AUSTIN: Welcome to Tips at the Table, an RPG podcast focused on critical questions, hopefully smart answers, and fun interaction between good friends. I am your very tired host, Austin Walker. And joining me today, Andrew Lee Swan?

DRE: Hey, you can find me on Twitter @swandre3000.

AUSTIN: Keith Carberry?

KEITH: My name is Keith Carberry. You can find me on twitter @keithjcarberry. You can find the let's plays that I do at youtube.com/runbutton.

AUSTIN: Jack de Quidt.

JACK: Hi, you can find me on twitter @notquitereal and buy any of the music featured on the show at notquitereal.bandcamp.com.

AUSTIN: And Austin Walker, and I fucked up my like flow, my intro cadence, because I saw "and Austin Walker" at the end of this list of names on the screen, and because I'm too tired to internalize [Jack chuckles] that I am Austin Walker and already introduced myself.

JACK: You're like, "that's me!"

AUSTIN: That's me. Austin Walker— oh, he's here? Cool.

KEITH: What if you had said it and someone else introduced themselves?

JACK: Aaah. [laughs]

AUSTIN: That would be the David Lynch version of Tips at the Table 2019.

JACK: "I'm on your podcast right now." [Austin laughs]

KEITH: It's Andrew Lee Swan, Jack de Quidt, Keith J. Carberry, and two competing Austin Walkers.

AUSTIN: Should I get Craig in here?

DRE: Oh, yeah.

JACK: Yeah, let's get Craig in here.

AUSTIN: We don't really need Craig, but I'll get Craig. Uhh. Where you at, Craig? Let's see, we're— Patreon chat, right? Okay. Is that wrong? Did I do this wrong? I misspelled Craig's name.

DRE: Oh. Criag.

AUSTIN: Is that not right?

JACK: Isn't he called Zraig?

AUSTIN: I thought it was…

KEITH: It's Zraig but the command is still Craig.

AUSTIN: I thought— is this command wrong?

KEITH: Command—

JACK: You spelled Craig wrong. Doesn't it use the semicolon, Austin? Isn't it like—

KEITH: Yeah, it's C-R-A-I-G.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I did that. The second time.

JACK: Oh.

KEITH: Oh, the second time.

JACK: Is it like a semicolon?

AUSTIN: I don't think it's a semicolon. Have we forgotten how Craig works?

DRE: Oh, it's colons around Craig and then join.

KEITH: Oh, that's what it is.

AUSTIN: Ohh, Craig is still…

DRE: There's Craig.

AUSTIN: Thanks, Craig.

KEITH: Thanks.

AUSTIN: Thanks, Craig. Hi, Craig.

KEITH: Hi.

DRE: I had to search Craig in the discord.

AUSTIN: Appreciate it. [Dre laughs]

KEITH: I did the same thing one second later.

AUSTIN: Yeah. That makes sense. Alright, let's jump into these questions, today. Sound good?

JACK: Mm-hmm.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: This one comes in from Morgan, who begins:

> "This question is for Jack and ONLY Jack!"

DRE: Alright, bye!

JACK: No one else is allowed.

AUSTIN: Everyone else— thanks.

KEITH: Earmuffs, everyone.

AUSTIN: Uh huh.

> "The music in Friends at the Table is some of my favorite podcast music, and I draw a lot of inspiration from it in the music I write, because I'm also a composer! Aside from the stylistic influences that are tailored to each season, who are your biggest musical/compositional influences on the soundtrack of Friends at the Table, and what inspires the music forms you use, beyond matching the spoken dialogue of the episode?"

JACK: So, I think we might have actually answered this before.

AUSTIN: Have we? Because it was still on our big list, and I tend to remove everything once we've hit it.

JACK: I looked inside a doc— [AUSTIN: okay] google powerpoint, [AUSTIN: mmm, mm-hmm] and it seems to have been in February. However—

AUSTIN: That would be great.

JACK: Some time has passed since February, [Austin laughs] so I can give the short updated answer, [AUSTIN: sure] you know, from between February and now. Which is to say that, as Spring in Hieron has kind of been progressing, I have found myself… You know when you start a project, and you're like [snaps fingers] I've got an idea and this is what it's gonna be.

DRE: Yeah.

JACK: And then you get halfway into it, and it's just completely so wildly different.

AUSTIN: Yeah, we made Twilight Mirage last year, so. [laughs]

JACK: Yeah, right! Right! And like, and I always feel a little bit of shame in my heart, when I realize how far I've moved away from my original idea, but I have to like...that is not a valuable feeling, in part because...that original idea, I moved away from it for a reason. Like, I'm doing more interesting or more different stuff now.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

JACK: I really— I remember like starting work on Spring and wanting it to be unbelievably...sparse, and... [AUSTIN: mmm] not bleak. Hieron has never been a bleak place, except for at some points during Winter.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Yeah, "never" is maybe a… [JACK: mmm. Mm-hmm] too broad of a timeline, there.

JACK: [chuckles] Look, there's lots of different kinds of warmth, and some of them are not good.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

JACK: But, I wanted it to have this very very sparse sound. And I've found, as I've gotten further and further into Spring's soundtrack, that I've just been taking further and further steps away from it. Up to like, now, I've just finished a track for Red Jack in a couple of episodes ago, that was just like one of the straight up most complicated tracks I've done for the show.

AUSTIN: Uh huh.

JACK: And I think that this pivot speaks to what you're asking, in terms of, you know, what inspires the musical forms, which is that like, I'm trying to make music— as a composer working on a project, I'm always trying to make music that reflects the project, and that i want to see the music kind of reflected back in. And Spring has been a season of so many different angles and so many different approaches and so many different complexities, both from a sort of narrative standpoint and also from the characters in this world who are seeing this transformation happening to them. And so as we get towards the end of the season, I think a thing that I'm thinking a lot about with the music is...you know, how do I conjure this feeling of a continent that is changing, kind of unrecognizably in front of our characters? And seems to be picking up the pace in terms of doing that. While also trying to carry forward that feeling of Hieron that we've sort of always had. And that's been a very—

AUSTIN: Which is a tough blend, right? Like that is…

JACK: Yeah, I mean, 'cause I trashed a lot of the… Something I always try and do when I bring back the kind of Marielda vibe is I don't just want to play the Marielda theme again?

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

JACK: 'Cause that's not very interesting. A sort of rule of thumb that I go with motifs is: every time I bring a motif back, I try and add something new to it. So you get this weird game of telephone by the end of the season, where the motifs have been kind of transforming. But now we're so late, not just in Spring, but also in the kind of Hieron trilogy, I'm having to think very carefully about every time I use a motif, because I want to make sure that I'm doing something interesting with it but I'm also not backing myself into a corner so close to the end of the trilogy, in terms of what it is that I'm trying to [AUSTIN: yeah] put down onto paper.

AUSTIN: That's a good answer. And, because—

JACK: Get back to me in six months, and… [laughs]

AUSTIN: Whoo, and we'll have launched another season of a different thing, and we'll have, I'm sure, big new questions about that sound and that soundtrack.

KEITH: Yeah.

JACK: I have them right now.

AUSTIN: Yeah! I know, we literally were talking about it twenty minutes ago, so. Alright, next question is from Jared, who has a question about The Sprawl. "Specifically," Jared says, "about fighting and combat."

"I'm a few sessions into a new campaign of The Sprawl (using the Touched add-on book that came out recently), and I love the system so far. However, I find that I'm having trouble in the action portions — namely, it feels like too often the action devolves into shootouts and fights.

While I'm okay with some fights breaking out (one of my players is playing a Killer) my players have started to feel punished for not having more combat-capable classes (the others are playing Hacker, Driver, and Hunter, respectively). I don't know how to raise the stakes or escalate conflict when the players fail rolls without threatening violence, and once the violence starts it often ends with a bloodbath and my players feeling like they should have picked different classes. How can I offer interesting failures and maintain tension, without having everything turn into a fight?"

AUSTIN: I like this question here because we've all played— I guess only Jack and Keith have played The Sprawl specifically, but we've— this collection of people have played a range of characters over the years, ranging from very combat-capable characters to characters who don't necessarily have the biggest combat moves. So I'm curious for y'all, what you think here, in terms of there being interesting stakes, both in The Sprawl but in games more broadly, that have nothing to do with just like who wins the fight. Or, how to make those fights more interesting.

KEITH: I guess like my gut reaction to it is, you can sort of paint yourself into a corner when you're coming up with the stakes for something where, you know, things break really bad, and then the...like, a very logical and almost expected consequence is that like, someone's trying to kill you, you fucked up so bad that now you're in a room of people trying to kill you?

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah.

KEITH: So, I think that the— like, for me, one option would be to rewind and to not be putting the players into a position where them breaking bad makes that an obvious choice.

AUSTIN: Yeah, where like the stakes are not...like, one really easy way to do this is like, no one there has guns, right? These are people that you're going up against who operate in a different mode of retaliation.

KEITH: Mm-hmm.

AUSTIN: I think about stuff where— you know, especially if you're playing with characters like the Hacker, where the consequences don't have to be about immediate physical violence, it can be about the Hacker's location being given away. It can be about their future stuff being marked in different ways, where like, oh wow, they're gonna get tracked going forward.

KEITH: It can be about something that they have, like a device they have on them that—

AUSTIN: Yes.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: With the Driver, it can be about their car being— coming under threat. Maybe someone has stolen their vehicle, right? Or, maybe they've had something— you know, they get something revoked, and have to lose access to their car, and have to do something around a chase sequence that is not in their normal vehicle. So, a lot of like looking at your characters and figuring out what they have available to them and then building kind of conflict around what that stuff looks like specifically. Dre and Jack, any thoughts, here? I know Audy was a pretty, kind of— had moments of being kind of a stone-cold killer, here?

JACK: Yeah. [Dre laughs]

AUSTIN: Not being afraid of direct violence.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: But I also don't think about— I think about lots of their— the high stakes moments with them as not necessarily being about gun fights.

JACK: No. I mean, like… I always tried to make Audy feel like a blunt instrument landing in every scene that they found themselves in?

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

JACK: And I think that as a GM, something that you were good at was kind of responding to that… If you know that Audy is only able to kind of interact as a blunt instrument, put them in a china shop.

AUSTIN: Right. Right.

JACK: Or put them in a situation where they are going to have to...not just that they are going to have to act out of character, but when they do act in character, it's going to have interesting consequences. And, you know, that in part is...it's a case of being like: what is the worst possible...what would be the most— what would cause the most problem for this individual character in this individual moment?

