

## Drawing Maps 21: December 2020 - Sangfielle Characters #7: Pickman

Transcriber: MynarLenahan [0:00:00-0:43:00] mewmew#6176 [0:43:00-1:58:37]

**AUSTIN:** Hello everyone and welcome to another episode of Drawing Maps. The final one in this series of pre-Season Seven, character-driven conversations that we've been doing. Joining me today, Jack De Quidt.

**JACK:** Hello there. I'm Jack. Are we doing this as, like, a proper introduction? Should I say where I am on the internet?

**AUSTIN:** No...

**JACK:** No.

**AUSTIN:** For Patreon stuff it's fine to not do all that. I mean, [notquitereal.bandcamp.com](https://notquitereal.bandcamp.com) to buy any of the music you hear on the show. I'll do that plug.

**JACK:** Oh, boy. Every year we have to do new music...

**AUSTIN:** It turns out.

**JACK:** And it's different. Each time.

**AUSTIN:** Mmm-hmm!

**JACK:** (laughs) It's like, "There's another one? We're making another season?"

**AUSTIN:** Totally.

**JACK:** Um...(sighs)

**AUSTIN:** Anyway, let me go over what the show is, because... Jack, I'm assuming you've not seen a Drawing Maps episode before.

**JACK:** No, I haven't. They're secrets to me.

**AUSTIN:** Right. This is what Keith said, yeah. (chuckles)

**JACK:** 'Cause you might be talking about stuff that...I would like to know. And I know that often you do them after the fact...

**AUSTIN:** Yes, I do. Yeah. If I do them. (chuckles)

**JACK:** ...but I'm like big David Lynch mood, "People always want me to talk about the film and the film is the talking."

**AUSTIN:** The film is the thing. Yeah, I get it. Trust me. Um. Drawing Maps is actual prep. It is not, like, mocked-up prep. It is not like, "This is what prep is like." This is us doing prep.

**JACK:** Right.

**AUSTIN:** It covers various shows. Today, we're doing Season Seven stuff. That doesn't mean we won't go into a Bluff [City] or a Quest or a... whatever in the future. Y'know, Drawing Maps will jump around. It's discussion and insight, hopefully. It's not just, "Here is a map I drew." It's like, "Here is a map I drew." And then talking about what the map is supposed to do. And then it's actual asset creation and management. I come up with NPCs and factions, locations... I do draw maps on the Drawing Maps occasionally. "Here is a monster that we're gonna fight and here's its stats." Stuff like that does happen on Drawing Maps.

What it isn't is unchecked or unannounced spoilers. We will not be talking about, like, y'know, the finale of Twilight Mirage without queueing up that we'll be doing that [**JACK** chuckles] and that you should jump ahead or something like that.

It is not permanent or unchangeable. The things we say here are not canon. The only thing that is canon is stuff that hits the show when the show comes out. Y'know, it has to be in the feed for it to be real. So that means, Jack, if you and I have an idea that we think we like tonight, but we don't like it a week from now, we shouldn't feel beholden to the fact that we said it into a microphone here on Drawing Maps.

**JACK:** Oh yeah.

**AUSTIN:** It's not an explicit tutorial. It's not a lesson. It's not a guide on how to do this. That requires a lot of additional work, I believe. And so this is just us doing it. It's not us telling you how to do it.

It's not designed by committee. While there are times when we ask for specific help from the chat... I can think of a couple of times where I said, "Hey, does anyone have a name for Blank?" or "A word that evokes Blank." Unless I'm explicitly doing that, that's not really what we're going for. So, I definitely appreciate that people have ideas, but please don't put them in the comments. That actually makes it less likely that we'll do the thing you hope we'll do. (chuckles) Not more likely.

[**Jack** chuckles]

**AUSTIN:** And then, finally, it's not complete. We can always eject from an idea today, Jack, in the middle of doing it. We shouldn't feel like we need to polish everything up.

**JACK:** Mmm.

**AUSTIN:** And we don't need to finish the episode, even. We could say we want to get through all fifteen or whatever of these questions and we only get through eight of them. And that's it. That's the end of the show because we ran out of time.

**JACK:** Yeah.

**AUSTIN:** We shouldn't feel like we need to, like, stay here until it's five am for you, just to get through everything. Y'know?

**JACK:** Which is a way of work that I find to be often deeply unproductive, right?

**AUSTIN:** Yes. Totally.

**JACK:** I think a thing we talk about a lot is like, “Oh, it’s not happening. Well. Time to put it down.”

**AUSTIN:** (chuckles) Yes, exactly. So, the way I’ve been doing this is after you- So, in spite of you being the last person to do this conversation with, you were the first person to send me notes on your class-

**JACK:** Trains.

**AUSTIN:** -which is the Train Knight. The Vermissian Knight. Which...do you wanna, like, summarize what the book says a Vermissian Knight is so we have a starting place?

**JACK:** Sure. Yeah, let me...I mean, I can pull the book up, but it seems like—at its most basic level—The Vermissian Knight is a kind of... guide? Or a kind of armed protector guiding people through the Vermissian, which is described as a parasite reality. Or moving through parasite realities. It is a vast, cursed, underground train line that is populated by all sorts of horrors.

**AUSTIN:** Yeah.

**JACK:** And this character, the Vermissian Knight, is a sort of... paladin, almost? Or a sort of cleric-type figure who, with sword and shield and a huge, [AUSTIN chuckles] characterful suit of armor—Vermissian plate armor—guides people who need to travel through the Vermissian along their path. And at the same time, tries to reach some kind of religious understanding or... sacred knowledge as a result of their travel through the Vermissian network.

**AUSTIN:** Yeah, there is sort of a transcendence to their long-term relationship to the Vermissian, right?

**JACK:** Mmm.

**AUSTIN:** Which is interesting. The Vermissian doesn’t make sense, but what if you could get close enough to it that it did. Y’know? (chuckles)

**JACK:** Yes.

**AUSTIN:** As written. And then, yeah, the core ability of that the Vermissian Knight has is this kind of... You know who they remind me of—of course—is, like, the Brotherhood of Steel in terms of, “You’re the person-” Partially because this armor isn’t just plate armor. It’s, like, plate armor that lives...

**JACK:** (laughs) It’s got some business.

**AUSTIN:** ...that moves. That does stuff. Yeah, exactly. [Quoting from Heat: The City Beneath, pg. 62] “Once per session, when you consume a resource with Technology or the Occult domain to augment or repair your armor...” which is like where it starts, but, y’know, depending on what

moves you take, like... The first Minor Ability listed is, "You got a gas mask that gets rid of airborne infections from the Heart." So you get bonus echo protection. And by the time you get to Major Abilities, it's like, "Your armor buzzes with static that makes your hair stand on end..."

[**Jack** laughs]

**AUSTIN:** And that's more protection, but also you can eventually, like... y'know, deal damage via electric shock and overclock [laughs] your armor and stuff like that. So there's a lot of space there for a fun character of a type that I don't think you've ever really moved in this space. You've never been bulky.

**JACK:** No, not really.

**AUSTIN:** I guess [AuDy](#)? AuDy is kind of close?

**JACK:** Yeah.

**AUSTIN:** And I guess [Kalar](#) touches this a little bit, but not the... Kalar is always in such a risky place, because of just being a big bird dad who has to fight giant robots. Whereas, like, you're a little closer to being a giant robot here, in terms of [**JACK:** Yeah, totally.] taking damage.

**JACK:** And I think that, y'know... I think there is something really appealing to me in this character in terms of how it is about interacting with an incoherent space.

**AUSTIN:** Yeah.

**JACK:** And not only in a way that's like, "Well, I'm going to make this space understandable."

**AUSTIN:** Right.

**JACK:** I think if the Vermissian Knight's whole deal was, "I want to make this space coherent," it wouldn't be a very interesting class. But instead it's all about moving in and around this idea of a space that is extremely dangerous.

**AUSTIN:** Mhm.

**JACK:** And also, um...the word I'm looking for isn't quite *profitable*, but there's, like, *something to be gained* in the train line.

**AUSTIN:** Yeah.

**JACK:** Um, whether that is the Vermissian Knight's clients are looking for that or whether that is, y'know, something that they are looking for themselves. And I think we can talk a bit more about this when we come to calling [**AUSTIN:** Yeah, we'll get there.] which isn't...Yeah.

**AUSTIN:** We'll get down there a little bit. And that's also a personal question as much as it's a class-wide question, if that makes sense. So we'll get there. Where I actually want to start is actually nowhere near trains. It's goats.

**JACK:** Oh! Yeah, let's talk about goats!

**AUSTIN:** You wanna be a goat person.

**JACK:** I do wanna be a goat person.

**AUSTIN:** What's that... mean? What's that look like? Who are the goat people? Are they tied to a particular... Is there a culture of goat people or are they spread across the world? What's the-  
Talk to me about goat people.

**JACK:** Ever seen The Vvitch? *[Here, Jack is talking about The Witch (2015), but is pronouncing it like the stylised title on the movie posters: VVITCH]*

**AUSTIN:** Yeah.

**JACK:** You know Black Phillip in The Vvitch?

**AUSTIN:** I do.

**JACK:** Have you... How much-

**AUSTIN:** We don't just call that movie The Witch? We call it the Vvitch? Is that what we're doing?

**[Jack & Austin laugh]**

**JACK:** It's a curse that Black Phillip did.

**AUSTIN:** Ah, I see. Yeah, that motherfucker...(chuckles)

**JACK:** That motherfucker! (chuckles) Um... I don't know how much time you've spent with goats IRL. If you've encountered goats IRL.

**AUSTIN:** I've encountered goats, but... minimal, I would say.

**JACK:** They're... remarkable. I love goats. And they have such a... There is such interesting stuff going on behind their eyes a lot of the time.

**AUSTIN:** Mmm-hmm.

**JACK:** And, while I am loath to say, "Well, let's just map animal characteristics onto a sapient being that lives in the world..."

**AUSTIN:** Mmm-hmm.

**JACK:** At the same time, I think a lot of what draws me to a goat-like character is the idea of a kind of implacability. Or is the idea of a kind of mischief. Or is the idea of kind of evoking that classic sort of, like, metal imagery, almost.

**AUSTIN:** Right.

**JACK:** Of like, “Here we are. It’s pentagrams. It’s goats. It’s... uh...” What are some other good metal imagery? Swords.

**AUSTIN:** Swords, yeah. Fire. Um, skulls...

**JACK:** Horns. Curled horns.

**AUSTIN:** Horns. Yeah, horns. Yeah, totally.

**JACK:** Um...

**AUSTIN:** Hooves, obviously, also. Like, that whole... The goat is just a very metal animal.

**JACK:** It’s sick. And we’re talking a lot about Hellboy...

**AUSTIN:** Tongues. Like, you know... Eaaah! (sticks tongue out)

**JACK:** Tongues, going Rreaah! (sticks tongue out)(laughs)

**AUSTIN:** Yeah.

**JACK:** Forked tongues...

**AUSTIN:** Forked tongues, for sure.

**JACK:** Um... We’re talking a lot about Hellboy and-

**AUSTIN:** Yeah.

**JACK:** -and I feel that something that fits really well in Mignola’s... How do you say his name? MIN-yola? Or MIG-nola?

**AUSTIN:** Hmm...(sounding it out) Mike MIG-nol... Hmm. Huh, I’ve always said...

**JACK:** I’ve always MIN-yola, but I don’t know.

**AUSTIN:** I’ve always said MIG-nola, until you just... It’s MIG-nola. Wikipedia says MIG-nola. Hard G.

**[ 10 minutes ]**

**JACK:** Excellent. Um... Y’know, the first thing I thought of when we were talking about this season was, “Oh, I want to play a priest with the head of a goat.”

**AUSTIN:** Right.

**JACK:** “And, like, a classic dark cowl. (chuckles) White dog collar, almost. Hands folded patiently around a book. Everything above the shoulders is a shaggy goat’s head with horns.”

**AUSTIN:** Right.

**JACK:** Just because that seemed to me to be, like, a real metal image that was interesting.

**AUSTIN:** And that moves it away from, like, satyr, a little bit? Because of the clothing. Like, satyrs are goat people, right?

**JACK:** Right! We're not talking about fauns, here.

**AUSTIN:** No.

**JACK:** We're talking about, like...

**AUSTIN:** What are we talking about? Why is it not a faun? Talk to me... Where is the line? Where is the difference?

**JACK:** Well, let's see... Let me search, uh, a satyr...

[**Jack** and **Austin** type]

**JACK:** Oh, right, okay. It looks like a satyr is a humanoid face... with horns.

**AUSTIN:** Yeah, that's a satyr. Yeah. But we've also seen... Like, I guess that's the search for satyr, but I did a search just now for, like, "goat person" y'know? Um, I guess this is... That's also a kind of human. So you just want... "It's a goat face." That's the key, right? It has, like, what do you- the snout of a goat. Like, the...

**JACK:** Yeah!

**AUSTIN:** It has a goat head!

**JACK:** Yeah. I mean... This is more like a- Let me open this in a tab and send it your way. This is more like a ram, but I'm thinking of, like, the Church Grim from Year Walk.

**AUSTIN:** Mmm-hmm.

**JACK:** Um. Where it's just a humanoid body with a goat's head.

**AUSTIN:** Yeah.

**JACK:** And, y'know, to the question, like, "Are they tied to a particular faction or civilisation?" And I think it's, like, maybe yes. Maybe they run one of the big settlements on the edge of the ringed city.

**AUSTIN:** Right, like, is there a country of these people somewhere?

**JACK:** (quietly) Well, so...

**AUSTIN:** Because in my mind the [Ringed City](#) is...the way I presented it yesterday in our chat after talking to Sylvi after Sylvia brought up the word Heartland was, like, what if Luxembourg became the Heart? And then you have Germany, Belgium, and France—which surround

Luxembourg—being like, “Ahh, shit! We gotta build a ringed city around this to keep this locked in.”

**JACK:** I’ve been thinking about this all day. This is just...it’s so exciting.

**AUSTIN:** “You can’t let this spread.” And I’m wondering...are the goats from one of those countries, so to speak? Or are they among all of those different countries, because that’s just how they’ve spread over history? You know what I mean?

**JACK:** I think the answer is they might be all over the place. But they come from a...do you have names for these countries?

**AUSTIN:** No, I-

**JACK:** I wrote down a word that-

**AUSTIN:** What’s your word? Gimme a word.

**JACK:** I wrote down “Canton” which is, like, the Swiss name for...

**AUSTIN:** Spell it?

**JACK:** C-A-N-T-O-N. For, like, prefectures?

**AUSTIN:** Right, right, right. Yeah.

**JACK:** I know that’s what the... What’s it called?

**AUSTIN:** Uh-huh.

**JACK:** The... staging point for journeying into the lamina was called Canton, right?

**AUSTIN:** It actually wasn’t that. It was, um... God, do I have the full map of fucking Hieron anywhere on deck? Not really...

**JACK:** Like a dwarven city? Did we ever visit it?

**AUSTIN:** You never went there. No. Kanton with a K. Here it is... Um, you never went there. You went to Wharfhurst- *You* didn’t, but the lamina delving party went to Kanton- I’m sorry, went to-

**JACK:** (world-weary, looking over map) Boy, we did a number on this continent.

**AUSTIN:** Yeah, this map. This continent... Yikes.

[Jack chuckles]

**AUSTIN:** You can see Wharfhurst covered by the...

**JACK:** An arm...

**AUSTIN:** (vaguely) By some stuff. Yeah, again. Don’t want to spoil anything here.



**JACK:** No.

**AUSTIN:** And then, yeah. Kanton to the bottom where it's like, "Question mark?"

**JACK:** Mmm.

**AUSTIN:** But we didn't ever go there. And if we spelled it different I would be okay with it. You know what I mean? And if we said it cant-ON instead of KAN-tin, which is kind of how I was saying it in Hieron. I'm fine with-

**JACK:** Yeah. And it's like...

**AUSTIN:** -with canton being a... Y'know. It's fun.

**JACK:** It's like the name of a kind of... class of country or something. Rather than a name of a country itself, right?

