuilding or want to...you know, I'm not just doing Jack Smith, right? I'm not just doing like, oh this is a person in the world, in our world, where I'll have a different kind of set of...not rules, but a desired impact. When I'm thinking about like, hey this is a new culture, then that whole culture is going to have names about something. Or names that feel unique to that culture? Like, I think the Mistral in the...Isles of Flight arc. I will come up with a set of very loose rules that are not necessarily "every name has to fit these". Because that isn't how names work, because cultures mix and because there's always exceptions and languages are inconsistent.

AUSTIN: [cont.] But, there will be a core of like a sound I want to bring out, or a set of sounds that I want to emphasize. And so like, you can go back and watch the Drawing Maps for the Isles of Flight, and you'll see that I wrote down...so like, "long vowels, round and curvy sounds". And I sat down and wrote 26 different names, one starting with each letter, just to kind of feel out what that space was. And all of that was because in my mind I want these to feel like, not birds in flight, because birds in flight flap their wings. Birds in flight would have lots of like...I think about something like names that would have like, *fa la la*, you know, things that have that, and it doesn't have that. I wanted them swooping and diving and lifting up and hovering— not hovering in place, but like raising on a gust of wind. Because they specifically are a culture where flight is a thing that's often compromised. They can't just flap forever anymore. And so that ended up being a big influence on that. And so it's not just like, "and then I went to the thesaurus and looked up 'synonyms for hover'." [chuckles] But also, sometime I'll do that too, and then try to play with it until it's something I like. The problem with that is the tweet that

Janine made yesterday about all of the bad Darths. Or, I guess you just asked what a Darth was, right?

KEITH: Yeah.

JANINE: [sighs] Yeah.

AUSTIN: But someone replied with a list of Darth names. And they are all—

JANINE: That was helpful. But they're terrible.

AUSTIN: They're terrible, right?

KEITH: They're terrible.

AUSTIN: They're terrible!

KEITH: And it—

JANINE: They're just like...a lot of them are just words! Like, just...Bane is just a thing.

AUSTIN: Uh huh!

KEITH: Mmm.

JANINE: Sidious is kinda just a thing.

AUSTIN: Uh huh.

JANINE: There's another one that's also just a thing. Like, they're all…

AUSTIN: I got a list here of the historical Darths. I know we…

KEITH: I mean, it takes, what, between three and four Darth names that you know to see exactly what they're doing? And it's: they take a name [AUSTIN: uh huh] that is a bad thing, [AUSTIN: yeah] and then put Darth in front of it, [AUSTIN: uh huh] or Dark Lord, or Dark...or something.

AUSTIN: Or something, right. Right.

KEITH: Yeah. Yeah.

AUSTIN: We talked about...the one that we realized today was, we knew— obviously, everyone knows Darth Malak. But then also, there's Darth Malgus, [JANINE: ew] and both of those are just like...the word "mal", the latin for "bad", but then adjusted a little bit?

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: But then I realized Darth Maul is also that.

KEITH: Well, yeah.

AUSTIN: There's also Darth Malus. Maul is also maul, like you're mauling someone.

KEITH: Like beating someone up, yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Uh huh!

KEITH: My favorite thing that I realized is that Darth Malak, his name before he [AUSTIN: oh my god] became Darth Malak was Alek. So he just went, "Oh, I was Alek, now I'm Malak. Bad Alek."

AUSTIN: Now I'm Malak. [Austin and Keith laugh, Janine groans] And it's...we love Star Wars. The reason we're here is, Keith and I…

KEITH: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

JANINE: I mean, I don't.

AUSTIN: You don't. I know you don't.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Keith and I do, despite this.

JANINE: I don't hate it, I just...it's fine.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

KEITH: Well, despite it, but also, it's like, there's a—

AUSTIN: [excited] Yo, Darth Karnage with a K! My guy. [Keith laughs loudly, distantly]

JANINE: There's Darth Ruin in here. There's one…

KEITH: Yeah!

JANINE: There's one in the second batch that I couldn't see that seemed terrible.

KEITH: Well, I think that that's an important thing about...this is not, this has nothing to do with what we're talking about. There's, you know, there's a degree to which [Austin chuckles] we have to recognize that Sith are kind of fucking dorks.

AUSTIN: They're big dorks.

KEITH: Like, they suck. They go...

AUSTIN: Uh huh.

KEITH: They like spend all their time in Jedi temples brooding, and they go, [dramatic brooding voice] "I can't be saved! [Austin chuckles] I'm gonna be...I'm gonna get a red lightsaber and now my name is Darth Malgus!"

AUSTIN: Sorry, the one I have on screen right now is Darth Ramage, or Ramage[ram-AGE]. It's rampage but they pulled the P out! [Keith laughs] They got…

JANINE: We missed Darth Tenebrous which just means Darth Shadowy.

AUSTIN: Dark. Yeah, exactly. [laughs] Darth Millennial, love you so much. I love— oh my god, look at this motherfucker. [Janine sighs] Oooh my god. Wow.

KEITH: When you become a Sith, they're just...they're looking through books to be like, what's a name that means "bad guy"?

AUSTIN: What's a name that means dreary? Darth Drear.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: For real. Ugh.

JANINE: How much must it suck to be Darth Gean? [Austin and Keith laugh]

AUSTIN: Is there a Darth Gean? Oh my god.

JANINE: There's a Darth Gean.

KEITH: Wait, G-E-A-N or G-E-N-E?

JANINE: It's G-E-A-N.

AUSTIN: Uh huh.

JANINE: Darth Gean.

AUSTIN: Damn.

KEITH: I would be remiss if I didn't bring up [AUSTIN: yeah] George Lucas's ideas for what you could call Starkiller, the main character from The Force Unleashed. They thought it would lend more credibility if they use a Darth title.

AUSTIN: Uh huh.

KEITH: George Lucas suggested Darth Icky and Darth Insanius? [Janine sighs, Austin laughs] And yeah like, imagine...all you have to do is look at the bottom of the barrel to see what the rest of the barrel has in it. Like, that's the...and it's that. It's Darth Icky and Darth Insanius. [Austin sighs]

JANINE: Imagine being so lucky that those are your ideas but you're still the genius of a franchise.

AUSTIN: But like, here's the fuckin', the worst thing is. We could, right now, get a name from Icky, right? that's good. I'm certain of it, right? You pull up like, Icky...what's the etymology of icky? [typing] Does anyone know?

