

Tips at the Table 31: Meat Grinder Thing (January 2020)

Transcriber: gray gray#2646 [0:00:00-0:51:00], mo [00:51:00 - 00:55:15],
mewmew#6176 [00:55:15 - 01:39:37]

(NOTE TO TRANSCRIBER- All transcripts with Sylvia's deadname are being changed over with a footnote on the first instance IN THE AUDIO. So please move forward transcribing with Sylvia. Thank you! -Cole, TATT person in charge)

The Footnote to use: "The name in the audio recording is no longer in use, hence the audio/transcript discrepancy."

AUSTIN: Welcome to Tips at the Table, an RPG podcast focused on critical questions, *hopefully* smart answers, and fun interactions between good friends. I'm your host Austin Walker. Joining me for this January 2020 new-decade new-year first edition of Tips at the Table, Keith J. Carberry is here.

KEITH: Hi, my name is Keith J. Carberry. You can find me on Twitter at @KeithJCarberry and you can find the Let's Plays that I do at youtube.com/RunButton.

AUSTIN: Also joining us: Sylvia¹ Clare!

SYLVIA: Hi, I'm Sylvia. You can find me on Twitter at @CaptainTrash and you can find my other podcast, Emojidrome, on your podcast app of choice.

AUSTIN: Uh, I just wanna say really quick, Keith sounds sick but insists he is not sick.

KEITH: No, I'm o- I'm *done* being sick. I'm not done sounding sick.

AUSTIN: Do w- we- I just wanna be a hundred percent clear that we said, hey, if you don't wanna do this tonight it's totally okay, we'll figure something out.

KEITH: I'm dying to do a podcast again. I'm-

AUSTIN (overlapping): I- oh, I so feel that.

KEITH (overlapping): -so long where I couldn't talk.

AUSTIN: Yes.

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KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah, yeah. A hundred percent.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Alright. Let's get it-

KEITH: (laughs loudly)

SYLVIA: No, like I agree, I just didn't really have a good time (KEITH still laughing in background) to really get in there.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: So I just snuck it in.

AUSTIN: I appreciate it. Uh, we-

KEITH: I'm- I'm making some hot tea. Which usually is just for taste but now is practical, and I think it will make me sound, um, like 20 to 30 percent better.

AUSTIN: Hell yeah. Absolutely.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Good.

AUSTIN: This first question, coming from Jared, uh, and it is about factions, and so that'll give you some time to make some tea, uh, while I talk about factions- *"I really appreciate," says Jared, "the nuance and texture that factions in Friends at the Table have. The way they're described in worldbuilding and in play makes them feel like actual real-world groups with cultures and practices, instead of just setting elements. I want to emulate this kind of worldbuilding in my home games, but when I try to write factions, I find myself falling into bland archetypes with not a lot of texture: the wealthy elites, the impoverished rebels, et cetera. At the table, the lack of texture makes it hard for me to distinguish various antagonistic forces from each other or demonstrate meaningful differences between non-agta- antagonistic groups. Austin, how do you design your factions to avoid falling into this trap, and where do you draw inspiration from? For everyone else, what makes a faction interesting to you from a player perspective?"*

AUSTIN: The first thing I'm gonna do is just say people should, if you're interested in this sort of question, you can and should go listen to the Partizan Drawing Maps episodes. Um, like- there's like 8 of them, and each one is me slowly building the f- the set of factions and squads, um, and so if you want to hear real-time what that looks like-

or not real-time, because you're missing some of the research phase- but if you wanna hear me talk through that thought process, that is the best thing to do. Um, uh- but I will say, briefly, like, a- a- a lot of it is just research and re- trying to pull from really wide, um, really w- a really big pool of ideas. Um, I will say that like, you know, there- I've been pretty open about some of the influences for Partizan around things like listening to and reading books about the Holy Roman Empire, um, looking into historical, um, uh, historical accounts of revolutions, um, reading science fiction that I had put off for (laughs briefly) for years. Um- but also thinking about- the other half of the faction stuff is, like, finding problems. Um. I wanna say- what was it? It was, um- it was- uh- da-da-da-da- the Veil? Is that the name that I gave them? Is that? That's the game that we started playing- uh-

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Right? It's just called "the Veil"? There was not another word there? Right? Uh-

SYLVIA: Yeah, I think there was an expansion [indistinct]-

AUSTIN: (overlapping) By Fraser, uh, Simons.

SYLVIA: -that might be throwing you off?

AUSTIN: Yeah, that is- that is what it is. There's like a couple of expansions. But that had a thing where, not for factions, but for arcs, um, you would set up kind of like- instead of having fronts, or instead of having a faction sheet, you had an antagonist and the antagonist had a question or a problem at the core of who they were. Um, and that was the kind of, like, motivating, uh, like that was the engine of the character. And sometimes I think about that with, with factions also. Um, and so that's a- an easy way for me to differentiate between factions, is to think about, like, what is the problem that I want to explore with them? Uh, this is way easier with a smaller sets of factions. You- you get up to like that, that early COUNTER/weight 30 faction thing and it gets blurry. Because you're like well what separates this technology company from this technology company? If we wanna say they're both, like, exploitative of the environment or something? Um, it's easy to not have that kind of dynamic, memorable, uh- uh- uh- you know, description of them both. But when you start- when you dig a little bit closer and you go okay, well, this one is- is- the way that we at the table can, like, have interesting questions about identity at the table, and selfhood, and then this one over here is about the ways in which, uh, you know, natural resources are particularly exploited from- you know, uh, places that are marginalized, or, or, places that are put to the periphery of the center of empire, or the center of power. Um, like suddenly you have something- you have two different stories, both about, you know, big science research labs or whatever. Um, and so- finding whatever that question is helps a lot for me. And it helps to end up giving some of that texture. The other half of it is just- it's work. (amused, small laugh) Like- it is not- it is- it is hours and hours and hours of writing and rewriting and rewriting.

And that is why, again and again, I will always emphasize that, like, no one listening to this podcast should feel bad about adapting an established setting or, or pulling one in. As much as I love critical worldbuilding, I do know that it doesn't fit into everyone's life. And so starting with something like the default, uh, setting for Beam Saber, or the one in Scum & Villainy, or- any of the other ones, like, I think that's totally via- or something, like, playing a game in the world of Star Wars. Let me tell you, there's a lot of good Star Wars material out there already to start pulling from. And I bet you could do good work with that. Um. So that is my, like, very high level- uh, the- actually, one last note on my thing. On my side of this. Is NPCs- is that, like, if I can't have an NPC to be a sort of g- uh, not a completely- you can't reduce any faction- no faction is monolithic, et cetera. But if I can't communicate the truth of the faction, or the heart of the faction, with a single NPC, then I have somehow missed the- then I haven't done a good enough job of communicating to myself, or figuring out, what that N- what that faction is. So if you think about like the first arc of- um- Partizan, uh, talking to the two characters from the, uh, the Oxblood Clan, I think you get a really good idea pretty quickly about, like, who they are. They cross a- they cross age groups, they come from a working class background, they don't take any fucking shit, they're vaguely optimistic about the world and- and their positions in it, and they're risk-takers. And so it's like, if I can't communicate that pretty quickly, then- then I've done a bad job of, of internalizing what the factions are. So think about an NPC, think about a question, um, and- and think about particular stakes in, in the world. That's my suggestion. Uh, but for- for Keith and Sylvia I'm curious, like, y'all have been playing games with me now for 5 years or something. Um, what makes a faction stick out in your head and be like, *that's* one I'm interested in? Besides just like, this is a thing broadly that I'm already interested in.

SYLVIA: Yeah, I mean, uh- t- for me, I, I, so I ki- I pulled up the, um, like, Partizan factions thing-

AUSTIN (overlapping): Yeah, totally.

SYLVIA (overlapping): -you gave us back when we started the campaign, just to sort of look at, like, the notes we wrote down and stuff. And, like, personally speaking I'm (laughs) this- you know, this says a lot about myself. I'm always looking for, like, what would be the most interesting to be in conflict with.

AUSTIN: Sure!

SYLVIA: Uh, I always wanna know, like, how would we, like- what could go wrong with this group and, like- if- would that be fun? And like, if things go right, would I feel good about them going right, still? Um-

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: So, it's not- not even finding a villain, necessarily, but it's just finding a group that you think would be interesting to have at odds and, like, is a good foil to your own party.

AUSTIN: Which suggests part of the thing that GMs should do is anticipate and talk to their- their players, and be like, "Hey! What types of things are you interested in-"

SYLVIA: Mhm.

AUSTIN: "What types of conflicts are you interested in seeing on screen, so I can build around that?" You know? Um, I'll note- Keith, in this Partizan doc, which I think I'm gonna put up as a pusher update sometime soon, uh, that has all of- everyone else's notes about what they think was interesting. Like Keith, one of your big ones was like- uh, where'd it go- god. I have just lost it- I had it, and then I lost it. Uh, "sounds like they have good cargo ships to hit," you suggested about one- one group.

KEITH: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Um, and like- yeah! Cool. Good. I'm glad that that came across because one of the things I went into when thinking about squads in Partizan was like, I know Keith is playing a pirate. How do I make people who would be attractive targets? You know? Um-

KEITH: Yeah. Um- For- so- for me, like, uh, Sylvia was talking about foils and for me, like, a lot of my experiences with a faction, um, as a player, come from what I, like- (clears throat) like, my character's first impression of, like, the- of who they're meeting. Um.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: Or- like, like, you don't have to have everything about a faction figured out before they're on screen because a lot of what's going to happen with them is going to be defined by the players playing with them. Um, and so, you know, you could do your best to make a- like, a faction that's going to be, um, maybe a rival faction or an enemy faction, uh, but if your characters meet one and they really like them- (AUSTIN laughs) uh, there's nothing you can do at that like- or I mean, maybe that's not true- but there's like, it's- you know. It's maybe... it's definitely possible to roll with that and to build based on that, than like, you could come up like, you know- anything can happen in play. So you can- not anything, but- (AUSTIN laughs) Um. If you're- if you're having trouble coming up with, like, a unique twist for a faction, you know, take what you've got and throw it out there and see how people react to them. Um.

AUSTIN: Totally.

[00:10:15]

KEITH: Um, because you can build on that. It doesn't have to be fully-formed from your brain before anybody meets them. Um, and you know- if- if you were setting something up and something totally different happens, that- I think that even, even if you go with your original plan, that could go- that could be something interesting in and of itself. Where it's like, well, they're still going to do what- that- the shitty thing that they were always going to do. But now you like them.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Now deal with them. Now deal with the fact that they also are caught up in this other shit.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: You know, um, I think a lot about the Brighton Lineage, uh, in Twilight Mirage where it's like- you know, on paper they did not have the attitude that Kent Brighton brought to them. Um, but seeing you as a player respond to that fun first conversation, and then building around that, was like, really useful in- in communicating something about them, but then also, it's like- well now I- now I have you hooked to this group that you have a fondness for. But they're gonna get into some shit. Like, what- what do you do-

KEITH (overlapping): Yeah.

AUSTIN (overlapping): -around that? Um, and that's fun.

KEITH (overlapping): And also think of, like, how defined the ark kids were-

AUSTIN (overlapping): Yeah.

KEITH: -by Art's play to try and bribe them (AUSTIN laughs) with a celebrity. (They both laugh) And it didn't work.

AUSTIN: And it didn't work. Right.

KEITH: That- I th- that, that defined the whole tone, I, for me, of that arc.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Totally. And that was not something I'd *written*, right, like I- I-

KEITH: Right. That was Art.

AUSTIN: A lot of prepping a faction is internalizing moods and understanding how they might react. You know, no plan survives contact with your players. Um, it's gonna shift. But if you understand how the pieces are gonna move, you'll be able to bring that life to them. Um, and so like, that is- that- or at least, that is the strategy I use and hope for. It's not like I'm always successful. You know what I mean? I think there's- if you look at the

history of 5 years of this show, there are plenty of times when factions get blurry or two different things end up being kind of similar or samey, or even just a thing just doesn't have much- think about like... Name as many COUNTER/weight- original COUNTER/weight factions as you can. Think about how many weird PMCs and side groups there were. Th-

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: That people don't even remember. Like, the- I think I brought up the Netted Wave recently. I mentioned- I mentioned a mech that the Netted Wave have. And it's like, who the fuck are the Netted Wave?

KEITH (overlapping): Yeah, and like- it's sort-

AUSTIN: Wouldn't blame anybody for not remembering that.

KEITH: It's sort of like, you've s- you've said before, I don't know exactly, but something about, like, that- that- one important way to use factions is, is like, pieces to, like, draw on when you need something to-

AUSTIN (overlapping): Yeah.

KEITH: -put somewhere. And it's- and- and it's like, you know. It would be- it sounds miserable to me to come up with 30- (AUSTIN and SYLVIA laugh) fully-formed, totally perfect-

AUSTIN: They're not!