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: Whether that's the door opening and someone who knows them coming in, which happens a lot in Twilight Mirage, where it's just like, "Oh my god, it's Open Metal." [laughs]

AUSTIN: [laughs] Right, yes, yeah yeah yeah.

JACK: Another thing that I think we do sometimes is we kind of distribute the peril across other characters, across NPCs.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

JACK: And I don't say that to mean "kill your NPCs". I think killing NPCs is fine, but I don't think you should be doing it left, right, and center, instead of— it should not be a replacement for putting your player characters in peril. But, if you have NPCs in scenes with you, they're a way for you to direct peril in a way you may not be able to do so directly with your players. I'm thinking about when we're often with Waltz Tango Cache, [AUSTIN: yeah] and lots of scenes with Waltz where we are all in peril, we see that peril reflected in Waltz as well. [KEITH, softly: god] He is having a tough time of it. [AUSTIN: mm-hmm] And the stakes for everybody are rising, as we're seeing things going worse for Waltz. Although, that dude's fuckin' amazing.

KEITH: Top most wild scenes are some of the things that have happened to Waltz Tango Cache. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Uh huh. Was that—

JACK: That dude's cool as hell.

AUSTIN: Keith, was that you or was that Dre who just said "god" under your breath when Waltz was brought up?

KEITH: I think that was Dre.

AUSTIN: Dre?

KEITH: Oh wait, it might have been me, I might have done it reflexively.

DRE: Yeah, that was you. [laughing] It was definitely you! [Austin laughs]

KEITH: Yeah, I didn't even… [laughs harder]

AUSTIN: Well like, the thing there—

KEITH: I was thinking of the elevator scene.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that elevator scene's great.

JACK: Yeah, uh huh.

AUSTIN: But like, that sequence, and then there's another sequence with Waltz towards the end of the season, [JACK: mm-hmm] with Waltz, Grand, and Fourteen Fifteen. And in both of those cases, those are scenes where the peril isn't "Waltz might get hurt", [JACK: no!] it's Waltz doesn't want the thing to happen to happen, the way it's happening, right? Or like, Waltz is...everyone likes Waltz, and Waltz will be compromised by things going down in the way that they're going down.

JACK: Waltz is a fantastic example of how…

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Sometimes not killing characters is that...if you had said in those moments, "I'm gonna kill Waltz," [AUSTIN: mm-hmm] A) There'd have been a riot, [AUSTIN, laughing: right] and B) that would have been the least interesting thing! The most interesting thing about Waltz is that it's super—it might be impossible, I don't know—it's very hard to kill him. And so that makes you make—

KEITH: I'm sure he's got a phylactery somewhere.

AUSTIN: Uh huh, you just gotta get to his phylactery, exactly. [laughter] No but, the other—

JACK: Can you kill Waltz?

AUSTIN: Eh, you know, it's complicated. The other half of this that's really interesting, or that comes to mind, is Devar, [JACK: mmm, mm-hmm] especially in Winter, where the peril was: Devar thinks you're doing something stupid.

JACK: Yeah!

AUSTIN: Devar disagrees with this. Devar will remember this.

JACK: That is an unbelievable motivator, because…

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: And also, know which characters your players like the most, and then…

AUSTIN: That is huge.

KEITH: Yeah, yeah.

JACK: Like, there are characters in Friends at the Table who, if I was told, "They're not going to like what you do", I'd go: okay, let's go. [Austin and Jack chuckle] But there are also characters who, if I was told that they're not gonna like what I do, that would motivate me very directly to think differently about what I was doing. And that would be a failure, I would consider that to be a failure, if Austin was like, "Red Jack is never going to speak to you." [Jack, Austin and Dre laugh softly]

AUSTIN: Yep. Hey, oh, that time that was Dre responding, yeah. Thoughts on that, Dre?

DRE: I think kind of building on what you said earlier, Austin, you know, about looking for things that are specific to classes. I think sometimes as GMs you get this kind of instinct where you don't want to set up something that seems to explicit for a specific character and a specific move, because you don't want to be railroading. But I think if you're playing a game that is new to you, or even if it's not new to you [AUSTIN: mm-hmm] but it's new to the players, sometimes it's kind of important to set up those kinds of specific opportunities, so that the players get to learn the depth and the breadth of what they can do and what's available to them. And I don't think it's railroading to set them up to do something cool. It's only railroading if they see the thing and they say, "Okay, I want to handle it X way," and you go "Well, no, 'cause I wanted you to do it Y way."

AUSTIN: Exactly.

DRE: But, you know, I think it's important. One of the things I like a lot about like the GM notes for Masks, is that it says in that first session your goal is to have everybody, or at least to have every move used at least once by somebody, [AUSTIN: yeah, yeah] and to very explicitly call out, "Okay, you want to do this, that is this move, and that's because blah blah blah is how this move works." I just think that's really helpful. Like, you said you're only a few games into this, so it might also be that, you know, people who are playing these non-combat roles just aren't as sure how to use their moves? Like, I remember— I forget which episode it was, Austin, but I talked about doing Discern Realities with Throndir and how I have special moves that make that move even better, [AUSTIN: mm-hmm] you were like, "Yo, why are you not doing this like every scene? [AUSTIN: yes] 'Cause this move is too good for you not to be using it more than you have."

KEITH: What was the move?

AUSTIN: Discern Realities.

KEITH: Oh, Discern Realities. Oh, it's the bonuses to— okay, got it.

AUSTIN: Yeah yeah yeah, from being a Ranger at the time, yeah yeah yeah.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Totally.

DRE: Yeah, I was like, "Oh, shit. Yeah, no, I should be using that more." [laughs]

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Totally, totally, a hundred percent. I think the other thing here for me is like—

KEITH: Everyone could use Discern Realities more.

AUSTIN: Yes. Everyone should always be using discern realities. [laughs] The other thing here is to get really specific on this set of characters and on The Sprawl. The Sprawl works best for me when direct violence is a great short term solution and a terrible long term solution. Which it always should be, because in The Sprawl, the things you're coming up against, unless you're only going up against like other runners or like local gangs or something, outnumber and outpower you, overpower you. A gunfight against a corporation might get you out of the room, but one way you can start to direct your characters away from that is to make it *very clear* that those clocks will tick faster when you leave bodies behind.

KEITH: That's a really great point. No one has more resources to make those clocks tick than a giant corporation.

AUSTIN: Yeah, absolutely.

KEITH: And they don't care how many people that you stop before they finally stop you.

AUSTIN: They will always have more in the bank. More money in the bank to hire more mercenaries, more soldiers in their roster. Right, like. You can win that gunfight, your Killer can get you out of that gunfight, probably. But, you know, your Hacker, Driver, and Hunter will probably start feeling like, with every body the Killer piles up, the more and more attention that the crew is getting, and will...you can underscore that for your Killer, which is like: hey, actually, the degree to which you go to the gun is actually putting more stress on the team altogether. Which shouldn't be like a finger wag to that player for picking that character either, that playbook either, but making it clear that you cannot kill your way out of every situation is important, right? Finding those other consequences for going that route. And, again, you tick clocks— ticking clocks doesn't only have to happen because there was a failed roll. Ticking clocks can follow the fiction, and so like, again, leaving behind a room filled with bodies, there's going to be a counteraction to that. And, you can underscore that like, hey, there are ways to get out of this—especially with these, with Hacker, Driver, and Hunter—where, hey, maybe instead of leaving behind twelve bodies, the Hunter can leave behind one. Maybe the Hunter can find a secret exit out because they're very good at investigation. Maybe the Driver, instead of doing the big gunfight, you do the thing where it's like: hey, there is literally an unstoppable force

coming in, we have to get out of here. Driver, get in that van and get us the fuck out of here. Hey Hacker, can you clear our records *because* of the bodies we left behind. Those are the sorts of goals— those are the sorts of ways that you can reward the other players for taking those playbooks, even if you already escalated towards the violence, you know? There's lots you can do there. The Sprawl's great for that stuff. I think, also, like you said, like Dre said, if you're new to this system, it's easy to default to combat, because the combat rules are pretty cool and pretty straightforward, and your players may not have gotten to the point where they're super familiar with their new stuff yet, so. Keep at it. Let us know how it turns out.

AUSTIN: Next up is from Chris, who writes:

> "Recently a friend of mine was admitted to a hospital for a few days. In order to take her mind off things, I asked her to tell me about other folks in the ward, and we came up with simple backstories for each of them. Taking inspiration from your show, I wanted to find a game that we could play via messenger that would flesh out these larger than life characters and the adventures and shenanigans they get up to, in order to keep my friend's spirits up.
>
> However, when I came to actually find an appropriate game, the sheer range of games and tools to play them with was overwhelming, and I ended up feeling discouraged from getting the game up and running. I found it really hard to find something to match the tone and setting we were going for, that didn't inject too much of it's own narrative into the mechanics of the game, and that would be amenable to playing via text. For example, The Sundered Land would have worked mechanically, but the tone and content was super not appropriate for the more light-hearted fun I was going for.
>
> Do you have any advice for finding a game to match an existing concept or narrative you already have in mind? How much time do you have to spend thinking about bending an existing system to fit your needs in these situations?"

AUSTIN: The answer to that last thing is like, constantly, all the time, forever? Forever ever. [Dre chuckles] I don't know that we've ever had a thing where we've been like, and this is… I think we probably went into Twilight Mirage feeling that The Veil was it, and it fit pretty well, but even there we had to do a lot of twisting, because The Veil was built to have kind of one clear conceptual antagonist and idea that you're exploring, and we bent that all the way around, to where there really, in the first half of that season, wasn't one. [chuckles] You know? So, my first tip here is just like...if you find something that you think fits the mechanic part of this, or the requirement about being played on a messenger or being played asymmetrically, I think spending the time to hack whatever that thing is is probably a great first step. My second piece of advice here is: you don't need a mechanic for this. With two players, you can kind of do an open-ended text-based RP that has a very simple dice mechanic. Take your 2d6 plus, or you know, whatever, and just roll with that. Or that has no dice mechanic at all. That sort of collaborative open-ended RP is something that lots of people have done for years and years

and years. Via messenger, via forums, in person, via LARPing. And that can be really rewarding, and you don't need to feel shackled to needing a system. Does anyone else have any thoughts here on either of these questions at the end?

JACK: Um…

AUSTIN: I know, Jack, you probably had to do a lot of like, "Hey, what's a cool system?" out there over the years.

