

Tips at the Table 35: May 2020 - Podcast

Transcriber: Kārlis (@townout on Twitter) [0:00:00-0:04:00], mo#3373 [00:04:00 - 1:40:34]

Introduction [00:00:00]

Austin: Welcome to Tips at the Table, an RPG podcast focused on critical questions, hopefully smart answers and fun interactions between good friends. I'm your host, Austin Walker. Joining me today, Art Martinez Tebbel.

Art: Hey, you can find me on Twitter at [@atebbel](#) and I guess I don't have anything else to plug right now.

Austin: [chuckles] Sylvia Clare.

SylviaAustin: Hi! You can find me on Twitter at [@sylviasurfer](#) and you can listen to my other podcast Emojidrome wherever you listen to your podcasts.

Austin: And Jack de Quidt.

Jack: Hi, you can find me on Twitter at [@notquitereal](#) or buy any of the music featured on the show at [notquitereal.bandcamp.com](#).

Austin: I guess let's kick it off by beginning by saying thank you to everyone who helped us raise a ton of money for a number of charities over the last month or so.

Art: Yeah!

Austin: We, uh... God, what did we— we ended up crossing 100,000, I don't have a final final number right now because I have to do some math to figure out the cut from itch.io. But 105 is around where I would guess? Which is pretty fucking incredible, IMO?

And as a reminder, that money goes to Reclaim the Block, Black Youth Project 100, The Bail Project and The Marshall Project, cut four ways. So around 25k each for each of those, those causes, which is super exciting.

Thank you so much everyone who showed us support and who picked up the postcards and who picked up the... ba ba ba ba ba... the zines and everything else. So, uh— And the music, also, when you were doing those sales, Jack! So again, thank you so much. It means a lot to us that we've been able to do that. It means a lot personally that we were able to raise as much money as Brooklyn Nine Nine.

[Sylvia and Art laugh]

Austin: That is, again, very petty to me, but I don't give a fuck. Come at me, Andy Samberg.

Art: And I think it's important to tell everyone that because of the deal we made with NBC-Universal...

[Jack laughs]

Art: We're gonna be taking over that spot in the fall schedule!

Austin: [laughs] Can you *imagine*?

Jack: Ah, step one, immediate dissolution of the show.

[Austin laughs]

Jack: Of Brooklyn Nine Nine, not us.

SylviaAustin: Weirdly enough, I've been cut? I don't really get it? But it's fine.

Austin: [laughs] Me too. I couldn't say why.

SylviaAustin: Yeah!

[all laugh]

Austin: They said I wasn't jolly enough, which, hmm.

[all laugh]

Art: Oh, wow!

Austin: Yeah, yeah, uh-huh!

SylviaAustin: Oh, why...

Austin: It turns out you can be as transphobic as you want if you have a nice smile. That's what I've learned about Terry Crews.

SylviaAustin: Ugh.

Jack: Wow!

Art: Wow. So we're done with those jokes, uh—

Austin: Uh-huh! I'm not here to play! I'm not here to play with those motherfuckers.

SylviaAustin: This is behind a paywall too!

Austin: [laughing] I've hated them for quite some time. God.

SylviaAustin: Yeah.

Art: Yeah, it costs five bucks to hear us do this.

SylviaAustin: Exactly!

Art: Probably not— I don't know if this is making it into the— [laughs].

[Austin and Jack laugh]

Austin: Oh, it is! I have fiat. I don't have fiat, [smiling] y'all can veto me, but.

[Sylvia laughs]

Jack: Vetoing Austin to go work on Brooklyn Nine Nine is the terrible mirror of...

[Sylvia laughs]

Art: Gonna start just yelling my Social Security Number when Austin goes to—

[Austin and Sylvia laugh]

Austin: All right. Let's get into your questions today because y'all send us some good ones, and bring the attitude back down a little bit. [laughing] Except that I forgot that I kicked this one off with one that's *personally* targeted at Art.

[Sylvia laughs]

Jack: Mm! Mm-hmm.

Austin: That makes this even better, I've combined it with one that's personally targeted, sort of at Jack, but not really. I think these are good questions. I think they're a sort of pair.

Questions 1 & 2 [00:03:20]

Austin: The first one comes in from Tim, the second one from Sim? [laughing] I swear I didn't pair them so that they would sound like Alice in Wonderland characters?

[Sylvia laughs]

Austin: Unrelated. But Art! This is an older question, but I felt like now was the time, now that there was a second character we could kind of string in here. So Tim writes in and says,

"Art, before I start, the way you strongly portray characters is fantastic, but I *hate* Grand Magnificent. More accurately, I hate how much I see Grand Magnificent as the worst possible version of who I could have been. It's better now but at the start of Season Four, Twilight Mirage, I was worried I wouldn't be able to listen because just hearing Grand Magnificent was giving me serious anxiety and I would feel physically ill.

“What were your inspirations when coming up with Grand Mag? I love the way you play characters, even if I don’t love this one.”

And then, Sim’s question, to kind of add on there is,

“Aside from Jack with Clementine Kesh, have any of you, as players, written a character with a backup immediately in mind? I don’t mean this as a dig at Jack at all... I’m just certain that no one can read a character like Clem and think, ‘Oh—’ And *not* think, ‘Oh, how long does she have?’ [chuckles]

“Thanks. Sim.”

[Jack chuckles]

Austin: So. I joined these together because y’all both played some real shit heel [laughing] characters. And I think that’s probably worth chatting through a little bit? You should see the question on the stream, that it’s not working is a OBS problem. I’ll fix it. Give me a second. But you could start answering already.

Art: Sure. I want to start by saying this is the requisite number of compliments you have to pay me to—

[Austin laughs]

Art: —come at one of my characters this hard. I really want to just, just, you know, salute the process here.

Austin: Yeah.

Art: Um, I mean it’s...We’re all, we’re all Grand Magnificent, right? I mean, every one of us who’s even a little creative feels that pull, right? It’s not just me? The like...

Austin: (cross) Like, the narcissism? The like...

SylviaAustin: (cross) Oh, yeah.

Art: Yeah, the like...I could be worse. (Everyone laughs) I could think more of myself and through that, just get to a worse place.

Austin: Mmhm.

Art: And like...I—It’s one of the easiest characters in that way. Just like the version of yourself that’s, you know, 5 or 6 times more pretentious. And honestly, I might be being very generous with myself right now.

Austin: (laughs) I think Grand Mag is more than 5% or 10% more pretentious than you are. I think—

Jack: Oh no, times not percent, Austin.

Art: 5 to 6 *times*.

Austin: Oh, *times*.

Sylvi: Yeah.

Art: (cross) 5 to 600% percent.

Jack: (cross) 500 is a lot of times.

Austin: Yeah, 5 or 6 times is right. Yeah, that might be generous. (laughs)

Art: Yeah!

Austin: 4—or 4.

Art: Maybe it's only 3!

Austin: Yeah!

Art: 3, 4. Somewhere in there.

Austin: Somewhere in there! Um, Jack, I'm curious if you've had similar thoughts about playing someone who is just miserable.

Jack: Yeah, I mean...(sighs) It's—It's...What are your inspirations? On one side, it's like—it's like. (pause) With Partizan, it seems like a series that has such a clear ideological direction to move in, you know. And we talked about this when we started Partizan, right? Where it's like we are beginning not at the bottom. Things could always get worse, but we're beginning pretty close to the bottom.

Austin: Yeah.

Jack: Um, and we talked about how it's going to be a season about trying to find a way kind of up and out, or to pull away from—What's the quote about pulling away or does our own gravity hold us to it? Pulling away from empire?

Austin: Uh huh, yeah. That's close enough.

Jack: You know. (laughs) And so I think with Partizan, it was really interesting to me to be like, "Well, what if one of the party just doesn't feel this way?" Like what if—

Austin: (laughs) Right. Just is incapable, right?

Jack: Yeah, yeah. What if someone in the party looks at the party goals and says, "Yeah...I mean...but what if I was on top?" (laughs)

Austin: Yeah, mmhm.

Jack: "I'm sure I could do it better." And I think I also wanted to try and do a...

Austin: Like Grand Magnificent.

Jack: Yeah, much like...I think Grand Mag and Clem would...(sighs) I think it is a cliché if I were to say I think they would get on. I don't think they would. I think they would probably hate each other, but I think they would probably be able to have a more collaborative relationship? I don't know. I don't know if I'm speaking for you there, Art.

Art: Mmhm.

Austin: (cross) I mean think about the scene where like Undela Apogica, the Doyenne, meets Grand Magnificent and commissions him. I could so easily imagine Clem commissioning Grand Magnificent.

Jack: Right.

Art: Yeah! And it's something for us to explore in Season 10: Friends at the Table All Stars.

[Austin and Jack laugh]

Art: (cross) Where we bring back—

Jack: (cross) Where we bring in a time machine.

Austin: God. Don't even joke.

Jack: I think also, there's like—(laughs) It's fun playing characters and I think this is something we saw that Art did really well with Grand Mag. It's fun playing characters that grow as people or characters that change, and Grand Mag goes on this—Goes on a journey across Twilight Mirage. And with Clem, I wanted to see what would happen if a character grew and changed but not towards virtue, if that makes sense? Like if Clem is the same character at the end of the season as she is at the beginning, I will be unhappy with how I've played.

Austin: Right, right.

Jack: But I don't want that growth to be like quote-unquote "better". Like, "Oh, Clem is a better person now." I think she might have sharpened ambitions or she might have different understandings of how the world works, but I don't think she's going to come out of Partizan going, "Oh yeah! Liberation!"

Austin: Yeah. I mean, that's the thing, right, is like poison ivy grows too. Not the character, the thing. Right? Weeds grow.

Jack: Oh, poison ivy absolutely grows, yeah!

Austin: Things that we don't like also grow. Faults in the Earth grow over time. Growth does not mean progress or does not mean—it does not mean becoming more beneficial to those around you necessarily.

Jack: Yeah. It's like the famous quote says, you know: "The arc of history is long but it bends."

Austin: That's what they say! (Art and Austin laugh) Ugh. I'm curious if any of you, to the second half of this question, the Sim part of this question. Have you ever come into a season like, "I got a back-up ready to go just in case this breaks bad." Cause I actually don't know that is true with Jack. Unless have you said that, Jack?

Jack: Yeah, I was gonna say. No, right off the bat.

Austin: Absolutely not.

Jack: You are being very generous in this premise.

Austin: Yeah.

Jack: I think you are giving me far too much credit for planning ahead. I don't have a back-up. I have characters that I think are fun, like that I...But they're not like Partizan characters. I've got like a list of things that might be fun to explore in future seasons but none of them are like...If Clem doesn't survive, which might happen.

Austin: Which, who knows! We're still in the middle of Kingdom.

Jack: Yeah we really...Yeah.

Austin: Like.

Jack: Uh...Uh...I'll have to come up with someone. And we can talk about that then but as of now, no. No backups.

Art: I've had other playbooks that I've thought looked interesting. That's not really the same question.

Austin: Ah! It's a step, right?

Art: It's like certainly where I would go if something didn't work out. Um, I don't remember any in particular right now. Um...And don't have any right now. I really need to hold on.