KEITH: -well-written factions-

AUSTIN: Yes. Yes.

KEITH: Uh, and then maybe 3 of them end up being super important. Uh, and then like maybe another 4 or 5 are like, tertiary factions.

AUSTIN: Totally. Well like, that's- the big thing is that they're not fully formed, right? Like if I look at, like, the Selfless, this- Tier 1 Nideo unit that is, like, about people willing to- to strive for atonement or whatever, it's like- okay! That's nothing. That's like, I wrote two sentences. That's not a well-defined squad. (laughing)

KEITH: No. No.

AUSTIN: But if I pop one of them on screen and there's a positive reaction to them, then suddenly there's enough to start building around them. And so it's like, that is the- that is the other half of this, is like, don't do too much work. Like, do the work. And do the work

for that broad umbrella, like, do the work for Stel Kesh, do the work for- um, you know- the- the, uh, Maelgwyn's Chosen or whatever, but you don't need to do the work for every small group inside of that subgroup, you know? Um. You will- you will over- you will overwork yourself and you will fall in love with stuff that will not show up at the table. And that will-

KEITH (overlapping): Yeah.

AUSTIN (overlapping): -break your heart. Um, so-

KEITH: And that way you-

AUSTIN (overlapping): Yeah.

KEITH (overlapping): And that way it's- it's like, um, you don't have to get worried about not having who you think is, like, a really interesting and three-dimensional faction right out of the gate.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: Because the factions that you like from listening to the show are, you know, slowly defined over the course of a dozen episodes or more.

AUSTIN: Totally. I mean I think about- when I think about COUNTER/weight, like, Sylvia, you and Dre helped so much with, like, I- figuring out what the heart of that show was. (amused) Um, and the heart of, like, what the politics and- of, of the factions and stuff were. Um. But like we started with, like, we each had a pet faction and then there was a list of 22 factions or something besides those 3. Um. (sigh) Do you have any thoughts on that side of it? Where it was like, alright, I have to do a scene with these people; how do I make them not terrible? How do I make them interesting for a listener or for- for, for me and Dre?

SYLVIA: (sigh) Uh, so- I don't know. It was- the thing with the faction game, I guess, was that I- in my head I was like, well I don't have to deal with any of these consequences really. Uh, other people do. So I just kind of was like- it was way easier for me to get in the head of making a, like, kind of crummy person.

AUSTIN: Mmm. Sure.

SYLVIA: And like being- and like getting over that hump and- that- I, like, has helped me over all of Friends at the Table. But I think the thing with that was always, we kind of tried to have at- like- (laughs) I don't know. I feel with us, we tend to at least- inject a little bit of humanity even in the scummiest people. Um, or at least, like, if we don't do that we make them a bit of a joke. Um. But I think you have to balance it some way

unless you're really going for, like, this face of this faction is the most evil person in the world. Um-

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: I think- but like, the- the thing with the faction game is we always knew- like, we always had an idea what the factions wanted. We always had an idea what they like-

AUSTIN: Totally.

SYLVIA: Like-

AUSTIN: (overlapping) That's a huge thing too.

SYLVIA: -where they were moving and where they were going, because of, partially, the system we were playing, but also just- we kept track of, like- and *you* (laughs) kept track of a lot of it. Where, like, everyone was headed; what, like- um- like, operations they were trying to do; what like- like, just the resources they were trying to attain. Little things like that add a lot to the flavor of a faction.

AUSTIN: Totally. I will say, games like- like Forged in the Dark games, for instance- right now, we're obviously playing Beam Saber, so that in particular- it's really useful to have a good idea of, like, what they want, like you say. And those games really help with that, because I can just look at a sheet and be like, oh yeah. They pr- they specifically want to, uh, you know, give themselves a better image, uh, in- in the public view. Or they specifically are trying to, you know, stoke- stoke a flame. Stoke flames between two other factions and manipulate them into a war. And these games give you kind of structure to make those choices. And it's so much easier to make those choi- to make those things as choices, (laughs) than it is to look at a blank page and be like, shit, I don't know. Whereas if you can kind of LEGO together something you can s- you can kind of feel out the gist and then find, you know, unique- unique stuff along the way. (clicks tongue) Uh, alright! Let's keep movin'. This one comes in- this is another Beam Saber-y one. This one's from SniperSerpent. Um, uh, who- who's also the author of Anomaly, which we played recently, so that's fun. Um- SniperSerpent says, *"I just GMed a very fun session of Beam Saber, the penultimate in a short campaign I'm running, while someone from a larger group of- a longer campaign is unavailable. We are having a blast, but something came up that I'm curious about how you would think is best handled. There is a downtime action in Beam Saber called 'Collect'. 'Collect' says: 'Choose a region to collect from and roll dice equal to its wealth rating. Gain an amount of supply points equal to the highest die rolled.'" Uh, so a dice- just so people know, a Wealth rating, uh, in Beam Saber can be anything from like 0 to I wanna say 4 or 5. So you roll- you could be rolling 3 or 4 or 5 dice. Uh, "however, those supplies aren't meant for you. If any of the dice come up as 1, gain the supply points but then immediately roll an Entanglement on the table, determined by your relationship with the faction that controls the region. If a faction does not control the region, use your status," blah blah*

blah. Uh, basically it's like, if you roll poorly, you can get an Entanglement. Um, uh, uh- and as a reminder, the way downtime actions work in Beam Saber is every player gets 3, uh, and then, uh, you can spend certain resources to get additional downtime actions. And this is a downtime action that gives you additional resources. Um- *"it was clear to us that something wasn't working as intended here, but we weren't sure the correct way to address it."* Uh, did I miss- I may have deleted something here. Uh, the thing that- the thing that SniperSerpent-

KEITH (overlapping): It looks like you skipped a sentence there.

AUSTIN (overlapping): I did.

AUSTIN: The thing- so the thing that SniperSerpent ends up saying is that they did this 30 times without hitting a 1 once. Uh- they- I'm gonna, I'm gonna see if I can pull it up really quick. Uh, but they straight-up, uh, like, did the Collect action 30 times (laughing) in a row.

SYLVIA: (laughs)

AUSTIN: Um, without a 1 hitting a single time. Or maybe it was 30 dice in a row. Do you know what I mean? Uh- gimme- I'm just gonna double check. Da-da-da-da-da...

SYLVIA: (quietly) That- huh.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Uh-huh. And- let me just double- Let me just triple check. Here we go. *"You take the action to get a number of supply points, but you can also spend one personnel to take another Collect action, which will generally result in a net profit. While this can lead to more Entanglements on a roll on a 1, 30 dice with no 1s later, my players had an ungodly amount of resources at effectively 0 cost."* Um- *"It was clear to us that something wasn't working as intended here, but we weren't sure the correct way to address it. I ended up reducing the region's wealth level by 1 and giving players negative status with the factions that made sense to be the most negatively impacted by the players' rampant piracy. The players as a crew were pirates, so the fiction made sense that they would continue to steal as long as they could get away with it. I'm curious both how you'd handle this specific situation, other situations, or a mechanical exploit that still technically works within the fiction appears in a game [sic]. I apologize if this question has negative repercussions on Partizan's economy."* Uh, *"I've brought my mechanical concerns to Austin Ramsay"*- the developer/writer of, of Beam Saber- *"so I'm more interested in the theory of addressing this type of problem than the specifics of how to deal with this mechanic in the future, but I figure the example is helpful."* Um, I'm curious for y'all- it- to start with, is like, what is your gut on something like this? Where it's like clearly-

[00:21:00]

SYLVIA: (laughs)

KEITH: Um, so-

AUSTIN: -an exploit- or, uh, or something.

KEITH: So you roll thir- thirty dice.

AUSTIN: Well- so, no. So this is- this is a series of rolls, is the thing that's happening here. So it's like-

KEITH (overlapping): Right.

AUSTIN: -let's say you had 3- you're rolling 3d6. Right? Uh-

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And- w- uh, da-da-da-da-da- uh- 'if any of the dice come up as 1,' blah blah blah, uh, you gain supply points equal to the highest die rolled. So that means you could roll 2, 3, 4 and then you get 4- 4 supply points.

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: And then immediately you could spend one of those supply points to then take- another c-

KEITH (overlapping): But if you got a 1, 3, 6, then it's the 1.

AUSTIN: Then it's the 1- o- then you-

KEITH (overlapping): Or, or, then you-

AUSTIN (overlapping): W- no, (laughing) it's still the 6.

KEITH (overlapping): Roll- That, that's when you roll, right, [indistinct].

AUSTIN: You still get the 6, and then you get an Entanglement-

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: -that could mess things up. But also some of the Entanglements aren't that bad. You could weather them, especially if you get this- in this- this injection of new supply points, right? Um- and so this is definitely ex- exploitable in that way.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Uh. My thing is like, tell me what you're doing. Right? Um...because eventually this feels to me like what you're doing is setting up a mission or a score or a heist or whatever. Uh, if you were doing an extended Collect- the thing about Collect, especially in mech fiction, is it's hard to find an example in mech fiction where the person doing it is not the *worst*, because-

KEITH: (laughs)

AUSTIN: You're- like, the, the only example- I actually brought this up in, in the Beam Saber discord a few months ago, where I was, like, trying to conceptualize- maybe I actually just messaged Austin, Austin Ramsay, about it, was like- "When does this happen in anything I've watched?" And the example that was brought up was, um, in 08th MS Team there's a sequence where some Zeon soldiers, like, rob a village of their food. And it's like- oh, right, *that's* what I'm doing. (laughs) Because what I'm not doing is robbing a military faction where I'd have to fight them, you know what I mean? What I'm doing is taxing people. What I'm- What I'm doing is knocking on doors. And so my first answer to this is to- pau- is to zoom in and be like, alright. Every time you roll this, you need to tell me what you're doing specifically, who you're targeting, why you're able to abstract it into a collect roll where there is not military force involved- we're not rolling- where there- we're not rolling, like, uh, action dice. Um. Because by default the way this works is, like, you are hurting- you are hitting people and taking their stuff who are not able to fight back. 'Cause if they were able to fight back, we would be rolling actions. We would be in a fight sequence. Or that *might* happen. Um, uh, and so that would be my first backstop for this, SniperSerpent. Um. The- but again, the reason I wanna put this to y'all is like- as players, have you ever seen something- a rule like this, where you feel like you're able to exploit it or- would you feel like you should be allowed to do this indefinitely?

KEITH: Uhhh...

SYLVIA: Gosh, I...

KEITH: I don't- well- I think part of it is, like, I don't know that I would want to?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: I don't know that making 30 dice worth of rolls (AUSTIN laughs) in a row because I can to get extra points is something I wanna spend time doing.

AUSTIN: Right. That's not very fun.

SYLVIA (overlapping): Yeah, and that-

KEITH (overlapping): It doesn't sound fun.

SYLVIA (overlapping): That feels more like-

KEITH (overlapping): That sounds like Munchkin. (SYLVIA laughs)

AUSTIN: (laughing) Yeah, it does.

SYLVIA (overlapping): Yeah, I was gonna say-it f- It feels a lot more like a, like a board game where you're trying to beat the other players.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: Um. I... Yeah, I- I- I was gonna say either, like, like- I really like your idea, Austin, of fictionalizing, like, making them *do* everything.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: Um. But-

AUSTIN (interrupting): Or at least after the first couple, right? Like the first one-

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: -you could be like, oh, yeah, we're gonna kinda do like the mobster thing of- we're running a protection racket. And like, alright, that's interesting. I don't- like, maybe I wanna zoom in the first time and be like, oh, let's just do that again- I'd be like, okay. By the third one I would really wanna know who the f- whose money are you taking? (laughs)

SYLVIA: Yeah. The- and, like, I guess this could be tied to that as well, but another thing- the thing that I immediately taught- thought of was, like, just faction attention.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: Like- if, if you're pla- this is specifically to Beam-

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: -Beam Saber, right?

AUSTIN (overlapping): Yeah yeah yeah.

SYLVIA: So like- If you are collecting a lot of- if you are amassing a lot of wealth, someone will notice. It doesn't necessarily have to be, like, the people you're taking money from, even, if it doesn't make sense for your, like, world or whatever.

AUSTIN: Right.

SYLVIA: It could just be people being like, "oh, I don't like seeing that this group is getting this power or this wealth and I want it for me."

AUSTIN: Right. Are- Is this already someone's territory? You know?

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Um- A fun thing-

KEITH (interrupting): Well, something else is, so, the consequence here for, uh, getting a 1 is it's a faction entanglement. Um. Right? And it's-

AUSTIN (overlapping): Yeah yeah yeah.

KEITH: -specifically with a faction?

AUSTIN: Yes.

KEITH: But-

SYLVIA: Ohh, okay.