JACK: Yeah, I feel like… I think primarily I'm with you, in terms of just like...this is a great space for freeform roleplaying. But, I also understand that, in some situations, having dice or having some kind of mechanical framework to help guide that storytelling is helpful. Especially if you're not necessarily as familiar with like open narrative roleplay? There is a really great series of very small zine games, [AUSTIN: mmm] by Adam Vass. They were on Kickstarter, but I think they're now on Itch. The collection is called— it's two collections, called Tome and Wish You Were Here, and they contain— it contains something like fifteen very small zine games that run a complete tone and style gamut, from system agnostic stuff for just running fantasy RPGs to a game about- with the kind of vibe of Over the Garden Wall.

AUSTIN: Cool.

JACK: I'm looking at the page now, and it includes...I'm just gonna read down this list of some of the games, 'cause it's extremely good. "A GM-less time traveling RPG for three players; a GM-less Western-themed hidden role game for three players; Snow and Cocoa, a Lasers and Feelings hack [Austin chuckles] of kids avoiding responsibility on a snow day, for two players; a GM-less party game of found objects; a GM-less reflective storytelling game; a sci-fi RPG of lost memories." The kind of breadth and small scope of a lot of these little games is very valuable to me. I picked this collection up just because I knew that there would be a point at which I'd be like, I need a game for [snaps fingers] this thing, [AUSTIN: mm-hmm] and this would be the place that I'd go to look. So I would just recommend that. The collection, again, is called: Tome and Wish You Were Here, by Adam Vass, that's V-A-S-S. And I think it's available on Itch.

AUSTIN: It is, and in fact, I think a lot of those— I think a lot of the— I think Adam was like the editor on that game, on Wish You Were Here, and there's a lot of—

JACK: Yeah, I think Wish You— There's a lot of games by other people in this collection, [AUSTIN: yes, yeah yeah yeah] which is fantastic, because you're basically opening a box from just like twenty RPG designers. This one sounds amazing. "Players fight to survive on a makeshift raft across an endless sea. Uses a twitter bot for procedurally generated setting."

AUSTIN: I love it. Love it. [Keith laughs]

JACK: I know this isn't specifically what you were looking for, but there's like twenty five games on this page.

AUSTIN: But it *could be*. [Dre laughs] Like, those characters you've made can go anywhere!

JACK: Austin. Austin, do you remember when we talked about a Bluff City game about a group of people on a flamingo raft that gets loose?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Uh huh! Yep. There it is!

JACK: Let's fuckin' play The Deep Blue! [snaps fingers] Let's do it! [Dre laughs]

AUSTIN: Right now! This is no longer a Tips at the Table, this is a Live.

JACK: Bluff City theme, here we go!

AUSTIN: I think, real quick, another thing you've just noted is Itch has become a fantastic resource [JACK: hell yeah] for tiny games. If you go to itch.io you can look up physical games as a really broad category, but you can also look at tags like TTRPG or story game and find lots and lots and lots of small games. And that answers kind of the first thing here, which is: how do you find new games. Itch has become kind of a great standout, with a huge and incredible independent and queer scene, so check that out for sure. Dre or Keith, anything here, or do you want to move on?

DRE: I'm good.

KEITH: Yeah, I don't have anything that is different from what's already been said.

AUSTIN: Okay. Here is Parker, who says:

> "How do you know when it's time to let go of a character? I think of Jack and Keith as the two most notable examples of this coming up in Friends at the Table. I have a player character who is separated from the party. He will probably come back eventually, but by then I'll be deep in a newly rolled character. I feel invested in my original character, but I don't want to take away from the main action by bringing the camera back to him (and also spending the majority of play not being involved as the story continues). The GM is open to whatever I want to do, so I could definitely work something out; how do I know when it's time to move on, or if it's worth continuing this character's arc?"

AUSTIN: And I'll note there's another question here that was very similar from sniperserpent, shoutouts to sniperserpent who's a great mod in the community. And they write:

"In my current Scum and Villainy campaign, I'm playing as a speaker who's kind of a combination of Princess Leia and Ibex. She's rad, and I've been playing her long enough that mechanically she's kind of at the apex of characters in the setting. She has eight different moves and nearly has every possible pip in the approaches she tends to use. Story-wise, there's a lot she's still tied to and it would be interesting to keep her around, but mechanically, she's seemingly reached her end point. How do I handle a character whose story has lasted longer than the game mechanics seem to allow for?"

AUSTIN: So a couple of questions here on just like: hey, how do I retire a character? Is it time to retire a character? And I guess techincally no one here has done that in the middle of a season, [JACK: mm-hmm] but I guess, Jack, you've kind of done that, in a sense, with Fourteen Fifteen a number of times. And I guess— I'm trying to figure out what Parker is looking at, here. Keith, do you know who they're thinking of for you?

KEITH: Yeah, that's gotta be Fero, right? Fero— I almost left as Fero.

AUSTIN: You almost did, but Fero did come back. We never really—

KEITH: He did come back, but that is, I think, a one-to-one [AUSTIN: yes] almost scenario. Separated from the party.

AUSTIN: Separated from the party, yes. That's true, that's true.

KEITH: PC separated from the party AND deciding whether or not to bring that character back.

AUSTIN: Yeah. And I guess part of it with Jack too could be some stuff around the...around Hitchcock [JACK: mm-hmm] towards the end of Marielda, to some degree, in terms of giving up control.

KEITH: I guess I'm curious about what...like, why the cha— I guess we don't need this to answer the thing, but why is the character leaving and it's gonna be long enough that you're rolling a new character for the meantime?

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

KEITH: 'Cause then what's gonna happen to that character when the original PC comes back?

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's a good question.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: A lot of games actually will straight up let you play as multiple characters. You know, one of the top level things you can do in Dungeon World is take on a protege and play as both of your characters. [KEITH, quietly: god] That is not a thing that is out of the realm of possibility.

KEITH: I'm like so close to hitting that with Fero, [AUSTIN: you are] and it's like. Imagine Fero with a protege! [laughs]

AUSTIN: It's very funny to me. It's extremely funny. I will say...we should talk about what happens with Fero at level 10, or at level 11, if we get there. We're like so close, but I don't know if there's that much season left, but we should figure it out.

KEITH: Yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: Jack, Dre, anybody here, do you have thoughts besides just like, I wish we had more details? I also wish we had more details, unfortunately we don't.

KEITH: I do have a thought based on...or like, putting my question to the side.

AUSTIN: Aside, yeah, yeah.

KEITH: My thought is like...you know, if Fero was coming back or not was very much a question— like I really had to think a long time about what...like, I had to roleplay, [laughs] is basically the answer. [Jack and Austin laugh] Like, I had to decide if Fero would actually come back. Like I didn't want to just bring Fero back because I wanted to keep playing as Fero. Like I really had to...it goes to, you know, the thing that I think of all the time when we're playing, or usually after we're playing, is like, you know...is the— what's the difference between the best idea and the most accurate roleplay? And is being the most accurate, does that make it the best thing to do? And I don't have an answer for that. But I can say that, you know, Samol— my character, Fero liked Samol, and Samol said, "You should go back", and so I was like, "I'll try it", and I wasn't sold, and then I had a really bad time [Austin chuckles] when I went back, and then I was about to quit again, and then everybody, like all my other old friends showed up, and I was like "I'll give it one more shot." And I got away for a little while and did a thing, and I came back and he wasn't like dying to leave anymore. You know, he still wasn't satisfied, but there wasn't— [AUSTIN: so your—] Like I didn't have that— there was like a real anger that had, you know, it passed for Fero.

AUSTIN: Fero tweeted through it, is what I was gonna say.

KEITH: Yeah, he— [Keith and Austin laugh] Yeah, yeah, he tweeted through it.

AUSTIN: I think that that's one of the biggest things for me, too, is that, if you feel like...okay, this person has separated, they're off doing another thing and you know what that thing is, I think if you...if you had a character who was like, "I'm gonna go—" this character has decided that

they're gonna spend the next ten years of their life like building a castle somewhere or whatever, like being a farmer. And that part of their life is not something I'm interested in putting the camera on, but I know that they need to go do that, then I think it's fine to be like, "I'm gonna roll a new character, let's step away." Likewise, to sniperserpent, if your character is like, hey, the type of action that is going to be portrayed is not something that I'm super excited about. If I'm gonna become this kind of Machiavellian master diplomat character, and that's not really what I want to continue playing as, it's super okay to be like: and they're gonna go off and do that, and maybe every now and then we'll check in on them and I'll do a scene or I'll do an update about what they're doing. Maybe we'll do a love letter style role now and then, maybe every session we do a cool check in, but really that's not what I want to do. It's totally fine to step away and just like let them live. If, on the other hand, what you have is a Fero situation, where it's like...you know, I want to— you know, I don't know if they are committed to the main story action anymore. I think that it could be very valuable to stick with them in those moments and play that stuff out, because it is often the case that you get to some really great characterization around that stuff. Jack and Dre, do you have any thoughts here? I know, Jack, again, you're named right in this question.

JACK: I think there's two things here that I think about a lot. When we were doing like a dress rehearsal for our live show, [AUSTIN: mm-hmm] when we played Best Friends Forever...we were doing some really funny jokes, and one of us was like, "Man, we have to think about this." And Janine was just like, "No. We will always have more funny jokes." [laughs softly]

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

JACK: And I think about this a lot, when I'm thinking about my hesitancy or reluctance to step away from a character, which is...there will always be new and interesting characters to explore and stories to take them on, and it's not even like I'm walking away from the old character, because I'm going into this new character [AUSTIN: mm-hmm] informed by everything— *everything* I— It's the same person pretending to be the character.

AUSTIN: [laughs] It's you.

JACK: That's me! And so like, I—

KEITH: No. [Jack, Keith, and Dre laugh]

AUSTIN: Great, good.

JACK: Keith, I got some bad news. And so, every new season— and this is part of why I loved playing Fourteen so much, because like, every two or three months I'd just be like, "Here we go!" firing guns in the air. [laughs] New person! I think, also, I love giving characters up because I know that I'm not just shutting them in a box? Characters that I step away from— I mean, you described in this question the character going off and doing other stuff. You know, such that they

might come back eventually. Any character you let go of isn't going to freeze. [Austin laughs] Unless you've frozen them. And that's so exciting—

AUSTIN: And even then.

JACK: And even then! That's so exciting to me, to take the direct focus off a character, but still know they are acting in certain ways. I think about this with the Hitchcock decision at the end of Marielda. I was so ready and confident and happy to make that decision, because I knew Austin would come straight out of the gate with Ethan and kind of just do interesting things with him? And so I think if you're worried, for that reason, of letting go of a character, I think...don't bring the focus back to them directly, don't necessarily be playing as them, but have in the back of your mind what they're doing, because I suspect if your GM is aware of this anxiety...they will work that character into what else is happening in the world.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: And we saw this with Fantasmo. We took the focus so directly off Fantasmo, but he...Fantasmo was not done.