**AUSTIN:** Right.

**JACK:** It'd be like with talking about prefectures rather than talking about, like...

**AUSTIN:** Parishes or...

**JACK:** Westphalia or-

**AUSTIN:** Yeah, sure. Right. Apparently, [quoting [Wikipedia](#)] "Cantons are relatively small in terms of surface area[...]" Blah-blah-blah-blah (paraphrasing) "Internationally, the best known cantons... the most politically important are those of Switzerland." Apparently Switzerland is made up of-

**JACK:** Yeah. That's-

**AUSTIN:** -Swiss cantons. That's... Okay, sure.

**JACK:** I got it from there and also Morrowind.

**AUSTIN:** Sure. Right.

**JACK:** (chuckles) The great buildings in Vivec are called cantons, which is my first encounter with them.

**AUSTIN:** Are Cantons, yeah, yeah. That's also probably where I was pulling it from. Or from... God, is there a... I guess there isn't a United States place that does that. I said parish earlier and the parishes are, like... New Orleans is broken up into parishes, I believe.

**JACK:** They're kind of counties in the US, right though, aren't they?

**AUSTIN:** Yeah. That's what we got.

**JACK:** That's sort of what we're talking about?

**AUSTIN:** Yeah, exactly.

**JACK:** And counties in the UK, too.

**AUSTIN:** Yeah.

**JACK:** But so, y'know...it's almost like...(sighs) Is what we're talking about...I'm giving you MS Paint.

**AUSTIN:** Yeah, uh-huh. Thank you.

**JACK:** So, it's like... At some point, something absolutely bananas happened in Luxembourg.

[Jack laughs]

**AUSTIN:** Yeah, uh-huh.

**JACK:** (drawing) Which is here.

**AUSTIN:** Yeah.

**JACK:** And it began to move out in waves.

**AUSTIN:** Uh-huh. Like this.

**JACK:** Like this.

**AUSTIN:** Yeah.

**JACK:** And everybody-

**AUSTIN:** You're gonna have to send me this when you're done so I can put it into the post, FYI.

**JACK:** Yeah. And everybody who lives around here...(chuckles) Just in...y'know, in kind of Europe or something-

**AUSTIN:** Right.

**JACK:** ...is like, "Fucking hell..." (chuckles)

**AUSTIN:** Yeah, well, like...I think an important thing to think about is...Again, Sylvi was...Sylvi starting to call it the Heartland made a lot of things start to click into place for me in terms of some of the thematic area we were going to play in. And the kind of genre space around frontiers and stuff.

**JACK:** Mmm.

**AUSTIN:** In that, I think...y'know, Europe is a place that has had empires rise and fall across it over centuries and millennia, right? Um, and that's many places, obviously, but—for in this Europe example—How many people have controlled Luxembourg over the course of centuries and milenia? Lots of different people have had control over it.

**JACK:** Yeah.

**AUSTIN:** It has been settled over and over again. And now we're in kind of a modern era where we don't probably think of that ever happening again, right? We think it's been settled in the lowercase "s" sense, not in the colonized sense, but in the like, "Alright, we-"

**JACK:** It's like, "We're done."

**AUSTIN:** "-we're done with this." Exactly. In the same way the American heartland in the popular American vision is never going to go back to being land run by Native American tribes despite the fact that it was taken from them. (chuckles) Do you know what I mean? It feels like it's been settled on top of being *settled*.

**JACK:** Yeah.

**AUSTIN:** Not that it wasn't settled before that by Native American people. Do you know what I mean? Like, that was already there...

**JACK:** Yeah.

**AUSTIN:** But I think... part of the thing that could be interesting about the way we frame this is that, this was once a place that was contested. That contestation ended with a new status quo being established and then *many* generations later, it becomes re-contested. It's not the frontier...

**JACK:** Right!

**AUSTIN:** ...It's re-frontier. Do you know what I mean?

**JACK:** Yeah.

**AUSTIN:** And in that way, there is... If this happened in Luxembourg... Right? You end up with an almost... You almost get that post-apocalyptic Bloodborne sense of like... The night fell and everyone has... Some of these places are just, like, abandoned because they're from generations ago. In some of them people hunker down and found a new way to live. Some of them were driven away. Some people were turned-

**JACK:** Some people couldn't afford to leave.

**AUSTIN:** Totally. Exactly. Yeah. Totally. And others began to arrive to delve for... whatever. So yeah, if that's your drawing, right? And it radiates out like that, I think at the edge of that last loop you've drawn is then...

**JACK:** Why is this so tiny? I thought there would be a cool spray paint.

**AUSTIN:** No.

**JACK:** I wanted to do, like, a neat- Ah. Here we go.

**AUSTIN:** That's bigger. There you go.

[Jack draws]

**AUSTIN:** Is this the ringed city?

**JACK:** This is fucking magic.

**AUSTIN:** This red?

**JACK:** Oh, no, no. This is magical energy to me.

**AUSTIN:** Oh, it's magic...It's like a magical miasma. This is... "Uh-oh. Some shit went down."

**JACK:** ...And it's pink, but you can't see that this is pink now because the- (laughs) because the thing is too small.

**AUSTIN:** Yeah. It's too small to actually see it.

**JACK:** And so then, everybody out here who... And this was a while ago, right? Or was this...

**AUSTIN:** Yeah, I think this is hundreds of years ago probably, right?

**JACK:** Yeah. Also, I think a lot about, y'know, when the Romans came to England-

**AUSTIN:** Yeah.

**JACK:** -And they settled it. (scowling) "Settled it."

**AUSTIN:** (scowling) "Settled it," yeah.

**JACK:** And they built a bunch of shit.

**AUSTIN:** Mmm-hmm.

**JACK:** And then they left, because... Like, y'know, the people who were living there fucked them up and also their infrastructure broke down and their empire fell.

**AUSTIN:** (chuckling) Right.

**JACK:** And then they came back again!

**AUSTIN:** Huh.

**JACK:** But there was like a hundred years or so between, y'know... [AUSTIN chuckles] Roman invasions of...

**AUSTIN:** Right.

**JACK:** ...Great Britain. And there must have been these incredible moments where people in Britain at the time would have been surrounded by this infrastructure.

**AUSTIN:** Right.

**JACK:** This ruined Roman infrastructure. Like, looking up at an aqueduct going, "Okay, this was built. Uhhh..."

**AUSTIN:** (chuckling) Yeah.

[**Jack** chuckles]

**AUSTIN:** "This was built eighty years ago. And the people who built it are gone."

**JACK:** "We don't necessarily have the technology to make use of it in the same way they did, but we can build buildings up alongside it."

**AUSTIN:** Yeah.

**JACK:** So then people say, "Fuck this." And they build a *massive* circle. A *massive* wall around it. Like this, right?

**AUSTIN:** Yeah. Yeah. And the thing is I do really like this conceptually-

**JACK:** {indistinct in background}

**AUSTIN:** -being an international decision. You didn't get very far in Disco Elysium, right?

**JACK:** No.

[ 20 minutes ]

**AUSTIN:** But one of the big world building things about that game is there was a communist revolution there, right? A generation ago. And, what happened in that game... In the world of that game is...I mean, what happened is the liberals betrayed the leftists, obviously.

**JACK:** (feigning surprise) Ohhh!

**AUSTIN:** Right? Um... (laughs)

**JACK:** Do they do that? IRL? Is that a thing liberals do?

**AUSTIN:** (laughs) Yeah, IRL. It turns out. It turns out...in this case it's the moralists...

**JACK:** (feigning surprise again) Ohhh!

**AUSTIN:** ...is the name of the Disco Elysium liberal...'cause there's also ultra liberalism, but that's neoliberalism, basically. I mean, that's even beyond that. That's ultra liberalism, like, all the way to super libertarian bullshit. But the moralists are the ones who are like...y'know...the Moralist International-

**JACK** (as a moralist): "Now, let's all think about this."

**AUSTIN:** Exactly.

**AUSTIN** (as a moralist): “No, let’s slow down and have a rational conversation about this. Everything is the way it is!”

**AUSTIN:** Y’know? Um, and the whole world came together and was like, “Alright, we gotta fuckin’ shut down Revachol.”

[**Jack** gasps theatrically]

**AUSTIN:** “We can’t let it be like this.”

**JACK:** Uhh. Yeah.

**AUSTIN:** And so I want to evoke... I like that a lot. The world seeing this wound on itself. And the powers that be going like- because we don’t have [Spire](#), right? We don’t have-

**JACK:** No. There’s no City Above.

**AUSTIN:** -the single, oppressive city above where the haves have and have-nots—who are racialized—are oppressed. Instead, (chuckles) what I’m more interested in is a world order in which the powerful decide they see this and they hate to see it. You hate to see it...

**JACK:** You hate to see it.

**AUSTIN:** And they go, “Let’s just cover that up. Let’s put that behind a bunch of brick. And we’ll study it and figure it out...”

**JACK:** But at the same time, right, they have political interests here.

**AUSTIN:** Totally.

**JACK:** So is it the case that, like, “Over here is the city of... X.”

**AUSTIN:** Uh. Maybe. I-

**JACK:** “And their territory extends out like this...”

**AUSTIN:** Yes. I think... So for me I really love the idea of just the ringed city being so mish-mashed together on the edge that it’s become a single-

**JACK:** Yeah. (chuckles)

**AUSTIN:** -city-state in and of itself.

**JACK:** Oh so they, like, blur up here like this.

**AUSTIN:** Right, but then beyond the walls: Absolutely. Right? Beyond the wall, it then becomes the rolling hills of... Canton, right? Or the... Beyond in a different direction will lead off to some sort of sea kingdom. I don’t fuckin’ know. Y’know?

**JACK:** Yeah, totally. Well, because there's presumably, like, big fuckin' rivers and lakes in here as well.

**AUSTIN:** Yeah, totally!

**JACK:** It's not all just land.

**AUSTIN:** Totally. A hundred percent.

**JACK:** Oh, whoops.

**AUSTIN:** That just disappeared.

**JACK:** I didn't even know you could do that.

**AUSTIN:** You just lost two things. Yeah.

**JACK:** (laughs) I just lost two things.

**AUSTIN:** Um...

**JACK:** But it's, like, yeah. It's this bizarre landscape of, like... Everybody is both reaching inward towards this...**[AUSTIN: Yes.]**...and fleeing outward from it at the same time.

**AUSTIN:** Totally. Totally. It's, like... What if a bomb went off and you knew that that bomb was not something that people made. **[JACK chuckles]** Your fucking national power country *wants* it. But also, a bomb went off.

**JACK:** Yeah.

**AUSTIN:** And what if another one does? We have to block that off. You know, there's also maybe signs here of like... another classic touchstone for us, right, is Annihilation. Right?

**JACK:** Oh! Yeah, totally.

**AUSTIN:** The, like, "I don't know what's going on there." And obviously the book is very clearly also inspired by stuff like *Stalker*, the... Tarkovsky film and *Roadside Picnic*, the book that it's based on, and stuff like that. I think all of that is here. And so... And also, the game is not going to be about this stuff. That's part of the thing that's interesting to me. Is like... I want to evoke that those spaces exist. That there is the goat kingdom or whatever that ends up looking like.

**JACK:** Oh, yeah.

**AUSTIN:** You know, whatever these places end up looking like. Y'know. I had some bad map once that was like, "The bug lords!" Y'know? (laughs)

**JACK:** Oh, that was a great map. (laughs)

**AUSTIN:** I want those to exist somewhere out there and for us to feel shades of them in the same way that, like, the... When you create a character in this game you go, "Okay, am I a gnoll? Am I a high elf? Where do I come from? What do I bring with me?"

**JACK:** Yeah.

**AUSTIN:** "What am I doing down here?" And so I would like to have at least some- Even if that's not tied to species, right? Because it's not racialised in that way.

**JACK:** Yeah.

**AUSTIN:** But is culturally spread across something so that, for the people who are coming here, we have some sort of grounding. And also because I do love that idea of the, like... Someone shows up from the Bug Lords, right? And it's like, "Ah, shit. Like, I don't wanna deal with someone from the fucking Bug Lords right now." [**JACK** chuckles] "They always think they have more power than they do, but they have just enough to be annoying. They don't have enough to actually overturn what's actually happening in our little town, because no-one actually gives a fuck, but also people sort of give a fuck because they all have fancy titles or whatever. Y'know?"

**JACK:** It's... It's so good. This is like...this is Europe in the eighteenth century, right?

**AUSTIN:** Right.

**JACK:** Where it's like, "I don't fucking want to deal with Prussia!"

**AUSTIN:** "I don't wanna deal with Prussia." Right! (chuckles)

**JACK:** "Prussia has just sent, like, Wolfgang So-And-So."

**AUSTIN:** "I'm just a little county." (chuckles) Right.

**JACK:** "And now we have to talk to him."

**AUSTIN:** "We have to at least put him up for the weekend, right?"

**JACK:** And then the British show up and everyone is like, (laughs) "Fuck these guys!"

**AUSTIN:** Right. (laughs)

**JACK:** "We can all agree that these guys, more than anybody..." (laughs) So yeah, I think-

**AUSTIN:** So, like, another great touchstone for me is something like Deadwood, where you have a place in which there is an internal hierarchy. One that gets affected strongly by the arrival of new business interests or whatever, but also one in which you have, like... Y'know, when the law arrives [**JACK:** Yeah.] people sort of laugh at it, right? This is, like, the Timothy Olyphant character plays a US Marshall who shows up to kinda, like be the appointed law in town?

**JACK:** "What the fuck are you doing here?"



**AUSTIN:** “What the fuck are you doing here? We have law. It’s just called culture. We just- Y’know...” [**JACK** laughs] “The guy who runs the bar takes care of it. And now you’re stepping onto his turf, right?” And so, like, that vibe I think is a little more the sense. Then like...

**JACK:** “What do you suppose we should do about you? Now?”

[**Austin & Jack** chuckle]

**AUSTIN:** Right. Right. The thing I don’t want is a season of war, right? Like, this is not a war season.

**JACK:** No. No, no, no.

**AUSTIN:** This is not- And so you might end up with, like, little political rivalries popping up, but I don’t think you’re gonna end up with big swings.

**JACK:** And maybe there’s a war happening up here.

**AUSTIN:** Oh, totally. A hundred percent. And refugees flee into the Heartland, right? Like, a hundred percent. That’s great. But the show isn’t about that fight.

**JACK:** No.

**AUSTIN:** It’s about people living their lives in this cursed place, right?

**JACK:** Yeah.

**AUSTIN:** So, given all of that... Goat people: What do you think?

**JACK:** They come from one of these Cantons, I think.

**AUSTIN:** They come from one of these Cantons, okay. Yeah.

**JACK:** But, I mean, I think they travel all over, but I do think that, y’know, they- I wrote down in my notes, “Did they come out of the Heart? Or were they abandoned there when people fled?”

**AUSTIN:** Totally. That’s another great question.

**JACK:** I don’t know. The answer is maybe.

**AUSTIN:** Mmm-hmm.

**JACK:** And they rapidly established themselves as one of these things. Where it’s like, “Well, what if people got through the wall?”

**AUSTIN:** Right.

**JACK:** And then it turned out that, y’know...

**AUSTIN:** I do think I have one species that I do know is here because they were here working and were left behind. I told you I wanted to do dragon people [**JACK:** Yeah!] but I think visually they're almost seahorse people? Which is a great Janine edit, here.

**JACK:** Oh, sick! (chuckles)

**AUSTIN:** That like... You know how seahorses have that, like, skin pulled taut over armor?

**JACK:** Yeah.

**AUSTIN:** And they have that just kind of, like...seahorses just look wild. Go look up some seahorses. Spiny...

**JACK:** Very, like... Obra Dinn vibes.

**AUSTIN:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. A hundred percent. Um, and I think that that's a culture that's here in a large part and, like, were the sorts of people who were part of a working class largely.

**JACK:** Yeah.

**AUSTIN:** They've been racialised to be- I mean, the specific thing here is that, like, we've done the thing of like, "We used to be wolves" with the gnolls years ago. That was, like, a classic line. I hope not too spoilery to be mentioning here. It's kind of a small throwaway thing. I promise it's not a big reveal or something. But I do think for these, like, seahorse dragon people, it's like, "We could trace our lineage back to a time when we were the draconic lords of the world."

