Tips at the Table - Blades and Villainy

Transcribed by Tor @torelk#5673

AUSTIN: Alright, let's clap.

ALI: Oh!

ART: Alright.

AUSTIN: I got time.is up.

ALI: Yeah!

JACK: Let's do it! Time.is. Everybody ready for a podcast? This is what you came and joined us here for.

JANINE: Oh, boy.

AUSTIN: Time to—time to record...

ALI: Fifteen? Ten?

AUSTIN: Ten. Ten.

ART: Fifteen seems—[AUSTIN laughs] seems conservative.

[pause]

[all clap]

[pause]

ART: I've never felt more pressure on a clap [ALI laughs] than on that one, after I was like, "psh, that's too late." [all laughing]

JANINE: Ehh.

ART: I was like, this clap has to be perfect—

AUSTIN: So it goes.

ART:—or you're the worst.

[pause]

AUSTIN: [typing sounds] Oop, come on, give me that full screen...there we go. Alright. Whew. [ALI sighs] Let me get my notes up. Welcome to Tips at the Table, an RPG podcast focused on critical questions, hopefully smart answers, and fun interaction between good friends. I am your host, Austin Walker. Joining me today, Alisha Acampora.

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

AUSTIN: Jack de Quidt.

JACK: Hi, I'm Jack de Quidt, you can find me on Twitter @notquitereal or buy any of the music featured on the show at notquitereal.bandcamp.com.

AUSTIN: Janine Hawkins.

JANINE: You can find me on Twitter @bleatingheart.

AUSTIN: And Art Martinez-Tebbel.

ART: Hey! You can find me on Twitter @atebbel, and if you're in Los Angeles, get some fruit from the carts on the street! [ALI and JACK laugh] Hot tip.

AUSTIN [overlapping]: Is this a—this is a rec?

ART [overlapping]: That's the first tip at the table.

AUSTIN: Wow!

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Good tip! An early tip, a pre-tip, a pre-show tip. Uh—

ART: Yeah. Get the lime and the chili pepper, [ALI: Ooh!] it's delicious. [AUSTIN: Interesting!] I'm eating it right now, way away from the mic, that's why all of my responses are going to be delayed.

AUSTIN: Okay. [laughing] You can follow me on Twitter @austin_walker, follow the show @friends_table. We also are on Facebook, if you go to Facebook, there's Friends at the Table there—is that facebook.com/friends_table? Or is that something else, Ali, do you know?

ALI: Which, Facebook?

AUSTIN: Yeah, Facebook.

ALI: Facebook is just friendsatthetable.

AUSTIN: Okay, yeah, one word, collapsed.

ALI: I think.

AUSTIN: And there's also a Fans at the Table group, so shoutouts to that Facebook group, which is really great. And as always, you can support the show at friendsatthetable.cash, and thank you for doing that already, if you're listening to this. [ALI laughs] And as a reminder, if you're backing at like the $5 level, for $15 you can watch us do this live and chat with us as we broadcast, which is fun. I think it's fun.

Alright, let's dive in. This week, we are talking primarily about switching to Scum and Villainy, and kind of the switch to Blades, as you can tell, the crew is made up this week or this month of a group of people who've played a lot of Blades, with Ali and Jack, and also Janine and Art, who, this is their first Blades experience. Scum and Villainy is of course based on Blades, to be clear. Alright! So. This is pretty broad. This is about—this comes from Sean, and this is sort of a broader question than about Blades specifically.

AUSTIN [reading the question]: "Anyone have thoughts for pitching a migration of rule sets for an established tabletop game? I've got buy-in in terms of new system and moving from D&D 5th Edition to a Powered by the Apocalypse system, probably Dungeon World or Inverse World, but they're all suddenly talking about building out entirely new characters because the playbooks don't match one for one to their previous characters. Any tips for massaging that transition if I'm invested in keeping the same characters involved in the story? At the end of the day, I'd rather keep running 5th Edition if they really don't want to use the same characters after the change, but d20 really doesn't handle the kind of social play we do, and I'd love to involve the players in more narrative decision-making with their moves and actions, which Powered by the Apocalypse games invite."

AUSTIN [cont'd]: Um, thoughts? Anyone—I guess, you know, we've switched games a couple of times now, and I'm curious; when I've done that pitch, like [laughs] if you've bought in, or like, what you're looking for when that pitch comes?

ART: Um, I made hard turns both the times we've switched games.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: And I think that, like, just—ah, but it's hard to tell people, "just do it. Just throw out a lot of what you've done"—

AUSTIN: [laughs] Yeah.

ART:—"and move on," because like, I'll throw out all my characters. We can—[laughs]

AUSTIN: [laughs] Yeah, sure—yeah, Art, we've heard the show.

[ALI and JACK laugh]

ART: I'm not, like—but I'm really not precious about it anymore, and there was a time in my life when I was very precious about it. And like, if I went to me then and was like, "Why don't you just not do this," I wouldn't listen. And so, like with many questions here, it really depends on your play group, but like...let them, I don't know, nudge them as hard as you can to like, "Well what if you did this and what if it looked like this," you know?

AUSTIN: Yeah. I think for me, one of the things with your characters, but really with everybody, is, it's an opportunity to kind of reinterpret the character to some degree, and to say, ooh, what's an element of this character that didn't get enough screen time, or that interested you but maybe you didn't develop in the way that you originally thought you would, or that you want to, you know, go back to roots in some way. I know obviously we just did all those episodes of Twilight Mirage with bringing characters over and switching to Scum and Villainy, and a lot of the conversations we had were like, what's an element of this character that is essential, what is stuff that can get cut, and what is stuff that like, can be recognized in a slightly different way. Like, I think Fourteen Fifteen, you don't have moves about being an assassin at this point—or, Jack, Fourteen Fifteen doesn't have moves about being an assassin to the same degree at this point, but like, you took a point in Brawl, or whatever, what's the—I think it starts with an S, whatever the—suh, suh—

JACK: Yeah, the punching one—

AUSTIN: Scrap. Scrap.

JACK: Scrap! Yeah.

AUSTIN: To be like, oh right. Fourteen Fifteen was an assassin and a bounty hunter, they have those abilities.

JACK: Yeah. I think that one of the nice benefits of playing a bunch of different systems like we do—and that's also been just a gift of the Patreon, is getting to expand the systems we play hugely—is that feeling, the rhythm of different game systems, is always really super exciting. And by rhythm I mean the sort of weird stuff that you only get after playing it for a few hours, of

how certain scenes tend to play better in certain systems or whatever. But also just the really basic stuff, of like—how often are we going to be rolling in this system—

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Right.

JACK: —or what does this system prejudice in terms of conversation over direct action. And when we are switching systems I always take it as an opportunity to look at what the rhythm of the new system is going to be like, and yeah, try to reinterpret the character based on, you know, sort of, what possibility space is the new system going to afford me. I remember switching from Mechnoir to The Sprawl with AuDy and just feeling AuDy come alive, in a—

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Yeah.

JACK:—AuDy was still blunt and weird and kind of impossible to handle [AUSTIN laughs quietly] but something about the way that The Sprawl allowed us to run scenes and allowed us to make decisions felt playing that bluntness, made it feel so much easier or made it feel so much more, like, [sighs] easy or narratively resonant.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: So I think it's a case of—in my experience at least, it's like, what can this new thing do for my character? Rather than throwing my character out completely. What are the bits of my character that I'm interested in seeing this new system bring out?

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally, I—

JANINE: [crosstalk] Yeah…

AUSTIN: Go ahead, Janine, sorry, I didn't mean to step on you.

JANINE: No, I also—we stepped on each other. [chuckles] I was going to say that, like, switching systems is a really good—I wrote about this a little bit for the last Pusher, I think, or upcoming one? I'm not sure—it's a good opportunity to distill a character. To, like, to figure out who your character actually is. Like, with Signet, we're switching from a very religious sort of heavy class to a doctor class, and a lot of that comes from figuring out, like—I'm not going to steal my own material here, I'm going to leave some of this unsaid [AUSTIN laughs]—but comes from figuring out what is that character's actual priority. Is her priority holding a big staff and conducting worship or whatever, or is her priority something else?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: But I think part of that also… [sighs] I don't find switching systems too challenging because I think the way that I approach making a character in the first place is similar, like I

came into the idea of playing Signet without looking at The Veil first, to be like, you know, which of these do I like, and then here's what my character looks like. I had an idea of what I wanted out of this before I started looking at The Veil for classes, and I found the class that fit what I was interested in playing best, and I don't know if the transition would have been different if I'd come at it the other way.

AUSTIN: Yeah…

JANINE: Like if I'd looked at the playbook and said, "which of these classes do I want to play?" And then built my character concept entirely around that class, [crosstalk] because then I could see—

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Which D&D does, pretty firmly, right?

JANINE: Yeah, exactly.

AUSTIN: Like, oh, I am a thief—or, not a thief, a rogue. Rogue? Whatever. Paladin. I'm a Paladin, I'm building my character around this core idea, is like a different thing.

JANINE: So I could see that making transitions a lot more difficult, if you built your character—I mean, I did the same thing with Adaire. Which was like, I know kind of who I want to play here, which of these classes is best suited to that kind of thing. And I could see if you built your character based on a playbook, then switching playbooks, switching systems, I could see that being a thing where you feel like you need to build a new character, but it is also that opportunity to figure out, like, who is your character independent of the system that they came out of.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Briefly, that also makes me think about the, especially like Signet's switch—really every character's switch—from The Veil to Scum and Villainy is, as a GM you have an opportunity to tie it to a fictional change. All of these transitions would be way harder to sell if not for the fact that we did This Year of Ours and this notion of there being a period of time during which character priorities slowly changed. This wasn't a light switch snapping off.

And it wasn't that in COUNTER/Weight either, if you remember—the original, the reason that last eight episodes were called This Year of Ours was a callback to This Month of Ours which was the faction turn where we, where Dre, Sylvia[1] and I reduced the number of factions down dramatically, and then we came back and had switched from TechNoir to The Sprawl. And, the notion was, the world has changed, the party has stitched themselves back up, and in that period of time have kind of like, focused in on what their roles are, to some degree.

And that's really the case in Twilight Mirage, and so like, even if you're playing D&D, think about how you can tie this to kind of a world-shifting event, a time jump, some sort of fictional circumstances that can help massage that transition in a way, so that any sort of inconsistency is contextualized inside of the character's lives. You know, there's a reason why

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

Signet does not, at this point, have the, like, some of the more mystical powers that she had during The Veil, and part of that is that she spent the year building a weird secret society that is specifically about making sure that there is a very mundane and material and non-magical solution for what the future looks like, and for helping people. She's been very focused on these very material, personal, interpersonal solutions instead of, 'I'm going to use my magic to not get shot' or whatever. And I think that helps sell that transition in a real way.

Ali, I think your kind of switch from The Veil to Scum and Villainy also does that, in that like, we kind of lined it up very nicely, because Tender was growing in that direction anyway, so this was a way to like really hammer home that switch.

ALI: Yeah, [laughing] I also write about it a little bit in the Pusher update, but um, it was really tough for Tender because a lot of what I had thought Tender was gonna be, from before Twilight Mirage into Twilight Mirage just wasn't there. So it was just an opportunity for me to be like, 'What can I scrape off from this, and rebuild off of what we've done so far?'

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: And even with Aria, I think the most interesting thing in doing is really just like, like Janine said, just distilling what about your character you really want to bring with you or change or realign for a different part of the game, essentially.

AUSTIN: Yeah. [trailing off] Cool...

ALI: The TechNoir to Sprawl one was a little more different, because I feel like the characters kind of got, like—like, the Sprawl had moves, right? [AUSTIN: Right.] Which TechNoir didn't, [AUSTIN: No.] so it kind of...it was less broad for them, I guess, when it came over, but it was also still able to be like, 'What are they the best at, and how are they communicating, and what tool set do they really actually have?'

AUSTIN: Right, instead of these very broad verbs, which is how TechNoir worked [ALI: Right.] for people who don't necessarily remember, it was like, we looked at your—

ART: TechNoir was *hard*!

AUSTIN: Yeah, TechNoir's hard! I love TechNoir, I would love to do a one-shot of TechNoir at some point because I really like that system, but it was really hard, and coming off of DungeonWorld, which was a fantastic introduction for players who hadn't played before, and also was just a great fit for the show, it helped communicate characters through moves very cleanly, and with Aria, Ali, I remember being like, 'Is Pusher the right fit? Like, what *is* the right fit?' [ALI laughing] And a lot of that conversation actually had to be forward-thinking. It wasn't 'What has—', well, part of it *was* 'What has Aria been doing,' and the answer was like, oh, she's *been* a Pusher, she *was* a Pusher for OriCon and for JoyPark and for all that, but then there's this like, level two thing, which was like, where do we think this character's going? Which

directions—we didn't say "fictional flags," but like, what were the flags that you had set, and like, very explicitly had that conversation.

[[00:15:05]]

And that's my number one advice all the time, is like, have the explicit conversation with your players. Like, where do you wanna, where do you see yourself in five years, fictionally? [ALI and ART laughing] Where is this character going? What sort of conflicts are you interested in? Um, because that will help that transition so much, because they'll be excited about going in a certain direction—and that doesn't have to be just purely fictional, it can be like, I wanna make a character who can beat the shit out of every other character, and like, alright, lemme put down 'Barbarian' in front of you. [ALI laughing]

Especially if you're doing Dungeon World—I don't know Inverse World super well, I've read it once—but there's also a ton of compendium classes that they can look at, where people have done lots of cool work to kind of come up with various other ideas, and it's probably worth looking at those, at the very least for inspiration. I wanted to keep Hieron kind of really focused on the core Dungeon World classes because it was our first game at the time, but if you're playing at home at your table, just like, yeah, link them to that list of compendium classes. If you just do a search online for "Dungeon World compendium classes" you'll get a ton of—or "compendium playbooks" or whatever—you'll get a ton of results of kind of homebrew, very interesting, different types of character classes, and I bet they'll find something that they can get excited about.

ALI: Yeah, there's like a billion…

AUSTIN: Yes.

ALI: I remember there was a time before we started Dungeon World where it was just like, 'Does this exist as a Dungeon World class?' and it always did.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah.

ALI: Yeah. [chuckles]

AUSTIN: Yeah. Totally.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Um...okay. Next question. Also, to answer something in the chat, Nemesis asks, very briefly, "I did wonder if Scum and Villainy just doesn't have guns, and if the Mirage thickening and stopping guns was because of that, or if it was planned before—" we actually got into this in the Pusher update, not to keep pushing the Pusher update [ALI laughs loudly] but Jack, Ali and I

did a whole Pusher update about this and yes, yeah, that's not in Scum and Villainy. Scum and Villainy has, like, Star Wars blasters. But we wanted to get away from—from guns.

JACK: No more guns!

AUSTIN: No more guns. Or, like, very few guns, or guns that feel like, if you pull the trigger—one, if you pull the trigger, it's a big deal. Two, if you pull the trigger and miss...uh-oh.

[all laugh]

JACK: You—your gun will break!

AUSTIN: Yeah. Alright. [as though moving on to the next question]

ART: Although, for some reason, Grand Magnificent needs to have a working gun. That's just…

AUSTIN: Yeah. [incredulously] Uh-huh.

ART: ...an important part of the fiction at this point. [ALI and AUSTIN laughing]

AUSTIN: Well, we know where the holiday special left off. Okay. So there are three questions that are very similar here, and I wanna just kind of shmush them together here. This first one, from Patrick, is probably the biggest one, and I want to kind of summarize the other two, from Lucas and Matt, that have overlap.

Patrick writes, "Over the last six months or so, I've been running a Blades in the Dark campaign. The players in my game have limited past experience with tabletop role-playing and all of us are new to the Blades system. In general, I think there are lots of strengths to this system for new players, given the narrative-first focus when it comes to taking actions. Describe what you're doing, then decide what you roll based on that description. At the same time, there are a lot of small and very specifically designed rules around the margins of the game, some of which can be easy to forget or complex to integrate. Some examples of this off the top of my head are resistance rolls, implementing harm, recovering from harm during downtime, and crafting new items or gadgets. My goal first and foremost is for the players to have a good time, so I don't want to bog things down in minutiae when I can avoid it. From a GM perspective, do you feel any obligation to remind players of rules that might benefit them in a particular situation, even if it might break the flow or feel like you're influencing their decision in that moment? From a player perspective, do you have any strategies for remembering the rules that come up less frequently, or do you focus more on the narrative decision-making when you can, trusting in the GM to bring up anything important you may have missed?"

