

Sangfielle Post Mortem

Transcribed by: Iris (@sacredwhim)

AUSTIN: Welcome to Friends at the Table, an actual play podcast focused on critical worldbuilding, smart characterization, and fun interaction between good friends. I'm your host Austin Walker, and joining me today, Ali Acampora.

ALI: Hi, I'm Ali, you can find me over at [@ali_west](#) on Twitter, and the show is over at [@Friends_Table](#).

AUSTIN: Keith Carberry.

KEITH: Hi, my name's 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. We just started *Metal Gear Solid 3*.

AUSTIN: Amazing. Sylvi Clare.

SYLVI: Hey, I'm Sylvia, you can find me on Twitter [@sylvibullet](#), and you can find my other show—I need to actually be specific about this, 'cause I forgot that we changed the way the podcast feed is listed.

AUSTIN: Oh.

SYLVI: If you search for just “Emojidrome,” it's the old one.

AUSTIN: Ohh.

SYLVI: You need to search for “Emojidrome 2.0” because we couldn't think of anything better to name it, so.

KEITH: Oh, is this why my podcast feed hasn't updated in like, 8 months?

SYLVI: Yeah, the company that hosted our podcast died—

AUSTIN: Oh my god.

SYLVI: —and we couldn't transfer anything. Yeah, no, it's been a weird week.

AUSTIN: Oh, that blows.

SYLVI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Everyone go follow Emojidrome 2.0.

JACK: I'm doing it right now.

AUSTIN: There you go.

SYLVI: Wow. Thank you, Jack.

AUSTIN: I just assumed the podcast went on hold, I had no idea.

SYLVI: No, this happens because we're both disasters, but that's separate from the technical issues.

AUSTIN: Fair enough. Jack de Quidt.

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

AUSTIN: Janine Hawkins.

JANINE: Hi, I'm Janine, you can find me [@bleatingheart](#) on Twitter.

AUSTIN: Art Martinez-Tebbel.

ART: Hey, you can find me on Twitter [@atebbel](#).

AUSTIN: And Andrew Lee Swan.

DRE: Hey, you can find me on Twitter [@swandre3000](#).

AUSTIN: As always, you can support the show by going to [friendsatthetable.cash](#). If you liked Sangfielle, and wanted to hear us talk about it during the season, we have a show called Drawing Maps you can do that during. We have a ton of additional actual play content from years of doing a show called Bluff City, we have Lives at the Table, which we'll be pivoting back to in a moment because we need to get some more Road to PALISADE going ASAP. Though, actually, we have one in the can. I guess we've said this on Patreon—

KEITH: Pretty long one, too.

AUSTIN: It's a pretty long one. We did a Dre-GM'd *Lancer* game set in the universe of the Principality, and that was an extremely fun game. I was excited to play as a player. Dre did an incredible job as GM.

JACK: They were great.

AUSTIN: It was a really fun game. So, look forward to that going in the feed in the near future. We have Bluff City in the can, that'll be coming out soonish also, once we get some lockdown on music and narration, so look forward to some more stuff in that feed shortly.

Today, we are doing the post-mortem for Sangfielle, a game that we played with—a season that we played with the following games: *The Ground Itself* by Everest Pipkin, *HEART: The City Beneath* by Grant Howitt and Christopher Taylor, *Inhuman Conditions* by Tommy Maranges and Cory O'Brien, *ICHOR-DROWNED* by Sillion L. and Brendan McLeod, *Anamnesis* by Samantha Leigh, and *A Visit to San Sibilis* by Peter Eijk. I believe that's everything. It's truly possible that

we missed a game [CHUCKLING] we played this season somehow. But I'm pretty sure that's the big stuff.

We got a ton of questions. Ali, if you counted individual questions—I'm guessing this is true, you did most of the pulling stuff from the tips email—100+ questions easy, easy, right?

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I think that that's probably right. We cannot get through 100 questions. Ali did a very good job of collating those, picking out the stuff that we got like, various versions of. You know, a lot of people asked 'how was *HEART* to play?' for instance, and similar things.

[ALI CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: We focused in on those questions, we focused in on questions that we saw a lot of people kind of interested in. That way we could get the most out of our time, which is increasingly limited. Very funny to think about where we were like seven years ago with a post-mortem, where it was like 'alright, it's gonna be six hours long, 'cause we all have six hours of time,' and now we all have pets and families and houses and—I don't have any of those things, but you know, we, collectively, do.

SYLVI: [CHUCKLING] Yeah.

ART: And in a hundred years, we'll all be dead. That's what Jacques Cousteau says.

AUSTIN: [CHUCKLING] That's what Jacques Cousteau says.

[ALI AND DRE LAUGH]

AUSTIN: Alright.

SYLVI: [CHUCKLES] Just like the kid's song. 'In a hundred years we'll be dead, just like Jacques Cousteau says.'

AUSTIN: [CHUCKLING] Just like Jacques Cousteau says. Uh-huh.

Alright, let's just open to the first one. This one comes in from anonymous, but also, again, a lot of folks had this to ask. "What is everyone's favorite single moment from the season?" This is a big one.

JANINE: Es and Marn working on the river boat to get—doing their like, [LAUGHING] co-working, like, research book-finding brunch kind of stuff was great.

[ALI LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JANINE: I loved it.

ALI: Hell yeah.

JACK: I liked it when Duvall obliterated a bunch of painting monsters in one of Art's first rolls in the entire season.

AUSTIN: They were resin monsters, thank you very much. [CHUCKLES]

JACK: They were resin monsters.

AUSTIN: [CHUCKLING] Painting monsters are from Twilight Mirage, it's different.

[ART CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: These are like paint-thinner monsters, somehow.

JACK: Oh, I see. Okay, paint-thinner monsters. I think it's very funny when we have a suspicion that the mechanics can do a thing—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: —but we're not sure whether they will, and then seeing it executed so violently and spectacularly so early in the season was really funny.

KEITH: No one ever did more damage than that, even close.

[ALI LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Not even close. Not even close!

ART: Not even close.

AUSTIN: I think Art maybe hit a similar thing once that was like 13 damage and it was still a big deal, but like—

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: That's an unbelievable amount of damage in that moment.

ART: Yeah. It was great.

AUSTIN: Any other big favorite moments?

SYLVI: I mean, that's easy—

ART: [OVERLAPPING] The Virtue—oh, sorry, go ahead.

SYLVI: No, go ahead.

ART: You heard me about to—Virtue becoming the vampire queen of Sapodilla was a—

[DRE CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: Was a highlight?

ART: Was a great one, yeah.

SYLVI: Yeah, you saved me from being the one to say it.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

[JACK LAUGHS]

ART: Yeah.

SYLVI: I do have another one, so people don't think I'm as obsessed with myself as I am.

[AUSTIN LAUGHS]

SYLVI: I really liked the Red Zephyr arc, the reveal at the end with Calen and stuff.

AUSTIN: [GROANS] Oh, god.

ALI: Oh, yeah.

SYLVI: I think that's just some of my favorite stuff that we've done on the show.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I love that arc.

SYLVI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: God, I don't—it's really hard for me to pick one, because—here's what—my answer is generic, and it's every time a player made a big swing. So that is Marn and Pickman kidnapping a cop and threatening them—

[KEITH, DRE, AND JACK LAUGH]

DRE: Oh, that was pretty good.

AUSTIN: That is Chine beating up a doppelganger of himself, or of himself—I guess Chine was he/they. That is the moment in Bell Metal where Lyke hits the thing of like 'I know what's happening here, but I can't just—'

JACK: Oh, that was great.

AUSTIN: 'I can't make it happen. I can't just like, make the truth be accepted by these people.' But like, the confrontation at the top of the stairwell is so good. Any time anybody makes—like, Es deciding that—I mean, that's who ended up doing a lot of damage towards the end of the season was Es becoming an unparalleled sniper and stealth, you know, assassin.

[GROUP CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: All of that stuff was really fun all the way through, so I think that those are my faves.

ALI: I have a hard time not just saying everyone's vignettes.

AUSTIN: Yeah, they're really good.

JACK: [OVERLAPPING] They're so good.

ALI: Like, 'cause it's eight episodes of the show, so. [CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: Oh yeah, my actual one is [CHUCKLING] every time we pulled a fucking joker at the end.

[ALI AND DRE LAUGH]

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: No, I was really happy with all of those all the way through, and each had a moment of the season for me in each case, so.

DRE: Oh, I just thought of mine, which was Duvall meeting the Captain on the ship.

JACK: Oh, that was great.

AUSTIN: That conversation's so fun.

JACK: The horrible bug room.

DRE: Uh-huh.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: That some of us were gonna try to go into, and Austin was like 'you probably shouldn't. You really shouldn't.'

AUSTIN: [OVERLAPPING] I was so worried. I was so worried. Yeah.

[ALI AND DRE LAUGH]

JACK: I think Austin explicitly said 'this will kill you if you're not Duvall.'

AUSTIN: Yeah, and I would have—

JACK: 'And it might even kill Duvall.'

AUSTIN: It might even kill Duvall, yeah.

ART: Maybe it did.

AUSTIN: Maybe it did! We don't know! We don't know.

ART: Something to think about for next time.

[ALI AND KEITH LAUGH]

JACK: I thought the Bell Metal crew finally getting turned into the airship was just miserable. That was one of my favorite horror beats of like, 'yep, the plan kept—Calen's plan kept working, and the people said who had said 'no, Calen's our buddy, this is not—you're talking nonsense' just eventually got turned into an airship.'

ALI: Oh, yeah.

JACK: Was very unpleasant and good.

AUSTIN: The little plaque commemorating them. It's so gross.

[ALI GROANS]

JACK: [CHUCKLING] I hate Calen.

AUSTIN: Calen's one of my favorite terrible people to have played.

JACK: Yes. So nasty.

AUSTIN: The point is, I don't have—I get to play him as a little worm, as you would say, Jack, onscreen, but like, I don't—all of the truly terrible stuff is finding evidence of it. You know?

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: It's finding the places and stuff, finding what happened—talking to people who were hurt by Calen. So. I like that quite a bit. Yes, Mitch in the chat says 'Lyke pulling up the ghost water cups that also get filled up.' That's a great—like, the way that the ghost water stuff pays off in Roseroot hall is really fun.

SYLVI: Oh my god, the skeletons. The skeletons with riddles.

AUSTIN: The skeletons were good, the riddle skeletons. And then the return of Fendleton in Lyke's vignette finale.

SYLVI: Yeah.

JACK: Oh, talking to a *Dark Souls* NPC in the basement of the library.

AUSTIN: Appletun, yeah. Appletun, the whatever of whatever, of the cards. I forget what ranking Appletun has, I have a list somewhere where Appletun is in the Wrights of the Seventh Sun deck, but. It's in there somewhere. My god. Some good ones.

ART: Oh, False War and True False War, those were—

[DRE, ALI, AND SYLVI LAUGH]

ART: Those were great.

AUSTIN: This is like, one of the funniest things to me, is that like, so many—we'll get some questions momentarily about like, how so much of this—it seemed like we were gonna be in

Blackwick in a real way this season, and then we just weren't. We were there for like, a little bit, and then some downtimes, and then the end. And then—but so many of my favorite moments are things like being on the river boat. And I don't think we'd get—I don't think we'd get False War and True False War without being on a river boat and me going 'I bet they have some sort of weird fun game I can come up with,' you know?

[DRE, JACK, AND ALI CHUCKLE]

JACK: And then Keith's single-minded spectacular insistence on [CHUCKLING] being involved with the tournament.

AUSTIN: I just love the asterisk on Lyke was poised to win it and didn't get the chance to. This is what I hope—

JACK: Because he misunderstood how the boat worked.

[ALI LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Yeah. Uh-huh. Yes. Yes.

ART: They said 'don't leave the boat.'

AUSTIN: [LAUGHING] They did say not to leave the boat.

JACK: They *did* say 'don't leave the boat!'

KEITH: They didn't say the boat was just gonna keep chugging along!

JACK: That's what boats do!

ART: [OVERLAPPING] That's what boats do!

[GROUP LAUGHTER]

KEITH: I thought it was gonna be a three-day pause.

AUSTIN: Oh, yeah, I didn't say, in the chat someone mentioned "Pickman getting a capitalist unalived." Yeah, no, fuckin' Pickman just getting Dayward YVE killed very simply and easily and walking away from it is so fun.

[ALI LAUGHS]

KEITH: Oh, yeah. That's great.

AUSTIN: That, to me, is the payoff to every book that's ever told me to look at my characters through the crosshairs of a gun and be willing to kill off my own NPCs because it's good. It's so, so good that that just happened that way. You had to make some rolls, you had to like, line it up, you had to know the right person, you asked the right person. It worked, and it was great, so. Yeah.

I—it is—we will talk about the like, difficulties that at least I—and I suspect some others—had with the season, but looking at it, like—zooming back and looking at it from a wide view and thinking about all of these different moments, I’m very happy with a lot of the story beats that we had, so. Should we advance? Should we keep on moving here?

DRE: Sure.

AUSTIN: I’m gonna do it. Dre, do you want to read this one from Dahlia?

DRE: Yeah. Let me get to the right tab.

AUSTIN: Okay.

DRE: “This season was something really special and new that y’all haven’t done before, and I want to thank you for working so hard to create an incredible show.” Thank you, Dahlia.

AUSTIN: Thank you.

DRE: “I want to ask about the production of Sangfielle. As the first season of F@TT created start to finish in the COVID-19 era, and a season in which you tried a system very unlike the games you played previously, I’m sure it came with a lot of difficulties. Y’all made no secret that figuring out the finale was a difficult process, and the start of the season came in hot very shortly after the end of PARTIZAN. Can you talk a little about that and any other challenges of note you faced throughout? All the best, Dahlia.”

AUSTIN: Yeah. It’s a—it was—it is the first—like, PARTIZAN started pre-COVID. And when I say started, I don’t just mean it started coming out, but like, I was hunkered down in cafés writing up the big Drawing Maps descriptions of the various factions, the various big five—the five Stels, I was prepping so much material, I was—in the world—preparing for PARTIZAN. Right? And that’s how I make things. I’m very bad at working at my desk at my house. It is very hard for me to do most types of work, except for live production work like doing a show, or doing a podcast. This is my podcasting space, it is not a writing space. Right? And that is difficult.

And so, even before—even PARTIZAN not just had its run-time being partly pre-COVID, but also its prep-time being pre-COVID, and that was huge. And also, I prepped for PARTIZAN for like, a year. Right? Like, I knew we were building to PARTIZAN before we were done *Twilight Mirage*, and so certain gears were turning that early.

Sangfielle, we’ve talked about this at this point, but like, we had vibes and various broad ideas, but like, we did not have Sangfielle when we finished PARTIZAN. Or maybe very, very—like, maybe by the time the final PARTIZAN episode came out we were there, but we didn’t—we certainly didn’t have a name, we certainly didn’t have more than ‘Gothic horror, weird west, haunted trains, maybe,’ you know, a lot of our early stuff was like—I’ve said this before, but there’s a video of—the first thing that was prepping for Sangfielle was me linking a video of a—not the Blood-starved Beast. One of the—there’s an NPC in *Bloodborne*—

JACK: Oh, yes.

AUSTIN: —who is a creepy guy, and if you talk to him enough times and find him enough times, he turns into a monster, and then, you know, does the thing of saying ‘hunters are the real monsters, how dare you,’ da-da-da-da-da, and I was like, ‘oh yeah, we should do that season. That’s a season we could do.’

[ALI CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: And we had lots of different ideas on it.

JACK: And we did! In the end I think we got to that video.

AUSTIN: [OVERLAPPING] Yeah, we did. In the end—we did get to that video. [CHUCKLES]

[DRE CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: We had versions of this—you know, I say ‘we,’ really it was like—I don’t like to torture everybody at once by dropping tons of, like, inspirational images and stuff into a chat with all 8 of us, because that’s, like—sometimes it seriously is a year out before anyone else needs to start thinking about this stuff, but I do subject Ali as the producer to it and then Jack as the composer shortly after.

And so, Ali, you and I were talking about, like, could we do a season where there’s like, vampires in the center of a continent, or like a big Gothic city in the center of a continent, and the outskirts are kind of like chill, and there’s like haunted forests in between, and traveling is a big deal, and you could be a—we pitched a thing that was like, ‘what if you’re magic students,’ like vampire hunter-y witch students going on like—doing your grad seminar. Doing your final—

JACK: Fieldwork.

AUSTIN: Your dissertation on a research—yeah, your fieldwork, basically. We didn’t do that, we did something else, but.

ALI: Yeah. I think one of the first things I said was like, the... a screencap from *Final Fantasy IX*.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. Sure.

ALI: Of the like, gate city that you go to, and it’s like, what if travel was restricted to the point that like, we had these big roads and big gates that you had to go through, and it was like—yeah, that was fun to think about at the time. [CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: Yeah, we went through a lot of variation. And then, we didn’t know what game to play. And again, I very much—

JACK: Whew.

AUSTIN: I know. Listen, we’ll talk—we have other questions about this coming in. We’ll talk about that process at some point.

[SYLVI LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: But yeah, it was—that was all pre-difficulties. And then COVID happened and we had to make a season.

[JACK SIGHS]

AUSTIN: I'm curious for y'all how that felt in terms of character creation, staying focused, making a season about some heavy stuff and dark—at least, you know. Dark and gruesome stuff, maybe not as heavy as PARTIZAN in some ways.

JACK: I—when the pandemic sort of had started and had been rumbling along for a bit, there was a bit of me that was like, well, I usually sit at home and work by talking into a microphone and playing with my friends, so I'm very lucky that the pandemic [CHUCKLING] isn't going to impact my work.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: And then the longer it happened, the more I was like, 'oh god, it is impacting my work.'

AUSTIN: Yep.

DRE: Mhm.

JACK: In the way that Austin describes about being able to get out of our houses and sit and think. In the way that like, you know—because of my visa problems, I wasn't able to do it with PARTIZAN, but a lot of the early seasons, Austin and Ali and I would sit in a cafe or in a restaurant in the early days of a season and just be like 'okay, what the hell are we interested in making?'

AUSTIN: Yep.

JACK: And that was just gone. And all the sort of bits of the practice that I had grown comfortable with over the years of doing this before the pandemic had just sort of fallen away. And all—the only bit that was left was 'you sit down at your desk, or in front of your instruments, and you try and make Friends at the Table.' And that was exhausting. And then the exhaustion of watching everybody get sick, and get ill, and die.

AUSTIN: I was just gonna say, yes.

DRE: Yeah.

[AUSTIN SIGHS]

JACK: And, you know, the thing of being like—even outside of work, going 'oh, the world is sick, and people aren't doing what they need to do.' Or like, 'the people who could change things aren't changing anything.'

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: And that just—as it has for everybody in every level, and for some more than others, just ground me down over the course of the season. And I can only speak for myself, but I am still reckoning with that.

AUSTIN: Oh yeah.

JACK: And still—I am still in the hole, as it were.

DRE: Mhm.

JACK: And trying to figure out what that means.

AUSTIN: Mhm. Anyone else have strong COVID production feelings?

ART: [SARCASTIC] Yeah, I think that COVID affected me not at all.

AUSTIN: Oh, okay.

[JACK LAUGHS]

ART: And that's why I made—

DRE: The best character?

ART: —a character that is a community all into himself.

AUSTIN: Mhm. Yeah. Interesting.

ART: Yeah, I didn't really think about it until this question came to me, but like, of course it is. Right? And it's all of the ways, and it's all of—you know, it's seeing the horror in the real world that makes you create fantastic horror to reckon with it, right? It's all of these things.

AUSTIN: Yeah, for sure. Also interesting, I think—I wondered, to some degree, if when I was so insistent on this being an episodic season, if it came for me from knowing I wouldn't have that time. I mean, I'd wanted to try an episodic season for a minute anyway, on and off, we had some false starts with Quest, which I still want to get back to at some point—which, I've seen some people ask why we haven't ever gone back to Quest like on the Patreon, and the answer truly is because of scheduling concerns, and not having—it turns out needing X group of people for a Live at the Table is way harder than just grabbing whoever's around to do a thing, which got in the way of expanding on Quest, which I really want to get back to at some point.

But, I've wanted to do this episodic-style thing for a long time, but I really think knowing that I wouldn't be able to go ruminate somewhere about big faction maneuvers, and feeling like I wanted a show that was a little easier to make from everybody's perspective. Now, we'll talk about whether that was true or not later. But the idea being 'players don't have to worry as much about what's going on in that kind of faction-tier view or politically.' Right? Politically in the world, not politically in meaning-making. I don't have to worry as much about setting up long-term conflicts, et cetera. I can just—we can just focus on kind of 'monster of the week'-style hauntings and misadventures.

And I think it was almost a decision made at least partially because I knew COVID wasn't going to allow for me to be as into that other production process as it was. And again, we'll talk about how we stuck with that or didn't stick with that, and why that changed, and how it went in general, I think, with some other questions, but. Anybody else feel like Art did, that the COVID stuff shifted how they thought about their characters? Ali, you know, you played a doctor, and a caregiver. I'm curious if you thought about that at all.

ALI: [LAUGHS] Yeah. I mean, Marn was such a response to what I had seen and learned through community efforts, through just like looking at what was happening through the COVID era, and the like—the thing of like, if you're gonna give 20 dollars to someone, it should not be to like this big organized fundraising, it should be to somebody who's gonna buy 15 sandwiches and give them to people, right? And like, that was sort of my thesis for Marn.

AUSTIN: Right, this was not just the COVID era. It was also, you know, we were prepping for this after the George Floyd stuff. Right? After the killing of George Floyd, the various Black Lives Matter uprisings across the country, the season itself post-dates those. In fact, I would say that the season itself exists in a period of reactionary vibe-shift, let's say, that has been frustrating. But I do think that—yeah, like, I think mutual aid was definitely top of mind when we were talking about Marn in the pre-season. In the pre-season, you know, like a football pre-season, but uh...