**JACK:** Yeah. (chuckling) Yes.

**AUSTIN:** "And now we have..." And is that even true? Right? To some degree there is, like, a...

**JACK:** Sure. It's like, "Are they from Atlantis?"

**AUSTIN:** Right, exactly. Or the Atlantis thing, right? Like, "Are they actually from Atlantis? Or is this mythmaking around-" I mean, what's definitely true is they are not being treated well. (chuckles)

**JACK:** Sure.

**AUSTIN:** And they probably had a culture somewhere that was oppressed and forced them to becoming, y'know, migrant laborers or whatever to come work the Heartland. Um, but that is a separate thing to whether or not the myths they tell about themselves as great dragons is true or not.

**JACK:** Yeah.

**AUSTIN:** And maybe it's true in a metaphorical or emotional sense, even if it's not true in a historical sense. Y'know? So, like, I think that, for me, is one of the species and peoples that will have been in this region quote unquote "originally" despite not being... Like they were brought here to do menial tasks. Right?

**JACK:** Yeah.

**AUSTIN:** To work the farms. To do the... digging. And were not the people who were brought away. Y'know, they were not... y'know, evacuated when the miasmas hit or whatever.

**JACK:** Yeah, yeah.

**AUSTIN:** So, like, I definitely think there is space for that sort of cultural work to go in. So if you end up-

**JACK:** We're sort of from here.

**AUSTIN:** Right. So if you end up having good ideas around the goat people just let me know and we'll work it in.

**JACK:** Yeah! I mean, we might hit more as we go down these questions, right?

**AUSTIN:** Totally.

**JACK:** Where like, "Does this reflect something of this person's culture or... Y'know, is this their whole deal?"

**AUSTIN:** Yeah. So let's keep going down your initial thing, here. Even before you were the Vermissian Knight, you knew you wanted to be a goat person who was a priest.

**JACK:** Mmm!

**AUSTIN:** What are you a priest of? Who or what?

**JACK:** I don't know. I don't know if I want to stay as a priest, where it's like... Y'know, as we moved closer and closer to Vermissian Knight, the priest aspect became less and less directly relevant.

**AUSTIN:** Gotcha. Okay.

**JACK:** And while, y'know, I don't know whether or not that's a- Why am I excited about playing a priest? I think I'm excited about a character who has a faith.

**AUSTIN:** Yeah.

**JACK:** Who believes in something that is spiritual. And lets that belief guide them. I think I am excited to play a character that takes care of people.

**AUSTIN:** Right.

**JACK:** And sometimes acts misguidedly out of care.

[ 30 minutes ]

**AUSTIN:** Mmm-hmm.

**JACK:** None of this is... Y'know...

**AUSTIN:** Unique to priests. (chuckles)

**JACK:** ....unique to a priesthood.

**AUSTIN:** Yeah.

**JACK:** At the same time, I'm wary of throwing the priest out. Like throwing out the baby with the bathwater.

**AUSTIN:** (chuckling) Right, right.

**JACK:** It might be that as we continue to talk we're like, "This is..." So I tried to- I kept writing and I was like, well, okay, let's say I *do* want to stay as a priest. Maybe they are, like, lay support.

**AUSTIN:** Oh, that's fun. Yeah.

**JACK:** They are, like, the people who unlock the church.

**AUSTIN:** Mmm-hmm.

**JACK:** And the people who make sure that the candles are all stocked up.

**AUSTIN:** Right.

**JACK:** And maybe if the curate or the priest isn't able to come in, they might stand up at the beginning of the service and say, "Alright! Listen up everybody! We're going to be, ah..."

**AUSTIN:** "Reading these passages today..."

**JACK:** "We're going to be sing- If you can all stand up and sing! Also, Mrs X would like to let everybody know that [**AUSTIN** chuckles] her chickens have been laying extra this week, so if anybody..." Y'know, there's that, like...

**AUSTIN:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**JACK:** I grew up in a village in the UK and I think -

**AUSTIN:** See, that just pushes me to just wanting you to just be that priest is the thing. (chuckles)

**JACK:** I know, right?

**AUSTIN:** It's fun.

**JACK:** Like that...on some level, it's like, "Oh, that's a more interesting priest than a..."

**AUSTIN:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. Than... yeah.

**JACK:** But it's, like, I grew up around, like, all the sort of extraneous members of a small, like, rural, religious community.

**AUSTIN:** Sure, yeah.

**JACK:** Where it's like, "There is the priest who has three churches that he has to tend to, but then your village has this kind of lay... um..." And sometimes you go to the church wanting to be counseled by the priest and you're like, "Oh, come on..."

**AUSTIN:** "The priest isn't here!"

**JACK:** "Why is *he* here?"

**AUSTIN:** Yeah. "I have to deal with this fuckin' guy..."

**JACK:** "It's just *this guy!*" Um, but at the same time, the idea of being a small parish priest is really interesting. Especially if we are talking about this kind of frontier town vibe.

**AUSTIN:** Yeah.

**JACK:** Where it's like, "There is the church. The church has one bell."

**AUSTIN:** Right. Right. Yeah, we'll see how big the haven is. I imagine it's big enough that seven people are not a major constituency enough to run the town.

**JACK:** (laughs) Yes!

**AUSTIN:** The player characters have to work and live in the town. They can't be the town, right? So that immediately means for me it's probably-

**JACK:** It's not like Deadwood in that sense.

**AUSTIN:** It's- Well, like, in Deadwood... Deadwood gets big, because Deadwood becomes a big- Y'know, there are people already who are there, like... What do you call it? Panning for gold? What's the...speculating? Is that right?

**JACK:** Uh. Prospecting!

**AUSTIN:** Prospecting. Prospecting. Um, and then what happens is... No. This motherfucker shows up to professionalize it all, right?

**JACK:** Sure.

**AUSTIN:** And own it all himself with money. He buys a bunch of land up. He kicks the prospectors off and then hires them to do what they were doing already, but for a wage. And he gets to keep the gold. Y'know, like, that style of work.

**JACK:** Uh-huh, that kind of motherfucker.

**AUSTIN:** Yeah, that type of motherfucker. Exactly. Or maybe they get a commission when they bring in gold, but they don't get the full value, 'cause he does. And so, that city does grow to some degree. And, y'know, that's a real place also, right? So that does, like, happen. But the... I still think it's never more than a few thousand at most, right? And I think that's probably the space we're in.

**JACK:** Right, right.

**AUSTIN:** I don't think that we're, like, a big ten thousand big city, y'know?

**JACK:** No.

**AUSTIN:** I think that would be too much. Let's see here... Yeah, I'm looking at it now. Wow. That's wild: Deadwood in 1890 was twenty-three hundred people. In 1900 was thirty-four hundred people.

**JACK:** Uh-oh.

**AUSTIN:** In 1910 was thirty-six hundred people. And then, I guess the highest it get after that is in 1940 with forty-one hundred people. Today, it's twelve hundred people.

**JACK:** Whoa!

**AUSTIN:** It never cracks five thousand, ever. Ever. (chuckles)

**JACK:** Damn.

**AUSTIN:** Small town.

**JACK:** Yeah. That's amazing.

**AUSTIN:** So yeah. Thousands. Thousands, y'know... I guess I don't know how big the town you were just talking about that you grew up in, but probably not more than a hundred thousand now, right? Let alone a hundred years ago.

**JACK:** Oh, I think about six hundred people live where I live.

**AUSTIN:** Oh, in your town. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I was thinking of Bath more generally even is probably not that big, right?

**JACK:** Oh, yeah, no. Yeah, Bath is probably...(quietly) I don't know how big is Bath. (searching) "How big is Bath?"

**AUSTIN:** But your town, hundreds. Yeah.

**JACK:** Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Um. And so, y'know, we can come around on this where it's like, I think the important, the important thing to come back to is like, what are the characteristics of...**[AUSTIN:** Mhm.] that drew me to wanting to play a priest...

**AUSTIN:** Yes. And how to we make sure you have space to do that.

**JACK:** Yeah, whether or not I am actually playing a priest. I don't think I want to play a debt priest. We've had a lot of real fun talking about...

**AUSTIN:** I've raised already in previous conversations what some of the big, like, faith groupings are here. [Kaitankro](#), Oil and Ash, the debt priests/the travel faith/the [Frog God of Wealth-curse](#). Um, and then the kind of like catch-all group. I've talked about those in previous episodes. We don't have to go over those beat-by-beat. I will say one development. Important development.

**JACK:** Oop. Uh-huh.

**AUSTIN:** The Oil and Ash faith now has three gods. There are the three gods of Oil and Ash. Or of whatever we end up calling that faith. There is, like, [the god of spark](#). Of like, the spark that lights the flame. There is the god of flame. And then there is the god of ash, AKA [The Smiling God of Death](#)...

**JACK:** Brilliant. (laughs)

**AUSTIN:** ...that is tied to Sylvi's Deadwalker character to some degree.

**JACK:** Amazing.

**AUSTIN:** Which is how we kind of, y'know, elbowed that out a little bit and sketched that a little bit. Um, so I still have to figure out what's up with those two other ones, in terms of what their domains are, but together they make up this kind of entropic [**JACK:** Yeah.] deity or faith around... digging things up and burning them because everything burns and we may as well be on the right side of it, y'know?

**JACK:** Yeah.

**AUSTIN:** So I don't think that's you. That feels too... like, nihilistic a little bit for you?

**JACK:** Yeah, and if I were part of the part of the church of debt, why am I in this...

**AUSTIN:** Totally. A hundred percent. We know that that's kind of almost a particular group of people. Or, you know, they stick together. There are not very many people.

**JACK:** I would be on the caravans or something.

**AUSTIN:** Yes, exactly. Exactly. Now, maybe there's another faith we haven't written up yet that ends up coming to your mind that you're interested in. You see a throughline here on the kind of list of ideas we've talked about that moves you more and you can kind of sketch that together, just let me know. Obviously. (chuckles)

**JACK:** Mmm-hmm.

**AUSTIN:** I'm not closed off to other things. Um, alright. We should talk about trains. My first question for you is like, "Are the people you're from tied to the trains? Where does the train come from? What's the train...who built these trains?"

**JACK:** So let's go down these questions one at a time.

**AUSTIN:** Yeah.

**JACK:** Are the goat people especially tied to the train line? No.

**AUSTIN:** (softly) No.

**JACK:** Um, but maybe they are less afraid of it? I don't know. I don't think that there is any particular cultural history. I think everybody here...

**AUSTIN:** Any more than anybody else. Right?

**JACK:** Yeah.

**AUSTIN:** Yeah.

**JACK:** Everybody here has an experience with the train line. I wrote, "Maybe they are less afraid of it???" Three question marks, because I'm not confident with that.

**AUSTIN:** Sure.

**JACK:** What is the name of the train line and of its appointed protectors? Great question!

**AUSTIN:** Yeah.

**JACK:** Horrible, horrible question!

**AUSTIN:** Sorry. (chuckles)

**JACK:** We need to make some lists of things...

**AUSTIN:** Yeah.

**JACK:** I like the idea of just calling it "The... Something Line." "The X Line."

**AUSTIN:** Yeah.

**JACK:** Um, I like the sort of... Naming a thing, like, "The Hammer and Sickle" is a name for a symbol that has a lot of meaning and... y'know, it's, like, a very specific descriptor of a symbol.

**AUSTIN:** Right.

**JACK:** And I like the idea of naming a train line something similar to that. It's like, "The X and The Y" or "The X and Y Line." You look at London Underground lines and they all... y'know, they don't have particularly exciting names. It's Waterloo Line, The Metropolitan Line, The Victoria Line, The Bakerloo Line...

**AUSTIN:** Right, right.



**JACK:** But I do like the idea of, like...we should make a list of just filling out the blanks in these spaces.

**AUSTIN:** Mmm-hmm.

**JACK:** Finding nice frames. Um, I wrote down "The Shape" as a name.

**AUSTIN:** Ooh!

**JACK:** For just... the map. For what the... Y'know. And maybe it's "The X Shape." "The Shape of X."

**AUSTIN:** Just an aside, "for the map" meaning the map of... the train line? The map of...

**JACK:** By map, I mean, like-

**AUSTIN:** ...the world?

**JACK:** No, the train line.

**AUSTIN:** Okay.

**JACK:** Like, not just the physical object of the map. I mean, like, the area spanned by the train line.

**AUSTIN:** Mmm-hmm...

**JACK:** Y'know, where you can go on that line is the... Shape?

**AUSTIN:** Is the Shape.

**JACK:** Or is moving on the Shape?

**AUSTIN:** Right.

**JACK:** Lines of the Shape. (typing) I don't know.

**AUSTIN:** I think there's something there, because there's something fundamental there, right? You're talking about- That lifts it from "It was just a train line," right? I think part of the thing I would love to keep is that sense the train was always already haunted from the moment it was built. Right? Y'know, the Vermissian tried to cut through reality, right? In a way that was like bad from the moment they laid the first track. And I would like to keep some-

**JACK:** It is a cursed train line.

**AUSTIN:** (chuckles) Right. It is a "they dug too deep" situation, except they dug too deep into reality, right?

**JACK:** Mmm.

**AUSTIN:** And I want to keep some of that here, even if we don't keep it all. And I think the idea of calling something "The Shape" indicates that sort of hubris, right? That, like, "just move on The Shape," and that immediately just calls to mind playing with geometry in a way that maybe always had some negative repercussions. Y'know, was always going to.

[ 40 minutes ]

**JACK:** Yes. And, y'know, as we kind of flirt with cosmic horror this season it's a very, like...

**AUSTIN:** Yeah.

**JACK:** This idea of, like, a geometric shape that is concerning is very...

**AUSTIN:** Mhm.

**JACK:** "Where did it come from?" I've just written-

**AUSTIN:** Totally. Do you know the...go ahead. What were you going to say?

**JACK:** "Came pouring out of the Heart."

**AUSTIN:** "Came-" Who knows? I mean, that's the question, right? Did it show up or was it built by people here before? Do you know the Amtrak line names? They're fun.

**JACK:** Amtrak train lines...

**AUSTIN:** For a country that doesn't do trains well, we do have some fun names here. Things like The Valley Flyer and The Southwest Chief...

**JACK:** (excitedly) Auto Train!

**AUSTIN:** The Auto Train, yeah. Uh-huh.

**JACK:** California Zephyr is a very famous one.

**AUSTIN:** Yeah, uh-huh. Crescent, Downeaster, Empire Builder...(chuckles) The Heartland Flyer.

**JACK:** Ethan Allen Express! (laughs)

**AUSTIN:** Yeah, uh-huh... Um, Keystone Service, Lake Shore Limited, uh...

**JACK:** Which of these would you most like to go on just based on the picture?

**AUSTIN:** Based on the- Sunset Limited, maybe? That seems really fun.

**JACK:** Southwest Chief looks really nice.

**AUSTIN:** Yeah, both of those have good... I mean, here's the thing: I looked at where you go and Sunset Limited is New Orleans, Houston, San Antonio, El Paso, Tucson, Palm Springs, Los Angeles...that's a fun trip.

**JACK:** Yeah. A train through New Orleans...

**AUSTIN:** I guess Southwest Chief is similar, but it starts in Chicago and that's fun. Yeah...

**JACK:** Oh, Flagstaff's lovely. I've been to Flagstaff.

**AUSTIN:** Yeah?

**JACK:** Yeah, it's in the shadow of a mountain in the middle of the desert.

**AUSTIN:** Ooh.

**JACK:** And so the rain falls there much-

**AUSTIN:** Right...

**JACK:** And so it looks like there's pine trees everywhere, but you're just in the middle of a desert. It's really cool. (sighs) Oh, I miss trains. You can't use trains anymore.

**AUSTIN:** No. 'Cause of... [**JACK** chuckles] 'Cause of people being on them. They're still running, right?

**JACK:** Oh, yeah. Uh-huh. Y'know...

**AUSTIN:** I just wouldn't want to be on one right now.

**JACK:** No. But is it, like, y'know.... So they're just, they're just huge. They just come out like this...and there are lines...[**AUSTIN:** Yeah.] that run like this. And maybe some of them go right through areas that...um...