KEITH: Does ANYONE know? I don't know.

AUSTIN: No one. No one knows. Let's see. I'm like super curious. "Excessively sentimental," oh, that's interesting. I didn't know that that's...yeah, okay, that makes sense. Uh, "Related terms: ick". Does ick predate icky? It must, right? 'Cause ick, it's ick-y, right?

KEITH: Uh. "1935, American English, probably from icky-boo, 'sickly, nauseated'—

JANINE: [crosstalk] Yeah, it says sick.

KEITH: —which probably is baby talk elaboration of sick."

AUSTIN: Okay. But it goes back further than that, because there's an Old Frisian that's just ik, I-K. And you can start playing with it. But like, I think—

JANINE: [crosstalk] But is that actually...what does that word mean?

AUSTIN: Okay, so there's an alternate version— who cares, right? Because like...eventually, if you get to like, Darth Eka, right? Darth Eka is immediately so much better than Darth Icky. By a lot! Because you're not just like, oh yeah, it's icky, you know? Or you do the synonym route, right, where it's like—

KEITH: It—

AUSTIN: Go ahead.

KEITH: Oh, I was just going to say, it's funny that this is what Darth names are, because the most famous one is Darth Vader, and Vader means "father".

AUSTIN: Right, yeah, uh huh.

KEITH: And that's so—

AUSTIN: Fuck dads dot com, so we can't really go down this road.

KEITH: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, the ultimate bad dad, Darth Vader. [Keith and Austin laugh] And, I don't know, that's just like...you know, why couldn't it have been...why couldn't all the Darth names have been, you know, a window into the tragic downfall of a Jedi?

AUSTIN: Right, why not? And I think maybe the other rule here, the other thing here, is like, this is why you should have really broad rules if you're gonna do like...here's a thing that, names that a culture...that are tied to some sort of cultural feeling or history. I think about the names from the Diaspora a lot, which were about being like separate— words separated from traditional meaning, because the Diaspora was such a place where meaning was allowed to become a little unhinged from referent, right, that like...you could just be named Cene and it not be about a scene in a movie or a story, right? And drop that S off there, 'cause it just looks cooler, 'cause it's the future. You could be...you could have a name that's just like a place or an object, because they lived in a society in which objects called divines were really important, and like the notion of there being objects that had personhood was established.

AUSTIN: [cont.] And so like, yeah, sometimes you just get a name that's, you know, the name of a planet, and you go, yeah, this place is called Counterweight now. We're just gonna name it that. This place is called Glimmer. That's cool. We're just gonna decide that. And that ended up producing a pretty broad array of names that you could still evoke a bunch of different feelings. You know, Attar is a specific thing, and it sounds way different than Cene, and it doesn't have specific rules about the way in which...you know...the sounds or the faux names are or something like that. But it still produces the effect, especially when contrasted with something else. So I think that's a big thing. And the other big one, I want to point back to something that Janine said, is like...think about variations on a single name. Think about what people would be called by different people in their own world and culture. [Janine laughs softly] You're laughing?

JANINE: [laughing] I just remembered Adaire has a name we've never used on camera before.

AUSTIN: Yeah, uh huh. A hundred percent. And I don't think we will?

JANINE: Yeah, there's no real reason to.

AUSTIN: No, like…

JANINE: It's funny. Like, I have funny things with it, but.

AUSTIN: Right. But I'm never gonna have a character that's like, "You're REAL name is blank." 'cause that's just like not the game we run. And it's not her real name?

JANINE: Someone alr— someone literally did that to Adaire in Winter. [laughs] What are you talking about?

AUSTIN: But it wasn't— but it wasn't like, "And that means that you're…" I mean, that was a thing that was like, "Hey, you're lying to these people right now."

JANINE: Sure.

AUSTIN: But at this point, you're Adaire. You've spent a decade being Adaire, you know?

JANINE: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

AUSTIN: The truth of who you are is not secretly this thing you've hidden or something, you know?

JANINE: Yes.

AUSTIN: Which was, again, a thing we talked about a lot with true names during Twilight Mirage, right? Like, we kind of got away from that, for sure. So yeah, I think that's a big thing for me. Keith, you're someone who like...I think the names end up having a lot of energy that's similar to who your characters are.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Do you want to talk about that a little bit, maybe?

KEITH: Sure. I think the odd one out there is Fero, which is one that I like...I don't know why I decided to do a Latin name for Fero.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: I can't...like, I literally don't remember why I did that. But that's the odd one out, because it's the one that I based least on how it felt.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: Like, we've done a lot of talking about like, mouthfeel and, you know, rhythm, and I think that those things and other things factor into naming stuff for me too, but I try...I think that I try to be less conscious of it? Like I try...for me it's like...I try really hard to think about the character and then go with a gut feeling. Which has a lot to do with, you know, all those other factors, but like...for me it's like, I'll sit and think about different words and turn it over until it sort of clicks and I go like, "ah, I got it!" you know?

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

KEITH: And for Fero I didn't do that, because I was trying to fit words that I thought sounded good and also make them at least sort of make sense in Latin. Fero can roughly translate— or, I think, actually, I think it literally means "I carry the wildness", is what it means.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

KEITH: I think it's the literal translation of it. But it also can mean like, "I bear the wildness", like it's both. My idea was that it was as much a burden as it was a gift.

AUSTIN: Right, right.

AUSTIN: I mean, also, there is a rhythm to that, right? I think Fero Feritas [KEITH: yeah] is one of my favorite things explicitly because he...Fero Feritas carries such a feeling of elegance and like...especially in a world in which we're post-post-apocalyptic, like the ancient world. But Fero is so the opposite of that, right?

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: There's also something I love about it, which is that Fero has always felt like an abbreviation of Feritas, even though it isn't, you know?

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: You can imagine that sort of...there is something there that feels like, an instant...you go like, "I'm Fero Feritas", and it's like, "Okay, wait, is that...okay, what?" [Keith laughs] Which is an extremely Fero thing.

KEITH: Yeah, I think...yeah. And I think it also...I don't...it's hard, because it's been so long, to know if like the chicken or the egg here, which one is which.

AUSTIN: Sure. Sure.