ALI: [LAUGHS] Yeah, one hundred percent.

SYLVI: Yeah, training camp.

ART: We're doing two days, and—

AUSTIN: Yes, exactly. Sylvi, you were going to say something also, here.

SYLVI: Just—not to be like, the most cynical, but it really did make it easy to be a total piece of shit seeing how people were acting during all this, like with Virtue.

AUSTIN: Deeply selfish, yeah.

SYLVI: Oh, yeah. Tons of role models to be for someone who doesn't have any regard for human life. And also people who are just like, really power-greedy and shit.

AUSTIN: Yeah. For sure.

SYLVI: You know, it just made it like—I think that's kind of it, is just like, it made me a bit more cynical about people as a whole, and that came out in this season a lot.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I think that that's fair. Any other—do we want to talk about finale now, or do we want to save that, because someone else does ask this, so let's just wait.

JACK: We can save it for finale questions. And then enter hell.

[ALI LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Yeah, I really wanted this to be our COVID question. Yeah, exactly.

Jack, presumably a different Jack, writes in and says: “This is the first season that you’ve explored horror elements. Did it go how you expected? What was the tone you expected it to be, or did you expect it to be lighter, darker, weirder, less weird, et cetera?”

Keith, you had mentioned in a comment on our big kind of question page that you’re not a horror person.

KEITH: No.

AUSTIN: Outside of, I guess, the *Silent Hill* streams that you’ve done.

KEITH: Right, yeah. And I—it doesn’t feel—horror stuff scares me, so I don’t watch it or read—well, I guess I also grew up reading Stephen King.

AUSTIN: You’re a Stephen King person, yeah.

KEITH: But it’s visual—it’s horror as like a visual medium that I don’t know almost anything about. The *Silent Hill* games that we’ve Let’s Played are pretty much the only horror games I’ve ever played, and they’re so old that it doesn’t feel like it counts. We’re very rarely scared by anything that happens in those games. And, yeah, so I just felt on the back foot kind of thematically, and like—in terms of like, you know, we’ve all got a pile of ideas that we can pull from, and it just felt like this was my smallest pile yet, of like—

AUSTIN: Well, Lyke ends up really becoming the like, cosmic horror academic who becomes caught in a cult—or a god beyond his means—to control, though, right? I feel like actually, Lyke is like the quintessential Miskatonic University professor in some ways. Which is a horror-adjacent thing, I guess. I know you’ve read some of those stories, so.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I’m curious if you were drawing on those, or if that’s just something you kind of stumbled into.

KEITH: Yeah, it just sort of came out of it. I weirdly, like—I had so many characters in a row that—maybe Gig is like the big exception—where it was like, it just felt like my characters were always the, like... like the thorn of the group that everyone was getting mad at, or that was getting mad at everyone, and I was like, ‘I just don’t want to do that this season.’ And that was really the only thing that I had going into the season besides being like, a little—

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: And that ended up absolutely not happening. I tried to make it happen, like I genuinely was like—

JACK: Lyke became the literal thorn.

KEITH: The character’s name is Lyke. Is the—

[ALI AND JACK CHUCKLE]

AUSTIN: Yeah. Uh-huh. True.

KEITH: So, the only thing that I went into this season was ‘I just want to have a season where my character doesn’t want to leave the group, and gets along with everybody.’

[SYLVI LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: How’d that, uh... how’d that turn out?

KEITH: It didn’t.

AUSTIN: Oh.

KEITH: It didn’t turn out.

[ALI LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: We’ll get to that later, also.

DRE: Chill vibes only?

AUSTIN: Chill vibes only.

SYLVI: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely.

AUSTIN: A lot of people in the chat pointing out various moments in previous seasons that we’ve had horror stuff, the Iconoclasts in *Twilight Mirage*, Motion in *PARTIZAN*—I also think the beginning of the Auspice mission in *PARTIZAN* where nothing is happening yet and everyone is investigating stuff—

JACK: Oh, that was so fun.

AUSTIN: —and Sylvi makes some decisions that are really great, are—is just really good.

SYLVI: Like usual.

AUSTIN: Like usual. And I think even Hieron has had dark and horror-tinged moments, but I think there’s something different between that and—this isn’t how Jack, the emailer, phrased it, but between sitting down and saying ‘we’re going to make a season that is like a horror season.’ And obviously, again, Bluff City, Blough City stuff has it, there’s lots of elements of horror in our *Lacuna* game, in *Catch the Devil*, like, we play in horror spaces sometimes. But I think that there is something different, and I’m curious if other people—maybe people who, unlike Keith, do have horror background—felt like we got there and if so, how, and if not, why, et cetera.

JANINE: I can—I’ll be honest here and say that, like—so, you know, I think historically I’ve gotten maybe too much credit for introducing horror elements into the show, but at the same time as I’m gonna say that, I’m also gonna say, like—to me, Sangfielle didn’t feel like—the thing that felt different about Sangfielle was more that I felt like I didn’t need to be apologetic, and that also you, when you were introducing those things, didn’t have to be apol—like, you could kind of

just do the thing, you know? And we could be like, 'you know what, we're gonna list—there's gonna be, like, two dozen content warnings on the front of this episode, and you know, it is what it is.'

Because like, *Twilight Mirage* is a good example. Like, when I compare the kind of horror I've been engaging in in *Sangfielle* with the kind of horror I was engaging in with *Twilight Mirage*, the way that like—from character creation on, kind of like defining a bunch of stuff and all of that, like, it's a lot of similar stuff, and, you know, things that were used in similar ways, and like, I would absolutely not shy away from saying that *Twilight Mirage* had horror, and a lot of that horror was centered around Signet.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JANINE: Like, you know, the—one of Signet's most elegant things was a living bug jewel computer thing, like, there's always some sort of—I don't know. So there's a lot of that of just like, I think the big difference was just that I didn't have to—you know, in those previous things, I felt like I was kind of always saying, like, 'I know everyone's gonna hate this, but here's this thing.' You know, a good example would be Teasel Moad doing the blood stuff.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: I was like, extremely apologetic going into that, but I wanted to do it very badly. And I guess the—you know. So the thing for me with *Sangfielle* was just that I didn't have to feel as bad about doing it.

AUSTIN: It's funny you say that, because I felt extremely, um... I—it took me half a season before I was willing to say the word "blood" this season, probably. Right?

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Or to describe it, especially. I mentioned—I have not—I don't know that I've mentioned this publicly, maybe in a *Drawing Maps*, but early on in the season, I messaged Jack while we were—before I was going to do the *Yellowfield* arc, the—what is the actual name of that arc?

JACK: The Candle Factory.

AUSTIN: Yeah, but what's it actually called?

JACK: Is it called the Candle Factory? No.

AUSTIN: No.

ALI: Yeah it is.

AUSTIN: Is it just called the Candle Factory? It is. Okay, yes. And being like, 'ugh, I'm struggling to come up with what this next set of monsters is,' and I think specifically asked if it was too soon to do flower-based monsters—

JACK: I remember this.

AUSTIN: —after doing the—the ‘what do you call it’ beast? The white-flower beast?

JACK: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Is that what—what’s the name of the—is that in the first episode basically?

SYLVI: Yeah, I think that’s what it was.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And then like, thinking through that conversation, I don’t even know that we actually talked for a long time, but it just struck me that like—I ended up going to wax, right? And was like, ‘oh, wax is interesting as like a material to do horror stuff from.’ [CHUCKLING] Obviously that’s not a novel thought, wax is a classic thing between the relationship to candles and the ways in which it’s skin-like, but off, right, the way it’s like corpse-y, when you think about stuff like wax figures, all that. Like, this is old shit. For us, obviously, also the way it subverts Slumbous, who is a fan fave, and so like, that was like, ‘okay, that’s a good choice,’ but I realized very quickly, like, ‘oh, I’m doing lots of things that let me stay away from saying the word “blood”’.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: That let me stay away from saying the word “skin”. That let me stay away from talking about people’s bodies, or bodies that are made of the stuff our bodies are. And I was constantly making choices like this in the early days. And I still think you can do a horror story that way. In fact, I think the most horrific thing in the season, the thing that actually scares me the way, you know, home invasion horror films still like, really fuck me up, is the Gates of Sapodilla. Right? Is like, the incredible unilateral power that someone else has over you and your future. That stuff is scarier to me than anything else we did this season.

I think partly it’s because we weren’t playing *HEART*, which is fundamentally an adventure game, you know? So I think that that was—that is where it ends up—and it’s also where I ended up taking the gloves off a little bit, right? If you go in and look at the stuff that happens with Chine in Hark! The Citadel Beneath, and even during the downtime in—

DRE: Whew!

AUSTIN: Like, the torture that Chine goes through, the stuff that—the way I ended up describing Katonya’s transformation, the way I ended up—like, all that stuff after that, it’s like, that was when my gloves came off in terms of being willing to describe fucked-up shit, so. That was a big part for me. Any other big horror tone differences?

SYLVI: Yeah, I feel like I kind of had some trouble kind of finding my footing for the first little while, in a similar way to you did. The stuff I like from horror tends to be very gross, and I don’t know, like, how much of it is going to play with our audience or on a podcast. So like, there’s a—

AUSTIN: Right. And I mean, I will say, like, right away, we saw a handful of people drop the Patreon because of—not a ton of people, not enough to make us go, like, ‘oh shit, I can’t make

rent this month,' but we saw that. And it was one of those things where like, that fully—I don't know that I reported that to the rest of the crew at that point, I think maybe Ali and I are the only people who really saw it, but like...

ART: I—

AUSTIN: It was one of those moments that was like, are we scaring people away with—right, Art, you saw it too. Are we scaring people away with content warnings? Are content warnings misrepresenting how severe some of this stuff is, that like, mostly we're all laughing on a microphone still?

SYLVI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: It was front of mind for me, and it did make me not get as gross the way that you're talking about, Sylvi.

SYLVI: Yeah, like, it just got in my head, so I feel like there's a lot of shit that I left on the table with Virture, and eventually I got to mention some of the stuff, like, I think like right before I'm done playing her for the season, I mention that she is partially decomposing and stuff, but there's so much more I could have done with that.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally. Yeah.

SYLVI: And I think I got some of it with like, the stuff with Hazard's head in there. I thought that that was like, some of the more body horror stuff that I'm happy with, but I think if we come back to this setting I've got to take bigger swings at it.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I think that that's fair. I think that that's—and who knows how we come back to the setting? We might come back to the setting and it not be as horror-themed, or have horror be one thing that we touch on, like, we don't know yet in that way.

SYLVI: We'll play, like, a really soft and sweet game and I will make the grossest character possible.

[ALI, JACK, AND JANINE CHUCKLE]

AUSTIN: That's the play, that's the play. Any other big horror thoughts?

[ALI INHALES]

JACK: Yeah—oh, sorry, go ahead.

ALI: Oh, um, well, I was just gonna say, content warnings is an interesting thing because it's something that I really tried to think about in terms of like—I mean, a lot of times I would give Austin just like, notes from the episode and be like, 'should we tag this?' A lot of question marks in our—

AUSTIN: Or 'how do we tag this,' a lot.

ALI: Right, yeah. Well, because it was just being like, where is the danger coming from, really? On my—my level of horror experience is like, I enjoy horror but I'm kind of a scaredy cat, and I—[LAUGHS] the more visceral a thing is, the less I'll probably like it. So, just the... the ground in terms of like, 'here's what sort of wounds are in this episode so you can avoid it,' or like, the bugs thing, obviously, but it—especially going with the last question, it was something that I took a lot of time on in the production side, just in terms of like, needing to be like—okay, the only thing that I can think about today is like, 'is this a murder or not?' [LAUGHS]

[DRE LAUGHS]

ALI: So we can decide this later.

JACK: Oh, god.

ALI: And then I should think about what I'm gonna do after this, instead of trying to do three different work things at once. And like, I mean, it's up to the audience how some of that stuff came across, but like, I did want to be careful about it just in terms of like, 'oh, what about listening to this is making me go sort of like 'ehh, I wish you hadn't said it like that.'"
[CHUCKLES] Versus like, where in a game where characters are getting hurt and the situation is changing because this thing is happening, like, what would actually disturb someone, versus it being like 'well, Es transformed into a funny monster and is dancing around now' which is like, body transformation is a thing we should still tag, but like, it's a triumphant moment for Es, and not like, you know, a time where she's vulnerable.

AUSTIN: Right. Totally. Totally. And there's stuff that's like, are we—I think we try to be judicious about the difference between something being mentioned and something being described, or something being heavily described, you know. We are not a visual-based medium, as you may know, but we do still have that ability to zoom in and to increase the kind of fidelity of description with words. And sometimes I want to do that, right? And I think by the end it was still the case that I was doing it more with wax monsters than bodies, than human bodies.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Because also I think the wax ended up taking on a really good—I think I found the right groove for that to be creepy in other ways, you know. So. Jack, it sounded like you had something else.

JACK: I was gonna say, especially with the wax, I think it was a—it was like you said, Austin, it was a sign of us feeling out the horror aesthetic, and the way of making a thing scary that we were happy with. The wax is such a good example of that, because, you know, Yellowfield scared me when I listened to it the first time, and I thought it was really fun, but the thing that scared me in Yellowfield was sort of the pervading weird dread, and Eyes, Ears, and Mouth walking past the window, and Bucho as this waxy sort of scarecrow figure, and then by the time we brought the wax back for the Blackwick sort of finale, pre-finale, I feel like we were all much more confident about how to describe wax, how to make wax, like—

AUSTIN: Yes, yes.

JACK: I think about—we basically drench Blackwick in wax in that arc in a way that—I don't know if you could also speak to this, Sylvi, in liking horror when it's gross, but sometimes—I'm also like, I really like horror, and some of my favorite stuff is when a production team just absolutely goes for it—

SYLVI: Yeah.

JACK: —in terms of the scale and less detail and more quantity of whatever they're employing—

[ALI LAUGHS]

JACK: —and, you know, I think by the time we got to Blackwick and Pickman was just covered in drying wax, and the buildings were dripping wax, we blew up the station and wax went everywhere, there were people covered in wax shambling all around the town—it felt like this great sort of visceral explosion of what we had been sort of demo-ing earlier in Yellowfield, which was a much quieter arc.

But more broadly, I do definitely feel closer to what you were describing, Austin, in terms of like, in explicitly setting out to make a horror season, I was constantly second-guessing myself about whether we could get away with describing this stuff, or whether we were going too far—and especially because there's—there are a lot of making this podcast, and all of us have different tolerances and different feelings about horror, and all of us are scared by different things, so it's very hard to have that kind of like clarity of viewpoint that sometimes makes horror work really well.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: But it was a lot of fun to—I know you and I had conversations pre-Gates of Sapodilla, pre-Pickman's interview, where, you know, I have had a lot of recent real-world traumatic contact with borders, and I think that through that conversation, the point I came to was basically, 'alright, give me both barrels, Austin, let's make this really scary.'

AUSTIN: Mhm. 'Let's just do it,' yeah.

JACK: Which, you know, I wouldn't want to take—I wouldn't want to make that choice for any other cast member, but I did like being in those moments in the season where, in moments relating to me, I felt able to just be like 'alright, okay, what's the worst you can do, let's do it.'

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. I will say, also, and this is a bigger mechanics thing that I think we'll get to throughout, but it was hard to make a horror season in a game where, despite the way it's written, players are extremely—characters are extremely effective, especially when they work together at solving things, and also players want to play super agentically and aggressively. I think a lot about the beginning of Roseroot Hall, which in my mind was going to be a slow-burn horror house, or haunted house story—

JACK: Oh, that's so funny.

AUSTIN: And then like—but there wasn't even a single night spent there, right, like? I think there was one night, all said, right? The next morning you were giving Dyre Ode his head back. Like, that was—

KEITH: The events happened on the first night.

AUSTIN: The events happened that night, on the first night, and it was one of those things where you can see—there's a particular moment where you can hear me letting go of the leash, and being like, 'yeah, just—I guess just roll again.' There is—the stuff that is true about this place is true about this place, or more importantly, if you're rolling to find stuff, I'm gonna let you roll to find stuff. I'm not gonna lie, you know, especially if you've done preliminary work investigating stuff and just jumping into it, and it's just like—this is also hours after Art obliterated three, you know, those monster goat creatures, and it's like, 'yeah, okay.'

They're just gonna be—this is not—the system loans itself to resource scarcity, and to it costing a lot to heal up, but I really had a hard time making it feel scary for you as players, and part of that is we were not playing that game to die. Like, I think if players—if both y'all and I were going into it with like, 'we should probably kill some player characters throughout this season,' and people were getting excited about triggering Zenith moves early, or about just dying in gruesome ways early, we'd maybe end up creating something that feels more like a traditional horror story, but we didn't. That's not how it felt, you know.

KEITH: Yeah. Well, there was a—

AUSTIN: We didn't have a PC death until the very end, and it was not from *HEART* basically at all.

KEITH: There was a—I don't remember how long it lasted, but there was a period at the beginning of playing the game where it felt like—to me it felt like, you know, people could die and we were going to play this—you know, this was going to be like, a different kind of season where player death was on the table because of the game that we were playing, and just the longer we did it, and pretty quickly it started to feel like—it just felt like another season of *Friends at the Table*, which meant that people were playing their characters in a world where they were not, like—

AUSTIN: [OVERLAPPING] People like their characters, yeah.

KEITH: —looking for—like, I'm no longer looking for Lyke to die in a fun and interesting way. I don't know. Maybe if by chance we didn't make it out of that early period with zero deaths, it would have felt different for the rest of the season, but—and I have no regrets about that, I don't feel like this season would have been better if, like, instead of having 9 PCs we had 14.

AUSTIN: Right. I think it would be an interesting thing. We've never done that, right? And so, I think that there would be—I'm curious how that would have gone. You know?

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: But I think that the thing is, the way death works in *HEART* is you get a Critical Fallout, and you tend to get a Critical Fallout when you already have multiple Major Fallouts, and they combine into a Critical Fallout, and that moment is always a moment of negotiation, and often—the book gives a bunch of different answers to how it gets triggered, but a player can always suggest it or say it happens. A player can always say ‘my two Major Fallouts combine and I get this sick Critical Fallout.’ And I say sick because the Fallouts that we’ve never—there’s an entire type of Fallout we never saw in this game that have a bunch—besides even just the Zenith moves that are about death, but things like—what’s the one I always—here, here’s one. An Echo Critical Fallout, Descent:

“The next time you’re in a landmark, the ground shakes as the Heart draws you and the place further down. Move the landmark and anyone in it to the next available space in the tier below. This is catastrophic. Most people will not survive. You are swallowed up by the Heart and retire as a player character. Immediate.” And it’s like, that’s sick. That never happened for us, because we just don’t play that way. And I think that was an important mismatch when it came to embodying horror in this way, because consequences were limited. We weren’t burning through characters in the way that a lot of horror stories would have done with a cast this big, you know?

But it’s why I end up thinking that things like the stuff that’s strong is stuff like the stuff that happens to Chine underneath Sapodilla, the Sapodilla entrance, Marrowcreek, where it’s playing in this surreal and confusing space, that’s everything’s kind of—there’s an air of threat in the air, because it feels like the ground is suddenly shaky, you know? But yeah. Alright, I’m gonna keep moving. Janine, can you read this one from anonymous?

JANINE: Yeah. “It’s pretty clear how driven the characters are mechanically by beats, and how that helps to drive the narrative in wonderful and unexpected ways, and there are few times players take beats without a clear intention of what path they want to take to get there. Duvall’s chase for the painting springs to mind here, originating from the beat ‘acquire a renowned piece of equipment.’ So the question I have is: how did the players go about picking beats both early in the season and later into it, and how often were you picking beats that had no immediate clear path in the fiction as it stood at that moment of being accomplished?”

AUSTIN: Good question. I don’t pick beats, so I can’t answer this one.

SYLVI: I have a very easy methodology here, it’s how I live most of my life, it’s ‘what will get me into the most trouble in the most fun way?’

[JANINE LAUGHS]

SYLVI: It was just like, what seems like it would cause some shit? Occasionally it was like, I need to do a thing mechanically, or I need to just like, get this thing on my character sheet so I can do more fun stuff with my character, and that would just be some of the ones where it’s like ‘suffer this type of Fallout’ or whatever. But like, I think the one with Virtue where it was like ‘steal a piece of knowledge’ or something like that, that led to her taking the Mother-beast tome, that was like specifically chosen because I was like, ‘I want to have her causing trouble for people immediately.’

AUSTIN: Yes.

[ALI AND DRE LAUGH]

SYLVI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: That ended up being a really good resource, and interesting resource, the way it got moved around over the course of that early season. [PAUSE] Other beats? Other strategies for picking beats?

ART: Just pick the coolest beat.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Just pick the coolest beat.

DRE: Yeah.

ART: I mean, there's a little bit of like, targeting Major or Minor based on the next advancement you want, but once you've picked a category, just pick the coolest beat.

KEITH: Yeah, there's also a little bit of consideration of like, where are we going to? Are we going to a place where it feels like I can do this? Does it feel like there's gonna be a cliff that I can kick someone off?

[DRE AND JACK LAUGH]

JACK: Oh, that was very funny.

AUSTIN: And normally, the thing that ended up happening was, I'd be like, 'ooh, I don't know if there's gonna be cliffs there.' And then I'd go, 'well, wait, I bet I could—'

KEITH: Yeah, and then I'd still miss it.

AUSTIN: And Ali, you and I would be like—Ali, you'd pitch me a thing a few times, and I'd be like, 'you know what, I'll figure it out. Take the one you want, I'll try to fit it in there somewhere.' And then, yeah, Keith, that's the thing, right? Is like, that Calen story—

KEITH: I'm still kicking myself.