**AUSTIN:** Right.

**JACK:** So a thing that I keep thinking a lot about the Shape is, uh, people ride it and there's lots of reasons that people might ride it.

**AUSTIN:** Mhm.

**JACK:** They might ride it because it's a cursed train and they are compelled.

**AUSTIN:** And they have the Heartsong calling or some equivalent thereof.

**JACK:** Yeah, absolutely. "Why are you on this train?" "Don't ask me, I don't want to be. And yet."

**AUSTIN:** (chuckles) Yeah.

**JACK:** Uh, there are people who ride it because it is...something I think a lot is, like, all throughout history people have engaged with dangerous and unknown entities because they need to for money?

**AUSTIN:** Mhm.

**JACK:** Or because people they love are on the other side of them?

**AUSTIN:** Yep.

**JACK:** Um, and so, like...maybe you need to get to work on time and in order to get to work you have to ride the thing.

**AUSTIN:** Right.

**JACK:** Or maybe...y'know, it is a forty-eight day journey to get here, but if you use the Shape you can get there in six or whatever.

**AUSTIN:** Right, right.

**JACK:** So, like, I don't think of this as a train line that is, like, so monumentally cursed that to ride it is a taboo, or is...

**AUSTIN:** Which is a big difference from the Vermissian, right?

**JACK:** Yes.

**AUSTIN:** In fact, the Vermissian is just subway tunnels. Effectively. [**JACK:** Yes.] It is not a train line. It was going to be a subway and it never got there. And instead, there's like one train left and it's a mystery if it ever shows up-

**JACK:** (sighs) And one some level-

**AUSTIN:** It's strange that it shows up.

**JACK:** This is where I have like, lowkey problems with the Vermissian of the book [**AUSTIN:** Mhm.], which is that I feel that in some aspects it plays too neatly into what I associate as a very British kind of...[**AUSTIN:** Mmm.]...uh, steampunk uh, um...weird fiction aspect of like, "well it's a bit like the stuff that we have in London but it's dirtier and it's scary to use."

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) Jack, can you undo those crossbeams you did? It makes the map harder to read.

[**Jack** laughs.]

**AUSTIN:** It's like, are those little outlets from the main...

**JACK:** (laughing) Yeah, they're little outlet lines.

**AUSTIN:** No one does that with trains.

**JACK:** Who built this train, Austin?

**AUSTIN:** You. Right now. You're doing it.

**JACK:** Cursed (laughing), cursed creatures.

**AUSTIN:** Um, it just looked too much like railroad tracks but they were so big that it's like, uh- not to like execute GM fiat.

**JACK:** (overlapping) Yes, that's true, I think I was drawing railroad tracks.

**AUSTIN:** But, but I, I like-

**JACK:** It's like, "what is that?"

**AUSTIN:** I like the cleanness of the Shape. Um, also it- I have to go back to a thing you said before, which is the first thing you said is that people ride the Shape, because again that's contrasting with the Vermissian which just isn't a thing in people's lives. But I first thought you said people "*write*" the Shape, [**JACK:** Mmm!] which obviously I love.

**JACK:** Yes!

**AUSTIN:** Because it means there are people who just like, memorize the line, right? They memorize the Shape and draw it. [**JACK:** Yes.] They are compelled to do that, there is something, um, comforting in drawing the Shape, in writing the Shape, um, and being like "this is the Map. This is the Map of the Heartland." Whatever else is, whatever else changes- so maybe do we go the other way here-

**JACK:** Yes.

**AUSTIN:** -which is like the Shape remains. Whatever else, you know- maybe you get off at the third exit on the Red Line, and it's supposed to be the, the Temple of the Moon and instead it is now um, some sort of giant pig farm run by pigs? Um, and you're like "oh shit."

**JACK:** (overlapping) What are they farming?

**AUSTIN:** Pigs.

**JACK:** Oh, fuck.

**AUSTIN:** Yeah, it's rough. Um, but you get off there and you're like, "uh-oh, that's not right." But the Shape is the Shape. [**JACK:** Yeah.] The Shape...you can get spit out somewhere else-

**JACK:** (overlapping) The map was right.

**AUSTIN:** Right, the map of where the train goes is right, what's on the other end might change because that's how the Heartland works. But, the Shape is the Shape and memorizing that means that you at the very least can position yourself in some way. [**JACK:** Yeah.] I like that quite a bit.

**JACK:** I think there's two other ways that you can write the Shape?

**AUSTIN:** Mhm?

**JACK:** Uh, one way that you can write the Shape is, you can get together a road crew-

**AUSTIN:** Right.

**JACK:** And you can get bales and railway, [AUSTIN: Right.] um, sleepers? And you can try and hook a rail line to the Shape.

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) A new line to the- right, yes, totally.

**JACK:** And this is *exceptionally* dangerous.

**AUSTIN:** Yes.

**JACK:** People try it fairly regularly because, you know, every town is like "if we just had a station. I mean, think about, you know, what this can bring."

**AUSTIN:** Mhm.

**JACK:** Um, but, but, sometimes it breaks bad? Sometimes there is, you know, like a colossal, magical problem? Um, sometimes it is fine, but the Shape doesn't come, it doesn't actually work. You haven't actually hooked it up. You know, you might see Shape trains going by in the distance but none of them ever get diverted onto your line. Um, and sometimes it does work, and it's like, oh the Green Line got extended down to, um, Strawberry Road or whatever. Um.

**AUSTIN:** Right, right.

**JACK:** The other way you might be able to write the Shape is you might be able to build a Shape station, and hope that it comes to you.

**AUSTIN:** (chuckling) That it just shows up, right. Yeah.

**JACK:** Um, again, very dangerous to do? Um, but it's like well what does the Shape like? Uh, and how can we, how can we make a space comfortable for [AUSTIN: Mhm.]...for the Shape to...the Shape to arrive. Maybe we've been waiting thirty years, we had a station all ready to go, and we're just waiting for it to come.

**AUSTIN:** Right. "Please show up. Our community could be saved if only- if only the Shape shows up."

**JACK:** And people are like, "well, why don't you just build a rail line out there?" It's like, well, uh, like Spongebob talking, "why don't you just build a rail line out there, you know how to build a rail line? We don't."

**AUSTIN:** Yeah, totally. We could build buildings but building a rail line, and a sleeper car, is a whole different thing, right?

**JACK:** Yeah. Yeah. Uh, 'kay, what's next?

**AUSTIN:** Um? "Do we know who built it or constructed it?"

**JACK:** Uh, the entities-

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) Also, I mean, also, wait, wait, we also don't yet now have the name of the Shape's protectors. Are you a Knight of the Shape then? Are you a...

**JACK:** A Shape Knight?

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) A Shape Knight?

**JACK:** Is there another-

**AUSTIN:** I like Shape Knight.

**JACK:** Is there another, um...is there a word that we haven't found yet, that we're going to say by accident?

**AUSTIN:** Yeah, is it Knight? Probably, right? Yeah, you know. Um, almost certainly. Uh, we'll sit on it. We don't need to have that today.

**JACK:** We don't really know who built the Shape, but I think that the things that built it, or things that are adjacent to the things that built it, are still out there on the line. [**AUSTIN:** Mmm.] At some point. You know, if a line gets- uh, if an avalanche comes down over the line, or a tunnel collapses, that will be cleared? Um, and it might be cleared by Shape Knights, [**AUSTIN:** Right.] or it might be cleared by the local community?

**AUSTIN:** Right.

**JACK:** But it might also be cleared by some...thing else.

**AUSTIN:** Question mark, question mark, question mark.

**JACK:** Um, the image I have in my mind is, what are those horrible little fuckers called in XCOM?

**AUSTIN:** Which ones?

**JACK:** (sighs) They're really concerning. They make- they, they lay eggs.

**AUSTIN:** This is- they lay eggs. Uh, Chryssalids?

**JACK:** Oh, maybe.

**AUSTIN:** Are they the little, are they like- do they have big bone knife legs?

**JACK:** Yeah.

**AUSTIN:** These fuckers?

**JACK:** Uh...

[short pause]

**JACK:** (small laugh) It's loading. Yes, yes!

**AUSTIN:** Yeah, uh huh? They're no good.

**JACK:** Like there's-

**AUSTIN:** We got them out there? Jesus Christ.

**JACK:** Well, I was trying to think, what is a really **[AUSTIN: Yeah.]** geometric, bizarre, alien thing to see working a line. And not really know whether it's like, did these things build it, or are they here to maintain it?

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) Right. This is also very, uh, um, this is very...

**JACK:** Or were they-

**AUSTIN:** Have you played Mass Effect?

**JACK:** Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

**[ 50 minutes ]**

**AUSTIN:** You know the Keepers in Mass Effect, **[JACK: Oh, right!]** on the Citadel?

**JACK:** Yes! This is kind of-

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) They're similar in shape, just not- but like meant- designed to be less upsetting. But they are very much, you know, creatures that move around on four legs and have the same shape as a Chryssalid actually, now that I'm looking at them, that's interesting.

**JACK:** (overlapping) They don't really have plans, or at least we haven't been able to work out what they're-

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) Right, we don't know-

**JACK:** -plans are?

**AUSTIN:** Right.

**JACK:** We...it's almost like Zen creatures from Half Life, **[AUSTIN: Mhm.]** where it's like, "oh, okay, they're here and they're interacting with what we've got here."

**AUSTIN:** Mhm. But what the fuck are- do they want, or how are- *how are* they? We don't know.

**JACK:** They don't really have consistency in size, either. I think the ones that you see a lot of running- changing signal points, and running, maintaining the lines, or like making a signal, making an incoherent signal to a train **[AUSTIN: Right.]** and then it will stop and something will be loaded onto it. Um, they might be the size of like a van? But there might be ones that are the size of like your hand? **[AUSTIN: Right.]** But there also might be ones that are like the size of a Strider from Half Life or something **[AUSTIN: Mhm.]** that is just, that you just might see from a distance painstakingly lifting rocks off a collapsed tunnel.



**AUSTIN:** (laughs softly) Right, right.

**JACK:** And I think the Shape Knights have a really, um, agnostic relationship with them. I don't think they...revere them? Yes!

**AUSTIN:** Oh, interesting. Sorry, I've given you a list of railway industry occupations.

**JACK:** (overlapping) Yeah, sick. What I actually wrote down in my original note was, um, "Vermissian Railway Crews: beings that aren't human/barely understood maintain the lines."

[**AUSTIN:** Mhm.] Yeah, like we're talking uh, Shape signalmen, Shape Firemen, Shape dispatchers. [**AUSTIN:** Mhm.] And we call them signalmen and firemen and dispatchers 'cause it's like, "what the fuck is it doing?"

**AUSTIN:** (laughing) Right.

**JACK:** "The trains seem to move. Um, okay, fine, we'll call that one a signalman." Or it's like-

**AUSTIN:** Right, 'cause that's what it- that's what it does.

**JACK:** Yeah, a Vermissian stationmaster. [**AUSTIN:** Right.] Like, like, a Shape stationmaster. Like, "what the fuck is that?"

**AUSTIN:** Right. And that is- these are these creatures that we're talking about, these like monstrous, multi-legged, insectoid in some ways, but also kind of reptilian.

**JACK:** Yeah.

**AUSTIN:** Yeah.

**JACK:** Maybe no clear face? Um, maybe a face? Lots of arms, lots of pointy [**AUSTIN:** Yeah.] strange things, I'm thinking, I think-

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) Are they, are they- how organic are they versus...like is it possible that they have limbs made of railroad spikes? Like to what degree are we in Silent Hill territory versus in...

**JACK:** I think they're organic.

**AUSTIN:** Okay.

**JACK:** Um, I think maybe you might see one with limbs made of railroad spikes and it's like, "fucking hell, that one has limbs made out of railroad spikes!"

**AUSTIN:** (laughing) Right. Right, right.

**JACK:** "I have...what?" There's an...I'm sending you an image...uh, old signal boxes? Had these incredible systems to, um...order trains around, and send signals, and they're just these bizarre combination of levers.

**AUSTIN:** Oh, wow. These rule, yeah.

**JACK:** And I'm like, well, what does a being that was built to use one of those things look like?

**AUSTIN:** Mhm. Well then, here's my question, is like, what the fuck's the Shape need with you? If it has these.

**JACK:** That's a- I think that's a great question! I think that is [**AUSTIN:** Uh huh.], that is a really concerning question. I think-

**AUSTIN:** Is that a question you don't know the answer to?

**JACK:** I don't know the answer to it right now.

**AUSTIN:** You the character, you the character, I mean.

**JACK:** Um, probably not. I mean, I'm trying to think of like...

[short pause]

**AUSTIN:** I guess here's my bigger question, and I'll just say it directly, is like, are you sure you work for the Shape and not against the Shape? Like are you sure you're a Train Knight in the way the- these creatures are, you know, of it. Or are you something trying to like, lasso it? Are the Shape Knights trying to gain hold of this thing versus being its protectors? [**JACK:** Yeah.] Or its- do you know what I mean?

**JACK:** Yeah, I mean, I wonder.

**AUSTIN:** You know, one of your moves is, um, (clicks tongue) one of your moves is...I'm on the wrong, I'm in the wrong playbook, here we go. Um, "Dragon Killer. You've been entrusted with a great blade from the Orders of Altstadt, an ancient weapon designed to slay the fiercest abominations from within the Vermissian Network," and like, the idea there is like, oh yeah, you're going after big, like, subway crocodiles or whatever. But like, what if that's a Train Killer? What if the thing that you do is- not *you*, but culturally, the Shape Knights are meant to try to *tame* the Shape. And that ends up making it a much different relationship. [**JACK:** Yeah.] I don't know if you want to go down that route. But again it is...it- it might, it would answer the question of "why do you exist along with these Shape creatures?" [**JACK:** Yeah!] Like maybe the Shape is a point of contestation.

**JACK:** I mean, I, uh, I- I think that's a really interesting angle to think about. Especially because I think I'm...I'm not necessarily interested in revering these Shape creatures. [**AUSTIN:** Right.] But I keep thinking about like, well, whose side is the mountain climber on? Is the mountain climber on the side of the mountain, [**AUSTIN:** No. Right.] or is the mountain climber on the side of the people climbing the mountain. And it's like kind of both, right? 'Cause like, what a mountain climber really wants is to get them or their people up to the top of the mountain safely. [**AUSTIN:** Mhm.] But the way they do that is through this weird mixture of respect and...and discipline [**AUSTIN:** Right, right.] with the entity. Where it's like, "I'm not going to go out here and just like, take swings at this mountain, I have to be extremely careful about this. This is very dangerous."

**AUSTIN:** Right, and they're not building a- they're also not a contractor or a um, like a land developer, who wants to build a railway up, up the mountain and wants to- or wants to build a tunnel through the mountain or wants to deforest the mountain to make a settlement. They-

**JACK:** (overlapping) Yeah, it's more like-

**AUSTIN:** There is like a...a relationship there with the thing as it is.

**JACK:** What if the Shape Knights are sent into the Shape to like, like garden it almost? Or like, the way-

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) Prune it back.

**JACK:** -tree surgeons are sent into an arboretum to be like, (sighs) "Oh man, that's got to go."

**AUSTIN:** Right. Where- and I mean, like, really, we're maybe overshooting this right, which is maybe if the Shape is big enough and its own thing enough, then we just needed them to be...they just need to be...like you said, mountain climbers, guides, right? Like they...you might not want to control it because you might- or maybe you'd love to be able to control the thing, but you've given up hope that you can.

**JACK:** (overlapping) It's like how do you control the sun?

**AUSTIN:** And so the best thing you can do is learn the routes, learn how to navigate people from one abandoned station to a- to a place where maybe there is a connecting line and a train will show up. Uh, you can, you know, drive back the creatures when they've decided to add a line that goes through someone's home and you're- and they're like, "no please don't."