And then briefly, to kind of layer on to that, so we can have this kind of broader conversation, Lucas says that they, uh, Lucas has been running this game for college friends, and they ran into the problem that every starting-out group runs into, where they felt that the game was very stop-and-go and it didn't flow well. They had a couple of talks and tried to

pinpoint, they pinpointed that their lack of familiarity with the game's mechanics have kind of hampered them, and that coming from D&D, the more free-form way to deal with problems is different and unfamiliar, you know, requiring a lot of creativity. Do we have any tips for easing into the mindset, er, of thinking in this way, this more open-ended creative way?

And then, finally, from Matt, "I've been looking at Blades in the Dark since it came out, and I have simultaneous feelings of, 'oh wow, this looks cool,' and 'damn, so many moving parts, feels crunchlicated,'" [interrupts reading to comment] good word. "How was your experiences with Austin and the players when you ran Marielda? I listened, and the story was sweet—as in 'sweet as,' an Aussie way of saying 'cool,' basically—and enjoyable, but how did you feel about all of those systems? Friction with the rules at all? Rose and thorns?"

Uh, rose and thorns is probably right for every game, I think, right? Like, I think that there's a lot of Blades that fits what we do really well. And I, as always, have like—I do my best to balance the, like, 'let's run this the way the book has written it, I'm going to try to internalize all of these rules, if I can, and bring them up when I think that they're important.' But also, I do my best to slowly introduce those rules based on the design of scenarios. Right? Like, I do my best to, in the first session, be like, "Okay, this is what an action roll looks like, this is what a fortune roll looks like, and this is what a resistance roll looks like. Don't worry about factions, don't worry about long-term projects—" like, I'll put a couple of clocks on the screen, but I don't have a screen of clocks the way I did with The Sprawl, you know, once we switched to The Sprawl and I was like, here's the clock sheet. The faction sheet exists, it's on a different, it's like on a sheet in a Google page somewhere. Like, I do my best to slowly roll those things out, and kind of tackle them when it makes sense.

My favourite example of this is a much more complicated system, which is Burning Wheel. I played a game with Adam Koebel of Burning Wheel, that you can find online, it was part of like the Roll20 GM series or whatever, that Adam, who is one of the co-authors of Dungeon World, was running. And, you know, we played for months and months and months, and like, it took two months before we got to the "proper," quote unquote, fight rules, or whatever. And like another month after that before we did Duel of Wits, because he was just so focused on like, okay, here's what basic resolution looks like. Here is what the, like, you know, experience looks like in this system. Very small, very focused gameplay.

ART: Those combat rules are bonkers, though.

AUSTIN: They're wild. And they're really fun, they're like, it's a really cool, like rock-paper-scissors, where you're plotting out encounters, so you're plotting out a number of moves, and then they kind of hit at the same time, and it's cool as hell, but you need to devote a night to that thing, that's what that game is.

ART: Well, it's like a game where it wants everyone to have their own whiteboard!

AUSTIN: Yes! A hundred percent. It's why we won't play that game here. [ALI laughs] And I like Burning Wheel a whole bunch! But like, it's just not a great radio show for what we—especially not a great radio show. Like, the streams I was doing with Adam were at least streams, where

he could pull up the, like, "Here is the chart of how this shit works." [ALI laughs] I can't do that on podcasts, right? And so for Blades—

ART: [crosstalk] Not yet.

AUSTIN: Yeah, well—

ART: Thanks, Apple.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Thanks, Apple. Podcasts 2.0, here we come. Um...in Blades it's like, we made that ship. We're not going to have ship combat in the first game, are you *fucking* kidding me? You know, we're not going to rush into some of that stuff. Because otherwise, I think we would—it would be really overwhelming.

ART: Whoa, ship combat's like, a thing?

AUSTIN: Yeah! That's why there's stats for ships.

ART: Oh, shit!

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's why we have a pilot, that's why Dre's the pilot!

ART: Hmmm.

AUSTIN: Mhm. It's why—

ART: Cool.

AUSTIN:—I have to stat out all those, like, those small vehicles you all have.

ALI: Oh, right!

JACK: [crosstalk] Yeah, we have like—we have like—

ALI: [crosstalk] We have to make our mechs!

AUSTIN: You have mechs, yeah.

ART: I thought those were vanity items.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] No!

ALI: [crosstalk] Oh, they are.

AUSTIN: Well—mmm....

[ALI laughs]

JACK: Well, yeah…

AUSTIN: No! You took that ability, you have those now! Those can come up!

ART: I would take vanity abilities…[laughing]

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Fair. Fair. Um, so yeah, as players, Jack and Ali, you've obviously played a lot more Blades than Janine and Art have, but I'm curious about all of your perspectives on this game.

ALI: Yeah, I, um, I have a few things to say about a lot of questions that we just got—I that that, um—

AUSTIN: Yeah—

ALI:—Blades is, it's a tough system, but the thing that I really like about it is that it's, like, segmented into parts. [AUSTIN: Mmm. Mhm.] Where it's like, this is the pre-mission, I know that this is the pre-mission, I know when the mission starts because we do a roll—

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] The engagement roll—

ALI: [crosstalk]—and then we know that the mission has started now, yeah.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Right, yes, totally.

ALI: And then downtime rolls, and everything else that happens there, is also in its own like separate section of the game. [AUSTIN: Right.] And if I remember correctly, I think that the Blades book specifically has, like, 'it's downtime time, you have this option of things that you can do,' which makes it a lot easier—

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Yeah.

ALI: In terms of, like, being a GM and not knowing how to break the flow or whatever else to do, I like, from a player perspective, I feel like you shouldn't have too much anxiety about that stuff because I rely on you so much to let me know what, like, the stakes of something is. So, like,

you saying like, 'Oh, you can either do this thing or you can resist it' is a big help, because like, that's something I feel like you would know better than I would? [AUSTIN: Yeah…] Maybe, I'm not sure about that. I don't know.

AUSTIN: Yeah. It's—well, it goes both ways for me, which is like, one, part of it is like being a well-informed patient [ALI laughs] to make sure that you can communicate with your doctor, do you know what I mean? To some degree.

ALI: Yeah.

JACK: Mhm.

AUSTIN: And, it's also, I walk the line, because I was just having a conversation with a friend of mine on Twitter about this who does not like in Blades that, a core difference between PbtA games, Powered by the Apocalypse games, and Blades, is that in Powered by the Apocalypse games, you say that you do a thing, and then what I say is, like, "alright, that is a hack and slash, roll hack and slash." Whereas, in Blades, and in Scum and Villainy, you describe a thing that you do, and you say, "And I'm using Scramble to do it."

Or, like, let's use a different example. Let's say like, okay. There's a guard, I'm trying to get in past this guard, I'm gonna talk to them, and you describe how you're talking to them, and then you say, "I'm gonna roll Doctor to do it, because I'm like, psychoanalyzing this guy, and like, trying to get him to like, realize that we're all on the same team here," or something. Now, in Powered by the Apocalypse games, you would say, "I'm going to psychoanalyze this guy," and I would say, "Okay, you're acting under fire using Charisma," or something, right. Whereas here, you'll say, "Okay, I'm using Doctor," and what I could say is like, "Ooh, okay, that's gonna be Desperate," or like, "that's gonna be Risky Limited, like, you can try to do it but you're gonna have limited effect that way." At which point you can say, oh, okay, you're right, lemme just actually try to Command instead, he's a solider, he knows how to, he responds well to commands, and so I'm gonna use Command and instead of psychoanalyzing him I'm gonna blah blah blah."

And I like that back-and-forth for two reasons. One, because I like exploring the fictional options at the table. It's like, one of the reasons I like doing this, and not just defaulting to roll Charisma. But also, because as a player, it's often the case that if it's not up to me, you suggest a thing I wouldn't suggest. As the GM, I'm almost always going to suggest your best option, because otherwise I feel like I'm not being a fan of the characters. But if you say "I'm going to psychoanalyze this guard and use Doctor to make the roll," that's incredible and yes, we can do that, [ALI laughs] I'm going to tell you the stakes and then we're gonna roll, if you decide to go with it, but like, if it were up to me, I would never say "use your Doctor skill to do this," because I know it's going to have a limited effect, comparatively. Um, and so I like the fact that Blades encourages you to use skills in ways that I wouldn't default to doing, you know what I mean?

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So like, that's part of that back-and-forth, is like, yes, I am looking out for you, but also, I'm looking out for the story, and so the fact that Blades has multiple ways to arrive at a solution means that I can, *you* can come up with solutions that I would not necessarily say, "Yes, do that."

My only other caveat there is, some people play games because they like to have that degree of mastery, and like how those moves come together. And so, I, there are some players for whom I think it's a great idea for them to be like, "I'm gonna know everything in this book so that I can make dope combos happen," or whatever. Like, good interesting synergies between abilities and between their teammates. Like, when I've had a good time with roleplaying games it's often because one person at the table like, understands how your leadership role can help emphasize the combat person's role, and they're like, "Oh, Austin! If you give a speech right now, like do this thing!" and there's a degree to which that can be like, way overstepping bounds, but that excitement can also be really contagious and like, "Oh shit, yeah, I'll do a speech, lemme just like, man up and do a speech right now." And like, okay, I did a bad speech, I rolled real poorly, now we're in more trouble, but like, the, the—only arrived because someone at the table did pay attention and did, like, does know the rules well enough to encourage those interlocking systems to fire at the same time. Um, so that's my perspective.

JACK: I think also, like, especially in the case of Blades, Blades feels like it was constructed to run heists, or to run robberies, [AUSTIN: Mhm.] or to run, like, scoundrel activities. Um...

[AUSTIN laughs]

JACK: You know, sc—[ART and JACK laugh] The brand of the broader umbrella of scoundrel activities. And, everything ab—I—it will come as no surprise given that we jump at the chance of playing it whenever, but I think Blades is remarkably well-designed to encourage those sorts of stories to flow naturally out of its mechanics, and to encourage players to engage with those more crunchy details and those more complicated details when they feel like they're pulling that tool out of their bag.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: There's the kind of broad-strokes genius bits of design in that game like the flashbacks, [AUSTIN: Mhm.] which, I feel are about as easy to internalize as they are difficult to remember to do.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Uh-huh.

JACK: And then there's, there is stuff like the Harm mechanic and there's bits and pieces that only come into play when you really think, alright, it's time for us to do that. And I think that that lends itself so well to the sort of scoundrel umbrella. Um, you talking about how, you know, Blades is great for saying you're doing a thing, like, "Oh, I'm gonna make a speech," and then

rolling, and then making, finding that you've made a bad speech, I think generated some of the best bits in Marielda.

AUSTIN: Totally,

JACK: Like, cause it cuts both ways, right? It's a character saying they're gonna do something great, and doing it, and then rolling, and then it going horribly wrong. And then also, the reverse, like the entrance into Memoriam, [AUSTIN sighs heavily] which was so implausibly, wildly, bad of an idea.

AUSTIN: Right.

[[00:30:04]]

JACK: And then we rolled the dice, and because of the way the pacing of that scene worked, it was successful! Which was just incredible.

AUSTIN: Right, and then like, cascaded in a really weird and surprising way. Like, that's, I love engagement, I love an engagement so much, because people keep coming up with ideas I would never have come up with. [JACK chuckles] The way Blades and Scum and Villainy work is they say, like, alright, present one clear, at least one clear method of engagement. Like, give them, "alright, you can kick down the door," or whatever the equivalent is. And then, and then have one in your back pocket that is, like, if you do a little research, you find out that blank, right, you find out that, you know, in the case of Memoriam, that there are these, you know, you scouted the place out, you learn that there are second-level—

JACK: Where the candle machine is!

AUSTIN: Or whatever, you know, second-level balconies you could come in on versus going in through the front door. And you know that it doesn't rearrange itself, and blah blah blah. But also, because the way it works is, you say, either we're going to do an Assault plan, a Sneaky plan, a Social plan, a Magic plan, or whatever the fifth plan is that I always forget, like, there's so much that's wide open.
        So, seeing how y'all do those things ends up being so surprising, and Memoriam was a great example of you being like, "We're gonna make a, we're gonna like, rile people up so that there's protesting, so that there's a distraction, [JACK giggles] so that we can sneak in the side," is like, so much better than "we climb a tree and jump to the balcony." You know? And then it cascades, because by the end of that sequence, we just have this amazing image of protestors in the streets, and fire, and blah blah blah. And I think that only comes with some degree of complexity.
        Not that simple things can't also do great work, that's one of the reasons we love working with games like Ben Robbins, like Follow and Kingdom and all of that is like, those

aren't games where you're rolling a bunch, necessarily, but they do allow for a certain sort of emotional complexity that other games sort of get in the way of.

For Art and Janine, I'm really curious, like, you've both played one session of this so far. Thoughts so far?

JANINE: [sighs and laughs] So, my first Scum and Villainy session went badly [AUSTIN laughs] in a way that I'm having to consciously tell myself not to hold against the game.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: And it's really hard. And I'm trying to be an adult about it [JANINE laughs, AUSTIN hums sympathetically] and I'm trying to remember that, like, a lot of the time, my first sessions with games have felt like, oh no, I made a mis—not like my character made a mistake, but, "oh no, I made a mistake by putting myself in this position where this is the thing we're doing, uh-oh."

[ART laughs]

AUSTIN: [laughs] Uh-huh.

JANINE: Um, and, [sighs] so my first session felt bad. Like, it felt—I often feel bad. Like, I made a joke on Twitter a long time ago, not a long time ago, a few months ago, that I hold, that I still kind of hold onto, which was, sub-drop but for podcasts, for tabletop games, something like that. Like, there's a weird bad feeling sometimes that comes after, [AUSTIN: Mhm.] you know, after a recording session, where it's such a weird, um, non-rational thing, like I know I have no reason to feel bad but I feel bad. And after the Scum and Villainy session, I felt bad in a, like, new way, almost. Where like, I've had sessions with bad rolls before. [laughs] I rolled three ones when I had advantage, and that stuff happens, but I felt more like...normally I don't feel like my bad rolls lead to a worse story.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JANINE: And that was how I kind of left that session feeling, was like, okay, well I had these ideas, and then they all fucked up, and now this story is in a bad place, and I don't know what it looks like turning it around.

AUSTIN: Right. [crosstalk] I think that that's—

JANINE: I feel like that's, I felt like that was more in my lap than it normally feels. Like, normally when I make bad rolls, it doesn't feel like, it doesn't feel quite that way.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I think that's an important experience to share because a lot of people, because it's a risky thing to switch systems. And it can really feel, like, bad rolls already feel bad. They're

gonna feel worse if you're switching systems and trying something new, because you will instinctively remember all of the times things went well for you in the good system.

[all laugh]

JANINE: Yes.

AUSTIN: And I mean that as a GM, too. Like, I definitely remember early, like I loved the Sprawl coming out of TechNoir, but also, felt like, worried that we were going to just do DungeonWorld again, in terms of what play felt like. And it didn't, by the end. By the end, we were doing things that the Sprawl supports that DungeonWorld doesn't, but in my first couple of encounters especially, I was worried that, like, combat would lose its sort of like, cinematic, or even more than cinematic, *literary* feeling that TechNoir suggested. And in the end, I was happy to make that transition because of the flow, but like, it felt bad, whenever it felt like I was scrambling to make a scene make sense. And so, I can totally see that, like—you had a real bad string of failures in this first game, Janine.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: It's bad.

ART: It was still TechNoir when we fought all those robots, right?

AUSTIN: A hundred percent.

ALI: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Yes. That was the first mission y'all were on.

ART: That's not true. That's probably—

JANINE (crosstalk): Yep, it was—

AUSTIN (crosstalk): It's a hundred percent true. It's a hundred percent true, because you were going to Snowtrack—

JANINE (crosstalk): That was like one of the first big things that Mako did.