KEITH: But Fero, I think now, it's clear, is a character with...I was gonna say with a lot of contradictions, and I think that that's true also, but it's also like...with a lot of like ambivalence. Who is being pulled in two different directions and has two different ways that things can go about everything.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: And I think that that is even true in the name. Which, in retrospect, I like, and wasn't on purpose.

AUSTIN: [chuckles] Right.

KEITH: At least, not when I was picking out the name. Like, before we had recorded an episode, I didn't know what [chuckles] season 3 of Hieron was gonna look like. But yeah, you know, I think a name...on some level, no matter how many tactics you have for picking out a good name, you'll know when something feels right.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

KEITH: And then you'll know a second time, three days later, when you look at it, and you go, "this still feels right", and not like "ah, I was trying too hard."

AUSTIN: Totally. Katie in the chat notes, "I also love Fero's name, but do you feel like the disconnect in the tone of the character is what's led to the Fero and Lem confusion over time?"

JANINE: I was thinking that, too.

AUSTIN: Totally possible. Totally. I mean, it also, here's—

KEITH: Yeah, we've said, I think we've said...or Austin at least has said that Fero feels like a Lem.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Well, part of it is the other way too. Lem...so, Lem is literally the name of the iconic bard in the Pathfinder game? If you read the Pathfinder rulebook, Lem is the bard. And that bard is like a goofy halfling? [chuckles]

KEITH: [laughs] Yeah. I didn't know that.

AUSTIN: And so I always make that jump. Yeah. Like, if you...I'm gonna send you...have you never seen a picture of Lem the bard?

KEITH: No.

AUSTIN: Uhh, I'll just bring it up on chat, but I'll also put it in here. This is Lem the bard. I put it in our group chat. [chuckles] This is Lem the Pathfinder bard? Which is—

JANINE: [dismayed] Oh, god.

AUSTIN: Uh huh! Which could not be any further from Lem King.

KEITH: Okay, it's definitely closer to Fero than it is to Lem, but this guy looks like he'd like kill me.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: He'd fight me.

AUSTIN: Yeah, you, Keith. [laughs] Keith J. Carberry.

KEITH: Yeah! Like, this guy looks like a guy...he looks like a cutpurse, but also like a cutthroat cutpurse.

AUSTIN: Uh huh. Totally. Totally! Very smarmy, very...yeah. Ugh.

KEITH: I do have...do we have more name stuff?

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] We can keep moving, but— go ahead.

JANINE: [crosstalk] I have a bit of practical advice.

AUSTIN: Sure.

JANINE: Also. Keith, you go first.

KEITH: I just...I have one last Star Wars name that I wanna pitch.

JANINE: [exasperated sound]

AUSTIN: Do you want to save that? Just get practical advice, then we'll do Star Wars, and then we'll… [Janine laughs]

KEITH: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I agree.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: My practical advice for people who particularly like the names that I pick is probably look at first names, last names, and just nouns.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

JANINE: Maybe some verbs, too. Mostly nouns from, I would say, like the 17th through the 19th century. That was...I mean, English ones, I'm thinking of. I can't really vouch for...there's some good French words, too, but I'm not familiar enough with others. But, for me, that's a golden sort of space in those languages for really cool names and words and like...just in general stuff [AUSTIN: mm-hmm] to draw on. I was reading a book recently with the name Cyprian, and I was like, that's a fuckin'…

AUSTIN: Oooh, good name.

JANINE: The character's name is Cyprian Wychbold. [laughs] It's a fuckin' amazing name.

AUSTIN: Great name, great name. Write your names down. Make lists, write down names.

JANINE: Yes. Yep!

AUSTIN: Whenever you fuckin' see a thing, you're like, that's a cool name…

JANINE: Everyone made fun of my name book, but look at me now.

AUSTIN: Yeah, well, that was— okay.

JANINE: I've got a name book. [chuckles]

KEITH: I want to apologize to Gig Kephart who also has a name that means a thing, which is that he goes from job to job.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: And it's, those are gigs. So, apologies—

AUSTIN: Still good, though! [Janine laughs]

KEITH: Apologies to forgetting that I also named Gig Kephart after the thing that he does.

AUSTIN: Another big thing, for me, is looking at the word of the day. I look at Miriam Webster's word of the day. Like, I catch up on them, basically, once a week or once every other week. To be like, yeah, there's some good fuckin' words out there. There are just some great, good words.

KEITH: Yo, shoutout to the words. Shoutout all the words.

AUSTIN: Shoutouts to the words, you know? And have conversations about it. Jack and I recently had a conversation about...not about names, but about words that we would love a character to use that feel severe, but they're not actually severe. Like, the way the words are written are...or the way you would pronounce them, especially as a character, would come across as if you're being scolded, even if they are not, like, bad. The word in question was expiate. Like, expiate or expiation is a great word. It's very sharp-sounding. Or like, vindicate. And, you know, someone who says that you're vindicated is not scolding you, right? They're actually saying something good, but you string enough of those words together, you find a character who speaks only in those like four-syllable words with lots of long vowels and hard sounds, and you're gonna find someone who feels like they're in control of every fucking room that they're in. So there is...again, we talk about sounds, we talk about rhythm, that stuff matters a lot, and often matters as much if not more than meaning. Keith, can you tell me...just, if you had like a Star Wars name to tell us about, I'd love to hear it.

KEITH: Yeah. Well, so, it's not funny, but.

AUSTIN: Okay.

KEITH: Austin, I know that you know Darth Traya.

AUSTIN: Yeah, of course.

KEITH: You know why Darth Traya is named Traya?

AUSTIN: Is it…

JANINE: Former flight attendant.

KEITH: No.

AUSTIN: Is it not...well...I guess I...is it related to another character in that world?

KEITH: No, it's not.

AUSTIN: It's not! No, I don't know.

KEITH: No. It is the middle— well, it *sounds* like another character's name.

AUSTIN: It does! Which is why...which is probably part of why it actually is that, right?

KEITH: Yeah, well, but the other part…

AUSTIN: In terms of the nonfi—

KEITH: Do you remember the phrase Sith title?

AUSTIN: Wait, Darth Traya is the Sith...is that—

KEITH: Darth Traya's Sith title was the Lord of Betrayal.

AUSTIN: Oh, right, yeah.

KEITH: Traya is the middle letters of betrayal. [Janine sighs]

AUSTIN: Yes. Uh huh. It's better than Darth Betraya! It's better than that! Or Darth Bet—

KEITH: Yeah, it is definitely better than Darth Betraya.