**JACK:** Just say, "No! No trains here."

**AUSTIN:** Yeah. (laughing) "No trains here," that's on- that's your job. And maybe different Shape Knights end up with different relationships to it, given that. [**JACK:** Yeah.] I mean, that's another question here, is like, are the Shape Knights an organization or is this a thing you become independent of any sort of group?

**JACK:** I wonder if- and we might more of this as we get further down the questions [**AUSTIN:** Yeah.] but I wonder if it's kind of like a bounty guild almost, where it's like, oh you work with this organization, but you are also- so like...we haven't even really got to trains yet...

**AUSTIN:** (laughing) No, we have not.

**JACK:** Where it's like, do you have a train, what is the relationship between a Shape Knight's train and other trains of the line...

**AUSTIN:** I don't think you- so the thing here is like, there's a lot here that's like, if this was a story about your character, you could- a lot of that stuff is more open? But because this is a story about seven characters and a Haven, the Haven might have a station, but I don't think you get to have a train. Do you know what I mean?

**JACK:** No. Unless we want a Blue Channel type.

**AUSTIN:** No, because the book- the game is about delving. And so you can't just get on your train and delve.

**JACK:** (laughing) Right.

**AUSTIN:** Do you know what I mean?

**JACK:** I want to go down!

**AUSTIN:** Right, like you have to go like through places that have not been- where getting on the train is not an option. [**JACK:** Yeah.] The Shape can't be the solution every week to the episodic story that's being told. And so for that to be the case, you can't have control over it like that.

**JACK:** Yeah.

**AUSTIN:** Um, it might be able to take you from Point A to Point B, but like- and this is the part of the thing where like I have to inject danger into it to where...I like the idea of the Shape being something people can sort of count on. But, it's important...one of the game mechanics is connecting to Havens, right? [**JACK:** Right.] That's a big important moment, and it ties to the way you level up, right? So for instance, the Adventurer Calling, I believe, has a, uh, major beat, which is like this is how they get their good moves, their best moves, one of them is "connect three Havens to one another with permanent paths." And so if we live in a world where major Havens are already connected by permanent paths, [**JACK:** Yeah, yeah, you're right] then that closes off that opportunity for that play to happen. And maybe that's fine, because they could instead go "successfully perform a dangerous action that saves the day," or "catalog their exploits for extended periods," but I do want to make sure that we're being thoughtful about the degree to which connections between these places already exist.

**JACK:** Yeah.

**AUSTIN:** Because the more it is, the more urbane everything will feel, and the more safe everything will feel for average people and for the sort of world as it stands? Um, and so, the thing that I want to, the thing that I lean on here is like, the train will get you somewhere, and it might even get you where you want to go, um, but you couldn't- I don't think you could be a commuter as a worker in this world. I think that's too risky.

[ 1 hour ]

**AUSTIN:** I think you can take the train to visit your family? I think you can take the- like, because, you need to, you need to go home, "I gotta get on the train." You could take the train to go on an important pilgrimage or something, but I worry about leaning too hard on the like, "new people show up every day on the train and they show up with their stuff and they're here!" Though, I mean, that is a genre place that does exist, so I do, I do want the train to show and for people to get off of it and show up into town and like, "someone new rolled into town via the train, that's a big deal."

**JACK:** But it's not like "I've got to catch it before 6:30 if I want to clock in at 10."

**AUSTIN:** Exactly. Right. [**JACK:** Yeah.] That's the part I don't want to hit, because that ends up leaning us towards...[**JACK:** Yeah!] towards an already settled space...

**JACK:** And I think-

**AUSTIN:** ...in a way that is different than we want to evoke, I think?

**JACK:** Yeah, I think in the same way that I realize that I don't really so much want to play a priest as I want to draw on these themes [**AUSTIN:** Mhm.] that aren't necessarily tied to priesthood, I wonder if what I was getting at when I wanted the idea of people using the trains was that this wasn't- that there is something profane about this, or there is something- it is not such an unutterable taboo that it's like, [**AUSTIN:** Right.] well this is the Shape Knight's main...

**AUSTIN:** Right, right, right. It's not Cursed, it's Technology right? Like in terms of the world of the domains here, whereas I think in Vermis- in the world of Heart, though the Vermissian starts with the Technology domain, the train itself, or the line itself is absolutely a cursed place. And that's not what that is for us.

**JACK:** I am sure there are some cursed places.

**AUSTIN:** A hundred percent! But it's not-

**JACK:** (overlapping) Like it's like, don't go here.

**AUSTIN:** -fundamentally- it's not, like you said, it's not a taboo, it's not something- if someone told you they were taking the train you would wish them well and hope to see them again soon, but you wouldn't, you wouldn't look at them like, like they've said they're going to eat knives, (laughs) you know.

**JACK:** Yeah, totally. It's the difference between saying like-

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) Or summon a dark god.

**JACK:** "I'm going to climb the mountain" [**AUSTIN:** Right.] and "I'm going to go into the orange bit of the volcano."

[**Austin** laughs.]

**JACK:** Where it's like the former is like, "oh, that's going to be a lot of work, good luck."

[**AUSTIN:** Yes.] "I hope you have- I hope you've prepared, I hope you have people who know where you're going" and the latter is like, "Wh- why? You'll burn. Dooon't go in there."

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) "You'll burn. Don't do that." Exactly. Yeah, I think that makes the most sense for me.

**JACK:** (distantly) Yeah. (sounds of pages turning) Um, okay. What's next?

**AUSTIN:** I mean, so what are the trains like? Let's talk, let's talk about trains [**JACK:** Oh-kay!], I mean, you've- not a subway. We know that. It's a train.

**JACK:** There are- the trains are...[long pause]...feudal. (laughing) The trains are a pyramid. The trains are, are- there are categories of train.

**AUSTIN:** Okay.

**JACK:** At the very top, we have uh, the sort of the god trains. The, the-

**AUSTIN:** I'm gonna need whatever these notes are that you have so I can include them-

**JACK:** [overlapping] I'm adlibbing.

**AUSTIN:** - and also so I can see them...oh. [**JACK** laughing.] I thought- I heard you turn a page, so I assumed you turned to the page in your book and-

**JACK:** (overlapping) I was looking for it. I was looking for it, and it wasn't there.

**AUSTIN:** Alright, they are, there are hierarchical trains.

**JACK:** Yes. They are not alive, they don't, they don't talk. They are- this is not Thomas the Tank Engine, they-

**AUSTIN:** Good, yeah. Uh huh.

**JACK:** I mean, they might be alive. What is, what is a living thing?

**AUSTIN:** Sure, yes.

**JACK:** And at the very top there is, mmm, one or two sort of godlike trains. [**AUSTIN:** Okay.] No one knows where they are. You see them, in the distance, if you're lucky? Uh, maybe they disappear completely. Maybe you see one go straight into the side of a mountain, [**AUSTIN:** Right.], um, and you're like-

**AUSTIN:** So they- do those ones do things that are hard to understand?

**JACK:** Yes. Uh, if you see them at all. It's like, [**AUSTIN:** Yeah yeah yeah.] it would be like seeing the Headless Horseman on the moor, you'd be like- [**AUSTIN:** Okay.] or maybe, maybe even worse, it would be like seeing the Devil. [**AUSTIN:** Right.] It would be like meeting the Devil. [**AUSTIN:** Right.] Um...there are a very small number of these. Then [sighs]...there are...special trains. And there's like...between five and ten of them. And they're like dukes, they're like uh, they're like...or cardinals almost. [**AUSTIN:** Mhm.] And I just wrote down like, "runaway train." "Ghost train." "Flags and pennants." [laughs] "Train that has disappeared completely." "Boat, question mark, question mark, question mark?" Um, "train pulled by 30 oxen rather than an engine."

**AUSTIN:** Okay.

**JACK:** And these are like characters in the same way that like- I've been thinking about boats a lot, and the similarities between trains and boats, [**AUSTIN:** [coughing] Right.] and you know like in sailing lore or pirate lore you like, you look through the binoculars and you see the ship with the tattered sails.

**AUSTIN:** Right. And you go "*Oh my god*, that's the Black Pearl," or whatever.

**JACK:** Or like it's the fucking, Davy Joneses', the Flying Dutchman. [**AUSTIN:** Right, right.] Or even in real history you're like, "Oh my god, I know who is on that boat," [**AUSTIN:** Right.] "and that is concerning to me."

**AUSTIN:** Yes. Yes.

**JACK:** And these things go around! They, they- who knows what the Vermissian does, or what trains on the Shape do.

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) And there are legends about- this is the Headless Horseman, right? This is the like-

**JACK:** (overlapping) *This* is the Headless Horseman. And it's like, oh you-

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) Right, right. This is like, the ghost train showed up to town, and out from everyone's home- you know, "all the doors on Main Street opened at once, and if you ever believe me for anything else in my life, believe me now, when I say: every house, from every house a specter came." [**JACK:** Yeah.] "And each one filed into single file and walked into that ghost train and that was it. All the ghosts in town were gone, uh, and what we hadn't realized was there a load of passengers who got off that train too, and that's why I need you to come and exorcise this, this whole fucking town."

**JACK:** (laughing) Yeah, exactly. You're like Billy-

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) "Do a ghost exchange."

**JACK:** You're like Miner Bob, and I'm like Bartender Larry, and you're like, "Bob, you've been having too much of the ole whiskey, I don't believe you."

**AUSTIN:** (laughing) Right, right.

**JACK:** And then like-

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) "The Shape's done some wild things but nothing like that, Bob."

**JACK:** "But nothing like that." And then like two years down the line, [**AUSTIN:** Right.], you know, um...oh! I mean like two years down the line my husband dies, or whatever. [**AUSTIN:** Right, right.] And I start thinking to myself, "there's a train that ghosts board." [**AUSTIN:** Right.] "Or that ghosts get off, and it's like maybe that thing fucking is out there." And then one day I see it! 'Cause these trains are real. There's probably-

**AUSTIN:** Right, right.

**JACK:** You know, I've said between five and ten of these Duke-tier trains, but there are probably like twenty that are completely made up. (laughing) Just, you know-

**AUSTIN:** (laughing) Right. Five to ten real ones, twenty fake ones.

**JACK:** Yeah. I sent you that image of a train with its boiler exploded?

**AUSTIN:** Yes. Love that train.

**JACK:** So basically for listeners the boiler of a steam train is full of lots and lots of tiny little, tiny little pipes and tubes to pump the steam through? [**AUSTIN:** Mhm.] And if it explodes for whatever reason, all of those come out like spaghetti. They just-

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) It rules. It's so good.

**JACK:** They burst out into this like horrifying- and so I thought like, "oh, one of these is a train that drags itself along by those things."

**AUSTIN:** Yeah. That's great. I'm going to add those to this document.

**JACK:** And these trains run the absolute gamut from, one that I just wrote is like, "aristocrat." It's like a beautiful carriage. [**AUSTIN:** Right, of course.] To like, this is a train that is dragging itself along by its own ruined boiler.

**AUSTIN:** As if they're tendrils, or something.

**JACK:** Yeah, yeah. Yeah yeah yeah. It's awful.

**AUSTIN:** It's a sea creature. Yeah.

**JACK:** And the beings, the Shape creatures, treat them all with the same- I suppose they pay, they will take care of the higher ranking trains.

**AUSTIN:** Sure.

**JACK:** Um...and then below that are just trains! Uh, and these trains are magical, but magical in the sense that they can ride the Shape [**AUSTIN:** Right.] and sometimes people who board them might not get off? But like...you know. Um. (laughing) They're just steam trains.

**AUSTIN:** Right, and then there are steam trains. Regular trains.

**JACK:** Regular trains. Did you see the diagram that I sent you?

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) Do people feel more comfortable...on those? Probably?

**JACK:** Yeah. Probably. But it's like, I don't feel good when I go to the dentist regardless of what they're going to do. It's like-



**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) No. True, true. Which image did you send me, or diagram? What did you just say?

**JACK:** Let me send it to you again...

**AUSTIN:** The answer is probably yes, but it's probably deep in here somewhere. Uh...yeah, I saw the big- (fondly) yeah, Jack, I saw the big horse train. What if-

**JACK:** So this is- what if a horse was thirty or forty feet tall?

**AUSTIN:** Yeah. And also-

**JACK:** (overlapping) And was pulling a train.

**AUSTIN:** -was pulling a train. Yeah, uh huh.

**JACK:** Where it's like, why are these things- I don't know if all of them have boilers, or all of them have engines, you know?

**AUSTIN:** Right. Sure. Sure, sure. Why would they? (typing) "Big Horse Train," got it. Alright.

**JACK:** Yeah, and they're all awful. To see one is dreadful, mostly. [**AUSTIN:** Right, right.] This is the way in which they're cursed, right?

**AUSTIN:** Can people build their own trains? We talked about sleeper cars-

**JACK:** (overlapping) They can build a bottom tier train.

**AUSTIN:** Right. And do they control it? If I was really rich could I make it my life- maybe this is the thing, is it- is there a character that I can make who is like, this is an NPC who, the thing that makes them incredible is that they have a train that *they* control. [**JACK:** Yes, but-] And they haven't lost it to the Shape yet.

**JACK:** -that is exceptionally dangerous, [**AUSTIN:** Yes.] and whether they admit it or not they are living in constant fear that they will lose it.

**AUSTIN:** Of course. Totally.

**JACK:** Like, they are never like, "oh I fucking did it, and it trundles all around, it goes where I want it to." [**AUSTIN:** (laughing) Right.] Like *that* is trying to touch the orange bit of the volcano at that point.

**AUSTIN:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. Totally.

**JACK:** You're like, "how is it doing that? Is it still going?" [**AUSTIN:** Right.] If someone said to me, "I built a train that runs on the Shape and it's been running for the last five years," I'd say, "No, you fucking didn't."

**AUSTIN:** Yeah, "you're a liar." Totally, totally. Great. Alright. We already kind of said we don't know who built it, and how it became the thing it is. One of my questions here is like, how long

have you been away from it? But that was when I was still conceptualizing the character based on an earlier conversation in which you kind of got stuck on it, and turned into a Train Knight?

[ 1 hour 10 minutes ]

**JACK:** Yeah.

**AUSTIN:** Um, but I don't know if that's how you became a Shape Knight now, or not. You know?

**JACK:** I don't- yeah, I don't know. I mean...

**AUSTIN:** 'Cause now, now that what we know is that you're almost more of a guide or a...you know, that you work along the Shape. You know how to walk the Shape, how to guide people onto it, um, how to address it, then it doesn't necessarily mean you- you could just have lived in the Haven your whole life if you wanted to have, or you could have come in- I'm not saying that's true, but like you could have, you know? Like there's, it opens up the possibility space. Now that I know that you were not- you're not the version of this that you first pitched me, which was "goat priest gets stuck on train-"

**JACK:** (laughing) For years.

**AUSTIN:** "-slowly becomes consumed- by years, by the armor until they become a Train Knight." Uh, different. Different situation now.

**JACK:** Okay. Alternatively.

**AUSTIN:** Yeah.

**JACK:** What about this? "Scrappy teen tries to rob a Shape Train."

**AUSTIN:** Love it.

**JACK:** And becomes stuck on it. [**AUSTIN:** Uh huh?] Captures a Shape Train, lures a Shape Train, captures it, tries to rob it, robbery goes monumentally, overwhelmingly wrong, and becomes trapped aboard the Shape, rides the Shape for...ten or fifteen years, you know?

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) A decade. Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

**JACK:** Jumping from train to train when he can, you know. Maybe he jumps-

**AUSTIN:** Why can't-

**JACK:** Hm?

**AUSTIN:** Why can't he get off the train?

**JACK:** Doesn't let him.

**AUSTIN:** What's that mean?

**JACK:** (overlapping) Doesn't stop.

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) He jumps off, why not jump off? Too fast?

**JACK:** It would kill you, maybe? Too fast, or maybe you jump off and you're back on the train again. Um. [**AUSTIN:** Okay.] I don't know, that's a good question. This isn't me being glib in terms of being like, "and I have an answer for it."