AUSTIN: Yes.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I mean, that's the thing—

ART: I understand that you all think that, [ALI laughs] but I think if we check the tape, you'll see [laughs] that we were seasoned professionals by then.

AUSTIN: [dubiously] Uh-huh. Definitely.

ART: And that that mission went great.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. Um, but yeah, like I think that those failures, and part of that's definitely going to be on me as the GM, is like, the encounter that happens there, everybody in that first encounter, that was, the Janine/Dre/Sylvia game, like, failed-failed-failed-failed, and part of that is definitely like, the dice are just not here. And also, people don't wanna spend stress yet, because it feels like it's the first sequence and you shouldn't be stressing, you shouldn't be spending that resource, um—

JANINE: I did spend stress, though!

AUSTIN: I know. There were, there were—

JANINE: Like—[frustrated sigh]

AUSTIN: There were opportunities for Dre and Sylvia to spend stress, where they didn't, is all. Um, and I'm not dragging them on it, I'm just saying like, there are—and the other part of that is, a lack of, not a lack of, but it's new, it's new to players, and so like, I think a lot about that sequence, which you'll hear next week, obviously, is like—oh, I should've made sure that I communicated to the players that they were close enough at all times to do teamwork moves. Because that is what would've pushed a number of those rolls into success, because that's always an option unless I explicitly take it away from them. And I didn't communicate that well enough.

And so that, to go back to Patrick's question of like, do I have an obligation to remind players of rules that might benefit them: yes, I do, and so I think a lot about where I drop the ball on those rules so that I can fix it in the future. Because otherwise, it's like, that's the bargain that you're making, is like, I'm not playing the game so I can win, you know what I mean? [laughs] I'm happy with how that first session ended up, I'm happy with how we got ourselves out of that scenario, in both in that case and then in a future case, but at the same time, I definitely think like, okay, I want to make sure that this rule is very clear, and very, like, obvious to them, that here are the ways in which they can really spend as many resources ranging from stress to gambits to teamwork to narrative positioning to help really secure things that they're interested in—that they're very committed to securing, versus things that they want to leave up to chance. And that definitely falls on my shoulders.

And I think that if you're listening as a GM, remember that. That is part of the bargain that you're making when you say you're going to GM a game.

Um, Art, how about you? How're you feeling? I mean, the first half of the first recording, [ART: Sure.] maybe not even the first half, but whatever, just went up this past week.

ART: It's tricky. Blades is tricky, you know. It's not like...I don't want to say it's hard, because it isn't, but it's very, it's not like what I'm used to?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: You know, I've been playing tabletop games a long time, and the mold of what I've played has been, you know, two or three very specific things that this is not, this is not any of those. I guess it's...I was going to say it is sort of like Powered by the Apocalypse, but it's not, I'm just like, drawing a connection in my brain where it doesn't exist.

AUSTIN: Right. Well, I don't know…

ART: And I—

AUSTIN: I think that there's overlap there. I think that there's definitely shared DNA.

ART: And I think I am struggling, in that first recording [AUSTIN: Mhm.] and the way I'm, like, dealing with it, is by kind of like, pulling into the spaces I feel more comfortable?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Can you give me a particular example of that? That first recording goes up until Gig is agreeing to help with the thing inside of the research room, with the, like, robot surgery, basically.

ART: I mean, I think it's as simple as looking at how long we just spent dunking on Gig, right? Like, I don't need to roll any dice [AUSTIN laughs] to do that, like, I don't need to know the rules or anything, we can just like, do that all day. In fact, like, do you want to throw up a Patreon, I'll just like, in character as Grand Magnificent, dunk on all the characters we've come up with, [AUSTIN laughs uproariously] I'll do it.

JACK: [laughs] A 30,000 goal.

ART: I don't have anything to do these days. Yeah. Let's scrap the live show, and instead [all laugh], uh—

AUSTIN: It's like a roast, but it's not roasting Grand Magnificent, it's just Grand Magnificent roasting all of the other player characters—across seasons, honestly.

ART: Yeah! Honestly, don't even start in the seasons.

[ALI laughs]

ART: But like, stuff like that, or like, we have a boat moment, [AUSTIN: Yeah.] which honestly, if you check the tape, I'm the, I'm not the person resisting getting off the boat this time, I'm a boat pusher, but like, even that, any little bit of, uh, any little bit of discussion and planning, that isn't so rules-heavy, it's like—taking that little, like, the little spaces where it's all the same no matter what the system is, and kind of living in those for these pregnant moments [AUSTIN: Mhm.] is my defense mechanism. And as I get more comfortable, we'll get into a better flow.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I think that there's a similar sequence with Signet, where we just zero in on, this won't be in the first episode, but it's in the first set of recordings, in which we do see her, like, with people, that I think worked really well, because—and there ended up being a roll there, but it was just a moment where we could at least see Signet do the thing that she does, and that actually, I think about those moments—there's also something like that for Echo, and for Even, and it's like, okay. They're all fuckin' failing like wild, but we still got good characterization on screen, and that is one of the three things that I say at the top of every game, so…[all laugh] I'll live with it.

Okay. We're going to keep moving, cause we've still got a bunch to get through, unless someone has a thing they wanna add here. Okay. So this comes in from Rorick, Mike, and Simon. They all have clock questions.

Rorick says, "I've GM'd a lot of Powered by the Apocalypse games and when I ran Blades, I felt really hamstrung by having to wait on a "door unlocked" or "spotted" clock to tick down before something happened. Instead of following the fiction and my own sense of narrative pacing, things ended up not happening yet because of the clock. How do you reconcile following the rules of a game with what you think the game needs at certain moments?"

Mike says, "Austin, really love the clock system from The Sprawl. Once you moved away from that system and back to DungeonWorld, is that a thing you kept going on in the background and just not telling the players about, or did you keep ramping it up on the fly? Do you have a good alternative system for keeping looming threats in check?"

And Simon said, "Loving these pods, super useful. You covered fronts so well in the last one; could you please address how clocks work within your games?"

Mike, I'm going to answer very quickly: no, I did not bring clocks into DungeonWorld. DungeonWorld has fronts, we did that whole episode on fronts, fronts are the thing that I think works for DungeonWorld, at least for the genre, the kind of sub-genre of fantasy that we're using DungeonWorld to go after. Clocks are very immediate, and they're very public. Clocks, you draw on the face of the screen, or you put them down on paper in front of people and you go, [ominous voice] "this thing is happening." And it's, y'know— [imitating a clock] "tick-tick-tick-tick-tick."

And that works super well when you have like, megacorporations, and I think when you have like armadas and spaceships and shit, but in the subgenre of fantasy that Hieron is, I always want the feeling of pressure to come from fictional events that the player characters can see, because those are stories about specific heroes, and not necessarily about factions that are in this massive interwoven clockwork combat. And so, the way that fronts work, there are

ominous portents, there are things that the player characters will have to experience firsthand, and so fronts work best for me there, and that's a conscious choice.

I've thought about it, I've thought long and hard about it, and that's not to say you can't bring things over from system to system, and if you're a GM who's like, "I really need clocks to keep factions in check and to think about what the world is," bringing those over definitely could work for that. In fact, I've thought about bringing stuff over from Apocalypse World 2.0 into DungeonWorld when we go forward back to Hieron later in 2018. So, that's a thing to think about. It's like, really think about what is the thematic core, what are the genre rulesets of the story you're telling, do those mechanics actually pair up with those. It's the same way that I wouldn't say, like, in Hieron, Hadrian is *The Paladin*, there aren't other paladins, in the way that Cass was *The Soldier*, and there were *lots* of other soldiers, and Cass was fundamentally replaceable. And that is why their heroism stands out, because they were replaceable. Aria Joie was not the only Pusher. We met a bunch of other Pushers. The fact that Aria ends up being a hero, or a heroine, is paramount to—her heroism is tied so closely to the fact that she may as well have been a nobody. And that's what makes her heroism count so much, mechanically and narratively, in The Sprawl.

[[00:45:02]]

To talk about clocks in a broader way, Rorick, your question is like, super-important to understand if you're going to play a game like Blades, with clocks tied to fiction. So, clocks in The Sprawl were just about factions, basically, and about missions. You advanced clocks when bad things were happening. You advanced clocks when a mission was turning bad, or when a faction was taking notice or you, or, you know, certain playbooks did have clocks that would fill up, but none of the ones that we used, that would fill up when good things were happening. There's a reporter playbook in The Sprawl that you start clicking, you kind of tick clocks, sort of The Veil's, Gig's playbook in The Veil had a similar thing.

But, clocks in Blades and in Scum and Villainy are often about progress. They're about, like, [sighs] the way I designed something like Memoriam, was, I had a set of clocks for getting inside, or a clock for getting inside, I had a clock for getting past, or locating the hidden library, a clock for locating the hidden room in the hidden library, and finding the book, and I had a clock for getting out. And you tick that clock whenever someone makes a success, but it's super important to remember, and I kind of zero in on this where you write, "instead of following the fiction and my own sense of narrative pacing, things ended up not happening yet because of the clock." If the fiction does a thing, the clock gets ticked. It doesn't matter that a roll didn't happen. If the fiction makes the world move, the clock should adjust for that fictional change. So, if, for instance, you had a clock—let's say that you have a clock that's like, let's say you're having two mechs battle outside a city. And there is a clock for, "does that city know that that fight is happening," right? And the mechs are fighting, and every time one of them uses a ranged weapon, or something, you tick the box, or every time someone misses a shot, every time someone misses a roll you tick a box, let's say, right? Like, that's one of the ways that you tick it.

Now, let's say that one of them uses a giant bomb that makes, like, a huge mushroom cloud appear in the distance? Tick that clock a whole bunch! Like, follow the fiction in that way,

and don't ever say, like, "I guess they just didn't see the mushroom cloud." [ALI laughs] Like, no, they saw it! Click that fuckin', throw that clock out! That's one of the things that Blades says very clearly, that Scum and Villainy says very clearly, is, if the fiction changes, the clocks should go with it.

And so, remember that as the GM, you have the right to make moves in silence, so like, if someone is, for instance, waiting on a door to open, or trying to break into a door, and no-one's making any rolls, you can do a thing that advances a clock, or that puts pressure on them to make a move, you can do all that stuff that kind of encourages that interaction. But like, the number one thing to think about is that, clocks are there to help you track a situation. They're not there to hold back the fiction and say that the world doesn't change until someone makes a roll. Everything else kind of clicks into place at that point, once you kind of have that going.

The other thing in Blades is, like, clocks can work for you in the opposite direction of that, which is, you heard The Notion, the episode The Notion, the final of those eight episodes, in which I must have said, to the point that Janine made fun of me for it in the final minute, "that sounds like a great long-term project." Clocks let the players do things over the course of weeks and months that are grander than a single roll, and in those cases, they help communicate that certain things take a lot of time. But even in those cases, be willing to throw out the thing, throw out the clock. So like, if you're making a clock to build bedrooms on a spaceship, and then for whatever reason, a faction is like, "you can have one thing you want," and they're like, "we want fuckin' bedrooms on the spaceship," throw the clock out. They've gotten the bedrooms. That's not just like, "okay, well, here, click the bedroom clock twice, but you still have to do your own work"—no, the faction gave them bedrooms. Let them have bedrooms.

So, that's my overview on clocks. As players, does anyone have any clock thoughts?

[ALI breathes in]

AUSTIN: It's okay if you don't. [ALI and JANINE laughing] I just wanted to answer these clock questions all at once.

ALI: I like them as a way to remind players of, like, intentions that they have for their characters. [AUSTIN: Yeah.] I feel like, especially the way we run stuff, where we're thinking of story arcs especially, it's really easy to be like, "this is the mission for today, and then once we close the door on it, that's it."

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: But being able to...and especially because we're a podcast, it's hard to be like, "well, I want a whole scene about Tender building a church." [AUSTIN: Right, right.] It's easier to be like, another month has passed in narrative time, we can click this, because it's obvious that she would be doing it in her free time. [AUSTIN: Right, right.] It doesn't have to be—you go on.

AUSTIN: No no, go ahead. It doesn't have to be?

ALI: I was just going to say, it doesn't always have to be, like, "the camera pans to her, sitting in this room," [AUSTIN laughs] and a whole conversation of us doing the thing.

AUSTIN: Right. It can be like, "hey, do we have one of those scenes in us right now? Do we have something we wanna frame there?" Or just like, "oh, here's what she's been doing during this downtime." It's one of the reasons I love the downtime system in Scum and Villainy and Blades so much, is because there's a lot of opportunities to work on those long-term projects and think about what characters are doing in their lives. Like, people have projects. [ART: Absolutely.] You know? People have things that they wanna fucking get to, but they can't do it in a weekend. It takes them a year, you know?

ART: Yeah. I really—I think every game, honestly, basically has to start copying that. Because you get this, like—without downtime, even if you say, "oh there was downtime, oh, what do you do," I don't think you feel it in the same way? [AUSTIN: Yeah.] And I think it's like, one of my only things—and I don't want to be like, "oh, one of the only things wrong with Winter in Hieron," like we're some perfect golden show [AUSTIN laughs] or anything—but a thing that bugs me about Winter in Hieron is that it feels so relentless.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Totally.

ART: Like, we're just like, "okay, so you guys started in—" uh, the bridge town?

AUSTIN: Uh, yeah, the bridge—

ART: "—by Old Man's Chin" [AUSTIN: Yup.] "And then, you just kind of went for four months. [ALI laughs] And at the end, you know, I don't wanna spoil it too much, but—"

AUSTIN: Some stuff happened!

ART: "—a bunch of really bad stuff happened! And maybe, all those rolls went bad, because you guys have just been travelling, for like, ever! You know? When was the last time any of you slept in a bed, you know?"

JACK: This is so interesting. Because I agree, Art, that that is something that other systems should take into account, but they should at least take it into account so that GMs can choose not to use it. Or players can choose not to use it. [ART: Mmm.] Because making—I had, I think a lot of us had, a tough time making Winter in Hieron—

[everyone makes noises in agreement]

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: —and I'm really happy with what we ended up with, but that was definitely the happy you are when you finish a marathon rather than the happy you are when you're on a marathon. [AUSTIN: Mhm.] Which is not happy at all. And so, I sort of feel that like, Winter's relentlessness, the fact that we hadn't slept, and the fact that we were just kind of like, propelled onto one disaster and onto another disaster really lent that situation flavour that I don't know if we'd have got if we'd been putting downtime in? But I think that giving GMs, and giving players, tools to begin to discuss this stuff, to begin to discuss like, what narrative effects do we want our characters' resting to have, and what mechanical effects do we want them resting to have, is super important.

ART: As someone who's run a half-marathon [ALI laughs] let me tell you about the emotional arc you go through during that. Which is, "okay, this is great, I'm having fun," and then it's like, "yeah! I'm doing great! I'm at, like, mile 5, mile 6! This is awesome! I'm having a great time!" Then it's like, "oh my god, when is this, like [AUSTIN laughs] Shouldn't we be further than this by now? [all laughing] I feel like the last two miles took as long as the first six. My clock doesn't say that, but it feels like that." Then it's like, "alright, I'm almost done! This is happening, this is happening!" Then it's like, "oh, that finish line is so far away. I think I should be able to see it by now. This wasn't that far on the way out." Then it's like, "yeah I'm gonna cross this finish line, it's great." Then it's like, "oh my god, I stopped running, I'm freezing cold. There's nothing. My body is just shutting down. Someone give me one of those parka things. Oh my god, where's Jess." [EVERYONE: Awww.] That's the—

JACK: And, bizarrely, everyone feels that.

[everyone laughs]

ART: [crosstalk] Right. Exactly.

AUSTIN: Right. "Where's Jess?"

JACK: You wonder where your wife is! It's really strange! Um, also, I want to be clear, I wasn't miserable while I was making Winter in Hieron—

AUSTIN: I was! I was 100%

JACK: That's fair.

AUSTIN: I'm still miserable about Winter in Hieron! Fuck!

JACK: I think I was miserable as a person. I think I was going through the show going like, "We're telling a story here, I'm very curious about where it's going, but it's like we're pushing a very heavy car."