AUSTIN: Well, it's a, it's-

KEITH (overlapping): But-

AUSTIN: -an entanglement *roll*, but it is- And it's an entanglement roll that is determined- we haven't done this on your side of the game yet. We were supposed to record th- this weekend. It didn't come together. But an entanglement roll is what you do at the end of a mission, basically, like during- during the downtime phase, basically, that is like, hey-

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: W- uh, who have you pissed off, or who shows up to knock at your door? Um. And, uh, that can- that is- you're on a certain table based on your relationship with the faction that-

KEITH (overlapping): Right.

AUSTIN: -you are assigned to, but in this case, it would be whatever region you're in. So, like, let's-

KEITH (overlapping): If they like you enough maybe they don't want to fight about you stealing their f- stuff. I-

AUSTIN (overlapping): (laughs) None of the- I will say, none of the entanglement things are all good. Even the good- even the ones-

KEITH: Right. Okay.

AUSTIN: -even the entanglement table, there's only three of them, and the one that is, like, the best one, still has some rough (laughs) some rough shit on it. Uh-

KEITH (overlapping): So-

AUSTIN: -is what I will say.

KEITH: So- I, I- a- but I guess my thing is like, that it doesn't leave any room for, like, something goes wrong that isn't, like, just getting into a- a mech fight.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: Like, if you're going and stealing stuff from people or doing a protection racket or claiming you're collecting taxes or whatever, like-

AUSTIN: Yeah yeah yeah.

KEITH: -something- something really bad could go wrong that isn't just a, like, a fight.

AUSTIN: Or, or that isn't just-

KEITH (overlapping): Or an ent- or that isn't an entanglement.

AUSTIN: Right right. And that isn't necessarily, um, uhh... about a, um (clicks tongue), it isn't just like you didn't get a lot of money this time. (laughs) Right?

KEITH: Right. No, I mean like-

AUSTIN: Yeah yeah yeah.

KEITH: -someone panics and tries to attack you and now they're dead.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: Like- that's-

AUSTIN: And now you've killed a person. Yeah yeah yeah yeah.

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: I think a lot of this ends up being about- you know, Forged in the Dark is so interesting because people play it so many different ways. If you- if you ever watch, uh, John Harper run Blades in the Dark, or talk to him about how the way he runs it, um, he'll run a score worth like 4 dice rolls. Total. Um, there's this- much higher level of abstraction in- in scores when he- when he tends to run them. O-obviously there are exam- there are times when you're, like, much more zoomed in, but it's a lot of, like, the camera is- you're alm- almost think of it like as a tactics game instead of a, like, a movie. D'you know what I mean? Where you're like, alright, I'm gonna move m- my- y'know, my whatever, slide over here and then here's how we're gonna get past the front gate, and here's how we're gonna get into the locked door, and now we're got the thing, and we're out. Um. I obviously have not run the game that way very often. (laughs) Uh, because- th- I think there's a big distinction between, between running it almost like a- like a- a much more (clicks tongue) tactics-y, like, big-picture strategy game and like, a strategy roleplaying game, and running it as, like, a show where you have to zoom in on character action all the time. Uh, but yeah, but I think that that's a big thing. Um, and- and a big distinction there where like, the Collect action makes a lot of sense when you're playing the meta-game or the downtime game like a board game and you're not zoomed in. But y- as the GM, one of the things that you should do, as always, is to continue to use your principles when you're doing this stuff, right? And so when the- when the principles say to let everything flow from the fiction, when the principles say to fill the world with inequality, you should be making the Collect roll be a way in which you're showing the inequality. Right? Um. Uh. And- the- I think the other thing here that is valuable (laughs) in Beam Saber particularly is that Beam Saber gives you certain tools. And maybe this was not the case at your table at the time? Um. To immediately interfere. Um. The rival system in Beam Saber is one of my favorite things and- I'm actually gonna shout it out again in a little bit. But the rival- a ri- if you have someone at the table who has a rival, a rival can fuck with you basically whenever, um, and so- I believe it's even in downtime. I'm, I'm pretty sure. Maybe I'm wrong, I- I'll have to check the rival move setup. But I'm pretty sure it basically says, at any time, a rival can- Here it is. "A number of times"- oh no, you know what, it does, it just says "a number of times per mission equal to the number of pilots." So maybe they can't do it in between. Um, but I wouldn't- I, I don't think it would be out of line for you to introduce a rival at- to one of these things and basically be like, hey, guess what. Someone is interf- your rival has decided to interfere with your next Collect action. Um, and I think the larger strategy that we're suggesting here is- f- flexibility with rules and- and interest in fiction, and like, finding- finding the sort of groove where the fiction creates tension and creates drama. And- and leveraging that. Uh- it, it- versus- the thing I wouldn't say is the GM should say, no, you can't do that. (laughs) Do you know? I don't think that's particularly interesting. Um.

[00:30:15]

KEITH: I think there-

AUSTIN (overlapping): Does that make sense?

KEITH: There i- There is also, like, they've already got all the stuff, right? (laughs)

AUSTIN: Yeah yeah yeah.

KEITH: Um. So. I- I guess that- the- like- what-

AUSTIN (interrupting): Well, they would be trying to get the stuff each time, right? Like that's the thing, is each roll is a chance for something to go wrong.

KEITH: Right, right.

AUSTIN: Y'know.

KEITH: But if they- if they- in the- in the, uh, message it says, like, they got- they- y'know, they succeeded, they got all that stuff. Whatever- however much stuff they did-

AUSTIN (overlapping): Oh, yes.

KEITH: -they now have a ton of resources.

AUSTIN: Yeah yeah yeah.

KEITH: So like, now I guess (amused) you've gotta figure out how to deal-

AUSTIN (interrupting): Retrospectively, you're saying. Yeah yeah. I- I-

KEITH: Retrospectively deal with a group that has a b- like, how do you make those resources-

AUSTIN (overlapping): Well, one of the-

KEITH: -uh, less important for them?

AUSTIN: One of the things that Beam Saber does immediately is, like, they can't hold onto those resources, actually.

KEITH: Oh, is that true?

AUSTIN: Yeah yeah, you need- there- (small sigh) there's a storage mechanism in Beam Saber that I have sort of- I haven't hand-waved it, but I've given you- Both sides of the Beam Saber game we're running, uh, uh, extra storage from the jump. Um, but you can only store 4 Personnel and 4 Materiel at Level 0, uh, on your Squad. And they have to invest in that- but I guess that's the thing, is like, you would end up getting enough to where maybe you could invest in it, um, uh, so yeah, I guess you could end up putting a hard block on it where you're like, you know what? Only 1 upgrade- you can only upgrade your storage once per cycle. Y'know? I feel like that's the video game-y (laughing) solution to this, is like, oh, it takes you time to do this, and so-

KEITH (quietly): Yeah.

AUSTIN: Blah, blah, blah.

KEITH: Right. I just think- I- I- honestly, I like the rival thing like just, yeah, now the rival fucking comes collects from you.

AUSTIN: What do you do? Yeah. I- I- Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. There's a lot of- there's a lot of ways- And what I would say is, like, don't worry about finding the one thing that's right. Because if one GM is like, oh, I know what I wanna do. I wanna make it so that every time you roll Collect, the entanglement, uh, number gets higher. So like the first time you do it, it's a 1. The second time it's a 1 and a 2, the third time is a 1, 2, and a 3. Or do the thing that you did, SniperSerpent, where you said, hey, each time- you know, going forward, each time that we do this I'm gonna start reducing the wealth rating. Stuff like that. Like as long as there is some sort of soft repercussion there based on what you think is tonally appropriate for your game, then I think you've made the right choice. You know? And- and if you find something that your- your players are interested in and- and excited about, you know? Um. The other thing there is, if they feel like that's necessary, then it feels like maybe there's a conversation worth having that is like, do y'all feel like you're not leveling up quick enough? Like, why do you feel so desperate to have these resources? Are you looking for a tone- uh, in this game where resources aren't that big of a problem for you? 'Cause if so, we can move things around. I can pay you more per mission, I can- Do you know what I mean? Like- it- once you find a st- a, a, a kind of exploitable strat- once someone pl- finds an exploitable strategy and decides to lean on it, I think that always says a lot about what the rest of the game has to offer. Um. I think that- about that a lot as a game critic, when like, I end up relying on one combo in a game, a lot. And it's like, well that's 'cause I'm just trying to get from set piece to set piece as quickly as possible. Y'know?

KEITH: Right. Find- You find your gun in the second mission-

AUSTIN (overlapping) Yeah yeah yeah-

KEITH (overlapping): -and then it's like, well-

AUSTIN (overlapping): -and that's the only gun that I use for-

KEITH (overlapping): -the com- now the combat stuff is dead.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: To me.

AUSTIN: Yeah yeah.

KEITH: Because I found the gun.

AUSTIN: Mhm. Mm. (takes a sip of a drink) Except for when they, like, take the gun away, and then suddenly it's a way better game, but, whatever, right? Yeah, yeah. That's exactly right. Um. Alright. Let's keep moving cause we got a few. Uh, Holden writes in and says, *"My friends and I recently wrapped up a year-long Wild West campaign that I GMed. It was a blast and we were already moving along to a Scum & Villainy game that one of my former players is running. I don't doubt their ability to run a f- fun campaign, but I've typically always acted as a GM for this specific group and for other groups. Part of my enjoyment of tabletop games comes from peeking behind the curtain in a sense, and setting up satisfying moments for my players. I've played characters before, but usually for one-shots, and never for a complete character arc. Do any of you have any advice for a former forever-GM on how to adapt to being a player? And how to be a player instead of an NPC?"* I'll start with y'all here.

SYLVIA: I- I don't think I have any advice here. I've GMed like twice.

AUSTIN: (laugh) What about a, just a new player? Getting your head around that feeling of, like, alright, I'm in a character now? How do- how do you start conceptualizing that and, like, what are- what are some good, like- what gets you excited about being a character?

SYLVIA: For me, I usually just, like, find a detail or something and that just like, worms into my brain.

AUSTIN: Mm.

SYLVIA: I just start expanding on that. Like, it's like, it's a tiny little thing for, like, for this season it was literally just, "what if I was a sniper?"

AUSTIN: Right.

SYLVIA: And then from that I just kinda like... was like okay, well what does that mean? Like, that mea- means I would like- was in a military of some sort, like, had military experience, like- it just like- the basic, most basic, letting the most basic choices

influence your, um, sort of like...both your backstory and, like, your- the way you see the character interacting with the world.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

SYLVIA: Um, because, like- I don't think you should be limited by what's on your character sheet but I think it is the best way to play a tabletop game is to make your character- everything on that sheet reflected in your character's, like, personality in some way, or the way they play.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: Um, that's my very basic tip for (overlapping) just sort of generating something, you know?

AUSTIN (overlapping): That's a good uh- that's a good tip. For sure. I think that's a good tip for someone who's coming over from being a GM, where you've probably thought about that on the other side of the screen, uh, where you're like, okay, here is my, like- you know, super-tough boxer but the boxer secretly also has a couple of skill points in history or whatever. Because they had a- a background studying history or whatever. And like, alright! Lean into that vibe as a player- as a player, who has a player character in front of them. Think about the ways in which you can build out your- your own character and just spend a lot more time with that. Uh, and try to get excited on that side of things. Keith, I'm curious about you because I know you d- definitely did some GMing. (overlapping) Before Friends at the Table.

KEITH (overlapping): Yeah, uh- I have a couple things. I started as a player but I did GM for a little bit, um, uh, you know how it goes. I GMed half of two campaigns. Uh- we never finished either but.

AUSTIN: (laughing) Uh huh.

KEITH: It was, you know, um. So- I guess- to start as like a little bit of a silver lining, um, you're going to- you're going to be doing a little bit uh less work now. That's fun. And then also, um, uh, like, you get to enjoy the benefit of someone else trying to, uh, set up satisfying moments for you. Uh, but the other thing is that, as a player, you are perfectly capable of, um, surprising your other players and then also the GM, um, and- and for me, doing something that, uh- uh, doing something unexpected, or trying to, uh, trying to...Yeah, I guess, like, doing something unexpected is some of the most fun that you can have at the table as a player. Like, does- is that making sense to- am I-

AUSTIN: Yeah yeah yeah! Totally. Totally. Totally.

KEITH: Um. Like whenever a player- when a player says something and it changes the direction of a session because someone had a weird idea-

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: -is like, always a fucking blast. Like, that's the best shit.