Austin: Yeah, I feel like we...There's Grand Magnificent in the middle of Twilight Mirage. There was probably an opportunity for there but I don't—I think we actually had the conversation that

was like you don't have a character ready to go. You know you could get one ready within a week but like...that's work. You know?

Art: Yeah. And it worked out, it was fine.

Austin: Yeah, totally. Also, Sovereign Immunity's arrest just happened on screen now so we can say that that almost went a different way.

Sylvi: Yeah!

Jack: Mhm.

Austin: Without getting into details. I guess look forward to a Pusher post in which Art might get into details about that one if you really want to know the deep lore about that episode. Um...

Art: Can I give like a teaser?

Austin: Yeah!

Art: Something I'm not even sure I told you. When I was like, so in my feelings after that episode that Jessica had to be like, "You can't quit Friends at the Table."

Austin: (cross) Wow!

Sylvi: (cross) Oh my god!

Austin: Art!

Art: And like I hadn't—I hadn't said anything like that but like that was like the vibe I was giving off.

Jack: (cross) Oh, so Jess was just putting it out there.

Austin: (cross) You just had that feeling. That's how hard it hit you.

Art: And it was like—And I'm the kind of person where like someone says something and I'm like, "I can quit anything I want."

Austin: (cross) Yeah, fuck I can't!

Sylvi: (cross) Damn it.

Art: I'll quit twice! I'm the only one who's read the operating agreement, let's see what happens!
(Austin and Jack laugh)

Austin: I'm vested, baby.

Jack: Well I'm glad you're still here.

Art: Yeah.

Austin: The Gucci Mane quote—The Gucci Mane quote when the judge asked if he was guilty and said, “Bitch, I might be.” (Sylvi and Art laugh) Ohh.

Sylvi: Um. Really quick, I would like to say that pretty much every season I’ve had a back-up character ready.

Austin: (cross) Really?

Art: (cross) Wow!

Jack: (cross) Whoaaa! Sylvi’s a professional.

Art: Yeah.

Sylvi: No—It’s not even that! It’s...If I’m being honest, I get bored and I make them ‘cause I’m like, “Well, what would happen if this went bad.”

Jack: Whoa! This is power moves.

Austin: (impressed) Yeah.

Sylvi: It’s fun! I just—I’ve always liked messing with playbooks so like, just filling the stuff in with basic enough details to feel like I have a grip on a character in case something happens is fun. And also like, it sometimes does come from—like with Marielda, I had a back-up character that came from me trying to pick between two different things.

Austin: Right.

Sylvi: Like I had a character sheet filled out for I think—I think, it was the class that Keith ended up playing for the live show. The sneaky one that I can’t remember the name of. It’s not...Leech was what Aubrey was so I’m like blanking, but anyway...

Austin: (overlapping) Oh right.

Sylvi: I had like—I—That whole thing and instead of like going through with it, I just had it as like a thing. In case, Aubrey like overindulged and was out of commission for a session.

Austin: Right. Well, that’s the other thing, right? It’s like these games do allow that. You could come in, right.

Sylvi: Yeah. And that—that—Like honestly, I think that’s why I got into the habit of it is because that’s when I came into the show—was starting like—That’s when I started making characters that had character sheets was Marielda.

Austin: (overlapping) Right, yeah.

Sylvi: And so I was like, "Well shit, she can go missing at any point if I feel like it. I should just be ready with this."

Austin: Yeah.

Sylvi: and then with Ephrim, I was like, "This guy's gonna piss somebody off." Also he did die. He did literally die at one point.

Jack: (cross) Mm.

Austin: (cross) He did literally die!

Sylvi: I was like, "Well, I should probably be prepared just in case."

Austin: God.

Sylvi: And now it's just a habit.

Austin: That's a good habit. It's a good habit to have.

Jack: Wow!

Sylvi: Yeah!

Jack: So how many do you have for Partizan?

Sylvi: I only have one for Partizan. I only have one like one at a time.

Austin: Yeah, yeah.

Sylvi: I don't like doing too many. I just like have one at a time because I don't wanna like...One, I don't wanna be like sitting on a bunch of fun ideas that I don't get to use.

Austin: (cross) That's so fucking true.

Jack: (cross) Yeah, yeah yeah.

Sylvi: For something very specific. Um...And like also, it's just a lot of work. It's a lot of work to make more than one back-up.

Austin: It is a lot of work.

Jack: Yeah, one character is exhausting.

Austin: Yeah definitely. Well you never know. I like that. I like that a lot. Um...I do it only in the sense that like, I need to create a bunch of NPCs, any of whom could become an antagonistic force or an important NPC. But like alright, which one's gonna hit, you know? So like, they all get screen time but it's like, "Hmm. Who do the characters have the most fun with, you know, antagonizing," or, "what makes the most sense based on the story?" But obviously, that's much

different than being a PC and having a backup one. Um...I'm going to advance. Ray writes in and Ray says,

Question 3 [00:15:04]

"Hi! A few friends and I started a game of Firebrands over Discord intending it to be a 1 or 2 session game. Three-fourths of us have played Follow together with great success but it seems to be developing into more of an ongoing campaign because of this we're starting to feel constrained by the scope of the Firebrand mini-games. The biggest roadblock right now is there doesn't seem to be a good way to introduce or get to know NPCs which makes the world feel a bit two-dimensional. Is there a game that might make sense to transition or do you have advice for helping Firebrands feel less constrained? Thanks for all you do."

Um...I have two answers for this, kind of. And the first is that you can always just do scenes in Firebrands. You can just say, "I want a scene with someone who does something," and then one of your other friends can play an NPC. You don't need to stick to the minigames in the hardest and fastest rules. Um, you can always just kinda have free play sessions. In fact, I think there may even be a minigame that just kind of sets up for that. The second is to just move to a different game. Lord knows we've done it many of times. To and from. Also, I just realized I'm still having trouble with this OBS right now and I'm going to have to fix this. There we go. I fixed it. Um...OBS has gotten really weird with capturing browser windows for me lately so, I don't know what the fuck is going on with that. Um. You might consider switching to another game and at that point, the question you should ask yourself and your friends is, "What do we want this play to look like?" Because I think you could go to something like Follow or something like Kingdom or something like Microscope, which really would zoom you out.

Jack: Yeah.

Austin: Um, and let you do *lots* of stuff with other NPCs. Um, or you could say, "Does one of us want to step up and start GMing?" In which case, we look at something like Beam Saber or Armour Astir and play from that perspective where suddenly, you're going to get a lot of NPCs but those are going to be primarily controlled by a GM. But that's like, a you thing, I think. Any other thoughts here?

(pause)

Art: It seems....Firebrands seems very hard to sustain long-term but maybe that's just because I've only played it in...

Austin: We've only played it in finales even. We've never played it as like, a kick-off game.

Art: Yeah so—

Sylvi: Let's do a Firebrands season! I'm sorry to everyone who actually wants that. It's a joke. (Austin laughs)

Jack: It's a great game.

Art: Firebrands is a game you play for 12 hours at a time and at the end you feel terrible, right? That's Firebrands?

(Austin and Jack laugh)

Sylvi: Like most games.

Austin: That's games!

Art: Uh huh.

Austin: There was just a Firebrands jam I believe, right? That just wrapped up earlier this year, I wanna say? I don't remember what it was called, I'll have to look it up. Um, but like, there's a bunch of Firebrands related games. There's even—God, there's a name for games made in the style of Firebrands. I don't remember. (types) What it's called.

Art: I hope it has a really great like...name.

Austin: Chat can help me for sure.

Art: Like Powered by the Apocalypse and Forged in the Dark.

Austin: Right.

Jack: Oh. Mm. Yeah.

Austin: Yeah, uh-huh. Yeah, I don't remember, fuck. Anyway. Any other thoughts here, or do you think that kinda covers it?

Jack: I was gonna suggest Microscope.

Austin: (overlapping) Yeah.

Jack: So I think the fact that you got to Microscope and Follow and Kingdom quite quickly as the trifecta of games that would sit really well or sit really naturally alongside Microscope and specifically, I think each of them is about putting the focus on different things that are interesting about the world that you have already created by now. Microscope would let you create, pull out and create, you know, big sweeping histories and possibly get a lot of movers and shakers NPCs out of that game.

Austin: Mmhm. Mmhm.

Jack: Follow would let you—Well, Follow and Kingdom right, would let you populate the world more easily. And there's nothing saying you can't turn back to Firebrands.

Austin: Correct. Yeah.

Jack: If you were like—

Austin: Zoom in on Firebrands, right?

Jack: Yeah, we got 20 really interesting NPCs that we can work with now that we are compelled by and we feel really comfortable in Firebrands, so let's move back towards that.

Austin: Mm, mmhm. And apparently the name of that jam was...was...[Rhymmerbrands](#). Your game name had to rhyme with Firebrands I believe, which is, which is good.

Art: How...How seriously were they taking the rhyming?

Jack: (cross) Attire...

Austin: Well how do you feel about Guys and Brands? Which seems to be a Neo Yokio hack of Firebrands.

Sylvi: (cross) Okay. Okay.

Austin: I'm down. Hierophants. That's close. That's a bit of a slant rhyme but...

Art: (thinking) Mmm...

Sylvi: I love a slant rhyme, okay!

Austin: I love a slant rhyme.

Art: I...I...I don't.

Sylvi: Wow...Maybe I gotta quit the show.

Austin: Uh, alright.

Art: Read the operating agreement, it's a real...(Sylvi and Jack laugh)

Austin: It's a whole thing. Alright, I think that's a good answer here. Um, apparently they did not take rule super seriously per Matt in the chat. Um...

Art: My uh— My working on Twitter hack was rejected. It was Time for Brands.

Austin: Time for Brands, yeah.

Jack: Ohh!

Art: It was just about making tweets—timely tweets from your hamburger restaurant Twitter account.

Jack: Yeah!

Sylvi: Also, my game about people with fruits for appendages called Lime for Hands.

Austin: Lime for Hands.

Art: Ohh! I like that one.

Sylvi: Thanks.

Austin: Great. (Sylvi and Art laugh) Uh...Moving on. Kirah writes in–

Sylvi: Yeah please do.

Art: Are you sure you don't want 20 more minutes of rhyming?

(Sylvi and Jack laughing)

Austin: I'm so certain. I'm so sure.

Art: Okay.

Jack: What about my undersea adventure Time for Crabs?

(everyone laughs)

Austin: That's not a rhyme!

Art: (laughing) That doesn't even end up close!

Sylvi: Like a slant rhyme if you squint with your ears!

Austin: (laughing) No! It's not!

Art: I would rather that you had said crands.

Austin: (laughs) And we'd be like, "Wait, what are crands? What do crands have to do with—" God. Kirah writes in and says:

Question 4 [00:21:16]

"Hi friends, this is only tangentially related to at the table play and more related to the nature of actual play podcasts." I love, you know, shop talk, so send in any of these questions you ever want to. "In addition to the show, y'all have done a wonderful job with the Fans at the Table Discord server. How did you approach creating a community, particularly one wrapped up in the discussion of your own work? Sometimes y'all, particularly Austin, answer questions about the episode or world in Discord. How did you decide which questions to clarify and what questions to leave vague-slash-address in later sessions?"