AUSTIN: [sighing] It was a very heavy car. And I think it's really funny. Because, if Dungeon World had more—like, Dungeon World does have some degree of a downtime system, in the way that D&D does. Where it's like, you can talk about food, and rations, and how much it costs to stay at an inn. [ALI starts to speak] But that's so much different than Blades—sorry, Ali, was that what you were going to say?

ALI: No, I was going to say that, in the counterpart to what Art was saying, I had that whole conversation where Hella brought that good bread, and I felt like she had—there's such a clear image in my mind of, like, them stopping at night and eating that nice bread [AUSTIN, sighing: Yeah.] and making tea and stuff. Like, I get the story never felt like that, because that was never the story that we were writing for that, but we—if that's the story that we were interested in telling, we could have made that time for it.

AUSTIN: So, the thing that's actually interesting for me is, when we conceived of Hieron, when we first conceived of Hieron, it was that. It did have more downtime. I didn't—we weren't gonna play a fuckin' game with gods in it. Like, we had a paladin, but who fuckin' cares, like, no. It's this weird faith that's an amalgam of other local faiths that is, like—Samothes wasn't going to show up, are you fucking kidding me? No, they're going to go off on fun adventures. We pitched it as, Adventure Time-y, as like, procedural. [JACK. You sure did.] In the television sense of procedural, where we're going to go off on adventures that, maybe there will be a tied-together big plot, but there won't be—it's not Lord of the Rings. In which, Lord of the Rings was about a single journey, and Winter is totally Lord of the Rings, in that there are three main arcs in Winter, obviously, or five if you count the two separate parties. But—

ART: You wanna talk about stories that feel like pushing a big car, though, that's fuckin Lord of the Rings—

AUSTIN: But that's the thing! So, it's funny, because I think that if DungeonWorld did have vices, and downtime actions, where you sat down and said, "What do you do during this period of downtime, we're rolling dice to figure out what happens," we would have veered toward a more procedural story. And again, when I say procedural, I don't mean shadow of Mordor, I mean like Law & Order style of game, in which we had little mini adventures that closed off. But, at the same time, Ali, you're totally right, because that's a thing that we went into Counter/WEIGHT wanting to do [ALI: Oh yeah.] and the Sprawl doesn't really have downtime in that same way, and we still managed to do it for the first, like, six arcs or whatever. Five arcs. But what it does have is the thing that Blades have, which is, now it is mission time. It doesn't have an engagement roll, but it has a time in which I say, "you're done doing legwork. Here is the mission clock." And that division does make it feel like there is downtime, and like, you're at the beach with Paisley, or you're meeting this old man in the park. And I think that communicates a sense of episodic content in the traditional sense, versus a single long serialized straightforward story.

ART: Yo, does someone make, like, a Law & Order-style tabletop game?

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Art, we're playing Primetime Adventures, tomorrow.

ART: ...I haven't read that book yet.

AUSTIN: You should read that book.

ALI: [reverently] Oh, you should.

AUSTIN: Also, you read that book, like, twelve years ago, and told me we should play it! [ALI laughs] So...

ART: I was very wise back then.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Ali, I'm sorry, what were you going to say?

ALI: No, I just wanted to say, it's funny that you mentioned the Sprawl, because I think that the Sprawl was something that I was kind of upset about in this way. [AUSTIN, interestedly: Mmm?] Because it didn't ever give me the, like—Aria was a Pusher, but I never had the space to be like, on this weekend, she's hosting this event. Or she's at this concert, or whatever. And there was never any reason to put the camera on that, or say that that's what she was doing.

AUSTIN: Or like, again, that goes back to what you were saying about Winter in Hieron, which is: we could have done those things. [ALI laughs] We could have said, "I want that sequence before we do this next mission." But when the game doesn't say, "Now, for the next 30 minutes, everyone is going to talk about what they did in what would traditionally be off camera." You don't get those rolls, and you don't get that encouragement. You don't force yourself to have those sequences, which is why Marielda worked so well is, we did do all of those side things, we do see the war with the Fontmen come out of one of those rolls. We do talk about—uh, uh, I'm gonna Audrey/Aubrey confused again, it's gonna fucking kill me—

ALI: It's always Aubrey. It's Aubrey. It's Aubrey! Why does no one know this!?

ART: No one is Audrey!

JANINE: I don't understand why it's so hard!

AUSTIN: [resignedly] I am bad at names sometimes. Like, remembering them. [crosstalk] 'Cause real names—

JANINE: [crosstalk] It's Aubrey, 'cause Aubrey is a baby!

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] —like Territory Jazz, are memorable! Aubrey, like, okay, if you say so…

ALI: Just remember, it *is* like Drake. [crosstalk] I know in your head you're thinking I don't think that it's like Drake—

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] That's the thing! I'm saying, it can't possibly be Drake! And it is!

ALI: It is.

AUSTIN: It is just Drake. I just have to remember that Sylvia is from the 6ix. So.

[ALI laughs loudly]

JANINE: Hmm…

AUSTIN: Aubrey working on stuff, working on new chemical compositions, trying to figure out the dream space stuff, is like, so cool, and we wouldn't have done any of it if what we were doing was just, "go on mission, come back from mission." Or, "go on mission, start new mission, start new mission." So, I'm hoping that the downtime in Scum and Villainy really leans into that stuff, because that will be the place to do a lot of the introspective stuff that the Veil is really good about on every roll.
        Alright, next question. From Matthias, who is in the chat right now: Matthias? Is it a soft T, or a hard T? Is it a thing that I'm just going to get wrong no matter what?

[[1:00:08]]

ART: I think it's silent. I think it's "Mahias."

AUSTIN: Okay. You can yell at Art right now, Matthias, because you're in the chat! So: "What has been the most frustrating thing to deal with in play post-Miracle? How did you solve it? Or, how is there still uncertainty or frustration that will need addressing? And, two, how much do you mind or like to be engaged by listeners in the show in regards to individual play? 'Play advice' can be tricky, as it's often a very personal expression, and comments can be very annoying. Or, even feel condescending for those who still feel themselves to be new to these games. I at times feel as strongly about use of mechanics as I do about character development."
        Um, Matthias—it's a hard T. Matthias. Mah-TEE-us. Okay, got it. Matthias has given us good feedback before about mechanics. So the way you do it has been very good, which is to say, you always ask, "hey, can I give some feedback about blah-blah-blah?" And you have been good about that. We definitely have gotten things before, now and then, of someone who's like, "you're doing it wrong!" And that's like, alright, bye. Like… [sighs] [ART and ALI laugh] One of

the things that makes the feedback thing complicated is, one, the episodes you hear are not complete recordings. So, sometimes we'll get someone who's like, "you did damage wrong!" And I'm like, "okay, wait two weeks. You're gonna hear when we go, 'oh, we did damage wrong.'" Like, in the recording, and then we fix it.

And also because, sometimes it goes back to what we said before, which is, sometimes as a GM, I'll leave out complexity, or will encourage a certain complexity, where it doesn't fundamentally have to be, or it should be there but I'm pulling it out for flow. And so sometimes that is about a specific choice versus something like, in Marielda, I always allowed Devil's Bargains to come after the fact. And I think in Marielda I also allowed Teamwork to come after the fact, maybe? I don't remember exactly. Where, like, you could do those things after a roll to kind of—and that was an intentional change of those rules so that we would have a kind of more free-flowing table situation for the show. But that's not always the case. So, I would say, ask politely, and then offer advice, is my experience. I don't know, players, if you have a different feeling about that, though? And then we'll wrap back around to that first question.

ALI: It's tough for me, especially, because I produce the show [AUSTIN: Right.] but immediately after I play a game, I'm already like, "I've made so many mistakes! Here's all the things I wish I could do better!" It's like, tabletop roleplaying is just the thing of like, wishing you had said a cool thing? [laughs]

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: Mhm!

ALI: But it lasts for, like, days. And I have to go listen to the episode three times. [AUSTIN: Mhm.] And like, you're right, that would've been cooler. Or, I listen to it and I'm like, "actually, that's not as bad as I thought it would be." Or it's both. So by the time the episode comes out, it's like, I don't…[laughing] I've already considered this from every angle. I appreciate it, but I'm not open to suggestions in that way, I guess.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: I guess that's where I'm at.

JACK: Sometimes...people understandably have suggestions about my style of play, which kind of involves a mixed relationship with success. [AUSTIN: Yeah.] And I can super understand that impulse. I can understand where you would see a character doing something awful and want to say, "if you'd just thought about the rules slightly differently," or, "you had that object in your inventory!" I can wholly understand that impulse. But at the same time, I try not to make decisions about throwing my character into a wall lightly. Sometimes I throw my character into a wall because I've missed something in my inventory, or because I've missed a move that I can do. But I'm not out here just trying to smash my characters up. And I think that sometimes...sometimes I think that some folks don't appreciate that we put thought, or put as

much thought as we do, into when our characters go careening into terrible decisions. But at the same time, I can super understand where that impulse comes from, to want to say, "oh, it could've all been so much better if you'd done this, or if you'd done that."

AUSTIN: Yeah. Definitely, I can definitely get the impulse, because I've listened to other actual play shows, right, and you get that—

JACK: [crosstalk] Yeah! And I've got—

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] And I've watched TV shows! And, like—

JACK: Yeah! We care about the characters in media, and we care about the people playing those characters! But at the same time, sometimes you just have to use the wrong sword.

AUSTIN: Right. But also, we like Fargo a whole bunch. And like, dramatic irony. And characters who put themselves into the sort of frustrating situations where they overextend themselves or they take risks that they shouldn't take, because it's in line with who they are as people. And sometimes those all pay off, and it feels incredible. So.

JACK: Totally.

[pause]

AUSTIN: Oh, it sounded like somebody else was about to speak, so I was being quiet. No?

ART: Yeah. Um...I never think very hard before throwing my characters into the wall.

JACK: Nice!

[AUSTIN laughs]

ART: [crosstalk] I guess that's not true, we just—

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Yeah, that's—[laughs]

JACK: [crosstalk] We're the angel and devil of bad character decisions.

ART: We just absolutely published the episode where it's like, I spend 20 minutes thinking about how hard I want to throw my character into the wall.

AUSTIN: Yep.

ART: But...I don't know. I don't want to say this. It's gonna make me sound like such an asshole.

ALI: Go on.

[all laugh]

ART: I'm just gonna do it. If it's too far, cut it out of the episode, it's just for the 34 people here. [AUSTIN laughs] It's hard to feel condescended to about these things, because ultimately, I don't...care? [ALI, AUSTIN and JACK cackle] Like, about what...anyone thinks about what we're doing?

AUSTIN: [laughing] That's broad, Art.

ART: [crosstalk] You're right, but like—

JACK: [crosstalk] Also, possibly, wrong.

JANINE: Yeah, I don't entirely believe that you mean that in the broader—

AUSTIN: Yeah me neither. Art, we talk—

ART: Well, on the mechanical level, I think I do.

ALI: Yeah.

ART: Like, I've never been like, "oh no, I did that rule wrong, oh no, I missed that move," like, that's never what's keeping me up after a recording. What's keeping me up after a recording is, like, "oh, I should've said this, oh, I should've remembered"—it's all about wit of the staircase, never about, "oh, I wish I could've made the dice work better."

AUSTIN: Right. I think that that's totally true. There are a handful of exceptions for me, which ends up being about, like, "ah, I should've gone lighter on them." So, like, with Blades, one of the things is, ironically, Matthias and I actually just talked about this in the Discord channel, how—so, in Blades, and in Scum and Villainy, when you roll to resist something using Stress, it's up to the GM to decide how much of the thing you can resist. Whether you can resist damage alone, but also fictional positioning, or if you are able to like, what you're able to get away with. Do you still lose the item you would've lost, but you manage to stay on top of the staircase or whatever, whatever the situation is.
    And so one of the things for me, in all of the GMing I do, is like, "ugh, could I have come up with a better, a more interesting, result to that roll." Especially in Powered by the Apocalypse, the 7-9s, and in Scum and Villainy the 4 and 5s. The, like, mixed success thing, is like, "ugh, I wish I had given them this option instead, that would've been dope." And that's a good feeling for me to have, because it's the thing that makes me spend 20 minutes before every session looking at your inventories, so that I know what I can take from you. Or, remembering to look at

faction alignments, so that I know who shows up. Because not having that result is what would lead the show to be less interesting and less complicated in that specific way. Which is, like, such a different thing, because as the GM, mechanics and narrative do overlap completely. I'm not just, like, trying to win rolls. In fact, I never roll the dice in half, in 90% of the games we play! You know!

JACK: That's fun, Austin, it's great. It goes really well.

AUSTIN: I like it! Me too, I like when you all roll and get numbers on there. But so for me, it ends up being that I wish I would have used this other GM move that I have. I wish I would've separated them instead of doing damage as established, or whatever. It's not about, like—and sometimes it's, I wish I did that speech better. Like, we re-recorded the Doyenne's speech because the first version that I did was garbage. Like, it was just like, I don't really know, I knew where we were going, I had three good ideas; I needed ten good ideas. [JACK chuckles] Once we were getting toward the holiday special, I had a much better understanding of who the Doyenne was and how she related to Volition, and what Volition's ideology was, and kind of where the Volition's side of Twilight Mirage was going. I was able to fix that recording. And that's not a thing we do when it comes to actions; we never go back and go, like, "well now you hit instead of missed," but there are situations where it's just, like, "this fuckin sucks. I'm terrible." It's hard to do a big speech off the top of your head sometimes.

    And there are times when the opposite thing happens, where it's like, all of the Fisherman and Fourteen Fifteen stuff was like, completely ad-libbed, and we just found that character immediately and it just worked. And thankfully, the bulk of what we do, 99% of it, does not have to be hit on a pickup in any kind of way. But the thing that's most frustrating for me is the stuff that can't be. Which is the, like, ah, I wish I had offered to take away their gun in that sequence instead of just doing damage. Because what would've followed would've been—like, that's a specific one from this season. It was, like, "I wish instead of saying, 'Gig, you're going to get shot again if you do this,' it was, 'Gig's gun gets shot. The hitman, Louis Armstrong, hits the gun and it breaks.'" It's way more interesting for whatever follows than, "alright, take more damage," you know? And so that's the stuff that keeps me up in terms of mechanical stuff. But also, advice isn't gonna help me on that.

ART: But to clarify, like—what I said is a reason why that kind of advice is fine, because I do wanna hear it, I don't wanna do things wrong. I was just saying, I feel like I can't feel condescended to, because I feel the stakes on that particular area are low for me.

AUSTIN: Gotchu. Versus, someone who says, "You should play Hadrian differently," for instance.

[JANINE laughs]

ART: Right. But those people are just, like, wrong.

[EVERYONE laughs]

AUSTIN: Gotcha.

ART: And that's easy to dismiss because Hadrian is perfect.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. [JACK laughs] Perfect cinnamon roll. Uh-huh. [ALI laughs] Who—anyone else, here, on advice?

JANINE: Uh—

AUSTIN: Janine, you got one?

JANINE: Yeah, so. I haven't gotten a lot of people coming at me about things I've done, which honestly in a lot of cases would be totally justified because I'm still really new to this, and I'm trying to be very aware of mistakes that I have made in this learning process. Some of the stuff that I have heard, though, is interesting because it is maybe a little more deliberate than people realize. There have been some situations where people have expressed that they think I'm a little bit too, like, explicit about things. I lay things out a little too plainly. Or, like, I—I think this especially true with Adaire. There's a very, like, "think out loud, here's all of the stuff, all on the table, here's my exact intention," etcetera.

   And a lot of that is because, there's a thing you used to put in notes and stuff, when someone asked a question that had been about canon that had been answered, which is, "it's in the text." Which is, like, a super teacher-y thing to write on stuff. Like, "it's in the thing, read the thing." But, like, this isn't text, is often my answer. So, it's hard for people to refer to stuff. It's hard for people to find things that may already be there. And it can be hard for people to follow stuff. Like, this is, the directness that I try to do is very much a reaction to me as a listener being like, "I don't know what the fuck is going on, I need to re-listen to three episodes right now cause I don't quite know what's happening." [JACK: Mhm. Yeah.]