JANINE: Is it? Because that one sounds cool. Darth Betraya could drop a single.

AUSTIN: Mmm… [laughs] Maybe.

KEITH: I think Darth Traya is better than Darth Betraya.

AUSTIN: I also think that.

KEITH: Or trayal. Darth Trayal.

AUSTIN: But it does also sound like another character in that game who she has a close relationship with.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Or, a particular relationship with, I guess.

KEITH: Yes, yeah. A particular relationship.

AUSTIN: Close is...ugh. Ugh. People I know have been dragging KOTOR 2, lately. Not to me.

KEITH: What? Hey, who?

AUSTIN: We're not gonna get into it here. We don't need to.

KEITH: Okay.

AUSTIN: We don't need to. Ugh, god, I...whooh. One day, Keith. One day we'll have justice. We'll get to do our KOTOR 2 let's play and just talk through the whole fuckin' thing.

KEITH: Oh, man. Yep.

AUSTIN: It's the dream. It's the dream. [chuckles] Alright. I'm gonna go to the next question. This one comes in from The Minutiae of Artistic Schools are my Passion. [chuckles] They say:

> "Do you have any advice for what to do if, during a campaign, you and your players are posting aesthetic inspirations and touchstones, and someone posts something that doesn't really jive with your setting? For instance, (and this is the part where I out myself as a terrible art history nerd), I'm DMing a Blades game in our own setting, and one of the factions is an artistic movement loosely based on late post-impressionists like Van Ghogh..."

AUSTIN: I don't know how to pronounce...Cignac[sig-nack]? Is that right?

KEITH: Cignac[sin-yack]?

AUSTIN: Cignac[sin-yack]?

JANINE: I say Cignac[sin-yack].

AUSTIN: And...is that Redon?

JANINE: Or Cignac[sin-yah]. Yeah, I'm not familiar.

AUSTIN: You're the one who knows languages better than me.

> "And one of my players posted some post-war German abstract expressionism in our aesthetics thread. I'm very happy that the rest of the game is excited about the aesthetics and images of the game, but what do I do when the aesthetics clash?"

AUSTIN: Um…

JANINE: Ah…

AUSTIN: I think you let them class. Clash, rather. I think there is… [sighs] You're making a game, a faction, loosely based on post-impressionists like these people. But you're not making a game that's about those people. This is the thing I said before, of like, why is the city pink. Why is there someone who's in this school who's making something that looks like German post-war abstract expressionism? Is this person, you know...or is this a sub-school? Is this something that is reflective of something in your city? Is there a schism inside of this school? I have said this before, but every school is a schism. That is like, part of all academic output, is that there are differences of opinion. Aesthetics live, they don't just sit on a page. And so like...and what we would say is like, "Yeah, but of course German abstract expressionism comes from a particular place with a particular history that is not like the same...it is not one step away from post-impressionism." But, maybe it isn't in your Blades setting, right? And the other half of that is like… [sighs] For the eyes of your other players, if those two images feel like they're in discussion, then maybe the difference isn't as far as we might think because of the knowledge of historical difference, or because of the knowledge of difference in craft or technique. If those works build an archive for those other players that seems coherent, figure out why that is, and then build from there. Instead of being like… "No, that isn't the type of...this is wrong." [laughs]

JANINE: Mmm.

AUSTIN: Unless it is something REALLY core. And I think, here, about something I think we all think about every day or at least once a week: the hypercat. [chuckles] Keith J. Carberry once suggested having a hypercat, having a zoid, in COUNTER/Weight.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And I was like, ugh, I really want the mechs to be humanoid. Because of "we built them like us." And like, that's my only...maybe my only exception of where I think, if I made that ruling, of I think that that's a little too out, that I was probably in the right. If I'm making that ruling anywhere else in the show, where I'm like, "this isn't thematically or aesthetically one hundred percent in line with my vision", I was fucking up by not trying to be broader and trying to find a way to work it in, instead of just trying to be like, "no, that doesn't fit." Like I don't think that that's a particularly productive mode, you know? Do y'all have any thoughts?

JANINE: The other thing is that inspiration...you know, if I post a picture of a cool shoe [AUSTIN: yeah] into one of our chats…

AUSTIN: And you have.

JANINE: I'm not saying any character in particular has to wear that shoe, you know?

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: None of the...inspiration is just what it is. Inspiration, touchstones, none of this stuff has to be necessarily like, this is a thing in fiction.

AUSTIN: Yes.

JANINE: None of it is...when someone posts something into your chat, when someone shares chat or whatever it is. When someone is sharing their enthusiasm and essentially saying like, "Hey, I saw this thing and it made me think of our game."

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: What they're posting is nothing...it's not a rope that has to tie you down. It's a thing that, honestly, most if not everyone in the chat will forget about.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

JANINE: At some point if not immediately. Unless it's a thing...if it's a thing where like, they just keep posting post-war German abstract expressionism, [Austin chuckles] and then in the actual game they keep describing post-war German abstract expressionist aesthetics and mentioning post-war abstract German expressionists, I don't think you need to worry about it too much. [laughs]

AUSTIN: And even if they...and again, I think if they do, then it's like…

JANINE: I appreciate it, but yeah.

AUSTIN: I think it's like, how do we work this in, more than anything.

JANINE: Yes. Yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: I really think that that's like the best way to frame it. And, again, I think part of it is just like…work out...do you know why the faction is based on post-impressionists like Van Gogh? Or is it just a cool thing? And if you know why, then take that second step and be like, "and then why is this other line in there?" And if you don't know why, then it shouldn't matter too much if this other person can also have this thing there, you know what I mean? The other thing—

JANINE: It means something to someone.

AUSTIN: Right. Totally. Totally!

JANINE: Just, crack that, you know?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah.

KEITH: And this is back to...Austin and Janine both touched on this, like...when you're posting pictures back and forth, it's a really...it is a way less efficient, I think, way of narrowing down the scope of something in other people's minds. And it's like, you know, like, "Hey, what kind of game do you want to play?" and then you say: the game I want to play is this picture [Austin chuckles] of...this like Van Gogh or this Cignac. And, like, that doesn't mean as much as if you said a whole bunch of words about what you wanted to do. And so like, going back and forth, they'll probably figure out the ways in which that didn't exactly fit your thing.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: You know? I think the only...the only chat that we have for a season where people are posting "hey, this thing is like this season" that has, I think, a perfect record is Bluff City. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Everything that everyone's ever posted in the Bluff City chat has been Bluff City. [Austin and Keith laugh]

AUSTIN: That's a hundred percent true.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: But most of it hasn't made its way—

JANINE: That's nice to hear, because that's the one I've been least secure about posting stuff into. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Oh, no, all that's perfect. All of it's perfect.