AUSTIN: Almost all of Bell Metal Station, like—Bell Metal Station exists because you have a beat that is 'I need to kick someone off of a high thing, and they really deserve it.'

[SYLVI AND ALI LAUGH]

AUSTIN: I'm like, who the fuck—okay, what does there need to be—

KEITH: And he *really* deserved it!

AUSTIN: Yeah. A hundred percent.

JACK: He *really* deserved it. And he still does.

AUSTIN: I thought it would happen. Yeah, someone should go find him and kick him off a high thing.

SYLVI: Between this and—oh my god, what's the name of the city in Hieron? The ghost city?

AUSTIN: Nacre.

SYLVI: Between this and Nacre, Keith has really willed some weird shit into existence.

[KEITH AND ALI LAUGH]

AUSTIN: Yes. Totally. That's how it works, I mean, that's the joy for me of the beat system is—

DRE: God, yeah.

AUSTIN: There's lots of stuff that is like, you're giving me prep prompts, right?

JACK: Oh, yeah.

AUSTIN: Like, Sangfielle does not exist in that way where it's like 'here's a complete map.' Which is part of the struggle with me and *HEART* honestly, is during the evaluation of 'what game should we play' one of my big notes was, 'ooh, *HEART* really reads like it works best if you have a bunch of places that you can just pull from a list that seem like a cool place to go to next. And I don't think I'm gonna have the time to prep in that way, to make a hundred cool places, or 80 cool places or something. This could bite me in the ass, because I'll have to make stuff every time.'

It mostly didn't, in the sense that the beats let me figure out what I should build next. But it did—I did always feel pretty bad about not having stuff prepped, or having a good idea of what Sangfielle was in my mind in that big-picture way, because it is a game about moving from place-to-place, and not having that in my back-pocket always made me feel un-prepped in terms of—that's kind of an answer on how this connects to my stuff in terms of beats. Anyway, other beat stuff?

JANINE: Um...

JACK: It was interest—oh, go on.

JANINE: No, go ahead.

JACK: It was interesting picking a Calling so early in development—

DRE: Yeah.

JACK: And this is deliberate, this isn't me being like 'oh, I wish that we'd picked the Calling after spending a little more time with the characters,' I liked that feeling, but it was really interesting making a Shape Knight, and looking at how a Shape Knight works, and then sort of being like

the Calling that I pick is going to define the kind of character I am, and I don't know how that's going to play out yet—

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: In the same way that when I pick Shape Knight, I know roughly how the character's going to behave, I know roughly what tools are available to me. I'd had this idea of a very blunt character from the start, so I was like, great, that's fine, but then picking the—I think it's the Heartsong Calling, is that the name of it? Heartsong?

AUSTIN: Yep.

JACK: Heart—yeah. Was like, 'oh, so this person's going to be a weirdo, and this person's going to be unorthodox, and this person is going to try and come into contact with bits of the Heart in a way that might not otherwise.' And it was really interesting having to make that call from the jump.

AUSTIN: Right. And in such a big—I mean, lots of people, I felt like, were struggling with 'which of these things fits my character concept,' you know?

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Which, again, I think, is part of the way we often do things versus maybe the way *HEART* intends, which is, this is a very—I think we maybe—do we play more fast and loose with these characters if no one has a concept, and instead comes to the table and goes, 'uh, I guess I'll be an Enlightenment Hound, and that's the thing I want,' and then like, you're just a hound, you don't have to—you don't have that ownership, because it's not yours, right? You didn't help invent it.

But that's just not how we tend to do things, and instead everybody kind of invented their own part of this setting during character creation, and I wonder how much that ends up adding to that sense of 'well, I'm not gonna fuckin' die over nothing.' Like, 'this isn't the right moment to die. If there's a moment to die, I'll happily die in a big dramatic way, but it's not this.' Whereas *HEART* wants any moment to be a moment to die. You know? Sorry, who else—someone else did have a beats thing. Was it Janine, was it...

JANINE: Yeah. I was gonna say that like, early on for me it was all about—or, it was mostly about picking beats that I thought were fun. Like, I thought it'd be fun for Es to write sort of her experiences out and like publish them or whatever. That would be enjoyable. As the season progressed, especially because we weren't sure if we were gonna be ending—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

[JACK CHUCKLES]

JANINE: We hit a point where it was like, every session was like 'is this the end? I don't know.' And at that point—

AUSTIN: Yep. Totally. And way earlier than people might think.

JANINE: Yes. Yeah. And at that point, it became more of a thing of like, 'well, what do I think I can get done?' Because I don't want to have a thing left over where I've like, banked half the progress I need in it—

JACK: Right.

JANINE: And then we switch systems and it doesn't fuckin' matter. So, I hit this point where I was just—I was mostly picking the things that felt like they could get done, and that was—I was, you know, I had built a—I had very much built a character where I was prepared for Syntyche to die and Es to persist in some way. Like I had—that was how I had reconciled, like, 'this is a game about character death, this is fine, this is how I'll do it.' Like, I had that plan. And it just—by the time that I was ready to consider Zenith moves, none of them felt like I could get them before we were in finale territory, and at that point it was like 'well, I'm not gonna die if I don't have a Zenith move, that's a waste.'

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JANINE: So then I just didn't bother pursuing those, right? Which I think is a problem that's fairly unique to making a show out of a game.

AUSTIN: Probably, yeah. That's a huge part of it.

JANINE: Which is kind of relevant to the issue.

KEITH: Yep.

AUSTIN: For sure, for sure. The—multiple people wrote in about basically why we didn't use any Zenith moves, or I saw it pop up on a number of questions, and the answer is no one had any Zenith beats completed. Right? Like, you can't—somebody asked about particularly why Chine didn't use Wield and Woe, which is a Cleaver Zenith move, and the answer is Chine had never completed a Zenith—Chine had a Zenith beat, but never completed that Zenith beat. And so you don't get to just do that thing without having that beat complete, and having chosen the move, too, so.

DRE: Yeah.

JANINE: I kind of feel like a thing—

SYLVI: Yeah, we like to play with the rules, but not that much.

AUSTIN: Right, right.

JANINE: I kind of feel like a thing that would have helped—I don't know if this would help a normal game of *HEART*, but I think a thing that would have helped our game of *HEART* is if there were three beat slots, two of them that function the way that they currently do, and one that was reserved just for a Zenith beat.

AUSTIN: Right. You just have it in there. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JANINE: And like, maybe you don't have to put a Zenith beat in there, but you can have it in there, and there's nothing else that can go in that slot. So it just feels—so you could pick that at the very start and just have that going if you want to.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's fun.

JANINE: I think that would have—you know, it kind of tampers with the idea. But you know.

KEITH: Yeah. We had a—I don't know, Austin, if you remember, but we did have a Zenith beat fakeout right at the very end where we were still not sure how anything was gonna end, and we thought that there was a way to get me a Zenith ability without having done a Zenith beat by doing like a move-swap, but it ended up—that was not how it was—

AUSTIN: Yeah, that was not how it was written, actually, yes. Unfortunately.

KEITH: Yeah. During the very long period of being like 'what happens?'

AUSTIN: Great question. Yeah, which we might be about to get to that question.

KEITH: One of those versions was that, I don't know, maybe I use a Zenith beat and solve everything. Or, a Zenith move and solve everything.

AUSTIN: And solve everything. Yeah. A hundred percent.

ART: I was like upset at my own set of Zenith beats, in that the Zenith beat wanted me to pick the answer to the question that I was asking before doing the legwork to get there? And I mean, we could have house-ruled it of course, but like, I don't know. It made me resentful and wary of the Zenith beat system. [CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: [CHUCKLES] You're Enlightenment, right? And so your two choices were "find the final secret you have so desperately sought for and use it to solve your impossible task" or "find the final secret you have so desperately sought and destroy it so no one else can know of it."

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Which I think is a very fascinating thing for Duvall to have done, if that had happened, like finding an answer and then—solving an impossible task, what's the impossible task, that's fascinating, or destroying it especially seemed really neat. But I do understand, in your mind it's like—the Zenith—using the Zenith is how you get the answer in a weird way in your head versus—

ART: Or tell me what it is and then I can decide if I'm gonna—

AUSTIN: Destroy or—right.

ART: —destroy it or not, but that's not how it—and again, we could have figured it out, but like—

AUSTIN: Right. Yeah, yeah, yeah, we could have.

ART: I didn't like the way they were making me deal with the question, you know?

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally.

KEITH: Mine were weird. Mine were "lead a Haven to prosperity," and we had done some negative work on that—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

[ALI SCOFFS]

KEITH: [CHUCKLES] And "reach Tier 4 of the heart," which honestly seems easy and we might have done, I don't know.

AUSTIN: You did it. You just didn't have the beat at the time.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Like, when you were in Marrowcreek and everything went bad, you were in Tier 4 very briefly. That would have hit that beat, but you didn't have that, right? So that's the other half of that beat system, right? Also, it's worth saying, everybody levelled up way more than the average *HEART* character does. I have no idea where even this information is, where it is in the book, but somewhere in the book they say straight-up like—yeah, eight. They suggest—the book suggests that the game should be run for eight sessions. [CHUCKLES] Which we just—even on one side, *blew* past. And became, by the end, very very powerful characters for having so many tools available, you know?

SYLVI: I think I played my characters for eight sessions.

AUSTIN: I think that that's right. I think that's probably about right, yeah. Absolutely. So.

SYLVI: I win.

[ALI CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: There you go. I'm gonna keep moving unless someone has a final beat thought. We still have a bunch of questions. I'll read this one, this is from Rozecrest and also LP, this is another one that we had a bunch of people write in about from various perspectives. I'm gonna read these two because I think it hits it from slightly two different directions.

Rozecrest says: “It was really fascinating to me how emotionally distanced the PCs were to each other this season. There were, of course, some moments of connection that really stood out, such as Pickman saving Marn with the tree’s fruit, and moments of heartbreak like Duvall and Chine in his epilogue. But largely, the relationships in the Blackwick Group felt like those of coworkers—those that spent months relying on each other in a strange beautiful land like Sangfielle, but coworkers nonetheless. How did it feel to go through a season like this and was it intentional? What was the thought process? And as a follow-up, what was it like having relationships with NPCs that are arguably warmer: Es with Dyre, Marn with Bucho, Duvall with Jolyon, Virtue with Darling, Pickman with Alekest, Chine with It?”

And then LP adds: “What do you think contributed to less inner-party interaction this season as compared to previous seasons? I might be wrong, but despite the chemistry being as rich as ever, I remember several opportunities for the party to communicate amongst themselves where folks seemed to let the moment pass. To what extent was that an intentional characterization of the group?”

[PAUSE]

JANINE: We—

ALI: I just want to call out this first question for not mentioning Lyke’s little fish.

AUSTIN: Oh, Tombo.

SYLVI: Oh, wow.

[KEITH LAUGHS]

ALI: [LAUGHS] Tombo should be on the board.

KEITH: Underused.

AUSTIN: That’s because that was not a warm relationship, that was a riotous—

[ALI LAUGHS]

KEITH: Right, yeah.

JACK: Tombo was a little shit, yeah.

AUSTIN: Lyke was a little shit. Tombo is a hero. Tombo said that.

ALI: [LAUGHING] Sorry Janine, go on.

JANINE: I was just gonna say, this came up—Austin, we were talking the other night, and you pointed out that the structure of downtime was very very different this season because it was in big groups and, you know, as a player it just often felt like because we were all together, we were all trying to get our shit done, and sometimes it would roll immediately into some kind of

story thing. It just kind of felt—I know for me, whenever I had the impulse to be like, ‘oh, I want to have a little moment with this character,’ it felt more selfish than it usually does.

Like, it felt more like a—you know, I think—I remember like early on, I did some throwaway line about Es accidentally taking Virtue’s umbrella instead of her parasol and having to swap them out and like, apologize, and it was like—I think back on that now, and it was like, I really wanted more of those interactions, but it felt like there just wasn’t enough room for them, because our schedules are so weird, and we only have a certain amount of time, and we all have to get together and get this thing done, and then we can move on with the quote unquote ‘real’ part of the season, like, so it kind of just felt like—compared to when you have a group of four players and you’re doing that downtime, when you can be like, ‘well, I want to get this and this done, but also, why don’t we go shopping? Why don’t we do this? Why don’t we—’ you know.

ART: Well, we also needed those downtimes to keep ourselves from, you know, dying.

AUSTIN: Yes.

JANINE: Yes, from falling apart? Sometimes literally? Yeah. Exactly.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. Also, those weren’t scenes the way they were in *Forged in the Dark* games. You have to do upkeep in *Forged in the Dark* game downtime too, but it’s by saying ‘I’m going to use this move.’

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: ‘I’m gonna do my repair move and I can invite another character to do it with me, and then we can frame a scene around that.’

JANINE: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Whereas, this is very transactional in nature in most cases. Right?

JANINE: This is ‘find the doctor, pay the doctor.’

AUSTIN: Pay the doctor, right. And we still did those sequences, but they were very rarely character—inner-party character relationships. Right?

JANINE: It was like, ‘do you also need to go to the doctor?’ [CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: Yes.

[DRE CHUCKLES]

ALL: Well, yeah, but I mean, I feel like that became interesting too because instead of being like, ‘oh, well I really want to talk to Es about something so I’m going to invite her to the doctor,’ it was like, ‘well, I guess I’m going to this cave with Lyke. Hey Lyke, what’s up with you?’

[JANINE LAUGHS]

ALI: And like, it ended up being like—that experience with Lyke is what sort of textured Marn’s interactions with him, even though that wasn’t intentional. It wasn’t like, ‘oh, Marn and Lyke have to go do this together.’

So I think that like, in terms of interpersonality, it was definitely less intentional, but we were able to stumble into it in a weird way. Like, look at how Duvall, Pickman, Lyke’s relationship changes just ‘cause it was the three players who wanted to play cards. Right? Like... [CHUCKLES] There were other tensions happening in those relationships, but the fact that they were all like ‘oh, let’s go talk to—’

JACK: Oh, to Hazard.

JANINE: I would say though, the river boat is like the closest we got to in feeling—for me, at least—to traditional downtime to us.

ALI: Yeah.

JANINE: Because it was very much like, we were captive on that boat. It was—‘look, we have these days to fill, what do you want to do?’

JACK: Yeah.

JANINE: ‘Yeah, you can go see the doctor whenever, but also, you’re here for these days.’ More or less, I mean, again, some things changed there, and again, it was a thing of like, sometimes the story happens and you’re done, but that felt—so, it makes sense to me that a lot of the real, like, juicy character moments we got were on that boat, right?

JACK: I think, also, when I think about bits of the show where we’ve had really strong relationships with the characters—I’m thinking about the Chime—something that keeps coming up with the Chime is like, they each sort of—we are able to see their personal space, and what they like to spend time doing when they’re not doing the work that the Chime does, you know. Mako likes his hoverboard, Aria’s a musician, AuDy is a weird robot who likes flying a ship—

[SYLVI AND DRE CHUCKLE]

JACK: And I don’t think it was a surprise that on the river boat where we all had our own little cabins and we were able to describe, you know—

JANINE: Yeah.

JACK: Pickman goes into Marn’s cabin and finds that she’s opened up a bunch of watches or things, and Es has the great bender in her cabin, we’ll go out and have breakfast. And I think that like—

ART: Pickman Kramers into Marn’s.

JACK: Pickman Kramers into everybody’s room in that arc, I think. I can’t remember why now, but I feel like she had a strong feeling about it at the time.

ALI: To tell everybody people got off the boat even though they shouldn't have gotten off the boat. [LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: [OVERLAPPING] People left, yeah.

JACK: Oh. [LAUGHS] Yeah, okay, fair enough.

AUSTIN: I mean, that whole boat was made for this reason, right? Like, I—we—Sapodilla was a very heavy set of arcs that by the time I was prepping—

JACK: Oh, I loved the boat.

AUSTIN: By the time I was prepping for Jade Moon, I thought it could go even darker, because who knows if you get Chine out? There's stuff under that castle that I prepped that no one saw, that was dark-dark. [CHUCKLES] And we did see some dark-dark stuff, so, like—you know, I didn't know what the vibe would be like, and I knew that we had not had any—we had not had great amount of time for PC interaction, I was like, 'we just need one big cut loose. We just need one big space where no one has to worry about shit, they can just hang out on a boat.'

[ALI CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: And do scenes. And it's gonna be annoying, because it means getting eight people together on the call for three or four recordings, but we did it, you know? So. Sorry, Jack, you were in the middle of saying something and I jumped in.

JACK: No, I think it's also worth coming back to the fact that personally, I feel that systems like Bonds really do help encourage this stuff.

AUSTIN: Yes, yes.

JACK: It is—you know, we have worked together for a long time, and we all know each other very well, but these kinds of character relationships are still tricky to just conjure out of thin air at the beginning of a season, when we know as much about—well, we know very slightly more about each other's characters as the listener does, but not much more.

And having a system of bonds where we can be like, 'here are—' beyond just like, here's what we did before we got to Blackwick, but where it's like, 'oh, I rely on this character for X,' or 'I fear this about that character,' just, is such a useful little tool, especially early in a season to start locking in these character interactions and character relationships that can get more nuanced and detailed as the season goes on.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Totally.

KEITH: I think there's also, like, one of the big avenues for PC interaction is like, everyone as a group reacting to an NPC that they're having a conversation with. And I feel like Sangfielle—even though this did happen, obviously, there was plenty of NPCs that were explaining stuff to us and we were reacting to them and reacting with each other—but it felt like there was a lot less of that, especially in the first half of the—maybe more like the middle half of

the season, where it's like, there's a lot of combat, and there's a lot of going to places, and there's a lot of asking Austin questions about what's going on, but there wasn't—you know, you've got Bucho, who is always sort of like an ever-present part of the season for the last half, but it felt like, you know, there wasn't a ton of—like, the skeletons. I feel like that kind of NPC, there were fewer of them than usual, where it's like, 'here's some NPCs, have fun with them.' And that's I think probably—maybe for me, the space where my characters get to know other characters more than any other—like, you know, Bonds are, and—what's the other word for Bonds? I think Jack just used it.

JACK: Are you thinking of Beliefs?

KEITH: Beliefs? Bonds, Beliefs?

JACK: Um, no...

KEITH: All the different ways the other games do it. Like, those are great, but for me, I feel like the most that I get to know other characters is by, like, talking to a weird NPC for 25 minutes.

[ALI CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: Right, right. Sure.

KEITH: And there was just not a lot of that in Sangfielle.

JACK: We got Alekest turning down Pickman, and the whole group being like 'hey!'

AUSTIN: It's a very funny bit, yeah. That was so good.

JACK: 'No need to be rude, Alekest!'

[ALI AND SYLVI CHUCKLE]

AUSTIN: People wondering in the chat about what else is underneath the Sapodilla stuff. I don't mind talking about this a little bit, because we're not going to go back there, probably, but like, there's the other half of the Davia Pledge-Zizilliana Esterházy story. Which is like, yeah, the fucking Glim Macula came and got Zizilliana, and then what did they do? And the answer is, they figured out the shit that they were trying to do with—or they tried to figure out the shit that they ended up doing with heritrixes.

JACK: Right.

AUSTIN: Because Zizilliana was a heritrix. So like, Zizilliana is the first test subject for what ends up being the thing that Es ends up putting a stop to. And there was, like, a hundred percent, the remains of Zizilliana Esterházy are underneath that castle. And that was a potential interaction that you could have had if you'd gone a different way.

And I was like, prepared for that to be just like, truly fucked up and terrifying and brutal in the horror story way. Especially because you wouldn't have any of the context for it. You would have this monstrous figure that you didn't play the other half of the game, right? So this is like a

real—irony horror. You know, the listener would understand that the monster you are confronting is in fact a person who was done badly by, and transformed into a monstrous shape by the authoritarians who run this place, and then cast aside.

And so, really, really, like—it could have gotten dark-dark. So I was like, we gotta have Jade Moon. We gotta have a card game tournament, you know? Ready to go. And we did, thankfully, and you, thankfully, also found your way into the underground rolling party in Second City underneath, instead of—

JACK: That place was great. I loved that arc.

AUSTIN: Instead of going to—yeah, that part was great. Yeah. So. Next question? We good to keep moving, or do we have any more thoughts on this?

SYLVI: Real quick, being distanced from the other PCs was like, very intentional with Virtue—

AUSTIN: Sure.

SYLVI: And then I was trying to really hardly ingratiate Hazard in a very transparent way with stuff, where they were trying to kinda glad-hand with people whenever they were around them and be their pal.

AUSTIN: Be their pal.

SYLVI: Yeah, so.

AUSTIN: Be their pal who also cuts people's heads off sometimes.

[ALI CHUCKLES]

SYLVI: Yeah. Normal. Who doesn't need a friend like that?

AUSTIN: Who doesn't? Great.

SYLVI: Anyway.

AUSTIN: Love it. Alright. We've been talking about *HEART* on and off a little bit, let's talk a little more directly. Sylvi, can you read these from Daniel and Morgan?

SYLVI: Yeah. “What do you think went most smoothly about running/playing *HEART*? What support do you feel it provided for the kind of play you were trying to get at the table? Where did it cause friction? Same goes for prep in running the game, of course.”

And then the second part: “Having just finished a campaign in *HEART*, what advice do you have for players and GMs for playing the game, particularly in relation to beats and mapping the game onto an original setting? Is there anything in particular that is good to do with beats you’ve enjoyed? Anything to avoid?”

AUSTIN: My number one piece of advice for players, because we got there eventually—I think for GMs too, actually, for anybody who’s running or playing this game—is like, you don’t have to be coy about beats. You can straight up say ‘can this be the place I kick someone off the top of something?’ Or ‘hey, don’t you have that Beat that says you can kick someone off the top of this? Maybe now’s a good time to do it.’