   And I think a lot of what we do is good in its subtlety, but also, I'm always very aware of, like, I don't want everyone to be watching everything through six different curtains. And that's a thing that I've definitely gotten some criticism for, but it's, I temper my reaction to that knowing that as a listener, I would appreciate that, I appreciate when that happens in episodes I'm listening to. When there is just, like, a plain, "here's what's going on" thing. So, I think, maybe being aware of the sort of bigger picture of what you want to bring to something helps.

AUSTIN: Totally. Totally. Like, figuring out what your role is for the table, almost, can help a ton. Again, I haven't played in much lately, because my time is mostly running stuff, and work, like Waypoint stuff. But when I was playing in games with Adam, especially online, I had to think a lot about, like, "okay, what members of the audience am I helping through my participation? How am I enabling other players at the table through my participation and play?" And that is so easy to forget that that's part of what you can do.

Like, part of my job, as a GM, my responsibility is being a fan of the players, and the characters, and making sure that the rules help manifest an interesting story. As a player, it's good advice to think, like, "How can I add something to this table?" Sometimes, that means bringing the Doritos. But sometimes it means, like, being the one who takes notes. Being the one who's like, "oh, yeah yeah yeah, Red Jack, that's the one we met back in Old Man's Chin, remember? Blah blah blah." And sometimes that can be the person who says, like, "alright, I'm gonna be the one who cares about this one big plot and knows where all the, like, knows the ins and outs of all the factions." And that stuff can really contribute to the table feeling like they're having a good time. Because, not everyone wants to care about everything that's happening all the time. So, yeah, and then especially for a show, it can be really useful to have an audience surrogate character who's just, like, "what the fuck is happening?" [JANINE laughs]

[[1:15:33]]

So, yeah. I'll also come back to that part of the question in a minute or so, because we have a similar question coming up. But, briefly, to talk, Matthias, about the most frustrating thing to deal with in post-Miracle Mirage—I wouldn't even say frustrating—it is, um, challenging to make sure that we're hitting tone right, still. And that we're being very clear about what that tone is, through the storytelling. And you'll hear that in the coming weeks as these first arcs show up. But, like, I think in a lot of ways, I think about the first Beloved game, of Contrition's Figure, which was frustrating for a number of reasons on the GM side, for me as like, doing things that I should have done differently. Or, I guess, frustrating on the player side, rather, not frustrating on the GM side.

But, also, it was really important for us to stick the landing on a very complex issue, which was, what does incarceration look like? What do you do when someone does something that hurts people, in a society that believes that it is, and strives to be, this particular type of utopia, that is about self-determination, and about autonomy, and about freedom? And about welfare, right—those are the things. About ensuring safety of all people, regardless of how they determine themselves to be and regardless of identity, encouraging them to explore those things, and to understand "safety" broadly, not just in a militaristic sense—in fact, barely in a militaristic sense—but incredibly in the sense of social safety nets. Like, how do you deal with someone who hurts somebody else in that scenario?

And I think we did a pretty good job of imagining one type of utopian response to that. And in the post-Miracle Mirage, the primary ideas at play—and this was always running underneath the pre-Miracle Mirage, but—you know, one of the things that Declan's Corrective said immediately was, there is a world outside of your fucking fleet, you idiots. Like, you don't get to say—it's easy to have a utopia when you all live on spaceships and ignore the vast trillions of people in the galaxy. It's way harder when you have to come into contact with them. And the post-Miracle Mirage is very much about utopias coming into contact with each other, and whether or not they can survive the encounter, whether or not there are other, better versions of perfection or whatever to strive towards. Never to arrive at, but to strive towards—the underlying thing with Twilight Mirage is, for me, that utopia is a verb and not a

noun. It's not a place you get to, it's a process that you commit to and continue to develop, and respond to changes, and respond to new stimuli, and political shifts, and all of that.

So all of that is more complicated now because we're depicting a culture that we know is responsible for bad things in the New Earth Hegemony, but also is a culture that takes care of trillions of people. In a way that I don't agree with, because they have a political ideology that is not my political ideology at all, and in which I am very clear about what the gaps are and who falls through those gaps in the system, but that is this one particular ideology's attempt at utopia. And it's tough to represent that, and to represent an idea of hopefulness that Twilight Mirage is fundamentally about imagining a world in which we can work together to achieve great things, while also being honest to, without sanding off the edges and being like, 'we all get along! If we all just come to the middle, everything's good!' So I'd say that the biggest challenge for me as a GM is making sure that we don't fall into a centrism that is like, if the New Earth Hegemony and the Divine Free States just work together everything will be good. Like, it has to be more than that, and I need to make sure that that's the case, right?

And also just, like, to continue to avoid and to be aware of the fact that fundamentally this has been a story about people who don't belong on Quire, going to Quire and taking it for themselves. It is something deep at the forefront of my mind, it is why Iota Pretense came up in such a big way in the This Year Of Ours game, that was Echo's, Sylvia's game, and will continue to be a player in this season, because I don't want to do the game where it's, like, the pilgrims fought the Conquistadors, who wins? Like, that's not a dope story to tell. So, yeah, those are the things for me, anyway, in terms of theme. Anybody else have those sorts of things, or anything else on top of mine?

ALI: Yeah, I don't know. I feel like Twilight Mirage has always been something where, it's like I'm thinking about it as a showrunner so much more [AUSTIN: Yeah, totally.] than I usually am. And I think that that's been good, and bad, in a lot of ways [ALI laughing]. But there's definitely, like, a wanting to cash the cheque that we wrote at the top of the season. And, you know, I think we're doing mostly a pretty good job with it, but it's always that second, there's always that second thought attached to any action that's made in that game.

AUSTIN: It's tough. It's so tough, because, again, without getting into specifics, it can be like, all of those tensions fight each other. Because they do in real life, too. Right? [ALI: Yeah.] Like, this is like, do you cross the aisle to work with someone whose political beliefs you disagree with because you want to get something done practically is a really hard and complex question and it's just as hard when you're talking about giant robots, it turns out. And like, weird metaphysical transportation shit. I'd say what's easier is, now that we've committed to space magic, we can do space magic. Like, we've really truly said, the laws don't apply here, the laws of physics don't apply in the same way, and we can just do it.

And that has been so intellectually freeing. I was explaining this whole setting to somebody yesterday, and like, what the things were, and what the, the liminal spaces, and blah blah blah, and it felt so good to not have to walk any of that back and say, 'well, there are these magic space robots that can do this thing—' like, no, we are extra as fuck, we are all the way in, and we can use those things as metaphors and as shortcuts to get to really interesting

dilemmas. So, yeah, that stuff has been good. There have been a number of really good conversations coming up in the show that are very much about working through these things in a way that I think we've never done before in the show. So, I'm excited about those.

ART: Someone pointed out on Twitter today that we're, like, 10 episodes shy of where we ended COUNTER/Weight.

AUSTIN: Yup. Someone—

ART: Yeah, that just felt big. That's all I have to say.

AUSTIN: Yeah, somebody posted the hour count recently, of the various seasons, and like Hieron altogether is still by far the longest, but Twilight Mirage will be the longest individual solo season. And we talk a lot about this in that Pusher update, Jack and Ali, but we could have done the hard reset, TechNoir-to-Sprawl style, three months ago, and we chose not to, and to give it this feeling of natural change, and I think the show is way better for that. Ali, maybe that's part of what you were talking about, when it came to talking about being a showrunner versus being just a player or a producer. But like, it would have been so easy to be, like, 'oh, we're doing Scum and VIllainy now, next week! Make new characters, go! We're gonna fix this show and get it back on track to the thing we imagined it would be!' Which again, was faster-paced, more procedural, blah blah blah. And it has been, it has already been really cool for me to see Scum and Villainy push us in those directions, a little more adventurous, a little bit more swashbuckling-y—more factions, also. 'Cause that's who I am. But there's still a lot of uncertainty, so. We'll see how it all shakes out, as always.

And to your point, Art—the length of COUNTER/Weight is wild because it feels so dense, and I think we—I know I've said this before, but going into Twilight Mirage, I felt like it would have COUNTER/Weight's rhythm, and it just doesn't because we have two full-length games, not a main game and a faction game, not a ground game and faction game. And that is why it's so long, is like—think about how many arcs we had before the holiday special this season. We had two, on each side. We had two and a half, on each side. And that's nothing, right? Like, two arcs into COUNTER/Weight we didn't switch to The Sprawl yet! We did two missions in COUNTER/Weight before anybody was in The Sprawl. Like, that's nothing—Ibex hadn't shown up yet, two missions in! And it had been two months or something, whereas this is six months of game, split between two parties. Partly because The Veil is also just, like, a kind of slow game, comparatively. Which worked, because it produced a lot of great introspection, but like, that was a big difference.

Alright, I'm gonna keep moving, because I wanna get us out of here sooner than later. [ALI laughs] This is from either Viss, or Vees, I'm not sure on the pronunciation, apologies if I got it wrong. They say, "Dear friends: I love stories, and I especially love the kind of deep, thoughtfully produced, meaningful stories, like the ones you make. However, sometimes I feel like I'm not smart enough to properly appreciate, or even understand, the kinds of stories I love so much. I'm bad at meta, and figuring things out, unless it's obvious stuff or someone's explained it to me, and I have no training or experience in stuff like literary criticism or textual

analysis. I enjoy simple, brainless escapism as much as the next person, but sometimes I feel like I'm missing out, or that I'm just embarrassing myself when I try to discuss the stories I love. Any tips for someone interested in building their mental muscles, or just I just make peace with my lack of intellectual prowess? Thanks Viss, or Vees." Um—

ART: It's not that one.

AUSTIN: It's not Vees? It could be Vees.

ART: No, it's not the making peace with lack of intellectual prowess one.

AUSTIN: Oh! [laughing] Gotchu. Gotchu.

ALI: I think it kind of is. [laughing quietly]

AUSTIN: Yeah, Ali, you were the one who said you wanted to—

ALI: Yeah, I specifically wanted to get to this question kind of quickly and and wanted to address it because I think it's a thing that I've struggled with a lot as someone who makes the show and also just a person who feels this way about things. I, like...when we got this question, I felt really sad. Full disclosure, I've been feeling really sad a lot lately, so it's nothing against you, Vis. I put a lot of work into the show, and to think of it as something that makes people not feel smart when that's something I've struggled with so much in my life is really difficult.

But I think—it's heavy. It's heavy, and I know that it's dense, and the fact that it's a podcast makes it harder to penetrate. But I think that, in the way that Friends at the Table is not, like, just Austin Walker's novel about the metaphysics of the Heat and the Dark. Like, listening to the show and wondering what Lem and Emmanuel's first date was like [AUSTIN: Totally.] is a completely valid response that isn't like, 'oh, I wanna know the metaphysics about the Heat and the Dark.' So I'm glad that there's things there that will attract different people to it, and people should be able to feel comfortable kind of getting from it what they do.

AUSTIN: No, I think that's huge. [ALI: Yeah.] I—so, the thing you just said reminds me that, like, you know, the Heat and the Dark and my interest in entropy and what we do as a society to respond to blah blah blah, is really important, and I don't want to say that it's not an important part of the show. Also an important part of the show is the tweet that I made the other day, in which I was very clear that Judas and Jesus' relationship in Jesus Christ Superstar [ALI laughs] is like, fundamental to my depiction of Samot and Samothes and that, like, terrible tragic relationship.

There is not a...no type of fandom is less valuable or less important or less valid than another type. If you're listening because you wanna hear good friends laugh about bullshit and Google dogs, that's why we do that. We like that too, a lot. And I think we want to make a show that we want to see in the world, and there are se—there are eight of us, I didn't count myself there, for a second, and that means that we have eight different perspectives on what that is.

And so sometimes it's Jack and me doing bureaucratic bullshit, and sometimes it's Art and me doing deeply tragic characters who are caught up in familial struggle and sometimes it's just a nice date. And like, all of that is Friends at the Table.

And so, while it's important to me that the metaphysics stuff is all there, because that is a big part of who I am, it's like...think about the Rosemerrow special, the Rosemerrow detective sequence in Winter in Hieron. Like, stopping at Emmanuel's shop is so important. It's just as important as the star arriving, it's just as important as what happens with Mother Glory. And I hope that we do offer a broad enough context or a broad enough catalogue of experience to keep people engaged.

ART: I'm uncomfortable with calling any of this "lack of intellectual prowess" though!

AUSTIN: Yeah! Agreed!

[everyone agreeing at once]

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Hundred percent. All of that is super intellectual stuff. Anyway. Go ahead.

JANINE: Yeah, I mean—sorry, Art, were you gonna say—

ART: No, I think I was—I think we're there. [ALI laughs] Go for it.

JANINE: I was just going to say that I have a Honours Bachelor degree in English. I spent four years doing literary criticism and textual analysis. In high school that was my favourite thing about reading, was cutting things up afterward. I still often find out shit about our show at the same time that fans do, when Austin just tweets a thing [ALI laughs] that I'm like, "oh shit, what?"

[[1:30:25]]

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] I'm so torn on that.

JANINE: I don't think that necessarily—I don't think anyone should feel like, if I was just smarter and had this background that I would get it and I'd be able to appreciate the thing more.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I get it. I also don't wanna stop the podcast and explain Aristotle's, like—

JANINE: [crosstalk] No, I—yes, like—

AUSTIN: [crosstalk]—like, whatever, for twenty minutes.

JANINE: —I understand. I mostly just mean that, like, I don't know. I want to encourage people who feel like they're missing out on something because they're not smart enough that, sometimes even if you do have this background, you still [AUSTIN: Mmm.]—if you're going to hold up this background and say, 'If I had this, then this,' like, no, sometimes you're just not gonna see things and it's fine. There's a lot of—this show is a very dense thing. Because it's a lot of storytellers all storytelling. And there's sort of, Austin is the over-arching storyteller, but everyone is adding bits and pieces, and everyone has their own ideas, and the end result is something that is, like, a really really dense fruitcake and you're probably never going to be able to see all the stuff in it. [AUSTIN: Right.] It kind of just is what it is. I hope that people can not beat themselves up about that.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I also briefly, just to re-emphasize Art's point, of like, please don't—that isn't a lack of intelligence. The last six weeks of my life, if you've been following my Waypoint work, I think pretty clearly shows that there is no amount of education that prevents you from missing a fucking thing and hurting people and getting something wrong. I think I'm a pretty intellectual person, I think I'm fairly smart. That doesn't mean that I understand everything, and that doesn't mean that anybody who is smart understands everything. And, sorry, people keep @-ing me on fucking xbox, and Windows won't shut up about it, [ALI and JANINE laugh] and I don't know how to get it to shut up about it. There's nothing I can do to get this thing to stop. [JACK laughs]

JACK: You wanna play Sea of Thieves?

AUSTIN: I don't! But this person who apparently stole my girlfriend, according to their username, sure does. [ALI, JACK, JANINE laughing] Thanks.

ART: And, like—

AUSTIN: Real quick, real quick, I just wanna finish that thought [ART: Oh.] which is, I want to also very briefly say that, like, the people who write in and say, like, "Oh, season two of Hieron made me think about the Anthropocene and like, the depths of human history," like—they ain't drawin' Samot fanart, though. [ALI laughs] Like, they aren't connecting—they're not! [JANINE: It's true.] There are different types of emotional and intellectual engagement with work, and like—I don't know, maybe some of them are. I guess I don't know if people are overlapping there.

        But like, each of those ways to engage requires intelligence, and often the different types of intelligences required to engage with the work in different ways, some of them are demeaned, and often across gendered lines, often across lines that have to do with race and culture, and that stuff sucks. And I hope that, one, I hope that no one has done that to you, in a sense, that says like, if you're listening now, this is me saying, I don't think that just because the thing you like from Friends at the Table is Aria and Jacquie, or something, that that means you're not engaging with it really. LIke, fuck off, no, you're totally, you're doing it right. That's rad.

And in fact, I think the show is at its best, its very best, when those two things overlap. When Jacquie can say to Aria, "Are we revolutionaries, or are we trying to live a happy life together?" and that is the philosophy, and the ethics, and the politics, pushing straight up through and connecting to the emotion and the interpersonal relationships and the romance. And all of those things, and both of those things, they matter, and they influence each other. The show is only worth, for me, only worth doing because those two things talk to each other. And otherwise I would write a book, and it would be dry. [ALI laughs] And it wouldn't be interesting. It would have really good prose, but like, it wouldn't have that other side of it, and that's why we do the show. Sorry, Art. I didn't mean to cut you off. Or, I did mean to cut you off, before.