AUSTIN (overlapping): It's the best shit. Yeah, totally. So yeah, don't feel like you need to give up that idea that you are, like, a f- that you are playing the g- like, really, you are playing the game. Like the GM is not giving you the content, right? Like you are the person- you are one of the people at the writer's table. You are one of the people, you know-

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: Helping to dir- to drive the car. Um, and so like, carry that energy. Carry that same- keep that same energy (small laugh) as a player.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Um, for sure. Cool! Uh, I agree with all this stuff. I don't have anything else to add here and, and- uh, I guess I will say, as someone who's jumped between the two, just not at Friends at the- I've done lots of playing, you know, on other people's streams and stuff like that over the last few years here and there, and like, I think you- in my experience, it's really really fun. There's a degree of just like, "(relaxed sigh) I don't have to worry about any of this shit!"

KEITH: Yeah.

[00:38:35]

AUSTIN: Um. The one thing that I will say has been fun is, like, you can carry your experience in to being a player, where- your, your GMing experience, where you can be- you can be the GM's, like, helper in some senses. Where you're like, "I'm gonna keep us moving. I'm gonna be the engine of the game. I'm gonna note when we're at a down point and, like- I'm happy to be the person who does the risky thing. Because I know the GM is like desperate for someone to do something risky. Or I, you know, I can-" You will probably be able to tell when you can feel the GM is, like, running out of prep or is, uh, you know, whatever, like I've definitely been in that situation where it's like, as someone who's GMed a lot, I can tell when the GM needs something from the table. Um, and being that thing can be such a relief, um, mostly it's momentum. Mostly it's like, you know, we've been running this game for 5 years now, or running games for 5 years now, and, uh, depending on the season, there's almost always a different person- different character who, because they're the character they are, I can rely on them for forward momentum. Um, and so if you've- you can look around the table and be like, "well that's taken care of," then maybe you can find something else, but that is always a huge, huge help as a GM is, like, the person who's willing to say "yes, I'm

gonna go try that thing," or like, "hey, here's an idea that we can go off and go do." Um, so try to figure out what that- what that- uh, saying a gap at the table is wrong, because I don't want to say that people who aren't doing that aren't playing or aren't contributing. They absolutely, absolutely, absolutely are. But there is a distinction for me between, um, uh, the sort- or, or, there is a type of- there is a type of awareness that comes with playing- having been a GM a lot, that you will recognize that you have, um, and it does not mean that you should step all over the GM's control or authority. Or not even authority, but like, their guidance for the story. Or that you should especially step on other player's stuff. Um, but- but there can be those moments where you're like, "huh. Okay. I think I see- they- the GM really wants us to open this fuckin' door." (laughs) "I'll open the door." Y'know? Um. You can- you can contribute a lot in that way, and- and that's a unique and rewarding thing for sure. Alright. Keep moving. Justin writes in and says- and I've been waiting for this one for a while for you, Keith- *"During a recent Tips at the Table, Austin touched on the differing ability of some players to mentally translate descriptions into visual imagery. While some people do indeed have varying- varying levels of personal ability in this area - some people have trouble rotating objects in their mind or fully immersing themselves in another place or time,"* uh, *"I wonder if any of you have had an experience playing a tabletop RPG with someone possessed of,"* uh, *"aphantasia. From Wikipedia, aphantasia is"* - which is spelled a-p-h-a-n-t-a-s-i-a, uh, *"aphantasia is the suggested name for a condition where one does not possess a functioning mind's eye and cannot voluntarily visualize imagery. As a GM, I've run games for a handful of folks with this condition; people who don't dream in images and who don't possess the ability to recreate scenes from their past. The people I've known with aphantasia can generally follow along with visual descriptions as a matter- matter of logical progression, and can act and improvise as well as anyone, but they also got more easily lost or bored when I res- when I resorted to skills that usually k- kill at the table: using the shorthand of film, touching on emotions tied up in visual language, that sort of thing. So a question: how do you all feel- ah, uh- How do you all feel Friends at the Table fares in the eyes of folks lacking the ability to quote/unquote 'see' what some of the rest of us enjoy so much about the show? Have you heard from folks- er, fans- with aphantasia? I think the concept is fascinating to many of us in the space, given the false assumptions that RPGs exist primarily in the mind's eye."* And Keith, you and I talked about this, but I don't think on microphone, ever. Um-

KEITH: No, no, we've talked about it a couple times, actually, it's come up.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Umm. Uh. I- It's- It's- It's hard to say, because it's like, how do I know what I can and can't do? I'm- (AUSTIN laughs) this might be me. (laughs) I might literally, uh, uh, not be able to picture things in my head. It's hard to know- like it's like, how do you not know if you can or not? I don't know. I definitely can't- (overlapped by AUSTIN) make something-

AUSTIN: You're not the only person I- know, though, who has- who has described this. For sure.

KEITH: Yeah?

AUSTIN: No. Hundred per-

KEITH: Well, I-

AUSTIN: A hundred percent.

KEITH: Okay. Who else?

AUSTIN: We're d- describing the Wikipedia page filled with, uh- muh- friend of, friend of all shows I'm on, Joel. Not Joel- Not Waypoint Joel, Joel my internet friend. Joel who I went to Australia with.

KEITH: Australia Joel, yeah.

AUSTIN (overlapping): Australia Joel.

KEITH (overlapping): Yeah yeah yeah, Joel.

AUSTIN: Umm. I- only recently found this out, because- because Australia Joel recently tweeted a thing around, um, (clicks tongue) rotating cubes? Rotating cubes. Did you see the cube rotation thing?

KEITH: No.

AUSTIN: Let me find it. I'm gonna find it.

KEITH: Okay.

AUSTIN: Cu- (amused) CTRL-F... "cube." (laughs)

KEITH: So- (also starts laughing)

AUSTIN: So it's making noises. "BooDooPerson cubes." Oh, that's not gonna- that's not gonna- um- I'm gonna find it and read it, 'cause I think this is definitely-

KEITH (overlapping): That fucking Australia-

AUSTIN (overlapping): -a thing here.

KEITH: -thing is one of the funniest things I've ever heard in my entire life, by the way.

AUSTIN: Yeah, it's ver- I think I've told that story before. The very quick version of the story is, I went to Australia as a kid with like a- not a student exchange, but like a scam. I went with like a scam company. It's probably not a scam (KEITH laughs) but it feels like a-

KEITH (overlapping): You did go!

AUSTIN (overlapping): -scam, in retrospect.

AUSTIN: I did go! (laughs) I did go. And we did spend th-

KEITH: Yeah!

AUSTIN: I did spend 21 days in Australia when I was-

KEITH (overlapping): It must be a really-

AUSTIN (overlapping): -like thirteen.

KEITH: -fucking slick scam if you still feel like a scam even though you did go.

AUSTIN: It was a real slick scam. Um, uh, it was- well it wasn't a scam, but it was like, scammish. Did you know what I mean? Um.

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: It was a very- it was- and Joel, BooDooPerson on Twitter, went- was there with me, and I didn't know. And it- like, I knew we were- we were good friends while we were in Australia. And then, years later, we completely stopped talking- we- were 13, we went to Australia. Uh. I guess the real way to tell the story is like, I was 13, I went to Australia, I had two friends, one named Pat, one named Joel. They were both from, like, Connecticut or whatever. I never talked to them again. 8 years later, BooDooPerson followed me on Twitter. Uh, and for years we were just friends on Twitter. And then I moved to New York for Giant Bomb and on my first Giant Bomb cast- Giant Beastcast- I talked about going to Australia and this exper- the experiences that I had there, like, being chased by an emu and getting hit by a bunch of sand and other stuff. And Joel, @BooDooPerson, was like, "uhh, hey... I went to Australia around that time with the same scam company. Uh- (KEITH laughs) that's weird, right?" And I said, "that's weird." And then we got- we got, like, we happened to get brunch that weekend and we were like, is that- did- did we kn- were we (KEITH is losing it) best friends for a summer?

SYLVIA: Oh my god.

KEITH: (still laughing and groaning)

AUSTIN: And then I happened to go home that weekend and I found the- f- the, I found, uh, like a class photo of this group and I was like, "this is you, isn't it?" And he was like, "that is absolutely me." (laughs) And- it's wild. So. I don't know- it's very weird. The internet is weird. Time is weird.

KEITH: Yeah. It's-

AUSTIN (overlapping): I found the tweet.

KEITH (overlapping): -very weird.

AUSTIN: The tweet, uh, was "How many cubes can you spin in your mind at once? That's your cube score."

KEITH: Zero. I can't even-

AUSTIN (overlapping): So that is-

KEITH (overlapping): -see a cube.

AUSTIN: Right. So that is the difference, right? Whereas like- I didn't- I didn't realize- Joel had responded, "Zero. I can visualize, like, 2 static triangles, maybe 4. That's all the brain GPU I can manage."

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And I had missed the word static, um, I thought that he had just said "I can visualize, like, 2 triangles, maybe 4." And so I had suggested to him that if you grid them you can get more. Or like, I can get more cubes-

KEITH (overlapping, incredulous): WHAT?

AUSTIN (overlapping): -by gridding them-

KEITH (overlapping): *Grid* them?

AUSTIN: By gridding them. And then rotating them inwards.

KEITH: Wh- what are you talking about?

(ALL laughing)

AUSTIN: So this is- this is what I mean when I say, oh- that is- Joel responded by saying, "Got some bad news- news about my brains, dude." (KEITH still laughing) And

that is why I'm saying, it's not a- thing- it is- you are- the thing you're talking about is a thing real- that people have. It's a thing! This is not a-

KEITH: Yeah. Yeah yeah yeah.

AUSTIN: You're- don't-

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Um, (laughs) it's just so funny to hear someone be like, "Yeah, you- you know, you just-" (AUSTIN laughs) "-take the triangles, rotate them, d- put them at an angle, and then all of a sudden you've got more triangles you can see in your head!" And it's just like, "what do you mean 'see in your head'?" (laughs) Like, okay. I can- if I try really hard, and I've- I've done, like, visualization exercises or whatever, which I always just thought was kind of, like, a metaphor?

AUSTIN: (small laugh) Right.

KEITH: Like, being like- "picture a beach." I thought that they meant just like, "think of a beach."

AUSTIN (overlapping): But I- this is the thing-

KEITH (overlapping): "Think about the beach."

AUSTIN: The thing that I can't do is, or the thing that I don't know- I'm like, do I not know- is there another way to think about a beach that isn't bringing an image of it into your head?

KEITH: Yeah, you just think about sand.

AUSTIN: Couldn't be me.

KEITH: Y- (snorts) You just go like, "yeah, sand!" Um- yeah, I remember, (laughs) I remember sand. Like, if I try really hard-

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: -I can sometimes get what, like, like some chicken scratch, white- shapes, a little b- like, and then they're gone. (snaps fingers)

AUSTIN: (overlapping) Right. Right.

KEITH: In like, less than half- like, they just, they're there and then just as fast they're gone. T- and they're nothing. It's like, squiggles. Or something. And like, I can't- I can't...I can't really remember anything from my childhood 'cause I can't picture any of it. Like, I have mem- I have memories of things that happened but not of pictures-

AUSTIN (overlapping): Right.

KEITH (overlapping): -of stuff.

AUSTIN: You know the things that happened, obviously, but-

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: But because I can't picture them I never think about them.

AUSTIN: I should-

KEITH: So I forgot 'em all.

AUSTIN: I should make a pause and just be like, I want to be a hundred percent clear that I don't want us to come across as, like, like- and if you have this condition, that means that you're shitty. Like, n- n- neurotypicality is itself kind of a myth. Uh, not to say that there are not folks who have been socially categorized as neuroatypical. But like, the brain is complicated and messy and normativity is a- is a thing that's- we've socially constructed in uh- in the same way that we've constructed categories of disability. Uh, and so I just wanted to take that quick- quick- hit that brake real quick and make sure it's clear that I'm not, like, "hahaha! You can't- Keith can't make f- can't have cubes in-"

KEITH: Yeah, no, I'm fine!

AUSTIN (overlapping): "-in his brain."

KEITH (overlapping): I'm on the fucking show!

AUSTIN: Y- (laughs) Yeah, okay.

KEITH: I'm on the show!

SYLVIA: Yeah!

AUSTIN:(crosstalk) Yeah, you're doing—

KEITH: I talk about movies. I fuckin', I love movies!

AUSTIN: Right. Totally.

KEITH: Um. And- but it's always, but, but, talking about- talking about, uh, about, um, like, talking about things in the language of film, taking film and using it to describe something in a, a tabletop game, is...it always seemed like an intellectual, like, um- Like, just, yeah. Just like a metaphor. Like y- yeah, do you know all that stuff that you've seen? Like yeah, I remember having seen it. And I can tell- it's applicable. Like I can't do the part where you actually- so- so I do get the, uh, Justin asked about, like, people getting bored by, by speaking individual languages.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: Or using visuals to evoke emotion. Like, I can do all that stuff and it is- I guess tougher? Um, but I do like doing it, it's a great shorthand even if I can't literally do it. Um.

AUSTIN: Is that because you understand- is it almost like, um, (clicks tongue)-

KEITH: Well I've practiced, watching movies, I guess.