Like, you don’t—you don’t need to stumble into that stuff organically, that’s not the purpose of it. It is as—it’s like almost video game-y. Right? Like, you should feel good about clicking ‘yes’ on the objective, and then selecting it, and then going and doing it, and everyone involved should be there for what the cutscene looks like, so to speak. Not that you shouldn’t have to, like, work for it if it’s something difficult, or have there be interesting dynamic challenges that allow for storytelling, but you don’t need to—they’re not things that you need to feel like you don’t get if you didn’t work hard to earn them. You know? That’s my biggest piece of advice.

KEITH: Speaking of video game-y, pick stuff up!

AUSTIN: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

[ALI LAUGHS]

SYLVI: Pick shit up. Oh my god, I did not pick nearly enough shit up.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JACK: Oh, yeah. And it encour—picking stuff up is great, because as Keith demonstrated, you can make use of it, but I also just loved the amount of texture that it gave to the world of, you know, ‘here is what is found in this place, here are little tiny—’ you know, we’re getting to see the world through the little *Fallout* clutter objects that are in it. I really appreciated that.

AUSTIN: Any other tips or thoughts about what worked and what didn’t? I—you know, I will say, and maybe this is the place to say it, that like, I don’t know that we had a great time running it for as long as we did.

DRE: Yeah.

ART: Mhm.

AUSTIN: I think by the end of it a lot of us were burned out on the system. It’s a system that I think does a lot of neat things, but it’s a system that I don’t—I probably had stronger feelings

about this a few weeks ago, when we were still—or a few months ago, now, when we were still deep in it—but for me, one of the hardest things is, as a GM, Fallout, because... Okay, my favorite thing we did this season in terms of a consequence, the most ‘ooh, let me break it, let me break a thing,’ quote unquote, Austin Walker, was when you decided to go all in on confronting Alaway, Keith. When Lyke was like ‘I’m gonna try to steal this heart.’ And we ended up stumbling into ‘oh, Alaway is gonna get to keep the heart, and is gonna steal Aterika’Kaal from you, and is gonna become Aterika’Kaal’s new patron/partner or whatever.’

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And that did not come from a Fallout. That came from ‘when you fail, I get to make a move as hard as I want,’ which is not how this game is written. This game has written that there is—when you fail a roll, or when you get a mixed success, you take stress, and that stress represents things starting to break bad, things starting to turn against you, the way the camera and the score in the film would suggest that things are getting more dire, but the situation hasn’t changed. Maybe you’re in a gunfight so to speak, and you know, it’s you, like, crunched up against cover, and the bullets are hitting the cover around you and breaking it, but you haven’t been hit yet, and you haven’t—the kind of core situation hasn’t changed.

And then Fallout is when that suggested boiling pressure turns into something serious. It turns into something that does permanently shift the situation in a way that you need to then work against to recover from. And I found that the momentum would get killed—partly, maybe this is me not knowing intuitively all of the Fallout available the way maybe more experienced GMs would after a campaign or two. It felt bad every time I gave someone Hex Eye, every time I gave someone Bloody, every time I gave somebody any preconceived Fallout. And it always felt less interesting than what my impulse was, which was ‘oh, what if this thing happened?’ And then I would always go ‘ugh, but is that a Minor or a Major? Am I hitting too hard here, ‘cause this only requires a Minor Fallout, and the idea I had feels like a Major Fallout.’ Or, ‘this is supposed to be a Major Fallout, but the idea I had feels more like a Minor Fallout. Well, maybe I can do that and then a different Minor Fallout, because two Minor Fallouts equal a Major Fallout. And then maybe, da-da-da...’ And at that point, it’s like, my momentum’s killed, and I feel like I’m getting lost in the texture of rules instead of coming up with an interesting consequence and rolling with it.

That said, I have a ton of experience playing in games when a failure is ‘I get to make a move as hard as I want.’ I’ve learned through practice and intuitive sense of that, and I fully understand why the list of Fallouts, all of which are cool as hell, would appeal as great prompts for what happens when a roll goes wrong. But I really struggled around Fallout, and I think it’s pretty obvious, like—I know, Ali, you made sure that like if I was looking for a Fallout for 15 or 20 seconds it probably didn’t go on for that long, but I think even in the episodes as they stand, it’s pretty clear that this was a stumbling block for me every time.

ART: Yeah. I also think that it was hard—hard’s too strong maybe, but mapping the game onto an original setting as someone who only did a little bit of that work was difficult, and I saw the difficulty that you had with it in other spaces, that like, *HEART* is very much its thing, and is

wrapped up in its own thing, and as people who don't like to play in other people's sandboxes in that way, it does feel challenging. 'What advice do you have to do it...'

AUSTIN: Don't be weird about that.

ART: Uh-huh.

AUSTIN: Like, we do this. That's the thing, like, I feel like it's my brain that's weird about this, but I think there is a moment this season where I describe Katonya in as evocative a way I can in the Marrowcreek arc, you know, swinging through the woods around the town, and I describe her flesh, and I do all the angel flesh stuff, and I do all the like, where the machines end, where the metal ends and the flesh begins, and I try to deliver it in this really powerful voice in the way that I do when it's time to do a thing like that, and I like, it doesn't—it didn't do anything for me because it's not mine. Like, I was pulling so heavily from just 'what are angels in *HEART*,' and this is extremely my own brain, and Art, I know your brain is like this too because we've been making stuff together for 20+—for 19 years now. We've been playing tabletop games together for 19 years now. Right? Or is it more than that? No, that's right. Right? 2003.

ART: No, 19 is right, yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah. And I know your brain is like this too, I like my bad ideas—I like *our* bad ideas. I'm going to—not like value, or not like think they're more quality or better, this is not me saying my worst idea is better than other people's best ideas. I like my 2/10 idea more than I like someone else's 8/10 idea, because the thing I like is the process of coming up with it. And so, throughout this whole season, there are so many moments where it's—we're using *HEART* worldbuilding and it does nothing for me as a storyteller, because it's not ours. Because it doesn't feel like ours. And so, yeah, my advice is don't have our [CHUCKLING] brains in that way.

[ALI AND DRE LAUGH]

SYLVI: I'm constantly giving that advice.

AUSTIN: Art, I don't know if you actually have a different direction for that, but. Because I think playing the game in the setting rules. It's a great setting.

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: It's a really fun—it has incredible stuff.

DRE: Mhm.

AUSTIN: I think we take some time to talk about how good the angel descriptions are in the book, and like, they're great, I was doing a bad—

KEITH: We read two different ones, too.

AUSTIN: Right, yeah, we read two different ones. There are five across the various sourcebooks. I think all the stuff in *ICHOR-DROWNED*, which we talked about from Brendan

and Sillion, also has a lot of really great evocative stuff—it's not ours. And so, like, that to me was a real struggle all season that is, like—we were talking at the beginning of the episode about how many great moments there were, and I really do like those moments. But in the process, I would leave sessions of running this, like, cold. Like, ice-cold, like I had just clocked out from when I used to work retail, because I felt like going through the motions a lot of the time, because so much of the game, including Fallouts, were not ours in that way. And again, I think that's a me thing, not a game thing. You know?

ART: It might be a little easier if you're not doing it in an outward-facing way.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally. A hundred percent. For sure.

ART: Like, if we were just playing this hanging out not being recorded, it might not feel—you might be able to push past it a little.

AUSTIN: [OVERLAPPING] [UNCERTAIN] Mm. [SIGHS] Almost certainly, right? I'm not gonna say no to that, but I also think about, like, the stuff that we did in college where there was no recording on anything, and I was still this person about a lot of this stuff. Right? Where I was still, like... you know. Not big on module books or sourcebooks with rare exception, and that rare exception is the—what's the economic guide to Rokugan called? What's the secret Kolat book?

ART: Yeah, it is—it's the Merchant's Guide, yeah.

AUSTIN: The Merchant's Guide to Rokugan, which is set up as if it's a long treatise on the economies of the L5r setting, and then like four or five pages in, it becomes that it's secretly about the anti-deist, anti-emperor, peasant rebellion secret spy organization, the Kolat. [CHUCKLES] It's a very good sourcebook. But that's about it. That's about what I like in terms of sourcebooks.

[ALI LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Any other *HEART* feelings? Sorry, I really—you can tell I found the way to pop the top off of the champagne bottle that was my feelings about this game just now. [CHUCKLES] But I don't want to step on other people who also have feelings about what works and what doesn't. Because I do think there's a lot of good stuff here. Or, also, if you didn't have a good time, I'd like to hear that too. I know, Sylvi, we were talking about what game you wanted to do next season—

SYLVI: [LAUGHS] Wow, I'm being called out.

AUSTIN: Well, not being—I don't want to call you out, but I do think it's worth saying—

SYLVI: No, no, yeah.

AUSTIN: —that like, when we were thinking about what else could we play in this setting, you know, not another game using resistance, is one of the things that we kind of decided on collectively.

SYLVI: Yeah, I grated against it at times, just like—it's just like an adjustment for me, finding the way I like to play tabletop games specifically for the show, too. I think like, a lot of the stuff with the lack of built-in downtime and Beliefs and stuff really helped with me not—being kind of cool on things, um... Yeah, I don't know. It just—it was a system that I both felt like there was a lot of stuff that I wasn't quite getting—I wasn't quite digging deep enough into, and at the same time, just like, wasn't—was also restrictive in the way that I was thinking about it. Yeah, I don't know. I just constantly felt weird about rolling, I guess is kind of what ended up happening at a certain point. And I was like, oh, that's not... great for me.

AUSTIN: We've had that conversation before, around like, the balance of success and failure. I'm curious if people felt like—I think the worst of it was when we first switched to *Scum and Villainy* and it often felt like 'oh my god, if I roll I'm inviting big consequences,' and so a number of people did not want to roll dice when we first switched over in *Twilight Mirage*. And I'm curious if people felt like that at all with *HEART*, or if they felt like they were pretty safe, or where that balance fell.

KEITH: As a character that knew how to heal, and also had a move that could just heal people, and also I was constantly picking stuff up, I almost never felt the sort of dread that I heard from other people in terms of like, getting and dealing with consequences to actions, personally. But I had like, a lot of stuff working in my favor.

AUSTIN: And in your pockets.

KEITH: And in my pockets, yeah.

AUSTIN: Picking stuff up is just an all-time tip. And again, you don't need to be coy about it. So many times someone would be like 'oh, is there something here for me to pick up?' And the answer is like, yeah, probably. There's probably at least a d4 resource here that we can find. You know, maybe you have to roll for it, but I bet you can find something.

JACK: Sometimes—and sometimes it's weird tar.

AUSTIN: Yeah. That's the real stuff.

[ALI LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: That's the good stuff.

JACK: I think—it's tough, right? Where it's like, I like this feeling of weird dread, weird mechanical dread, where you're constantly getting debuffed and the debuffs are scaling, and are making it harder for you to do the thing that you've built the character to do.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JACK: In a game like *Darkest Dungeon*, where—

AUSTIN: A real touchstone for us, by the way, this season, for sure.

JACK: Massive touchstone. When you're playing *Darkest Dungeon*, and you get to the point where you—so *Darkest Dungeon* is a roguelike game that is spectacularly, monstrously bleak mechanically—and I guess narratively—and you'll be playing that video game, and you'll be at a point where it's like, 'okay, I think all is lost. I can't do the thing that I am trying to do, and I have to take these really big swings, and sometimes it will pay off and that will feel incredible, but a lot of the time I will just grind this character into the ground, and they'll fall apart.'

But in a tabletop game where we're making it for the show, sometimes it felt frustrating to be like 'I really want to see this character kind of humming along, and doing the thing that they're able to do,' and maybe it's that the—I think this comes back to like, I don't know that we were playing this to kill our characters. Maybe there is a version of this where we do go through 14 player characters like you'd said, where we do play up the Fallouts as just miserable and ongoing and horrible, where like, 'well, that's that character done with.' But I don't think that was the game that we were playing, and as such, sometimes when I got a Fallout that was just like, 'it's gonna make it really hard for you to use whatever Protection,' I was like 'ah, god. Okay.'

KEITH: Where it just like, comes across as annoying?

JACK: Yeah. More than frightening.

AUSTIN: Jack, do you want to know what was in the treasure room you didn't go to in Hark! The City Beneath?

[ALI LAUGHS]

JACK: The one that I [CHUCKLING] absolutely hyperfocused on?

AUSTIN: Yeah, that one.

JACK: Yeah, what was in there?

AUSTIN: Alright. It was the floor three treasure room. Spice Box, d6 Haven.

JACK: I'll take that.

AUSTIN: Jewelry and Gems, d8 Haven.

[SYLVI CHUCKLES]

JACK: Okay, have you got a weapon or something for me?

AUSTIN: At this point, you would have probably confronted somebody who had a gilded shot-cannon or a pray-hook or—

ALI: There were two fuckin' super-cops up there just chilling. [CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: There's guards up there, yeah. Uh-huh.

SYLVI: Are we doing two-minute reports on our game now, like, what's going on here?

[AUSTIN, ALI, AND JACK LAUGH]

AUSTIN: Confiscated Sorcerer's Contraband, d10 Occult Satchel, with the Dangerous tag, and then d12: "A Really Nice Wooden Chair," Furniture - Awkward. So.

JACK: Oh my god.

AUSTIN: It would have been just a really beautiful chair.

JACK: Our stowing through that thing—it would have been great if we'd brought that chair down to Chine as a 'well-done on being rescued' snack.

[AUSTIN AND DRE LAUGH]

JACK: [CHUCKLING] 'Chine, we brought you a really well-made chair to eat.'

AUSTIN: That would have been Haven, too, because that was not a Desolate chair. That was not a broken-up chair. Other—here's the other one, this is the other one that—here is the punch. Here is the thing I set up earlier is, if you had fought and beaten this other creature, this half-submerged failed experiment, you would have found a closely-clutched pendant inside a tiny micro-portrait of a beautiful young composer. D6, Haven.

JACK: Aw!

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. Let me get that shit in now before the season's totally over.

[ALI LAUGHS]

JACK: What would I—that was Haven?

AUSTIN: That would have been Haven, yeah.

JACK: Yeah, okay. So I couldn't have fed it into my armor. I wouldn't have wanted to.

AUSTIN: No, no. Oh my god. But you wouldn't have known. You would have been like, 'eh. It's a little locket with a little composer in it. Weird.' You know?

JACK: [LAUGHS] With a composer—a visible composer. They're holding an instrument.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I think it probably would have been a conductor, is probably what it would have been more of, right?

JACK: With a baton, right.

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

ALI: Well, we would have found the locket and then music would have come from the other side of the town, and then we'd have been like, 'well, wait a minute. Hold on.' [LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Right, yeah. Totally. Absolutely.

JACK: 'Did we do this by picking this up?'

AUSTIN: [LAUGHING] By picking up this—

[ALI LAUGHS]

JACK: Real big 'this is a treasure chest that makes meat.'

AUSTIN: Yes, the carpet. Yes. A hundred percent. You'll have to listen to previous Friends at the Table material to understand what that's referencing. Alright, I'm gonna keep on moving here. Ali, you want to read this one? From Gabriel.

ALI: Sure. Gabriel writes: "My question is for everyone. If you had to play as an NPC for just an episode, which character would you have chosen?"

KEITH: Tombo.

ALI: Wow.

DRE: Ooh.

KEITH: Carry me around, please.

[ALI CHUCKLES]

JACK: Oh, god.

ART: I think I would also answer Tombo.

[AUSTIN AND KEITH LAUGH]

SYLVI: We can't all play Tombo.

JANINE: You know, you could just play a character who needs to be carried around.

JACK: I've thought about this so many times. Since doing AuDy, I've thought about what about a character that is just a weird shape that has difficulty—like, what if this character is just [CHUCKLING] a chest of drawers or a piece of furniture or something?

JANINE: Or like a cube or something.

JACK: Yeah, but it's like, I can't make that work. If there's a way to make that work, I haven't figured it out yet.

JANINE: Not until you try.

JACK: I know.

KEITH: Well, that's the thing about being a chest of drawers or a weird piece of paper or a fish, is it's on everyone else to make it work. You don't have to do shit.

JACK: But this is why I don't want to do it.

[GROUP LAUGHTER]

ART: But a chest of drawers is kind of the opposite of being AuDy, right? AuDy is a robot that moves people around.

[JACK LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Right, they're a driver. Yeah.

ART: Yeah. And a chest of drawers is something that like—it's closer to being a ship.

AUSTIN: Right, the chest of drawers actually carries other things around, you know?

ART: Right, yeah.

JACK: Truly the first pitch for AuDy—which I think kind of ended up in Thisbe in a lot of interesting ways—is I remember sending Austin a gif of a robot whose whole job was planting small seedlings in an orchard.

AUSTIN: Mhm. I remember this gif.

JACK: And it was basically just like an arm with 500 tiny plants.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: But, nope, humanoid robot that walks around, because ultimately you've got to make the show. [CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: Mhm. I mean, this had been a long-running thing for you too, though, right? 'Cause like, listening back to—you know, as we get ready to go back to PALISADE and go back through some previous Divine Cycle stuff, and there's some stuff early on in COUNTER/Weight where you're like, really interested in Liberty and Discovery being a bunch of little drones that fly around and explore the galaxy.

JACK: And then Curiosity shows up.

AUSTIN: And then of course—and then Curiosity shows up. And it's like a more developed version of your interest in that that you have more control over, because Curiosity was your Divine to divine. Or to describe. So. Interesting stuff.

JACK: Not to get off track, my answer would be Bucho or Alekest, just because I would want to play somebody who was warm and generous and pleasant. [CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: [CHUCKLES] Ah, yes.

JANINE: Counterpoint, pre-Blackwick Alaway.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's fun. Yeah.

JACK: Ooh, Alaway would be fun.

JANINE: Too late. You did yours. He's mine.

JACK: No, yeah, you can take Alaway.

[AUSTIN AND SYLVI LAUGH]

ART: Post-PC Virtue.

AUSTIN: Oh, sure.

SYLVI: Oh, wow.

AUSTIN: Queen of Sapodilla Virtue, yeah.

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's a fun one.

ART: My answer's still Tombo, I'm just still pitching.

DRE: Sure, sure, sure.

KEITH: I'm gonna play all three of the miners a la like *Lost Vikings*.

AUSTIN: The Toll-collectors? Yeah.

ALI: Oh, no no no, I'm claiming Larch. Larch is my answer. [CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: The Toll-collectors are so good. I love the Toll-collectors.

AUSTIN: That was one of my favorite bits.

DRE: What was the group—what were the egg-people that had replicas of themselves over and over again?

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's the Toll-collectors.

DRE: Okay, yeah. That was also gonna be my answer

AUSTIN: Wait, the egg-people? Are they egg-people?

DRE: Weren't they, like, the people who first found the egg in Blackwick?

AUSTIN: Oh, they stole that. They stole that.

DRE: That's right, yeah.

AUSTIN: Or they—

ALI: They gave it to Alaway, didn't they?

AUSTIN: Yeah, they brought it to Alaway. They stole it and brought it to Alaway who then—yeah. Yes. Correct. They did not come from an egg, though, they were not—

DRE: So Keith will play one collection of them, and I'll play a different collection of them. It'll be fine.

JACK: And then Ali will play Larch.

ALI: No, wait, I'm getting Lurch, who is the third one who's like 'I'm not Larch. My name is Lurch.' [CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: 'My name is Lurch.' Yes. Specifically.

SYLVI: Oh, that's really good.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

SYLVI: I want to be the lady who runs the 'you will never come back' game at the circus.

AUSTIN: Oh my god. I forgot about that.

JACK: Oh yeah, 'disappear forever.'

SYLVI: 'You will disappear forever,' yeah.

JACK: She reappears in Zevunzolia.

KEITH: Can I play someone who was never onscreen?

JACK: Oh, yeah, of course, I think.

ALI: Please.

KEITH: I will be the skeleton queen.

AUSTIN: Oh, Altapasqua, yeah.

JACK: [OVERLAPPING] Oh, yeah, Altapasqua.

ALI: [OVERLAPPING] Oh, you would kill that, Keith. [CHUCKLES]

SYLVI: [OVERLAPPING] I'm always saying 'I want to be the skeleton queen.'

AUSTIN: I can't fucking believe we didn't end up going—yeah, you are, it's true.

JACK: Down in the murky depths of the lake.

AUSTIN: We truly were going to. We were truly going to. That was going to happen. And then it didn't.

KEITH: We almost—

JACK: We didn't need to go down there.

KEITH: We talked ourselves out of it to do something—

AUSTIN: One second, I—

KEITH: What did we do instead of that?

AUSTIN: Where—is this coming up? Where is the question?

JACK: We'll get there, yeah.

[ALI LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Where the fuck is the ending question? I don't know what number it is. We'll get there. We'll get there.

SYLVI: Oh, wow.

JACK: Interestingly, where the fuck is the ending? It was sort of—

AUSTIN: [LAUGHS] Yes. Yes. Should we keep moving? Any other NPC—I feel like we got good ones there.

SYLVI: Yeah. We should keep it going. I looked at how many questions are left.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. Sylvi, can you read this one from Vivian?

SYLVI: Yes. "Sangfielle was my first season following Friends at the Table, as well as supporting the Patreon to look behind the scenes. And as the season went on, the structure of the narrative appeared to expand, and shifted to something beyond what was originally expected. I can't help but feel like the truth of the Heartland derailed the original vision of the series. What elements of the season did you expect to be larger than they were, and what elements emerged in ways that surprised you?"

AUSTIN: Great question. We got a bunch of other questions similar to this around like, moving away from episodic structure to bigger plot-focused stuff in the back half, and leaving Blackwick despite starting with *Ground Itself*.

SYLVI: Yeah, my one kind of is just a result of Virtue leaving the season halfway through.

AUSTIN: Yeah, sure.

SYLVI: Which was the, like, both the stuff with what's going on with Darling, and what is keeping Virtue alive, and the Residuum, and like—there were ideas for the death god and shit, and that's stuff I can message you about when we come back to this setting.