ART: No, that's—I was, I was cutting you off, I thought you were more done than you were. [ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: That's fine.

ART: I'm sorry. And if you're listening to this answer, and you're still like, "yeah, but I still feel that I'm lacking something," like—this is entirely a skill you can acquire if you're, like, "no, what I really wanna know is how do I become better at textual analysis," that is something you can absolutely learn. It is something you can learn at any age. It is something that there are many people who would teach you, you know—this is like, a stealth advertisement, because my wife just finished a PhD that largely relates to media studies, so hearing people be like, "how do I study media better?" it's like, well, have you—[AUSTIN: Right.] have you thought about that you could?

AUSTIN: It's hard.

ART: But no one starts knowing how to do it.

AUSTIN: Right. I think we've gotten better at it, even. And, I guess, one other thing is, I think Twilight Mirage has been especially hard with this, and that is an intentional thing from me. We got a really good email at the beginning of Twilight Mirage about someone who had a really hard time with the virtual spaces because we'd said that they were important and that they were real, in the way that the real world was, but they also felt like anything could happen there and there weren't any rules. And, like, how do you—if they're physical, but they're not physical—and it was this really tough conceptual problem for them to wrap their heads around.

And so I talked to them a little bit via email or DM or whatever about what we were going for there, but at the end of the day, one of the things that I had to communicate was, like, this ambiguity is the emotional core of Twilight Mirage, to some degree. Like, one of the reasons we switched to Scum and Villainy, and we did the Miracle, was that I wanted more shots like at the end of Evangelion. I wanted more things that felt impossible. I wanted the story to feel more like Roadside Picnic or Stalker, like the weird parts at the end of Outlaw Star or things where reality bends in confusing and frustrating ways. And that is intentional, and it's not intentional that it be

in every one of the stories that we tell, but it is intentional in this story, that's very interested in the places between places. It's very interested in the unpredictability of the future.

And so, when I say "it's in the text" sometimes, it's not because I don't wanna type the answer out. It's because part of what I want is for people to, like—the degree of ambiguity is the text, sometimes. Sometimes it's not. Sometimes it's me saying, me not being clear about Adelaide's control over undeath, in which I did not communicate clearly that that was not a physical curse or a physical disease or something. Like, that was on me as a storyteller that I could have found a vehicle to communicate that more clearly or more early. But there are times when it's, like, oh yeah, there's an answer in the text, but it's not meant to be a thing that I just say out loud.

And so for me as a storyteller, the things that I try to get better at is being as clear as possible when those two things are different. Where, like, yeah, there are plenty of possible solutions you might know, here's what they are, and there could be many more that I'm not naming, versus, alright, here's what's happening in Contrition's Figure. There's this cloud thing. It's doing this. [ALI laughing] Which I should say—we've talked about this, I should have said that at the beginning of our second recording there.

And so, I don't think there's much more there, but I do want to go for ambiguity sometimes. I do wanna be clear that like, something like Hadrian using Guidance, right, and like—for years, I would tell you, it's in the text. Like, it *is* in the text, who is responding to Hadrian's call for help. And it was important that I didn't say, "okay, well. [laughs] Samothes and Samot, and also, this other thing—" and like, no, stop stop stop, that would have—it's not that it would have given it away, it's not that it's a spoiler. It's that even laying out those options would reduce the degree of ambiguity when Hadrian falls to his knees and says, "I just need to know what the fuck I'm doing." Like, yes, that is how it should feel. You know? So, so yeah. That's my long speech on ambiguity.

ALI: Yeah. Before we move on, I wanna—unless, Jack, you've been quiet, so I don't know if you have something…

JACK: I feel...I think that everyone's been saying super good stuff. I think I broadly super agree with what Ali's saying about, I worry a lot in my own reception of media, I spend a lot of time approaching, especially big media properties, and going like, "oh, I'm doing this wrong. I'm doing this wrong, in some big way."

[everyone laughs in understanding]

JACK: And I'm at a point in my life now, where I realize that this is not something I'm interested in, but I have tried and failed to watch Game of Thrones maybe four or five times.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: And the reason that I always back out is [whispering in emphasis] *I don't know who that is!* [all laugh] *What is this?! Where are they going?! What are they doing here?!* And a kind of a

personal, I guess like a New Year's resolution for me in 2018 is, I'm trying to treat stories less like puzzles, or less like things where I can make a percentage in my understanding of it go up. [AUSTIN: Mhm.] Or, I can understand it better, but that doesn't have to be a granular thing. When I was playing Breath of the Wild, I was really worried when I started playing that I was going to miss things. And Austin kind of guided me into just sort of—there is so much in this game, that missing stuff is not a problem.

AUSTIN: Right. Or even, to some degree, missing something is the point.

JACK: Is the point! And without those conversations, Austin, there is no way I'd be playing Monster Hunter World, which I am playing at the moment. And I think that there is, to an extent, a responsibility in creators—I'm increasingly less interested in making stories that are puzzles for listeners to solve, and more interested in making stories that cause listeners to think things that interest them, or cause listeners to, like, wonder about questions.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: And that's no excuse for not telling a story clearly, or not keeping a narrative thread interesting, but as a creator, I'm less interested in trying to tell a story that has to be solved and that is demanding of being solved, and as a consumer of content I'm trying to be much more easy about what I let go.

AUSTIN: Mmm.

JACK: I'm playing Monster Hunter right now, and I go, "I don't understand cooking, at all," [AUSTIN and ALI laugh] and at the same time there are aspects of the show, there are aspects of our own storytelling [ALI: Yeah.] that I don't understand, and I'm kind of learning to be fine with that. I'm learning to be fine with this weird headcanon about how bits of our show might work, or might not work. [AUSTIN: Mhm.] And that's exciting. That's an interesting way to be part of stories, or at least it is to me, to go, "I don't think I grasp this, but there are bits of it that I do grasp, and I like those bits."

AUSTIN: And that speaks to what I was saying before, about one of the ways you can serve the table is by being the person who's interested in the thing. Like, it's so nice for me to think about, to look at the spread of characters now, and say, okay. They each have authorship over different parts of this world now, because it's what they're invested in, and it's what their characters are invested in. So the rest of this season, anytime anything in the law comes up, I'm gonna say, "Fourteen Fifteen, what is the legal precedent here on this? Have you read about anything here?"

JACK: [as though from far away] Probably not!

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Probably not, but maybe you make a roll, maybe we make a fortune roll, and it's like, okay, well, you know a little bit of information, and I get to say, "Alright, so, what is it? You tell me. Let's work it out." [JACK: Yeah.] And being able to do that is so great. Or, a moment like when we opened the cybertome, [chuckles] hashtag cybertome, and I just asked Signet, I said like, we were talking about - what was the actual question? It wasn't loneliness, it was...was it loneliness? No, it was…

JANINE: Peace?

AUSTIN: Peace? Yeah, was it, "What does peace mean to you?" And then like, had you sketch those ideas out. And those scenes, those sequences. And that is not a code meant to be broken by any means. It's meant to make you feel a certain way because certain words come after certain other words. And being able to rely on players to do those sorts of things has been so great, and it is really cool for me to be able to say, like, "Well, we can zoom in as much as this specific player wants to on this specific issue." And it's one of the things I'm most excited about going forward, for sure.

So, yeah. Top level, try not to beat yourself up. If you're interested, there are resources out there for trying to get into that sort of, doing literary analysis. And also, if you just rewatch things, relisten to things, you'll pick up new things the second time. I've said this before, but Twilight Mirage is the first season that I am explicitly trying to make for relistens to be fun, not because there are spoilers, necessarily, but because, like, there are ideas that will return over and over again. Like, I knew what the New Earth Hegemony was when we started with the first Miracle - or, no not the Miracle, the mystery, kind of like, interactive game—

[[1:45:00]]

JACK: Back when they were called the Earth Cult.

AUSTIN: Well, like they were always called the New Earth Hegemony in my notes! But you knew them as the Earth Cult, right? So like, that opening sequence includes, like, the Statue of Liberty leaving Earth and turning past Jupiter and blah blah—there's this fantastic art about this, by the way. You should go on Twitter, I think I retweeted it.

And, it's like, okay, from the beginning we're thinking about the roots of Earth, and stuff like that. And like, I'd never thought about this show that way until this season. Like, I thought about what came before, but I never thought about returning to listening to a show a second or third time. And I just noticed that lots of fans were doing it, and I was like, oh, I should do this—not for them, but like, I should keep in mind that that's a way—and that's how I, like, you know, Janine is watching Twin Peaks and that's made me go back and watch some Twin Peaks also. And it's like, oh, wow, there's all this shit that I'm picking up on that I hadn't picked up on previously.

And, you know, some of it's clearly unintentional, completely, and there's gonna be that stuff, but there is gonna be stuff, this season especially, that's like, three years from now on a

relisten, on a whim, you might catch a thing that is not so much about analysis as having a different perspective on it. And I hope that that stuff's all enjoyable in the long run. Because hopefully it will be!

ART: And I've spent so much time learning how to talk backwards, so.

[ALI and AUSTIN laugh]

ALI: I just wanna say, quickly before we move on, in terms of like, tips stuff with this, I think that the most obvious thing is not being afraid to, there's something here where it says, like, "I'm afraid that I'm embarrassing myself discussing the stories I love," [AUSTIN: Ohhh.] which is, like, do not ever feel that way.

AUSTIN: [emphatically] Yes.

ALI: Like, in terms of just how long we spend talking about it, there's definitely, like, we're willing to answer questions up front about things [AUSTIN: Totally.] that you might not understand, and if it's like, not something you're supposed to understand yet, we will say that.

AUSTIN: Totally. Totally.

ALI: And then in terms of just, like, if there is a specific thing that you don't understand, if the Doyan speech was like, "I don't know why she feels like this," going back and listening to scenes with her will probably help, and like… [trails off]

AUSTIN: That's a huge—I think that's a great idea. Yeah.

ALI: Yeah. Reaching out to us, or to other fans, for like, timestamps on that stuff can also always happen. You shouldn't feel embarrassed for talking to people because all anyone wants to do is talk to people about stuff that they love or stuff that they mutually don't like.

AUSTIN: [in agreement] Yuh-huh!

ALI: And that's kind of the best part of fandom, and that's the best part of us interacting with the fandom, so like, don't - like, shed all of that embarrassment. But otherwise, if you—

AUSTIN: [speaking over ALI] But also—

ALI: Oh, go on.

AUSTIN: No, you go ahead.

ALI: I was just going to say that if you did want to build your mental muscles there are other resources for that.

AUSTIN: Um, how often do I say something, in either our chat or the official one, where I'm like, "Oh, I don't remember that happening." [ALI and JANINE laugh] "Oh, is that what happened? I totally forgot that." Like, you know, I GM this thing, and I often forget important details and have to go back and relisten to things, and like, obviously that's more the case with something like COUNTER/Weight where, like, I'll go back and listen to an intro where I've forgotten what all of the names of the Divines are that showed up in that season, or something, right? [ALI laughs]

But there are other times when it is, where that conversation that we have is so good. So I totally—like, I obviously really love a lot of this stuff, and would be happy to talk if I have time on a given day about what I'm trying to say with a Doyan speech, for instance, you know, or what she's talking about. Versus, you know, something else—like I said, there are times when I wanna be ambiguous, but please ask, and like, asking, even when I'm like, "Oh, that's meant to be ambiguous," that response is not, "I think that you're not smart." It's the opposite of that! It's like, "Yes, you're totally responding—you didn't get that? Totally. Like, yep, uh-huh. I bet no one in that room—"

ALI: [laughing] "Good job!"

AUSTIN: "—I bet Even Gardener looked at her and was like, 'Yeah? Okay…' Like, 'Whatever you say...'" You know? So, I think that that's an important thing to keep in mind. And yeah, come join the Discord and talk to people. People would love to chat.

Um, next question, is from, Tim and Nick. Tim asks, [reading from question] "Blades in the Dark comes with a very complete world. How fully did you create the factions, etc. for Marielda?"

And then Nick says, "I've started my own Dungeon World campaign, and it's going well, but the one thing tripping me up is the daunting amount of notes to take and review. I feel like every few minutes my game drags to a halt while I look up what an NPC was called or what's supposed to be going on in this part of the world. Any advice on how to take, keep, and organize notes for smoother sessions?"

I put these together because the answer to the second one is the answer to the first one in some regard. Which is, for me as a GM, it's about focus. It's about, like, okay. Where do I need to spend that time, and I'm never going to be the encyclopedia of the world, even our own world, and so prepping is about anticipation and, like, having a good idea of what could come up and having the answers for that in mind. And when I don't have answers, to have touchstones, so I can generate answers. For Blades in the Dark, I named all of those factions, and I had probably one-line notes, maybe? Maybe about each of those? Does anyone remember like, uh, Mung? Mung and Sons? What was the name of that faction?

ALI: Wait, what?

AUSTIN: I'm trying to think of a faction that, like, never came up.

JACK: Oh, it's like Thaddeus Mung and his brother, right? The…

AUSTIN: Yes.

JACK: Oh, what are they called…

AUSTIN: The Mung Brothers.

JACK: Mung Quarry and Conveyance?

AUSTIN: Yes. Mung Brothers Freight and Conveyance. Or was it Quarry and Conveyance?

JACK: It's something like that.

AUSTIN: Yeah. So—

JACK: I liked the Mung Brothers. The other day, I suddenly thought the name Thaddeus Mung, and was like, "Where does that come from?" [ALI and JANINE laugh] See, this is it. I thought, "Where does that come from?" And I googled it, and was like, "Oh, right. We did it."

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: [overlapping] Oh, us. We did it. Yeah.

JACK: [overlapping] We did it!

AUSTIN: So, yeah, in a case like that, it's like, oh, I don't think that they're gonna come up, probably, but I know enough—I know that they exist, I'm gonna write one line about them in my notes somewhere, which I can't even find at this moment, so I don't even know where my fuckin' Marielda faction notes are, at this point, but they're somewhere—and then, like, put them on a list. And like, that was it.
        But I had a good feeling that because we'd made, after our first introductory session, we knew that the Six were going to be about stealing knowledge, that the Fontmen would be someone, would be a group that I needed to know more about their organization, their fashion, what type of weapons they used, how they operated. And so, like, I went out of my way to make more notes about them, just in case they would come up again in the future.
        And so, that was—that's a huge thing for me, is just like, as always, pay attention to fictional flags, think about geographies and who would be in a place. And so when it comes to actual note-taking, I literally just—I tried using Scrivener for the first half of this season and it just like, didn't work for me. Like, I work a full-time job. I think if I did this full-time I could use something like Scrivener, but I don't have the time to be as comprehensive and encyclopedic as I would love to be, and instead I just have a bunch of Google Docs.

And whenever I go into a session, I have up on my screen a list of potential NPCs that could come up, with very bare-bones stats, I have, you know, whatever, an intro text if I'm gonna read an intro text or something, I have locations that have traits and that have interesting elements that could come up in fiction, and I have my principles and some broad goals in play. And then, if it's not there, like...it's great if it comes up, it's interesting to flick through the faction tables sometimes and think, "Ooh, who could be here?" but I mostly do that ahead of time, and if it comes up it comes up. And if it doesn't, it's okay for them not to.

Blades and Scum and Villainy are very clear that when you do your prep and you think about how factions have moved, like, there is a faction turn in Blades and in Scum and Villainy, in which you think about how factions did stuff, and like, did they get their goals, and you build clocks for them, and you roll for them, and I'm super excited to do all that shit, but I'm not doing it for 44 factions, are you fucking kidding me? [ALI laughs] Like, I'm not gonna do that!

But what I am gonna do is pick the 10 that are most interesting. I'm gonna roll for the Waking Cadent. I'm gonna roll for the Concrete Town Particulars. I'm gonna roll for the, the, whatever, like, all these other factions that we know have already come up in the fiction, and that have stakes that characters are invested in. Or, I'll roll for things that I want to happen and see how they shake out, you know, because I think that they could have an impact on later things. So, it's a lot of knowing where the focus is.