AUSTIN (overlapping): We- you- y, well you know- the thing that ended up being really interesting is when we had this conversation the first t- right, that's part of it, is the practice of watching movies you understand intellectually what a long shot, or a wide shot, does to you-

[00:50:05]

KEITH (overlapping): Yeah.

AUSTIN: -as a viewer. Like, if I'm like, there's a- or if I'm like, there is a single-shot action sequence, you understand the subtext of what I'm saying is about momentum and a feeling of tension, like...

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Is the shot gonna break? And blah blah blah. But one of the things that I think was super interesting, talking to you, was about music. And the way in which you can hear tones that I can't hear because of a difference in education, or because my brain is different than yours. Where like-

KEITH: Right. Yeah.

AUSTIN: I don't fuckin' know shit- I can't- I can- I can hear a song in my head that I know, but I can't play with it in the way that you can play with it.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Because of your history making music.

KEITH: Right. Yeah. And- um- you know. A-and that's the thing, is that, like, the world is full of a bunch of things that aren't visual.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: So, okay. D'you remember B'loonies?

AUSTIN: Do I remember-

KEITH (overlapping): You might not!

AUSTIN (overlapping): -B'loonies-

SYLVIA: B'loonies?

KEITH: You're older than me. So you might not remember B'loonies. Sylvia, do you remember B'loonies?

SYLVIA: Nn- I-

KEITH: D'you remember Grab-a-Bubble?

AUSTIN: (amused) This is all- (amused)

SYLVIA: The fuck-

AUSTIN: What?

SYLVIA: What the fuck are you saying to me, Keith?

KEITH: These are some, like, Nickelodeon commercial-ass toys.

SYLVIA: Ohhh.

AUSTIN: (overlapping) I see.

SYLVIA: (overlapping) Okay, yeah.

KEITH: A B'loonie—It's plastic bubbles, it comes in a metal tube and you squeeze the tube and some weird goop comes out- colored goop- and you put it on a straw and you blow and it makes like a bubble that is like sticky but permanent, or like you know, it lasts like 20, 30 minutes.

SYLVIA: Ahhh.

AUSTIN: I do remember these ads.

SYLVIA: That sounds familiar.

AUSTIN: I do remember this, yeah.

KEITH: So yesterday, I was at my friend's bar and he poured me a weirdo-

AUSTIN: A B'loonie, yeah.

KEITH: Well, and I, I smel- I immediately over-this one smells exactly like B'loonies, like plastic suspended in alcohol, it's the same fucking smell, 100%. And like, like, I didn't picture a B'loonie but it was a very intense sense memory.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: People talk about all the time that like your olfactory senses produce some of the strongest memories that you can have but it's like—there's a lot of ways of thinking about things that aren't just in pictures.

AUSTIN: Thomas Whitney says, "My B'loonie score is 0." (AUSTIN and KEITH laugh) No, you're totally right, and it's definitely been a thing that has been useful—like that conversation with you is really useful partially because it helped, you know, I'm still using visual language all the time but one of the things I do my best to do is try to bring in some other sensory data or sensory descriptions. One of the great things about building a region for Forged In The Dark games is that you're supposed to kind of produce a snapshot that is not—and I say snapshot, but that is not just visual—that you're like, "What's this place smell like? What's it sound like?"

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Like trying to paint a picture. Trying to develop—try to develop a photo. (laughs)

KEITH: Paint a smell picture.

AUSTIN: Paint a smell picture, like they say. (KEITH laughs) Which you know, try to produce a description that is not just that single thing.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: But yeah, I am curious for listeners, because it is such a big part of me—of the type of storytelling—it *is* a big part of the storytelling we do. It is one of the big distinct things that I think when people one day decide to include us on a list of influential actual

play podcasts, whenever that happens, in 30 decades. Which is very far in the future, 300 years from now. (laughs)

KEITH: (crosstalk) 300 years from now, we'll be mostly—

AUSTIN: (crosstalk) When we finally get put on a top 10 list.

KEITH: (crosstalk) It's mostly—it's a very—

SYLVIA: (crosstalk) Under the "Other Shows to Look Out For" section.

KEITH: (crosstalk) No one watches TV anymore.

AUSTIN: Ohh! (laughs) When they say Critical Role or Friends at the Table as if we're anywhere near that degree of success. Um...One of the things I think people talk about with our show is that style of visual language. Talking about the show as if it's a movie, talking about the show as if it's an anime, etc. And so, it is a key part of it and I do, I do wonder about that and like whether or not it's easy to get lost in that stuff. But also, we make a show where there are occasionally 5 minute long political monologues. So...kind of fucking up left and right, you know?

KEITH: Yeah. So full disclosure, cause I also have, um...I would say manageable but pretty severe ADHD. I've had it for, you know, I guess my whole life. I don't know how that works.

AUSTIN: Right, yeah.

KEITH: But. Um, uh...I do sometimes find it difficult to pay attention to our show while it's happening and it's just something I've always had to work with. I never considered that it was this and not just the ADHD. Uh, so I'll have to—I'll have to pay more attention to when I'm not paying attention. (laughs) Which sounds impossible, but I've gotten better at it over the past couple years, so.

AUSTIN: Totally. Well, you know, I think part of that ends up being, is there stuff to hang onto on the show that is not just—and at the table—that is not just visual depiction, and that is like, keeping, keeping players involved in general. Um, I will say, one of the best notes I ever got on the show was like, pause and recap. Like slow down after a scene and recap at a high level what just happened if possible. I don't do it as much as I'd like to, but it is a thing that I do try to do, and it is like, you know, it is improv, it is live performance, even though it's a recorded show, uh, that there's, you know, we are- we are sitting at a table and playing- or sitting at a virtual table playing a game, and so I can forget that sometimes, but hearing that note from someone who I don't believe has aphantasia but is one of the ways in which I've done my best to- and this happened in like the middle of Twilight Mirage, which is why I think part of Twilight Mirage gets- one of the reasons I think Twilight Mirage gets better is because I'm like, okay, let me

reiterate what the action of that scene was, so that we're all on the same table, so that if you lost attention for a second, it's okay and you can get back on board. And I think those sorts of things- or because details were lost in the, uh, in the, you know, the overall picture was lost in the details sometimes you definitely lose the forest for the trees in that way. Um, anyway. Anything else?

KEITH: Okay, I do have to ask though.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: And I've asked this before. But. How clear is it-

AUSTIN (overlapping): Extremely clear, Keith.

KEITH: -the, the sq- like what do you mean clear?

AUSTIN: I- It is, this is...

KEITH: It might as well be there.

AUSTIN: If I close my eyes.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Do you-

KEITH: (crosstalk) Un- un-fucking-believable.

AUSTIN: (crosstalk) Like what type of- what type of beach do you want?

SYLVIA: (laughs)

KEITH: Literally unbelievable.

AUSTIN: What, what texture is the cube, I can, yeah.

KEITH: (sighs)

AUSTIN: It's, it is- well like, here's the other half of this, you and I talked about this too, this is why I'm a quitter (laughs) at art.

KEITH: (laughs)

AUSTIN: -is because I can conceive of something in my mind that is like "oh yeah, I know exactly what I want to draw." And like, (scoffs) no. Absolutely not.

SYLVIA: Yeah...

KEITH: Right, yeah.

AUSTIN: Absolutely can- I can never do. And what I should have developed was discipline and stick-to-it-iveness and a good practice regimen and instead I thought, "I'll just keep this image in my mind, that's okay." Um. And instead what I did-

KEITH: Wow.

AUSTIN: -was started a podcast with my friends where I could say the images instead of needing to actually, like-

KEITH: (overlapping) So you're saying that-

AUSTIN: -create them.

KEITHS: -Friends at the Table is to make up for not being a painter.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah.

KEITH: (laughs)

SYLVIA: Yeah, that's why I'm here too. That, that was the sort of unifying thing.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: Friendship...

AUSTIN: Yours is that way too, though, Sylvi?

SYLVIA: Yeah no, I um, I'm similar to you Austin, where I like can, I can picture things very vividly but I have trouble like putting them down visually, like on paper. Like I can't draw shit.

AUSTIN: (overlapping) Yeah.

SYLVIA: [unintelligible]

KEITH: I also can't- for what it's worth, I also cannot draw.

AUSTIN: Well the thing that was interesting when we were talking about art with this, Keith, was like, for me, it's always been like, I have a developed picture in my head, and then I try to recreate that. Whereas for you, if you were drawing a house, that is not the- that is not the sequence of events?

KEITH: Mmm-hmm.

AUSTIN: Right? I don't know. This is a thing that-

KEITH: What do you mean "sequence?"

AUSTIN: Like for me, step one, imagine a house, I'mma draw a house-

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: And in my mind, I'm like, all right, here's the perspective of the house, here is what it's made of, here's the colors that it is, now let me just plop that down from my brain on the sheet, whereas for you, you would go about that-

KEITH: Well I do all that same thing, I just can't- I just have to-

AUSTIN: (overlapping) There's just not-

KEITH: (overlapping) I just can't see it-

AUSTIN: (overlapping) Right. They're just facts about the house.

KEITH: They're just facts about the house.

AUSTIN: (overlapping) Right. Okay.

KEITH: Right, yeah. It's a two thirds angle on the house where you can see this, and the door is black but the thing is red, and the roof goes this like- I can say all of that.

AUSTIN: (overlapping) Right, you can paint a picture with your words.

KEITH: Right, yeah.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: And then think about the words.

AUSTIN: (laughs) Right.

KEITH: (laughs)

AUSTIN: Right, which is another angle here, which is super interesting and now it's like, yeah, cause like, you could, you could do- if I asked you in play, "hey tell me what-" When I say "what is Mako wearing?"

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: The experience you have of describing that is way different than the experience I have of hearing it.

KEITH: Yeah. Yeah yeah yeah.

AUSTIN: Or maybe it isn't, I don't- maybe it isn't that different. Maybe it is not quote/unquote "way different" because again, we aren't fucking neurologists or, or-

KEITH: Sure.

AUSTIN: You know, we don't, we are not experts.

KEITH: (overlapping) It's perceptively very different at least.

AUSTIN: (overlapping) But it seems, it would seem as if that's way different-

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: Which is so fascinating.

KEITH: Right, yeah.

AUSTIN: Totally. Totally.

KEITH: Yeah, I've never been- I have never been able- It takes me until someone draws fanart of something to see what it is that I actually said. (laughs)

AUSTIN: (laughs)

SYLVIA: (laughs)

AUSTIN: Are you ever surprised? Are you ever like, "ooo, is this, this is it? This is what I said?"

KEITH: No, no, it's exactly what I said!

AUSTIN: (overlapping) Okay! Okay, well good, shoutout to our fan artists!

KEITH: (overlapping) Well, you know, yeah, and it's, you know-

AUSTIN: (overlapping) There's interpretations obviously, and yeah yeah yeah.

KEITH: (overlapping) Right, I have proclivities, sometimes I like a style more than another style, but like it's all there.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Like, you put the bowties on the thing just like I said.

AUSTIN: Right. (laughs)

[01:00:00]

KEITH: Did I have a shirt covered in bowties? I did that, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah, in one of Mako's final outfits was-

KEITH: Yeah. Yeah yeah yeah yeah.

AUSTIN: It had bowties and little else.

KEITH: It was, it was the plastic shirt I think? I don't know, I can't remember.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah. Alright.

KEITH: (overlapping) I think that was two different things.

AUSTIN: There was a plastic shirt, there was also bowties, I don't know if that was at the same time, maybe those, the, the dance was the ties- anyway, we're going to keep moving.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Uh, thank you Justin for your question. This one comes in from Hazel, who says *"Hey Tipsters! I recently started a new Dungeon World game using The Quiet Year as my session zero. I wanted to give my players agency over the bones of the setting and allow for more organic growth. Going in, I had one cool thing I wanted to incorporate: the area with the community was going to be on a castle in the sky, uh, in a Castle in the Sky-esque machine that would be activated. But as play went on, the things I put on the map to signal that, of course, got turned into other cool stuff by my co-players. What advice do you have to help with giving up precious, precious narrative control (laughs) and rolling with the punches when starting a campaign using a game like The Quiet Year? I want to preserve the choices we made in the world we built while adding onto it in interesting ways."* Um.

KEITH: Fully give it up.

AUSTIN: Fully give it up? And if you're not going to, say it up top what the things are you're not giving up. Right? Um, they're- I think once it's out, it's out and the moment has passed, you know? Um, the thing, the thing- you gave it up.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: You gave it up already in play, they made decisions, I would never want to take those away.

KEITH: And then the other thing is like, you have veto power in the way that also so doesn't everybody else.

AUSTIN: True. True.

KEITH: And, and maybe because if you're, um, if you're planning on GMing, well, like, you might have a better idea of what you might want to veto.