AUSTIN: For sure.

SYLVI: But it was just stuff that never really ended up coming up because it just didn't end up getting the time to develop. But like, I'm fine with it. She's a fucking machine god now.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. True enough. Other stuff that maybe people thought would come up or wanted to come up more that didn't?

KEITH: Well, in a weird way, I feel like the second half was a lot stronger than the first half, even though I also feel like I wish we had done more episodic stuff, so I'm like, I wish that we had stuck with the stuff that we were doing in the half that I think is the worse half. And I don't really know what that means. [CHUCKLES]

[SYLVI AND JACK LAUGH]

AUSTIN: No, I get it. I do. I—so my original plan was to do more stuff like Roseroot Hall, where it would be like, very close by to Blackwick, or even in Blackwick itself, and using Delve mechanics to represent things that were not Delves, like hauntings. And then the way—the speed with which Roseroot Hall was dealt with was like, 'oh, this isn't—I don't know that I could have ever said 'you only get to tick two steps on this Delve because you rolled—because you got a success but then had to roll damage on the haunting.' Like, you found where the thing was and the abstraction there didn't work for non-traversal things for me.

There's an example in the playtest document for heart, where they do a sort of ritual via a Delve, and I think we maybe did one or two things like that, where we used Delves to be something other than traversal, but it never worked as well as "go a place." *HEART* is really really good at 'go to a place and have some wild encounters on the way, explore a space and get from Point A to Point B while dealing with weird nuns showing up with the leg of a dragon, or dealing with a weird hippo monster in a cave,' and that stuff is—I think ended up pushing us away from the episodic—or, not the episodic, but the Blackwick-centric stuff, that like, we wanted to do—I wanted to do a game about a place, and then we picked a game that was about leaving a place behind. Even getting back could be really hard.

And then we did the thing of like 'oh, these two stories feel like they're going towards Sapodilla. Let's do a Sapodilla story.' And then that ended up being a huge chunk of it, and the way *HEART* works is like, there are specific mechanics for travel back and forth from a place. It is not a game where you are supposed to just snap your fingers and then say getting back is easy. That's a thing you earn by doing certain things to make the trip back more easy, and even then you don't get to just come back for free, it's just like the difficulty is much more reduced, and I feel like we probably have the thing here of the 'John Harper runs *Blades in the Dark* and runs a score of *Blades* in 40 minutes and it takes us 4 hours,' where like, I bet you could run a Delve in 40 minutes. I bet you could get to and from Sapodilla in 40 minutes. Not the way we run the fuckin' game. Everything we do is a scene. Everything we do is a conversation, everything we do is an encounter.

KEITH: I don't even know how it—I should just listen to one of those and even see what it sounds like.

AUSTIN: It's just very abstract, right? It's just not as zoomed in on making everything a capital M Moment. You know?

KEITH: It's—yeah, I just can't even—I can't picture it. Like, I can't imagine.

SYLVI: [CHUCKLES] Keith, I thought you were saying you should listen to our show.

[AUSTIN LAUGHS]

KEITH: No, no, I've heard that one. It's okay. [CHUCKLES]

SYLVI: 'Man, I've really gotta listen to one of those.'

AUSTIN: Yeah. I also think that the other half of this is that like, for me, I like Roseroot Hall, I like bits of the very first arc, but I think Bell Metal Station is where it started to really click for me, and that was of course the moment—building off of stuff from Yellowfield from the Candle Factory, where I started working in the meta-plot about bad utopias, about the Wrights of the Seventh Sun, about Zevunzolia, about the City of Lights, all that stuff, and like, I truly think you're getting a better version of me as a GM because my attention and interest tick up when I'm saying something, and when I'm trying to build towards something, even if I don't know what I'm building towards, because I am the Wrights of the Seventh Sun, I guess. Like, there is—the act of building is more fun to me than the act of facilitating you through my prep. Do you know what I mean? That's not as—it's not going anywhere. And so I think I just get better as a GM and as a writer if I know I'm pushing toward something, and also I think we all did just get more comfortable around then with *HEART* in terms of making it move, you know? So.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Any other feelings on stuff that y'all thought we would get to? Or feelings about the episodic structure at the beginning, the sort of just like, 'yeah, this is just like—these are all just loose stories?'

KEITH: I regret not knowing more about Blackwick by the end.

AUSTIN: Yeah, me too. But also, like, knowing more is also a funny thing, because it's like, there isn't more to know, because we just didn't invent more. You know?

KEITH: Right, yes, yes. I regret there not being more to know.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Yeah, it's interesting how like, Blackwick was supposed to be sort of *the* location. But then Sapodilla ended up being such a memorable place where like, character arcs were changing, and these big world structures were involved in there, and like, when we went to Sapodilla that didn't really feel like a big player choice.

AUSTIN: No, it's just where Calen fled to, right? And then...

ALI: Right. Well, I think initially it was pitched, like, 'oh, who wants to go to Sapodilla to help Art find a painting?'

AUSTIN: Right. That is it, yes.

ALI: And then... [LAUGHS] The Yellowfield people went to Yellowfield and then it was like, 'oh, the train from Yellowfield is going to go to Sapodilla and we're gonna have this really interesting structure in terms of the whole party is gonna be there,' that's when we did the interrogations obviously, but it feels like that's when we sort of left Blackwick behind? Question mark?

AUSTIN: Mhm.

KEITH: Yeah.

ALI: And yeah. I mean, not that I regret it, it's just weird to see.

AUSTIN: No, no, I think you're totally right.

KEITH: It's funny, because that is like the second arc.

[ALI LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: What is?

KEITH: Like—

AUSTIN: Bell Metal.

KEITH: Bell Metal and Yellowfield.

AUSTIN: Bell Metal and Yellowfield are the second—yeah. A hundred percent. We got Roseroot Hall, we got—so we got *Ground Itself*, obviously, Curse of Eastern Folley, then we got Hymn of the Mother-beast, Roseroot Hall—I'd say Roseroot Hall is a Blackwick story. Hymn of the Mother-beast is, 'cause it's about the chapel of the Mother-beast, but it visually is not inside of Blackwick. But it is about the history thereof, so I guess that counts. The nuns end up coming back through, you know? We get to see them with their cool flower-faces and stuff.

KEITH: Yeah. I consider those both to be Blackwick, yeah.

AUSTIN: Blackwick-y stories. We got a downtime, we got A Market Day in Blackwick, that's Blackwick. Candle Factory, not Blackwick. What Happened at Bell Metal Station, not Blackwick except the very beginning when you're on your way to the neighboring town, that to me feels Blackwick-y, but the bulk of it, not Blackwick. Gates of Sapodilla, no. Whispers by the City of the Sea, no. Perpetual Oratorio, no. Hark!, no. Passage on the Jade Moon, no. Clapcast: The Most Wanted Song, yes.

[ALI, KEITH, AND SYLVI LAUGH]

AUSTIN: Sangfielle: Marrow in the Field, Marrow in the Bone, no. But I would not trade that arc for the world. Just Returns forward, yes, right? Or I guess Two Types of Quarry, no, but Just Returns was, and then Wax, Ichor, and Iron were.

KEITH: Maybe we did deserve to be fired.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

[ALI LAUGHS]

JACK: Maybe we did deserve to be fired, but not by them.

KEITH: Right, not by them, yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's it. Yes.

JACK: I quite liked Blackwick just being like, the place where through bad luck and circumstance we bring back all our demons.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: And I think that that worked really well by—we spent so long setting up Blackwick. And so, *The Ground Itself* did a weird thing when we played it, where we rolled to see how long the gap between events would be, and we rolled the smallest number we could, and so we produced this like, hyper-dense, really weird opening, where everything happens in this city over a period of like, one horrible week. Which I suppose presages us returning and bringing back the wax and the Pale Magistrates, but it meant that we got to know it really intimately at the start, and then we left it, and then we got to see everything fall apart there, and I liked that a lot.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I—

JACK: It was—it felt cruel to Blackwick in a way that I think was consistent with us making a horror season, and consistent with what we know about the Heartland, which is—in prep we talked about trains regularly destroying towns, we talked about, you know, the Course or the Shape or the Structure sweeping through and changing places irreparably. I mean, you were describing earlier, Austin, a situation where a landmark falls through the ground into somewhere else, so I think it's very in-character that we make this place, leave it, and then come back to smash it to pieces at the end.

KEITH: Yeah, none of my regrets and would-they should-theys are about, like—like, translate actually to wishing we did something different.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: Or like, not liking what we ended up doing.

AUSTIN: It's one of those things where it's like, we were making 'Sangfielle' the show, not 'Blackwick' the show. Right? And I think if we decided after doing that intro like, 'ooh, actually,

we really want to stay in Blackwick,’ the two things we would need to do is: rename the season Blackwick, or choose Blackwick as the name, or choose Eastern Folley as the name—

JACK: Which we thought about doing.

AUSTIN: Totally.

JACK: And I think we stopped doing because I think it was you, correctly, said ‘we’re not making a Blackwick season.’

AUSTIN: And we weren’t. We were making a Sangfielle season. And not play *HEART*. Play a game that has community building in it in a deeper way. There—again, there are mechanics often about building roads to and from a Haven in *HEART*. If you read the sanctum book that’s like ‘something something something’ sanctum or something like that, that has some more rules about trying to run a Haven-based game, but it’s still basically ‘go out from the Haven and come back to it,’ the difference being that a traditional *HEART* game you go out for what for us was *Concentus*, what for *HEART*’s default setting is *Derelictus*, towards the center of the Heart. And you have business along the way. And we did do the game where you leave the Haven and come back to it, it’s just we didn’t come back multiple times, you know? So. Alright, I’m gonna keep moving. Sorry, was there—did someone have something else there?

KEITH: Oh, no, sorry, unrelated.

AUSTIN: Alright, Keith, can you read this?

KEITH: Sure. This is the Stella-Jude?

AUSTIN: Correct.

KEITH: Sure.

“Jack, in previous post-mortems, you have firmly established yourself as not a violinist, however, this season’s soundtrack makes extensive use of violins. What was it about Sangfielle’s sound that made you want to use violins?”

JACK: I think I’ve talked about this before, but I thought we were gonna be making a different season than the season we ended up making. So when I was doing pre-production for the music, I was still imagining the city, the vampire city. And I thought we were making something much closer to *Bloodborne*, in terms of ‘we’re going to be in a city that’s a sort of noble or upper-class space that has fallen to ruin and destruction,’ and so all of my early—

AUSTIN: The *Brinkwood* game, basically.

JACK: Oh, right, yes. A hundred percent.

AUSTIN: If we had decided to play *Brinkwood: The Blood of Tyrants*, one of the games we have since talked about as like ‘oh, could we do this, could we do Sangfielle with this?’ That is not a hint about what we’re doing—I will give you the *list* of games we have talked about doing later.

JACK: [CHUCKLES] And so, I was looking at harps, and I was looking at baroque music, because I wanted to make something that was so distinct from Hieron going back to fantasy. So I really—you know, I ruled out an acoustic guitar, and I tried to rule out a clarinet as early as possible. And so when we had this first prep meeting, and everyone was like ‘yeah, we’re making a western,’ there was a real moment where I went ‘oh, god, none of my prep works. At all.’ So I started looking for inspirations for music that felt sort of shattered or ruined, and I found the great Michael Nyman soundtrack for the film *Ravenous*, which is an uneven but fun film about cannibals.

KEITH: Uneven *but* fun?

JACK: Yeah. Uneven but fun film about cannibals. And it has an incredible soundtrack by Michael Nyman, in which he—I can’t tell whether he got people who couldn’t play the violin, or he instructed professional violinists to play as though they couldn’t play the violin, and it produced this—like, just this remarkable sound. The violin is an instrument that has so many affordances for you to make sounds with it that aren’t good, as anybody who has ever heard a child play the violin can tell you, and I heard Michael Nyman’s soundtrack for this, and I was like, ‘oh, this is where I can go, I need to find an instrument that I can’t play, but I have enough passing familiarity with to be able to make sounds with it.’

So I thought about the trumpet, which is not something that I can even begin to—you know, I come from playing the clarinet, which has 60 or 70 keys, and the trumpet has 3, so that was off the table, but being a guitarist, I looked at the violin and I thought, ‘I broadly understand how a fingerboard works, and there is a lot of room here for me to make sounds that are broken or are off-kilter.’ And so my goal was take—try and compose as quote unquote ‘well’ as I could, or try and compose properly, and then try and render it out through an instrument that I can’t really play to make the sound of a place that once was able to produce music quote unquote ‘properly,’ which is not really something I believe in, and has since found that the tools and the instruments available to them don’t work.

KEITH: Do you feel like you got better at the violin despite actively playing poorly?

JACK: Yeah, I did, but not much. There were points towards the end of the season, and I feel this towards the end of every season, where I was running out of ideas, and with the goal in Sangfielle being to make the music feel perverse and strange and off-kilter, I was sitting down and composing and feeling comfortable with the instrument in a way that I really wasn’t happy with, where I was like ‘I need this to be weirder and stranger.’ And so, that’s—the last track was Pickman Goes Home. I was trying to do something that is really difficult for someone like me who can’t play the violin, which is overdub these things very closely, get this rhythm feeling as precise as I could, and setting myself up to fail, so to try and produce this Sangfielle sound again.

But all the instrumentation, I—even on instruments I know how to play, I tried to fuck up in some way. I would detune the clarinet, I would play the clarinet facing away from the microphone, I would mic the piano in a really weird way in the few times that a piano showed up, I would sit in front of the microphone and perform vocal parts with my knees kind of crunched up to my chest

so that my diaphragm was out, I'd try and pick keys which were just uncomfortably outside of my vocal range. It was really a project about trying to compose as best as I could, but push it out through instrumentation that I wasn't familiar with.

AUSTIN: And it turned out great, IMO. So.

JACK: Thank you. I'm so stoked for when we get back to Sangfielle. It's—I've been thinking about this a lot as we go back to PALISADE, where it's like a sequel to a sci-fi show, but there's going to need to be a breadth of change in the music going from PARTIZAN to PALISADE, and Austin and I have got some really fun ideas about what that is. But Hieron kind of—the soundtracks for those are drawing from the same palette, and I think Sangfielle is probably going to draw from the same palette.

AUSTIN: Yeah, Sangfielle is the same.

JACK: So when we come back to Sangfielle, I'm so excited to pick up the strings again and start making horrible noises.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Agreed.

KEITH: You should get a different instrument that you can't play. You should get a dulcimer or something.

JACK: I'm thinking about it. I am thinking about it. I can play the dulcimer.

KEITH: [SOFTLY] God damn it.

[ALI CHUCKLES]

JACK: It might be the trumpet. Oh, what I want to get is a bass clarinet.

AUSTIN: Ooh.

JACK: I had to do so much—so there's no digital instruments in Sangfielle at all, except for a bass drum, because I live in an upstairs flat—

AUSTIN: You don't own a—yeah.

JACK: And I don't own a bass drum. But there was a lot of—and I'm really wary about, you know, sort of getting on my high horse and saying 'all the instrumentation was analog or organic' because it truly wasn't. There was so much digital and computer processing that went into this soundtrack that is visible in an interesting way, or just completely invisible. You know, pitches were changed, pitches were bent up and down, rhythms were messed around with—there was so much processing on basically everything. But the big one was, you know, dropping everything down an octave to create base versions of the instruments that I have.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: And so when we get back to Sangfielle 2, I would love to get a bass clarinet. Which is just a huge, deep clarinet. And mess around with that sound.

AUSTIN: Truly would love to hear it.

KEITH: Is it the hammered dulcimer, or the mountain dulcimer, or both?

[ALI LAUGHS]

JACK: [LAUGHS] I can play a hammered dulcimer, but I would need to look at a mountain dulcimer.

KEITH: I was thinking mountain dulcimer, because that's like the American dulcimer. It's much different.

JACK: Yeah, that would be fun, wouldn't it?

AUSTIN: You live here now, so you have to switch over. That's the law.

JACK: I know. I know. That is the law.

ART: If it's the three keys that bothers you about the trumpet, I think you can get one with a fourth. There's a—I think that you can get a trumpet with a pinky trigger.

JACK: I mean, a clarinet has 60 keys. One extra one is not gonna make me feel more comfortable.

ART: It's a 33% increase. I think you're really not giving it enough—

JACK: Mm. [CHUCKLES]

KEITH: Trombone? That's a tough one.

AUSTIN: No keys on that one, right?

JACK: Yeah. I can't play the trombone, no. That might be fun.

AUSTIN: Just sliding.

KEITH: Trombone also is—I find them very compelling, but also inherently kind of funny.

AUSTIN: Having infinite keys.

JACK: Oh, something that might be worth saying is—Austin and I have talked about this a lot, there are no guitars, no acoustic guitars in Sangfielle. Not just in the soundtrack, but in the world they don't exist.

AUSTIN: Narratively. Yeah, world-building wise, they don't exist.

JACK: But, Sangfielle, much like they've invented trains in a weird way, they have found an electric guitar in the mines. This is something that Austin and I have talked about, and it's something that I sketched—

SYLVI: Oh my god.

JACK: The Shape Trains theme was in electric guitar, and the Pale Magistrates have a big wild west Morricone sort of electric guitar riff associated with them, that just never got put in the show.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: We can talk about that when we get to later questions.

AUSTIN: This is—that's one of my ones for 'things you wish you'd gotten in the show but you didn't.' I mean, I did, I just had to do it at the very last possible second in the one place that I had fiat—

JACK: Oh, the radio.

AUSTIN: Yeah, is the intro, the radio. In my mind, from the middle of the season forward, one of the last images of this show was going to be people in Blackwick pulling out a massive radio antenna, and—like, bit by bit, one of the last things they get out of the mines is the kind of big metal crossbeams and wiring of this radio antenna, and they're puzzled by it, and scratch their heads, and then figure out how to put it together. We know radios exist, because Marn had that cursed one.

JACK: Oh, yeah, that tries to talk to the moon.

AUSTIN: That tries to talk to the moon, and then like—I was just talking about this, but a book that I don't know that I'd recommend, I haven't read it recently enough to know if I could recommend it, I would—I certainly remember it being rough in places, as much of Philip K. Dick's work is, but *Doctor Bloodmoney or How We Got Along After The Bomb* has an incredible conceit, which I am certain I have drawn on before in *Friends at the Table*, maybe not have referenced. In that movie, which is like a post-apocalyptic post-cold war book, there is a family—the first family of Mars is launching, on their way to Mars, a guy named Walter or Waltin or Walt—fuck, what is his last name? It's not Buzzfeld, it's, um... God, I forget what his name is. It's Walt something. He and his wife are on their way to Mars to go colonize Mars, and, you know, it's like the sort of person who's on the front of a Life magazine cover, right? Walter Dangerfield, that's his name.

[JACK LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: And he's, you know, in a satellite, waiting for the final rocket to fire to go take him and his family to Mars, and the nukes drop. And he gets—he never goes to Mars. He stays in orbit forever and becomes a radio, like a—he can send messages down. He can send radio signal down as he orbits around the world, and so Walt ends up being like, the voice in the heavens calling down the one radio signal everyone in the world gets at like 7:00 P.M. their time as he

floats around the world, and he reads books to them, and he plays what few records he has up there. And he gets to be this kind of important, unifying voice, and in my mind, drawing on that was something that I really wanted as a final image for Blackwick, and I kind of snuck it in there as the editor of the Heartland Rider ends up becoming a radio DJ instead of being an editor.

JACK: It's so much fun.

AUSTIN: Which, you know. Industrial—industrial pivots in technology and media are a backstory happening throughout Sangfielle with the rise of the Pledge cylinder and all that stuff, right? So.

JACK: Yeah. Real quick, before we move on, someone in the chat asked 'how do I hold the violin—'

AUSTIN: Great question.

JACK: I hold it in my left hand like you hold a violin, but against my chest instead of at my chin, because I wanted to be able to see how my fingers were working. And the thing that they tell you, especially when you're playing the clarinet and playing the piano, is 'don't look at your fingers,' because you will screw your sound up completely, and I was like 'sounds good to me! Let's go.' [CHUCKLES]

[ALI CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: Next question. Art, have you read one? Who hasn't read one?

JACK: I haven't.

ART: I have not read one.

JACK: Oh.

AUSTIN: Art, do this one, Jack, you do the next one.

ART: Alright. Next one is: "Many of the characters seem to exemplify not just background or history, but a foundational truth—" Is Mabel coming through?

AUSTIN: Eh. Mabel's allowed.

JACK: No, is she having a good time?

ART: Okay. "Exemplify not just background or history, but a foundational truth of the world. I'm thinking of Chine with the Course, Pickman with the Shape, and Duvall with the Structure. How did your prep in worldbuilding differ in this season relative to some of your earlier seasons? Were the players more directly involved in the details of creating some of these major background elements? Are there any lessons you've learned here that you're planning to apply to future work?"

AUSTIN: I would say no more than some past—*some* past seasons. Maybe more in that basically every character touched some big part of the world in that way, in terms of the nature

of vampires, the nature of Shape Knights, but, you know, Twilight Mirage opens with y'all creating what ended up being the eight major subsections of civilization, you know?

JACK: [CHUCKLES] Yeah.

AUSTIN: And even my variations on Quire are just knock-ons from your main—your work there. Is there anything especially different here? I think it was very key—I think that having those three things of the Course, the Shape, and the Structure was very interesting, seeing those come together independently across your three prep stories. For people who don't know, we did interviews—interviews. We did conversations about prepping these characters from a very early-on perspective, all in the Patreon, I think those are all Drawing Maps. Definitely worth going back and listening to those. Very interesting, I would say, based on where we ended up with all of them. Did y'all feel like, more or less invested in the world creation stuff than normal? I'm curious because I only know my perspective.

KEITH: I wouldn't say less invested, but I felt like I *did* less.

AUSTIN: Involved, I mean. Yeah?