**AUSTIN:** No no no no, this is- yes, yes.

**JACK:** Why doesn't he leave the train line? Uh...

**AUSTIN:** Listen, the train can be- jumped onto, jumped onto one of these Dukes by mistake, right? And when you're on the Duke, you can't leave it. You're not- that's one of the things it does, is *it* determines when you've arrived. [**JACK:** Yeah.] There's a person, or there's a person, one of these Keeper things on it, maybe, that will only let you off when you've reached your destination. Right?

**JACK:** Mhm. Something I wrote down is like, oh you can't get off the train until it stops and that's the point at which you go, "oh I guess this is where I'm supposed to be." [**AUSTIN:** Right.] You know, back when I was originally conceptualizing this as like, working for the Shape, [**AUSTIN:** Yeah.] the idea would be that the Shape would send Shape Knights out to locations that they might not know where they were going, you know? [**AUSTIN:** Right.] They'd kind of just arrive. You know, and maybe he killed the thing on board the Duke, and then another one just came out of a tube or something. [**AUSTIN:** (laughing) Right, right.] Just unfolded itself horribly and was like-

**AUSTIN:** Like, "ah, well, fuck." Yeah.

**JACK:** It put up no resistance to being killed, because it was just like, "I don't know, I'm just going to make another of these."

**AUSTIN:** "I'll just make another." Yeah, totally. And again, you can keep thinking on this, we don't need a firm finished answer here, [**JACK:** Yeah.] but like there's a lot there that we can play with. And again the line here for me ends up needing to be- whatever, however you started it, are you now part of an organization- and we kind of already kind of talked about this. Of like, I like the idea that there's like the kind of independent worker but like you have your Guild card, so to speak, right? You have your like- you go check in at some, or you *could* go check in at some location down the way, [**JACK:** Right.] and say like, "ah yeah, I need a- here, I'm turning in my punch card, 'cause I've done my ten mandatory walks this year, I need my pay." Or whatever it is, right?

**JACK:** "I've done my daily challenges."

**AUSTIN:** (laughing) Yeah, exactly. Yes.

**JACK:** Yeah, and I mean there's this, there is this community-

**AUSTIN:** Or, "I need more training- I need some- do you have any resources on learning how to deal with blank," or whatever, you know?

**JACK:** Yeah, it's like, "oh, it seems like I'm going to need to ride Red Line B" or whatever, [AUSTIN: Right.] the lines need names, [AUSTIN: Yeah, we'll get there.] but it's like "I know Red Line B goes through these fucking awful cuttings in the mountain," and it's like, "I'm not familiar with tunnel work" [AUSTIN: Mhm.] "so I need to send in..." I do think that after he'd been on this train for five years or something, he passed another train, and there was someone on it too. [AUSTIN: Right.] And that was kind of like the first real thing of like, "oh, other people have- I'm not the only person who is stuck here."

**AUSTIN:** Right.

**JACK:** And I wonder if that is the way into this kind of Order, is this faintly empowering realization of like, "oh, right, things that aren't the Shape can- have made this mistake before me," [AUSTIN: Mhm.] "and we are now stuck on this line."

**AUSTIN:** Were other people not getting on and off the train for that five years? It was just a prison train for you?

**JACK:** (overlapping) I don't think you can board- I think it was a prison train, yeah. [AUSTIN: Okay.] I don't think you can board one the Duke-tier trains unless-

**AUSTIN:** What's it gain by that...what's it gain by holding a 15-year-old child for five years?

**JACK:** Uh, it's revenge? It's...

**AUSTIN:** For what?

**JACK:** Trying to rob it. [AUSTIN: So it-] Trying to think that you could capture the train.

**AUSTIN:** Okay.

**JACK:** It's, again, I don't know what the answer is.

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) But then you've captured the train for five years. This is the thing.

**JACK:** (overlapping) No, how have I captured it? I can't-

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) Is if the train is the- because what you've managed to do is trick it into being obsessed with you for five years instead of doing whatever else it wants.

**JACK:** I mean, that's presupposing [AUSTIN: Right?] that it isn't already doing whatever else it wants, right? Does it?

**AUSTIN:** But what else would it be- would it have been picking up and carrying things? Because if it's not doing that and only carrying you, then, it's a prison for the train too. Do you know what I mean?

**JACK:** (laughing) It's like "I got this fucking boy on my train."

**AUSTIN:** Right. Right.

**JACK:** "He keeps killing the guard."

**AUSTIN:** Right. Right. (laughing) Every three weeks, he kills another guard.

**JACK:** (overlapping) "He takes another shot at killing the guard. I should make another one."

**AUSTIN:** "I make another one." Or also like, I'm not-

**JACK:** What do trains want?

**AUSTIN:** -I'm not trying to push back on this, I'm trying to like figure out what's, [**JACK:** No, no, totally.] what the...like, what do you eat when you're on this train? Is there a dining car? Is there, that just always has food?

**JACK:** There's fucking awful manna, yeah, there's like, there's like...

[short pause]

**JACK:** There's like bizarre tasteless Shape food. There's like-

**AUSTIN:** What if you're stuck in certain car- What if there's...what if...the thing I'm trying to get to also is like...I want the train to keep working the way it wants to work, [**JACK:** Also this-] but then also separate you from it.

**JACK:** What does a train do?

**AUSTIN:** I don't know. A train-

**JACK:** What does a train want?

**AUSTIN:** -a train, uh, consumes fuel to haul things on predetermined lines.

**JACK:** It follows lines, it draws lines [**AUSTIN:** Yeah. Yeah.] repeatedly. It follows a loop. It, um...it has passengers?

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) I think it has to be- it has to include, yeah, having passengers or freight, [**JACK:** Or freight.] because otherwise it would just be the engine, and it's not just the engine, it's also the freight or passenger cars, right? And these Dukes could definitely get rid of those passenger or freight trucks, cars, if they wanted to, presumably. Unless they can't in which case are they also- are they also prisoners to the fucking Shape?

**JACK:** They're prisoners to the Line, right? [**AUSTIN:** Yeah.] Like the Line is the thing, it's not the trains, it's the...the problem is the Line. And everybody who interacts with the Line gets stuck in it one way or another. [**AUSTIN:** Yeah, yeah.] Like the Dukes? And right up the top, the Cardinals, they're as close to sitting pretty on this thing as they can. 'Cause they're like...

**AUSTIN:** Which means that they have more freedom than the regular trains?

**JACK:** Yeah, maybe.

**AUSTIN:** They express themselves in more- in a wider range of ways?

**JACK:** Is this, we are- Thomas the Tank Engine again here though, right? **[AUSTIN: Yeah.]** I mean, like anytime we make vehicles that, that have the-

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) I'm not saying they talk, when I say they express themselves I mean they get to be a big horse carrying the, you know, leading the train, or they get to be the broken engine tendril monster. And that's a sort of expression of self, presumably, right?

**JACK:** Yeah, totally! It's...we're sort of verging on sort of like, um, vaguely Branched conversations here where it's like, well, what is something so far removed **[AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah.]** from a person want? Like I imagine up in the north one of the Dukes has been building a new track, uh, **[AUSTIN: Sure.]** or new track is being constructed, and it's really fucking scary, because what it's building is it just like goes up here **[AUSTIN: Mhm.]** and then it just does, it just does lines. **[AUSTIN: (laughing) Right.]** Like this. **[AUSTIN: Yeah.]** And they're like, "what are you doing? Why are you building this? You keep just making these weird shapes up here."

**AUSTIN:** And then like the Ringed City people are like, "this is very close to us, can you not do this please." And-

**JACK:** So they send in a Shape Knight. But the Shape Knights know that they can't kill one of the Dukes. Maybe someone did it once and it just came back.

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) Someone did it once. Yeah.

**JACK:** But it's like, so what do you have to do then, you have to scare it off, like it's an animal, like it's a big-

**AUSTIN:** Right, you have to like corral it back towards the center.

**JACK:** (overlapped) Maybe I was rescued! By Shape Knights.

**AUSTIN:** Right, maybe you were rescued. Yeah. Yeah yeah yeah. And then brought into the fold, at that point.

**JACK:** And the moment that they show me how- the moment that, in the rescue when they stop a Duke and they board a Duke, I realize how facile and ridiculous, you know, my-

**AUSTIN:** (laughing) Yeah. What if you were- okay, what if you were- what if there was someone else- what if there were a bunch of other people stuck on this train with you and- because otherwise, who gets the Shape Knight sent after them and the answer is like-

**JACK:** (overlapping) Why, why does a child...you know...

**AUSTIN:** -it's some fancy lady from the Ringed City who got on the wrong train, [**JACK:** Yeah!] or thought she was running away from her mother, and then, you know what I mean? The dynasty sent out a Shape Knight to rescue her or what- you know what I mean, that style of-

**JACK:** (overlapping) What I love here is it's like, well what if she's been on here for- when I board aged fifteen what if she's been on here for ten years already? [**AUSTIN:** Right.] And she is just at her absolute wits end. [**AUSTIN:** Yes.] And there's something- that says something really powerful about the Shape Knights as well, which is that they take the commission, and they're like "fucking hell. Stopping one of these things is going to be a project."

**AUSTIN:** "This is my life's work, this is-" this is a long-term project.

[ 1 hour 20 minutes ]

**JACK:** Yeah. This is Moby- [**AUSTIN:** Right. Right, yeah.] this is- the big figure here is Moby Dick as well, right? It's like- to hunt Moby Dick would be like hunting one of the Cardinals, [**AUSTIN:** Right.] but trying to take down, even taking down like a Duke-tier train would be like, (big breath in) "oooooh boy." And then when-

**AUSTIN:** And that's when it's like "I'm not taking it out, I'm not taking it down, I'm just getting on, I'm rescuing whoever's on that fucking thing, I'm getting out," right?

**JACK:** But we need to stop the train to do that [**AUSTIN:** Right.] and that is going to take real magic [**AUSTIN:** Right, right.] or real planning, or you know...we'll have to liaise with other local- we might need a Deadwalker to do this thing, [**AUSTIN:** Right.] we might need a-

**AUSTIN:** Yes, yes, exactly. Right, right, right, right, right. And then you stop it for long enough to get on, get what you need, and get off. And then in some ways that's a Shape Knight who's done what you said you wanted to do, right? And that's part of the thing, that's like- you wanted to do that.

**JACK:** (overlapping) Yeah, totally!

**AUSTIN:** And you couldn't do it. You got trapped on here with her and maybe with some other people. The thing that I would love is the vision of like, I would love for you to leave that with like four connections [**JACK:** Yeah!] of people who passed through. Maybe one person gets let off *once*.

**JACK:** Oh, it's awful!

**AUSTIN:** It's like in the middle of the night, everyone's asleep, the train comes to a halt and then like the only door that opens is someone else on the train, you know? Some debt priest or something.

**JACK:** Everybody banging on the windows. Or-

**AUSTIN:** Yes. And sees this person leaving and they're like, "I'm going to take the opportunity to go! I guess I served my time!" You know?

**JACK:** Yeah. Yeah. It's awful, it's terrifying.

**AUSTIN:** Yeah, that's fun. So now you've been away from it for some amount of time, you've been free from that train for long enough to have become a Shape Knight.

**JACK:** And I've been working on the Shape, yes.

**AUSTIN:** Have gotten onto other trains at this point. Have...led people...

**JACK:** (overlapping) Regularly boards and rides the lowest tier, you know.

**AUSTIN:** Right, right. The regular trains. Quote unquote. "Regular" trains.

**JACK:** Corrals trains, **[AUSTIN: Mhm.]** you know, keeps them out of certain areas, like raids a Shape construction site which is just manned **[AUSTIN: Right.]** by these things. What are other things Shape Knights do? If a rumor spreads that one of the trains is carrying a thing you might be able to intercept it but that's really hard...

**AUSTIN:** Yeah, yeah.

**JACK:** And then research, you know. **[AUSTIN: Yeah.]** There are probably researchers and scientists and...

**AUSTIN:** All sorts of- yeah, that style of scholar, right? Train scholars. Shape scholars. Let's keep moving because we've been going for a while already.

**JACK:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**AUSTIN:** I think this one is pretty easy to change. You know, there's this move called the Last Train that is about calling the last train to you. At this point that's a zenith ability, that's one of the- it's the last move you would take, there's three of those that you could pick from if you complete a zenith-level flag, or whatever- what are they called, why am I blanking on the names of those things? Uh, beats. One of them is the Last Train and that's like, "hey, The Train shows up."

**JACK:** Yes.

**AUSTIN:** And I guess that still works for us because trains are still- it could be one of these Cardinal trains, or it could be one of these god trains that shows up if you take that move, right. That's the last thing you'll do as a person. (laughing) So we should be as big as we want to, **[JACK: Yes, absolutely.]** and I feel like we've answered that question through our conversation. We've already talked about how people have learned to use the train despite its unpredictability, we've already talked about whether you're a part of an official organization. I really do like that idea of like the bounty office of like, yeah you can go and and you can check in, but that doesn't mean that you are- you don't have a boss, right?

**JACK:** No. I might have like a Greef Karga kind of figure, who is like-



**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) Right, you might have someone who is like, what do you call that, like a dispatcher or something, right?

**JACK:** Yeah. Which is very different than a Shape dispatcher.

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) "Yeah, we've got a contract for such-and-such a place" right?

**JACK:** Yeah. Yeah yeah yeah. And we're going to send you out to...you know...but also you might just go out on horseback or whatever [**AUSTIN:** Mhm.] and notice that there's like a- (laughing) I was going to say notice that there's like a wounded train out there or whatever, but you know what I mean, right? Like that kind of a...

**AUSTIN:** Maybe! Right? Totally! Listen, I could cause trouble for someone else on another train coming this way.

**JACK:** Absolutely. Or like the line's broken and the Shape beings don't seem to be fixing it, so like, "oh my god, we need to probably just patch this up."

**AUSTIN:** Yeah. Um, what- is the- people recognize you as a Shape Knight. [**JACK:** Mhm!] Presumably. [**JACK:** Mhm.] And that doesn't carry authority in the legal sense but it does carry authority culturally? I'm guessing?

**JACK:** Yeah, they're probably like the bounty hunter riding into town, or like the...[**AUSTIN:** Right.] But the specific bounty hunter, if you had a problem with trains. Or if you had a problem with, you know...

**AUSTIN:** Right. Do you do work that's not train related when it- [**JACK:** Yes.] I mean, you will, because that's the game that we're playing, [**JACK:** Yes.] but like have you in the past?

**JACK:** There are big jobs and small jobs, you know? [**AUSTIN:** Right.] It's like the stupid specific set of skills thing, I think things that Train Knights can do, or that Shape Knights can do, allow them to do other things. Like. [**AUSTIN:** Right.] Classical bounty hunting-

**AUSTIN:** Right. When someone says-

**JACK:** -or smuggling, or...

**AUSTIN:** When someone says like, "oh my god, there is a foul living swamp creature, undead swamp creature who's infested the part of the town- some part of the town," you don't go like, "well it ain't the train station so that's not my job. You can't pay me to do that."

**JACK:** Absolutely. No.

**AUSTIN:** You'd go like, "eh, okay, if you can't take care of it, if the price is right, I'll kill that troll or whatever."

**JACK:** I'd say like, is Ali's character available? Or like is-

**AUSTIN:** Exactly. Yeah yeah yeah. Right.

**JACK:** You know, it's like, "yeah absolutely, would you prefer to get someone?" And they're like, "oh we sent it in and uh, she was killed."

**AUSTIN:** (laughing) Right.

**JACK:** (laughing) Like the swamp creature just ate her.

**AUSTIN:** And then you say "well, my rate is twice that now. Twice what it was before, and."

**JACK:** Yeah, exactly. "And I think I'm going to die, but. Let's, you know."

**AUSTIN:** Let's talk about your armor, because the Vermissian plate is such a big deal. **[JACK: Yes.]** What's the Shape Knight armor look like? Is it-

**JACK:** It's made of a train, they killed a train. They got one!

**AUSTIN:** They got one?

**JACK:** A loooong time ago.

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) They did? Like a regular one.

**JACK:** Nope.

**AUSTIN:** A big one.

**JACK:** Yep. They got one. **[AUSTIN: Oooo.]** They- it was like the work of a century, or of like fifty years. **[AUSTIN: Right.]** It was like- and when I say "they" I don't mean me. I mean...