AUSTIN: Yeah, the thing that I would say is, I would never want to play that sort of game where I get to consistently say, "no you can't do that because I have a better idea?"

KEITH: Right, yeah.

AUSTIN: What- this is why I think up top the thing to do is to say, "I have three things in this session, or this, you know, this, this- while we play that I want to bring into focus." And either say them up top, which is like, "eventually one of the things I want to reveal is that this community is on a Castle in the Sky-esque machine, um, uh, and so let's build towards that?" The other is to do what I ended up doing with the Marielda one, which is like, I have three clocks that I am going to introduce as the GM of the overall campaign, and those reveal things that are true about the world, and to have those set up at the top and to play them out that way. Um, but what- once you've- if you've put things down on your player turn where you're like, "this is just a cool thing," and some other player picked it up and ran with it and did something dope? Like, if they did something dope they did something dope, and part of- (sighs) I'm cautious around using veto rules for control versus for safety, if that makes sense? Um, though obviously-

KEITH: (overlapping) Right, yeah, I wasn't really even thinking about like, like "no because I have something better that I want to do."

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: That, that's not a nice way to do veto to your friends. (laughs)

AUSTIN: No. (laughs)

KEITH: Um, uh-

AUSTIN: Are we still doing, are we still doing, uh, "My Cousin-", no "My Cousin Vinny," not "My Cousin Veto," (laughs) that's a different-

KEITH: (laughs) There's prob-, there's a Veto in that family.

AUSTIN: There's gotta be a Veto.

KEITH: Actually, um, uh, Marisa Tomei's character's last name is Vito.

AUSTIN: There you go.

KEITH: So. There we go.

AUSTIN: (overlapping) There you go.

KEITH: (overlapping) Marisa Tomei. That's when you veto, you say Marisa Tomei. Um, I happen to have watched that movie fairly recently-

AUSTIN: (overlapping) Right, her name is Mona Lisa Vito. Great name.

KEITH: Mona Lisa Vito, yeah.

AUSTIN: Fuck.

KEITH: I watched that movie very recently, it is tremendously good. I really love it (laughs).

AUSTIN: (overlapping) Do you remember what Vinny's full name is?

KEITH: Um, Vinny Gambini.

AUSTIN: Do you remember what his middle name is?

KEITH: "Bag-a-donuts."

AUSTIN: It's LaGuardia.

KEITH: Is it really?

AUSTIN: (laughs) It's Vincent LaGuardia Gambini.

KEITH: (laughs) That's funny.

AUSTIN: Love it.

KEITH: No, the "bag-a-donuts" is what uh, is what uh, Ralph Macchio calls him.

AUSTIN: Right, yes, yes.

KEITH: Ralph Macchio, by the way, such a fucking good actor, Ralph Macchio is.

AUSTIN: (laughs) I like that you said that as if you were a Ralph Macchio character.

KEITH: (laughs)

SYLVIA: (laughs)

KEITH: It's, I just feel like, you know, he's not in a lot of movies.

AUSTIN: He was- wasn't he just in that Karate Kid sequel? Show?

KEITH: Oh, no, no I didn't see that. I didn't see that.

AUSTIN: He was in "Cobra Kai," he was in-

SYLVIA: It was like a YouTube premium show.

AUSTIN: It was a YouTube premium show. That's true. Anyway.

KEITH: Um, uh, he um...I don't know what I was going to say about Ralph Macchio. Um. What-

AUSTIN: He was in "Psych: the Movie."

KEITH: He was. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Which I didn't know was a thing.

KEITH: Um.

SYLVIA: He seems like the type of actor who'd show up in a minor role on "Riverdale."

AUSTIN: Aw yeah.

KEITH: Yeah, totally. He aged in an unexpected way, but. He looks good.

AUSTIN: He looks good. What was the question? Where are we at? Giving up choices.

KEITH: (laughs) Um, who's your favorite character from, uh, "My Cousin Vinny?"

AUSTIN: (laughs) That's where we were, that was the question.

KEITH: And the answer's the grits cook who has no time for (laughs), to appreciate Marisa Tomei not understanding what grits are.

AUSTIN: (laughs) Anyway. To Hazel's question. Uh, Sylvi, what are your thoughts here?

SYLVIA: Yeah, I think like, I think it would be kinda crappy if you like, did something that didn't- that like went against the choices your players made, but I think there's a way to incorporate your ideas without like, wholesale abandoning them.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: I think the big one is talk to your players about it. But this is the type of thing where- and I don't know your campaign, I don't know how geographically large it is, but like you could make a smaller like, region that is on this- that does just like lift up out of the ground sometimes, it doesn't necessarily need to be everything.

AUSTIN: (overlapping) Hazel is in the chat, and just basically said that, Hazel says, "I just have to accept that building a world with my players means giving up total control. I think I'm going to add the Mobile Empire as a faction instead." There you go.

KEITH: Yeah, that's- I was literally going to say like, someone else gets the castle then.

AUSTIN: Yeah, guess what, they didn't get the fucking castle.

KEITH: (overlapping) Yeah.

AUSTIN: You could have had the dope castle.

KEITH: (overlapping) And you could tell them, too. You can be like, this was supposed to be for you, but you-

AUSTIN: But instead you added dragon-kin, or whatever.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Which are also cool.

KEITH: (overlapping) Which is incompatible, and everyone knows, with sky castles.

AUSTIN: (laughs) Everyone knows you can't have a sky castle *and* dragon-kin. Those two ideas clearly don't develop together and then have lots of cool synergies. "Oh, what type of deck are you playing?" "Oh, I'm playing like a sky castle/dragon-kin build."

KEITH: Whoa! Whoa!

AUSTIN: Unbelievable, no, you can't do that!

KEITH: House rules. I house-ruled it so that you could.

AUSTIN: Cool. Good. Any other thoughts here before we move on but Hazel seems like, like, in a good place with this.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Alright. Uh, the Weakest Part of a Mech writes in, and says, *"I am a relatively new GM, having run a few successful sessions of D&D. Recently, a friend and I have been trying to put together a game of Call of Cthulhu using the publisher's Wild West setting and campaign. We'll probably have had a session zero and one by the time this is read. I'm having some anxiety with starting a new system, where the characters are less powerful by design. Call of Cthulhu investigators are pretty fragile"* (something I can speak to, Austin can speak to, uh, first hand, I played a lot of Call of Cthulhu in college) and um *"I don't want to run-"*

KEITH: Or if you've read anything that, anything that has-

AUSTIN: (overlapping) Right.

KEITH: Anyone who has ever read anything by that guy.

AUSTIN: Yeah, by Lovecraft.

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: Or anyone who has written in a Lovecraftian, like, the mythos, uh, uh can tell you.

KEITH: (crosstalk) Yeah.

AUSTIN: *"I don't want to run a meat grinder and ruin the feel of a creepy mystery but I also don't want to pull my punches too much and have them breeze through, killing the atmosphere of the game. Do you have advice for maintaining a horror atmosphere and threatening characters? Also, if I can have a bonus question, do you have general tips for integrating new characters into an existing group, either in the case of a character's*

death or adding a new player." We haven't done a lot of that second thing in Friends at the Table. Um, in fact I think we've done-

KEITH: Or the first one.

SYLVIA: Eh.

AUSTIN: We've done a little bit of the first one, I actually included this specifically because we just played, we're in the middle of doing a horror game in Bluff right now, um, with Catch the Devil-

KEITH: Mmm.

AUSTIN: And then I think, I would say that "Messy Business" leaned in that direction a little bit, Keith. You were in that, right?

KEITH: Yeah. Yeah.

AUSTIN: So I think "Messy Business" and "Catch the Devil" in Bluff are the two horror-y things? Um.

KEITH: Yeah. And characters in, in, um, "Messy-" in "Messy Business" and Lacuna?

AUSTIN: Lacuna.

KEITH: Lagoon.

AUSTIN: Yeah, Lacuna. Yeah.

KEITH: Lacuna. Very fragile. I mean.

AUSTIN: Um. But Sylvi, I am definitely curious as someone who's played Catch the Devil recently, how you felt about the tone of that game, and whether or not that was something that was maintained, or like what worked there.

SYLVIA: So, I will say one of my quick problems with answering this question is that, um, my partner was listening to those episodes and pointed out to me, I rolled really well?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: So I was like almost never in peril, but the reason the setting still worked for me was because the stakes were made personal, and I felt like invested in the characters that were around us. I was less worried about, like, my own character really dying for a

lot of the game, and then like- but I was very invested with like...oh my god, I'm blanking on their names. But the like security guard and the reporter that we met.

AUSTIN: (overlapping) Doc- Yes. Yes, totally.

SYLVIA: Um, and the lion. And uh-

AUSTIN: Yes. Th- let's be careful what we say beyond that because I think there's one more part of that to come-

SYLVIA: (overlapping) Sorry. Yeah.

AUSTIN: No no no, all of that is in there.

SYLVIA: (overlapping) Maybe, should we-

AUSTIN: (overlapping) All of that is in there.

SYLVIA: Okay. We're good?

AUSTIN: We're good.

SYLVIA: I thought so. I thought that-

AUSTIN: We're good. Through those things, yes.

SYLVIA: Yeah. I'll stop there.

AUSTIN: Uh-

SYLVIA: Um, but like I got, I got really invested into that, and like we built these- and, and also through that like we built these characters, and then like this kind of ties into the other one because our characters were so connected it made us want to like-

AUSTIN: (overlapping) Yes.

SYLVIA: Or, at least for me, made me want to make sure the others were okay as well.

AUSTIN: Totally.

SYLVIA: Um.

AUSTIN: Spreading that concern away from just the player character and- any specific player character and to PCs and NPCs definitely helps a lot, because then any threat is felt really severely.

SYLVIA: Yeah. I'm, I feel like, like just generally speaking a lot of that game was us looking for the like other people in our group?

[01:10:02]

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: Or like, being like "oh no, we need to take-" Cause we also had the added bonus of our characters being related, but-

AUSTIN: (overlapping) Right. Right.

SYLVIA: It, it, like you don't need to have it as that tight a bond even, it can just be something as like, your character, one character feels responsible for this other thing.

AUSTIN: Totally.

SYLVIA: Um. But yeah, if you don't want to like- if you don't want to- again, this is a very weird way of saying this, if you don't want to fuck up your player characters, fuck up the things that they care about.

KEITH: (laughs)

AUSTIN: That's totally it, a hundred percent. Because if you're building- and, and you should bring that into the sess- I mean, obviously you've done session zero already, but if you haven't talked to them about this yet, now would be a good time, to be like: what does your character care about? Are there people in your character's life who they care about? Are there places, are there, you know, things, is there a, is there a project they're working on, is there a society they belong to, or, you know, a group, uh, you know, some sort of, you know, organization that they care about? Um, you know, is there a book series that they love? Like there is something out there that motivates them besides the mystery, um, and tying that in can be really powerful. Um, I will say it can be really tough in certain games. Catch the Devil was weird because y'all rolled so well for two full episodes, uh, or nearly two full recordings, um, and I was just like desperate for a bad roll, because I couldn't do anything, I wasn't, I wasn't enabled to introduce consequence without a bad roll. Um, and once it started I could go to some really interesting places, but it took a minute to get there. Uh, and, and- so what I will say is that Call of Cthulhu, or at least the version of Call of Cthulhu I played...god. You know. What year is it? It's 2020. The one that I was playing, the one that I was playing 13 to 15 years ago, 16 years ago, was pretty severe. And pretty rough. And my GM very rarely needed to like turn the knob to make it more punishing or threatening. Um, the, the ways in which that game can punish you is, especially if you're dealing with mythos creatures and stuff from the kind of cosmic horror, you know, uh, uh...

KEITH: Milieu?