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I mean, you did less than the Equiaxed, certainly. The Equiaxed are such a big deal. But I feel like we have Equiaxed-tier stuff here like Shape Knights, and the Structure, it just wasn't—you weren't in the driver's seat this time, right?

KEITH: Yeah. My thing, I—you and Dre were trying to figure out the name for the Course. I named the Course. That was my one thing.

AUSTIN: You did name the Course. You did name the Course, yes. This is true. This is true.

JACK: I think something that definitely struck me as different was that we were making a fantasy season outside of Hieron for the first time—

AUSTIN: Mm, mhm. Right.

JACK: —and we'll approach this in another question, but even setting aside Hieron, the idea of being like 'how can we go to a fantasy space that is new, and how can we make that feel new?'

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JACK: And also, after having made Hieron for so long, what are we excited about that we haven't been able to put in our sci-fi seasons that would fit in a fantasy season? And how can we get that involved? I was so excited about the creation and the dread consequences of industrialization in a fantasy world, and it was so exciting to be able to have a space to explore that kind of stuff. So that—right from the jump, I was like, 'oh, man, yeah, we've gotta have people chopping down trees and people digging for—' my first notes for this season were like, people digging for oil all over. Which kind of—

AUSTIN: Yeah, *There Will Be Blood* was definitely one of our touchstones, right?

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Y'all did a Pushier tier podcast on that.

ALI: Mhm.

JACK: But yeah, so I think the worldbuilding prep in its difference for me, was like, 'we're making somewhere completely new, what are we excited about? What does that give us to be excited about?'

AUSTIN: Mhm. We also had way less—we already hit this on the COVID question, but like, I cannot communicate how much less time I had to prep this than I'd like to, and sit with it. There are—you know. There are people out there—I think the *Beam Saber* Discord where I still post every now and then—where like, we are deep in conversations about various, you know, various books I want to read, and books I am currently reading about Indigeneity, and revolution, and, you know, we're out there talking about the Métis, and talking about Frantz Fanon, and talking about, you know, 'what does anarchism say about decolonialism?' And so, all of that's prep for PALISADE.

And like, I have a big reading list that I'm working through for that. I did not—we did not have time to do a big reading list for this. And I mean that both in terms of deep philosophy and theory and political work, but I also mean that in terms of genre-work. The leave time between PARTIZAN and Sangfielle was not long enough for me to do the sort of worldbuilding I like to do. It was not long enough for me to feel like I got into the right space outside of stuff I could watch in the background while doing other work. You know, I was also gearing up to quit one job and start another one, and one that would be very busy during this, and we made the season while I was getting used to working a new job and new hours and all of that, too.

So I think that there is a degree of that that I think really shifted there, and I did really rely on being able to come into this with 'yeah, I don't know. I don't know what the answer is.' Like, that was supposed to be very freeing for me, and in some ways it really was, to straight up say 'yeah, I don't know what the big-picture ideas here are yet. I don't know what the—' I mean, I have like a big thesis, but I have not done the preliminary work that I normally have the time to do before we have to keep doing this so we can all make our rent. We don't—you know. [CHUCKLES] I can't take six months off this show to go, like, do a sabbatical to prep for this show. We have to keep making the show.

And that—I think I was very grateful to be able to rely on y'all coming up with big ideas like the Shape, the Structure, and the Course, collaborating with me on that, but also things like the Telluricist Union, heritrixes, like, all of that stuff ended up being big, big, big, big helps. You know, the Cleavers end up being—and 'what is a Cleaver' ends up being where some of our most important stakes end up hinging at the end of the season. Right? And even when I wasn't relying on it in that way, stuff like that the centrality of Aterika'Kaal, which is like, yeah, I came up with Aterika'Kaal, but I came up with Aterika'Kaal to be a one-off monster you kill. Right?

This indifferent god that the early colonizers of this place ended up taking and convincing to work for them instead of for locals, which, if ever there was a recurring theme in *Friends* at the

Table, it's that the world will not—the world is not on the side of justice. Nature does not have a dog in the fight, except for 'it's going to kill us all in the end because of what we're doing,' but it is not a—I don't believe that nature is anti-colonial. Right? Unfortunately. I don't believe that that's a truth about the world. And, in fact, it ends up being a thing that imperialists use to gain more power, is their exploitation of it, their willing exploitation of it.

And so, there is a recurring thing, so something like the Roseroot Hall and Aterika'Kaal story ends up dealing with that, and it's supposed to deal with that and move on. Right? It's supposed to deal with that, and then Aterika'Kaal disappears, but instead Aterika'Kaal ends up being the other big major ongoing threat throughout this season. Threat and character, and maybe it wouldn't have been a threat if some things go differently.

KEITH: Threat? You think threat?

AUSTIN: Yeah, I think so. I think maybe a threat. Let's say neutral threat. Yeah, the Residuum, in chat, people mentioning, also huge, for sure. So yeah, so like, I think there is a lot of stuff there that is like, there is stuff where the prep—me not having time to have the prep really made me grateful that I could leverage y'all for coming up with some of these big details. And we worked hard on it. Like, go listen to those conversations. Like, I was absolutely giving y'all homework and being like, you know. 'Come back with more detail.' Because I needed it, to be able to do this season. I knew I was not gonna be in a place this year where I could pick up the slack, because I didn't have the time to do that, so.

Hopefully getting back to PALISADE will be a little bit, you know. We still have some months before we get back to it. I'll say, now, don't expect you're gonna hear a trailer for anything at the end of this. [CHUCKLES] We do not work on those timescales anymore. We just don't.

KEITH: Well, part of the reason there's not a trailer for it is the—I mean, part of it is that we haven't recorded like a ton in the last few whatevers, and so we just don't have it, but also part of it is like, doing the road to seasons means having—being less sure about, like—there's stuff that we're building up what would even be in the trailer by playing—going through six different sessions of...

AUSTIN: Yeah, you know. By the time we got to that trailer for 'the Road to,' even though pretty quick, coming off of Hieron, it's COVID. Like, COVID truly fucked our scheduling up. It made so much of the work that we used to do, or that I used to do, as both—for in terms of prep, but then also Patreon maintenance and stuff like that, so much harder for me to do, because I have to do it from a space that I struggle deeply working from.

KEITH: Yep.

AUSTIN: And it's—I have not found a solution to this yet, so. Anyway.

SYLVI: We'll improv a trailer at the end of the stream.

AUSTIN: Yeah, uh-huh.

[ALI CHUCKLES]

SYLVI: No, we won't. We won't. I'm sorry.

AUSTIN: Don't give people false hope.

SYLVI: I shouldn't be joking about that, even.

AUSTIN: Jack, do you want to read this one?

JACK: Yeah. Sasha asks: "As we saw, Sangfielle focused on a few antagonists who were each interested in their own terrible version of utopia. What was the inspiration for that? Were you all interested in exploring that theme from the start of the series, or did that emerge during play?"

AUSTIN: Mostly emerged during play, with the exception that—and Jack, you kind of pointed this out, right, in the comment to this, which was that one of our big questions was 'what do people do in the face of not understanding something' and the answer is that they begin to hypothesize answers, and believe answers of their own, and try to find schema to put on the world, and I think the extension of 'hey, here's how I make sense of the world' to 'and therefore the world should be like this' is one that we are always interested in. But then I think it just came together between the Calen story and the Alaway story. I was like 'oh, here's what's happening.' And the Mother-beast story to some degree, the sisters of the Mother-beast making their own little hymn to live in forever is also a sort of weird utopia, right?

JACK: I think also, just from a structural perspective, when we're telling a story where anything could happen, one way to sort of anchor our way through the structure of a season is to say 'here's what this character thinks could happen. Alright, now here's what *this* character thinks could happen.' They're sort of like weird little resting points where—you know, in the sort of noise and churn of Sangfielle, we're able to go 'Alaway's vision of this looks like this' or 'the Wrights' vision of this looks like this' before we go plunging back into how Sangfielle is right now.

AUSTIN: Mhm. Yeah, I think that that's pretty much it, right? I don't think we need to stay on this one too long, because, again, it wasn't like a—there was no grand motive outside of 'oh, this is a fun thread to start pulling on' and then next thing you know you have a deck of cards for a weird cult. Weird cult/secret society. That was the other thing with the Wrights, was very much thinking about—a lot of the eras in history we're talking about end up also intersecting with interesting secret societies and occultism and stuff like that, and the Wrights very much are drawing on that stuff, so.

JACK: Is the—you know, the answer to this can be like 'I don't know, let's figure it out,' but is the deck of cards itself a reflection of that in terms of the like weird sort of tchotchkes that secret societies have?

AUSTIN: Definitely. A hundred percent.

JACK: 'Oh, it's the ring,' or 'it's the little wax seal,' and in this case they've all got like a little costume deck of cards.

AUSTIN: Mhm. Alright. I'll read these from Vaughn and Kate.

Vaughn writes: “Thank you all for the hard work you put into making an incredible show. I noticed in this season there was significantly more tension between character desires, particularly Lyke and other PCs, that seemed in audio to result in some frustration between players. How do you deal with these deeply emotional character conflicts in a way that maintains healthy relationships between the players?”

And then Kate writes in saying: “I always appreciate the out-of-character discussion and debate about PC conflict. Hearing how a story is created is one of the things I really appreciate about the show, and it’s also reassuring to see that the conflict doesn’t extend beyond the characters.” Opposite reads on the same audio, this is what it is to listen to things and perceive. “My question is about balancing that kind of discussion with the RP itself, or transitioning from one, the RP, to the other, the conversation around the character motivations. Does it ever feel difficult to shift gears or to potentially reiterate what was just said? This came to mind when listening to Chine’s final moments, where what the characters actually said out loud was so brief that standing alone I wasn’t sure whether it supported the resulting action. Of course, it wasn’t standing alone, so the story came through. But I’m curious what that experience, or other similar, is like from a player perspective.”

[PAUSE]

AUSTIN: Big question.

KEITH: Yeah, that’s a lot.

ART: I don’t want to speak for anyone else this year, but I never felt any out-of-character frustration or, you know, emotion this season at all. Everything was just play and the characters, and if it had gone a different way, I think I would have felt exactly the same. I don’t know if it’s just like, appreciating it just as more of just like a—you know, if the Virtue thing had gone the other way, I don’t think I would have been mad or upset. I think it would have just been what it was, you know?

SYLVI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And that’s not you being precious and being like ‘well, we always—we never have tension.’ We have definitely had those moments. We’ve talked about them before many times.

ART: But this wasn’t one of them.

AUSTIN: Yes, yes.

KEITH: Yeah.

ART: Either of these instances being described here, I—I mean, the Chine thing was heavily negotiated before it was recorded. I—well, I guess—we had a little—

AUSTIN: Only halfway through, right? We had to—I mean, we can just say it outright, right? That we recorded a whole sequence there and we didn’t like it.

ART: And it went differently.

AUSTIN: It went differently.

ART: And we went back—and we didn't like it, so we talked about what it would be, and the only—the only thing that happened is that when we went—when I went into that recording, I thought that Duvall was gonna kill Chine. And that was not what everyone else understood was going to happen.

AUSTIN: That was very weird, yeah.

KEITH: Yeah, that was a big surprise for me. And I was like—I was about to be like, well, we should just let that happen, too. Because I also wasn't like, gunning for Chine even a little. Like I wasn't like, 'hey Austin, if we go back to this, make sure that I'm the one that kills Chine.'

[DRE AND AUSTIN LAUGH]

KEITH: Like, that didn't happen at all.

ART: Well, I remember telling Austin that I thought that Lyke should do it, but if you, Keith, weren't comfortable with it, then I would.

AUSTIN: Right.

ART: And Austin never circled back to me to say 'oh yeah, Keith's gonna do it.'

AUSTIN: That Keith and I talked through it. Yeah. So let me just slow down and talk through this whole thing—

ART: [OVERLAPPING] Yeah, so I just came in there being like 'alright.'

AUSTIN: Let me give like, the high level—and also, Dre should talk about this, because I think Chine is Dre's character and is—I would love to hear Dre talk about this.

ART: That's who played Chine, yeah.

KEITH: Yeah. Yeah, you're right.

[DRE LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: So, that whole sequence happens the first time through, and it ends in this sort of—alright. I keep pushing for ways to de-escalate it, as if it were a real conflict between people who I care about deeply. I start introducing rolls that players need to make in order to make things happen, I start introducing—a roll will happen, and it's like, 'alright, this is still gonna fuckin' happen, someone's gonna die,' and I keep introducing new reasons to try to convince Chine to back down, or Lyke to back down. I keep trying to find the thing that will let this de-escalate. And it eventually does, right? I think the thing that ends up eventually happening is you end up—is it, Chine, you end up saying—or Dre, you end up saying that Chine won't—it's

not that you won't give It to Duvall, you would have been happy for that to happen, but it was something It-related. Correct? Do you even remember? It's been 4 months now, right?

DRE: Ohh... yeah.

ALI: I do remember.

AUSTIN: Ali, you remember this. Please, please, please.

ALI: Well, what happened is, because the conversation had come to a point where it ended up being a roll where Chine had to convince It to not—

DRE: Right, yeah, yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: Right, to go to—I say It will not leave your side. I tell you It won't do it without a roll. Which is wrong, because It would do it without a roll—that's the—It is a thing—It is not my character. It is yours. Right? And because it felt like that's where you wanted to take this story to go, and I kept trying to put the brakes on it. I kept trying to convince the rule—I kept trying to leverage the rules away from this big character confrontation, despite having spent three hours on this character confrontation slowly building, and that's what we end up doing. And we end up stepping away from it, and then individually, I talk to everybody. Dre, you weren't feeling good about it. Art, you felt like Duvall should have done—you felt like Lyke should have done it, or Duvall should have done it if Lyke didn't. Keith, you and I talked about what that might look like.

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: Dre, you were pretty certain, and this is where I'd love to hear from you, thinking about that ending and where you were with it, I think one of the things we kept coming back to is like, 'well, what's the future look like? For Chine?' And it seemed just empty.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Can you talk about where you were with Chine by that point in the story?

[DRE EXHALES]

AUSTIN: I know this is like a heavy one, or a difficult one, because this season was really hard to make.

DRE: Yeah. I mean, I think—

AUSTIN: And not in a—I don't even mean in like a meaningful, fun, 'and here's the lesson we learned' way.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Just like, in a—it's hard to carry heavy rocks.

DRE: Yeah. I mean, I think—gosh. Okay. Part of this goes back to the second or third question, the question from Dahlia about COVID. And I think the thing that I have realized about Chine more than anything is—because, Austin, you and I have talked a lot throughout the season about how I was really struggling to play Chine, and there were times where I did not—I just did not like playing Chine. Which was then kind of doubled down in a weird way, because I kept seeing a lot of people really like Chine, and really draw cool fanart, and I was like, ‘well, fuck, what is going on with me that I don’t like this character [LAUGHING] but all these other people do?’

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: And honestly, I think what it all came down to was that, like, right around the time that either we were starting or we were kind of getting into Sangfuelle, I quit my job and I started a private practice, and at the—I don’t want to say the height of the pandemic, but like, when we were still actually doing things to address a pandemic.

AUSTIN: Mhm, mhm.

KEITH: The height of federal interest in the pandemic.

DRE: Yeah, right, yeah. Federal and state government interest in acting like we’re in a pandemic. And I—honestly, I think the way that I dealt with being a mental health professional going through a pandemic, and helping people who’re also going through a pandemic, was just checking the fuck out from everything.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: And I think my—I think that is my biggest regret with Chine, is that I think a lot of times the issues that I had with Chine were the result of me kind of checking the fuck out from everything, and then having to make a snap decision. And so never really feeling like I had a good idea of how to play Chine, or who Chine was, or where to go with Chine, and I think at times that made for like, good interesting moments.

AUSTIN: I think you still—yeah. From my perspective, it still—it’s wild, because so many of the things that you end up embodying in Chine feel coherent and consistent in the sense that, like—my favorite moment of the season is when Chine meets the doppelgänger in Marrowcreek and it is not a moment of reflection, or nostalgia, or inquiry. You play Chine in exactly the way you have threatened to play Chine—

[DRE LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Which is, you belittle this person, you dismiss this person, you hurt this person, you destroy their home, you have no—you have less than no interest. There’s a degree of... not bitterness, but resentment? Or—not even resentment. It’s not as emotional or sentimental as resentment. Right?

KEITH: Animosity?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Just raw animosity. This person is nothing to you, and how dare they get in the way. And I—when I think about Chine, I think of that initial set of conversations we had about Chine. And the most telling thing that you said, and the thing that I think you did internalize from a—I don't know if you internalized it or if you just happened to play this way, but it seemed like you internalized this was—we were talking about what the difference between you and a Telluricist or a Keen like Marn would be, and you said there would be times when—you know, Telluricists are there to help people. That's what they're there to do. We had these big conversations about like, you both feel like you're variations on a Witcher in some way. You know, you're—Marn isn't a monster hunter, but is someone who is about addressing the unknown and coming to a town and helping people and figuring out what's going on there.

But with you, you are saying, with Chine, Chine and the Cleavers will often be invited to help a situation and then side with the monster. And say, 'oh, no, no, no, this is what's supposed to be happening. I'm sorry, but the werewolf is supposed to eat the child. That's what the werewolf does. That's how it's supposed to go.'

DRE: Mhm.

AUSTIN: And I think that that has been super consistent with Chine from the jump. And you know, you see a lot of that in the relationship to Blackwick, and a lot of that in the relationship to anything except for characters close to Chine. We had this conversation early about how like, player characters don't have close bonds, and Chine is the one person who is constantly like, you know, 'I put on for my city. If it's not my city, my friends.' I guess in this case. Like, 'I'm going to get between anyone who's trying to hurt one of my friends, it doesn't matter how fucked up I am, I am going to help the people who I'm close to.' And I think that that is really interesting, and I'm curious if that—is that also something you felt like is just stream of consciousness play, and not sitting with the character play?

DRE: Yeah. I mean, I think so, because like, honestly, Keith, I think when you set on the question about world-creation and stuff, I think you said you felt like you weren't as involved.

KEITH: Yeah.

DRE: That resonated with me, because I felt like there was a lot of stuff about Cleavers that like, you and I brainstormed about, Austin, that I just—I just, and we, never came back to.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

DRE: Like, I think the best mechanical example I can give would be the mechanic that I picked up about the Cleaver being able to tell stories about specific monsters and stuff like that.

AUSTIN: Right, yeah.

DRE: Which I think, again, I think we've talked about this, right? Where you've expressed regret for like, 'I wish I had given you more of those opportunities,' but honestly, I think if I were—if I hadn't been as checked out as I was at times, I would have pushed for those more and

advocated for those more. And looked for those more. So—I think I’ve gotten away from even the question you originally asked me. [LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: No, I think that this has all been very exploratory in terms of feeling in that moment that—I mean, both—it’s two sides of it. One is you not being particularly heated and tense about that moment, but the other side of it, not necessarily feeling like the way you played the first time through was tied to a big picture idea of who Chine was.

DRE: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Right?

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I think that makes sense. To get to the question of like—and we have more Chine stuff to say in literally a second, we’ll zero in on another part of that answer, or this event—but, we do—we have gotten very good, I think, or we have gotten better, at having these sorts of moments. Making sure everybody is—making sure we’re talking about character relationships and not player relationships, or player disputes, right, and importantly, giving ourselves space. We do a lot of saying ‘let’s play it out and see how it goes and if we want to change it, we can change it tomorrow.’ Which is something you can do at your home game. Like, don’t ever forget that you can say ‘let’s try this, and if we don’t like it, we can come back and change it.’

And to that end, to Kate’s part of the question of like, when is it—when do you know when to switch between in-character play and out-of-character negotiation and discussion, it’s a real ‘what’s the table feel,’ talk about that at the table, because I know that there is a style of play, because I used to play this way 19 years ago with Art, where starting to quote unquote ‘meta-game’ even in the concept of talking about what is happening inside of a character’s head is not a thing I wanted to do at the time. I wanted to always be in-character. I wanted to be RPing. Right? Like, I am making—I am *role*-playing. I am the character I am playing as, I’m going to inhabit it, I’m going to embody it, I’m going to step away and have to come down from that experience.

And that’s—I’d lean into that as much as possible when I was in college, and it’s how I liked to play. But, as a GM, I often encouraged not just doing that, and thinking like a writer. Thinking like a writer’s room. Collaborating, talking, zooming out and talking about things from narrative meaning, thinking about how systems intersect with play and encourage certain types of reading or actions. Which is a big part of how we ended up doing this, too, like, Keith, you and I went back so many times thinking about like—and we didn’t decide through this conversation, really. We ended up—it ended up still feeling like it was still kind of up in the air until we recorded it, but like, ‘is there a way for you to get a Zenith that you could trigger here that changes things, is there a way for you to—do you use—do you try to use Aterika’Kaal, do we try to use...’

KEITH: We had a really, really in-depth conversation—

AUSTIN: Yes.

KEITH: —about how to do this in a way that felt like it would work onscreen, you know?

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah. Definitely.

KEITH: I think we got there.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I think so too. I think the stuff with the—I specifically like the subtle shift in relationship with the beast, the Ravening Beast. Which is—maybe, let's talk about Fallout, I love the Ravening Beast.

KEITH: Oh, love it.

AUSTIN: What a great Fallout the Ravening Beast was. Also—

KEITH: Yeah. This is maybe the other thing, you know, when you talk about hating the Fallout, part of me is like, a part of me is—it's not just like, 'oh, I don't really know, I don't see where Austin's coming from here,' but it also feels like I haven't seen Austin feel that way when we play, because I'm always getting the Ravening Beast, and it's always so fun and exciting.
[CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: Yeah. I mean, that's the thing, when the Fallouts are great, they're prompting me to make decisions I wouldn't come up with naturally. I just happen to believe that I would like those decisions, too. You know what I mean? But I wouldn't have come up with the Ravening Beast for you, probably. There's no way. Right? It's such a particular and interesting thing. Though, actually, maybe I would have, because you were the one who came with the Ravening Beast in a sense, because it comes from your prep.

