

Tips at the Table: Spoiler Alert

AUSTIN: Welcome to Tips at the Table, an RPG podcast focused on critical questions, hopefully smart answers, and fun interactions ... between good friends I am your host, Austin Walker, [chuckling] follow me on Twitter @austin_walker and, you know, uh, a thing I don't ever say here is sometimes I stream at twitch.tv/waypoint....

[laughter]

AUSTIN: And maybe you were one of the, how many was it, Art, hundred and...

ART: Hundred and thirty.

AUSTIN: Hundred and thirty people that saw me streaming over there a minute ago... whoops... umm... instead we're streaming this today over on our youtube channel, and doing a recording, as always, thank you to our patrons who let us do this, and if you want to support us, or already are, and want to change, and say "hey, maybe if I give Austin another dollar a month, his brain will be good, then, and he'll remember not to stream to the wrong channel", you can go to friendsatthetable.cash to do that. Joining me today, Ali Acompora&

ALI: Umm, yep, that's me, you can find me @ali_west on Twitter.com.

AUSTIN: Sylvia¹ Claire

SYLVIA: Hey, I'm Sylvia, you can find me on Twitter @captaintrash and you can find my other show @emojidrome.

AUSTIN: Art Martinez-Tebbel

ART: Hey, hi, you can follow me on Twitter @atebbel. You've already missed being named as one of the twelve Waypoint fans that I like, so, it's too late for that, but um... you can still be one of my top One Song Only podcast listeners-

AUSTIN: There ya go.

ART: - that you can follow on Twitter @onesongpod.

AUSTIN: Uh, and I don't know if you noticed this, but my cadence was, I was gonna be like "and Austin Walker" but then I noticed that that one was me, so, given all the good lead-in we've got, we should just jump right into these questions, what's, does that sound good to you?

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

[sound of a pop-tab can being opened, source unknown]

ALI: Mm hmm!

ART: Yeah!

AUSTIN: Okay, so this one comes in from Mary, who says: Hello friends and table. I recently started playing a tabletop game with some long time friends. The character I've chosen is a pop star who just woke up from cryo-sleep after one hundred years. I've chosen to play this character with no interest in combat, at least for the moment, since the last time she remembers was peaceful. The issue is that the system we're playing, Starfinder, is pretty combat-focused, and while the GM is encouraging me to explore my character's aversion to combat, some of the other players were upset with my decision to not grab a weapon when we started, and it worries me that I'll be making the game un-fun for them. Should I go ahead and play into the system by giving my character a weapon, or should I let myself explore my characters feelings, even if it puts her, and potentially others, in danger? Thanks for everything y'all do, Mary.

Um, so, I guess my immediate thought here is that this is one of those reasons why I advocate so often for open conversation about goals and tone and what a campaign is, because it feels like there might be some disconnect between what the rest of players at the table want and what you want, and I don't mean the combat thing. It sounds like you're super interested in exploring your character first and foremost, and that's rad, obviously, we're big fans of that here, but there might be players at the table who are more interested in like, interesting combat challenges, and getting cool fighty powers, and Starfinder is certainly, from my reading of it, I haven't ever actually played it, but I've the book, a little bit more in that direction. And so I think the thing to say here, for me anyway, is: It's not too late to have that conversation, and say "hey, the thing that I'm really interested in here is doing this type of thing, and I hope that ya'll understand that, and I don't want to get in the way necessarily, but that's really what draws me to the table." And to just have an honest conversation about like, where you're going, it sounds like your GM is really supportive of this, and my hope is that, and again, this is something you can talk to them about, they should be providing opportunities for you to do the things you're interested in, in the same way they're providing opportunities for the rest of the players. And that does mean sometimes there will be moments where your character is not super useful in a fight, and that's not a bad thing, what's important is to make those sequences really interesting and really compelling on their own, because being the person who doesn't have a weapon in a fight... is good, is like a cool, interesting thing to deal with, and it should be the case that you dig into, like, "Hey, my character's the one who doesn't want to fuckin' shoot people, like, what's that look like?" And I think that that's actually a really potent idea for a character, even in a game that is very combat heavy. Any thoughts from anybody else here?

ART: Yeah, I would like to call someone out on this which is the unnamed GM here, because if the GM is encouraging this character's aversion to combat, and some of the players are upset that there's no weapon-grabbing, then there's a disconnect, and it's the GM's fault. Because if the combat is so hard that it is unfun missing a set of combat roles, then your GM isn't really

encouraging you as much as they're like... making you a secondary antagonist, y'know. You should do what you want to do and what is fun for you, and all of that, but you also shouldn't be making the game un-fun for everyone else playing with you because... they're dying now.

AUSTIN: Right, right. Which, because your GM was like "Yeah, cool, let's do that", they should then react to that in a way that isn't just like "Well then if the party dies, that's on you, Mary". And like, that's not it, that's not really the thing that encouragement looks like. There is mechanical encouragement too, y'know. Ali, Sylvia, thoughts here?

SYLVIA: I was gonna say, if you talk to your group and they still wanna do combat, but you still wanna be part of it, there are still ways to engage in those sequences without directly committing violence, and I don't know Starfinder, so I don't know what options you have mechanically there, but definitely look over and see what options you have, cause that can really lead to interesting stuff to, when you're engaging in stuff in a way that everyone else is doing one way, and you just throw something else at them. Like when you have pocket sand that's choke dust instead of hitting someone with a wrench.

[laughter]

SYLVIA: Like, that was my whole thing with Aubery, was trying to find different ways to engage in that without doing something that could be considered direct combat, and it's tricky, but if you can find a way to do that that's fun, I think it's really rewarding to do in a tabletop game.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I will say the one thing that makes it a little tough is that Starfinder is by Piezo, the company that makes Pathfinder, and it is like sci-fi, science-fantasy Pathfinder. It came out last year, it's neat, it has some neat things, but like, y'know, it's still a game that has attacks of opportunity and critical hits and, y'know "Take one swift action or take two... whatever actions", like that's very much the thing it... it is, it is as a game built towards combat, that's not to say there aren't cool other things, other abilities and stuff, but... I don't know what class or whatever Mary is playing here, but my hope is that it's a class that has cool stuff to do that isn't just "I hit them hard" or "I cast a spell that hurts them", y'know? But... y'know, it can be tough, it can be tough.

Ali, one of the things I like is like, Sylvia you already said, obviously Aubrey was someone who avoided combat, but then Ali, Aria, also a popstar, but also someone who specifically never wanted to kill anybody. Right, maybe not never, but started that game with, like "I'm not out to kill people".

ALI: Yeah, that's why this question is a... little bit of a bummer? Cause like, I feel bad that these people, not these people, but your friends aren't encouraging you, or like, at least like, aren't being nice about it. Especially since like, I mean, the way that it's stated here at least, is like "Yeah, this is how she feels right now, and maybe my character's gonna feel differently later". There are definitely support roles you can take and like, cooler combat things you can do that are not like, "I have a gun and I shoot it, and also I like to sing". Like there are other, there are

other variances there, and so I think, like, you should probably just, like, talk it out with everybody... just to get on the same page in terms of like “yeah, I don’t think she wants to fight this way, but I can do xyz or whatever else”, just so people can kind of feel like they have the pathways of having a good time.

AUSTIN: Totally, and I do think that if you look at the book, and look at the game, and think about like... if you come around and you’re like “Oh hey, actually, maybe I do wanna be part of combat”, and you can do that for a lot of reasons ranging from you just decide it’s cool, to your GM is not giving you great opportunities for interaction outside of combat, and that’s a bummer, but you still really like your friends and you wanna hang out. Like, I’ve been in those situations, and as much as I like to like, y’know hit the drum of “have the conversation and fix the situation”- I, uh, didn’t mean to rhyme that, but like put it in my fuckin’ self-help GM book, have the conversation fix the situation, there are times at which you, like, make the compromise, and so what I’ll say here is, if you do make the compromise, the compromise should be a compromise, the compromise shouldn’t be “and now my character is a mass murderer overnight, i’m cool with shooting guns at people”, you should talk to your GM if you decide that you do want to move your character towards doing combat stuff, have the conversation that’s like “well how do i get there? I want to see on-screen, so to speak, how my character goes from being the pop idol who woke up from cryosleep for a hundred years, to someone who is willing to like, slice someone with a sword or pull a trigger, and I want that to happen over the course of like, a couple of sessions”, and that should feel dramatic, and like, start thinking about, and talking at the table about what would make your character draw a weapon, what would make your character hurt someone? And in some way, you have the very good role of being the person at the table who can contextualize the violence of other characters, and say, like “Yo, are you really gonna kill this person”, and it will make it really cool if and when you decide this is the thing I’ve decided is worth fighting for. So like, I would say if you’re going to compromise on it, make sure to compromise it where you’re still able to have the fun you’ve outlined here, which is about, like, understanding who your character is, and like, thinking about who this person is after a hundred years, and really roleplaying her... Those two things aren’t necessarily incompatible, even if sometimes games like Starfinder might predispose you towards being someone who at the end of the day is willing to shoot some lasers at some space goblins, or whatever, y’know?