KEITH: Yeah. Yeah.

AUSTIN: It's all...it's all perfect.

KEITH: Mm-hmm.

AUSTIN: Ugh, god, I'm looking at it now. It's all the best.

KEITH: And so, when it's like, two people posting image image image and trading off, each time you post an image, everybody that's looking at those images gets a clearer idea of the average.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

JANINE: Mmm.

KEITH: And so like...and sometimes there's just one that misses, and sometimes it's that they didn't get it at first and then they'll move on, and probably that's all that it is. But also, yeah, if this is a person that's interested in...German post-war abstract impressionism, and you don't have a reason—

JANINE: Expressionism.

KEITH: Expressionism, sorry. [Austin chuckles] "Impressionism", kill me! [laughs]

JANINE: If it was impressionism it'd be closer, it'd be fine!

AUSTIN: Yeah, uh huh.

KEITH: Like, if that's something they're interested in, and there's no reason not to include it, then like, yeah, you know.

JANINE: There's also the very real fear here of like...this is something where...I hope I didn't sound like I was making fun of this asker a little earlier, 'cause it's something that I empathize with very strongly, is when I'm really enthusiastic about something, there are a lot of shades of thing that I worry about.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

JANINE: One of them is that I'm gonna like, overwhelm people or put people off with my enthusiasm. The other thing I worry about is that, if I find people who are interested but not as like intensely focused, that when they share something, if I don't respond in the correct way, it will put them off from sharing stuff like that in the future because they'll think that what they did was wrong or that I...that, you know, that they weren't up to standards in terms of like my expertise in a field versus theirs or something like that.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

JANINE: Depending on the crew that you're playing with. Like, if you're playing with people who like art but aren't into the minutiae in the same way that you are, I do worry there's a risk of like, if you get really into the weeds...maybe they'll still, you know, 'cause I'm assuming these are your friends and they know your deal. But, if you get really into the weeds about individual things that it might make them feel a little bit nervous about sharing things in the future, and that's not something you want to have happen, if you're running a game with them.

AUSTIN: There is a reason why I don't have a Season 6 chat for us internally yet, that isn't just...I have one with Ali and Jack, because they're like the production team, but even that, I

literally only added Jack two weeks ago, because I've gotten to the point where I was sending them stuff pretty often. But even there, my actual notes about inspiration for Season 6 is way broader than what I will share, because the last thing I want to do is like...overwhelm people with giant robots. [Austin and Janine chuckle] Or with like, images from space. Or, you know, whatever it is, right? There's a degree to which I don't...I don't want to come across like I expect my degree of enthusiasm on this thing we're not even working on yet, you know? Or, I guess we're sort of working on it, with Road to Season 6 stuff, but I want to keep that road stuff a little more under-inspired right now, for pretty particular...god, I'm scrolling through my fucking Season 6 chat right now, and just like...I have weird, like, stuff I sketched up in MS Paint. It's wild. [Janine laughs] It's fucking great. I love it. Do that stuff for yourself all the time. Because even if it's just an exercise, the output can help shape that, like as Keith was saying, that average. I'm gonna keep moving, because we're running a little late. This one comes in from Holden, who says:

> "In the near future, I'll be playing in a Scum and Villainy campaign with a very Star Wars-esque cast of alien species. Since I thought it would be boring to play a human in such a fun space setting, I pitched playing this character to my GM."

AUSTIN: Um, Keith, can you describe the thing that's on the screen right now?

JANINE: [softly] I love it.

KEITH: Yeah. Slug— snail warrior.

AUSTIN: Uh huh.

KEITH: We've got exactly a snail.

AUSTIN: Yep.

KEITH: Inside you can see where...you can see, you know how a snail curls up into their shell.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

KEITH: This snail goes up into a big back hump that looks sort of, in sort of like Krogan-y style armor.

AUSTIN: Yeah, mm-hmm.

KEITH: And then goes inward...I don't know if there's a body down there or if it's robot, but—

AUSTIN: You know what? No one knows.

KEITH: But, really muscular.

JANINE: I was just gonna say, I think it's a robot body and maybe not even a snail, but like just a…

KEITH: A slug?

JANINE: I mean, 'cause it's already in a space suit. So like…

KEITH: I mean, is there...yeah.

JANINE: Is a slug in pants a snail?

KEITH: Yes. I think once a slug has a shell it's a snail.

AUSTIN: But what about pants?

KEITH: Pants. Well, what are pants but leg shells?

AUSTIN: Leg shells. Leg shells, yeah.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: On a note, this is art by pc lim over on artstation, you can find it. It's called "space snail lol". So we have the artist...the artist says snail, here, for sure.

KEITH: Yeah.

JANINE: Mm-hmm.

AUSTIN: So, you know, that's something. Let me continue...

KEITH: Ripped.

AUSTIN: Let me continue the—

KEITH: Really like, slim but ripped.

AUSTIN: Slim but ripped. The bodysuit is, at least.

KEITH: The bodysuit is.

JANINE: Terrible posture. Awful posture.

AUSTIN: Maybe!

KEITH: Right. Well, I think that's the, you know, that's the...you know.

JANINE: Center of gravity, though. That would be…'cause the thing on the back.

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah, true.

JANINE: It's...you gotta balance, so that's probably the posture.

[TIMESTAMP: 1:30:03]

AUSTIN: "The GM agreed—"

KEITH: I think you just gotta take into account the angle that a snail has to be at to fit inside a suit of armor.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: And then, also, where are the eyes? They're up on the antennae.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: They're up on the antennae. Yeah. Antenn-eyes.

JANINE: I think they're called stalks.

AUSTIN: Stalks, right.

JANINE: Eye stalks.

AUSTIN:

> "The GM agreed immediately, but that leaves me with some questions. Should this character speak with a kind of electronic voice box or in a non-traditional way of speaking, like a screen with a text scroll or some kind of alien sign language? If the latter, how do I accomplish normal conversation without repeatedly describing what I want to say appear on a screen or have to sign? Is there a way to keep the flow of conversation without having to break it with description?"