**AUSTIN:** No no no no no.

**JACK:** The closest thing to the guild.

**AUSTIN:** You mean previous Train Knights, the first Knights of the Shape.

**JACK:** They managed to kill one and get one. I don't know how but the image I have in my head is almost like loads of awful gossamer threads strung up around a track. **[AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah.]** And a train hitting almost like spider web at 200 miles an hour.

**AUSTIN:** It can't see it- yeah, uh huh. Yeah.

**JACK:** And they kill it. They manage to kill this train, and they have got it in- or they've got what's left of it in a train yard, that they protect devoutly. But I don't mean like religiously, **[AUSTIN: Right.]** I mean it's like extremely important, **[AUSTIN: Yeah.]** because when a new Train Knight have proven themselves, they strip this- they are in the process of stripping this train **[AUSTIN: Mhm.]** and forging armor from its corpse?

**AUSTIN:** Mhm. Was this like a Cardinal level or a god level, like how high up was this?

**JACK:** I don't think it was like a god level train...

**AUSTIN:** Okay.

**JACK:** I think it's probably higher than a Duke. Or maybe it is some...something...we need other names for these, I don't think they're called like Dukes and Cardinals...

**AUSTIN:** No no no. But I know what you mean.

**JACK:** There is something interesting about-

**AUSTIN:** A Limited, not an Express, or you know, whatever we end up with.

**JACK:** Yeah yeah yeah. I don't know. Either they got a Cardinal and it was like the biggest fucking deal that they've ever done [**AUSTIN:** Mhm.] or they got a Duke and it's still a big fucking deal. [**AUSTIN:** Right, right.] The armor is the train in synecdoche, it has the same power that the train does, which is why it is...important armor. And why it has these properties. As far as the objects remember what they were, especially objects that did the same thing, like travel these lines for a very long time, and this armor remembers that it used to be a train? [**AUSTIN:** Mhm.] And I wonder if on some level it's like, "well now I can go fucking anywhere. I don't have to..." Um...

**AUSTIN:** Right. Like it might have- there might be part of it that is almost perversely...

**JACK:** Well it was freed from the Shape.

**AUSTIN:** ...interested in this. Right, it was freed from the Shape. Right.

**JACK:** And the Shape is the train's master, in the same way that, you know.

**AUSTIN:** Right. Is there, um...do...let's say you're a Shape Knight. And you're rescuing an heiress from a train, and it turns out there's a now 22-year-old bad bandit stuck on the train, and "ah fuck, I guess you're coming with me." And on the way out you grab a...on the way out you notice that there is a- some sort of, you know, valve loose, from where you burst through the side of the train, when you briefly stopped it. Do you grab that valve and then use that as part of what you enhance your armor with? Do Shape Knights, like, salvage stuff from the trains that they interact with, and add it to the armor? Or is everything they have from that one fallen train from centuries ago?

**JACK:** I could go either way. I do quite like the idea that they have this very finite resource.

**AUSTIN:** Me too. Yeah.

**JACK:** Also they're like, well it's...one some level they're like, "well it's fine that we can chop this train up because it's dead, or because it's not on rails, it can't go anywhere." But like if I take something from one of these Dukes, that train is on some level going to be pissed at me now?

**AUSTIN:** Oh yeah. Totally.

**JACK:** And I might need to travel on it, or I might need [**AUSTIN:** Right, right.] to form some...in-

[ 1 hour 30 minutes ]

**AUSTIN:** So at the very least it's a very egotistical and risky thing to do.

**JACK:** Yes. And there are probably young Shape Knights who try it? **[AUSTIN: Mhm.]** And that's the last mistake they make. **[AUSTIN: Mhm.]** And there are probably young Shape Knights who succeed, and then they're the fucking king of the town. Or believe they are for the next six months or whatever.

**AUSTIN:** Right. Until the train rolls through. Yeah. Can you remove your armor? I don't think this is in the book, like I don't know...

**JACK:** This is a good question. I was thinking about-

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) You know, does it-

**JACK:** I was watching the Mandalorian, and I was thinking, if you have a character whose thing is that their face is covered by a mask, your story is inevitably going to be about removing the mask.

**AUSTIN:** Yeah, totally.

**JACK:** You will never be able to get away from that. And one level that's sick as hell, but on the other hand it's like, is this this character? Can this character-

**AUSTIN:** Is that the story you want to tell? Yeah.

[short pause]

**AUSTIN:** And it doesn't seem like it is.

**JACK:** No.

**AUSTIN:** It doesn't seem like, "oh, I'm stuck in my work suit," this seems more like someone who from the jump is like, "whew! Long day. Taking the armor off, putin' on my-"

**JACK:** (overlapping) "I'm gonna to get a drink."

**AUSTIN:** Exactly, "I'm going to go get a drink, I'm going to go hang out with- I'm going to play some cards." That.

**JACK:** Yeah, where it's like there's like a guy in the saloon who can play the violin, like really well. **[AUSTIN: Right, right.]** And I want to go listen to this guy play the violin.

**AUSTIN:** Just gonna go listen to that guy play the violin, I just- that's all I need right now.

**JACK:** I think the...part of what we're getting at here though is like, well why would I take it off when I'm working? It's like this thing, why would I take my welding goggles off? If I try welding without these goggles-

**AUSTIN:** Oh! Yeah. I did not mean while you were working. I meant [**JACK:** No. No, yeah.] at like the end of the day.

**JACK:** It's like, "can you remove your armor? No, not while I'm working, I will get killed by a train."

**AUSTIN:** (laughing) Yes, exactly. Uh, alright! Some other moves here, or I guess it's time to talk about some moves. You already talked about the one zenith move. There are other ones here, and we already have answered this one, Vermissian plate, which is your main one, says "your armor is made of scavenged, barely understood technology from the alternate realities inside the Vermissian network." That is not the case for us.

**JACK:** No.

**AUSTIN:** Instead it is made up of the trains themselves, so that's-

**JACK:** Well, one train.

**AUSTIN:** That helps, because it means I don't have to worry about alternate realities from the train, I already have enough alternate realities going on across the Heartland.

**JACK:** (laughing) Yeah.

**AUSTIN:** Protector's Gauntlet says, "a heavy metal gauntlet bearing the emblem of your House: the Lords Galvanic, the Free Wheels, the Cross Countrymen." We've already kind of suggested that no, there aren't similar houses, but is there some sort of categorization here for you? And obviously, Protector's Gauntlet, you don't need that to be true to take it, [**JACK:** Right.] the thing that's true about Protector's Gauntlet is you get plus one blood protection and plus one fortune protection, right? And you have a new big gauntlet on. But I am curious if there's like- are there like Train Knight gangs, or subdivisions, or some- like what would be the thing that sets this off that isn't just "I got a new big gauntlet."

**JACK:** It's like, "Oh I got this gauntlet from the Bayou Boys." [**AUSTIN:** Right.] Or it's like, "I got this gauntlet from the Great Plains Mudskippers." Or...

**AUSTIN:** And are those subgroups of Shape Knights? [**JACK:** No.] Those are-

**JACK:** I mean, they are Shape Knights. But they're almost like local crews. They're not even- I'm so hesitant to say oh, they're a part of a big guild or whatever, but it's like, "Ah fine, Larry, you're a Shape Knight." [**AUSTIN:** Right.] "We could the whole 'this town ain't big enough for the both of us,' but I hear that there's a Duke coming over the horizon in the next two weeks, and.." And then we do that for five years and we're like, "oh sick, actually we're kind of a team."

**AUSTIN:** Right. So there are these little affiliated-

**JACK:** (overlapping) Very loose-

**AUSTIN:** -affiliated Train Knights, or Shape Knights, right, but they're not- there's no hierarchy. It's, you wear a patch, you get a discount at the drink at the right bar.

**JACK:** Yeah, and you see another gang and you're like, "I'm from the whatever crew," and they're like, (laughing) "I don't know who that is or what," you know?

**AUSTIN:** Right. "Y'all sound corny as shit." [**JACK:** Yeah. Uh huh.] "Whaddup." You know? "Like I'm glad you're a Shape Knight but this is Bayou Boy territory."

**JACK:** "Yeah, we're from the very well named Bayou Boys." (laughing)

**AUSTIN:** Yeah, totally. Um, I don't know why I have this next question: "Dragon Killer says you've been entrusted with a great blade from the Order's vaults, an ancient weapon designed to slay the fiercest abominations within the Network. Will this be available to you? Is this tied to an Order or something more organic?" I guess this is like, you can answer that if you end up taking that move, really, but given that we do know that there is this one felled train, the idea that there is a weapon made of that, that those are very rare, makes sense to me.

**JACK:** Right. Also it just became clear to me that perhaps the loose affiliations are Line-based?

**AUSTIN:** Ooooooh, that's it.

**JACK:** There is still this idea, it's still very very loose, but [**AUSTIN:** Yeeah.] it's like, "Oh cool. So the Green Line actually has four gangs on it 'cause the Green Line is really big." [**AUSTIN:** Right.] And up on the southern tip you're going to be dealing with the fucking Bayou Boys or whatever.

**AUSTIN:** Right. Right.

**JACK:** And there's reputations as well. It's like, "oh the people on the Purple Line are weird as hell." [**AUSTIN:** Yeah. Yeah.] "And they keep claiming they managed to kill an X but we know they didn't."

**AUSTIN:** (sneeringly) "We know they didn't."

**JACK:** Yeah, the blade is from the corpse of the train.

**AUSTIN:** Right, yeah, that makes sense. There are some abilities here, like Sanguinarian Ray or Steel Bones that read the armor as almost a prosthetic a little bit? So Steel Bones for instance says, "your armor bolts onto special implants that absorb harmful energy and distribute it throughout your body. Gain the Endure skill. You can fall distances of up to three stories" [**JACK:** (distantly) Whooo.] "without taking damage." Sanguinarian Ray says "your inefficient mortal heart is supplemented by a rig that extracts, filters, and nourishes your vital fluids. One side effect of this is that your blood acts as an antenna for the scattershot electrical impulses of the Heart. Gain the Discern skill. If one of your senses becomes damaged or unusable, you can replace it with the weird echoes that shudder through your exposed blood. It's not perfect, but it'll do." Those to me feel medical and feel connected to disability-

**JACK:** Right.

**AUSTIN:** -and bodies in that very direct way. And those are minor abilities, so that means there's a good chance you'll end up having the kind of XP, so to speak, to take it. You start with three minor abilities and you get them- and you get another one whenever you complete a minor beat. And you'll complete those once per session, basically, right? And so there's a chance you'll take those. I'm not sure if you're interested in those or that part of it, but I am curious to what degree...I mean, those are something that I will pull on when I'm looking at other NPC Train Knights, for instance.

**JACK:** (sighs) Yeah.

**AUSTIN:** And so I'm curious how you feel about that as a throughline for this character. 'Cause it's not- they're not prosthetics in the sense that they are about addressing damage to the body or something like that, or bodily difference. They are a little more proactive than that in both cases, which is like, puts it more in the deus ex realm of body prosthetic? Though I guess Sanguinarian Ray really is like, anything that's like...that's like having a dialysis machine almost, [JACK: Yeah.] you know what I mean, built into you. So that is drawing on that pretty directly. I'm curious how you feel about that stuff with the Shape Knights in general.

**JACK:** I think...I wonder if it varies Knight by Knight, [AUSTIN: Mhm.] or company by company. I think for this character, um...I was thinking of it more in terms of putting on weapons?

[AUSTIN: Mmm, mhm.] Kind of mechanical god kind of thing.

**AUSTIN:** Yeah yeah yeah.

**JACK:** Where it's like, you are going to be dealing with such intense forces of like velocity and inertia that the way to do that is to clad yourself in the sort of the source of those forces?

[AUSTIN: Mhm.] I don't know whether or not I am particularly looking to go down that aspect of like that, that particular body modification, [AUSTIN: Right.] or that particular conversation there? It's much more like an...an armature that the Shape Knight, or that this Shape Knight puts on. With that being said, I think there is probably an immense culture of technology and of exploration around that stuff. And also people who might get injured, [AUSTIN: Right.] and want to continue to work, or have to continue to work. And so utilize the- I think out of all the people here the Shape Knights are probably the people who would be like, "oh yeah, absolutely, we can figure out how to do this."

**AUSTIN:** Right, right. "We can make this work, we can figure this out for you." Yeah. Totally. Speaking of technology, the Vermissian is the only class to start with the domain Technology. You know, there're lots of classes that start with Occult, for instance, in this book, unsurprisingly.

[JACK: Mmm!] You know, the Hound starts with Haven, the Cleaver starts I want to say with Cursed. But you're the only one to start with Technology. So that gives you as a player, I think, the kind of like brush a little bit to talk about Technology in- and we've already had a bit of this conversation in a previous call that you and I had, with everybody else, but I'm curious if you've had any more thoughts on what that means. What is technology in this world? I mean, I guess the book says that Technology is...what? How do they describe it? (laughing) "Machines, buildings, and devices."

**JACK:** Yeah, uh huh.

**AUSTIN:** So that's pretty broad. Buildings is a great inclusion there.

[ 1 hour 40 minutes ]

**JACK:** I don't think there's anything wireless. And I think that transmitting [ **AUSTIN:** Oh sure. Definitely.] stuff down wireless is really difficult. And-

**AUSTIN:** It has to be experimental at best, right?

**JACK:** And very rare, you know. You know those awful Victorian wires that were like fiber-wrapped in fiber or something? [ **AUSTIN:** Mhm. ] I don't want any of that shit. Like I don't want any of the "oh look, it's cool early electricity!"

**AUSTIN:** Right.

**JACK:** I think the technology that I'm much more interested in is like right on the edge of- they've managed to make steam trains- oh no, they haven't! That's the other thing, right? They probably- are there normal trains? Have we managed to make steam trains?

**AUSTIN:** No, right. We've said this, right, the answer is only the fucking- someone who's made it their life's work and now they're looking over their shoulder has managed to make the steam train, right?

**JACK:** And hook it up to the Shape.

**AUSTIN:** Yeah. Yeah. Hook it up to the Shape.

**JACK:** Like they could have it go round their backyard.

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) I guess then the question is beyond the Ringed City are there trains?

**JACK:** And maybe no. Maybe you know, it's like, what's a piece of alien-

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) It's a big difference, because the second there's a train- we should be very thoughtful about this in terms of which direction we go because it will shape everything to come in some ways. Trains change the world the same way planes and boats do, right? [ **JACK:** Yes. Yeah. ] Like space gets so much smaller once you can cut down a forest and then ship all of that wood or ship all of the granite you've dug up over train lines inland, a distance that would have taken you a year, you can now do it in a week or whatever, that's a big difference. So I'm not- I'm open to going wherever you want to go on that. But.

**JACK:** Yeah. It's really interesting both ways.

**AUSTIN:** The other thing that ends up doing that is so fascinating would be like, if there aren't trains outside the Ringed City, one: that helps indicate why the forces outside that world do want to send in scouts and scholars [ **JACK:** Yes. ] and people to study this place? Is because if



there's technology here that is distinct and novel, they will want it, right? And two: it does end up making this space, um...like an infection of modernity?

**JACK:** Yes! Yes.

**AUSTIN:** Which is kind of fun?

**JACK:** Yes, it's like-

**AUSTIN:** And a reverse of the way this normally goes? Frontier spaces are often framed as being backwards, right, or like the last place quote unquote "civilization" touches.

**JACK:** (overlapping) Like we are pushing into them, with all of our technology. **[AUSTIN:** Right.] But it's like, no, what if the technology just came streaming out of this thing? And...

**AUSTIN:** Right. Which also helps connect to this like, the wound on the world thing? **[JACK:** Yeah.] That we've kind of stumbled into? That like, oh yeah, modernity's coming. Not that the old world is good, necessarily, um, but is the arrival of- did the arrival of steam power fundamentally help the world. And the answer is like yes in many ways. And also, we did not know how much we were going to destroy the world with new techno- by burning coal. You know? For the next centuries.