ART: Austin, while that is excellent advice, I wanna make sure people don’t forget the lessons of important works of literature, and in this situation I of course mean the early Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson movie The Rundown.

AUSTIN: Yeah, right, good, oh, that’s it, you got it. This is a good one, mmmm.

ALI: Please go on.

ART: I’m sure I don’t need to remind everyone here of the plot of The Rundown but in case anyone listening hasn’t seen the movie... and honestly, consider just turning the podcast off now, watching the whole movie and coming back, cause this is, I’m about to tell you the end of the

movie. Umm, but for the whole movie, Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson, I think that’s the name of the character...

AUSTIN: Yep, that’s him.

SYLVIA: Wait, that’s his name in every movie. They should change that.

ART: Refuses to use guns.

AUSTIN: And what’s the dude’s name he’s with?

ART: Shaun William-Scott

AUSTIN: Okay, so not “Jason Todd Scott” which is what I wrote into Google?

ART: No, that’s not right, Jason Todd is the Robin who died.

AUSTIN: Who’s Todd Scott?

ART: I guess I spoiled that too.

[laughter]

SYLVIA: Spoilers for Batman. The franchise.

ART: So he doesn’t use guns, he’s like this badass, chasin’ people through the thing, but he doesn’t use guns.

AUSTIN: Batman? Yeah, Batman doesn’t use guns.

ART: No, Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson as Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson in The Rundown, starring Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson.

AUSTIN: Gotcha.

ART: And at the end of the movie, it turns out he doesn’t use guns because he’s the best person to ever use guns in the whole world. He’s like, shooting people from a hundred yards away with a shotgun, it’s unreal, he’s like a badass this whole movie, and then at the end, he’s like “I don’t use guns, cause I’m too good” and then grabs two guns and kills like 50 people in 20 seconds, it’s AMAZING, so I’m saying you shouldn’t be afraid to lean into that in your own storytelling.

AUSTIN: Right, actually Mary the pop idol was actually the greatest gunslinger known to this peaceful time. She did a whole thing around gunslinging, like a whole stage show around it once, it was great.

ART: Yeah, there's lots of ways to get good with guns without killing people, probably, I don't know, I'm not good with guns.

AUSTIN: It's weird. Batman also, that's also Batman's arc. When Batman finally pulls out a gun, he'll shoot people. Mostly just that one, though... Batman shot a gun recently, I'm gonna move on.

[laughter]

ALI: Thank you, thank you, for that.

AUSTIN: We read about it on a previous clap- or a tip- or a clapcast, we talked all about the anti-life equation, anyway, we're gonna move on...

ALI: [quietly, laugh] What?

ART: Did that make it?

AUSTIN: The anti-life equation stuff? Yeah, didn't it?

ALI: Is that the [???] stuff?

AUSTIN: Yes, yes.

ALI: Okay, okay.

AUSTIN: Alright, I wanna move on to the next question, this one comes in from Parker, who says: I am GMing a Powered By The Apocalypse game, Monster of the Week, for the first time, and I wanted some advice on mixed successes in social situations. When in combat, it's pretty easy to put PCs in a tough spot, but when they're investigating a mystery, trying to cover something up, or some other social situation with stakes, I struggle to know how to handle a 7-9 roll, or even an outright failure. It isn't compelling just to have the NPC not be persuaded, but I don't know how to make moves against them that are more interesting and make sense contextually, especially when most of the Keeper moves don't seem applicable. What are the ways to raise the stakes of failure and to make it interesting?

So the first thing I would say is that it's almost certainly worth re-visiting the actual base moves that they're rolling, because on a 7-9 there will be some degree of clarity on most things, and sometimes it can be kind of vague... I'm trying to find a basic sheet for Monster of the Week really quick, the basic moves, here we go, give me a second... I actually really love any time

that they're like "go to the text", I love it, any time I have to look at just moves and have to talk through some shit, this is my new favorite thing that we do on this podcast... Alright, so, the basic moves... Like, for instance, on investigating a mystery, they roll their sharp skill, and on 10+ they hold 2, on a 7-9 they basically only get to ask one thing, and on a miss it says "you reveal some information to the monster, or whoever you are talking to. The Keeper might ask you some questions which you have to answer. It's important that your attempts to investigate and the results that you get from them are plausible and consistent with what's happening. The keeper- who's the MC or the GM or the DM here- says 'How did you find that out?'. If you don't have a good answer, choose another method instead."

And so like, in a situation like that, you have a lot of leeway there, it's about maybe getting some information from them, it's about them revealing information to the monster they're hunting, so like, lean into that stuff. And the other thing that I'll say is like, I'm obviously the biggest fan in the world of "Yes you succeed, but there is a cost you didn't think of". Here's, this is an example I'm stealing 100% from Adam Koebel, who co-wrote Dungeon World, and it's his example for failing a circles roll in Burning Wheel. In Burning Wheel, you have a stat called circles, which represents your ability to have a friend nearby, have someone you can count on, have someone you can call in a favor to. In Star Wars: A New Hope, Princess Leia rolls a 7-9 on circles, she rolls a 7-9 trying to contact her good friend, Ben Kenobi, who she can trust, but she gets a mixed success which means it takes a little longer to get there, because it ends up in the hands of someone else, who is also trustworthy, but not directly to the person that she was sending the message to. In Empire Strikes Back, Han Solo fails his circles roll, and what he gets is Lando Calrissien, Lando is someone he can trust, he runs into Lando, Lando's cool, he gets to add Lando as a contact... Lando's already betrayed him, Lando actually cannot be trusted, and despite being an old friend, has already sold them out to the empire. And so yes, they get to dock the Millennium Falcon, you don't get the call where it's like "no sorry, you're not allowed here, bye", that's not good for the story, but a failed social roll can look like a success at first, and then what you do is immediately start showing them the barrel of the gun, immediately be like "something seems a little off here", or like "Come on in, and like, he's normally a little more standoffish than this" or whatever.

ART: Yo, is C3PO missing?

[laughter]

AUSTIN: Right, exactly. For instance. Umm, any other thoughts here, I mean, this comes up all the time I think in our games. Usually you're on the other side of it, but...

ART: Yeah, cause I of course don't have any experience in saying what happens when a roll fails, I've just failed a lot of rolls. Uh, but those are all great examples, and yeah, Empire Strikes Back sure is a good movie.

AUSTIN: Sure is, sure is.

ART: I wish Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson was in it.

ALI: Hold on to hope, Art.

AUSTIN: One day. The other thing is, a lot of the moves in PBTA games, again, something like manipulate someone or something like read a situation, either it'll be you get less information, or it will be give them something ahead of time, like “yeah, I'll do it for you, if you show me right now that you'll come through, or promise me you'll give me x, or give me x now and I'll do a thing for you” that stuff is pretty actionable. And then the other thing is, like, missing should not just be no, it should be actually you've hit a nerve, or actually this person isn't who they think you are, or someone else watched you succeed and now they're following you, it's a lot of going three steps away, and seeing how... if you fail, if you fail to, like, you're trying to get into a closed bar and you're trying to sway the bouncer and you fail the roll or whatever, y'know, it can't just be the bouncer says no. It has to be the bouncer says like, no and literally throws you into the middle of the street, or the bouncer says yes but it turns out to be not the club inside you thought it was, and there's vampires in there or some shit, or it's yes you go in, but they take your weapons from you, or yes you go in, but you've actually been tailed all the way inside, always be looking for that second step of a thing that turns things on their side. Same thing with investigation, like, give them the information they need, but in something like Scum and Villainy, tick up the heat clock. Yes, give them the information they need, but make it clear that, like, one I do all the time, or I threatened this, for instance, in the very first Scum and Villainy game, was yes you can break this lock open, but it will be broken, and it will be obvious that the lock has been tampered with, right, so when someone comes back later, they'll be able to gather evidence and know that this was broken into. And like, once that happens, you've shown them a really big gun, because it means someone will be on the lookout for them. Those are the things that I'd say like, those are the ones I go to all the fuckin' time. You don't just have to do the things that your book says are your moves, or you can think about those in really broad ways, it's not just like, put a villain on screen to show the the barrel of the gun, or whatever, right...