KEITH: Have you heard of the Selkath?

AUSTIN: What's the Selkath?

KEITH: You know the Selkath, from KOTOR?

AUSTIN: [sighs] I don't fucking remember the Selkath, let me look at the...

KEITH: They're like the...it's the fish planet, Manaan. They're the…

AUSTIN: Oh, the Man— yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah.

KEITH: Yeah. Very similar look.

AUSTIN: With the like, *mrr*, they got like the droopy mouth?

KEITH: [imitates fish alien with a lot of mouth sounds]

JANINE: [displeased] No. Ick.

KEITH: That's what they sound like.

AUSTIN: Don't do that at the table. I don't like it.

JANINE: Uh uh.

KEITH: Well, but you could describe it a couple times, and then everybody knows, and then if it's fictionally important.

AUSTIN: Well, so that's the question. That is the question this person is basically asking, is like...I mean, they're not basically. But they're saying like, hey. One of the things they're saying is: if I say like, "oh they sign with their hands," or "they do something with their stalks," or whatever, should I repeat saying that? Is there a way for me to make sure that that's clear about my character—

KEITH: Okay. I get that.

AUSTIN: That they aren't just talking the way a human does, without having to be like, every time, "Hey, I sign with my stalks and my mouth things, that blah blah blah blah blah." And I'm kind of of a couple different minds here. I'm not really settled on what I would do with a character like this. I think in...as a GM with an NPC, I would really emphasize it. Because like, one of the things I like to emphasize, especially with nonhuman species, is like, hey, there is...or, not only when nonhuman species, right, with characters who sign. There are characters who sign in this world, and like...to emphasize that that is a thing that is happening or that they are, if they speak through signage. I think about like the robot pastor in [chuckles] Twilight Mirage, or

like tour guide/pastor, I forget what...like a church tour guide, basically, but was a robot on an asteroid space station.

JANINE: I always just picture a 1930s radio on wheels.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's exactly right.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And then it also had like a screen on it, and I emphasized that screen. I said like, "oh, on the screen, blah blah blah." But that's different for an NPC than a player character. So I'm curious for y'all, as player characters, what you would do in this scenario. I don't think either of you have played a character quite like this, right?

KEITH: No.

JANINE: I've actually...I've thought about it.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: For reasons.

AUSTIN: Uh huh.

JANINE: It's a...yeah, it's definitely a thing I've been thinking about a lot lately.

AUSTIN: Yes, we've talked about this. Uh huh. Well, you can even think about your character from the last Season 6 game, who was not...who often communicated in pauses or gestures.

JANINE: [laughs] You just called it the last Season 6 game.

AUSTIN: Road to Season 6 game. You know what I'm saying.

JANINE: Oh, okay. I thought you meant— okay, okay. Alright. [Janine and Austin chuckle] That's true, yes.

AUSTIN: Your last one, also, not the last one, which you weren't in.

JANINE: Yeah. She still talked, she just said very short phrases and had more like physical tells. I think the key question, here, is: who understands you, and how much do they understand? Like...presuming that everyone in the party understands you, then I think it's totally reasonable to just be like...you know, "I say this." I think maybe that might be the distinction to draw, is like you frame it rather than just say saying it. Which is a thing that I think is probably gonna be

easier for some people. I find myself doing that anyway a lot of the time. I'll do like, you know, "Adaire basically says whatever." Because sometimes that just feels more natural to me. It's not a good habit, but, you know. In this case, that...you know, focusing on the fact that you're communicating this idea might be the way to go. It gets a little complicated with NPCs, but the GM's gonna decide that anyway, so like…

AUSTIN: I will say, the thing that I—

JANINE: The more complicated it is, the less you're gonna want to do it.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally. The other thing I want to note is...the thing I try to walk the line on here, when I'm doing this as an NPC, or as a GM about an NPC, and I don't always succeed at this, is to walk the line between recognizing difference while also not playing for laughs or playing for like...without othering that method of communication, right? You want to recognize that like, hey, this space snail signs with their stalks. That is a distinct way of communication that has its own history, that presumably has a difference in some sort of...not a difference in vocabulary necessarily, but has its own nuances, and that people who know how to read and communicate in it probably have in-jokes, and there are puns, and there are...there's a whole history of things. It doesn't just boil down to the same as human vocalization, right? But also, what I wouldn't want is to be at a table where someone is like, "It's so goofy how this snail signs instead of talks!" and it could be really easy to fall into that trap, because it's a fun environment and you're not someone who signs with your eye stalks, and so, da da da da da da da. It's easy to do that.

AUSTIN: [cont.] And that is a thing that's like, just be thoughtful about that, and be conscientious, and remember that if this is a thing that's true about your character, it's also true for a bunch of other NPCs in this world, and it's a thing that exists with a particular history. And so the more you can think about that, the better. And then, also, that is a place where what you can do is end up...those are the times that you'll want to si— single it out. I kept wanting to say signal it out. Single it out and say like, you know, yeah...so, say someone asks something of you, and you can say like: yeah, I sign back a yes, but at the last moment I move my eye stalks in such a way that if anyone nearby could read this sign language knows that I'm doing it under duress or it's kind of a sarcastic yes. Or, you know, it turns out saying "yes" and the word for "mom" are very similar, and so it looks like I say "yes, mom". [chuckles] You know, or something like that, where like, again, you can make jokes, but the joke there is not "my body is different than your normative body", it's about understanding that nuance and history there. And again, I'm not...I'm saying this as someone who I know I've fucked this up before, because actual play does not give you the ability to hit backspace and think through and build out an entire language the way that, like, writing fiction does? [chuckles] But it's something I do keep in mind, and it's, at the very least, a goal or an aspiration. And yes, Holden in the chat says, who I'm guessing is maybe the same Holden, "American Sign Language puns are fantastic, by the way." I've seen them, and they seem really, really good. Alright. I'm gonna keep moving, just because we only have one left and because I am due somewhere very soon. E writes in, and they say:

"I am planning a Dungeon World campaign as the GM for a group of experienced tabletop players. Most of us are used to playing D&D 5th Edition, where character alignment exists as a holdover from past systems but doesn't often come up as a mechanic in contemporary play. Dungeon World, on the other hand, actively uses character alignment as a mechanic that you can check over and gain experience with at the end of every session. However, I find myself uncomfortable with the idea of using an alignment system like Dungeon World's without also critically engaging with concepts like Good, Evil, Lawfulness, et cetera as a theme of the campaign—and I don't feel like that's something I'm ready to tackle as a GM. I'm curious whether you have ever considered replacing or shifting focus away from the alignment system during Hieron or in any other games you've played with a similar alignment mechanic. Is alignment worth using even in a setting where you aren't planning to tackle those themes? Is it a cop-out to replace alignment with a more general statement like a character's drive? (Example: Drive: adventure. Take reckless action that puts an ally in danger.) Any thoughts and advice are much appreciated. Thanks, E."