AUSTIN: Right. There's been a presence, let's say. Dre, a thing that I think about here, actually, with you, is that when we did the faction games in COUNTER/weight, in a sense you were doing this all the time. [laughs]

DRE: [laughs lightly] Yeah, that's true.

AUSTIN: Right, like, small ways, like Natalya, was a huge— sorry, small ways, *not* like Natalya, [Dre laughs] Natalya's the biggest example of this, literally. But, you know, we were jumping between characters, often different people would end up playing the same character, but then, I think specifically stuff with Natalya, especially in the final act of that series...you have to let go in a big, big way. I guess I'm curious if you have any thoughts on this in the same way.

DRE: Well...yeah, I mean, I think, just looking at this question, there is like the question of: are you as a player still having fun mechanically?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: That seems to be an important part of this, too, where it's like...you know, if *you're* feeling like you're not having fun mechanically, then to me that's a pretty good sign that you're safe to kind of leave the story part of this stuff in the GM's hands. But, I think too, there is also the question of the story, and if you are invested in this character, and you want to feel like you had a more direct say in like where this character's arc and story goes, then I think it's probably worth still playing that character. But if you're just so out of it from the mechanics side of things, and you are just kind of...you're interested in seeing where this character goes, but you don't

feel like you have a conviction [AUSTIN: yeah] about her, you know, then I think that's probably a time to let that go. I think...man, I pretty much kind of had an idea in my head of where I wanted to take Natalya like very very early on in those games.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

DRE: So, I was pretty ready for that to happen. [laughs]

AUSTIN: That whole arc? Fair, fair. I think, actually, you underscored something that's really good, and I hadn't thought about this in terms of Fero, but, mechanics, right? Is it still fun to play? Part of what we ended up doing with Fero was introducing a new style of play that became pretty central to him, and Keith, to your play this season.

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: Which was a—

KEITH: A ton of that this arc has been informed by— I mean, Fero doesn't, without the sand stuff, Fero doesn't feel like he has to go anywhere.

AUSTIN: Right. Right, totally.

KEITH: And then, all of a su— like, I both wanted to leave and also didn't feel comfortable using any of my relevant skills.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: And…

AUSTIN: And then we built new skills and picked new skills from the book.

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: Between that and custom moves, we were like, okay, here's this whole new toolbox that's super exciting. [KEITH: mm-hmm] And so that's the other thing, is that like, the other thing that can happen at tenth level is you multiclass. You start a new class, you bring over the stuff that makes sense to carry over—this is in Dungeon World—and then you drop all the other stuff. Is it worth doing that with your Princess Leia character, Princess Leia slash Ibex character? What if Princess Leia used to be Ibex. [laughs] Sniperserpent, because there is...is it worth being like, well, actually, maybe the trick here is to change this character into a new playbook and start fresh. To have something big in their life switch things up for you. There is a degree to which you can be like, hey, I feel like I kind of— I still want to play this character, but I want there to be a moment where the skillset shifts in some way. Or, can I turn this character into literally

the head of a faction in the game, and maybe make a character who works for her, but where she is out of the picture in terms of dice rolls. There's all sorts of cool stuff there. [excited] Or, what if she gets put in a situation where like, she can't show how skillful she is 'cause it will give away her identity, and so you like just take a drop in all your skills 'cause you have to hide who she is. Listen, we could do all sorts of stuff, let's, you know, let's talk. I know I'm not running that game, but. [chuckles] Alright, I'm gonna keep moving, 'cause we still have a few to get through. This is the other half of the sniperserpent question.

> "I'm thinking of starting a Blades campaign with some people, but we can't get a regular schedule for everyone. My plan is just to use the episodic structure of Blades to justify the changing party: not every member of the crew is present in every heist, that seems reasonable for a criminal organization. I have a thought about letting people who aren't there for a score take downtime actions to represent what they were doing instead, which seems to fit fictionally well, but I'm worried that this will disrupt the downtime economy too much to give people downtime actions that don't need to compensate for stress and harm taken. Based on all the experience you have playing and running Forged in the Dark games, do you think this would be a fun mechanic, or would it remove too much tension from the game's downtime system?"

AUSTIN: I'm gonna just be like, I think it's fun and you should try it.

DRE: Yep.

AUSTIN: And if it breaks, it breaks, but that sounds fun as shit.

DRE: Yeah, I agree.

AUSTIN: Dre, you seemed to have an immediate reaction. Yeah.

DRE: Yeah, no, I was gonna say exactly that. And I think, too, it's not like they are just getting stuff for free. [AUSTIN: yes] You also have to remember, they're gonna be missing so much for not taking part in that score. [AUSTIN: yeah] Like, they're not gonna get money. They're not gonna be able to find something, they're not gonna be able to potentially advance [AUSTIN: yep] all the stuff that goes with their character. I think how like you said too, if you try it for a couple games and it turns out that it's kind of busted, you can just stop doing it. And also, I think, too, it depends on the tone of how you want to run a Blades game? You know, if you want a kind of very intense Blades game where the stakes are always high, maybe this wouldn't work as much, [AUSTIN: mm-hmm] because for that game, stress and harm in that kind of economy would be way more intense. But it sounds like you want to run something that is kind of, you know, more based on having fun and is kind of more spectacular as opposed to mundane, and I think this would be fine for that.

AUSTIN: Totally. Keith, Jack?

KEITH: Pretty much same.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Me too. I feel like, just do it. Like, it seems so fuckin' cool. And you could also create lots of fun stuff, right? Like, stuff can go wrong during downtime actions, [DRE: oh, yeah] that can create the next set of sessions for you, you know?

JACK: Yeah. And that is immediately— 'cause it's that feeling— you're gonna have this great feeling of like sitting down at someone else's desk, except maybe the person will be standing next to you going, "Hey, hey, don't worry about all of this." [Dre laughs]

AUSTIN: Uh huh, yeah. Totally.

JACK: And the new people are just going to be like, "Wait, hang on."

AUSTIN: "Excuse me." Yeah. Alexander Calgiori in the chat says, "If they die, they die". [all laugh] Love it. God. Alright. I think it was a quick one. I just wanted to tack this on, 'cause I felt like in our hearts we were all gonna be in the same space here—

DRE: Hell yeah, go for it.

KEITH: Yeah, go for it.

AUSTIN: And that space was: go for it, and also let me open a notebook and write this down. [Dre laughs]

KEITH: And any other weird idea that you thought about and discarded, do that one too.

AUSTIN: Do that one too! Give it a shot! Like, I think that we can get into a conservative mode as players, because we have to make a show, [JACK: yeah] and there is stuff that [KEITH: mm-hmm] we wouldn't do 'cause it's so [chuckles] risky and time consuming. But, I think if you're playing a game at home… One, I hope that we resist that urge, actually, I think that we do our best to be experimental and it makes sense to be experimental.

JACK: Twilight Mirage was last year.

AUSTIN: Oh, right, the Twilight Mirage, yeah. [Dre chuckles] I forgot that we did that. Whoo, what a weird season we did. [laughs] I love that fuckin' thing. Do it. Do play the experiment. Especially in— if you're playing games like Blades, if you're playing stuff that's Powered by the Apocalypse, if you're playing story games in general, like...the border between— we don't live in the time when everyone thinks you just have to play the fuckin' book. Like, we...for decades, as someone who was trying to play roleplaying games, I thought the game was the book. And then I learned that the game was the table. And the table has the book on it, no doubt, but like. The

game is the table, and it's the people at the table, and you can do whatever the fuck you want! Experiment with it!

KEITH: And you know who's at the table?

AUSTIN: Who?

KEITH: The friends are.

AUSTIN: The friends are! [Dre and Jack laugh] It's the friends at the table, that's why we called it this!

JACK: That's why we called it this?

AUSTIN: I know we're not there in any of the cover art, [laughing] I know the tables look like they're empty every time, [Keith laughs loudly] but that's just so you can see how cool everything is. Think about it, look at this—

KEITH: That's a good point, there's no one at our tables.

AUSTIN: That's 'cause you'd be blockin' the cool castle in the background if there was someone at that table!

KEITH: Gained some perspective.

JACK: Also...we have to get that art done before we start.

AUSTIN: Before we sit at the table.

JACK: Yeah.

DRE: Yeah.

JACK: We're just waiting, for everyone...everyone got a good look at the art?

KEITH: Well, no, it could have been— it could be us.

AUSTIN: It could be us, it could be us. But, you know—

JACK: We're the chairs?

KEITH: I like the empty— oh, yeah, we're the chairs.

AUSTIN: We're the chairs.

KEITH: It's a season where we're all playing chairs.

AUSTIN: Maybe we're the other stuff here. Maybe the stuff at the table in this art is the spring, the berries, the flowers, the petals. Maybe that's us, we're the friends.

KEITH: In Season 6 I'm gonna be four chairs.

AUSTIN: [amused] Great.

JACK: Just all, *clomp clomp clomp*.

KEITH: My character's gonna be four chairs.

DRE: Fuckin' spoilers, Keith. [Austin and Keith laugh]

AUSTIN: Alright. Gotta keep moving. Felan writes in and says, and this is, again, for Jack and only Jack:

> "The Grapplers Down at Promenade Arena theme is somehow one of the best things I've ever heard. [JACK, touched: thank you!] Like giddly stomping my foot, nodding my head, and pumping my fist in the air while doing dishes good. [Austin chuckles] I would love to know more about the composition of that piece — were there specific inspirations or cues? Who played the instruments? Keep up the brilliant work, Jack and everyone!"

JACK: So, I played all the instruments. All of the instruments on...I think all the instruments on that track are VSTs, are like digital instruments. [AUSTIN: mm-hmm] I can't play the trumpet. I wish I could.

AUSTIN: But I do remember when you figured out how to use that specific trumpet, and it was great.

JACK: Yeah! 'Cause I'd done that a couple of episodes beforehand, the trumpet showed up slightly earlier.

AUSTIN: God, did you send us...I have to look for the word "trumpet" in production chat.

JACK: Oh, I can send you some tests right now. I actually have another test that I want to send you for this specific track, but I'll get to that in a second.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: I'm sending this to you in…

AUSTIN: Can I play it?

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

AUSTIN: Okay. A little bonus. This stuff is normally reserved for like Pusher tier, if people didn't know that. I'm gonna just play Horn Test 17. Sorry, Horn Test mp3, it's 17 seconds long. Ready? I guess if y'all want to hear it you can listen to the stream.

JACK: Yeah, I'm muting myself.

AUSTIN: Yeah, F— I almost said Fero and Throndir. [laughs slightly] Keith and Dre.