ART: Isn't there a meme with you in it, that's like “failing a roll means you get what you wanted and it turns out it's the worst thing that ever happened to you”.

AUSTIN: [laughter] Uh huh, that's what a failure looks like, it happens and you're not happy about it. Totally. Ali, do you have anything here.

ALI: No, uh, I... No.

AUSTIN: Okay, that's fair, that's fair. All right, I think we got that one pretty quick. I just thought I heard you start to speak earlier and I wanted to give you the opportunity, just in case.

ALI: Yeah, no, I haven't GMed before, I like, mostly ignore consequences when I'm playing games, so it's fine, yup.

AUSTIN: Great, good, perfect. All right, next one. This one comes in from Josh, and I'm really curious for y'all as players about this, as we are going towards this. Josh says: Hi friends, wanted to ask what your thoughts were for best practices on ending campaigns. My Apocalypse World campaign looks like it might be ending soon, and I wanna know what's important to you as GMs and players in the end of a campaign. We plan to end our current campaign and perhaps jump elsewhere in the world afterwards. Thanks, Josh.

So let's start with y'all, I'm really curious, as we wrap TM in the next... two weeks, what matters to you, when you wrap up a campaign?

[overwhelmed sighs]

SYLVIA: I think for me, it kinda, weirdly enough, just comes down to like, what I like in writing in general, where it's just like, I want stuff to feel consistent with the characters, like even if it's a bad ending, if it feels like I got there because of my actions and it fits with the character I've been playing, then I'm pretty satisfied with how a campaign ends. Yeah, that's all I got.

AUSTIN: No that, that makes sense. I think a lot about Aubery in that way, like, the end of Marielda was super intense, but you can draw such a clean line from, for each of the characters, where we first see them on screen to what they're doing in the big final confrontation, y'know?

SYLVIA: Yeah, I think counter/WEIGHT's a really good example of that too, like I obviously wasn't a main PC for that, but like, everybody's story felt, like, consistent with them.

AUSTIN: Totally, totally, yeah. Ali and Art?

ART: Do you wanna go or should I?

ALI: I dunno, I feel like beyond, like, knowing that it's the end, obviously, and then like having everybody else at the table sort of know, like be in that mode, y'know? I mean, I feel like the worst thing to end a campaign would be like, "Oh, it's a Tuesday, we're all sitting down" and then being like... "okay, that's it", or like whatever, needing to make those big decisions, because suddenly we've found, like, the big boss, or whatever else.

AUSTIN: Thankfully, I don't think that's happened for us, right? I think Winter felt that way maybe a little bit... but you know what would have actually, what would have, would be what if we ended after September, right, we didn't do the finale of counter/WEIGHT, and it was just like "well that's it, you win the day, and that's it, or you lose, the end". That would have sucked, right, because there was not the same build.

ALI: Um, yeah, I mean, even with TM, we were like "did we just record the last ever session of that game?" and like, we could have, I'm glad that we didn't, because I feel like for something to

end, and to like wrap it up, you would wanna be able to sit down and be like “okay, what were my intentions here, and how am I gonna hit those in the next... 2½ hours or whatever”

AUSTIN: Totally, exactly. I think that that’s like... it’s a weird thing, because it’s such a collaborative thing that we do, but we should always be on the same page, or as close as we can be, about like, where are we in this story? And in the last couple of weeks we’ve been having conversations as we’ve moved towards the end of Twilight Mirage, and there’s been lots of like “yeah, I feel like I’m in the final act of my character, y’know, I feel like I’m gonna start making choices towards closure, towards like, big-picture swings, big turns, not only because like, there’s only a few episodes left, but because I feel like I’ve gotten what I needed out of the second step of this character’s arc, and now we’re moving into the final one.” Art, how about you?

ART: Um, I mean, I think there’s like, an importance of setting everyone up to succeed or fail in however they’re comfortable with, and, I mean, this is sure gonna feel apparent over the next couple of weeks of Twilight Mirage, but I don’t think you can get too comfortable in your character going up to the end, if you know there’s an end coming, you have to be prepared to make... really big choices. Because it’s going away, right? You don’t need to hold onto it the same way.

AUSTIN: Yeah, like you don’t need to play conservatively, you don’t need to play safely, um, not that you should ever anyway, but we all do to some degree, right? I think about the last few episodes of Twilight Mirage, the ones that have already come out even, where it was like, you know, there’s a moment in a recent episode of Twilight Mirage where I’m literally pausing to look at my principles to make sure that I’m not like... wavering in my duties when it comes to, like hey, this is a situation where a character could definitely be killed, could receive lethal damage and we have to decide what happens from there, and fictionally speaking, it might be the case that they die. And that was... I probably would have tried to find a bigger loophole there... six months ago, right? Or maybe not six months ago, because holiday time is also a time where it feels like any amount of plot armor can- and we don’t explicitly play with plot armor, when we’ve done Dungeon World, I would never fucking fudge a death roll, because I’m so interested in how that stuff would play out, but there is a degree of like, can I talk the players down from this, and I also don’t think that players often will lean in in that way in like, the dead middle or the first act of a campaign, y’know?

ART: Yeah, and I do wanna say that if you’re gearing up for a finale and the big thing in your finale is gonna be a giant fight scene, you should probably think a little more about it, because I think like, video games have improperly conditioned us to believe that that’s like, a really great climax, when like... y’know, fighting Kefka is awesome- god, I’m a dinosaur...

AUSTIN: They just, you just saw it for the first time at Summer Games Done Quick, you were like “wow, cool fight”.

ART: Yeah, uh huh, Fallen One is a real pain. But like, that's a great fight because you're invested in it, but like, movies end in fights, but those fights are about, y'know, emotional conflicts in good movies, like, um... like The Rundown starring Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson.

AUSTIN: Right, he doesn't use guns, right, uh huh.

ART: Well, that's really about Seann William-Scott and his dad, but it's not really important- oh and "The Rock" and guns. Um, but like, the biggest moment in your finale should be an emotional moment, and not like "well, he's got five thousand hitpoints" unless the five thousand hitpoints is important to someone's arc in some way, like, you set out from your village knowing that you would be the one to deal five thousand hitpoints of damage someday.

AUSTIN: Right, right... which is not... anything, it's not a thing, like it's meant- I think about gameplay mechanics a lot, both for tabletop games and video games, and I do my best to think about them as analogy, or as... um, analogy isn't even the right word, it like.... Uh, what is the fuckin' word I'm looking for, um... it's another a-word, that's sort of like... it's closer to like "fairy-tale". But that's not right.

SYLVIA: It's not allegory, right?

AUSTIN: It is allegory, thank you, actually, thank you very much.

SYLVIA: It is the word, okay, I was like "I don't know if I have this right..."

AUSTIN: Yeah, and I do my best to think about some mechanics as kind of an abstract allegory, like, I am the person who doesn't like the Uncharted games, but even I am kind of tired of the "Drake kills so many people" take, because it's allegorical action, and like, part of the reason I don't like that game is because Drake kills so many people et cetera et cetera, but like, I also think that for most video games, and for a lot of tabletop games, something allegorical is happening. In X-Com, everyone goes one at a time, combat doesn't work like that, right? Same thing with DnD, everybody is constantly fighting each other, it's allegorical, it's allegorical for tactical decision making for your ability to have endurance and all that stuff your characters have, right, and it's even allegorical for what does it take to succeed, it's a really broad allegory. And even in something Frozen Sye-napse, or Frozen Si-napse depending on if you're from the UK or the US, a tactical combat game in which everybody moves at the same time, even that isn't just it's true, even that is allegorical, and what it's doing is like, overloading your brain with the huge canvas of possibility, because that's a game where you plot all of your character's moves, and so does your opponent, and you hit go and see what happens, and you can spend literally hours just doing test runs before you commit to your move and trying out different configurations. And that's not like, "oh, that's what true combat is", combat isn't someone stares at a screen and like, tries out a million different combinations until it goes the way they want, but it's allegorical for the feeling of being overwhelmed because everything happens at one time, things don't go one, then two, then three.