AUSTIN: Milieu. But, but what's the- bestiary? Those things will fuck up, fuck you up without even touching you. Um, and so you shouldn't have too much problem once they get to that stage of an investigation, but before that I think one of the things to emphasize, the things that ended up creating a tense atmosphere when I was playing a game like that, um, were often about the mundanity of the world? Um, emphasizing the smallness of the characters and the ways in which non-supernatural threats were very scary? Let me tell you about being in an empty house alone, a strange empty house, it's terrifying.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And so hammering that stuff home, of like, alright, you're investigating what you think is, you know, uh, you're investigating a tenured professor, uh, who you think is tied to uh, uh, a cult to Cthulhu. Uh, and you're in, you know, their apartment. And being in an apartment at night alone is scary, because you don't know if someone else is there. Emphasize the ways in which, you know, uh, the ways in which they could be under, under, um, surveillance, uh, can be scary. Emphasize the ways in which their daily lives are impacted by their investigation as people start to pay attention to them, you know, checking the news- checking the newspaper for someone's name or you know, taking books out of the library, or any, any, all of that stuff leaves a trail, and emphasizing that trail was always something that scared me, um, because it made you feel unsafe. Like a Call of Cthulhu game is, has a sort of, or when I was playing in them, had the same sort of like mission downtime structure, only less codified? You kind of had your day life and then you had your investigation phase, kind of, and uh, or didn't move- it didn't necessarily move that way exactly, but you kind of thought about your character in those ways, right? I was, my, I think my longest running character was a tutor? Um, was like a tutor to a rich kid, which was very fun, um, and uh, thinking about like okay, like here is my- by day, I'm tutoring this, you know, 17-year-old brat, uh, from, who's like the scion of a super wealthy family, and trying to use the resources in that house to investigate the cult because they had a cool library or whatever, while trying not to get in trouble with that kid's family or whatever, right? Um, uh, the, being- focusing on that mundanity works really well, and then because you're playing in cosmic horror, you can, you can twist the dial a little bit and suddenly, you know, you look out the window and you see the stars are moving into a strange alignment or whatever. Um, putting those two things in juxtaposition help a lot. Um, I think I would be remiss not to say briefly that I do think that it's probably worth reading into ways to do cosmic horror that don't lean on some of the rules that Call of Cthulhu as a game specifically brings to bear around mental health, um. It is very much a game that is like "roll on the madness table," um, and as a 19-year-old, that was sick. As a 34-year-old, who has been much more critical about stuff, that stuff especially like, it's one thing for me to consume media in that space where I'm going into it critically and being like "alright, whew, okay, I'm going to play 'Darkest Dungeon' and it's going to have a stress meter that can give my characters 'madness debuffs'" and like I'll roll my eyes at it or I'll think about the ways in

which it's incorporating recuperation and then try and come to an agreement in my own head about the way it's doing it and if it does it well. It's a different thing at a table, where you may have neuroatypical people, where you may be a neuroatypical person as the GM, I'm not- I don't wanna, I don't wanna, uh, uh assume anything about you as the person who wrote into this, I'm not assuming that you're going to- that you're handling this poorly necessarily, but talk about that at the table. Read into the ways in which those mechanics can be uh, harmful to players? Um, make sure everyone's at the sa- at the table feels safe and comfortable and has safety tools available to back out, and that's doubly true because it's not only a game that has like quote/unquote "insanity effects" but also because it's a game that is about horror, and like horror is going to be a space where-

KEITH: Scary.

AUSTIN: Where it's scary, y'all. Like, I think "Messy Business" is really good, but there are parts of "Messy Business" that are really frightening, um, like genuinely frightening and um, I know that if I'd been a player in that game, I would want, I would have wanted to know that at any point I could have been like, alright, I'm going to, I'm going to play the X card or I'm going to let the people at the table know that I'd like to pull a veil or I'd just like to move on, or that I just don't like the direction something is going in. Um, so, so those things are, are I think really- having those safety tools at the table are really important, and do not run contrary to the idea of horror. And in fact, tend to help the atmosphere because when you know you're safe at the table you let yourself be a little more vulnerable, you know what I mean? You're not like, ready to, to veto everything because you're not, you know, you're not feeling comfortable. When you feel like you know that you can trust the GM and the other players to take things seriously and to take your safety seriously, you let yourself, you can let yourself be, or at least in my experience, I've been able to let myself lean in a little bit more to the horror, if that makes sense. Um, any other thoughts here on tension in horror and establishing it-

KEITH: Yeah. I, I, I think that this (clears throat) has a little bit to do with something that both of you said, but um, like, it, it might feel weird going from Dungeons & Dragons to Call of Cthulhu because of the like, like, there's monsters in Cthulhu stuff, but like, you're not, it's not a game about getting blasted with fireballs by a wizard?

AUSTIN: (laughs) No.

KEITH: Um, and so like-

AUSTIN: Though I have been. I have been blasted by a fireball in a Call of Cthulhu game.

KEITH: But, but was it a wizard?

AUSTIN: Yeah. There are wizards.

KEITH: (crosstalk) Um. Okay.

AUSTIN: (crosstalk) There are cultists.

KEITH: (crosstalk) Alright. That's fair.

AUSTIN: But it is not like that, it is not, it is such a different thing like you're saying.

KEITH: No. Well, it's like yeah, the consequences are going to come from the fiction and it's going to feel more comfortable once you're in there and like, the things that you're doing are going to make sense to the players and the reason that the, like, it's- you'll get- it's worse to get like a broken bone in Call of Cthulhu- I haven't played Call of Cthulhu specifically, so-

AUSTIN: Yeah yeah yeah.

KEITH: Um, but it's worse to get like a broken bone or shot once than to like almost die in Dungeons & Dragons.

AUSTIN: (laughs) Yes.

KEITH: Like you are always-

AUSTIN: (laughs, overlapping) Always almost dying.

KEITH: Almost dying in Dungeons & Dragons. Like, if, if anything it's going to make, I think, the consequences feel more, uh, concrete, and like it's just- it's going to make sense when you're in there to you and to the players. I think. Like.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah.

KEITH: You know, like, you're right, don't do a meat grinder, it's not going to be fun for you or them unless you all want to do a meat grinder thing.

AUSTIN: Which is also the other thing: if you're, you and your players want to do a meat grinder thing, that's, that's not a- that can be fun, you can run through characters and do the kind of slasher horror movie thing of like, "yep, my last character just got devoured by the empty nothingness, wild." You know? (laughs)

KEITH: (laughs)

AUSTIN: That is, that is a thing that can happen.

KEITH: Yeah, if you've, I mean if you've ever read Lovecraft that's how they all end.

AUSTIN: It goes bad.

KEITH: (overlapping) Yeah.

AUSTIN: For sure. Um, basic role play is such a weird, interesting system, it's not- I don't know that it's good but have y'all ever seen like the sheet for how many skills there are?

KEITH: I have, yeah.

SYLVIA: No, I don't know if I have.

AUSTIN: I'll just read through some of them real quick: uh, Accounting? Anthropology. Appraise. Archeology. Art slash Craft. Charm, Climb, Credit Rating, (laughs) Cthulhu Mythos.

[01:20:00]

KEITH and SYLVIA: (laughs)

AUSTIN: Cthulhu Mythos, Disguise, Drive Auto, Electric Repair, Fast Talk...

KEITH: Oh my god.

SYLVIA: Oh my god.

AUSTIN: Uh, Natural World. Operate Heavy Machinery. Uh, Throw. There's a lot of good ones. Psychology? Psychoanalysis. Two different skills.

KEITH: Unbelievable.

SYLVIA: This is like, an expanded version of the like, White Wolf Hunters game I played ages ago.

AUSTIN: (overlapping) Oh yeah, definitely. Definitely. Um, I played so much of this game in, in college, which, which- and played it with people who were, who understood a lot of the, the uh, shitty stuff about Lovecraft and understood-

KEITH: (crosstalk) Yeah. There's a lot of that.

AUSTIN: A lot of the, the deeply problematic shit about even just having a game that has a sanity meter, like, um, and we had a safe, good critical time so it was, it was fine. Uh. That GM loved to fucking kill characters. So. I don't know.

KEITH: Um, you could keep the madness table but it's just "Madness" by Prince Buster and every time you roll on it you play the song?

AUSTIN: (laughs) That's what it is. You just, that's it.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Every time.

SYLVIA: Maybe they're just getting angry.

AUSTIN: You're just getting real mad, arghh, I'm so mad at these monsters!

KEITH: (overlapping) I'm so mad at the King of Blue Beat!

AUSTIN: (laughs) Furious.

SYLVIA: (laughs)

AUSTIN: Noir writes in and says, *"I'm running a campaign of Dungeon World for my partner and our friends and for ten sessions it's going very well. All but one of us have played tabletop RPGs before. My new player was initially very hesitant about joining, expressing that she was worried she wouldn't grasp the mechanics, but she's been doing great and she told me she's really enjoying the campaign. The heart of my question is this: I often see her hesitating to put forward ideas or talk to NPCs. On the occasions that she does her ideas are great, she really brings a lot to the session and expresses that she found the session especially fun. How can I encourage her, uh, encourage that, uh, encourage her voice and ideas uh, and let her know that they're, that they're valued at the table without putting undue pressure on her?"* This is a good question, uh, because I think everyone starts somewhere, everyone has to start playing uh, tabletop RPGs at some point, uh, it's, it's always someone's first one. Uh, and so, or someone- everyone who plays them has had their first one, and you can really set-

KEITH: (overlapping) Right, not everyone *has* to play one at some point (laughs).

AUSTIN: Right, everyone *has* to. As King of the World I have decreed it.

KEITH: New rule!

AUSTIN: New (laughs), new (laughs). New No-No! Um, the, the, yeah, so I think like the, the- it sounds like you're already doing the right thing, which is like, kind of, "hey, you did a good job! That was really fun, I'd love to hear from you more."

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Um, I will say as a GM one of the things that can be really tough is to, is to find the line that you're hitting at here, which is how do I encourage without putting pressure on someone, and I've seen this br- I saw this break bad in a, in a Call of Cthulhu game actually once, where there was a new player who just felt like anything she did was going to be the wrong thing, because the consequences were so high (laughs), um, and the GM felt stuck, because it was like, you know, he didn't want to give one player a softer break and blah blah blah- it was wei- it was a bad par-, a bad table environment, and largely because we didn't talk about it. We didn't talk about that dynamic at all. Um, and so one is to obviously talk about that stuff, but also I think one of the things I do as a GM is to pass- and this is a teaching tool, too, right, but pass the spotlight around, like, structure your play such that you, you naturally pass the spotlight around? Um, there is an- I once saw a critique of our, the way that we run Dungeon World, um, which is that on paper it's theoretical that there's no such thing as a- I mean, it's not theoretical, there's no such things as a turn order in Dungeon World, right, like, um. You're not rolling for initiative, you're supposed to let the action flow naturally but that one of the things that I do is pass the spotlight around and I go, "Alright Keith, what's Fero doing? Alright Sylvi, what's up with Ephrim?" And then I go like "what's up with Hella?" Um, and then I take actions as my characters and sometimes we'll do a double, right? You know, you'll do a setup thing and then you'll roll again to do a different thing, or I'll have two enemies do things back to back but there's a lot of like, you go, I go, you go, I go stuff, um, and that is not like, a misunderstanding of the rules. That is one, we're playing a show, but also two, I want to make sure that the- that everyone has the mic in their hand, um, and has a designated moment for which it is time for them to step up and make, to take action? Um, and that erases- to set- my hope is that that helps not erase but diffuse the pressure. One, because someone can anticipate when it's going to be their turn at the mic, you know, their, their turn to say what's happening at the table, and two, because it ensures that um, people who are hyper-competent and hyper-comfortable aren't dominating the conversation? Because a, a role playing game is a conversation? And I say that as someone who dominates conversations unintentionally and who's had that criticism hurled my way fairly, um, and is one of the reasons I like the structured conversations of role playing games, is because it can help, it can help emphasize a quiet voice, because there is a designated moment for that quiet voice to speak. And that doesn't mean that's the only time that person should be able to speak, it doesn't mean that you shouldn't encourage them in other ways, uh, you know, it doesn't mean that when you see that that person, that she has a really good idea but isn't quite voicing it, that you shouldn't specifically- and I think in those moments you really should be like, "Oh wait, do you have something?" you know, or like "Oh what's your idea, I'm really excited, I'm really curious about what your idea is," you know, um, voice that stuff? But having that structured play does- and that doesn't mean you're rolling for initiative, but it does mean that it's your job as the GM to, to have a system set up where it feels natural for her to be able to step up and, and take control of the conch shell so to speak, and give- add her voice to the conversation. Especially in a game like Dungeon World where it does just work when you do that, for sure. Um, uh, Keith and, and Sylvi, who are- who have different styles of play, for sure, I think including in terms of this specific thing, I'm curious, what do y'all think?

KEITH: Um, as a big overtalker-

AUSTIN: Ah. Yeah.

KEITH: Um.

AUSTIN: (laughs)

KEITH: (laughs) Um, I, I think you touched on a few of the things that I, I was going to say? Uh, I guess I'm wondering like, this is a new player, is there also a little bit of like, like, like uh...you know, when I go to a party, I'm not the best party guest in the world, it takes me maybe a full hour, sometimes, to like acclimate to it? Uh, and like, partici- start participating as a, as a, you know, person that's in a group of other people?

AUSTIN: Mhm.

KEITH: Is there sort of just like a, you know, she's just warming up, she's a new player, she might feel a little bit uncomfortable, you're already being encouraging, you're being- you're actively thinking about, you know, how you can make her feel more comfortable and more included and that she is doing a good job. Is there a part of it where it's like she's just- she can just get acclimated now, you're already considering these things. Um, she'll just get used to it. I don't know. I'm asking.

AUSTIN: Yeah, maybe? Right?