It is very hard to decide which to answer and which to leave vague. (Sylvi laughs) I guess broadly to say how we started it, this is actually something that like Ali could speak to better because Ali really spearheaded it for mods, and it's such a different place now than when we launched it. It was way smaller when it first launched, which happened right alongside or around the same time as the Patreon. I believe just before the Patreon, I wanna say, because I remember announcing it there also. I remember people rushing to the Discord to like, post about it. I think the big things really have been just working with mods to make sure that it's clear what the rules of that place are, what type of conversations should happen there, stuff like that. To the point of like, what questions do you answer, I'm kinda curious from y'all cause like what is...Art you will sometimes go on and answer a question here or there. I'm curious what you think like, where you draw that line or what compels you to do it.

Art: Uh...The...The maw of being on your phone late at night or early in the morning.

Sylvi: (cross) Yeah.

Austin: (cross) Yeah, okay same. Yeah, big same. (laughs)

Art: It's honestly—I wish I had like a better answer than just like, coincidence. If the last thing in a given chat is something I feel like talking about when I happen to look at it, I'll jump in or like...Yeah I don't even think I was—or if someone told me something was happening, but I don't think that's ever happened. Um.

Austin: There was probably a time when I've been like, "Hey Art, someone asked you—someone saying some stuff about Hadrian that maybe you might be interested in," or blah blah blah. But I try not to.

Art: Yeah, and then just like um...Like I ended up doing a really long bit in the chat like right before an episode dropped, it was really irresponsible. It really derailed the whole thing but I announced that we're the official actual play podcast of the minions.

Austin: Which is true.

Sylvi: (laughs) Great!

Austin: We did get that license.

Art: And then that went on for 40 minutes or something.

Austin: Great.

Art: It was a lot of fun but it wasn't...Someone made a Hebrew joke and it was a homonym for minions and I was like you're close instead it's...We're minions now.

Austin: We're minions now, I got you. Perfect.

Art: Yeah.

Austin: For me, it's really tough, because there is the balance between...I like, one thing I like to do is clarify. That's always like in the wheelhouse for me has been, "Hey here's a thing I said, let me reiterate that thing in clearer words." Or like, here's a really good example from this season. There's a fleet that gets attacked and a character seeing that fleet get attacked and I start to say thing A and then I get distracted in the middle of this monologue and then ended up saying thing B.

Jack: Mhm.

Austin: And I don't—I'm trying to communicate that that character knows the location of the place but I don't communicate that clearly and I get distracted and say something else. So that's a place where I go and say, "Oh, that's just a fuck up on my - I'm not hiding information there." Someone in the chat had said, "I think what's Austin trying to say is blah blah blah," and I was like, "Yes, absolutely. As soon as this next episode comes out, I'm going to have a clarifying statement about it that's dadada." So I happen to do that stuff. It gets tricky when it's like discourse-y stuff. The stuff this past season has been—was the Valence Gur Sevraq true divine stuff. Because on one hand, I think it's really important there's a place where those conversations happen. On the other hand, it's tough to be like, "And I know what happens in two weeks." Twilight Mirage actually—Can we pause and go back to a previous season where we've seen it all play out all the way? The number one difficult thing with this historically was the first Notion arc which was the post-mid season shuffle.

Jack: Ohh, yeah.

Austin: Where, um, where some stuff happens where basically, characters end up interacting with a number of different factions that I had been signaling were not factions that were like, chill. These were like pretty villainously-coded, let's say. And there was week to week speculation that like, we didn't realize that what we were doing was showing these compromised people making a deal with the devil basically. When in fact, three weeks from then when it would become explicitly clear that that is what had happened. That's like—It becomes explicitly clear that that was something we were really conscious of. That in fact, you can't just soft pedal with fascists and for me, the really interesting conversation that comes out of that once that arc is over was people who think that it was unfair to depict those factions the way that they were or not just unfair. I definitely think about the Concrete Town Particulars and how specifically the way that those were handled in that season was a big part of why I ended up working with a disability consultant this season is because it was like, these are disabled people and the material stuff that leads them to that is really fascinating but then from that point forward, they become just kind of background villains? And I wasn't happy with that and fans were not happy with that.

So, I think there is really good discourse to have around some of the way that first arc happened, but the week to week thing was kind of really rough for me because I wanted to go in—I can't go in and be like, "Hey, don't worry. Two episodes from now, you're going to see that

we are very aware that these are characters playing with fire.” Or more importantly, doing that doesn’t actually stop someone from listening and feeling like we’re walking towards a fucking cliff because in the world of media, they’ve seen people fuck up a billion times, if that makes sense, right? Like, when you’ve had your trust broken so many times, I understand why you’re not keen to give it. And so, like things like this season, there was a conversation between Valence and Gur Servaq that I think actually opened up their relationship to faith and what their particular beliefs were. That was like two or three weeks after a scene that did not necessarily go in depth in that way. And that’s one of the things where it’s like, all I can really do in that scenario is go in and say, “Hey. You know, I’m aware. Thank you for your feedback. I’m gonna—we’re gonna keep making this show and I hope that what comes up in the future elucidates some of what’s happening.” But that’s way different than going in and clarifying something because the show is supposed to do that work itself, if that makes sense.

I kinda feel the same way about trivia or details or like what happened to character X or like, those sorts of things because I want the show to be the show at least until it’s over, you know? Until we’re done with a story, at which point I’m happy to share some notes or clarify or not even clarify but like, imagine a different world in which Character A came on screen and did XYZ thing because at that point they didn’t do it and I can talk about what I was planning or what could’ve happened but it’s not in the show at that point, so who cares? I’m actually more willing to have those conversations after the fact because the show is—the series or whatever it is finished at that point, if that makes sense. The...I’m trying to think if there’s anything else there. Does anyone else have thoughts on this discourse-y stuff. I know Jack, you’re not there at this point but Sylvi and Art, I’m curious if you have any other thoughts on that.

Art: I’ve certainly pointedly avoided all the things you’re talking about.

Austin: Fair. (laughs) It’s stressful, right? I mean, what I will say is I think in the near future, I will probably step back further from the channel. I think many of us will. It’s gotten way bigger and way faster. I literally can’t keep up with it as it stands now. Whereas like 2 years ago, I could read every single thing that went in there and now I just can’t. And part of that is that I’m busy in a different way now. I’m just like not on Discord the way I used to be. I used to try to keep up with the Waypoint server also and I obviously don’t do that anymore. And so like, I do think that there’s a point at which I’m going to have to rely on Twitter and email for other sources of people reaching out for stuff versus trying to stay on top of every conversation in what is frankly, a very busy and big server. That doesn’t mean I won’t ever swing through or whatever, but I do think that that’s something probably worth saying now ahead of doing that. I don’t know when that’ll be but I’d rather get in the air than have it be a big dramatic like exit because there isn’t—the reason is I’m exhausted and can’t keep up with it and I feel bad seeing messages in there that I haven’t read and I would rather just not feel bad and instead have good associations with the fandom which I love.

Art: Were you reading every message in every channel?

Austin: I wouldn't read certain hobby channels, right? (Sylvi laughs) So like, I don't follow—if I look at the Discord right now, I was not keeping up with music-zone or movie-cinema-zone or television-zone, but there was a point where I was reading everything in anime-zone, everything in video-game-zones. Everything in book-zone.

Art: Oh my god!

Austin: Yeah dude, I was like—I was doing it. And then earlier this year, I switched to just trying to read stuff in The Dang Show, which is our just the show stuff. Um, and then I try to keep up and lurk tabletop-game-zone still because of that being the thing we do. Um, but that's kind of it at this point. But even just reading the show ones, like sometimes, something will kick up and I'll open my phone and there'll be like 500 new messages and I'll be like, "Well...I hope those are... I hope I don't need to read all those, you know?" (Art laughs)

So it's a lot, but I—it's a lot and also, it's interesting because it is currently still our space in that way. Um. I used to talk to—When I was at Giant Bomb, one of the things that was interesting about being at Giant Bomb was that, and I guess Waypoint is sort of similar to this, there's an official Giant Bomb forum, right? There's also a huge thread over on Resetera. Before that, when people were still at Neogaf, there was a huge one on Neogaf. Um, the impulse when you are a public figure is to read everything about you on the internet. You can't do that, and what you especially cannot do is think that people shouldn't be allowed to say XYZ outside of your space. One of the big talks I ended up having with Vinny was Vinny telling me like, "Austin, the people on Neogaf or on Resetera"—at the time it was Gaf. They actually—What he said was, "Austin, I totally get it. What my wife told me once and I will tell you now is they need a place where you aren't at to talk about you. You're a public figure." and I actually totally believe that. And so like, if someone says some shit about me on a thread somewhere on a forum like alright...That's—You know what, that's the role I'm in. That has to happen. But there was a distinction when I was at Giant Bomb between that sort of conversation that was going to happen at Gaf versus the sort of conversation that was going to happen on like, the Giant Bomb forums. If someone wants to say that they hate the way I say a word, it should probably not be on my forums. That's rude, but if someone wants to say that and get that off their chest on the Penny Arcade forums or whatever, go for it. Friends at the table by the way had a nice-sized contingent of fans at the Penny Arcade forums, which is a weird fact about us, I guess.

Sylvi: Very weird.

Austin: Shout outs to Weed Lord Vegeta. Who I don't know is still there but was doing the work of...

Art: (cross) Shout out to Weed Lord Vegata.

Sylvi: Shout out to Weed Lord anyway!

Austin: Yeah, just shout out to Weed Lord always.

Sylvi: Yeah.

Art: Yeah. Although wrong on the designated hitter, I wanna say.

Austin: Wait, wait, wait. What does Weed Lord think about the designated hitter?

Art: Weed Lord is pro-designated hitter and I like any decent person against the designated hitter.

Austin: I see. So it's a moral situation.

Art: Uh huh.

Austin: I see.

Art: And to piggyback on your actual point, you've told me that thing before.

Austin: Yes.

Art: What Vinny said because I'll—I've—I fall for that.

Austin: Yeah!

Art: And I think I've done a really good job of stopping. But I have the opposite relationship that Vinny has with my wife who wants to—She's like, "I want to know everything someone says about you and then I'm gonna kill them." (Austin laughs) And it's like, it just doesn't...It...please don't, it doesn't matter.

Austin : (cross) She wants the smoke. Yeah.

Sylvi: (cross) Yeah.

Austin: Doesn't that chill you out a little bit? Because it's like, she's taking—She's in that more active angry role and you get to be like, "It's fine. It's fine."

Art: A little, and she's not actually going to do anything, so it's fine.

Austin: No, of course not. She's just very pro—Hi Jess, we all love you.

Sylvi: Hi Jess. Should we make Jess a mod of the discord? (Austin and Sylvi laugh)

Austin: Oh my god!

Art: No.

Austin: No!

Sylvi: No.

Austin: Absolutely not.

Sylvi: Sorry for even suggesting it.

Austin: No, it's fine.

Sylvi: Wouldn't wish that on her.

Austin: No. God. It's been, what I'll say is -

Sylvi: Modding a Discord's hard, shout out to the mod team. That's what I mean.

Art: (cross) Shout out to the mod team.