And so I think that like, in terms of death, in terms of big boss fights at the end of a campaign, in terms of like, “hey, we’re all gonna wrap up with something”. Think about what the allegory is you’re making, think about what that means mechanically. I think, again, with counter/WEIGHT, we were super clear, and we had a great tool. Shoutouts to Matt Mitchell for putting Firebrands in my hand like, three months before, two months before we recorded the finale, and I read it, and immediately saw everything I wanted there. Like, that’s a game that is, from top to bottom, in line with- maybe even not from top to bottom, it was hackable to be exactly what we wanted, I don’t know that counter/WEIGHT was as factional as Firebrands was, but we leaned into that, we did a time jump so it was possible to lean into, “hey, the last time we saw all these characters, the Chime at least was like, pretty tight. Now they’re a little bit more spread out, they have other allegiances that are pulling on them”. But the core thing of like “fight against your friends, team up with your rivals, fall in love with your enemies”, yeah, that’s counter/WEIGHT, top to bottom, right? And the gameplay mechanics, allegorically, are sort of about that sort of messiness, that entanglement. And so as a GM, think about what you’re giving your players as their big final challenge, or if there even is one, or how that’s set up, because you’ll be communicating something with them. At the end of Winter in Hieron, and again, I’m gonna do my best to be vague here, I gave one side the feeling of just like, the most frustrating conversation they’d ever be part of, just the feeling of like, you can’t talk this person out of depression, and you can’t talk someone out of having a chronic illness, or a terminal illness, in this case. And he’s just a stubborn asshole, and he’s gonna be a stubborn asshole, and the combat needed to feel like that too, right, the combat needed to feel like “How- Where is this fucking dog? How come this person keeps showing up in a boat, wha-hrmm”, like that needed to be in line, and then at the other hand, for Mountain Party, which was dealing with these larger than life things, magic that didn’t make any fucking sense, like, unpredictability, I needed that conflict to feel geographically unsettling and unclear and the future to seem open ended, and so we did that conflict inside of where that big last fight happens, and then I ended that, and I was like okay, we’ve gotten through the magic shit, and then the actual conclusions of that are the party fracturing, right, it is conversations between characters that ens up being so important at the end of that, because they’ve been pushed to the brink by these larger-than-life, hard-to-understand things, and that was how I was trying to end that- and that’s the end of a year, obviously the Dungeon World campaign continues, and we’ll pick back up and we’ll be having this conversation in a muuuch bigger way. And I’ll say that that’s the last thing, is have that conversation. In the last couple of weeks, if you just look at our Twilight Mirage chat internally, I mean the last little bit has been me just... fuckin’, crying out loud trying to figure out how the fuck to do this finale, but I was aided that in that by lots of conversation about what people wanted to see there. Ali, you have a great line up here, I just had it, and scrolled and lost it, where’d it go... you said, umm.... Nope, that’s about Grand, that’s super about Grand, here we go, “It almost feels like the question isn’t ‘is unification possible’ but more like ‘how are we meeting the needs of people who are in the system’”, and that was super useful for me to start thinking through mechanics and games we wanted to look at for the finale, because... yeah, that is it, it’s how are we meeting the needs of people, who maybe all have different ideas about what the future looks like. And so it’s like, instead of doing the game of like “by hook or by crook, we’re all gonna agree”, it’s like, okay, no, what games make it possible for us to think

about survival, what mechanics make it possible for us to think about, y'know, working on things over a long period of time, and addressing needs. And that was super useful. And we had, y'know, you, Janine, like, a lot of people in this conversation laid out different things, and for me, that's such an important conversation to end up having. And sometimes it means tossing things aside, and I think we'll probably wrap back around to this, or not tossing things aside, but prioritizing, and I said for me with Twilight Mirage, one of the things that was one of my guiding principles from the jump was that science fiction lets us imagine different worlds than the ones that we can imagine inside of naturalistic and realistic contemporary fiction, because fiction that takes place in the here and now that is honest in the here and now, it's really hard to imagine a future without capitalism, for instance, or a future where we have gotten our shit together to address climate change in a substantial way, it's really hard for me to genuinely believe that stuff because the world is so terrible, um, but science fiction is a hammer that can break through that shell, and I can be like "eheheh, science fiction, it's science fiction, so let's just focus on the outcome, let's focus on imagining a different world", and so that is something, like, I need to bring forward. So as a GM, think about that stuff, what were the big-picture ideas that you really wanted to bring forward, and even if you can't bring forward all of them, and put a nice wrapper on all of them, pick the ones that mean the most to you, and more importantly, the ones that have worked really well with your players. It took me way too long into this season to think about writing intros and coming up with characters and coming up with situations that were about the things that my players were interested in, and going into the finale that's hyper-important, or going into the end of any campaign, it's like okay, you've thrown all this stuff out there, you've put up all these paintings in the gallery, which are the paintings people are gathering around? Focus in there, it's okay that you have other stuff that you thought was really interesting, if they're not into it, fuck it, like, it goes away, it doesn't need to be the focus of the end of your campaign, focus in on where people are already spending their attention, where they're already raising their flags. That is what I would say. Any other thoughts here about ending things? Alright, let's keep on moving.

Aah, so this next question does have a spoiler for Marielda and a spoiler for counter/WEIGHT, I've edited them out as best I could, but what I'm gonna do is read it through with blanks, and then I'm gonna read it again through- umm, I'll read it through with blanks and if everybody on the call is like "yeah, I know what you're talking about", then I think we're good, because that's... I think that that's the thing, and if someone on the call is like "I don't know what that is", then I think what I'm gonna do is be like "hey, I'm gonna spoil this, jump ahead 15 seconds", I hope that that works. So.

This one's from M, who says "When you have a secret about a player character, Audi being blank, say, or Castille being blank, how early in advance do you have that planned out? Do you have any strategies for letting those pieces fall into place? Those are my favorite kinds of revelations throughout the show, and the exact kind of evil GMing I hope to emulate someday." Thanks, M. Does everyone know what these blanks are?

ART: Can we get a little... can I ask a clarifying question because I'm not sure about some... operations?

AUSTIN: Is it about Marielda or counter/WEIGHT?

ART: Who knew about these blanks first?

AUSTIN: So I think that's part of the question. I think, in both-

ART: I was under the impression that you knew the first one well before, and I did not get the same impression about the second one. But maybe that's because Marielda was shorter?

AUSTIN: That's funny. I knew Marielda way before I knew counter/WEIGHT.

ART: But not you...

AUSTIN: Wait... what do you mean not me?

ART: When did Ali know blank?

AUSTIN: Oh!

ALI: Oh, I knew when Austin said it. I... yeah, I had no idea.

AUSTIN: But we both know what we're talking about here, with both of these things?

ART: Yeah, I know what we're talking about.

AUSTIN: I know... no, YOU know...

ALI: [laughter]

AUSTIN: God, I can't believe we lost the episode of Art and Austin. It's gone forever now. Anyway, the Art and Austin show will be back in... 2019. Um, so-

ART: It's gonna be on Showtime though, so get ready to pay for it.

AUSTIN: [laughter] God, ugh, I wish I could talk about some shit I can't talk about.

ART and ALI: [laughter]

AUSTIN: Y'know, I'm just sayin', pay your people. That's my rule, as a, as someone who works with people, pay your people. Umm, so... [laughter] Eathura says "Castille being: a cat". Yup, that's it, that's the big spoiler. Um, so in both of those cases, I knew ahead of when the players knew. But in the Castille case I knew from the moment... from character creation, right Ali? Because you... I had this good idea, I was like "oh, actually".

ALI: [laughter] To the point that I like... I didn't change my character idea, but I was like "okay, we can go with that"... and yeah, that was her deal, and I didn't know, and it was... I mean, I feel like there's part of me that wishes that I had known sooner, because I... there were some hooks in Castille that weren't there that I feel like, if I had known that before we started that season, would have been more fun to play with. But like, yknow...

AUSTIN: Sure... the thing, my only counter to that is, I thought we had three or four more missions...

ALI: [laughter]

AUSTIN: Right? You learned it in the second full mission, it's just that... we only did another one, we only did the downtime and then one more, and so like, in my mind it was like "Okay, don't do it in the first one, but then at like the end of the second one, it'll come out. This ghost'll tell her, and that'll be cool, and then we'll have like three more missions to like, really play it out with her know-" no, we didn't, we ended up ending Marielda way too quick.

ALI: Oh well... [laughter]

AUSTIN: I mean, it happens, that's just, turned out, our games go long, and we need to be smarter about that sometimes. Umm, Audi was the opposite. Audi came much later, ahead of, like, not much earlier than that episode. I mean, there's a pretty... someone, heh, hmm, I'm trying to see if there's a way I can talk about this without spoiling it, but I can't, so... You can tell that I'm excited about it in a way that, not that I wasn't excited about the reveal for Castille, but the Castille reveal, another rhyme, uh, was a thing that I knew was coming and I was a little more practiced with it, and I had the delivery mechanism extremely clear in my mind, whereas the Audi one, I had only figured out like, a month before, a couple weeks before, and had not been like, eager to, I wasn't like "ah, now is the time to reveal this", whereas it totally was, like I made the mission where Castille's, uh deal... gets revealed, fuck off, words.