**JACK:** Yes. And there's definitely like a queen in one of these cantons, outside- well, maybe there's countries out there **[AUSTIN:** Oh yeah.] outside the Ringed City who is like, "wait! I want one of those things. But can it not make the scream of a god when it moves? You know?" **[AUSTIN:** Right.] "Can flowers not die? I just want it to go. Just go quickly please." (laughs)

**AUSTIN:** Yeah, totally.

**JACK:** Also she has no idea that what she's actually talking about is like mass deforestation and smoke poisoning.

**AUSTIN:** Exactly. Right, exactly. And everything that goes with that. Because she wants the fancy thing. Yeah. That's fun.

**JACK:** But also so that it doesn't- so that weird birds don't come pouring out of the back of it all the time.

**AUSTIN:** Right. So does that mean- so here's a question. We know that there will be...I was just talking to, who was I just talking to about this, this was...(sighs) I was *just* looking at the numbers for like populations in the Middle Ages. Maybe it was with Ali, on Ali's call, that like some Havens, probably not our Haven, which we've said will be like thousands of people, but there are probably some Havens in here that are tens of thousands of people, right?

**JACK:** Yeah, big!

**AUSTIN:** Big cities down here. Are there factories? Are there smokestacks?

**JACK:** Maybe way out. Maybe way out on the edge of the wall.

**AUSTIN:** What's the...like Dickens has factories, right?

**JACK:** Oh yeah.

**AUSTIN:** That doesn't feel too far off for us.

**JACK:** No, it's coming. Either they're being built, or they are...

**AUSTIN:** Or there's a city. There's one city that is marked by the smokestack, right? [**JACK:** Yeah.] And marked by mass production and early, you know, division of labor and automation and stuff like that. It's fun to align that stuff with this, 'cause that opens up a lot in terms of the ways in which we can make places be cursed and haunted.

**JACK:** It also gives- yeah, like a- there's some real fun Hunt: Showdown kind of stuff there, right, [**AUSTIN:** Yeah.] where it's like, "oh we're in a sawmill. We're in like a big..." you know.

**AUSTIN:** Right, yes. A cannery. Right? Yes, like those spaces are fun then, yeah.

**JACK:** Part of the reason maybe that that stuff hasn't been as widespread, or hasn't been- you know, like I do love the idea of you know, us delving through a forest and in the middle of the clearing is a lumber mill. And it's like maybe there's a dirt road coming to it, but it's not like there's a massive factory district. [**AUSTIN:** Right.] And maybe the reason there aren't these big factory districts is because in order to sustain factory districts in that way, they would need to hook them up to the Shape? [**AUSTIN:** Right.] And that is something that they want *desperately* to do, and also-

**AUSTIN:** Right, but it's so unpredictable.

**JACK:** So unpredictable. [**AUSTIN:** Right.] And so dangerous. Where it's like, "oh fine, okay, either we have to build our own trains-"

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) It's a bet. You're making a bet every time you put stuff on it, right?

**JACK:** Yeah, totally! Putting *your*, you know, I put-

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) And I love that our one other sort of mass transit convoy system is just as unpredictable because the stuff they carry transforms.

**JACK:** (laughing) Yes! Yeah! Absolutely.

**AUSTIN:** The debt priests. Like this is the part of the curse of this place is, on the way- when things leave one place and go to another place, they sh- you don't know that they're going to get there, or they might change. They've been commoditized in a way, right? They've stopped having hold on the character of what they are. You can't get things places quickly safely without risk of them being lost or changed. [**JACK:** Yeah.] That's a great element for why it hasn't become more widespread. You know?

**JACK:** But they also want that so badly.

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) But the areas directly around the lumber mill, will have- it's clear that they will have been touched by being close to the lumber mill. Right?

**JACK:** Oh yeah! Absolutely! And they'll be able to shift lumber. [**AUSTIN:** Totally.] You know, if we're talking about a cannery or we're talking about some awful Hunt: Showdown slaughterhouse or a farm or something, it's like, that is a mark of industry beyond just being some cottage project. [**AUSTIN:** Right.] It's just not mass...industry.

**AUSTIN:** Right, it's not mass- yes, yes. Totally. Not yet, anyway, right?

**JACK:** No. How do you ship goods?

**AUSTIN:** I can't believe we fucking made this show about capitalism again. God damn it.

**JACK:** (laughs) You put goods on the back of an oxcart, right?

**AUSTIN:** Right, totally. Totally!

**JACK:** Maybe you have ten oxcarts that all peel out of the factory gates at the same time. And you have a fucking Cleaver riding the back to make sure that [**AUSTIN:** Mhm.] ...whatever. But then someone says, "no, look, I swear! I've been loading iron ingots onto the Shape for decades, it's always worked great!" [**AUSTIN:** Right.] And you know, they corral a train and load it all onto a train, and the train just fucking drives off a cliff or something! And they're like-

**AUSTIN:** Totally. Or it doesn't, and what actually happens is, [**JACK:** laughs] that motherfucker just took your iron, and "ah well, you know, one in a hundred of these trains, they go right off the cliff. (sputters) Ah well, it happens, unfortunately!"

**JACK:** Yeah, and there's some Shape Knight watching it happen and is like, "that is not a train." (makes shrugging sound)

**AUSTIN:** (laughing) Yeah, exactly.

**JACK:** "That thing that went off the cliff-"

**AUSTIN:** No, I promise, earlier in this conversation I did have an idea of a con man who insists he has a train, and does not have a train.

**JACK:** (laughing) Just does not. It's so-

**AUSTIN:** Yeah. Also I've just noticed we've both gone towards, uh, what's-his-face...god, what is the character's name? Why am I blanking on it- Daniel Plainview voice with this guy (laughing).

**JACK:** All these industrialists...

**AUSTIN:** (in Daniel Plainview voice) "I'm Daniel Plainview and this is my train."

**JACK:** (in Daniel Plainview voice) "Look, I- look here, this is my son, H.W."

**AUSTIN:** (in Daniel Plainview voice) "H.W.?" (laughing) Yes. Uh, god.

**JACK:** Yeah, full of Daniel Plainview motherfuckers around here. [**AUSTIN:** Yeah, definitely.] That are constantly getting- swindling people and getting swindled by the Heart.

**AUSTIN:** (sighs) The fucking [Ash Priests](#) want a train so bad. It burns things for fuel? It's already the thing they are. They want one so bad.

**JACK:** They probably worship one of the trains.

**AUSTIN:** Oh, definitely. At least one of the Cardinals is- maybe the God of the Spark or the God of Flame is a train god. [**JACK:** Yeah.] Is a train, right?

**JACK:** Yeah.

**AUSTIN:** What do you think, Spark or Flame? What's the embodiment?

**JACK:** Well, a train...hmmm. It's Flame, right? A burner is-

**AUSTIN:** It has to be Flame, yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

**JACK:** Is that train on fire?

**AUSTIN:** Oh, definitely. Yeah yeah yeah.

**JACK:** Just a burning awful burning wreck of a train screaming by.

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) A burning train, yeah. Yeah.

**JACK:** And the Ash Priests are like, "sick!" (laughing) "Look at this!"

**AUSTIN:** Yeah, absolutely sick. Totally. Um, alright, well, we got two of those three. We need a name for that faith but we'll get there. Alright. So that's Technology. Did you take a look at the Vermissian locations in the book, 'cause there's a bunch of them?

**JACK:** (overlapping) Yeah, I'm not too tied to- I feel like we can come up with ones that fit with what we're doing better? [**AUSTIN:** Totally.] I do like sort of what they're talking about, about like drainage facilities or, um...

**[ 1 hour 50 minutes ]**

**AUSTIN:** That was really more my thing, is like, is this on vibe so to speak?

**JACK:** (sighs) Yeah, kind of.

**AUSTIN:** In terms of...yeah.

**JACK:** It's like...I think also it's- there is probably one area of it which is to do with the...it's kind of like three sectors, right? One is to do with the train gods themselves, spaces about them, you

know, like what does a train's nest look like? Where does- does a train ever stop? If they do, what happens there.

**AUSTIN:** Right, right.

**JACK:** Does something happen to tracks if a god rides over them? Does something happen to a tunnel if a god goes through it? Is there a tunnel that just has a train inside it that you don't realize until you enter and see the lights? [**AUSTIN:** Mhm.] Then there is stuff to do with the fucking weird, weird horror...weird horrors. Just like forty copper pipes that spring from the earth and every time a train goes by, one of these horrible Chrysalids crawls out of a pipe and makes something that might be a wave and then crawls back into the pipe again. [**AUSTIN:** Right.] Or um, I picture them as almost like the Iconoclasts in that they're just able to move out of, like they could come out of a hole the size of a dollar or something. [**AUSTIN:** Totally, totally.] And then the third is like people interacting with the Shape. So people who have built stations hoping that a train will come. [**AUSTIN:** Yeah, yeah.] Or like a wreck or...you know.

**AUSTIN:** Yeah, totally, yeah. Okay. Yeah, those are the sort of spaces I have in mind anyway, so that makes sense to me. Have you thought about a calling for you?

**JACK:** Yeah...

**AUSTIN:** Where you leaning in?

**JACK:** I'm torn...so when we started talking I was thinking about...is it called Forced? What's? I'm pulling up the...

**AUSTIN:** Forced. Yeah, Forced is one of them, that's the one that's like, you don't want to be down here, you're a prisoner or some sort of cult initiate or you're being blackmailed.

**JACK:** And that fitted a little better with the kind of earlier ideas of this character, [**AUSTIN:** Yeah.] but now we're talking more about...it might be something like Adventure? [**AUSTIN:** Mhm.] I was thinking of Heartsong, but I don't know whether or not...this is about what we want the character to pivot around, where it's like, [**AUSTIN:** Yeah, definitely.] I could make this Adventure...

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) The two things are: it's an ability, so it's a core ability, it's one of your starting abilities, [**JACK:** Yeah.] which is important, and then it's also a few character creation questions, like for instance the Heartsong one, one of them is "Which three images, symbols, people, or creatures do you repeatedly see when you dream?" And then it's also beats, and beats are super important because that's how you level up. And there are also literal explicit flags that you give me to say, "set me up for this next time that we play." So for instance, looking at Forced again, you know, a minor beat could be "Do something dangerous to conceal your past," or "Receive aid for someone reprehensible who's in the employ of your master." And then a major beat, let's go to a different class, or a different calling, let's go to the Penitent, one of them could be, "Save a landmark dedicated to your Order" or "Perform an act that if your Order discovered it would undo your penance."

**JACK:** Mmm.

**AUSTIN:** So like those things help me set up what you want to do. And so yeah, Adventure, Enlightenment, I think, are for me the two easiest [**JACK:** Yeah.] and most flexible for sure? The least like "here is *the* pivot point of your character in that way?" [**JACK:** Yeah.] But I'm also not opposed to someone taking a big swing and going with one of those, you know?

**JACK:** Yeah. Yeah. Adventure is "I want to be the best at this, and I believe that I can both gain glory and help people by doing so." And Heartsong is like, "I want to fucking catch a train." Like, "I wanna...I wanna...get that."

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) It might be that! I mean, you know, it might not be, it might be that the trains get you somewhere else, right. The zenith beats, right, the goals of the Heartsong are "become one with the Heart and bind your essence to it."

**JACK:** (overlapping) I'm sorry, did I say Heartsong?

**AUSTIN:** You did just say Heartsong.

**JACK:** I meant Enlightenment.

**AUSTIN:** Oh, Enlightenment, yes yes yes. Okay, yes.

**JACK:** Enlightenment is "I want to get a train."

**AUSTIN:** "I want to get a train, I want to discover how the trains work, I want to unravel the mystery of who built the train," whatever that is, right? It doesn't have to be "I want to get a train." Like, Adventurer could be "I want to get a train." It really could, but Enlightenment I think is the one that really is obsessed with knowledge and is about understanding and connection in that way. You know?

**JACK:** And does that fit with the...(sighs)

**AUSTIN:** And you don't have to decide this now! You can sleep on this.

**JACK:** No no no.

**AUSTIN:** You should reread Forced, Heartsong, and Penitent because you could come up with a great idea for one of those that we haven't thought of yet, you know? So.

**JACK:** Yeah. That might open up more doors than it closes.

**AUSTIN:** Totally.

**JACK:** Yeah. Okay! I'll keep that in mind.

**AUSTIN:** The last thing I have written down here that we haven't touched on yet, or we definitely have, but- I guess that's not true, there's two more, sorry. One is: "why are you committed to the Haven as part of the party? Why is the Haven more or less happy to have you?" I think that's a

kind of a not a hard question, given your skill set? **[JACK: Useful?]** And given that you're not like a big monster character the way like, the Witch is or something, you know?

**JACK:** (laughs) Sure. Yeah. I'm useful.

**AUSTIN:** But yeah. Useful. And you like people, presumably. **[JACK: Yeah.]** You like being part of this Haven.

**JACK:** Yeah, definitely. Um, I think this person has way fewer attachments than someone like Kalar. **[AUSTIN: Sure.]** I think that Kalar- this person doesn't necessarily have the warmth that Kalar does? But at the same time, they're like, "you know, I'm gonna roll into town, I'm gonna...what? You wanna play darts? Fine, but I have to go kill a train after we play darts." (laughs)

**AUSTIN:** "After we play darts, I have to go deal with this shit." Yeah, mhm. Cool. The last actual thing here, and this was- at a certain point this was the first question I had on the list for everybody, but I felt like, eh, it's a little too much to put it up top-

**JACK:** (overlapping) It's a lot to have first.

**AUSTIN:** -I'd rather include it at the end, now that we've talked about it? Yeah, it's just like, one of the ways in which the Shape Knight can address themes of certainty, contradiction, and uncertainty, and community. And I think we've already hit a lot of these, but I'm curious if you have any thoughts that we haven't raised or anything like that.

[short pause]

**JACK:** I mean, think that like there is something to be said for the fact this is a character who by necessity is going to be traveling? Not necessarily this character particularly, but Shape Knights move. They might move up and down lines, **[AUSTIN: Yeah.]** but they are in that way characters that will come into contact with a lot of different communities, while at the same time remaining somewhat outside of them? And I think a good Shape Knight is in some level like a pastoral role as well, where they arrive and they're like "What's going on here? How do we, you know, how do we best help this?" But I'm not actually from here, and I'm probably not really from anywhere.

**AUSTIN:** Mhm.

**JACK:** I think a train is an object that is very interested in certainty and uncertainty? It can only go in a certain place?

**AUSTIN:** To places it can go, right. Except that now we know the ways in which it does that can be unpredictable, and what it finds there can similarly not necessarily be locked in place.

**JACK:** Yeah, I mean, for example, I think the god trains and maybe even the Cardinal trains, they run on track, but getting track is not a problem for them. **[AUSTIN: Right, right.]** There is track where they go. But at the same time I think somebody who is involved with this, is going to be bound by this, you know, both weirdly flexible and weirdly rigid sort of transport network, almost.

**AUSTIN:** Mhm. Totally. Um, alright. Do you have any other notes or things you want to raise, or questions?

**JACK:** Mmmm. I don't...?

**AUSTIN:** We have a bunch of stuff up top still, but like-

**JACK:** Yeah, I don't think...

**AUSTIN:** -we've hit most of these things already, I think. So.

**JACK:** Yeah, I think we really have done most of these.

**AUSTIN:** Yeah.

**JACK:** Yeah. I think that's it. I'm excited! This is very exciting.

**AUSTIN:** (overlapping) Alright, well. Me too! Same. We're getting closer and closer to having a game every day, you know?

**JACK:** (in background) Yep!

**AUSTIN:** I can now start the process of like synthesizing all this stuff, [**JACK:** Yeah.] and thinking about maps, and I appre- can you send me this map you've drawn, over, to me.

**JACK:** Oh yeah! This really good map?

**AUSTIN:** I would love to have this great map, to include it in this post? You know? Alright, time.is?

**JACK:** Let's do it!

**AUSTIN:** Uh, twenty-five? Or are you just getting there?

**JACK:** Oh no, it's not open!

**AUSTIN:** You're just getting there.

**JACK:** No no no, I got it.

**AUSTIN:** Alright, thirty. Thirty, thirty, thirty.

**JACK:** Mhm.

[clap]