SYLVIA: (quietly) Yeah...

AUSTIN: Um, Sylvi?

SYLVIA: I, I think that like on some level yeah, but I know personally like I sometimes struggle with just like, feeling like I have a moment to say something? Like, knowing when to jump in and like, the stuff that Austin brought up earlier really helps with that. So even if you can be, even if you think like, "oh yeah, they're acclimated now," it still really helps to make sure you're getting everyone involved, especially when you notice they haven't said anything for a while.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: Um, yeah, I... (sighs) I don't know if I have too much to add other than you, you said, like it's, it's- I think the, the main thing is just don't like, you don't want to put pressure on her but like, make her, make sure she knows like you like her ideas, like be like, it doesn't even need to be like all of them, like you don't want to overdo it, but if something really grabs you at the end of the session you can be like, "Hey I'm really

glad you brought that up." And that'll just like help her feel more comfortable, um, expressing herself during the game.

AUSTIN: Totally.

KEITH: Um.

AUSTIN: Go ahead.

KEITH: Uh, no, another thing is uh, you know, in addition to the usefulness of the, you know, making sure, trying, trying like- like what Austin was saying trying to control the microphone and like making sure that everybody gets a chance, but also um- cause that's, you, you referenced it specifically in um, like, a combat turn order but you- it also happens outside of combat.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Hundred percent, yeah.

KEITH: But it's also like trying to, some of I think the best moments in like role play is when things really feel like a conversation? And it's hard to not bring your ideas to the table when everyone is participating in like, a full actual for real conversation in character because that is not just the GM making sure that we're sharing focus but it is everyone participating in that together. Um.

AUSTIN: One of my favorite things to do as a GM is to back off and be like "y'all have this convers-" like my favorite- two of my favorite moments in Twilight Mirage, uh, coming in the Feast of Patina and then the Ark plot, the uh, the, the, I don't remember what the full name of the Gift-3 arc, uh, plot, or Ark arc, I guess, (laughs) um-

KEITH: (overlapping) Yeah.

AUSTIN: Were moments were I was like "I'm going to back the fuck off and just let y'all talk because y'all have some stuff to talk through."

KEITH: (overlapping) Yeah.

[01:29:50]

AUSTIN: I do think even there power dynamics can come to play and new players can find themselves being quiet, um, and so if you're a player in that situation, be sure to be like, "Hey, Melissa!" (presuming the character's name is Melissa), "what do you think?" Like try to bring the player in that way without it being- again, without it being about "you better have the right answer." Um, the other, I, I also have one more note here which is that, if you have players who you know are confident and will find their groove, find- and when I say groove I don't even mean just like "they're in the flow" but I mean they will literally find some, some story to fit their character into, they will find a way to, to, uh, fit

their character into the, the, kind of, shape of whatever the story is you're telling. Um, and you have a player who is new and who is a little less confident, or even a player who is old but does not necessarily have their character down pat, you shouldn't feel bad putting together a plot that you know will connect, or uh, uh, you know, a premise for a story, that you know will connect that other player, that, that, the player who's a little less confident from the jump and give them the kind of, um, the netting? The, the kind of like safety net, of like "Oh yeah, I care about this because this is an NPC from my background. This is a plot about an organization that I have a relationship with already. Hey, I'm playing the wizard and we're going to a, a, you know, a ruined- an abandoned wizard school," right? Uh, when you have the character like, and I'm going to be straight up here, like I know Fero is going to figure out a cool thing to do no matter where I put Fero, you know? (laughs) Like that was going to happen with Keith, um, because Keith totally understood who Fero was and Keith was able to be that player I talked about before, who's like, "I'm going to be the engine." Right, like Keith, you've told me before like that was one of the goals that you had was to be the person who took action while, if the party was stuck deliberating, right?

KEITH: Did I say that?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: That sounds- that makes sense, but I don't remember.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's a thing you said. Uh, but in Season Two, or "Winter in Hieron."

KEITH: Okay.

AUSTIN: Uh, uh, or you've told me privately maybe, but like that was a thing, and that was a thing I could rely on, was, was-

KEITH: It was probably, it was probably also during our conversation of uh, uh, I'm talking, I talk first too much. (laughs)

AUSTIN: Probably. Yeah yeah yeah.

KEITH: (overlapping) (laughs) I'm always talking first.

AUSTIN: (overlapping) But that was- but, but well that's the thing, because I could count on Fero taking action, I could then have a session where I'm like, okay, this is going to be a Lem-heavy prep session or this is going to be, you know, a thing where I know that I can get some Ephrim stuff up front and Fero will find, Keith will find a way to be excited and have a good time here. Keith has a good time when we play games. Keith likes playing games together!

KEITH: Yep.

AUSTIN: Um, and so, like, and that's not- Sylvi, I'm not saying that you were not having a good time (laughs), I hope that that's not how that came across.

SYLVI: (sarcastically) I hated every second of it!

AUSTIN: Noooooo! (laughs) Um, but you know what I mean, right? And like, you shouldn't as a GM feel bad about that-

KEITH: (overlapping) Well, one of the features, one of the consistent features of, between all of my characters I think is that you can kind of tell that they're trying to have a good time? (laughs)

AUSTIN: Totally.

KEITH: Even when it doesn't work and even if they're also really sad?

AUSTIN: Totally. Totally. Um, definitely. Definitely. And also, I'll say it changes from game to game, like that is- you can, if you go listen to, uh, us across different games, it's really funny, especially I think Bluff City, uh, or, or one shots, where it's like, ooo, I, someone just doesn't have the character in their head or yo, immediately slotted into this character, like zero to one hundred off, off the dome, you know?

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Um, and that is, that is part of actual- that is actual play, like if you played tabletop games, or system stuff where it's like, I have sat down to play games and been like, I'm going to be quiet because I don't fucking know how this system works. (laughs)

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Um, I feel- I don't feel like I have it, or, or who this character is. Um.

KEITH: One that sticks out for me, it took me a session and a half to, to get into "Messy Business."

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah, definitely, I remember this.

KEITH: Um. It's not uncommon.

AUSTIN: (overlapping) Sure.

KEITH: Uh, it took me a while to get into uh, uh, what was the, what was the one where Hector Hu is introduced, what game was that?

AUSTIN: Noirlandia.

KEITH: Noirlandia took a while.

AUSTIN: (overlapping) Noirlandia was tough for all of us, I think. I think that was one of the hardest ones for sure. Um, I like that game, but it was-

KEITH: I ended up really liking the game too, both that and Lacuna are both games where I was like "I don't fucking know about this" but then by the end I was like, "I actually love that."

AUSTIN: Yeah. Sylvi, do you have any other thoughts here or should we wrap up?

SYLVIA: Um. No, I kind of, like, (sighs) honestly the stuff I said kind of was covered, like the stuff that I agree with was covered like pretty early on with this, like what helps me when I'm feeling not talkative is just like, being prompted, so...

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: ...that's kind of it.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Prompt your players. Seriously. And, and the other thing is you can prompt them off mic, or off- away from the table between sessions? Um, how often, you know, Sylvi and, and, uh, Keith, have I come to you and been like what do you want to do next session? Like is there a thing you want to do? Because I want to fr- because if there's a scene you want to do or if you have a, an arc you want to start, or if you have like a thing you want to get into, the sooner I know about it the sooner I can prep a- and that doesn't mean you should overprep in this way, but like it's worth if you have a quiet player talking to them about the type of stuff they want to do. Um, uh, or have them start to think about it at least. Because, because sometimes it's about time and sometimes you have different degrees of reactivity at the table, uh, and so if you can give someone a heads up and be like, "Hey I think next session we're going to be dealing with this faction, is there anything you want to do with them?" That can be enough for them to get their head in the right place, so that they can have that, that style of reaction, you know?

KEITH: And there, I, there is one more thing for me, which is like uh- (coughs) Uh, you didn't, you didn't say this in the thing, but uh, if there, if there is that char- that, that player that like is very or overwilling to talk first, um, like, it's, it's, it's possible that it's even a problem where you, that you can bring to them where it's like-

AUSTIN: (crosstalk) Yeah.

KEITH: Well, it's not- you don't have to work on the more quiet person, it's the person who's always jumping in that maybe needs to be told, "Hey, shut up sometimes."
(laughs)

AUSTIN: (overlapping) We've had those conversations. (laughs)

KEITH: I, I, and even when we've had those conversations I already am trying not to jump in all the time.

AUSTIN: (overlapping) Right.

KEITH: Like, even when I'm at my worst, I still am aware of it and trying?

AUSTIN: Yes. (laughs)

KEITH: Uh, but sometimes being told, like you're not, still not doing a good job, uh, of that, uh, is, uh, helpful and probably won't hurt anybody's feelings. I don't think. It's hard to find someone who talks a lot that doesn't know that they talk a lot.

AUSTIN: We're all working on it.

KEITH: (overlapping) Yeah, we're working on it. Mhm.

AUSTIN: (overlapping) We're all trying to get better. (laughs) All right, that's going to do it for us this episode, thank you for joining us. I hope that the new year has been good for everyone so far, I know it's been a rough new year. I know that there's like, bad news all across the fucking world right now, uh, so sending love and support to everyone. As always, you can send us questions: tipsatthetable@gmail.com and thank you as always for your support. Uh, if you uh, want to change your level or support us or whatever, friendsatthetable.cash is the email- or, is the web address. Um, we are getting way closer than, than we were before about, about postcard stuff. I have a meeting tomorrow about the first of two big postcard sets, um, the first of which will be a big package deal and that'll hit hopefully sooner than later? My, my goal is for that to come out soon. Capital S Soon. I have to do some work to get it there and then, then obviously we have to print stuff and blah blah blah blah and there's a bunch of other stuff, but we're having for real talks about, about doing a nice big package of, of one set of postcards, and the other set look fucking sick. Uh, and that set will be unfolding, uh, bit by bit, uh, the way that the postcards traditionally went. Um, so look forward to both of those if you're at the postcard tier. Um, we're going to hopefully do another live soon, we really want to get "Stewpot" out, we really want to wrap up "Stewpot," but schedules have been schedules. Um.

KEITH: Yeah, and, and people have been really sick.

AUSTIN: And also people- (laughs) *Some* people have been sick.

KEITH: Uhhh...I think-

AUSTIN: (overlapping) Me. It was me last time.

KEITH: It was you last time, it was a couple other people before that, and then it was me.

AUSTIN: (crosstalk) Yes. That's, yeah.

KEITH: Really, really before that.

SYLVIA: (overlapping) Yeah, I got sick over the holidays.

KEITH: Oh, did you have a sick cancellation too?

AUSTIN: We've all been sick.

SYLVIA: Yeah. Not cause of recording, I was just like, it was another Friends at the Table cast member who was sick, during this stretch of time.

KEITH: That you were also sick. (laughs)

SYLVIA: Yeah.

KEITH: Okay.

SYLVIA: It was very weird.

KEITH: (laughs) Yeah. That's why you, you want to hold out until someone else cancels first.

AUSTIN: That's right.

KEITH: (overlapping) And then you're like, then you're like-

AUSTIN: (overlapping) And then you're like, you're- whew! Clear.

KEITH: (overlapping) I can't believe you're canceling!

AUSTIN: (overlapping) We were supposed to-

KEITH: Point, point the finger!

AUSTIN: (in sick voice) But we were supposed to do "Stewpot" today!

SYLVIA: Yeah.

KEITH: (laughs) Yeah, but I, like- from December 8th until like January 2nd, I couldn't have recorded even if we wanted to.

AUSTIN: Jesus.

KEITH: Yeah. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah. It's brutal. It's brutal.

SYLVIA: I'm glad you're feeling better.

AUSTIN: Me too.

KEITH: Thank you! Yeah, thanks. I had the flu, and the flu led to bronchitis, and the bronchitis led to uh, tonsillitis. I got all three in a row.

SYLVIA: (overlapping) Oh my god.

AUSTIN: That's, that's the triple threat right there.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: That's the Triple Crown.

KEITH: Yep. Yep.

AUSTIN: Congrats. (laughs) You won.

KEITH: It's the triple threat, and the Triple Crown-

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: I'm going to be in a Broadway show, I'm going to get- my, my flu, bronchitis and uh, and tonsillitis are going to get me an EGOT.

AUSTIN: Can't wait, I'm so excited for your EGOT. Um, I'm going to get an EGOT starting by being in the new CATS revival. Uh, I am going to play-

KEITH: That's where they bring back all the dead Jellicle cats? Is the "New Cats Revival?"

SYLVIA: Oh my god.

KEITH: (laughs)

AUSTIN: (laughs) Fuck. (laughs) Ooooh, alright, that's going to do it for us, friendsatthetable.cash, you already know what it is, hope everyone has a good month, talk to you all soon, bye bye bye bye bye!

SYLVIA: Bye!

KEITH: Bye!