KEITH: Yeah, let me do that.

AUSTIN: I'm gonna go ahead and hit horn test number— I keep saying number. This is unnumbered. Horn_test.mp3

[music plays: a rough version of the beginning of "The Eighty Six"]

AUSTIN: [in horn test] Well, this is—

[music ends]

AUSTIN: And "horn test" became what, Jack? That becomes…

JACK: That's way earlier, it's…

AUSTIN: No, it's the one before Promenade.

JACK: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: It's Action Movie World, right? It's Action Movie World.

JACK: Yes! Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah yeah yeah. 'Cause that's me doing...whatever the fuck that dude's name is, the announcer.

JACK: But then as soon as I knew that I could do horns like this, the next step was I wanted it to sound like there was a horn section on stage.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: You know when you see like a live band, and they come out, and you're like, "Oh my god, he's brought a horn section."

AUSTIN: Yeah, one second. I need to just— I need to put a thing on the screen that when I first heard the thing you just sent me, but I also need to black out the third part of it. [Dre laughs] Because if I don't, there will be a spoiler for Season...I regret to inform everyone, but Season 7. [Austin, Dre, and Jack laugh] The season that truly doesn't—

DRE: We *just* got a Season 6 chat, Austin!

AUSTIN: I've had a Season 7 chat for months. [Dre sighs] I've just gotta block this out, block that out there, make it...give me the solid fill, please...there we go. And then I can bring this over. My immediate response to what you just sent us and what we just played was "Oh my god, Jack what, holy shit, I honestly need a whole season of this. Ali, is this…" dot dot dot, "is this," and then "*REDACTED* season".

JACK: [laughs] Oh, yeah, I remember that.

AUSTIN: Uh huh!

JACK: But like—

AUSTIN: And then you sent the second— is the second piece just that same piece but expanded?

JACK: I think so, yeah. I think that's just me doing more there.

AUSTIN: Yes. It's good, yeah. But I'll leave that one for a Pusher update.

JACK: Yeah yeah yeah. I think the—

KEITH: I also can't play the trumpet, but for anyone who ever gets a chance to try it, it's fun, it makes your lips tingle like crazy.

JACK: It makes your lips tingle like crazy.

KEITH: Like *crazy*.

AUSTIN: Does it?

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Huh.

KEITH: Oh yeah, yeah. It makes them numb in like a minute.

JACK: But don't play the clarinet, because it makes your whoole face hurt. [Dre and Keith laugh]

AUSTIN: Huh. Learning things.

JACK: But I liked the sound of this horn section so much, and I think Austin and I talked about this idea at the time, that we were actually going to have this track as though it had been produced by an in-world horn section?

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: Where it's like, so-and-so and her somebody-or-anothers.

AUSTIN: Oh, we did want that.

KEITH: We're introducing diagetic music to…

JACK: Yeah. But I think the only reason we didn't, was 'cause—we do this all the goddamn time on the show—we couldn't find a thing we liked [laughs] fast enough, for a character name.

AUSTIN: Right. Yeah, that happens.

JACK: The other thing that I wanted to send you is, and Austin you have to— this track is three minutes long, [AUSTIN: okay] you have to promise not to play more than a minute of it.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: This track is named… [AUSTIN: is this—go ahead] "wrestling horrible scratch". [Dre laughs]

AUSTIN: Great. Love it. Very excited.

JACK: 'Cause I knew what I wanted the shape of the grapplers down at the promenade track to be, like basically instantly. I was playing the piano, and I worked out the shape of the track really fast. But I knew that I would forget it unless I played it with the rough instrumentation very quickly?

AUSTIN: Like immediately.

JACK: Like, instantly.

AUSTIN: Okay, so I will only play— should I play the first minute of what you're about to send me?

JACK: Oh, yeah yeah yeah, just play the first minute. I want to say: this is bad. But it is…"The Grapplers Down at Promenade Arena".

AUSTIN: Welcome to an actual play podcast.

JACK: Everyone should also…[Keith laughs] people on this call should mute it, because this is worth listening to.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: It's very skilled.

AUSTIN: I'm gonna do that count-in. I'm gonna do it from now: five, four, three, two, one, play.

[music plays: reminiscent of "The Grapplers Down at Promenade Arena" but more discordant, clearly a test track]

AUSTIN: And that's a minute. That's a minute, right there. [Jack chuckles] That's a full minute.

KEITH: And now, what happens after that?

AUSTIN: I just want to be clear, I just want to be clear, I did not play two songs on top of one another there. [Austin and Dre chuckle]

JACK: No, no, no.

AUSTIN: That is just...you know how I do Drawing Maps sometimes, where I'm like: [Jack chuckles] here's, fuckin', I don't know. This is— [JACK: mm-hmm] I have ideas, but I don't have a show yet." [JACK: mm-hmm!] That felt like your version of that.

JACK: Oh yeah. A hundred percent. I remember watching some process videos from Conner Fawcett, thebadbucket on twitter, [AUSTIN: mm-hmm] where he just revealed that he basically created a Frankenstein collage, [AUSTIN: yes] of a load of reference images? And that made me feel very good in my heart, because I knew what true horror [Austin laughs] I unleashed for, again, "wrestling horrible scratch".

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: So yeah, that's—

AUSTIN: So how do you go from that— so, again. So that idea there's like, uhh, I have six things that I need to put down right now. [JACK: mmm] They're not gonna be right, but this is the direction, this is maybe a couple of riffs that I wanna hit, here is a melody line, here is like the rhythm. Is that where you start, and then you just tune?

JACK: Yeah, pretty much. Like, I'll open a duplicate file in Logic, so I'll basically say, "Give me two of that." [Austin chuckles] And then I'll delete everything from the duplicate file, and then just start going like piece by piece, kind of laboriously, like...Logic calls them regions, like chunks of recorded track.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

JACK: Going one by one, replacing them until I get it to a stage that I want. So I knew pretty much straight away that I wanted that opening piano riff. [AUSTIN: mm-hmm] So I just like opened it up in the new thing and tried to play it as correctly as I could and then fixed mistakes as I went. And then I just did that for about like eight or nine hours. [chuckles] And then...the track was—

AUSTIN: And then there's a song!

JACK: And then the track was legible, by the end!

AUSTIN: [sighs] I feel you!

KEITH: Mm-hmm.

AUSTIN: This is every creative—

KEITH: I like the original version.

AUSTIN: Of course. Of course.

KEITH: I like "wrestling horrible scratch".

AUSTIN: [laughs] We'll do a… that has not been in a Pusher update yet, right, Jack?

JACK: I don't think so.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] We should put that in an upcoming…

JACK: [crosstalk] I'll put the full thing in there, 'cause there's a drum solo later, it's…

AUSTIN: Oh my god, I bet.

KEITH: Is that what you didn't want people to hear? What's the part that you said "don't play more".

JACK: Oh, it just goes on for like four minutes, and there's—

AUSTIN: It's like four minutes.

KEITH: Oh, okay.

JACK: There's a point at which you're just like...

KEITH: It wasn't like a secret.

JACK: No, no, no, there's no secret stuff in there.

AUSTIN: [laughs] There's a point at which Jack, they just start saying their social security number? [Keith and Dre laugh]

JACK: Well, jokes on you, 'cause I don't have one! The Americans don't give them to foreigners!

AUSTIN: You have a social *insurance* number? What do you have, what's the U.K. version?

JACK: What, in the U.K.? I have a national insurance number, but [AUSTIN: a national insurance] less is based on it, so.

AUSTIN: Gotcha.

JACK: While it's still a fairly secret number, it's...you can't, I don't think, do identity theft with it.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: Still not gonna tell you!

KEITH: I just thought— I thought maybe it just got like...*more* dissonant and off-tempo?

JACK: Oh, no, it does! [Austin and Dre laugh] But I would be fine with people listening to that.

KEITH: Right, right, yeah.

JACK: I have no shame there.

KEITH: But like, to a point where—

JACK: It's just, we have a podcast [KEITH: good!] to do.

AUSTIN: We do have a podcast to do.

KEITH: Okay.

AUSTIN: Well, thank you, Jack. Do you want to note any inspirations on that track? 'Cause we didn't really...do that part.

JACK: I mean, we talked a lot about like...we talked about Bruce Springsteen for the whole season, [AUSTIN: yeah, we did] and I just wanted the feeling of someone running out onto a stage where musicians have already been playing? Also—

AUSTIN: Right. That's exactly right. That is so live in that song, [JACK: yeah] where you can im— this song is an encore for a concert you didn't hear.

JACK: Well, especially because—and I worked really hard to get this last moment of it working—there's a moment in the kind of final eight bars where the horn section like interlocks with itself?

AUSTIN: Uh huh.

JACK: And I love that moment where there are bows happening, or an encore happening, and after the bows are done, the band can focus on playing again and drops back into playing really well. [AUSTIN: mm-hmm] And I wanted to get that vibe across. Also, Bruce Springsteen, that piano intro, Bruce Springsteen. Oh man, I had so many Bruce Springseen tracks open, [AUSTIN: yeah, so—] 'cause I was trying to fake his piano.

AUSTIN: Yeah, so, here's what I want to say. One is there's this message from you, where you write: "God, there's always a step in composing where it's just a hell nightmare as far as quality goes, but so much fun, where it's like barely music but I'm just bashing the piano [JACK: oh, that was it!] and it's the best."

JACK: You just heard that!

AUSTIN: "And it's always the most fun when we're doing a pastiche, because it sounds like music from a weird parallel universe style. Anyway, all of this is to say I spent the morning trying to get a piano that sounded close enough to Springsteen that I was happy with it, and now I am playing it very badly." [Keith laugh distantly]

JACK: Yeah, that's exactly it! I think— yeah, I'll need to like, find out in future and put on twitter the exact name of the track that I tried to lift that piano from.

AUSTIN: Well, I can see if we can find it real quick, 'cause I have all of the songs— okay, it's not "Atlantic City", which is a great song. You were like, "I don't need a playlist for this Bluff ep, but if you could send me maybe two Springsteen tracks you're thinking of, it would be so helpful." And I said, "absolutely". And then I sent you one, two, three, four, [laughs] five, six, seven. [Jack laughs] And those, just for the record, were: "Atlantic City". "Thunder Road", which is probably my favorite Springsteen track, and everyone should go listen to "Thunder Road". "The River", which is also a great Springsteen track, but not the direction you went. "Backstreets", which, maybe it's…"Backstreets" is so good, everyone should listen to— everyone should listen to *Born To Run*, at least. "Born to Run" itself, which also has a great intro. All these songs have a great intro. "Lost in the Flood", which I kinda was like, oh wait, actually, maybe the direction to go is more *Greetings from Asbury Park* than *Born to Run*. And then, finally, "For You", also off of *Greetings from Asbury Park*. They're all very good. But those are the tracks that I sent over. Bluff City was always supposed to be a Springsteen season. We didn't really go all the way that direction, but I love that it came up and you nailed it on this track, so thank you for your hard work.