ALI: [laughter]

AUSTIN: Uh, but the Audi one I'd figured out like a month prior while doing some prep, based on... based on the way Jack had been playing the character, based on how I was starting to come to understand some of the fiction, like I think one of the funny things to remember is that, the Audi reveal happens, and then An Animal Out Of Context happens. And remember, And Animal Out Of Context isn't a thing we hit play on, we played that game, which means we didn't know any of that shit. I didn't know blank, Audi being blank? I didn't know blank, I knew blank from a couple of other things, you know what I mean, like?

ALI: Oh boy... [laughter]

AUSTIN: What?

ALI: No, go on.

AUSTIN: You get what I'm saying.

ALI: Yep.

AUSTIN: We had to develop what blank was, and so, I knew part of blank, but I didn't know all of blank, and so I saw an opportunity to kinda push the button, as it were, and took that opportunity, especially because I knew Jack would be in town soon and we could record a cool thing together. So sometimes, uh, you pull the trigger. So I guess what I'm saying is there is no, there is no single solution there, um, those revelations are fun, like Ali said, sometimes you should bring the player in on them, sometimes you should bring the whole table in on them way earlier because dramatic irony is great. We had that whole conversation about Grand Magnificent a month ago, a month and a half ago, the last downtime episode, where Art was like "I think Grand Magnificent is done", that's a conversation that needed to happen at the table, right, and I went back and forth on that, where I was like "ah, do I want to leave that in? Is that like showing a hand too-" no, leave it at the table, it's an interesting conversation, and it's useful for the players to then play around, like you said Ali, if you had known about Castille, there's stuff you would have been able to play towards that would have brought it together, um, that's actual play, you know. I'm trying to think... If there's been any other examples of this in this show... there's lots of like, things the players learn that aren't about their characters, that are just about the world, obviously... Twilight Mirage didn't really have this, right? I guess like, Signet...

ALI: Not yet...

ART: Yeah, we still got some shit to do.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I gotta look at my notes, maybe there's some shit in here... I mean, yeah...

ART: I'm gonna say something out loud, just to see how it sounds...

AUSTIN: Yeah, go for it.

ART: [clears throat] ... Demarch Magnificent.

AUSTIN: Great, great...

ALI: [laughter]

AUSTIN: I love it. Anyone else have OCs they wanna bring to the table? ... No?

ART: Aren't all of our characters OCs?

ALI: Yeah, we do that.

SYLVIA: Yeah, like, gotta save that for future episodes.

ALI: I feel like, was the Hela stuff one of these? Not as much...

AUSTIN: Which Hela stuff- uuum, sort of, but like...

ALI: But like...

AUSTIN: It's so much lighter because it's about like, Hela's heritage, not about Hela as a person, right, or... I mean, that's the other thing that's super important about these, and maybe that's the most important thing: I never want to do one that undermines the character as played, and so for Audi for example, I made it super clear that blank was true, and also that Audi was consistent with being Audi for that entire game. For Castille, there was an excuse for why Castille didn't remember being blank, and the thing that I love about that season is that for the rest of that season, Castille has a relationship with having been blank, y'know. And there are so many scenes that you did, Ali, where you were like, addressing that part of who she was, but addressing it as the person she was now, not just like slipping back into that character, does that make sense?

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Ashley Cambell in the chat says "Grand Magnificent was a divine all along, he's gonna make a new body for himself". Grand, you ever think of that? You ever think about making a new body, for someone?

ART: How do, how do we know that hasn't already happened?

AUSTIN: Yeah, good question. Umm, Sylvia, you have anything else here?

SYLVIA: Uh, no, but I was thinking, I think we had a very minor one, like, with Ephrim, when I took a move towards the end of the game and you just said "Oh, I know where Ephrim's powers come from", and you didn't even say it explicitly to me, I was just like "Oh, shit, yeah, I see it". Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I mean, those are fun, I actually just realized, we also definitely did this with, this is... what we did... in a weird way, individually all the time in faction game, right? Which is like, we all had our factions that we cared about, and that we had our own fuckin' twist shit for, and then also we did it to the other faction characters constantly, where it's like oh actually, here's this thing happening with this character over here. And that was fun, like that's a different vibe, because you're not embodying that same character in that same way, but, y'know. Umm,

alright, let's keep movin', couple more and we outta here. This one comes in from Jack, not, not Jack de Quidt.

ALI: You sure?

AUSTIN: Ah, you know. "Something I love about your show is the way tragedy both big and small is focused on and handled, partially due to the fact that I find it much easier and more satisfying to engage with and pick apart things that make me sad. However, since I formed this bias in the way I engage in media, I often find myself bogged down in my own storytelling by my focus on tragedy and worry about the negative impact it could have, particularly in the context of being a GM, when I am also fully capable of recognizing the fact that not everyone loves to be sad all the time. Where do you find the balance when your games cover such heavy themes and events, along with having many characters dealing with their own personal tragedies?"

ALI: [quiet laughter]

AUSTIN: What's that, what's up Ali? What's good?

ALI: Ummm... y'know... This is, okay, you know what it is, is that...

AUSTIN: What is it?

ALI: Sometimes that's just the thing that we're doing, right? I dunno, I think the way that we balance it is usually by like... I don't know that like, the stuff that gets really heavy is ever the stuff that... fully defines a character... so there's that.

AUSTIN: Like, I think it can be interesting, on my side, I definitely have the characters who I'm like "okay, this character is largely defined by some tragedy", like, Morning's Observation is like, I can't go an episode with Morning's Observation without having him snap at somebody, and that comes from a place, that comes from a trauma, right. Morning's Observation has been... tricked, by a government, to throw his life away, and he will never get over that fact, and he thinks he has it worse than most people, and he plays that, and he leans into it sometimes, because to him, everybody else remembers, for instance, everyone that they knew in their lifetimes, right, and maybe other people have died, and they've lost people, but he's lost everybody, until he met these new people. And I play that, and it means that it can get really heavy, also he was deeply invested in Calci-Yum, like deeply deeply deeply invested in Calci-Yum. And people are like that, and like, characters in general, outside of the most morose ones, tend to be able to be a vehicle for lightness and for sadness, or for tragedy or for anger or whatever, and so the thing that I'll say is, even if, like me, you're super interested in the tragedy, let yourself have the jokiness, let yourself let those characters be on screen and not have to just be the, the... I guess what I'm really saying is, don't fear that by being jokey, you won't be able to be heavy also. As Keith points out in the chat, Keith loves this show, Keith J Carberry in the chat, who's either the cast member Keith J Carberry, or a fan of our Primetime Adventures

game, and has named their account after the character from that show, Keith J Carberry, and, uh, they say “I don’t ever like to be sad and I love Friends at the Table”, and I think that that’s the thing, is like... one, I think Keith has had some sad characters, but that’s a different conversation... I think that it is 100% true that like, you can tell a story that deals without necessarily leaning into that, and so you shouldn’t feel too bad as a GM that like, “Hey, I have players that want to have a good time, even if I have this big tragic story I’m interested in”, if that makes sense. And then trust yourself to be able to deliver that... that good time, also. Sylvia and Art, you’ve both played some sad characters over the years.

SYLVIA: [laughter] Yeah, I dunno, I think it kinda, like you said, you kinda just need to make sure it’s balanced, and your character isn’t just there to make people cry, like, that’s not fun, in a lot of ways, because you get numb to it. Like, if you lean into the sadness all the time, you get numb to it, like, that’s a thing that you see in movies and stuff too, if something is just constantly the same emotion being bombarded at you, you kinda get numb. So if you’re trying to make your players cry every session, it’s not gonna happen.

[laughter]

AUSTIN: No, it’s not.

SYLVIA: It’s basically just like, knowing when to do it, and knowing when to go really hard with it, is more effective than just going hard with it all the time.

AUSTIN: You can also like, loud-quiet-loud your way through this, Pixies-style, where it’s like... And I don’t just mean that in terms of like, happy-sad-happy, or whatever. Sometimes I will lead with tragedy, and then spin it, to be like hey, actually, this is like... there is something underneath this that is fundamentally sad, but look at how you saved these people, look at how you helped people here. I think the Gift-3 Sailors of the Arc arc is actually exactly this, which like, begins with something that is very scary and very sad, about y’know, lost children, children who have left home or have gone missing, and why that’s happened, and then by the end of that session, by the end of that mini-arc, ya’ll had found a solution that genuinely was one of the feel-good moments of the season... and it maintained a bit of the sadness, because caught up in the Sailors of the Arc was the fact that the Sailors of the Arc needed to exist in the first place. But you can hit someone in the chest emotionally without it necessarily being a bad, tragic thing, it can be an uplifting thing that still makes them go like “[sharp inhale]... God damn...”, y’know? Art, you play, maybe, the saddest characters season to season...