AUSTIN: The first thing I want to say is: it's not a cop-out, especially if that's what your table wants to do and if that's where you're comfortable. If you're like, "Hey, I think the Drive system just works for us better," use it. Period, the end, easy to move on. What I will add, though, is: one, I haven't wanted to change it because I think we've had lots of productive conversation critically around what those concepts are. And because of like, it's been a fun way to track character change? And I would have really hated to jettison, you know, "Is anything here evil?" not because it's a fun joke, but actually because it has helped be a guiding point for who Hadrian is, for who Hella is, and it's been a good way especially as we established like...who is answering that question "What here is evil?"? That has helped us fill in gaps about the world. That doesn't necessarily mean that it's the same for everything all the time everywhere, you know? I don't think that should be true for every game, necessarily. My only other note here is: I suspect you are going to deal with themes of lawfulness, goodness, evilness, corruption, all of those things, whether you plan to or not.

AUSTIN: [cont.] Maybe you don't want to be like, to have those critical conversations at the table where you go "what does evil mean anyway, for real?" but my guess is you're gonna have a character who does something selfish and players at the table are gonna have opinions about whether or not that selfish act was justified or not, right? And once you're having those conversations, you're engaging with those themes, even if you're doing it at a slant. So...and also, believe in yourself and your ability to engage critically with these things. You don't need a degree in philosophy to start talking about philosophical concepts. Like, these are ideas that we all contend with every day, constantly, when we look out into the world. Many of us have settled on what we think good and evil are and what the place of law is, and when I say "us" I don't mean the people listening to this, but I mean many people have done this. But my guess is, if you're writing a question like this, you are engaged enough with the stuff you want to build and create and play, that you're actually extremely capable of walking down this path.

AUSTIN: [cont.] And you'll do it, probably, as the GM, as you think about like, who's a good villain to get my players mad at? You're going to be thinking about like, how can I get them pissed off? Oh, I know, I can put like a really corrupt magistrate into play, and they'll be pissed off about the way that he has authority but he doesn't use that authority for good and in fact uses it to take advantage of oppressed people. And like, alright, you're talking about good, evil, lawfulness, et cetera. Like, you're already there, you're just maybe not thinking about it in that term. And that isn't me saying "and that's why you should use alignment." [chuckles] But I am, just, I want to emphasize that I suspect you're already doing it and will probably do it pretty well if you're the sort of person who would ask us this question. Janine and Keith, any thoughts on this? Sorry for ranting, I just had this answer locked and loaded.

JANINE: I think that, from the sounds of things, the most helpful thing would probably be to get away from the really traditional descriptions and understandings of alignment. I think I often in the past and in the...distant and recent past, struggled a lot with Adaire's alignment because of that. Like, that sort of locked in understanding and also the way that Dungeon World writes those things out of. It has been really hard to pin down where I think she sits on that, because I was thinking like, what does Evil mean? What does Chaotic mean?

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

JANINE: And the thing that has helped me more than anything is to look at alignment more...not as so much like a moral thing, but where a character's interests lie and how far they're willing to go to preserve or pursue those interests. So to me, you know, I think self...I think a lot of alignments are based in self-interest, but depends a lot on what the character sees as their best interest and how far they're willing to go for that. Like, an "evil", quote, unquote, character is gonna go farther to preserve themselves than a neutral character.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: And a good character—to them, their self-interest is sort of a larger thing than to a neutral character, probably. So I try and think in terms of like, you know, if this character is in a fire, what are they reaching for? Like that kind of thing.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

JANINE: And that might be more helpful than thinking like, well, Good and Lawful and, you know, the Evil gem-stealing wizard, stuff like that.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Yes, yes. Totally. Keith, do you have any thoughts on this? I know Fero is in an interesting place with alignment right now.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Has that been useful for you, or do you think that that's been more trouble than it's worth?

KEITH: Being in a weird place with alignment?

AUSTIN: Dealing with alignment for Fero.

KEITH: Dealing with alignment?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Um...I think it's been a fun way to mechanize the sort of conflict, or, I guess turmoil would be the word. [Austin laughs] The sort of, Fero's turmoil. Which is like—

AUSTIN: Oh, Darth Turmoil?

KEITH: Yeah, which is like, you know…

AUSTIN: Darth Moil, that's it.

KEITH: [laughs loudly] Triple-bladed lightsaber. [Austin chuckles] Like, you know...I sort of lost my place.

AUSTIN: No worries.

KEITH: You know. Not… When Fero was Chaotic, it never, you know, meant that he didn't want to help people or do good things, but the way he was was just not like...like he just wasn't Good. Like he, I don't know, it's not Good. It's not like...which doesn't make it bad, it just makes it chaotic. [chuckles] It's just sort of a thing that I...felt was...you know, now that he has a lot more questions about how to...about methods.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

KEITH: And...a lot more questions about like, efficacy I guess, and about what people or what he specifically should be doing. Like, it didn't feel right for him to stay Chaotic, because he wasn't in a spot where he was like, "I know what I want to do, and I'm going to do it." and he's now in a spot where he doesn't know what he wants to do.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: And so, having the alignment there, where I could be like, so he's not Chaotic, he's Neutral, and he's Neutral in a way that he doesn't have...he doesn't have a drive. He doesn't

have like the statement that's attached to the alignment, really. He just kind of feels stuck. And I'm in the process of rewriting a new alignment.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

KEITH: Let's see how that goes. But...it has felt… I don't know, I feel like the alignment...I don't know, I feel like I'm sort of rambling.

AUSTIN: [chuckles] That's fair.

KEITH: 'Cause it's tough. Fero is the toughest char— I think it's harder to play Fero than it is to play any other character that I've played. And it's because of how long ago season 1 was.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah. You don't have that consistency of play, where there is change, but it's a little bit more, if not natural, then concurrent.