JACK: Thank you!

AUSTIN: I think we have...another Jack question! I wanted to get them all here, 'cause we haven't had you on in a minute, Jack, and I think this is actually one we can all answer, and make Jack feel bad about. [JACK: mmm…]

> "Some of my favorite tracks are ones for dramatic scenes, like 'Mr. Magnificent & Elegy' and 'Hadrian & His Son'. Are there any other scenes that you'd like to have done music for if you'd had time and resources?"

JACK: Fuckin' all of them! [Austin laughs] All of them.

AUSTIN: And let me say, right now, there will probably be light spoilers here, because we have to describe a scene, scenes. [JACK: mmm] So, I'm curious, I'm gonna put this to everybody. Are there scenes that you wish you could have had scored, and what would they be? If we all get one. This is from Dylan, by the way.

JACK: Oh, I know mine straight away. Which is, anytime mechs fight.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: There is a—

AUSTIN: We're gonna have a new season of that, so get ready!

JACK: There is a reason that I can't compose for mechs fighting, which is that combat needs to have this rhythm to it, if you're going to put a soundtrack to it. [AUSTIN: mm-hmm] Or it needs to have a specific absence of rhythm, but that has to be reflected in the narrative, which we don't always want.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: And our combat scenes can be really pacy and tight and good, but we, by the nature of the medium, are breaking them up by rolling dice, [AUSTIN: yeah] talking and making jokes, and cutting to other scenes, and— like, this is just one of these instances where I can understand exactly why we can't soundtrack mechs fighting, but I'm just like the horse at the beginning of the horse race, inside the gate, going "Let me out there! Let me let those mechs fight!"

AUSTIN: [laughs] Let me figure this out! Yeah. I think we'll crack it to some degree in 6…

JACK: I think I know how we do it, which is just, we don't script fights but we just cut, we edit— it comes down in the edit, I think.

AUSTIN: Yeah, it either comes down in the edit or we find moments to script, or moments of— as we get better at describing combat scenes, we get better at being able to score them, I think.

JACK: The closest I've got is "The Reveries", where Echo and Ballad fight.

AUSTIN: Yeah! Yep.

JACK: And I loved that just because that scene narratively feels so dissonant and unpleasant and uncomfortable, and so I was super happy to just let synth pads, like, feedback and swirl and be unpleasant, [AUSTIN: yeah] right up until the moment when I needed characters to physically strike at each other? [AUSTIN: mm-hmm] When I could just bring in these like three- or four-bar-long hits as the characters are fighting and then jump back. But what I really want to do— there's two mech fights I want to do. I want to do a mech fight that's just like jazz drums, [AUSTIN: yeah] 'cause that's fuckin' anime bullshit. And I want to do a mech fight— Austin, what was that show you watched me that the mechs fight and it plays a song like "fa la la la la, the prince is coming"? [chuckles]

AUSTIN: Ohh my god, it's so fucking good. It's a scene in *Gundam Thunderbolt*, the second season. The second season, which is called *Bandit Flower*. There is a fuckin' moment in that show that is…

JACK: It's so good! Season 6!

AUSTIN: It's so good. And I don't know that I can find it, which is a shame. But I did just— [chuckles] I did just pull a bunch of screenshots from it in our Season 6 chat.

JACK: Oh, for real? That's from this scene? Or just from—

AUSTIN: I did. If you pin it— if you check our pinned tweets in our "Season 6 For Real" chat, you will see…

JACK: Oh, yeah. Oh, here we go. Let's go to the lyrics.

AUSTIN: I'm just gonna pull these screenshots up, because they do have the lyrics on them. The three that I pulled out were...that's a search. Here we go. "The princess cannot attend the party, for all the princes are dying." [laughs] While a mech does a flamethrower [JACK, laughing: the flamethrower!] in the jungle. Then, the other side of that flamethrower hitting with a bunch of mechs walking forward. "The soldiers dance in the field, bleeding and calling to God." And then, as missiles descend, "The smell of gunpowder, the sound of spears, the anticipation of her tower collapsing." And this is like a great like...god, how do I describe— like you said, a "fa la la la la" sound, right? But…

JACK: Yeah, it's just like… [singing cheerfully] "Things are bad and the world is good and the mechs are going to war." Over just like [AUSTIN: yeah, I found—] utter destruction. [laughs softly]

AUSTIN: The name of the song is Senso / Yoshida Sara. If you search for Gundam Thunderbolt season 2 OST. I'm now playing it, and it's just so good. Music can be *anything*!

JACK: Music can be *anything*!

AUSTIN: God.

JACK: Hey, remember when they're all— they all have a nice sing about the carnival at the end of Bluff City?

AUSTIN: I do remember that!

JACK: Music can be anything!

AUSTIN: Sorry, I'm listening to this song now, and it's just so good. Alright, I'm gonna stop listening to it and close this image. Any other— Dre and Keith, what's one scene you wish you could score?

[thoughtful sounds]

AUSTIN: I know.

DRE: I'm having trouble remembering what is and isn't scored, too, I think that's part of it.

AUSTIN: Fair, fair.

KEITH: I'm having trouble remembering anything in our show.

AUSTIN: Uh, can I tell you the truth?

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Is, I did a search just now for "best scenes friends at the table". [Austin, Keith, and Jack laugh]

DRE: Oh, that's a good...alright. Yeah, let's plug that in.

JACK: What's the consensus?

AUSTIN: Um, nothing comes up. There's someone on reddit being like, "What is this show like? Can listeners share the general tone, seriousness vs. humor?" Uhh…

KEITH: I cannot share that.

AUSTIN: "Does Friends at the Table stay consistently good through its current run?"

JACK: No.

AUSTIN: And, for those who've listened through any of the actual play shows they've already described, which are Adventure Zone, Glass Canon Podcast, Sneak Attack, and Campaign Star Wars, where does Friends at the Table shake out? So, thank you to those who responded to this person's question and directed them to listen to the show. But no, I...I'm like you in that I don't remember what is and isn't scored. Except that like, I can think of a few key moments that were *definitely* scored. The stuff that comes to mind for me tend to be, that I really, I'm like "oh, I wish this was", it's whenever two characters are talking to one another, [Dre laughs] two player characters, ideally. But like, I think about stuff like Even talking to his rival on Skein. I think about Maryland September and Audy speaking, any time the two of them had a conversation. I think about Fero and Samol speaking. And all three of those are things where it's like, I just want there to be punctuation.

KEITH: There was a Fero-Samol score.

AUSTIN: Sure. I believe you, I believe it was great. But in this moment, we're on the— if I heard it, I was like, oh of course, that's what it was.

KEITH: So, I have a sort of answer, where I think that like...Fero's arc for the last full season, over one season, like from this point in the last season to now, Fero's arc has been all about deciding when and when not to be solitary? [AUSTIN: mm-hmm] And I think that...I don't think that there's any scoring for that. I think that maybe the last time Fero was alone and scored was maybe when he was alone in his house at the Archives, because Lem and...um...was it Lem and Ephrim and…

JACK: Devar?

KEITH: Throndir? No, not Throndir, just Devar, right?

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

KEITH: They were like, "No, we're not going to your…" I think that was scored, I'm not sure. Jack, do you remember?

JACK: I don't think...we got some Fero… Fero alone, we got him meeting the dragon at the very end of Winter, but I don't think that's—

AUSTIN: Yeah, but that's just the whole— that's like the whole of that sequence, right?

JACK: And then— no—

KEITH: Yeah, and that wasn't— no, was that? But that was not about— that wasn't about Fero alone. That was about the end of the season.

JACK: Oh, no, Fero had a unique track about going and seeing the dragon, [KEITH: oh, okay] in that kind of montage.

AUSTIN: Going into the Erasure, the Mark of the Erasure, yeah yeah yeah.

KEITH: Okay.

AUSTIN: My actual favorite, looking at my notes and looking at our conversations, Jack, are the moments where I don't think that there's an obvious score, and then you find it, and you deliver something so spectacular. I still think one of my favorite pieces from you of all time is the early Twilight Mirage season conversation between Morning's Observation and the [JACK: ohh, sleep detachments] Beloved Dust where you bust out those drums.

JACK: Mmm.

AUSTIN: Yeah, Sleep Detachment. And where it's like, wow, this is— you found a rhythm in that conversation that I didn't realize was there, which were this like, rising action followed by these lulls, where Morning's Observation goes from being angry to being pacified and trying to find his way in, and you just nail that rhythm so much. I think that's also something you found— I mean, obviously to every heist description in Marielda, [Jack laughs] but maybe that was a little more obvious. But I think that is part of what I mean when I say I really love the ways in which you are able to identify the tone, the musical tone of any given sequence— yeah, the other big Twilight Mirage thing is the song that sounds like nothing else in the Twilight Mirage soundtrack, which is the stuff that's happening [JACK: yeah] before the midseason finale, [JACK: mmm] that has that almost noir vibe.

JACK: Yeah, I wanted it to feel like something was—

AUSTIN: What is the name of that track?

JACK: Everything in it's right...no, it's like, Time to Talk or something?

AUSTIN: Time to Talk, that's it. Uh...it's not "Data Will Arrive", it's…

JACK: It's "Just Give it Some Thought".

AUSTIN: "Just Give it Some Thought"?

JACK: Mm-hmm.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: There's a lot of music for this show.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Yeah!

KEITH: It's outrageous how much music there is.

JACK: Is there too much music? Maybe!

AUSTIN, KEITH, and DRE: No. [Dre laughs]

KEITH: No, no no no. There's not too much music.

AUSTIN: No. I've— yeah.

KEITH: It's only a shame that it probably feels like that for the one person who does all the music. [Dre laughs]

AUSTIN: Uh huh!

DRE: Yeah.

JACK: No, I mean, it's… I've been playing Plague Tale, which has a great soundtrack by Olivier Deriviere who's one of my favorite games composers. And there's some scenes in that game in which people are fighting huge swarms of rats, and the soundtrack is just this beautiful lyrical cello music as that's happening, and I'm like, [snaps fingers] hell yeah, Olivier, man of my own heart, going on here. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Totally.

JACK: I recognize this impulse.