ART: You know how hard I didn’t want to do a tragic character this season?

AUSTIN: I not only know how hard, we can go to the tale of the tape, y’know, like we have IMs, where you’re like “I don’t want to play”

ART: Well... It’s not over yet.

AUSTIN: It's true. That's true. It's good to remember that.

ART: Um, y'know... I was gonna make a really bad analogy there...

AUSTIN: Okay, well?

ART: I was gonna be like "Y'know, things looked pretty bad for Hamlet", and then I remembered how Hamlet ends.

[laughter]

ART: Spoilers for Hamlet, everyone dies... damn, I'm just ruining shit tonight... no, I dunno... I don't think there's like, some... I think you need the, if you just had sweet all the time it wouldn't taste good. You gotta be able to mix that up.

AUSTIN: Right but like, let me push back on that a little bit: So many of your characters have very rarely been sweet, in that sense.

ART: I mean, I would argue that I've never been as sugary-sweet as Grand Magnificent stepped off that boat as.

AUSTIN: Which boat.

ART: Um... the space boat?

AUSTIN: Oh, at the beginning of the season, you're saying. Yeah, fair.

ART: Yeah, I don't know, and I'm rooting for, I'm hoping that we end up Spring with a happy ending for our old pal Hadrian.

ALI: [giggle]

AUSTIN: Yes, me too. He's in a really good place right now, right?

ART: I mean, so I could end up with two outta three... I dunno... counter/WEIGHT spoiler warning, counter/WEIGHT spoiler warning, I'm gonna give everyone ten seconds here...

AUSTIN: Yeah, jump ahead thirty or forty seconds if you don't want counter/WEIGHT spoilers here... maybe you should jump a minute

ART: Maybe a whole minute, counter/WEIGHT spoilers... counter/WEIGHT spoilers... okay here I go: Cassander had to die. That was the only way out for them. Cassander tried to run and couldn't, that was it. That was the only way that character could go, the fun parts of that

character are in the middle... and... and it had to go that way. counter/WEIGHT spoilers over, counter/WEIGHT spoilers over.

AUSTIN: They can't, if they're skipping ahead, they would've missed that the counter/WEIGHT spoilers are over.

ART: Well maybe they skipped to that part.

AUSTIN: True, fair... fair... uh, yeah, yeah, and we'll see, like, I mean, we were just talking about endings, and I think Ali, you were the one who just like, two days ago, were like "we should all have a big talk about Spring before we start Spring", and like, yes we should. I'm super curious, we do such a strange thing on this show, there's so many of us, and we all want different things in terms of... and I don't mean that in like "[breakup voice] we just all want different things, this isn't working out", I mean this in terms of like that's how taste works. Y'know, I think if any of us were to write, sit down and write out a bullet-point list of things we wanted to happen in this next season, not things our characters wanted to happen, things we wanted to happen, none of those lists would overlap more than 25%. And that I don't think is a flaw, I think that that is the strength of the medium, because, especially when you play it super collaboratively, you end up with something that, as an individual, you wouldn't get. I think about the Vault of Anticipation arc: that's not how I thought that was gonna go, I didn't think, a hundred percent, that's why I had those characters at the top, where it was like "go get the thing then bring it to one of these three factions" and you were like "mm, nah, instead this", and that's way cooler, that's waaay cooler, y'know? And that happens every session, every session, and some... and sometimes it stings [Sylvia laughs], because for instance I've set up a really great setpiece in a very beautiful winter cabin retreat inside of a spaceship and instead we stay in a warehouse for ninety minutes, and it stings, but it's still better than if you'd gone to that fucking winter cabin retreat. So, that is, like, the strength of this, is that I think that there is a disconnect often between what people want and what ends up coming out, is instead something that none of them individually would have come up with, and that should be the case with this sort of tragic stuff too, because here's the other thing as a GM: you don't know what's gonna hit your players all of the time. Sometimes you do a thing and you're like "oh yeah, it's no big deal" and you're like "oh wait, it feels like the tone at this entire table has taken a shift for the worst, what happened?". And it's like oh, that was really sad, that thing I just did, whoops. And other times you're like "I got em, I got this dope, I'm gonna just, they're not gonna, BAM, here's some sad shit" and they're like "yeah, kill the goblin, like okay, sad waaaah, playing the world's tiniest violin for this goblin I guess, whatever", and that... almost happened I think with like, a couple things that I want- y'know, there are characters that like, I put out in the world to be like "okay, this is supposed to be somebody who's sympathetic" and like, no, not at all. And that, you just have to roll with it, if they're not sympathetic you're not gonna bring them over to the sympathy and your sad story is not gonna land, pivot... um, so, y'know...

ART: So it was a winter cabin?

AUSTIN: It was, yeah, it was Camp David, it was Camp David in the winter, is literally what it was, so that is what that was. So yeah, if you listen to today's intro, I- so that's the thing I do sometimes, is unlike a real campaign, where you're just playing at your table, I have the benefit of cut material being material that can go into intros, and that was a really good example of this too though, which was like... or the ending question, which is like, so I describe the, my first draft of today's intro, the intro today is a character walking around at this, like, diplomatic retreat, thinking about what she needs to do to bring her utopia into existence, and the first draft of that was like, filled with weird factional stuff, was like, here's who's attending this diplomatic retreat, here's who's gonna show up, and it was me trying to like, get the exposition in at the last second so that people who were listening would know what was happening at that retreat, and I was like, that's not Twilight Mirage, that might have been counter/WEIGHT, I don't think it would be Heiron, it was definitely Marielda, and the Marielda version of it I absolutely would have leaned into all the political factions vying over control of the city, or whatever, here, what was important was her emotional state, and that was what would resonate, hopefully, between listeners, and then the events that Fourteen and Grand were going through, was, here is some emotional grounding to the exposition, there's still gonna be the exposition about Our Prophet and blah blah blah, but like, it's not gonna be the exposition about all these other characters where just like, name-dropping people isn't gonna cause any effect. Instead, focus on what is going to cause an effect that's in-theme with the rest of everything that you do, and that is what I try to do there. So keep that in mind as you're doing sad stuff, is like, hey, what actually fits in to the stuff that you've succeeded at here already. All right, last one, for today.

"Given that smart characterization is one of your goals as a podcast, I'm hoping you have some advice on how to bring characters out of dark emotional places. I've been playing the same character for the last two years, and will probably continue for another two, given how the game's narrative is progressing. About a year ago, I was depressed, and my unhappiness seeped into the character choices I made. My character became a spy working against their friends, killed a well-liked NPC, and behaved dismissively towards the other characters in the game. Over time I recovered, but my character didn't. I just didn't know how to get her out of the characterization hole I had dug. I discussed this with my GM, and he suggested rolling a new character. However, I was too emotionally invested in my original character, and I felt like I owed it to her to fix things. Because we couldn't come up with a better solution, my GM and I decided to retcon it all, my character doesn't remember any of it and they were absolved of any blame. I feel like I cheated myself and my character out of doing the work to put her on a more positive path. How have you redeemed characters or recovered from character choices you regret? Do you have any advice to help characters grow out of dark places?"

I'm going to say right now, we are going to talk spoilers about everything we've ever recorded, otherwise we would not be able to have this conversation, so...

ART: Are you sure this isn't a post-mortem question that you jumped the gun on?

AUSTIN: No... cause I'm wanna know how, what you're doing. This actually for me was about other characters, this to me was like, a very big Hella question. We can revisit it, for sure, but I haven't seen proof that you've done it yet, Grand.

ART: I'm not sure I know how to do it!

AUSTIN: Then that's ok, have this conversation now!

ART: I was gonna ask, if anyone knows the answer to this question, send me a message.

AUSTIN: Right, I mean, our answer is not gonna be a retcon, right?

ART: ... I dunno...

AUSTIN: I guess it could be, the Twilight Mirage is wild, y'all. Right we've already seen, I mean Quire has already retconned an entire- again, we're gonna spoil... everything, going forward, everything that's already been released, nothing that's unreleased. But Quire retconned history to bring into being an entire new culture, right? So, y'know, in the Twilight Mirage, could a different Grand Magnificent be walking around out there? I guess that's a thing we could talk about. That's sad.