Question 5 [00:34:53]

Austin: (cross) The mods have been incredible, so shout outs to the entire mod team. Shout outs to everyone who's made that place so good. Alright. Next question comes in, um, from Nev who says:

"My campaign that I am GMing is rapidly approaching the moment where we're going to switch over from Dungeon World to Armour Astir Advent. The original pitch for the entire campaign was that we would start in a fantasy setting and eventually get mechs."

Jack: (cross) Yo!

Austin: "And I'm hyped that it's finally happening soon-ish." Yeah. I fucking love this pitch. This pitch is good.

Jack: (cross) Hell yeah!

Art: (cross) Yep.

Austin: As someone who's changed games before, let's say, I understand this. "I think I have a good handle on how players will transfer their characters over to a new system, although any additional advice you have there would be helpful. However, I'm also wondering if there's any advice on how to GM in a new system with these same characters. In general, I plan to default to Armour Astir rules but I think there will always be the temptation to pull a move from their old playbook if needed. I'm wondering your thoughts on how much we should be willing to dip back into Dungeon World if it makes sense." Excuse me. "Should I try to stick 100% to Armour Astir's rules or should I fudge if it makes sense as a better way to handle a specific situation? For reference, so far the only thing from Armour Astir that I patched into Dungeon World was the way it handles long-term projects. Also, I think at least one of my players will listen to this so, hey Jessie. I love Nine Years Buried so much and thank you again for detailing our last session in such a wonderful way." Great name for a character, Nine Years Buried.

Sylvi: (cross) Yeah, that's good for a character name

Austin: (cross) Yeah, it's fucking A-plus.

Art: Yeah, I'm like mad I read it cause now if I ever come up with something like that, I'll have to discard it.

Austin: Just shout out Jessie. Just be like shout outs to Jessie.

Sylvi: Yeah.

Art: Shout out.

Sylvi: That's my character Ten Years Buried.

Austin: (laughs) Um, here's my—Here's my gut on this. Um, I guess, the prologue to this—The kind of prelude for me is like, if you wanna dip in and grab a move because it feels like it's the right moment for it. Fucking go for it, who cares? But do your best to make that translation and that switch as comprehensive as possible so that you don't feel like you need to. And underlying that is that it shouldn't feel like, "We have mechs, so now we're playing Armour Astir." It should feel like, and you should know this from me based on the way Bluff is handled, it should feel like, to some degree, the world has changed such that this rule makes more sense or the way that Twilight Mirage's switch happened or even the way the Counter/WEIGHT switch happened, which happens early, but there's a degree to which the Sprawl and Tech/Noir are different takes on cyberpunk and you have to—In my opinion, it's best practice to lean into that comprehensive change because that is what the game is built for. Now, if what you're looking at is your character sheet and going, "I really don't want this character to lose this move," and there is no equivalent in Armour Astir, then try to hack that in at the point at which it makes the most sense, which is at the transition during the switchover.

The one place where I think it would be okay is that if it feels like that old world is reaching back towards you somehow, is yanking you away from the world of Armour Astir, which is a much different game at the meta level. It isn't just, there are mechs now. It's also that you're a resistance movement fighting against an authority. It's also that you're tracking relationships with other players and NPCs differently. There's gravity clocks. Sort of like—Sort of like—the drive clocks and relationships clocks of Beam Saber mixed together. That stuff is mechanically different and that means the world is—Literally the oncology of the world is different. The metaphysics of the world are different. The way things exist is different, once you make that switch and so for me, you should think about the ways in which if you're reverting to an old move, you should be really thoughtful about how that is framed and how that communicates something about the sort of narrative or theme of the moment that it happens. Do you know what I mean? Does that make sense to people in the call? Am I speaking out of my ass? Okay.

Jack: (cross) Yeah. No, definitely.

Art: (cross) Yeah.

Jack: It's like, on some level, it feels like a key change in music to me. Of like—

Austin: (cross) Yeah!

Jack: You make a key change to do something specific and it's gonna have an effect for as long as the track keeps going, you know? It's going to—It's gonna kind of change the internal grammar of your track in the same way that changing systems is going to change the grammar of the game that you're playing. To mix 3 different metaphors together. (Austin laughs) But you know, to continue with what you were saying there like, to change key again or to drop back into the mode that you were working with earlier in the track feels like such a radical moment but it's not one that can be kind of undertaken lightly. So yeah, if you are going to make that maneuver back into... Every time you, I think it's in part because it happens so infrequently, but whenever you pull up an old character sheet, Austin, it feels amazing as a player.

Austin: Yeah. We did it in spring right. We pull a Marielda sheet...

Jack: (cross) I feel like you've done it a couple of times, right?

Austin: I've done it in Spring, I've done it in Bluff. I've done it where like, "Oh let's bring up the Inspectres sheet because it's fun and for me it's because of—

Jack: Oh yeah, when we played Inspectres.

Austin: Yeah, when we played World Wide Wrestling and there's a scene where Sylvi, I think it's you, I'm like, "Pull up your inspectres sheet."

Sylvi: Right!

Austin: To make a roll because you're playing that other character and for me, it's like those characters are embodying a different world logic like very literally in Bluff City. The world doesn't work for them the same as it does here.

Jack: Right.

Austin: Part of the reason, the current Bluff City arc, right? Part of the thing I love, I fucking love this about this current arc, which is an arc I don't love all said, because we stumble over a lot and the rules are tough for us. But Art, we're playing this game Capers in Bluff City right now, right? And coming from Masks where these characters are interested in, like mechanically interested in, influence, relationships with each other, all the sort of soft power like interpersonal power stuff. That shit's gone. That shit doesn't exist in Blough City, right? What exists in Blough City? How expensive is a car? How expensive is a bicycle?

Art: How many matches come in a box?

Austin: (laughs) How many matches come in a box! How many tiles can you move in a turn?

Jack: (cross) Fucking awful.

Austin: How many points do you have to spend in order to get your kinetic reflective boost or what the fuck ever. Goo generation, for instance, is a thing that exists in Blough City. (laughs)

Art: I wanna say that if anyone's thinking of starting that, there's not a lot of goo generation content in the...

Austin: Ehh, well.

Art: Once you get into it.

Austin: Ehh well, we'll see, you know. But yeah, there is—The thing that I love about that switch is that game is more Blough City to me in a real way, because it's more to—There's more to keep track of, it's less expressive in the same ways or about the same things. It's expressive in other ways. I think combat expressivity shouldn't be taken for granted or underutilized or underappreciated. And it reflects just a different world logic and so pulling those characters *from* Bluff City into Blough City and making that exchange felt is something, you know. There are other ways we could have done it too. I almost used Mutants in The Night for that. Shout outs to Orion Black, by the way, who recently stopped working at Wizards of The Coast and people should go look up Dungeoncommander on Twitter and read their post about why they are no longer at Wizards of the Coast because that situation sucks and it turns out that institutional and systemic racism are not easily wallpapered over by diversity initiatives or what the fuck ever. In any case, Mutants of the Night by Orion is a fantastic kind of Forged in the Dark take on...In my mind, it's all very Night of the Sentinel style, X-men Mutants on the run basically, right? And it's great, but I don't think we had the same—The playbooks that were available didn't map neatly but that similarly would have been a real switch from Masks in tone and energy and one day, we'll get to —do something probably with that game because I think that game rules. But yeah, so think about it in those ways be wary of saying, "Oh, but I really miss X move," or, "Hey, just for fun, let's roll Hack and Slash" or something. And I know it's extremely Austin Walker to be like, "Don't do something because it's fun, do it because it means some shit." But...you're already there to have fun, you could have fun just playing Armour Astir, and it's probably worth—It's probably worth thinking ahead about what those changes look like instead of kind of doing it ad hoc.

Art: If I can do what I think has become almost my brand on Tips at the Table and talk about the classic or not really classic, but the John Wick game, Flux, a game about changing systems but keeping the same characters. They have to like—You have to like use some sort of resource to use an old move and while I don't think you should use that.

Austin: (cross) Yeah. Right.

Jack: (cross) Hm.

Art: It like—It shows you like, it should be rare and meaningful and impactful.

Austin: Mhm. I forgot about the Flux. We should talk about The Flux. I forgot about this. We're not talking about John Wick, the guy who shoots people. We're talking about John Wick, the game developer.

Sylvi: Oh okay! As always, really confused.

Jack: I was confused. Yeah, I was gonna say, is the resource one of those cool golden coins?
(Austin and Sylvi laugh)

Art: Ah, hmm.

Austin: It could be. I feel like Houses of the Blooded is a cool golden coin game.

Jack: Whoa!

Austin: What?

Art: Yeah, House of the Blooded is an incredibly cool storytelling game.

Austin: Oh, are you not familiar with houses of the blooded? (laughs)

Jack: So what happened was that I got the pleasant experience in my brain of someone saying that title for the first time to me.

Austin: Yeah, uh huh.

Art: It's a game that...Okay so, I was younger and less smart when I read that book for the first time, but it starts with this like very long played completely straight like, history lesson.

Jack: Hm!

Art: And at the end, I was like, "Wait a minute, this never happened!" (Austin and Jack laugh)
And it's the fiction of the game world, but I was like—I just like, bought it hook line and sinker the first time I read that book.

Jack: Yeah!

Austin: Oh, that's so good. That's fantastic. I have not—We have not played that game. We have not played most of John Wick's post L5R stuff, I guess. Huh, Art? Maybe you have, I have not. I have not.

Art: No, despite him coming up with some pretty cool stuff in that time period.

Austin: Yeah, yeah, ugh.

Art: And then getting sucked right back into the same...Now he's just making Seventh Sea. Again.

Austin: Wait, is he back on Seventh Sea?

Art: Yeah, he like bought the rights and did a very successful Kickstarter and he spent like four years now I think, just making Seventh Sea.

Austin: That's wild.

Art: But Seventh Sea the card game is coming back. We'll talk about it later.

Austin: Ooh. Yeah, we'll talk off mic.

Art: Yeah.

Question 6 [00:45:46]

Austin: Um...That's so funny. Alright, um, alright. I hope that that helps. Next question comes in...We got two, I wanna say, gaelic names in a row here? Enif and—and—Hm. Hmm. Let me see if I can get this right. Saoirse [pronounced sur-shuh]? Is that correct?

Sylvi: Yeah.

Art: Yeah, that's how the Hollywood actress pronounces it.

Austin: Okay. Saoirse writes in and this is a little long but that's why the font is so small. So, apologies.

"I know you've all received questions of the like over the last few years but I am really having trouble coming to terms with the idea of letting my tabletop roleplaying game character go. I come from a tradition of writing RP background for 20 years." Sorry, "I come from a traditional *writing* RP background for 20ish years and they've always been not original characters. Therefore the character would always continue to exist. I would have fanfic, fanart, etcetra to still consume, even if canon material ended. So I'm utterly unfamiliar with the idea of letting go of a character I've played over the years or for over 3 years. I'm not a real writer." Which I disagree with here, by the way.

"Therefore, I've never finished a story. I know you're all big believers in starting new things—That starting new things feels good and ending things feels good. But in all honesty, it genuinely distresses me and the idea makes me want to cry. My GM and some other players are real writers and they like stories closing, whilst I could stay loving a character forever. Again, it's a bit of a weird one for y'all, I know, because fanfic-slash-fanart exists of your characters. So that's nice and if I could commission my character forever, that would be great but sadly I am poor."