AUSTIN: Definitely. A hundred percent. God, I'm now thinking of things that I want to talk to you about off mic about Season 6 stuff, so we'll talk. Dre, do you have an answer, or do you want to move on?

DRE: We can move on, yeah.

AUSTIN: We have one more question, here. This comes in from— I believe it's one more question, anyway, let me double check. Yes. From Brian, who says:

> "A large part of the hobby of tabletop games is collecting and reading games and rulebooks without ever getting a chance to play them. I've read through my copy of Masks a whole bunch, but haven't gotten around to playing it in the year that I've owned it — maybe because I'm the usual GM for my group, and I'm way more interested in playing Masks than in running it. What are your favorite tabletop roleplaying games (or other tabletop/board games) that you've never played? For those of you who are GMs, are there any games out there that you can only imagine yourself as a player in and not a GM for (or vice versa)?"

JACK: This is a good question.

KEITH: I have an easy one for this, [AUSTIN: yeah] because it's kind of a cop-out. It used to be Blades in the Dark.

AUSTIN: Sure.

KEITH: But then we played the second half of Twilight Mirage, [AUSTIN: right] with Scum and Villainy. But that was a game that I've known about for...

AUSTIN: Like, you were listening to Marielda, and you were like, "fuck, I want to play that"?

KEITH: Yeah. And I had known about it before then, but not for a very long time. I think it was— I think I read it when we were considering games for Marielda.

AUSTIN: Right, right.

KEITH: So it was before we started reading, and I read it. I was like, this seems very fun. So I'm glad that I finally did get to play it. Nothing's really replaced it. I've mentioned before, but when I was doing— besides friends at the table, the time in my life when I was doing the most tabletop roleplaying games, I didn't know that there were other games besides Dungeons and Dragons!

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: I thought it was the only one of those.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: So I just didn't— I don't have like a huge backlog of games that I know about, apart from the last like...how long have we been doing this?

JACK: Four…?

AUSTIN: Five years this September!

DRE: Wow.

KEITH: So, yeah, five years, yeah.

AUSTIN: Uh huh.

KEITH: Five years, oh my god.

AUSTIN: Uh huh!

KEITH: I have a fun idea. This is off— never mind.

DRE: Okay.

KEITH: This is a for myself thing.

AUSTIN: That's a— you know what, you just message that to us on the side. Dre, Jack?

JACK: I wanna play— Burning Wheel sounds fuckin' wild.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Burning Wheel's wild. Burning Wheel was my answer for this for years. I mean, I played it briefly, as like a one-shot in college but then never got to *really* play it, and I finally got to play it, and it's wild. It's very fun, it's very good.

JACK: Every time I am around Austin's house, you have like a big copy, like a really nice leather-bound Burning Wheel book. And I'll leaf through it.

AUSTIN: Yeah, like, I live with the editor of Burning Wheel, so it's…

JACK: I didn't know if I wanted to say that, though. [laughs]

AUSTIN: I think it's worth disclosing that, because otherwise [JACK: oh, yeah, that's true] it feels like it's not a full disclosure.

JACK: Actually, it's the disclosure, not the privacy aspect.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah.

JACK: Anyway, reading Burning Wheel feels like slipping into a wild parallel universe of tabletop that I know absolutely nothing about.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

JACK: And that's very exciting. That's very exciting to me. Also, Lancer.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: I want to get to Lancer.

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah.

KEITH: Oh, yeah, that seems really fun.

DRE: Yeah, Lancer.

AUSTIN: God, we need to just…

KEITH: What a great game to not do for... [laughs]

JACK: I know! Lancer is like a—

AUSTIN: We should just play it for [KEITH: yeah] us, when we're in Indianapolis.

KEITH: Yeah.

JACK: [sadly] I'm not gonna be in Indianapolis.

AUSTIN: You should just come to Indianapolis.

KEITH: Just come to Indianapolis.

DRE: Yeah, just come hang out.

AUSTIN: We got a couch. [Jack laughs]

KEITH: Yeah, we—

DRE: [laughs] We got a spare bedroom, fuck.

AUSTIN: See?

JACK: Oh, god.

AUSTIN: I don't know.

DRE: Seventh Sea is my answer.

AUSTIN: Ooh, good answer!

DRE: Have you ever seen the art in Seventh Sea?

AUSTIN: Yeah, it fuckin' rules.

DRE: This book is fuckin' gorgeous!

AUSTIN: Do you want to explain what Seventh Sea is?

DRE: It's like...I mean, the way I— my one minute or one sentence pitch [AUSTIN: mm-hmm] is it's like Pirates of the Carribbean, but it's also like, [JACK: good] queer as fuck. Yeah. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Uh huh!

DRE: Like, a lot of the art in Seventh Sea pays a lot of attention to showing like, a lot of relationships of peoples of varying genders and ethnicities and stuff like that. But yeah, it's mostly like a pirate game, but it's got magic and stuff behind it too, and yeah. Yeah.

AUSTIN: That's a good answer. That's a good answer.

DRE: Seventh Sea looks fuckin' rad. But it's one of those games where it's like, I don't want to learn how to run it. [laughs]

AUSTIN: No, I get that a hundred percent.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I…

JACK: What's that game you and Art played a bunch of?

AUSTIN: Legend of the Five Rings, which is the same—

JACK: Yeah

DRE: L5R.

AUSTIN: The same like heritages as Seventh Sea. Current Seventh Sea I think is— is Seventh Sea still made by AG? Who makes it now?

DRE: Uh, let me look in this book. [unclear ??? 1:11:53]

AUSTIN: Do you just have it on hand? Is it like right—

DRE: Yeah, man, I'm just looking at this art.

AUSTIN: That is the sign of a game you wish you could play. [Dre laughs] Yeah.

DRE: It is…hold on. This is—

AUSTIN: [thinking sounds] Chaosium has it now, I think.

DRE: Okay. Yeah, the only thing I—

AUSTIN: Unless you're…

DRE: I see John Wick Presents in here.

AUSTIN: John Wick is the original creator of both Seventh Sea [DRE: gotcha] and L5R.

JACK: He gets around.

AUSTIN: He does get around. He's made some really great games. God, for me, it's like so hard to pick one thing. I have— you know what, the direction that I would go is it's specifically stuff that I don't get to play 'cause I don't have a local group. So, like, Star-Crossed or Dread both come to mind, because those are games that require you to play Jenga. [chuckles]

JACK: Oh, yeah.

AUSTIN: Where you have a Jenga thing. Stuff like that is huge. And then, even more broadly inside of a tabletop space...you know, I've wanted to play the non-Firebrands version of, uh...what's the name of that game? Fuck, why am I blanking on it? Mobile Frame 0, which is the...it's a mech tactics game using legos? And it is the version— it is just a mech strategy tactics game. Versus Firebrands, which is like a mech kissing game, you know?

JACK: Mmm. Mechs can do two things.

KEITH: Have we ever—

AUSTIN: Mechs have two hands.

KEITH: Have we ever kissed mechs in Firebrands? We've played it a couple times, right?

AUSTIN: I think we've gotten close. I think some of Signet's stuff has gotten close. There's a hand kiss in the Twilight Mirage finale.

KEITH: Right, yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: So that counts. You know. That's a big one, for me.

KEITH: Is Season 6 the one where we finally all kiss our mechs?

AUSTIN: I...you know, probably not, is actually my answer. Because...well, we'll see. There could be mechs to kiss, but it is not going to be a divine-heavy season. Divines are gonna feel very— should feel very rare and special. With, you know, a couple of exceptions, maybe, but like. I don't think sapient— I think the robots are going to feel like machines in a real way, and the reason for that is to make divines feel very rare and special. Which, you know, jump cut four

months from now, [Jack chuckles] and when everyone has a divine, I'll be like, well, fuckin', I was wrong. [chuckles] So, we'll see. Alright. I think that that's it, unless anyone else has another game they want to talk about. But I think that that's all of us. I think that that's all of our answers. So, with that, I am gonna take us to the outro. Remember, as always, you can send your questions to tipsatthetable@gmail.com, and I'll also say, you should get ready to start sending your post-mortem questions for Spring in Hieron. We are getting there. We are very close.

JACK: We're not there yet, but we opened up the Season 6 chat.

AUSTIN: We did open up the Season 6 chat, and also, I just got back from LA where I had a very productive meeting with Ali and Art about what the rest of the season looks like, and I worked through stuff in a big way. And I have a pretty good idea of like, structure. You know, that conversation is not like plot beats, so much as it is general structure. It's not like character decisions, it's not like outcomes, but it is like...I have all this shit in my head, how do I structure it in a way that would make for a good finale? And I had a very good donut meeting with Art and Ali, and that helped work that out.

JACK: Spring horrible scratch.

AUSTIN: Yeah. [Keith laughs] Spring horrible scratch. You know what? Spring *horrible* scratch, so. [Jack chuckles] Look forward to that. So yeah, so, we're getting towards a post-mortem, and that'll be a big post-mortem, 'cause it's the Hieron post-mortem. [someone sighs apprehensively] Not just a Spring in Hieron post-mortem, a Hieron post-mortem?

KEITH: Yeah…

AUSTIN: Which, is gonna be…

KEITH: Those three seasons, almost as long as Twilight Mirage, so it's gonna be a big one. [Jack laughs]

AUSTIN: Oh, it's longer.

KEITH: I know.

AUSTIN: It is longer, it is!

KEITH: I know, I know. It is longer.

AUSTIN: Somehow. Somehow longer, at this point. So, we will hopefully be able to have good answers for everybody. I feel like the...god. You know what, we can't— you know what, let's save— I was gonna start a post-mortem right now. I was like, "I feel like I feel good about Hieron, and da da da da da…" [Keith laughs] This is— that's—

KEITH: That's a pre-mortem.

AUSTIN: That's a pre-mortem. Hieron still—

KEITH: I'm comfortable with the mortem.

AUSTIN: The state of the mortem right now is pretty good, so. Alright. On that note, thank you all for hanging out with us. As always, you can support the show by going to friendsatthetable.cash. We are running back on a bunch of stuff right now, because of E3 season, because people had to move and change their lives around this year. We are also still approaching that $20,000 mark. We did a test run of what that new bonus thing would be, 'cause it's not gonna be a Bluff City bonus game. We just do not have the time to make that happen.

JACK: Bluff City is really hard to make. [chuckles]

AUSTIN: It turns out. And so, until big life situations change, I would never be able to make that promise. But we are trying out some other stuff. We did a test run. If you want to hear what that test run was, you can go up to the Pusher level for a month, and go back and listen to I think our most recent pusher update, which was that bonus game— or bonus, not game, bonus podcast idea, basically. We have some other stuff that we've thought about doing in that slot. I do like the thing that we did. I'm not one hundred percent on it yet, but it seemed like a good idea. So we're still figuring that out, nothing to announce on that front, yet. And also, we're coming up on our anniversary, our Patreon anniversary, which is wild to me. Is this our third anniversary?