ART: Oh, I was just gonna pitch you on some sort of holodeck malfunction.

AUSTIN: I see. I don't think that's it. I don't think that's gonna be it, unfortunately. So what do y'all think? Y'all have had some characters that have been in some fuckin' holes. Can we start with you, Ali, since I mentioned Hella?

ALI: Um, sure, I mean I feel like the Hella stuff is, like, straightforward, but I guess it isn't where it was just like... I guess cause we had that break especially, it was just like... I know why Hella did it, but I also know that she didn't feel great about it. So like, the mission for Season 2 or whatever was like, how do I repent for this, and like, how dedicated would she be, like, the one action isn't the thing that like, changed her mind for the rest of her life, but like, y'know, it's a slow path towards realizing that the decisions you make are bad. I... in terms of this question, I feel bad 'cause like, at some point, I don't know that you should feel super bad about just letting go of a character if you really feel like you've had a hard time like, just getting out of it, like that isn't a failing on any part, but like, if it's a character that you're staying with, really try to think about like, "okay, how do they feel about the things that they did, and how are we gonna show that on screen now?" I think a way that helped with that a lot is Janine was able to introduce Adaire, and then we also had, like, all of the Hella-Hadrian stuff, so it was like, we know that she has the capacity to treat people in her life very badly. [laughter] Introducing characters that she would have to care about or have to protect, or like at least just try to do something differently than that one thing, y'know, how successful is that going forward? And I think that like, y'know, how protective, quote-unquote, she was of Adaire, or at least trying to be helpful, was an easier way to like, show that stuff.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I think that is all... it's about those material things, and one of the things that helped there is like, the world offered opportunity, and in this case, you're right, it's Adaire, it's

another player character. Like if I could, one of the things I'm not happy about with Winter is that I didn't play up Adelaide enough at all, throughout that entire season, it was just like my headspace was not there. I'm not looking for like, a pat on the back here or whatever, I'm genuinely like, in post-mortem mode here to some degree which is like, my advice is for you to ask your GM to think about ways in which you... again, have that conversation, fix the situation, talk through what would recovery look like, and then the second thing that Ali hit was time away, but then a return. And so, I don't know if you're still playing this character, maybe there's a way to un-retcon the retcon, I don't fuckin' know. But if there is, consider doing that, and then saying "I'm going to take a break from this character to play a different character for a while." Not to, like "I'm gonna stop playing this character", say like "Hey, this character is just not doing interesting shit for the next six months. This character is like, getting their life together a little bit, this character is working on themselves, this character is out on a farm somewhere, this character is on a journey, and maybe we'll check in with them." Maybe once a session, you get like, a scene as that character, but you're not ready to take over that character again yet. Instead, you're gonna keep playing this new character, and again, it's not about like, "I'm done, I'm out", it's, things don't have to be that binary, and so, I would love for you to go talk to your GM and figure out a solution to where you can have that experience still. Maybe it isn't that your character suddenly remembers and feels guilty all of a sudden again, but maybe there's something at the back of their mind that's like "I did some bad stuff", like I dunno, talk to your GM, and my hope, in my experience, the second I start thinking about these things, my brain just opens up, I go cosmic brain thinking of all the possibilities with what can be done there. And so I would say try to have that conversation for sure, and try to return to that stuff, and look for an Adaire in your campaign, even if that Adaire is an NPC, or that Adaire is an NPC, or a faction that they care about, or a location they care about and want to take care of, that's a huge thing. Y'know, a cat, a pet, a plant they have to protect, for instance.

ALI: [laughter]

AUSTIN: God, that was the first bit of prep for Winter in Hieron, by the way. Umm, Sylvia, you have any thoughts here?

SYLVIA: Yeah, we actually, I can't talk about it 'cause it's upcoming, but you and me had a really good exchange in a recent episode with Echo and some of this... so I guess that's just a teaser for people. But like, like you said, bringing in another character, or just doing anything that sort of forces them to confront... whether it's something they're running away from, or something that's really haunting them, forcing them to confront can lead to, sort of... it can take your character progression from being static to being like, back in motion again. 'Cause that's the thing with mourning, right, it's one of those things like, even in real life, your character is in mourning, it's gonna be like you are stuck for a little while, that's just how it feels, but then something happens that can get you moving again, and there's no reason why tabletop games can't work like that, right?

AUSTIN: Totally, totally, exactly. And again, it's fair to have that conversation of like, "hey, I just don't have an NPC I can connect to". You know, I think that was a big thing that has come out about Grand Magnificent, in the recording that Even started like, Grand and Waltz get along all right, Grand and Morning's Observation kind of click, but Grand has never had the sort of like... the kind of relationship that Tender and Morning's Observation have, or the kind of relationship that Sho and Fourteen Fifteen have, or the kind of relationship that Gig has with Kent, or that Even has with Cascabel, like there's lots of these NPCs that fill that need, and Grand hasn't had that character. So maybe that's one way you could drag yourself out of this hole, Art.

ART: [sighs]

AUSTIN: You think that's, has that come up?

ART: Um, you, you've known, you know what happens, right? You know the, you're three episodes ahead of air, right?

AUSTIN: Two, only, two... but yes.

ART: That's gonna be one episode?

AUSTIN: Yeah, dog.

ART: Oh my god...

AUSTIN: Downtimes are one episode.

ART: Block out some time on your calendar...

AUSTIN: Yeah... [indignant] It actually wasn't that long, all said...

ALI: [laughter] It's breezy, it's like an hour and a half.

AUSTIN: Nonononononono, the downtime.

ALI: Oh yeah, that's, okay, yeah.

AUSTIN: It's big, it's big, but I don't think it's that much bigger than most downtimes.

ALI: ... It's trying.

AUSTIN: Well, now that I don't have to end, like, record a 30-minute outro to make it the finale, it's definitely... not as long as it could be.

ART: I mean my file's 4:45.

AUSTIN: Mine was not that long... why was yours 4:45...

ART: Yeah, you were late.

ALI: [laughter]

AUSTIN: And y'all didn't start playing before I got there!

ART: You don't know.

[laughter]

AUSTIN: See, then I don't know!

ART: Lot of important stuff happened there, you'll have to hear it on air.

AUSTIN: Oh man, jeez...

ART: I think there's a couple things here, one is like, you don't have to worry as much about like, other characters forgiving you, because you can kind of make it happen. Like, the other characters should forgive you because the other players want to keep playing with you.

ALI: [laughter]

AUSTIN: [incredulous] Mmmm... umm, no, and we know that-

ART: Oh, see I-

AUSTIN: No, because you know that, 'cause I was just looking at our chat from like, a year ago, and we absolutely had a conversation that was like "no, I don't know that my character would forgive this other character".

ART: Who said that.

AUSTIN: Y-you. Arthur Martine-

ART: To who.

AUSTIN: To me, to Austin Walker.

ART: About what.

AUSTIN: About the thrown-away episode.

ART: Mmm... yeah...

AUSTIN: Right? Which is like, no, sometimes character do come to a divide, that is not, that doesn't make sense to just, like... I'm not saying that the case here...

ART: But I don't know that, but like could you get that way with the whole table?

AUSTIN: I think that experience got that way to the whole table. Umm, but yes, I think so, I think you could, I think that Grand is at risk of it.

ART: Nah, Grand's gonna be fine.

AUSTIN: Okay...

ART: I think the other thing-

AUSTIN: Or I guess here's what I'm saying, I don't think it's interesting, I don't think... I think that what's been interesting about the way you're playing Grand is that you are making choices as a player that are pushing Grand into a position where, if he does want to maintain those relationships, it can't be because the players at the table want that relationship to continue, or else-

ART: Oh no that's actually, that's I think the nice thing about this, because I know it's ending, I don't have to worry about the characters, I just have to worry about... what is objectively true, and in a smaller sense, like, the audience. I don't have to play to the table any more, I get to play to the balcony. Um... I would also like to spoil another piece of pop-culture: season five episode eleven of The Simpsons, "Homer The Vigilante", and with one of my favorite lines about exactly this, I'm gonna give everyone a second in case they wanna watch season five episode eleven...

AUSTIN: [halfhearted] Simpsons spoilers, Simpsons spoiler, Simpsons spoilers...

SYLVIA: Skip ahead thirty seconds.

ART: Skip ahead thirty seconds, and that quote is, dramaticpauseforpeopleskipingahead, "No, no, dig up, stupid".

AUSTIN: Right.

ART: The context is they're in a hole. They've dug too deep, tryna dig out of it, and he says dig up stupid...