KEITH: Yeah, and I...it needs to feel...for me, I have this need for it to feel consistent in a way that I haven't needed anything else to feel. And having to...me, Keith, in 2019, having to feel consistent with me, Keith, from two years ago.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: And from four years ago. Or five years ago? How fuckin' long?

AUSTIN: It's been five years this September. Which is wild.

KEITH: Yeah, so, five years ago.

AUSTIN: Four and a half years, yeah, five, yeah, mm-hmm, give or take.

KEITH: Yeah, like, I don't know, I was 21 five years ago?

AUSTIN: Right. I mean, look at this just in terms of even just what the core of what Fero's questions have been.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And I think that's changed quite a bit over the years, you know?

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And into a thing that's a lot more...directed, now, maybe?

KEITH: Mm-hmm.

AUSTIN: If that's fair. I don't know.

KEITH: Yeah. Well, so, the alignment thing, I guess that's what my point in this is. Is that the alignment system for Dungeon World has helped me most by looking at it and feeling that it's wrong.

AUSTIN: Right. Yeah.

KEITH: And feeling that it needs to change.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: And it's a useful tool in a similar way that Drive is, but without like...there's, I don't know, I feel like there's a core to an alignment that...where a Drive is like an action, the alignments are like a core, and also—

AUSTIN: Like a description of who the person is first and foremost or something.

KEITH: Right. Yeah, it's like a reflex and also a drive together.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Like, it's got both. It has, like, Fero was Chaotic, and the way that he was Chaotic was *blank*, and like, Fero is Neutral, and the way that he's Neutral is *blank*.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: And so I think having both of those has really helped, specifically in when it's not true anymore.

AUSTIN: Right, when it's time to move. And I think that's one of the biggest things about the Dungeon World thing is like, change them! Don't feel scared about changing them. Make dramatic action happen, and change them. They are a fun tool to use, they are not...it is not… All of Dungeon World's rules are prescriptive and descriptive. They both should set fiction into reality, and when the fiction changes that reality, the rules should reflect that, and the mechanics should change to reflect that. And so, there is a degree to which the alignment in Dungeon World only works if you're willing to be like, "Hey, did this change my alignment?" "Hey, am I in the middle of changing my alignment right now?" And, I think looking at the characters whose alignments have changed over the years, especially recently, that helps show how that can work for you. If you can't grok that, or if you think that it's just like, [intake of breath] there's something about it that's just like, "I don't want to think about my characters being capital-e Evil, it doesn't

work for this setting." fuckin' drop it. It's easy to move on from that stuff. It's not intrinstic, and systems like Drive I think do a great job of supplementing it, for sure. Briefly, real quick, wanna be clear: Darth Moil, not a joke about Jewish men who perform brises. I recognized, like seconds after saying it, that our joke about the way that words get reduced in Star Wars into Darth names, I had said a word I knew, and I was like, "Isn't that…? Wait." [Keith laughs] And, to be clear—

KEITH: Yiddish.

AUSTIN: It is Yiddish, yeah. Star Wars's history of antisemitism is such that it's totally possible, the same movies that have Wato, in that world could absolutely have an antisemitic Darth something, so.

KEITH: Yeah. And so we should have said Darth Turmo.

AUSTIN: Darth— [Austin and Keith laugh] No, I don't like that either. I wanna be clear. I don't know that that's a slur, but it sounds like it could be.

KEITH: Turmo's probably nothing.

AUSTIN: I hope not.

KEITH: It's likely nothing.

AUSTIN: It's German for tower. It's what the chess— it's what the rook is in German, apparently. Wait, no, not in German. It's in Ido? I don't know what Ido is. I-D-O. Interesting. Anyway. It's another language. That's all. [Janine laughs]

KEITH: Yeah. That's all. Did I have one more thing? I think that I had one more thing but it was small, so forget it.

AUSTIN: Alright. Well, on that note.

KEITH: On that note.

AUSTIN: On that good note. I'm trying to figure out what Ido is, what this language is. I don't know anything about this language. It's a constructed language. I don't know what that...means. Someone tell me what this is! About I-D-O, yeah, About Ido. Tell me this, Wiktionary. That doesn't help me at all. This doesn't help me at all. Ido. Language.

KEITH: It's derived from reformed Esperanto.

AUSTIN: OH, it's like a...oh, wow! Wild! Okay, sure. It's a— okay. So that is why it's a constructed language.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: It's like a built language.

JANINE: Ohh.

AUSTIN: There are flags.

KEITH: Okay, so…

AUSTIN: Look at this flag for constructed language.

KEITH: That's interesting. So, I don't know if you noticed this on the Wikipedia page, it says that it was created to be a universal second language?

AUSTIN: [interested] Ohh.

KEITH: Which I do not think was the goal of Esperanto, which was to be a universal primary language.

AUSTIN: Primary language, right?

KEITH: Yeah. So I think that's the difference, like Ido—

AUSTIN: Mmm, wait, no, no.

KEITH: No?

AUSTIN: This does say "international auxiliary language". Because the idea is you would have a primary language that is your local national whatever, regional language. And then you would have a secondary or auxiliary language that is for international communication.

KEITH: Wow. Esperanto and Ido are way older than I thought they were.

AUSTIN: Yeah, it's wild. We should wrap up, because I have to go to get a drink with some friends who are in town.

KEITH: Okay!

AUSTIN: If you have questions, you can send them to tipsatthetable@gmail.com. Thank you, as always, for supporting us. You can follow us on Twitter @friends_table, or you can support us at friendsatthetable.cash, which you already are. Thank you so much for that support. I think that's gonna do it for us. We should do a quick time.is, so that we have a second clap just in case Zraig/Craig betrays us. Like Darth Traya would. You wanna do top of the minute?

KEITH: Sure.

JANINE: Darth Zraig is actually a good Darth name.

AUSTIN: Darth Zraig, good Darth.

JANINE: It's the only one.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Darth Craig, also good.

JANINE: [doubtful] Mmm.

[they clap]

KEITH: Nice.

AUSTIN: It's me, Darth Craig.

KEITH: That was a perfect clap.

AUSTIN: That was a good clap. Alright, thank you so much for hanging out, everybody, I hope you have a good night.

KEITH: Bye.

JANINE: Bye!