KEITH: I did, yes. Yes.

AUSTIN: It comes from you. So—

KEITH: Total coincidence that there's a move like that in the thing, but yes. I sort of simultaneously—or, I came up with it, and then there was a direct analogue in my character's book that I had literally not seen.

AUSTIN: Right. And then you didn't get rid of Ravening Call.

KEITH: No. Never did.

AUSTIN: In the same way that Marn didn't get rid of whatever the Alaway one was.

KEITH: You know what was so fun was, I always had in the back of my head, like, I could just get rid of it, and not just like 'I can get rid of this—' not like a 'I know that I could get rid of it, but I won't,' but I was like, if I was ever so flushed that I could just get rid of this, then I will,' and I really felt like that was true, and then every time it came up I was always like, 'yeah, but I really could use this d6 for—like, I really don't want to give up this last d6.' And so, every time the decision came up, I renewed, like, 'no, I will keep this item to not get rid of it.' And so it genuinely didn't ever feel like a long-term plan, like it—I almost forced it feeling like an accident that I always kept reminding myself, which is a ton of fun.

AUSTIN: Yeah, but I think about the Fallouts I really liked. Ravening Beast, ‘Alaway’s gonna come kick your ass—’ that’s the name of the Fallout.

KEITH: Yeah.

SYLVI: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Marrowcreek, the mirage one. The one that’s like ‘the next landmark you arrive at is not going to be the thing it seems like it is.’ And then Alekest. Alekest being infatuated by your knowledge of Zevunzolia and wanting to—

ALI: Oh, yeah.

AUSTIN: That’s also a Fallout.

JACK: Picking the wrong person, too.

[DRE HUMS]

AUSTIN: Right. Yes. And so, it’s interesting, ‘cause the Fallouts I don’t like are things about the moment, and the ones that I have had a good time about—Ravening Beast is often about the moment, because of how the Ravening Beast shows up, and that part’s rough.

JACK: Every time the Ravening Beast shows up is always so good.

AUSTIN: But—

KEITH: But it’s also about ‘why won’t Lyke get rid of this monster?’

AUSTIN: It’s a long-term—exactly. And the stuff that I like ends up being that long-term stuff—the Long Moon is sort of like that too—but when it was like—again, I keep coming back to like, Hex Eye, or ‘you’re Bloody now,’ or ‘your leg is busted.’

JACK: ‘You just can’t use Echo Fallout.’

AUSTIN: ‘You can’t use Echo stuff,’ like, I don’t—that’s—and, I mean, I would play in that space—I almost wish that version of the game is like, those are types of consequences that are—I don’t know. Like, it’s almost as if I—when I think about *Blades in the Dark* consequences, or *Forged in the Dark* consequences, and it being like, okay, this is the type of thing that could happen, that—you know. A wound is the type of thing that I could give you minus one dice when you’re, you know, when you’re doing blank because you’ve taken that damage, that’s available. Or in, you know, a *Powered by the Apocalypse* game, you could get a minus one to a stat temporarily, or whatever. That stuff is all available. But for whatever reason, needing to look through it every time and find the right one just really bummed me out, so. Anyway. I’m gonna move on to the next one, because we’re still on Chine time. This is a cut-down from a very long email from Arp, which says:

“In the final confrontation between Chine, Lyke, and Duvall, I couldn’t help but read Chine as having lost control of themselves in a way that looked very similar to a mental health crisis, especially since we’d already seen them snap out of a similar episode in Marrowcreek. So, the jump to lethal force from Lyke was sort of terrifying? And it’s a horror season, so great. Love to be terrified. But don’t love to see it then framed as Chine just being whimsically stubborn as a person, or having weird beliefs, unless they were, I don’t know, maybe that’s the case. But then—” The It question, earlier in this email, there’s a question about It, cycles back around.

“But I don’t know. If y’all could speak more on any of that a little, I’d appreciate it. I know I’m in the minority, but Lyke’s decision to follow through on executing Chine after they’d stopped building the dam and offered no resistance, and the subsequent—” To be clear, Chine would have kept building the dam if Lyke had left, right?

DRE: Yeah.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: “—and the subsequent lack of any consequence for that choice was very disturbing for me.”

KEITH: This is—it’s so funny, because this is like—the words ‘Chine having lost control’ and then ‘jump to lethal force,’ like, there is not a single scene in the whole thing that has more control and less jumping than this particular moment. [CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: Mhm.

KEITH: Out of character.

AUSTIN: Right, out of character. In terms of it being, like—and again, we’ve had those situations at the table before. Where it’s like, ‘oh, this is getting heated, someone is going to say that their character draws a knife.’ You know? This was so much more negotiated than that, and yet, I think going back to what Kate was saying, the way the sequence plays out, where it’s like, so much of that conversation is out of character talking through stuff, or talking through—getting clarity. Is Chine ever gonna back down on this? No? Then let’s not—we don’t have to keep going back in a circle.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: We can get this to the stakes, you know?

KEITH: If I can have two more meta-comments on this, the first one is like, you know, ‘jumping to lethal force,’ I think that there’s another sort of like, hand-wave actual play thing here, where it was like—we couldn’t sit there and do a fight. We just literally couldn’t. It was—we had been doing this for so long, and it was eight of us, and like, Chine and I have already been in this situation where we forced a bunch of people to wait while we did combat—

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. That did happen. And also, it’s not—

[DRE LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Dre was very clear, 'I will not fight back.' So it wasn't gonna be a fight.

KEITH: Right, yeah. That was the other thing is that, like, when you're doing—like, a lot of games have specific rules for PC-on-PC combat, I don't know the rules for this, but like, sort of both sides have to agree that there's going to be combat, and I can't, like, turn it into a fight-fight. And then the other thing—I just want to get this on the record, because I know people were upset that Lyke killed Chine. The thing that I said to you, Austin, when you reached out to us individually to be like 'it seems like we're gonna redo this, what are people's thoughts?'

AUSTIN: Mhm.

KEITH: I said 'I have no problem morally with Lyke killing Chine.'

[SOMEONE LAUGHS]

KEITH: If Chine didn't stop, I also wouldn't have stopped.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: If someone was telling the story after the fact, I would not want to be the guy that let Blackwick be a permanent nightmare circus because his friend really didn't want to stop, and then, you know.

AUSTIN: Right, doing this.

SYLVI: Get his ass.

DRE: Mhm.

KEITH: And that was sort of the mode that I was in, which was like, the stakes were really high. Like, this wasn't just a situation for me where my friend was doing someone that no one liked and, like, 'it's time to help my friend.' It really was like 'this is life and death for hundreds of people.' Like, literally, like this is—in an action movie analogue, this is like Chine setting a bomb, like this is the—this is a big deal. So that is my—that's how I was going into the situation. I don't know if Dre or Art have different feelings about how it happened, but.

ART: I don't know that I do have different feelings.

DRE: Yeah.

ART: Similar feelings.

AUSTIN: Dre, do you have thoughts on Chine being—I mean, I will say from the production side, one of the things I really wanted to emphasize was Chine's vision of the world. I thought a lot about how one of our first big Chine moments was the teeth, looking into the sort of like scrimshaw dream version of the Course, and I wanted to make sure that there was something like that in the moment of death, because that's what the world was to Chine. Chine—and the

Cleavers in general—have this other perspective that does not come across when you're talking about d12s. Like—and when you're talking about, like, HP and Fallout, and that's—and 'how many resources do you have in your pocket.' That is a Junk Mage way of seeing the world, right? Not to—that's not me picking on Lyke, but it is picking—it is me saying that, like, in a way *HEART* sees the world the way Lye Lychen sees the world, and I wanted to make sure we included a last vision of how Chine sees the world—and then I actually think Chine showing up in Duvall's finale, that whole finale feels very Course-y to me, also, you know?

DRE: Mm.

AUSTIN: So. But I don't know. Dre, do you have any other thoughts about the difference between being stubborn and being—like, having an episode, quote unquote, as Arp says?

DRE: Yeah. I mean, I don't... I could talk for half an hour on what it means to have a mental health crisis.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

DRE: But I think, like, to sum it up, it was like—Chine didn't fit.

KEITH: Yeah.

DRE: And I say that not as an 'aw, sad' way, because I mean, I'm with Keith, right? Like, Chine shouldn't fit if Chine trying to fit is going to end up killing or whatever-ing, you know, getting people stuck in a lifelong magic tornado circus. [CHUCKLES] That's not good. I mean, I think you can acknowledge that and still say it is, like, sad, and tragic, right?

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

DRE: That's not me saying, like, 'so yeah, don't be sad, Chine deserved to die.'

KEITH: I was very sad when we recorded it. I really felt like—

DRE: No, it—

KEITH: It felt like what Chine was doing was like, asking us to kill him.

DRE: Yeah. And I mean, I don't know if it was that far, but it was kind of like—

KEITH: Yeah.

DRE: Like, I think—

KEITH: But it was *you* asking us to kill Chine.

DRE: [LAUGHS] Not necessarily. I mean, that was not like—I didn't go into this being like, 'I want Chine to die.' Like, at all.

AUSTIN: But you did go into it with the beat—what was the exact beat, do you remember?

DRE: No, I can see if it's still on Roll20.

ALI: Destroy a Haven to, uh... [LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Destroy a Haven, right?

DRE: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: "Destroy a Haven, returning the land to the Heart." Right? And you were like, 'I'm gonna pursue this.'

DRE: Yeah.

KEITH: It's tough, because it's hard to be—

ART: [OVERLAPPING] And I don't want to make, like, a universal rule for people listening to this, but if you have a friend who is trying to trap you in an eternal clown tornado—

[AUSTIN AND ALI LAUGH]

DRE: Yeah. That's not a friend.

ART: Don't feel like you have to give them too much space there, like, you can assert your own boundaries about being in a never-ending clown tornado, and do what you need to do to leave that situation. That situation being, again, 'trapped in a clown tornado that is threatening to envelop you forever.'

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: Can we go back to the COVID question? I think I have an answer that involves the phrase 'eternal clown tornado.'

[DRE, ALI, AND AUSTIN LAUGH]

ART: Yeah, I think just back it up, I think we're not going long enough on these questions.

[AUSTIN AND JANINE CHUCKLE]

AUSTIN: This makes sense.

DRE: Yeah. I do—I like what Nathaniel just said in the chat, which is that Chine and Lyke were stuck in the cruelty of Sangfielle, and I think that is a good way to look at it.

AUSTIN: Totally. I mean, this is the, like—one of the reasons I liked this moment is because it is Sangfielle in that way, and this is the threat of spreading Sangfielle to the entire world, right? This is the trade-off of 'it's sick when you let the supernatural haunted blood fields spill out into the empire that once colonized it, and then the rest of the world as it breaks through Concentus' is that this is the stuff that happens in Sangfielle. Right? Dyre is very ready to let that happen

everywhere. Is very ready to let the Lyke-Chine confrontation happen across the entire world. One of my favorite bits is Es being like 'okay, but can I be there to kind of intercede a little bit?' So.

ALI: Yeah, I do think that's sort of some of the interesting part of that scene as like, we're talking about like, 'why were the character dynamics different this season?' And like, 'why did it feel like people weren't that close?' Like, Pickman had had that conversation with Chine, and so like, it felt like some of the characters who would have been more—I mean, I'm speaking hypothetically here, but like—

AUSTIN: Oh, I love this part of it. Yeah.

ALI: [LAUGHS] But if, you know, if Es, Pickman, and Marn had not been the people who were like 'okay, this is happening, we're gonna go deal with something else now,' and like, it is the thing of sending the wrong person in to go talk to Chine—

JACK: Yeah.

ALI: 'Cause like, there's ways for that conversation to happen differently, but that's not the scene that we had with Lyke and Duvall.

AUSTIN: And it's Chine being the wrong person to talk about what they believe, right? Like, Dyre Ode and Chine believe the same thing about the world in a real way. I mean, Chine is not a—or, sorry, Dyre is not a devotee of the Course, or is only as much as he's also a devotee of the Structure and the Shape and the blood of Sangfielle, the people of Sangfielle and everything that mixes together, but is a defender of the Course in that way, does think the Course deserves to exist, or that those that exist in it shouldn't be stuck where it is inside of these walls.

And Dyre Ode could have tried to convince Lyke of that. Dyre Ode wouldn't have been trying to destroy this particular town, because of a big difference there, you know? But Dyre wanted to go do the thing Dyre had to go do, and to do that you had to not get eaten by the clown tornado. But, I loved that disconnect between it being Lyke and Chine and not two characters who could have better enunciated the particular worldview in question and worked through it. Sorry, Art, you were going to say something. Or, Keith.

KEITH: Well, Lyke is pretty Course-y.

[ALI LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Lyke is pretty Course-y, this is what I'm saying! I actually think—

KEITH: Lyke is like the second most Course-y—

AUSTIN: I think that the two—I think that Lyke and Chine are pretty close on this stuff.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Like, Lyke also believes in taking care of monsters, you know?

[KEITH LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: You're two people with pet monsters, truly.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: You had two pet monsters! You had three if you count Tombo!

[ALI, KEITH, AND JACK LAUGH]

JACK: Which you should!

KEITH: I think that we're stretching the definition of 'pet.'

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. Or 'monster,' one or the other. No, Tombo's a monster, for sure.

KEITH: No, Tombo's the only [one of the] three of them that was a monster.

[ALI AND AUSTIN LAUGH]

AUSTIN: Tombo resents that.

[KEITH LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Yeah, but like, that to me is the best part of this conversation, is like, Chine knows this stuff, knows what they feel about the world, and is a killer. That's like, the thing that you're good at doing. You didn't have Haven, I don't think, Chine, or talk—what's the talk verb in this game?

ALI: Compel?

AUSTIN: Compel.

JACK: Would have had Haven if I brought them back the chair.

AUSTIN: The chair, the chair, yeah, true. True, true, true.

JACK: Yeah, that pleasant chair. I think something that was—no, let's move on.

AUSTIN: No, wait, what?

JACK: I mean, I suppose, real quick, like something that was important for me in playing Pickman, and was like, deeply frustrating, but was sort of part in parcel with the character and so I didn't feel too internally bad about, is that Pickman has a pretty rich internal—Pickman thinks about—Pickman is not blunt on the inside.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: I think Pickman is thinking things through, and she has ideas about the world, and she has ideas about how people in the world should be treated, but she does not have the experience or vocabulary to be able to output those ideas. I really have—I've never thought of

Pickman as someone who's unemotional, or, you know, in that—Pickman, there is more to Pickman inside, between the horns, than there is what comes out of her mouth.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: And something that was just so fun and so frustrating when Pickman goes to speak to Chine is, was trying to articulate—was trying to perform Pickman knowing that this was wrong, but not being able to explain why. And I'm so delighted that it didn't work, Pickman bounced, and then they sent in the wrong people.

AUSTIN: Right. Right. Alright. Keepin' movin'. "How do you—" Anonymous writes: "How do you decide what moments in the show get a soundtrack? Do you know in the moment or do you figure it out later?" Speaking of moments that got soundtracks.

[ALI CHUCKLES]

JACK: Mm. I mean, our answer to this is sort of pretty consistent with the seasons that we make, but I want to make a big caveat here, which is that this soundtrack was produced during COVID, and getting the show soundtracked is a real process that Ali and Austin and I are kind of all involved with, but it is one that is time-consuming and difficult. So, there were scenes in this that I would have liked to have soundtracked, but I also don't lose sleep over the fact that we didn't. Just because the material conditions of making Sangfielle and making music and making anything during a pandemic are gonna make things harder. But it's—

KEITH: You also had specifically a particularly busy year.

JACK: I immigrated, and immigration was horrible, and it is hard to make music when you are, like, physically trying to do other things that have time commitments, and it's also hard to try and think creatively when you're spending all your time thinking about how immigration works. But in terms of how we decide, there's sort of three ways—and I think Ali and Austin can help me out here if not—either we'll hear a scene in the recording and we will all agree 'okay, this needs music,' and sort of straight away I will put a message in the chat and say 'hey, can I get a copy of this scene when it's done?' And we talk it over and I send through scratch-tracks, which are sort of like sketches really, very unpolished sort of attempts at ideas, and I'm so grateful at having done this for so long Ali and Austin are both pretty confident that no matter how horrible the scratch-track I send them is, it will get rendered out into something listenable by the end.

The other way we do it is that I won't be in the recording, and Ali or Austin will send me something and go 'we think this might be good for music,' and we'll talk it through and pick it. And the third way is that I will listen to a scene and go 'this needs music' and everybody else will go [UNCERTAIN] 'does it?' And then—[LAUGHS] And then either it will, or it won't.

AUSTIN: [CHUCKLES] Mostly it does, if you ID something that does, it tends to be yes.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Also, it tends to mean you have an idea, and I think Ali and I are—it's rare that we're like, 'don't follow that idea,' you know?

JACK: Sometimes what will happen is I'll write demos for it and it just won't work. This happens maybe more than you would think, listening to the final show, but like, I write a lot of music for the seasons that doesn't get—let me see. How many files are in my scratch-track folder for Sangfielle? Will they tell me how many files are in this folder?

AUSTIN: While you're finding that, I will say that—

JACK: 53. [CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: Jeez. Jeez. Normally, in the rare case that you say 'I think we should do a song for here' and Ali and I say like, 'mm... maybe not,' it is really only because we know there is another big song—

JACK: Yes.

AUSTIN: —that's either just after it or before it, maybe, and we're like, 'just get the one. Just do the one we know we need, you don't have to do This Year of Ours or This Month of—This Day of—' what was our—

JACK: This Year of Ours.

AUSTIN: This Year of Ours, yeah, yeah, yeah. This Month of Ours is COUNTER/Weight.

JACK: When every character had a theme.

AUSTIN: Yes, yes.

JACK: In the end, I really only wrote two character themes for this, which was Lye, and was all the stuff surrounding Chine.

AUSTIN: I thought that was your way of saying that you were lying just now.

[GROUP LAUGHTER]

AUSTIN: 'Which was lie.'

JACK: But, you know, writing character themes is *exhausting* and it's really stressful, because I don't want to make an assumption about someone's character musically. I think the role of a composer is to kind of help explore what the rest of the story is telling.

AUSTIN: And we don't have the rest of the story, Jack.

JACK: Yeah. Uh-huh.

AUSTIN: That's part of it, right?

JACK: I mean the rest of the story other than the composer, you know?

AUSTIN: I get that, but I'm saying that like, if you were to write a Lye Lychen theme today, I bet it would sound a little bit different than it did when you wrote Lye six tracks into the theme, right? That's actual play.

JACK: Yeah. A hundred percent.

AUSTIN: Baby.

KEITH: I love the character themes, personally.

JACK: I'm happy with them, but—and I'm glad to hear that, but I do always feel when it's like 'oh, god, now I've got to write a theme for Duvall or something,' it's like, is the thing I think I am communicating about Duvall different from what Art thinks he is communicating about Duvall? Even Pickman Goes Home is not a Pickman theme, I thought about doing a Pickman theme, but—[SIGHS]

AUSTIN: I mean, Pickman's in such a weird place at the end of this. Like, I don't know what a Pickman theme even sounds like yet, you know?

JACK: That is music about finding yourself back in Sangfielle.

AUSTIN: Yes.

JACK: And going, 'here we are.'

AUSTIN: God. That's a fun ending. Fun ending track.

JACK: Sometimes we cut music. We write a bunch of it, and then it just absolutely doesn't work.

AUSTIN: That's very rare. Don't tell people that, because they're gonna think that we threw out a bunch of songs, Jack.

[ALI LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: That has not happened. When has that happened?

JACK: When I start composing a thing and go 'I'm gonna try and write music for this scene,' and then it just doesn't happen, because I can't think of an idea good enough.

AUSTIN: Yeah, but that's not the same. That's not the same thing as throwing finished—

JACK: Yeah, we don't cut finished. We don't cut finished. No, we don't—

AUSTIN: I just don't want people to get the wrong feeling.

KEITH: People are gonna be clamoring for the uncut soundtrack.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

[ALI LAUGHS]

ART: Yeah, well, I mean, we don't cut everything except that full-length scoring of all of Marielda that we finished, produced, mixed—

[ALI LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Right, right, right. Mixed, yeah.

ART: —and then threw away.

JACK: My god.

ART: I think it's on physical hard drives buried in the desert.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Which desert? You'll have to find out.

ART: Yeah, try all of them.

[KEITH LAUGHS]

ART: Remember, Antarctica is also a desert.

AUSTIN: It's true.

JACK: Something I did for Sangfielle in part because I knew nothing about the world or the characters in it once I had to shift focus, was I started writing themes for fictitious places and scenes.

AUSTIN: Oh, true.

JACK: And sending them to Austin. My early notes are called—my first note is called 'this season's going to kill me,' and then I have 'Blood in the Vine,' which ends up becoming all to do with the hymn of the Mother-beast, and then 'Plaguelands River Boat,' which I wrote before we did—that was before we even started the show, but ends up being kind of the Jade Moon.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: And then 'Fire Sprites Demo.'

AUSTIN: Oh, right.

JACK: And you liked Fire Sprites enough, Austin, that when I sent it to you, you said 'I'm gonna have to set something on fire in the next arc just to use this.' [CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: We didn't do that, though, did we?

JACK: But we didn't, no.

AUSTIN: Damn. Save that. We'll come back to it. Set something on fire next season.

JACK: Yeah.

KEITH: So, everyone keep your eyes out for a fire.

AUSTIN: Mhm. Be careful. It's out there. I'm gonna move on. Janine, can you read this from Collin?