(laughs awkwardly) Which is...Saoirse then says, "haha" which I'm not laughing at them, I'm laughing with. "I have tried out other characters in minigames, even minigames that go on over months and even though I've gotten good feedback, I've never formed as much as an attachment. I know the group's intent is to try to come to an final act but I'm not sure narratively I feel ready, especially as some secrets that came out about my character from the GM has

caused a tonal shift that doesn't totally fit their arc in a satisfying way and my GM regrets that a lot, or that I will ever really be able to let go. I've tried to come up with other characters like I said, but nothing has really felt the same and the idea of letting him go genuinely terrifies me—slash-makes me wonder if I would want to continue to roleplay on tabletop games again, despite how much I love it because I don't know if I could experience that loss again.

My GM once pondered whether there was a way to make them exist beyond or past the game but short of me winning the lottery to fund commissions, I don't know that that could happen. Especially as I think others want to move on from the current game and setting entirely, so it's not like they'd pop back in eventually."

Um. I think this is a tough situation, and it's definitely one in which I think I have a different relationship to. Though not entirely distinct in the sense that, I definitely know that feeling of like getting a little—getting sad because you're closing the book on something. I like closing the book on things, but it doesn't mean that it doesn't feel sad. What it means is that I kind of like that – (laughs) Surprise, Austin kind of likes feeling sad sometimes! I do kind of—I do kind of enjoy that. Um, but I also do think that there are ways in this scenario for *you* to continue having ownership over that character and thinking about that character without it feeling like the end of the campaign is the end of the character, if that makes sense.

For me, that's like, keep writing about that character, right? There's nothing that says when the GM ends the game and y'all come to a conclusion, that the character's life ends there. Outside of the character's life ending there, I suppose. And even if that happens, there's lots of room for you to continue in your spare time writing about things that were not done at the table, right? I'm sure that this character had had a life in between whatever the focus of the sessions were. And I know that that's like kind of putting it back on you, to some degree. Uh, but if this character means that much to you, you can keep him alive in your own writing and part of writing fanfic and being in that space, you know kind of what you gesture at, is those stories don't need to be concluded ever. You could spend a year writing kind of vignettes, stories, one offs about your character and the world that they're in, even inventing new characters, if that was something you're interested in, you know, easily. You could fill a year every day doing that and not run out of stuff to do. And it sounds like you've done that with other characters in the past. So for me, it seems like one solution would be to transition how you think about this character from that kind of main tabletop game to one of the characters you write about separately. You could also try to find someone in the game who's interested in continuing the story in a different format. Moving to a written RP format, asynchronous, whatever, however you want to do that, and continuing a story in that way. It sounds like maybe those other players are ready to wrap up and at that point, it is a difficult thing, right? It is a difficult thing for people to be like, "Well, I'm done with this, I want to do something else." So I definitely have sympathy for you there. I'm curious for the rest of the folks on the call if you've felt like this as you've wrapped up characters before if you have any advice for Saoirse.

[pause]

Jack: I think that like, it sounds—it sounds stressful and I want to just like begin by acknowledging that it sounds—it sounds like a really unpleasant process to be going through. You know, to be recognizing that this story is coming to an end and not wanting to let go of the character. The thing I was thinking of when Austin—Before Austin gave his answer was, exactly the same, was you are the—Not you are the character, that's not how it works necessarily. Like you—

Austin: (cross) You're Clem.

Jack: You are in charge of that character's— (laughs) Oh man. You are in charge of that character. You are in charge of that character's story. I definitely find myself thinking of fanfiction as something that other people make and that's something that other people do. I read it and I enjoy it but I'm not the person who makes it, and I have to remind myself that if there is a story that is compelling to me or a character that I like that is compelling to me, that it's like, "No, you can just do that. You can work on that. You can develop those stories and those ideas." I think the other thing that I was thinking of, and I was trying to find an example of this and I can't. So it's kind of a half-half-solution, is if part of the ritual of tabletop is what appeals to you about this character or is what rounds that character out, it might be worth looking into one-shots or short-form games or solo games about saying goodbye to a character.

Austin: Ohh, good answer.

Jack: Because I know. I *know* that those have been made. Um, and I wish I could give you some actual examples but I'm sure there are some phenomenal indie tabletop games or rituals or processes about exploring a goodbye to a character, whether or not that's a departure on travels or a death or just setting the character aside for the time being. And sometimes when I'm feeling anxious about things, having that little aspect of ritual helps me move through it and work through those ideas. So maybe looking to see if there are games about saying goodbye would be what would be helpful to you if you decided you did want to move on from the character in that way.

Austin: Yeah. I...It's tough because I kind of—Part of me wants to give a certain answer that I think maybe is too glib, which is—I'm still gonna cue it up and you can sit with it. Which is, like trust in your ability to fall in love again with one of your own characters. (Jack laughs) And I say fall in love in a very intentional way because being broken-hearted every time feels like it's the only time it's happened to this degree. And every breakup I've been through feels like the end of the world and that I'll never feel this way, and I never do. I feel different ways in the future. I feel like, moved in different ways and compelled and engaged with and invested in and attracted all that stuff differently each time, and there is no capturing lightning in a bottle, right? There is no regaining what you've lost necessarily and that's—Confronting that is really terrifying. But it doesn't mean that general verb of loving someone or loving a character or loving what you do or loving a place you live or any of that stuff, that more general verb remains accessible to you. And in some ways, it's—Your perspective is very honest about the loss of this character, and what he means to you. What I don't—What I hope that you are able to understand or you're able

to feel more than understand, because the way you've written gives me a pretty clear insight that you've very clearly understand the situation, but I hope that you can get to a place where what you feel in your heart is, "I will love a character again." Whatever that character is will not be him and will not take up that perspective or position exactly, but you will surprise yourself how much you love a different character again one day. Not—Or to the degrees, the new ways in which someone moves you, the new ways in which you're like, "Oh, I never explored this type of thing."

And that condolence is like, difficult because it's not tomorrow. It's not like, "Well, here's the—Take two of these and call me in the morning." There's not...It's not actionable in that way except to say if you continue to let yourself do this and push through what will probably be a very difficult transitional period from this character into new ones and I say ones because you probably won't love the next one as much as you love this one or in the same ways, and it'll be difficult and frustrating and maybe you take a break from tabletop gaming for a while, but I'm confident in your ability to have that degree of investment again or that type of investment again or a similar type or degree of investment again, because you've proven you've done it once. And very few things in the world are truly so singular that you'll never be able to even approach them again. It's not to say there aren't great losses or that you know, them being— Things being individual does mean that they are not fully remappable, but it doesn't mean that you have lost that capacity. And again, I know that kind of sounds aphroismistic or something but like, I do truly believe that given the degree of investment you have now, that it is possible for you to get there again. And it's important to give yourself the—Not to demand of yourself that you do it immediately. That you force yourself to do it because it will take some time, for sure. (pauses)

Art: The quote I reach for about this is, "Everytime you fall in love with a kitten, you put an old cat to sleep."

Austin: Oof.

Art: And...

Jack: Art!

Art: Yeah.

Jack: No, you're right. I'm just—You're right, I'm just protesting

Art: Um, I mean, or you don't, I guess, but that probably means something bad happened to you. And it's like...It's still worth it, you know?

Austin: Mhm.

Art: I love...I love all my pets and they're all fleeting and so to with tabletop characters. And I mean, if you want to play the kind of game where you play the same characters forever, I'm sure there are groups out there who are still playing the same characters they were playing 20 years

ago, right? You just have to find that group and then start over, but you know. (Austin laughs) I mean it's a new group. You can probably just run back the same idea.

Austin: Yeah, but that's not the same, you know.

Art: That's not the same.

Austin: That character's lived. You can get an interstitial going where your characters are jumping from universe to universe. Then you can bring him back in.

Art: Yeah. Um, but yeah. I think this is a very natural part of the life cycle and you're either gonna stay feeling like this and it's gonna be tough or you won't. I used to be very attached to characters and now I'm less so. I mean, I still get very attached to them but I'm—you know, I'm already like, what's season 7 gonna be?

Jack: Right.

Austin: Right. Right, right totally. Sylvi, I don't know if you have thoughts here.

Sylvi: Yeah. I don't know if I have anything to add that wouldn't be just like saying something that someone said already, but I definitely understand this feeling. Like I remember—To go back to talk about Marielda again, I remember ending that was really hard for me because I liked Aubrey so much. And then like, it got easier as time went on, partially because I had a thing going on where I had Ephrim to come back to after we did Twilight Mirage like, I knew that that would still be waiting for me. But like, going through Twilight Mirage and doing like a full season of Hieron and having to take a break from that made it definitely easier when it came time to say goodbye to characters. So it was—Counterproductive it may seem like, cause you're like, "Ugh, I feel so bad about this." Jump like right back in if you...Or maybe not right back in, but jump in again soon and try and like...Just—I don't know. It's just—I find that it helps. Like again, I feel like people have said this already. It helps you get used to that feeling the more that you do it and the more that you like...Find, like find the way that you like to make characters is kind of the thing.

Austin: Yeah, that's a really good angle on that, right? It's like, part of what it sounds like is that you—This is a unique experience for you, in a sense, and that means that it might be hard to believe that you could do this skill again. This is a skill you've been practicing and it's really easy to be like, "This was a fluke. (laughs) I'll never be able to create a character like this again." And it's—I know that it's not necessarily actionable again but like, Sylvi's right that you can work on that skill. You can do it again. You can jump back in the saddle and keep it at it right? Um...

Sylvi: Yeah, I mean I would hope so. I said it so, I hope that was right. (Austin laughs) But yeah, no, I do like—Weirdly enough, I would kind of compare it to learning how to play guitar. It gets easier when you build up calluses.

Austin: Ohh. Ooh. Damn ,we're all on one right now!

Sylvi: Just, oh, everybody's got aphorisms today!

Austin: Yeah, we're dropping it. (laughs)

Sylvi: Yeah, but like it's true. I think that it's gonna suck first time and suck less the next time and so on and so forth.

Question 7 [01:01:06]

Austin: Agreed. Alright. Well, thank you for the good question and good luck with your character. Let us know how it goes. Uh...Josh writes in and says "Hi friends, I'm running a Masks game for me and my 6 friends and I've run into a problem. I think I've accidentally pushed up one of my players as the main character. Mainly because he's the player who has min-maxed this character to allow for more success and B, is the most socially dominating person in the group. How should I combat this kind of thing where one character is completely dominating the story and gameplay?"

(Sylvi smacks lips)

That sounded like a thought.

Sylvi: Yeah, I mean, I think the first one and this is like kind of, uhh maybe a no-brainer, but it's like, try and just directly ask the other people who aren't as, how did you say it? Socially dominating. Ask them like specifically, what does your character do? What do you do here? Find ways to make the focus go on them in a way that doesn't make them uncomfortable but feels like they're in, you know. They're valued. Cause I know I've been the person who—No one wants to feel like they're being called on by teacher, but like sometimes, there's a gentler way to do that and it can lead to really good stuff and it can help move the spotlight around.