JACK: Second?

KEITH: Second.

AUSTIN: Is it our second?

KEITH: Second Patreon— yeah.

AUSTIN: Okay, second. Last year was our first.

KEITH: I was actually just looking at the episode list [AUSTIN: yes] to remind myself of scenes that had music in them or not, [AUSTIN: okay, okay, okay] and the Patreon announcement [AUSTIN: yes] was like the last thing released in Winter in Hieron.

AUSTIN: Okay. So that was two years ago.

KEITH: Yeah. And it released on my birthday!

AUSTIN: Well, happy birthday.

JACK: Happy birthday, Keith!

AUSTIN: Wait, when's your birthday?

KEITH: Happy birthday. It is on the 25th of this month.

JACK: Happy birthday, Keith!

AUSTIN: Well, happy birthday to you.

KEITH: Thank you.

AUSTIN: You know what I like to call your birthday? I like to call it the fourth tuesday in June. [Austin and Keith laugh]

KEITH: It is on a Tuesday. Good, nice.

AUSTIN: It is, that's. Yeah, uh huh. [laughs] Have a good night, everybody. That's gonna do it for us. Happy fourth Tuesday in June to Keith.

KEITH: Yeah. Coming up on the third Tuesday in June, another big day.

AUSTIN: Wow. That's the big one, right there. Can we do a time.is?

KEITH: Sure.

JACK: Yeah, let's do it.

AUSTIN: Let's do a time.is real quick. I just want to say to everybody: "Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap, but by the seeds that you plant." That's Robert Louis Stevenson. And also, happy— oop, there's no day today. So, we're just gonna do a clap. You wanna do it at :45?

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Okay.

[silence for a moment, then they clap]

AUSTIN: Good clap.

KEITH: Imagine telling a farmer who just reaped a terrible harvest, like, "Yeah, but it was really about the seeds you planted."

AUSTIN: It was really the seeds all the way.

JACK: What did Robert Louis Stevenson do? Did he do *Treasure Island*?

DRE: Yes, he did.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: I just googled it. He also did *The Strange Case of Dr. Jeckel and Mr. Hyde*.

AUSTIN: Huh.

JACK: "I can do two books. [Keith laughs] Pirates, or one man transforms into another one."

KEITH: Mr. Louis Stevenson, how many books can you do?

DRE: Oh, he did more than those two.

JACK: All the same.

AUSTIN: One of them is called The Wrecker. Great name for a book.

DRE: Oh, that is a good one.

AUSTIN: "This story is a sprawling, episodic [KEITH: oh] adventure story, a comedy of brash manners, and something of a detective mystery."

KEITH: One of them is called *The Bottle Imp*.

AUSTIN: That one sounds like it might be racist. [chuckles]

KEITH: Yeah, you think so?

AUSTIN: Yeah, I got a feeling.

JACK: "You've discovered my third kind of book." [Dre and Austin laugh]

AUSTIN: Actually, this is a great premise. The premise for this story is: "In it, the protagonist buys a bottle with an imp inside that grants wishes. However, the bottle is cursed, and if the holder dies bearing it, his or her soul is forfeit to hell."

DRE: [laughs] Oh, god!

KEITH: The imp was born to be in it.

JACK: Shit.

AUSTIN: Uh huh! I will also say that this could be racist.

KEITH: It could still be racist, yeah.

AUSTIN: I skimmed the rest, and went, "hmm…"

KEITH: Sorry, I read the first five words [Austin laughs] of the plot on wikipedia, [AUSTIN: uh huh?] and yeah, it could be racist.

AUSTIN: It could still be racist.

DRE: Mmm.

AUSTIN: Uh huh.

JACK: What's it called, The Imp in the Bottle?

KEITH: *The Bottle Imp*.

AUSTIN: *The Bottle Imp*.

JACK: The racist bottle imp?

AUSTIN: [laughs] The racist bottle imp.

KEITH: [laughs] I don't think it's the imp that's racist, but the guy with the typewriter. [Jack laughs]

AUSTIN: You know, maybe it's anti-racist. I have my doubts.

KEITH: Yeah, maybe it's a book about a racist imp.

AUSTIN: Uh huh.

KEITH: That it would be like, look how…it's showing how silly it is to be racist.

AUSTIN: Right. Right, right.

KEITH: Makes you look like an imp in a bottle.

AUSTIN: Okay, wait, wait, wait.

JACK: This bottle was owned by Napoleon. Did you see that bit?

AUSTIN: Was it? Is that how he ended up there?

JACK: Uh, it was brought to earth by the devil...

KEITH: I thought he was cursed to an island, not cursed to hell.

JACK: Well, he sold it.

AUSTIN: Okay, wait, you know what? Here's what I'm gonna say. I did a little googlin'. I did a little look around.

JACK: Bottle, imp, racist, question mark?

AUSTIN: That is what— I wrote "the bottle imp racist" question mark. And this person, who I cannot vouch for, did a review of *The Bottle Imp*. And in it, they note: "If you're asking yourself, why Hawaii?" The book takes place in Hawaii or deals with Hawaii. "Stevenson suffered from Tuberculosis, and in the late 1880s set off to the south seas in search of a salutary change of climate. Polynesia agreed with him, and his health flourished, albeit too briefly. In 1890, he decided to stay for good, and with his wife, bought 400 acres in the Samoan island of Upolu. He became deeply involved in the lives of the local population, acting vigorously in their defense against the incompetence and reflective racism of the European colonial government."

JACK: Oh.

KEITH: Hmm.

AUSTIN: So, you know...I, maybe.

KEITH: It's an open case.

AUSTIN: It's an open case, exactly.

JACK: And then at the bottom of the review, it says, "I have a bottle that I will sell you for *very* cheap." [Austin and Keith laugh]

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah, uh huh.

KEITH: Oh, they made a film— a 1917 film of this.

JACK: Oh, man, when the films were in the 17s, they were just bad!

AUSTIN: They were bad. I bet that movie is racist, regardless.

KEITH: Yeah, I bet the movie is definitely racist.

JACK: Not only racist, but like six minutes long. [Austin laughs]

KEITH: Runtime 50. 50 minutes.

JACK: Holy shit.

KEITH: Language: silent. [Jack laughs]

AUSTIN: Oh, wow. Wow. Alright. We should stop doing this bit, which is… [Dre laughs] Here's what I'll say.

JACK: If you like this— [laughs]

AUSTIN: If you like this bit we're doing, you should let us know, because perhaps you could scry some future in which this is the bonus show that you get for $20,000 a month. [Jack laughs] For hitting that.

KEITH: Each.

AUSTIN: Each! Yeah, if each of you— [Keith laughs loudly] No, I think it's fair to say, like...the thing we just did of falling into a wikipedia hole, if that sounds good to you, then let us know, because that's kind of exactly the thing we did a test of, and you should go—

JACK: It's all Robert Louis Stevenson based.

AUSTIN: That's the only person, though. It's only things you can— it's six degrees of Stevenson. [laughs]

KEITH: It's— yeah. Pretty much every episode so far is we pick a random Robert Louis Stevenson book, [AUSTIN: yes] and we try to decide, [Jack laughs] without reading any of it, if it's racist or not.

AUSTIN: Is it racist? But yeah, if you go up to the Pusher level for a month, even, and go listen to the one that we just did, it was this but with cricket and with...what else did we do?

JACK: Oh, um…

AUSTIN: The state of…

JACK: No, it was...who's that—

KEITH: Cricket the bug or cricket the game?

AUSTIN: The game.

JACK: The game, and also, who's the great American [AUSTIN: oh, Paul Bunyan] legend, Paul Bunyan.

AUSTIN: If you want to hear us just like, learn all sorts of shit about Paul Bunyan, let me tell you...that you should go be a Pusher for a little while, and listen to us do that.

KEITH: I wasn't part of this. What didn't you know about Paul Bunyan that you learned?

AUSTIN: You should go listen to this podcast, Keith.

JACK: [crosstalk] Keith, please listen to it.

AUSTIN: Because, did you know that there's a debate about what is true about Paul Bunyan?

JACK: And it's all.

AUSTIN: And, I know what you're thinking…

KEITH: Isn't nothing true about Paul Bunyan?

AUSTIN: Well, you know, there's debate. And we get into that debate, on the name of the thing that I forgot we had a name for.

KEITH: Smart money's on that he did in fact have a giant blue ox.

AUSTIN: That is not— that is under debate! This is what I'm saying!

KEITH: That he had a giant blue ox?!

AUSTIN: Is under debate!

KEITH: I mean, you can debate about anything, it doesn't make it real! [Jack chuckles]

AUSTIN: There's a matrix, Keith.

KEITH: I will cut— if Santa Claus is not real, I will cut off my left pinkie!

AUSTIN: [laughs] Debate me! [Jack and Keith laugh] I'm just gonna put this matrix here for you, Keith. It's in our Patreon chat. There is a debate. There is the Duluth News, the Rockwell, the MacGillivray, the Harrigan, the Stewart & Watt, and the Laughead. [Keith laughs] Accounts that are wildly different.

KEITH: Wow, there are so many accounts of this thing.

AUSTIN: If this sounds fun to you, if you want to know what we think about whether or not Paul Bunyan made a pea soup lake, [Keith laughs] or if he had a blue ox…

KEITH: I won't tell you how many people thought that he did, but it's not none! [Jack laughs] It's like more than half!

AUSTIN: There's only one thing that everyone agrees on. And that's that he did stove skating. What's stove skating?

KEITH: Now, I've never even heard of that!

AUSTIN: Become a Pusher to find out. And that's what we're gonna do, and that's what we're gonna sign off on for now. Have a good week, everybody. We will be back later this week— we will not have an episode this week. We're taking this week off 'cause of E3, 'cause I have not had time to prep what comes next in Hieron or record it. But we're gonna try to do that this weekend, and hopefully there will be an episode the following week. So look forward to that, everyone. Here, I'm gonna put, just so people know what the fuck I'm talking about...here, look at this. Look at the debated authenticity chart. Who knows what that could mean? Maybe you will find out one day.

KEITH: What does the gold check mean?

AUSTIN: You will have to find out one day, Keith.

KEITH: Ahhh.

AUSTIN: I will send you this mp3.

KEITH: Okay. Cool.

AUSTIN: Alright. Bye, everybody.

JACK: Bye

KEITH: Bye.

DRE: Bye.