AUSTIN: Like the dwarves? Like they dug too deep, like Balrog?

ART: Um, no, not like that, it's just like, it's not a metaphor, it's just a regular hole.

AUSTIN: I don't follow.

ART: And while it doesn't work in real life, I do think it works in the games a little bit, I think.

AUSTIN: Digging up, you're saying.

ART: Yeah, I think you can dig up.

AUSTIN: I played Minecraft.

ART: I really haven't, can you dig up in that?

SYLVIA: Spoilers for Minecraft, you can dig up.

ALI: [laughter]

AUSTIN: Skip ahead thirty seconds, uh... uh, sort of, you can dig diagonally up, right? That's the way it works, and maybe that's actually it, yeah, there you go, there you go.

ALI: See, that's the technique.

AUSTIN: That's the technique.

ART: But you're gonna get dirty goin' up.

AUSTIN: You are, you're gonna get dirty. And sometimes you're gonna fall in pit holes, you're gonna you're gonna hit a hole, and oh shit, there's already a hole down here... true, Jessie M in the chat says "you can dig up and then jump and put ground under you". Also true.

ALI: Aaah...

AUSTIN: Again, just decipher these metaphors for hot tips. It's an ARG, a hot ARG... Did you leave that mention of the ARG in Ali, or did you pull it?

ALI: Uuuh, no that's in there. Is that in the big one, is that the long one?

AUSTIN: No, it's in the Fourteen-Grand one. I don't know if it's come up yet, it might not have come up yet, we should cut that.

ART: No, I heard someone, someone in our Discord was talking about the ARG, which means that it must be in something.

AUSTIN: Okay, it must be in there.

ALI: No, the ARG was the um, the wrestling chart.

AUSTIN: Okay, that was from that Clapcast. There's another thing in the next episode, then. Cut that thing.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: You'll hear it. You'll know it when you hear it.

ALI: I've listened, okay...

ART: I really... would love-

ALI: Oh... the secret?

AUSTIN: Yeah, it's the secret.

ALI: Okay that's a different, that's a whole different thing.

AUSTIN: It's not.

ART: What are we talking-

ALI: The secret's an ARG?

ART: When we cut, can you tell me what the hell we're talking about right now?

AUSTIN: No, I can't, I made an agreement, I made a blood agreement. Umm...

ALI: Art, I'll tell you, I'll tell you later.

AUSTIN: You don't know it either!

ALI: I know-

AUSTIN: No you don't.

ALI: No, but I know what, the, the conversation that Art was in that we're talking about that he doesn't know [laughter]

ART: Yeah, if I was in the conversation, I think I can know about it.

[laughter]

AUSTIN: All right, umm...

ART: Oh, I would like to encourage people to scroll up, Jess had some good reading suggestions for our tragedy conversation.

AUSTIN: Oh, awesome, I missed those entirely, where are they? Hi Jess! Hi... Jess says "I don't play these games, but I'm pretty sure everyone should go read Sianne Ngai's 'Ugly Feelings' and Jack Halberstam's 'The Queer Art Of Failure'". Thank you for those recs! All right, I think-

ART: I mean, we already knew about one of those, because we tried to trademark "the queer art of failure" for us.

AUSTIN: [laughter]

SYLVIA: Pff, god...

AUSTIN: [more laughter] It's us. That's gonna do it for us today, remember, if you have questions you can send them over to tipsatthetable@gmail.com. I do my best these days to get them up on the screen pretty quick, so if you have questions, like, getting them in front of us is a really good way of- we still, a lot of these still did come from the document we have that still has like thirty pages of questions, um, but, new ones are very likely to be like "oh, I can build a theme around this", it's like, I'll take these two questions and then find three or four other ones from the pool that combine into a really good episode. Thank you as always for hanging out with us, and as always, you can support the show at friendsatthetable.cash. I think, that is gonna do it for us. Anybody else have any final words or thoughts... or prayers?

SYLVIA: ... So who else is in *The Rundown*? Anybody else know, or...

ART: Uh, Rosario Dawson and umm... umm...

SYLVIA: Oh!

AUSTIN: See, look at that.

ART: Whatsisname, umm, the old guy, uh, very funny...

AUSTIN: Christoper Walken.

ART: That's it.

SYLVIA: OOOH! The guy everyone, okay, yeah, I love that guy, everybody does his silly voice.

AUSTIN: Directed by Peter Burg, who also directed... Very Bad Things, Friday Night Lights, the movie, The Kingdom, the movie.

SYLVIA: I thought you, I thought you just meant he's only directed very bad things.

[laughter]

SYLVIA: And I was like damn, okay.

AUSTIN: Okay, well I'll keep going then, Hancock, Battleship...

SYLVIA: OOOOOH!!

ART: Okay, it's way better than Hancock, or, I haven't seen Battleship but I assume Battleship...

ALI: Wasn't Rihanna in that? I bet it's fine...

ART: I bet it's not.

AUSTIN: There's a Virtuality TV movie, what is Virtuality the TV movie? ... Is this based on the, the movie-movie? No... have y'all ever seen Virtuality, the real movie?

ALI: No...

SYLVIA: Uuh, I have.

AUSTIN: With Denzel Washington and Russel Crowe? ... Is that the name of that movie is- Virtuosity, that movie's called Virtuosity. Not as good. Virtuality, that's the ticket. Virtuosity is dope. Whats up?

ALI: You're saying those words, but in my mind, so clearly, came The Gamer with Gerard... whoever...

AUSTIN: Butler. I had a professor who loved Gamer.

ART: That movie is secretly amazing, I think.

AUSTIN: So this professor of mine, two things I'll tell you about this professor of mine: one, he loved the philosophers Deleuze and Guattari more than anyone I've ever known, they are very difficult to get and love and he got them and loved them, two, he is a, y'know, radical leftist professor who I used to work under at CalArts, and it came up at a visiting professor dinner once, sometimes a professor comes and like, gives a talk and then everybody goes out to dinner, we did that, and the question of guns came up, and he was like, y'know, he was pro-gun control, but also really enjoys shooting guns at a range, and I was like "Oh, when's the last time you shot a gun?" and he says "Well actually, I haven't shot one in a long time, uh, I used to live in Columbia and I shot one there, and when I came back, I shot one during the LA riots". And I was like "Okay...? What happened?" and then he wouldn't tell me. And that was a very strange dinner... to have. He really liked the movie Gamer, a lot. Nevaldine and Taylor, so, you know. Everyone should watch Virtuosity, it's, bad, it's a 1995 movie about VR and about... Denzel Washington hunting a cybernetic serial killer.

SYLVIA: Ah, I was like "aw, he's gonna be a VR serial killer, I know it".

AUSTIN: It's better.

SYLVIA: The second you said "hunting" I was like "VR serial killer".

AUSTIN: It's so much better than that, it's not just a VR serial killer, it's like an algorithmic serial killer, who's been made of all the big data from all other serial killers. The cops made him. Surprise. Sorry for spoiling Virtuosity!

[laughter]

AUSTIN: Spoilers coming up for Virtuosity...

ART: The Rundown is not on Netflix, you're gonna have to find it somewhere else...

ALI: I just, yeah...

AUSTIN: Bullshit, bullshit, alright, let's clap, let's uh...

ART: But don't check Amazon right now.

AUSTIN: I promise that that twist in, the SID 6.7 spoiler hits pretty early on, so, alright, let's clap at 10 seconds... Keith, I promise- look, it says it right here, SID is short for Sadistic, Intelligent, Dangerous, a VR amalgam of the most violent serial killers throughout history, but like, it's a police project, that's the whole thing, one of the programmers in charge of, it's a whole thing, it's in the first paragraph, you're fine, go watch it. We should clap at 35 seconds.

ART: Okay, but you said ten, and then talked the...

[single clap]

ALI: What was that?

AUSTIN: I was catching up with the, that was ten.

[group clap]

ALI: Don't- Okay, I didn't clap because I had to tell you, Don't Ever Joke Clap! Don't do it!

AUSTIN: Ever? Ever is a long time!

ALI: No!

ART: My ten clap was not a joke clap, I thought we were gonna do it.

ALI: [exasperatedly laughing] The point of the claps is visual! That's the point of them!

SYLVIA: [fading laughter]

AUSTIN: But now you'll see that there weren't six of them, or whatever.

ALI: [deep sigh]

ART: Ten again?

AUSTIN: Yeah, ten seconds. Wait, ten minutes? I'll clap no- okay, ten seconds.

[group clap]

AUSTIN: That was a good one, on my side...

ALI: Yeah...