Austin: I think that's a huge part for me, definitely. It's your job as the GM to call on people by name to frame scenes where it makes sense for other characters to take the lead. Um. For NPCs to specifically want to get the opinion of, especially in Masks where influence is such an important element, to have a character want to wield their influence over or against other different player characters and I knew this was an old question because I dug deep into questions today for some of them. I wanted to get some older stuff in. Josh is in the chat. Josh says, "This is my question"—Oh. "This is my question from 3 years ago." And Josh says...(Sylvi laughs) "Spoiler alert: this guy was a fascist and we kicked him out."

Sylvi: OH MY GOD!

Jack: Wow! Oh my god, this is the best—This is the best twist, right? Ok, we have to start asking older questions but only ones we somehow determine will have a great twist.

Austin: A great final resolution. I'm glad that he's out of the game now.

Sylvi: Holy shit!

Austin: I should say not everyone...Not everyone wants...

Jack: (cross) Not this, okay. I was gonna say.

Austin: (cross) Go ahead, What were you gonna say?

Jack: Here's the answer...

Austin: Uh-huh.

Jack: They're a fascist. Kick them out of the game. (Austin laughs) I'm Jack from the future.

Austin: That's not always true for all scene-stealers! Or all spotlight-

Art: They're a fascist, like all charismatic people. (Jack and Austin laugh)

Sylvi: I thought we were saying we weren't doing much discourse anymore.

Austin: Oh jeez.

Jack: Holy shit. That's so good, wow.

Sylvi: What a twist, holy fuck.

Austin: Art, do you have thoughts about this as someone who I think has probably played characters who feel like the main character before?

Art: Yeah, it's—I mean, it only helps if the person's on your side but like tell them just to—

Austin: Not a fascist?

Art: Yeah. On your side narratively and...

Jack: Ideologically?

Art: Ideologically. (Art and Austin laugh)

Austin: Morally, yeah.

Art: Which is like, people should—As a player, you should feel—Like, it is the GM's job to get everyone involved but it's also every player's job to get every player involved.

Austin: Right, yes. Yes.

Art And if you gotta pull that person aside and be like, "Hey."

Austin: That's the job sometimes.

Art: Yeah, sometimes. Sometimes, you need to make someone else look good and that's just as important as...It's Masks, so I guess being the superman, you know?

Austin: Right, right. Sometimes you gotta like—In wrestling terminologies, sometimes you gotta put someone else over, you know?

Art: Yeah.

Austin: Yeah, and so then for what it's worth, it's not—It should be clear, I hope it's clear, that like that's been my job before. I think I've talked to Art about that. I've definitely talked to other players about like, “Hey, just can you make sure not to talk over person X?” Or, “Hey, I know that this scenario means that your character should do XYZ but let's make sure to remember that those other characters aren't NPCs. Those are players and they need some space to do ABC.” That is part of what it means to be a good GM and ideally, you should have a good rapport with your players such that they know it's not a judgment of them or a personal failing or something like that. It's about making sure that everyone at the table has a good time, you know? And if they can't understand that then...kick them out of the game for being a fascist. (laughs) Um...so.

Art: No matter what their real politics are.

Austin: Well, listen. If what you're there to do is like—I'm—If you're like, “Hey, can you just make sure in the future, you know person A was really trying to have a scene about that and you really like really hogged it up a little bit.” If they're like, “Yeah, it's 'cause im better than them.” Then you might have a fascist.

Jack: “Genetically,” and you're like “Whoa!”

Austin: Whoa! Slow down buddy! What happened? And then, you know what you got in your hands. You gotta deal with it. Not every asshole is a fascist, to be clear. Some...

Sylvi: But every fascist is an asshole!

Austin: That's what they say! (Austin and Jack laugh) Ohh, God. Incredible. Eliza says that there's also a question that they sent in similar about crosstalk, which is true and I almost made the connection. Maybe we'll come back to crosstalk question in a future podcast.

Art: If nothing like this has ever happened to you as a tabletop player, you're living a charmed life.

Austin: Oh, absolutely. Yeah no, 100%.

Sylvi: Yeah.

Austin: Yeah, 100%. This just happens. It sucks, especially if you're playing at like a game store and you just kinda put out feelers for like, "Oh yeah, I really wanna run blank," and then next thing you know...

Art: The game store... Lets call it Jester's Playhouse.

Austin: Let's just call it Jester's Playhouse, for instance.

Jack: When you make the mistake of accidentally signing up to a game with the protagonist.

Austin: Yeah, with someone's who's like, "That's it. I'm gonna have all the moves. I'm gonna min-max my character. I'm gonna quote rules at the character until I get it the way I want it, and I'm gonna talk over other people's scenes and interject myself in their scenes, even when I'm not there." It sucks. Anyway, Jester's Playhouse, rest in peace.

Sylvi: I would just say also, if you do one, an easy way to spot fascists at the table. Just don't play with people wearing Hugo Boss. Alright, let's move on.

Question 8 [01:07:39]

Austin: (laughing) Last question comes in from Riley, who says: "I'm a tabletop designer and I'm often drawn to thinking about crunch in games." Which, we should be clear what we mean is—I guess Riley continues: "The way multiple systems can connect together and make a satisfying click of serotonin in my brain but I know sometimes it can spiral out of control and be a mess of rolling dice and vaguely hoping. What do you think about crunch in games? When does it become too much? When is it not enough? What do you gloss over in favor of more narrative fun?"

Um. Art thought this was a game about crunch in games, like exploitative labor practices.

Art: Yeah. Which I didn't think was as big a problem in publishing, especially independent.

Austin: It still happens. It still happens. Independent publishing has the thing of underpaying for the work.

Art: Mm.

Austin: That's the big one. There was some discourse about recently was uh... People being like, "But I can't make this game if I don't underpay my freelancers," and those people not just being like, "I guess I shouldn't do this then or I should give myself a longer time frame and save up money so I can pay people right instead of taking advantage of them." Anyway, that's not the sort of crunch we're talking about. We're talking about crunchiness. We're talking about mechanics. Uh, you know—

Art: Crunch versus fluff.

Austin: Crunch versus fluff. That's the old binary that we used to talk about in the old days. Um, I don't know. Let's open to the first. What do y'all think about this stuff?

(pause)

Sylvi: I don't really like crunchy games. I just—There's something that just like, my eyes like glaze over.

Austin: Yeah.

Sylvi: Um, I think it is just hard for me to like sort of get into stuff that is very dense but specifically, if a game has a bunch of rules about the weight of my inventory...

Austin: Mm.

Sylvi: I'm gonna leave. (Austin laughs) I'm gonna leave! I don't need to know how much a bedroll weighs. I just need to know that I have one. Um. I have played like very crunchy games in the past. I used to play a lot of World of Darkness, surprising no one. (Art laughs) Um...and I think it just sort of like—Yeah, I know. I think it just sort of like got that out of me in a weird way because that is like, I remember playing Hunters and that's just like a full sheet of like a bunch of things that you can put points into that might come up and like, you—It's all—It's—I can't even explain it. It just gives me a headache and so, I think part of it is I've just built up a sort of like aversion to it over the years.

Austin: Yeah, fair.

Sylvi: But I also just find those very hard to get people who are like—I play games with a lot of people who aren't like super deep into games like outside of Friends at the Table. And so like, it's really hard to get people to sit down and like read through a super thick player's manual or whatever.

Austin: Yeah, yeah.

Sylvi: It's way more easy—It's way easier to be like, "You roll 2 six-sided dice when you wanna do a thing and I'll tell you which stat it corresponds to." You know?

Austin: My crunchy era was very much in college. Which, for two reasons. One is because I think we had GMs all around us who liked crunchier games. I played a lot of Call of Cthulhu. I played a lot of 3.5. Were you in those Call of Cthulhu games, Art? You were in some of them.

Art: I played at least a couple. I played enough Call of Cthulhu games to know that I don't care for Call of Cthulhu.

Austin: For basic roleplay? Yeah.

Art: Yeah.

Austin: You know, we played a number of editions of DnD actually, now that I think about it. We've played...God, we played a lot of games and many of them were crunchy in that way. I mean, frankly I ran L5R for years and that's a crunchier game than anything we play on this podcast. Um, and the other half of that was not just who we surrounded ourselves with but it was having the free time to stare at a character sheet and look at rulebooks and splatbooks and, you know, add-ons and try to like game it in that really fun way of like, "Ooh, if I combine this with this, I can get this item, and if I can get this perk, go to this in-game school, etcetera. I can really make this thing just blow up in a really cool way." Um, and there was some fun to be had with that system or with that style of system.

The thing that's tough here is like, what do I think about it is a different question than would I do it on the show. And I think we've been pretty clear that like Lancer is a game that I think looks sick and I'll never run it on the show unless it's like Gloom Haven and a video game version of it comes out one day that automates everything. In which case, I would love to stream that game, you know?

Um. I think my question ends up being, what...What...This is like, if you want here's like a quick Austin Walker cheat code. Ready? When I was doing my master's, there's a book that I read that was super influential for me. It's by a Canadian sociologist and historian named Bonnie Honig called *Democracy and the Foreigner* and that book opens—It's a great book. The book is about—The book—Here's what the book is about. The book opens by saying, a lot of contemporary discourse is how do we solve or address the difficulties and problems that arise around the issue of immigration? Around the issue of the foreign or foreign people. And she says, instead of asking that question, let's instead ask, what does the concept of the foreigner solve for society? What does it put the foreigner to use to do? And so, you know, what she ends up doing is looking at like, this notion of the foreign founder. A lot of cultures have this idea of someone coming in from the outside, solving things, creating a culture, and then leaving. And she looks at these ideas across a bunch of different cultures and a bunch of different kind of examples, both real or like you know, pseudo-historical. Like Russia has a very specific foreign founder myth. Philosophical, Rousseau has a very clear outsider comes in to set the walls right and then leaves. And then historical also, with the way that Martin Luther King Jr. has been mythologized as someone who shows up, does what needs to be done, and then gets killed is another way the foreign founder ends and then you don't have to worry about him anymore, right? Culturally we just, hup, and he did it and now we don't have to worry about what he actually said or meant. We can just close the book on him. And Dorothy from *The Wizard of Oz* is also someone who comes in, settles something, and then moves on in the cultural imagination. Obviously, there are additional *Wizard of Oz* books in which that complicates that, but that's the story of *The Wizard of Oz*, right? Here she is. She makes everything good. She leaves.

And that formation, what does this thing do? What does this solve? And again, the way that Bonnie Honig is talking is not like, "And that means it's good now!" It's solution is solution is

being used as a verb or as like a, what does it solve. Not as a moral judgment. Not as an evaluative. There's not a superlative. These are solutions. It's a solution the way that white-out is a solution or the way that bleach is a solution, right? Like yeah, you could bleach something. It doesn't mean bleach is innately good.