That said, with Twilight Mirage, I did write up descriptions for all 44 factions and sent them to the players, because I really wanted to communicate how the world had changed. That, like, pre-Miracle, there were two factions. There were lots of Divines, and different fleets, different ships in the fleet, but that was one faction. The Divine Fleet was a faction, the New Earth Hegemony was a faction. Now there are 44. And they have alignment, and like, a lot of the Divine Free States are totally in lockstep with each other, but they're individual factions, which means I don't know what tomorrow holds. And so I wanted to communicate that to the players in that one case. And also, I had a lot of fun writing them. [chuckles] So, there's that.

Um, does anybody else take—Janine, I know you and I have spoken on this podcast a bunch about your note-taking stuff, have your note-taking, has anyone else picked up note-taking tips since then? Or is that still kind of as it was a couple of months ago?

ALI: Yeah, so, one thing that I realized with Blades systems, and specifically with Scum and Villainy, is that there are, the items on your sheet are suggestions [AUSTIN: Yes.] and not, like—it says you have a fine weapon, figure out what that fine weapon is, and what it—is. Because it should change every time. So the thing that I haven't done yet, but have kind of done in my head, will do, is, I really wanna add to Roll20 in the way we've been thinking of Bluff City names, is, like, three fine weapons, so I don't always have to think about what the best thing is, but like, what she would have in her, like, toolbox, essentially.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Totally. That's a really cool thing to do in general, I think, as a player, is like, here are some cool toys for me to introduce, and not always weapons even right? Like, it can be a skill that I picked up. Like, one of my favourite things is, Signet has that skill that "I'm a doctor, not a blank," you took that skill, right? Yeah, that's your basic skill from Stitch, right?

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And it's like, I'm not telling you that you should have 10 stories ready for how that move works, but, you know—that would be fun to have. For people who don't know, because I don't think, it hasn't come up in your vignette, "I'm a doctor, not a blank" says that you can push yourself to roll Doctor while performing any other action. [reading from the skill] "Say which patient, research, or posting taught you this trick." And it's like, oh, wow, that's a lot of—there's a lot of cool things that you can write up ahead of time to pull from. And I'd say, I guess, the counterargument to that is, like, don't get buried in notes and possible things that might happen. So.

JANINE: That's also the kind of thing that I don't know that I would…[laughs] like, I...with Adaire, you know, because she was my first character, wanted to do a lot of pre-writing stuff, so I would have ideas just ready to go. But like, for me, that Stitch move is something that I think I would find it too hard to anticipate—

AUSTIN: Right, like, the specifics?

JANINE: Yeah, to anticipate the situation of, like, well, what am I gonna be—it's hard. It's one of those things that—the temptation to pre-write that used to be there, I don't really feel it with that move, because it's so hard for me to imagine what the story in that moment is going to be. And there is always that feeling of, "Well, if I prepare too much, then it won't fit, and it'll just be weird."

AUSTIN: Riiight. That'll be, like, the RPG mechanic of, the JRPG mechanic of having a bunch of potions you don't wanna use, necessarily, because it's not the right time for it?

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Where it's like, "I have this athlete I worked—I have it listed, but this isn't really, they were a long jumper, not a runner, so I'm not gonna use them here," or whatever. [ALI laughs]

JANINE: Yes. Totally.

AUSTIN: And also, sort of, the having-components-on-people thing. [JANINE: Mhm.] That was obviously a little bit different, but. Alright. Next question, as we race toward the end here.
          This is from Rodrigo, who says, "I wanted to thank you all: because of Friends at the Table, I started to read about RPGs, and now I'm DMing two Dungeon World campaigns, and it's a lot of fun." That's really—I'm really glad to hear that. [continues reading from the question] "I noticed the podcast started kind of using PbtA games for the main seasons, and now are pivoting toward Powered by Blades, question mark, games? Blades in the Dark was always intended to be—ah, *was* Blades in the Dark always intended to be a platform? Are there new settings and rulesets being made, and if there are, do you guys intend to explore more of the Blades games? And y'all seem to play mostly indie and less conventional games like D&D or

Shadowrun. Is that a conscious decision? If it is, is it because you'd like to explore new games and expose them to more people, or because these games are more fitted to your intentions with Friends at the Table?"

Um, Blades is definitely becoming a bit of a platform. Obviously Scum and Villainy is out now, or it's nearing final release, the version we're using is now publicly available, you can buy it at, like, DriveThruRPG, and some other places—and yeah, there are like, Band of Blades is now a thing, which is like a dark fantasy RPG, where, it's about fantasy soldiers and leadership roles and, like, tactics. It sounds really dope, I've read bits of it, and it seems really cool. Someone just announced on Twitter, and I think I follow, I hope I follow them, I better go back in my mentions and make sure I follow them [ALI and ART laugh] a sci-fi Blades game that's a little bit like Night Witches. It's called...and I posted it here, I know I posted it here...somewhere...here it is. It's called Beam Saber. It is a vehicle/mech focused hack of Blades in the Dark. It's only at point one right now and it is very much mission based in the military sense, it's about going out on, like, Gundam-style missions, and that's - that's really cool. If you look at, like, the list, I just now realized that COUNTER/Weight is listed as one of the influences. So, we should probably follow this game and see what's going on with it! [ALI laughs]

[[2:00:01]]

So, yeah, people are definitely doing more Blades hacks. And it's, it's—I don't think we're like, "And that's it, we're the Blades in the Dark show now," by any means. Again, one of the nice things about Live and Bluff is that we get to try out a bunch of different stuff. But, I like it.

ALI: Yeah, I will say on this topic, when you first pitched Scum and Villainy to me, [AUSTIN: Mhm.] I remember being, like, "But we wanna use this other Blades system later!" And then, like, it took me halfway into that conversation to be, like, "Oh, my god, I'm saying we shouldn't play Dungeon World because we might play Monsterhearts." Like, that's not…[laughing]

AUSTIN: Yes. Yes. Totally. Totally. Which is also just, like, we, [sighs] there's a larger thing that I think—we are at our best, like I said earlier, we're at our best when, like, the interesting interpersonal relationships overlap with the ideas, the big-picture whatever ideas we have for any given season. We're also at our best when we, like, pull the trigger, and we just do the thing we're excited about doing instead of sitting on it. I am pathological about this. This is why a season advances suddenly very quickly sometimes, is like, oh, this is a good idea [sharp inhale] so, like, Independence was meant to be, Independence and Volition were meant to be, like, end-of-season things. And Volition is, you know, obviously—maybe that'll still be it. But I didn't anticipate, when I started this season, having Independence show up pre-holiday special, right? And so, but the show got way better because we pulled the trigger on Independence showing up. And so, like, when you have the idea in your heart, do it. Do the thing. You'll get better ideas, you'll get more ideas, I promise. Let the idea go. Do the thing.

ART: Yeah, and I—I— ugh. Hm. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah? What's up, bud?

ART: No, it's just like—I think that is, like, the temptation to hold onto your ideas is so bad [AUSTIN: Mm.] that like, use all of your ideas, right away, and then know that your next five ideas are gonna be better.

AUSTIN: Right. Right. And if they're not, it's okay. Like—

ART: Yeah, that's also fine. Yeah.

AUSTIN [overlapping]: We get stuff wrong a lot, and—

ART [overlapping]: Less for us, but.

[ART and AUSTIN laugh]

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah. Less for us, because then sometimes a year later you go, like "I could've done that whole season better, ugh." And then yeah, for the second bit about conventional RPGs like D&D and Shadowrun, to get those to do what we want, I think we'd have to hack them quite a bit. And that's largely because the show is not a streamed show, it is a hour to two-and-a-half-hour weekly podcast that doesn't have video, and that is less interested in tactical play and more interested in social engagement, in what's going on inside of a character's mind, in factional entanglement, and, you know, I've played a lot of D&D, I've played some Shadowrun, I like those games enough to play them. But they're not in line with the sort of storytelling the show is built for, both in terms of its thematic interests, and also in terms of good radio. Powered by the Apocalypse games, Blades in the Dark, a lot of these independent games, a lot of worldbuilding games, encourage us to be on our best behaviour as storytellers. That's why I veer toward those.

ALI: Yeah, I'm glad we have stuff like Live at the Table and Bluff City now, so like, for the people who really want to see us run Shadowrun, we may not do exactly that, but like…[AUSTIN: Yeah.] They're opportunities to see us do different types of play, um, where—

AUSTIN: Yes. I thought it was really—Golden Sky Stories was like that. Because that's a game that, I think, as mechanics go, was not in line with what we wanna do, because it requires so much pre-writing from me and not a lot of, like, "Where's the story gonna go," thing, but I still think that that was a really good episode to do that told a great story. And I would not want to do a whole season like that, but...I left that table feeling bad about that episode because I didn't get to improv very much, but now, looking back on it and thinking about it, I'm actually really warm on it. And so that was nice. That was a good example of this.

JANINE: It really—the like, the post-Golden Sky Stories thing was really weird, because you were so down on it, but for me, that was, like, I think that was my favourite recording [AUSTIN: Yeah.] or at least my favourite pre-Fall of Magic—I think Fall of Magic sort of eclipsed it. But at the time, it was like, that was the best I had ever felt leaving the table, as it were.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK [in the background]: I really like Fall of Magic.

JANINE: So to hear that you were kind of bummed about, just the kind of storytelling that is compared to what we usually do, [AUSTIN: Yeah, I—] was kind of, you know, a shame.

AUSTIN: It's tough. It's tough, because, like, I literally have all—except, so, my favourite thing in that game was you going into that store and stealing the candy, and Jack—

JANINE: I wasn't stealing, I was just a—

AUSTIN: Mmm, it was theft.

JANINE [overlapping]: It was a— [breaks off laughing]

AUSTIN: And Jack talking to all the kids, also a good moment to remember that kids are good in games, and people should have kids in games, which is a thing that we were a fool about until now. As this past episode shows, in which a kid just mercilessly makes fun of Gig Kephart. [JACK chuckles] Um…

JACK: For hours.

AUSTIN: For just hours. But, like, all of the rest—those are my favourite sequences. They're the only sequences I don't have written down in front of me right now, where I literally have what all of those other scenes are. And that's the way I used to play games. Like, Art can vouch for this, that is how we played games in college, where I knew what each scene was and I'd shepherd people from scene to scene until they got to, like, the Cave of Wonders and got their magic item. And it's fine, but like... it's at it's best when I'm still being surprised by actions you do. But like, I don't like knowing what scene 5 is when scene 1 is happening. And so that was really hard for me. But removed from the process of having to walk down this script I've written, basically, I now am left with the fun memories of your characters and the warmth of the characters who I got to play. And I have good feelings about those, still. Jack, you were saying a thing, I think?

JACK: Um, only that I felt really great about those—I felt really great about those games when we came out of them at the end. And also to second the fact that, like, you talking about having written down scenes, and knowing where people are going, it's not the same for us, because obviously we don't have notes written down in that sense, we don't know where the episodes

are going in the way you do, but we have a rough idea of what's going to be happening in each episode, I think, when we kick off. You know, if we know we're trying—if we know what our goal is, we can have some sense [AUSTIN: I guess.] of what's going on there.

AUSTIN: I—

JACK: But that makes it all the more—

AUSTIN: I don't think it's—

JACK: But if we're going in—

AUSTIN: But here's the difference is, and this didn't come up in our one game of Golden Sky Stories, but like, if you decided to do a different thing than what I'd written down, my job as a GM is to get you back on to my thing. And that's not my job in Blades, and so, like, it didn't come up in that one episode, but I worry that if we continued playing games like that, I would end up being the railroady GM [JACK: Yeah, no, totally.] that pushed us back onto track. That, I think, would get to you as players, sooner than later. I don't know. Maybe not.

JACK: Yeah. Uh...yeah. It just sometimes feels a bit like, when we find scenes like that, when we find moments where we go off-pieced, whether or not we're going off-pieced in a game like Golden Sky Stories where it's, oh, I don't know if scripted is the right word, but it's kind of close to scripted—

AUSTIN: It's close. It's not scripted. What you do in those sequences is totally up to you, as long as it's in resolution of what the individual problem in that scene I set up was.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I don't know. It's an interesting game that comes out from a time and a context in which that is what a lot of RPGs looked like, and it's not that different from D&D, in which what I would be preparing for you is a dungeon that has certain traps, and like, "Okay, you're going to have to get past this spiked floor trap," whether that is jumping over it with your athletics skill or using your dungeoneering skill to procure a bridge that you can put overtop of it or if it's by using whatever the trap-disarming skill is, you know, like, it's similar, except it was about—it was nice, because it was about like, whale gods, and warm relationships between moms and daughters and stuff, right. And so I like it better than if we had just played D&D that night. But yeah. Anyway. I don't mean to be down on it.

Um, but yeah, I think that that's it for why we don't play kind of conventional things, for sure. It's just like - it's hard to, it's hard to get into a D&D combat system or sequence with four players who are, like, checking their various hit bonuses and...we did a lot of combat in the first arc of Dungeon World and like, it's not that interesting, unfortunately. So.

Next question! And I think final question, from Hazel. "I am a new DM, running a game in Blades with a group of very experienced players. I'm really struggling with knowing how to balance the goofs and the more serious storytelling. I know there is a place and need for both. But what do you do offscreen to help maintain a healthy narrative tone?"

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: [laughing] I wish - Ali, why are you laughing?

ALI: [still laughing] Mm? No?

AUSTIN: What are you - no? [ALI laughing] Are you laughing because the other - because we were just talking about how with Noirlandia, the Bluff City game that went up these last couple of months, I literally opened by going, "Okay, does anyone have any non-goof-related intros?"

ALI: Yeah! And then that had a goof-related intro, and it was like, still fine!

AUSTIN: It did, and it was still fine. It was still fine. Yeah. And I definitely get the worry, but also…[sighs] I don't know that there's a formula for it? I don't know.

ALI: I think our real actual answer to this is that we started having purposeful conversations before recordings because we knew we were selling them to people. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Yeah…

ALI: Like, we used to, it used to be really mechanical. We would start as soon as we could, because we were starting late anyway, and then we would talk more in between scenes, because it was the only time that we were on a phone together. Whereas now, it's like, "Oh hi, you came in! Is everybody recording? I saw Star Wars today! I actually wanna hear what you thought about Star Wars!" [AUSTIN: Right.] instead of moving on to this next thing. And I think that's helped us a lot, a lot a lot.

AUSTIN: It's a good warmup, to get to do that. [ALI: Yeah.] For sure. Of just like, oh, we're talking, we're getting in the flow of joking around and playing with each other, and just like, having that vibe. Whereas, like, in season 1 and 2 especially, it's just like, oh, like, we're only on the call to stream a video game or to record this, at that point, and it's like, we're doing bits all the time because of that. And I also think that sometimes a season will find its footing in terms of drama, and then it's like, ooh, the thing I'm interested in doing right now is that drama. And so you dig into it. But like, it's not like we didn't laugh during the Hella/Calhoun episode ever, you know? [ALI laughs]
So, like, I don't know. It's a - I think it's a table answer. I think it's about that group, and that, who - what they want to be doing, and what you want to be doing as a DM, and not necessarily the golden mean, you know, there isn't necessarily a, like...I don't know. In order to

maintain that tone, though, I think one big thing is definitely being very clear about the tone of whatever that game is going to be, going into it. I—we knew by the end of the Rosemerrow detective arc that it was dark. We didn't know how dark it would be, certainly, but no one was joking over the fucking Mother Glory stuff. And I think a big part of that is just, we call it Friends at the Table, because we hang out and talk and we're—we're friends, we're friends [ALI laughs] and we kind of got to be aligned on that because we did stream video games together and because we do talk and link each other wrestling stuff and sneakers and get a kind of similar vibe.

And that's tough sometimes, because I've definitely played tabletop games before with people who I'm like, we ain't friends. Like, I'm running D&D for you every week, but like, we ain't going to McDonald's, you know? [ALI laughs] So I get that that's not always the case. But if you can find ways to talk to them, and text them, and share things—sharing inspiration is actually—that's what it is.