And I use *that* formation: what does blank do for us? What does it solve? What problems are we utilizing it to address? Way more often than the opposite of, how do I solve this thing? I look at what is already being used and so, this is a case where I say, "Well, what does crunch give us?" What is it that—Why are we—Why do games want crunch? Why do game players—Why are they drawn to crunch? What is the crunch solving for us when we put it in games? And because—The answer is something, right? Lots of people like that. They like to have lots of additional moves. They like to have lots of abilities and spell lists and lots of people want there to be a section in the game that talks about grappling or talks about the weight of a bedroll in your backpack. They might not even use those rules but they think that it's a better game for it being there, right? And so what is being solved by that? And you could open—You could write a thesis around this very easily and to answer it directly is to get into speculation. I know speaking to myself though where it's less speculative, when I was a younger player, what it solved for me was a sort of magic trick. A sort of convincing of that—The illusion would hold. When I played *Cyberpunk 2020* or when I read those books, I looked at the rules for *Friday Night Firefight*, this incredibly complex system in which you're rolling dice to see where bullets land in the middle of a gun fight. (Jack laughs) Like literally like, not just is it a hit or not, but like which part of the enemy body did it hit?

Jack: Or does it go over there?

Austin: Right. Their left shoulder or their right shoulder. That exact type of thing, right? I was being—I was looking for something to convince me that this was a real world or that this was a world that was—A game that was taking simulation seriously. And I wanted that for lots of reasons and lots of psychological reasons and lots of, you know, immaterial philosophical reasons what I wanted as a player at that time. But knowing that now, I can think, is there another better way to address that feeling or to address that desire for simulcra in game design? And the answer is, you can probably do it without needing the system of rolling whether or not you shoot someone in the left foot or the right shoulder but that is what it was solving for me.

And if you can get to that point as a player, you can identify games you like more and that will fit those needs more and as a designer, you can say why am I compelled by crunch? What is it I'm really getting at here? What is the experience I want to deliver to a player beyond, I think there should be lots of special moves for melee fighting versus long-range fighting or something like that. And once you get to that point, you can start to actually address the core concern which is, what is adding crunch to your game doing for you? Beside just giving you access to a certain type of player who only wants to play crunchy games but like as a player yourself, what are you trying to enable by adding layers of complexity? What are you trying to address by adding a bunch of different social systems 'cause crunch is not just about combat, right? You can have lots of complexity and crunchiness around other aspects of characterization. Of—Of—Of

mechanical interaction. Sylvi said inventory stuff. I think about *Torchbearer's* inventory stuff is very crunchy but I think it's actually super smooth in comparison to a lot of other games that track inventory stuff. Um. Sorry for that long rambling rant but I hope that that gives you an answer that's more compelling than, I like it or I don't like it, because the real answer about that is well, what are you doing with it? Yeah, I like mustard but what's the sandwich? (Sylvi and Austin laugh) This is my dipping mustard, but go off.

Sylvi: *Oh my god.*

Jack: All time great tweet.

Austin: All time great tweet. (laughing) These are my dipping grappling rules, but go off.

Jack: (laughs) Yeah, I don't know. The stuff that's interesting—You know, you talking about what it does. I think—I don't like—I don't like crunchiness in tabletop games but I *do* quite like it in board games.

Austin: Mm.

Jack: And I was trying to work out where the difference is there for me, and I think it's that really satisfying crunch in board games appeals to me because of its tactility. Like when you're playing *Azul*, or when you're playing *Agricola*, or when you're playing like these games that are about setting up interesting things and then developing them. Which is actually very similar to developing a character sheet in a very crunchy rules heavy game where you're like, "Oh, I can combo this thing and that thing or I can work at like—" Keith does this really well during *Partizan*, right? Or was it—What game were we playing where Keith basically works out that he can start generating +1s seemingly indefinitely? Is it *Partizan*?

Austin: It's *Partizan* and it's possibly also *Hieron*.

Sylvi: (cross) Yeah, there was some wacky *Fero*.

Austin: (cross) Because *Fero* is just OP. *Fero* is just so OP at the end of that game.

Sylvi: Yeah.

Jack: And like for me, the tactility is the big thing there. Which is like, for the most part, when we play tabletop games, we're not playing them together. We're not rolling dice and so, I feel like I bounce off those systems of crunch so easily and I think even if we were in the same place and we were just rolling dice, I would probably bounce off them in the same way. *But* if I've got a thick cardboard board in front of me and I've got a lot of little transparent squares and I can push them over there and I know that if I turn over these three cards in the right order, I can double the number of those squares in like a really satisfying way. That's what tickles that bit of my brain for me.

Austin: That makes sense. I think that's a great—And I think there's a world in which if we were playing Lancer with minis together at a table, I bet we'd have a blast, you know what I mean?

Jack: Oh yeah. Hell yeah, That'd be great!

Austin: Yeah, exactly.

Jack: We could pretend we were knocking them over when explosions went off. Stuff like that. It's great.

Austin: Yeah, see? This is the fun stuff. This is what crunch enables. What I think is interesting too is someone in the chat, Author X and Josh in the chat, are both talking about Forged in the Dark games and Blades in the Dark being actually crunchier than many other games and I was actually talking with my roommate about this a few months ago about Forged in the Dark games. I guess this is like...I don't mind sharing this. I've said this before and I guess disclosure because I talked about *Torchbearer* earlier but I live with Thor who works at the Burning Wheel company. Burning Wheel Headquarter, is that— Art, is that right?

Art: Um. They certainly refer to themselves as that. I don't know if that's what their company is called, but yeah.

Austin: That that's what their company is called, yeah. Whatever it is. About Forged in the Dark, and we were talking about how the resolution mechanic in Forged in the Dark has like a billion steps, right? It's like, alright well, what are you doing? Alright, what do you want to—what verb are you using? What action are you using? Then I as the GM say, this is the positioning, this is the effect. Then at some point—Which are two big things to determine. You have to determine you those. You determine magnitude and scale and, you know, quality and tier and all of that stuff that I have worked out shortcuts to do that math very quickly while playing and to prep for it ahead of time. But there's a lot of steps versus some other systems like *Burning Wheel* or *Torchbearer* or *Mouse Guard* which theoretically have more complex feel or have the reputation of complexity and crunchiness but resolution in one of those games is very quick. Resolution in those games is like you gather a dice pool, you roll those dice. Did you succeed or not? There's no positioning or effect. There's, you know, not as much in terms of checking, you know, other additional things.

And yet—And this is the part I'm getting to, for me, I would have a much harder time running Burning Wheel than I do running Blades in the Dark because just the way my brain is wired. And I think part of it is that position and effect are really simple for my narratively minded brain to internalize it, because I'm already thinking about those things when I talk about camerawork or when I think about whether or not a character seems winded while they're doing something. The sort of mind's eye theater is already running for me constantly in that way that I know that if someone is being chased across a rooftop and being shot at and they're trying to leap from one rooftop to another, that I'm already thinking about that desperately. especially if they're like security—high level security guards and this is like a low tier, you know, smuggler or something. Like I've already done that calculus and so it flows really naturally versus some of the stuff that

comes up in what we think of as more crunchy games. You know, Capers was so difficult for us to run because of how much backchecking. Ok, how do you spend a boost? How many points does it cost, etcetera. Even though that's a game where I think the core mechanic, the resolution in Capers, is so good. I don't know, Art, if you had that same feeling but—

Art: Oh, I love the resolution and the book was so tricky.

Austin: Yes.

Art: And it's—And it's—I wanna, I wanna blame this on my age and I don't think it's real. I'm like, I'm old. I don't wanna learn new things anymore.

Austin: Yeah

Art: But like, there are definitely people older than me that go out and play crunchier shit than I can imagine. I remember I was playing L5R back before—back when game stores were real.

Austin: Yeah.

Art: And there was this group of people behind me who were playing some like, super involved World War 2 miniatures game.

Austin: Sure.

Art: And it caught my attention because one particularly unsavory person yelled Bonzai every time they went to attack with their Japanese navy.

Austin: (groans) So you were naturally like, “What the fuck is going on behind me?”

Art: Yeah and so I like half-investigated it and you know, I've been at conventions that had giant tournaments for stuff like that and I guess now that I think about it, the current LFG5R might be the crunchiest game I've ever played.

Austin: Mm.

Art: It's mind—It's honestly mind numbing and I use that way more literally than I often do. Like it's... So I guess it's not that I can't learn complicated games anymore. More than like I just don't want to.

Austin: Yeah.

Art: For like, this part of my life. And I guess it is like I—Same thing, you know, Jack said about board games that like, yeah I'll do it for a card game if I can go and like hang out with people and do it in like a space, that's one thing. But like, for this it feels very different and it's—and—I guess, I wanna admire the crunchiness of the game.

Austin: Yes.

Art: I want the mechanic to entrance me. In the way that *Burning Wheel* does. In a way that, if we're talking about—*Blades in the Dark* feels like a magic trick in a way that like, looking at *goo* generation doesn't tickle my brain in the same way. (Austin laughs) It's like one of my quarantine or my lockdown projects is I've been building an *Magic the Gathering* deck.

Austin: Mm.

Art: And *Magic the Gathering* is the same way for me. It's a game that feels so, so fluid when you're really like—you really like, look at it in a way that a lot of other stuff isn't.

Austin: Yeah, yeah. I guess to answer that last—the um—To answer one more thing here, I think that the thing is...When do I think it's the right amount? Changes based on where it is in the game. Like I'm really interested in um...Like *Armour Astir* has a system, like I already said earlier called gravity clocks, which are sort of like drive clocks or bonds. And those aren't like super crunchy necessarily, but that's a system about something that isn't just about what I've seen crunch do before. And so one of the ways that I like crunch is when it's innovative in a space that is interesting to me. I think about when we first started playing indie games, Art. In college, things like *With Great Power*, where um.

Art: Mmhm.

Austin: Or you know for the show, *Technoir*, right? Where it's like, yo. This thing is—has some complicated math to keep track of or there is some—It is not just 2d6. It is not just *Powered by The Apocalypse*. It's not just, you know, even something like basic roleplay, which is crunchy but not. The resolution mechanic is still pretty simple. You're rolling a d100, is it under your skill? Yes or no. Which, if you've not played that game, you're looking at me like I'm speaking nonsense. Rolling a d100 and checking if the result is under your skill, I understand seems strange. But looking at something like *With Great Power* where there's this whole array of cards you're playing is like very complex and a lot to keep track of. Um, but was doing something and trying to simulate something that was not just a physical space. It was trying to simulate the arc of a genre. the same thing with *Technoir's* dice pool—uh, dice trading system was very much about trying to simulate the logic of noir stories and that was compelling to me, even if it was a lot harder to track than just a simple 2d6. You know, is it greater than 10 or a 7 or 9. And that to me, can move me, is like, are you just—Are you repeating crunch that you found elsewhere? Are you doing this because you think this is what good, you know, crunch looks like? Or are you doing it because you found something kind of crunchy that gets at simulating or I mean, simulating in a broad sense here. Simulating does not mean representing accurately. Simulating means representing, and that you can have simulation that is not trying to—Simulations are like maps. Sometimes they look like the place you're looking at and sometimes they look nothing like the place you're looking at. Some maps that have no interest in representing something in a way that's visually identical to what you're looking at and sometimes they do. And so simulations are the same way and so if you're doing something as a compelling or fresh simulation and to do that, you feel like you need to develop or bring crunch to the table, then you can crunch the

table. Our new chip review podcast. We're eating chips and we're saying whether they're good or not. I hope everything signed up for that and is ready for it.

Jack: I got a new theme coming.

Austin: Great. (laughs)

Art: It's all just building up to the episode with those...What are those Canadian chips?

Austin: Which one?

Jack: Ruffles?

Art: They have a very—No, they have a very specific name.