ALI (overlapping): Yeah.

JANINE (overlapping): Yeah.

AUSTIN: The best bit here is, we just have a chat open all the time in which, it's split into different seasons, into different groups, and we just drop inspiration. And so, if you look at, like, the last four things that were dropped in our Twilight Mirage channel, they range from, cool jellyfish that's glowy, to the Friends at the Table art with the opening mystery in the first session of the Twilight Mirage space game, to really, more good fan art, a song from the Celeste soundtrack that Jack said the bass was good, and then a picture that Ali sent [ALI bursts out laughing] that just says, "Gig," and it's—I'm gonna link this. It is a photo of [ALI continues laughing, JACK laughs] a 198...4? like, Chevy, some bullshit [JACK sighs] that has a door handle—

JACK (overlapping): I love this car.

[JANINE laughing]

AUSTIN: —that has, like, an industrial steel metal doorknob, like a knob, like an inside door knob, plated on. LIke, plate. Like, a huge steel plate just drilled into the side of this hole that's a door handle, a door knob, drilled into it. So. Good mix of goofs. [ALI starts laughing again] Plus serious inspiration that gets you on board, you know. Like, hey, we should think about the mechs from Anthem in relation to our, the mechs that y'all have on the ships now. That's one. Two, me linking a funny sea, like, otter man, from the Star Wars comic, and just saying, "Serge." So, having that space is so important, I think. And also—

ART: And it's, it's—oh—

AUSTIN: —because you know what kind of serious it is, I think. Anyway. Art, sorry.

ART: It's also, like, impor—like, you need to have mid-game goofs to cut the tension?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: Because you don't want the game where everyone is just, like, doing serious storytelling for three hours, because that is exhausting and sucks. [ALI snorts]

AUSTIN: Yeah. And it would be bad—like, it's hard to do that at all, like, it's really hard to be like, no, we're going to be serious the whole way through. And make it be good! I don't know. It's hard.

[[2:15:11]]

ART: But also, you don't wanna get to the point, like—there's some post on Tumblr going around on like, how to be a bard in Dungeons and Dragons, and I hate it. I hate everything about it.

AUSTIN: What's it say? Wait, what's it say?

[JACK chuckles knowingly]

ART: It's like, you're not a bard unless you've seduced your way out of something important, and then it's like, everyone telling their like, "here's my bard seduction story—"

JACK: I mean, I kind of did that.

[ALI and JANINE laugh]

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ART: Yes. And I think one of our best, you know, goofy moments, is Keith essentially doing that when he buys 40 robots.

JACK: And Ali literally doing that! With Jacquie!

AUSTIN: As a bard.

ART: But like, go find this obscure Tumblr post that I can't find or help you get to, [ALI laughs] and then compare that to what we do, and I think there's like a difference. Like, I think you have to be, like, I don't know. I think you have to be aware of the knife, you know?

ALI: Yeah, I—

AUSTIN: Wait. Wait, but so much of our show is about people not being aware of the knife, and the trouble that it causes cause they lost track of that knife!

[ALI laughs]

ALI: I think the important thing is that the actions, at the end of the day, are not the joke, right? Like, I, being able to stop and google "dog" for five minutes and have a good time with that, and then also, Hella makes this big incredible decision, is, whatever. Aria asking Jacquie out was not a big decision. That was a decision that I had made because I knew that the way that Jacquie interacted with Aria when they first met, that she had a crush on her. That's why she didn't try to kill her then, that's why she never tried to kill her. [AUSTIN: Mhm…] She was, like, super smitten!

And the first thing that I said to Austin when we hung up that phone call was, like, "I'm really glad that that roll went as well as it did, because I knew that if it didn't, Jamil would've just gotten shot in the face." And I knew that as a player, but like, Aria's so dashing, and I think it would be really funny if they went out! Like, that was the character decision.

AUSTIN: Right. That's a huge thing, that it isn't—like, that's why it's not called Duckberg. [ALI laughs] Because, like, Arrell is in control of Velas now. And that means something. And Velas means something, Velasian means something.

And the in-character stuff, like—Janine and I used to play a lot of MMO's together, [ALI laughs] and the thing that bummed me the fuck out was going into town and seeing, like, Pizza McBardface walk by, and I'm like, "You ain't taking this seriously at all, are you?! And I'm not saying you gotta be in roleplay mode all the time, my guy, but like—" it got under my skin. And to be clear, it wasn't Janine who was Pizza McBardface. [JANINE and ALI laugh] I wanna be 100% clear. But that there was a degree of like, I wanna be on the same page, I want those jokes to exist in, in—between friends, not necessarily—and not like, between characters, characters can joke and it's very funny, but like, Keith actually talks about this a lot, which is: Keith obviously buying lots of robots was funny, but Keith did that because Mako thought it was a good plan. Which is very funny, because it's a terrible plan, but Mako thought that was a good plan. It wasn't, Mako being funny. And if everybody on stage agrees that Mako thinks it's a good plan, you get the comedy out of it in the scene, instead of it being, like, here's a Family Guy reference. Or, like, "I'm gonna do a goofy voice now" being the entirety of the sequence.

And like, that's just comedy. Like, if you get everybody on the same page, in terms of who is being the, like goofball, and who is playing it straight, you'll get to a good outcome in a way that's, like, just not possible if everyone is constantly just trying to out-goof each other, I think. I don't know—that's just our, that's just us, anyway.

JACK: DId we—have we—has the most recent Bluff City arc closed, or have we got one more episode on that one?

AUSTIN: The Noirlandia one?

ALI: Has not started...so. [laughs]

AUSTIN: No, no, Noirlandia's closed.

ALI: Noirlandia's closed, yeah.

JACK: Noirlandia's, like, done?

ALI: Yeah.

JACK: Yeah, like, the most recent one of this, like Keith buying the robots because it was a good character decision, was, um, Ali's character [ALI snorts] trying to convince the cop in the party in Bluff City.

AUSTIN: [in realization] Oh yeah!

JACK: Where like, Ali committed—[starts laughing]—Ali committed so hard to this goof that was also an entirely sensible desperate in-character play. And that was one of these situations where, like - it was the opposite of competing for a goof, because all I had to do on that joke was stop making jokes—

[ALI laughing]

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: —like, increasingly bemused by this person melting down in front of me. And like, that's just always such a joy to have, right? Where like, around the table you can feel another player embarking on a bit that works as a character move and works as a gag, and that you don't have to involve yourself with.

AUSTIN: Totally. Um, two other answers to this, because we've done a lot of talking about how to make the comedy tone make sense, which is like, sharing stuff off screen, or off mic, or off table, away from table, and about keeping the jokes around the action instead of making the out, the play, goofy.

   My two other answers to this: one, talk away from the table with your players about what they're interested in and what they wanna do and accomplish with their characters. Because that will help you build stakes that get their attention in-game, where they will know it's serious time. If you don't do that, you will end up in a situation that I've been in before, where it's like, "Oh, here's a thing I think that you care about! Let me dangle it in front of you!" And the character is like, "Uh, who? Like, what? No, don't care. Not gonna check in for this sequence because it's not for me." And then it's like, no! I thought this was for you! Ah, no! And so that is a huge thing, making sure you're aligned on what the player cares about. And sometimes you'll be wrong, and that's okay, and you just have to roll with it.

And sometimes you'll be wrong even after that conversation, because it can be hard as a player! As a player, I have told GMs, "The thing I wanna do is X," and really what I wanted to do was Y, and I just didn't know it, or have the words for it. Like, it's funny, someone mentioned another Blades hack earlier, is Girl in Moonlight, which is by Andrew Gills, Gillis? I always forget Andrew's full name, and that feels bad. [typing sounds] Girl in Moonlight, by...Andrew Gillis, yeah. Which is like, a Magical Girl Blades in the Dark hack, which we should definitely do in a Live, at some point. And Andrew and I played in a bunch of games together, and I loved playing with Andrew's character, and the thing I didn't know to tell my GMs was, "what I wanna do is be in scenes where Andrew's character and I get to, like, flirt and bicker." But my GMs were smart enough to know that, and so we did. And so they gave me those sequences. Whereas what I said was like, "I wanna give big speeches!" And I did wanna give big speeches, but not as much as I wanted to flirt and bicker with Andrew's characters.

Um, and so, being a good GM is being able to read what your players' interests are, and give them sequences where they can engage with that stuff. I think my best example of it in recent memory is actually not from Friends at the Table because we have that rhythm, now, and we know, and we do talk off mic. It was the Beastcast, the Giant Bomb Holiday Beastcast this year was a game of Apocalypse World, with the normal cast plus Dan Riker, who has never played an RPG really before—I mean, he did some Pathfinder out on the west coast with Giant Bomb, and that went away—[JANINE laughs]—and it went a different way this time, because I managed to figure out what he was really interested in, I managed to figure out what the whole table was really interested in, this concept of giant trains that were also snakes, and was just like, "Okay, we're gonna do this thing." [ALI laughs]

And so, like, being able to notice when your party, or when your players, are way into a thing and giving them that thing will get them to check in and will move the conversation away from table giggles to table chatter. And table chatter can still be super funny, but also will be a lot more zoomed in on what they care about. So that's the one tip I had, that's maybe actually the only one, I don't remember what the other one is. So that's it.

ALI: Yeah…

JANINE: Um...

AUSTIN: Oh! Oh, I remembered, which is, give them a thing to care about, ask them a question and give them authorship over a thing, so that when the New Archives flood, that's on you, Jack de Quidt, because those are your archives, you helped invent those archives, I asked you what that place looked like and you told me, and now you're ruining it.

And so, like, handing over a little bit of authorship to a player immediately will give them a degree of ownership, and once they have that ownership, they will be invested in a way, or like 90% of the time [JACK laughs] not always, all of this stuff is not always, but it'll give them a chance to get invested into a thing that they might not normally be invested in because it's just words you read from a page, versus a thing that you asked them to either give you in detail, or add a little bit of detail to.

Ask them what colour the flags are, something—ask them what type of badges the guards have. Those things get the player invested in the sequence, because there's a little bit of them in it. And it's something that I try to do more and more every time I play.

JANINE: Um—

ART: Always call one of your players Jack de Quidt.

JACK: Yeah yeah yeah. Yeah, please don't...please don't weird me out.

JANINE: Uh, the thing that I was gonna say was that there's a lot of, like…[sighs] The first thing that came into my mind reading this question was the idea of, like, shit, I lost the word—investment! [AUSTIN: Mhm.] Of, like, "well, just make sure all your players are invested, and then it's fine." [AUSTIN laughs] But the thing that's kind of missing, I think, when we talk about the idea of players being invested in something or buying into something is, like, we have this idea of, that just means they're into it. But there is a very material aspect of it that kind of gets lost, of like—they do need to have chips on the table. They do need to have—like, investment is very specifically like, you are putting something in. And when you put something in, you automatically are going to want to—you're gonna take things a little more seriously. It's not necessarily enough to kind of buy into one part of what you're doing, or buy into, "Oh, we're here to play Blades," or whatever, I'm buying into being at this table, [AUSTIN laughs] like, you do need to find that currency that everyone is trading in.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: And then whence you—whence? [laughs]

AUSTIN: The currency that Janine is trading in is…

JANINE: I'm very tired!

[ALI laughing]

AUSTIN: ...is past languages. Is Middle English!

JANINE: Once everyone sort of, has actual stakes, then I feel like it's a lot easier to be on the same page. [AUSTIN: Mm.] Because you know, you do want to see things through. You want to, you want things to be fun but also make sense, you know?

AUSTIN: Mhm. Totally. And like—

JANINE: Like, your currency can't just be the chuckles.

AUSTIN (overlapping): Well, it can.

JANINE: I mean, it can, but that's a different kind of game.

AUSTIN: Well, that's the thing, is like—when you talk about it needing to make sense, what "sense" is shifts from table to table. Certain tables are really committed to knowing how magic works, or whatever. And this is not me dragging those tables—I've been at those tables and had a good time. Other tables are really interested in how a relationship makes sense. Like, why does it make sense that this person wants to blow up the world, or hates me so much that they want to kill me above everything else? Other tables are really interested in the sense of tactical combat, and like, why would—the enemy should be trying to win a fight, and the sense that they care about is having those combat encounters feel like they make sense and aren't just about advancing the plot, but are actually the fun for that table.

And I don't think that any of those tables are any more or less valid than any of the other ones, but it's super important as a DM to know which sort of table you have. Because otherwise, you're not going to be able to find what Janine just said, which was like, that core shared currency, basically.

And sometimes it doesn't line up perfectly, and you need two currencies to handle four different people, and you gotta do your best to like, find the overlap, and make sure that you're handing out that currency, so to speak, or trading that currency with as many people at the table as possible, and that you're not just like, "Oh, shit, this one person is not getting what they want, and everybody else is," and that's just an awkward—it's a hard table to be at on either side of the GM table, GM screen, as it were.

ALI: Yeah. When I read this question, I'm afraid of the opposite side of it, where like, there's the possibility that this table had their Mother Glory scene, and someone was jokey about it.

AUSTIN: Yup.

ALI: Which is like...then, just talk to that person.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah. That's the conversation you have to have, right?

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Because there's a real, there would be a real disconnect between expectations in a way that could drag down the experience of so many other people. Yeah. Oh—yeah, for people who want to see Girl by Moonlight, it is @commutingcrow on Twitter, is Andrew Gillis. Um, I think that that is it, unless anyone has anything else on this question? [pause] I don't think they do, doesn't sound like it?

Okay, so remember, you can send your questions to tipsatthetable@gmail.com and every month we'll do one of these and answer some questions.

Again, I'm Austin Walker, you can follow me on Twitter @austin_walker. Support the show at friendsattthetable.cash. And as always, come listen to our show on the various podcast services. And, if you do listen to the show, and you do like it, and you haven't done this already, please go give us a review on iTunes or on whatever service you listen to us on, it means a lot. It, like, actually does mean a lot, in terms of visibility. And let your friends know about the Patreon! That is, like, the only way we get the word out, so it means a lot to us.

Um. I'm ending this like it's a Waypoint podcast, [ALI giggles] so I'm gonna ask, where can people find you on the internet, Janine?

JANINE: You can find me @bleatingheart on Twitter.

AUSTIN: Art?

ART: You can find me on Twitter @atebbel.

AUSTIN: Jack?

JACK: You can find me on Twitter @notquitereal, and buy any of the music on the show at notquitereal.bandcamp.com.

AUSTIN: And Ali?

ALI: Yeah, I'm over @ali_west on Twitter, and the show is over @friends_table.

AUSTIN: Awesome. Uhh, let's do a clap!

ALI: Yeah! Ooh, I've closed time.is.

JACK: Yeah, I have to re-open it!

[AUSTIN chuckles]

ALI: At the start I was like, "I'm gonna keep this open…"

ART: Oh, I always worry that it, like, lags if I close it. I always re-open it.

JANINE: ...What?

ALI: Wait, what?

AUSTIN (overlapping): You mean you think, you're worried it lags if you leave it open?

ART (overlapping): I think time.is is like...yeah. I think time.is is failing if I leave it.

ALI: But the point is that it's… dot is. Like, it's the time, dot is.

AUSTIN: Wait. You're worried—[sighs]

ART: I'm worried it becomes dot was.

[pause, then all speak at once]

ALI: That's—

JACK: Time dot…

AUSTIN: I think it's way more likely to become time.was if you leave it open than if you close it.

ART: ...Yeah.

JACK: That's what he's saying!

AUSTIN: Oh!

ART: I've got a new instance of time.is every time.

JANINE: Y'all know you can just refresh a page, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's what I do.

ART: But why leave it open, if I'm just gonna refresh it when I come back?

JANINE: Because it's...a few less keystrokes?

AUSTIN: ...Okay.

JANINE: You need to maximize your time.is?

ALI: Thirty seconds.

AUSTIN: Thirty...thirty?! Yeah, thirty. Let's do thirty.

[long pause, then ALI laughs quietly]

ALI: That was too many.

[all clap]

AUSTIN: Damn good clap.

ALI: [big sigh] We've done it.

AUSTIN: Alright, everybody, Hope your week is good. Happy new year!

ALI: Bye!

ART: Bye!

AUSTIN: Bye!