Jack: *All-dressed*.

Art: (cross) All-dressed, yeah.

Austin: (cross) Oh, I would love some all-dressed.

Sylvi: (cross) Oh, yeah.

Jack: Yeah.

Austin: I would eat some all-dressed chips so hard right now. Ugh, I miss them. They're so good.

Art: Episode 50. We have to build to it.

Austin: Oh, we'll get there.

Art: We're gonna be way past sour cream and onion.

Sylvi: I might just go get some tonight, honestly.

Austin: (cross) Ugh, god damn.

Jack: (cross) Show off!

Austin: Damn it.

Sylvi: Yeah, yeah! Honestly. No, precisely. That is the entire point of saying that.

Jack: Ugh.

Austin: God.

Jack: You can get them in the UK. They're kind of—They're not quite—I'm not making a one to one thing here 'cause I know it's not true, but you can get prawn cocktail which is kind of similar.

Austin: Okay. Ugh...

Jack: If you're a UK listener and you want to know what all-dressed *kinda* tastes like...

Sylvi: I don't even know what it is, all-dressed. I just think it's like the rest of the flavors, they're on there. It's good though. It tastes great. It sort of makes my brain tingle a little.

Jack: Yeah, uh huh. Spicy.

Sylvi: Yeah, it's like a tiny bit.

Jack: It's like [unintelligible] if it was a crisp.

Sylvi: Exactly!

Austin: god.

Jack: Alllll-dressed.

Sylvi: Sorry, we're spoiling it all now.

Austin: It's fine. It's fine. It's fine. You know. If you tip at the 5 thousand dollar level, that's how we'll get...We will not. Don't do that.

Art: Yeah, don't. Don't.

Austin: It's a joke. It's not real. What is real is that you can send your questions to tipsatthetable@gmail.com. We have a couple more Tips episodes to get caught up on. Um. So look forward to those in the coming weeks. We have a lot of catch up stuff to come but we're still kind of coming out of our post-Kingdom haze, but look forward to some stuff. I have some cool ideas for some live games coming up. Live at the table games, not live—Not live show, which seems to be off for the foreseeable future because of lockdown.

Art: I'm so glad we didn't sign a contract with a venue like I really wanted us to do in February.

Austin: Oh my god. We were really close to making some choices there.

Sylvi: Oh my god.

Art: That money would just be gone.

Austin: Uh huh. That would be tens of—I wanna just say for people listening, it costs a fortune to get a live venue, it turns out. And it like—A lot of money especially if you wanna seat the amount of people that we wanted to seat because it turns out seating 50 people, not big of a deal. Seating 200 or whatever is tough because it doesn't really go—That middle ground between, I

wanna seat a few people to, I wanna seat hundreds of people really jumps. It really jumps after like 100 to like 500 and that's expensive. So.

Art: Yeah, and I bet we wouldn't have gotten the insurance. I bet someone would've been like, "Do you want some sort of catastrophe insurance?" And I would've been like, "No, what's gonna happen?"

Austin: And then 15,000 dollars would disappear.

Art: Uh-huh. So, sorry to whoever did do that. Whoever did not do the...

Austin: Yeah.

Jack: For the same person that we told that their player is a fascist and you should kick them out, also a pandemic is coming.

Austin: (laughs) Buckle up.

Jack: It's going to be really weird.

Art: There's nothing you can do about it.

Austin: No, no. Please don't become that person who...Actually you know, maybe if you could note—

Jack: Pick up a N95 mask while the supply chain is still good. (Austin laughs)

Austin: And you know, maybe suggest that one of the things that the Trump administration might do is completely gut an already underfunded, you know, CDC.

Jack: Pandemic response team, yeah.

Austin: And also throw away some material that would have helped them in this crisis.

Art: but if you're listening to *this* show and people in the Trump administration will listen to you about things?

Austin: Then you're probably that player that got kicked out of that game

Jack: Yeah.

Art: Yeah.

Sylvi: Yeah.

Art: I don't think you're enjoying the content here.

Austin: (laughs) I feel like you've missed what we've been laying down.

Jack: (laughs) Ughh.

Austin: Ohh, God. Alright. I guess I'm gonna use this opportunity to say, we are also currently trying to figure out ways to stay up to date with stuff a little bit better. Which might actually mean changing some tiers or not tiers but like, how often stuff comes out. One of the things that I'm backed up on right on is Drawing Maps but like, what the fuck am I gonna do with Drawing Maps now that we're in the middle of the Kingdom game? There was a window where I could've snuck one in right before the Kingdom game or maybe I even did that but it was very weirdly timed with some other stuff. So between that and Tips at the Table and Live, that's a lot to do every month, turns out. Especially when we all have more on our plate this year than we thought we would. And so there may be coming soon some sort of revision that gets us onto a slightly different schedule. Just so we can keep that schedule and be more predictable around it. I'd rather do that than continue to promise a bunch of stuff every single month and then not hit exactly right. So there will be further communication about that stuff but again, just like the discord thing, I would rather say that now than have it come out of nowhere in two months or whatever. Which is not a timeline. It might be sooner, it might be later. But in general, our hope is to catch up with stuff. I'm also really hopeful I can get a system going with Mapmaker shit in the future because we're so far back on Mapmaker stuff now but also—What I really wanted to do this season was just have a living document but that ends up being really tough when if that document gets updated, it will have spoilers on it for stuff that hasn't happened yet in the show. Do you know what I mean? Where like, "Oh shit, Art's drive clock advanced in the last session. I can see it because I can see the sheet." but I'm going to keep trying to figure out a solution for things like that because I want that to be way more up-to-date and way more useful for people, but we'll see. But I could just spitball changes to the patreon forever here. Also, I guess another thing is, if you are listening to this in July. Which I mean—No one—If you're not that one person who listens to episodes in the past from the future. Heads up, there was just some changes on the tax side of Patreon. Is that true, Art?

Art: Yeah, starting July 1st, Patreon is charging sales tax and they make it very hard for us to tell you what you'll be paying.

Austin: Right.

Art: Because it involves what you're getting and what—how we set it and where you live.

Austin: And a million other weird things to track.

Art: Yeah, and I don't know if I should say this into a microphone but it really felt like they wanted me to lie a lot.

Austin: (laughs) But they didn't.

Art: I wanna say that we didn't lie more than what I understand is real.

Austin: We told the truth as far as we know.

Art: I told the truth as far as we understand truth to be.

Austin: I didn't handle any of this, feds. But—but I'm also not—

Art: I have bad news to you about how liability works in this specific scenario, Austin. (laughs)

Austin: Shit, goddamnit.

Jack: (laughs) Two podcast hours cannot be charged for the same crime.

(Austin and Sylvi laughs)

Austin: That's right.

Art: Oh, we should remake that movie. *Double Jeopardy*.

Austin: Yeah, uh huh. But about podcast hosts.

Art: But about podcast hosts.

Austin: (laughs) Uh-huh. God.

Art: And tax fraud.

Austin: And also tax fraud. Tax fraud for 32 dollars or whatever it would end up being.

Art: We're not even—It's not even for us. We're doing Patreon's work for them.

Austin: Yeah, right. Patreon is—Someone should take Patreon to court is what you're saying.
(Sylvi laughs)

Art: Yeah.

Jack: But in the way that makes our source of income not monumentally unstable. I wanna be clear.

Austin: Yeah, I want to continue to make rent hopefully.

Jack: Yes.

Austin: I hate—I hate—I love crowdfunding. Crowdfunding is incredible. I hate how precarious it feels all the time. We can't go down this road unfortunately because we'd be here for another 5 hours. Thank you all so much.

Art: And I'd end up saying things I'm not allowed to say.

Austin: (laughs) Probably.

Art: I'm like 40 seconds from saying something I'm not supposed to say. Let's get out of here.
(Jack laughs)

Austin: And thank you to our partners at Pandora.

Art: Oh yeah.

Austin: (laughs) Thank you for again for supporting us as always. tipsatthetable@gmail.com is the address. I hope everyone has a good week. We'll be back with another episode a little later this week. Not another Tips. Ah, maybe another Tips but probably not. A regular episode will be out this week. Probably another Bluff also. So look forward to those. Until then, have a good one.

Jack: Bye!

Art: Bye!

Austin: time.is everyone.

Jack: Oh!

Sylvi: (softly) Bye. Ok.

Austin: International kissing day, everyone. It's still international kissing day. Hasn't changed here.

Jack: Not for me!

Austin: Oh, is it a new day?

Jack: I can't kiss anymore! No, it's just Tuesday, July 7.

Austin: Not a kissing day.

Sylvi: Sorry, Jack. Just international Tuesday now.

Jack: It's international Tuesday. Ugh. (Sylvi laughs)

Austin: I can't believe how commercialized Tues has gotten.

Jack: Oh, dear. (Austin laughs)

Austin: they call it Tuesday 'cause it's the twosday of the week.

Sylvi: Yeah!

Jack: Yeah, uh-huh. It's the same as with Thursday as the third day of the week.

Austin: The third day of the week. Yeah, exactly. This is like twelve steps away, not even, like twelve seconds away from the—What's his name? What's the British fantasy author who everyone likes? Actually likes?

Jack: Terry Prachett?

Austin: Terry Pratchett. This is a Terry Pratchett bit. I can see Tuesday—

Art: This is a joke on *Friends*. I'm sorry to inform you.

Jack: Wait, really?

Austin: Terry Pratchett's friends?!

Jack: (cross) What are Friends by Terry Pratchett?

Art: No, the—*Friends* the NBC sitcom starring David Schwimmer has this exactly.

Austin: Yeah.

Sylvi: Okay, hold on! Starring David Schwimmer—Starring everybody and also David Schwimmer's there. (Jack laughs)

Art: (cross) He was the first cast member name that popped into my head.

Austin: (cross) I found this quote here. Alright. Listen, the last day of auditions is Thursday so okay. So I gotta get there by Thursday. Ok, just remember Thursday. Thursday. Can you remember Thursday? Chandler says, yeah, so Tuesday. Joey says Thursday. Look, if you need help remembering, just think of it like this: the third day. Alright, Monday one day. Tuesday, two day. Wednesday, when? Huh? What day? Thursday, the third day. (laughs) Okay?

Sylvi: Okay, alright.

Austin: That's a good line.

Jack: That's a pretty good joke.

Austin: That's a pretty good joke.

Sylvi: The only time I'll ever give it to *Friends*.

Austin: (laughs) Yeah, you gotta hand it to *Friends*.

Jack: They have one joke.

Art: This is the only joke Chandler's ever involved in that isn't a gay panic joke. It's, you know.

Austin: Gooooood.

Sylvi: Or a trans panic joke! There's those ones too!

Austin: There's those ones too. Ahhh, our world. Uh, ten seconds.

Jack: Ah!

(CLAPS)

Jack: Fuck, I couldn't do it. Sorry.

Austin: It's okay. 20. 20 seconds.

Sylvi: Yeah, I got there at 9.

Austin: 20 seconds.

(Austin laughs)

(CLAPS)

Austin: I really just wanted to get us out as quick as possible.

Jack: Yeah, uh-huh.

Sylvi: Yeah.

Austin: Alright, thank you everyone for listening. Have a goood night!

[END OF EPISODE]