JANINE: Yeah. "Hey friends, I have a question about the way GM prep worked for Austin in *HEART*, both within individual sessions/arcs and bigger picture, and how it interacted with player decisions and Fallout. Did you prep Fronts that built up over time, transforming through PC intervention and neglect? Was it more session by session? For example, in the Just Returns arc, did you have Fronts or some similar threat clock type situation for the Magistratum and the wax vampire going on in the background while the Blackwick company were off doing something else, and this is where those countdowns were at when they got back to Blackwick, or when you sat down to prep those sessions, did you have a looser sense of 'these are the threats that are in play that make sense to have come to a head here?' How much of the wax vampire stuff came out of Marn's Fallout in the moment during the session vs. what you'd prepped?"

AUSTIN: So, for people who don't know, 'Fronts' was a term from—'Fronts' is really a term from *Apocalypse World*, but then gets used also by *Dungeon World*, which we ran Hieron in, and then things like threat clocks you might remember from us playing various *Forged in the Dark* games, or *The Sprawl*, where there were kind of corporation clocks. These are all tools that we've used in the past, that I've used in the past as a GM, to keep track of big-picture threats. Other factions and organizations looking to pursue things, you know. *Beam Saber*, that we use for PARTIZAN has an entire faction system that does a great job of tracking other factions pursuing their ends. In COUNTER/Weight, on top of the corporate clocks, we also did the *Stars Without Number* and *Microscope* game with Sylvi and Dre, and that had big factional and narrative implications.

HEART doesn't have any of it. *HEART* says 'stop planning. Stop it. Stop doing planning.' You know, build and break tension, you hear me say this stuff, right? You hear me read my interpretation of their goals at the beginning of every episode and it's build and break tension, you know, ask—stop—'don't plan and ask questions' or something like that, 'evoke an atmosphere of wonder, horror, and humanity,' or something like that, 'build and break tension.' And so, that is like—that is it. There—*HEART* is not a game about factions. We've specifically picked one that wasn't about factions for the reason we talked about before, in terms of trying to do an episodic season. Like, you know, if all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail. If all you give me is clocks and faction rules, I'm going to tell a story about factional interaction and involvement. This is not that story. Right?

Yes, there are some big organizations in it. Yes, the Wrights of the Seventh Sun are sort of working toward something. I wasn't ever, ever, ever keeping track of how close they were to doing a thing, because that's not what *HEART* is. And I'm not going to try to—I'm pro-hacking games, I in a descriptivist sense believe that basically everybody plays hacked RPGs, that there are always house rules, large and small, that people make, I don't think that's a problem with them, I think that's a feature, I think games like *Apocalypse World* lean into that feature and give you the toolsets you need to improvise new rules on the spot, and so, all that's good, but I don't

like to take a game and make it my thing, and I instead prefer to find the thing to play that version of the game. Right? Like, if I wanted this to be a season where I did have fronts and factions, and threat clocks, I would have decided we should have played something else. And instead I wanted to really lean in, really give this style of play a shot.

What ended up happening is around Bell Metal Station, we get the Wrights, it becomes clear that people are kind of interested in that, or at least sort of interested in Calen, I think about the big Zevunzolia model reveal as being a potentially fun follow-on to that, that stuff feels like 'okay, this could become a long-term plot that we come back to in future seasons, so let me give that some air space.' Alaway comes back because Marn has the 'I'm gonna come kick your ass' fallout. If Marn gets rid of that, it doesn't happen. Right? And that's not me putting that on Ali, that—I'm grateful that Ali didn't get rid of it, because it was a weird one to feel like how you would get rid of it would be to—I don't know how you would have gotten rid of that narratively.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Mechanically, you would have spent a resource at the right thing. You know? And we would have had to come up with something.

ALI: Right. That's why I never touched it, because I was like, I'm not just gonna give someone, like, a weird fork and then this guy isn't gonna be mad at me anymore.

AUSTIN: Exactly.

ALI: Like, that's not... yeah.

AUSTIN: Exactly. And so, there is a real desire on my part not to try and invent mechanics for stuff like that. Fallout represents a lot of that stuff. That stuff is there. And so, I felt like doing a mission about—and also narrative stakes do, right? Like, there are consequences for things. It was very—the stakes of that very first adventure were 'hey, if you kill this guy, people are going to come looking for him.' And they did. You know? And so, no, didn't really manage anything. The only way to think about it is that any time a big Fallout hits, that could be about one of the pieces on the board that you have. So, yeah. That's my short answer there.

Otherwise, I prepped a lot like I do with *Blades* in terms of—especially for something like Just Returns, right, where I have a pretty good understanding of what the—Just Returns and the final arc, the—what is the actual name of that arc? Is it Dead in the Dust? And Also Wax, Ichor, and Iron. Those final few, I had a pretty good idea of what's going on in Blackwick, where the threats are, and so my *Blades* prep-style which is like 'build *Hitman* levels in my mind' on paper, ends up being pretty useful for that, so. Like, 'here is a place, here is where the people kind of are, move those around if you need to to make the story make sense. Don't worry about it so much.' You know? So, there you go.

Dre, can you read this from Hazel?

DRE: Yeah. “Hello, I’m very interested in how you handled Sylvi’s shift from playing Virtue into playing Hazard. It was a very bold move that worked out incredibly well, and I’d love to hear more about what drove that decision and how you handle changing major characters mid-season from both a narrative and organizational standpoint.”

SYLVI: I mean, the way it happened was that it fell into our laps, specifically. Like, I don’t think—this wasn’t one of the ones that we planned ahead of time, I think when it happened, we were just like, happy with it. We didn’t go back and record anything extra. Did we do pick-ups for that? I don’t remember doing pick-ups for that.

AUSTIN: I want to say Keith and I maybe did a pick-up on the beach or something? I don’t—maybe we didn’t. I don’t remember doing any big pick-ups for that.

SYLVI: Yeah.

KEITH: Yeah, the only thing that might have gotten picked up was like, where I woke up when this was over.

AUSTIN: Yes. That makes sense.

KEITH: I can’t remember if we ever did anything, but I remember you—

AUSTIN: Maybe we talked about it and then didn’t end up doing it. I don’t remember.

KEITH: Yeah, we definitely talked about it. We can agree on that we talked about it.

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah. Anyway.

SYLVI: Yeah, and so like, it—the shift to Hazard kind of came abruptly because of that, and like—we talked earlier about how nobody really did the thing of looking at, like, a calling and a class and wanting to—and just mashing those together and making a character out of it, but that’s what I did with Hazard.

AUSTIN: Right.

SYLVI: It, like—I knew the Incarnadine had some cool moves, that’s what kind of got me drawn to that, and then I started trying to figure things out until I think you sent me the *ICHOR-DROWNED* book, and it had the Retribution Calling, and that was when I was like ‘oh, that’s a really easy way to get a character into something halfway through.’

AUSTIN: Right. Yeah.

SYLVI: Especially when—like, my idea was that Hazard would eventually hire the group instead of just hanging around while they fell apart, but it works out either way.

[AUSTIN AND KEITH CHUCKLE]

SYLVI: Yeah, and it just seemed a really easy singular motivation to get a character that could—

AUSTIN: Late in the season.

SYLVI: —branch into more stuff, but like, was tied enough to things that we'd already established. It just kind of worked out in a very happy way. And then—have I—I don't think I've done the mid-season shift before. I think this was the first time I've done it.

AUSTIN: I think so.

SYLVI: It's not that hard.

AUSTIN: Wow, damn.

KEITH: Wow. Called out.

[ALI LAUGHS]

JACK: I was going to say though, Sylvi, you're kind of a pro at this, right? Because you—

[SYLVI LAUGHS]

JACK: You're the one of us who makes back-up characters every season.

SYLVI: That's just because I like making OCs. I'm part of the DeviantArt generation, baby.

[GROUP LAUGHTER]

JACK: When I lose characters mid-way through a season, I'm like, 'okay, Christ, who's gonna show up now?'

KEITH: Yeah.

JACK: But I—

SYLVI: Go ahead.

JACK: No, I don't know, was it—did you find that your experience in being like 'I've already got someone in the back pocket' made it easier?

SYLVI: Well, it wasn't—so, I didn't really have someone in the back pocket, I had like other ideas for characters that Virtue almost was that I like picked and chose. The decapitation thing linking both my characters kind of obviously is a thing there. But like, the whole like, having the head stolen and trying to hunt that down was a flip of a thing I was gonna do with a different class that I'm not talking about in specific, because I still might use that idea for something.

AUSTIN: Who knows? You can always come back around to it, right?

SYLVI: Yeah. But yeah, it—I think something that helps too, with doing it, was that we kind of had figured out the world of Sangfielle more by the time I was doing it with Hazard.

AUSTIN: Yes.

SYLVI: Like, it was—stuff was established, I wasn't—I didn't have as many, like, possibilities in mind in a weird way while also having the possibilities that were there way more focused. Like, I think we had pretty recently— isn't it like Bell Metal and then we go to Sapodilla?

AUSTIN: Sapodilla right after that, yeah.

SYLVI: Like, we very recently found out about the Wrights, and that was such an easy in to sort of tie Hazard into what I considered sort of the main plot of the season in a lot of ways.

AUSTIN: Which then helped cement it as a main plot, right? Because it was like 'oh, now I have a character who cares about this in a very direct, you know, what's the—Calling-related way,' and so like, that helps cement it in a way, which is nice.

SYLVI: Yeah. But yeah, so much of Hazard was situational. The card shark thing, that just came because you mentioned the book. Or not the book, the boat.

AUSTIN: The boat, yeah.

SYLVI: B-words, they're hard. That just kind of, I was like, oh, I wanted Hazard to have something that—I think I mentioned I wanted them to have something that they played with, like fidgeted with, or some element of chance with them.

AUSTIN: Right. And cards came right there, yeah. It was perfect.

SYLVI: And you were like, 'they're gonna be on this boat, how about cards?' And the rest is history.

AUSTIN: Boom. Boom.

SYLVI: Yeah. I don't know if I have—

AUSTIN: True False War champion. Or I guess dealer, not champion—you also did not...

SYLVI: Yeah, we never got to see Hazard actually—we never got to see the king of card games, you know?

[DRE CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: Yeah, I feel you. Damn, true.

ART: A great opportunity to announce that Duvall is retiring as—

AUSTIN: Oh, okay. [LAUGHS] I just remembered another moment I love which is the confrontation with Uno Riscano in the showers of the slaughterhouse between—that's just such a funny fucked-up little fight and encounter.

SYLVI: That is like when I figured out who Hazard was, too.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVI: Like, that specific scene, I was like ‘oh, okay. This guy’s a weirdo.’

AUSTIN: [CHUCKLES] Incredible. Alright, I’m gonna keep moving. Ali, can you read this one from Bane?

ALI: Yeah. From Bane: “Hi there. Sangfielle and Hieron both take place in fantasy worlds, albeit quite different flavors of fantasy. Were there any points where it was difficult to avoid re-treading old ground since the genres were more similar to one another than the sci-fi world of the Divine Cycle, or was it easy enough given the different worldbuilding and systems?”

AUSTIN: I think it kept happen—at the end, it kept happening, which is very funny to me. Fuckin’ Art’s game where—Art’s finale, the ‘Duvall wanders into a god’s forge’ is like, alright, well, here we are. But I also think it’s worth saying just outright that like, there was a point at which we were like, ‘oh, is Sangfielle going to be a sequel to Hieron?’ And like, some of the—I think some of the ghostly overlaps between the two are echoes of that being one of the places where we started, was like, ‘we would love to do a show that’s a deep distant follow-up to Hieron. That could be a fun thing to do.’ We ended up going away from that, but I think that there are many echoes of that still, and I think that that’s a fun—you know, I think we managed to do the thing I love, which is that *Dark Souls* is not a sequel to *Demon Souls*. It just isn’t. And yet, it’s fun to think about how the two can be connected, right? And I think that that happened a lot this season, and I think it happened—there are ways in which I’m happy to play with it, and evoke it, without it being true.

But, what I think is really important is, the end of Es’s finale is like, you know, we basically say ‘whatever this world was before, it’s Sangfielle now.’ Right? So I think even if you read this whole world as being a Hieron 2 in some way, it isn’t anymore. Right? Or it has its own identity. And I think there were points at which I was very afraid of that overlap, and very interested in pulling the trigger and saying ‘ooh, I know we said we weren’t gonna do, but what if we did it? What if we did it finally?’ Still, like, one of the first images I had of this years ago was like—when it was still more *Bloodborne*-y and maybe you were all gonna be Masters students in, like, thaumaturgy or whatever, it was like someone picking up a locket and seeing a character from Hieron in it. Right? And like, we decided, and I think correctly, we never want to do it like that. Right? We never want it to be, ‘boom, here is the one-to-one direct thing.’ Right?

But I think there’s lots of fun echoes of it, like, my favorite one—and this is the funniest thing, is I feel like talking about it takes the power out of it, because it means we can never use it as a punch, and so I’m happy to talk about it. But like, the three-faced god of death and fire in the Triadic Pyre—

JACK: Oh, yeah.

AUSTIN: —is very easy to read as a trio of characters who had death as a central pivot point. Right? Except that our version of them is the god of lightning—the goddess of lightning, and instant justice, like, ‘okay I can kind of work with that,’ the smiling god of death, ‘ooh, okay, I can see—ooh, the smiling god of death? Very interesting.’ And then a big fuck-off train.

[CHUCKLES] And then it's like, okay, well that just doesn't map one-to-one with three Hieron characters.

SYLVI: Except for the fact that they're still a polycule.

[ALI CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: They are still a polycule. Right, of course. And so in that way, it still works. But like, it doesn't work, and to me that's so much more interesting than if it didn't. Do you know what I mean, like?

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Again, part of me likes talking about this because it takes the—it changes it. But like, you can straight up read the godly duel that Marn walks into as like a complete follow-on to the end of Spring in Hieron. To the epilogues of Spring in Hieron. You can totally decode what's happening there. And like, I don't know that it even happened. Who could say? It doesn't matter. You know?

JACK: But like, I want to be as clear as possible, we are not telling you, the listener, that that is what it is. This is not us sneakily saying—

AUSTIN: No, it isn't. I'm in fact telling you it isn't that. Right?

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And I'm doing it because it prevents me from ever saying it is. You know what I mean? And more importantly, even if that was your reading, the end of Sangfielle undoes it in a real way, because the strangeness, the truth of the Heartland, seeps out and covers the world. Right? It completely rewrites the entire world into being Sangfielle.

KEITH: We've talked about and gone in and out of this idea so much—

AUSTIN: Totally.

KEITH: —that right now is the only time I've ever felt sure one way or the other what the fuck Sangfielle is.

[DRE AND JACK CHUCKLE]

AUSTIN: And that's why I wanted to pull the trigger on it. That's why I was like, let's answer this question, because it's gonna force us to say it, and then it'll take it off the table in a way. Right?

KEITH: I also—

ART: [OVERLAPPING] The other important—oh.

AUSTIN: Yeah, Art, you should say your thing. You should—

KEITH: Yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: Go ahead. Finish your thought.

ART: No, mine is a joke, so Keith should go.

AUSTIN: Oh. Keith should go, yeah.

KEITH: Okay. I—you started talking about this, and I was like, ‘is this a fake? Is this a head fake—’ like, I genuinely don’t know. Like, are you doing a head fake? Is this about to set some rug-pull for next season, or is this real, did you finally decide?

AUSTIN: Don’t say rug-pull, people are gonna think we are getting into NFTs. We’re not.

[KEITH LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: I know a rug-pull predates NFTs, I’m not...

ART: We are getting into Ponzi schemes, though, so, um... just send us some money and we’ll keep it.

KEITH: Yeah, we don’t know what a Ponzi scheme is, but we are starting one.

AUSTIN: [CHUCKLING] Art, we’re doing that now, it’s called running a business, it’s our Patreon. We’re already taking money from people.

ART: But no, yeah. So the important—two important takeaways here: one, Sangfielle is *not* a direct sequel to Hieron.

AUSTIN: Yes.

ART: Two, it *is* a direct sequel to *Demon Souls*.

AUSTIN: [CHUCKLING] That’s correct. Yes.

[JACK AND KEITH LAUGH]

SYLVI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: The fog has spread out—

ART: We’ve removed a fair bit, but yeah.

AUSTIN: Boletaria and Aldomina are very close, and the fog is seeping in.

JACK: And we got the rights.

AUSTIN: And we did get the rights from Sony, actually, we did—we made a big trade—

SYLVI: [LAUGHING] I thought you meant the Wrights of the Seventh Sun.

AUSTIN: Oh. [LAUGHS] Boo.

SYLVI: I was so confused, I was like, wait, were they in *Demon Souls*?

AUSTIN: I mean, Art, do you want to say what your very first idea of Duvall was?

ART: Oh, yeah. That Duvall is a jar of bees. That Duvall is the Heat and the Dark made into a person—

SYLVI: Oh. That's good.

AUSTIN: And again, there are still ways you could make that read. I love it. It's so good. But it's also the opposite structure being—it can't be right, because you are actually from the Structure. But you are a jar of bees, you know?

[SYLVI CHUCKLES]

ART: Right. And yeah, that Duvall was going to be like a conduit for the Heat and the Dark as like a before-thing, a primordial force, and it just didn't work out.

AUSTIN: It just doesn't work right. You know? But I love imagining a world in which there are lore videos from fuckin' Vaati being like... you know.

[ALI CHUCKLES]

SYLVI: Vaati, please listen to our show.

JACK: Oh my god.

SYLVI: We'll start writing item descriptions, I promise.

[ALI LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: We will, we'll get there. We used to do—you know, I think our intros used to have the item description quality to them in a sense.

JACK: The tracks in Sangfielle all have a little description that feel like item descriptions..

AUSTIN: Yes. This is true, this is true.

JACK: This venn diagram with Hieron was something I thought about a lot in the music in the back half of the season. I don't think I talked to you about this.

AUSTIN: Well, we talked about it right away because you wanted to use a clarinet, and I was like, 'Jack, you can't use a clarinet this season.'

JACK: And then, Austin, do you remember who added the clarinet back?

AUSTIN: Was it me?

JACK: It was you.

AUSTIN: Fuck.

JACK: I actually have a message from you somewhere in which you say 'Jack, I hate to be the one saying it, but [JACK LAUGHING] I think we need the clarinet back.'

AUSTIN: Was it for Sapodilla? What was it for?

JACK: No, it was for the theme.

AUSTIN: Oh, the main theme. Oh! Because you had done a version of it with the clarinet, and I was like, 'ooh, we can't use this clarinet,' and then I was like 'I miss the clarinet.' Right?

[ALI CHUCKLES]

JACK: Yeah. But the big thing for me was I have absolutely no interest ever in being like 'the twist is that it's in Hieron, here comes the Hieron theme.'

AUSTIN: Right, right. Yes.

JACK: I couldn't think of a way—

AUSTIN: What a disservice we would do to all of these characters to make them just a conduit for Hieron.

JACK: And to the work we've done making Hieron.

AUSTIN: Totally, totally.

JACK: You know, saying 'now we're gonna come back in a weird way.' But something I did do was play with themes and tones that I knew would resonate in certain ways to listeners, such that—

AUSTIN: Yes, yes.

JACK: The biggest one for me was all the stuff surrounding the Course and the stuff surrounding Chine dying. I wanted to carry a similar feel that we often heard associated with being welcomed into the arms of a god in Hieron.

AUSTIN: Right, sure.

JACK: I'm thinking of stuff like The Warmth of Love, where there's this sort of keening welcoming feeling where even in the midst of this chaos, there is a warmth and a comfort that can be found. And I did that less because I was going 'ooh, and it's actually all about Samoths,' or whatever, and more because I'm like—

[ALI AND SYLVI LAUGH]

JACK: This is the audio language of the show—

AUSTIN: Of the show. Right. Yep.

JACK: —that we have set up, and this is a way to talk about this feeling that I know will, whether or not it is directly visible to listeners, will be legible to listeners in one way or another.

AUSTIN: Yep. We think about this stuff all the time. Like, you know. Sapodilla is very clearly a strange echo of Marielda, I think that there's stuff like that throughout—in terms of down—or Velas, right? Like, in my mind, the map of Sapodilla actually looks a lot like the map of Velas in my head, because it's a sea-side town with these strangely named districts, and you build out from there. And there are times this season where I've been writing in that direction, like, 'oh, no, I can't, this is too far. This is like corny, actually,' and I will stop doing it. But there are other times where I'm like 'oh, that's really fun.'

But the stuff I ended up really loving about this season was like, the—again, if we talk about Marrowcreek as what's probably—with some caveats—one of my favorite arcs coming out of the mirage Fallout—not Twilight Mirage—that's a line that I have no interest in crossing, by the way. The Divine Cycle to either of our fantasy seasons, or series, I have like—that doesn't excite me in any way. That I think is just fully corny, whereas this stuff I think is kind of like fun to think about, even if it's not true. The—Marrowcreek first shows up in interviews at the Gates of Sapodilla as this town that keeps recurring in my mind. Like, I can see the coloring of the ground and the dust and the fountain that shows up in Sylvi's, in Virtue's interview, in Marn's interview, and I want to say in Lyke's also.

KEITH: Yep.

AUSTIN: And I was like, 'is this a real place?' And then we joke about it being a real place, and then I'm like, 'oh, it's a real place.' But also, you're not in the real version of the real place. That to me is so much more interesting than anything we would ever do that is like 'and actually it's Rosemerrow' or 'actually it's da-da-da.' And like, that's fine.

KEITH: It's funny, 'cause the fake version of the real place was kinda scary, but the real version of the real place sounded kinda scary too.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I mean, it's a scary place. Yeah, totally. Did you—is that where you ended up going? You went to the real version of the real place? Or did you end up going to the fake version of the real place?

KEITH: We don't know.

AUSTIN: We don't know. I don't think we know. Yeah. A hundred percent. Anyway.

KEITH: If that's wrong and we do know, then I apologize, but I don't think we know.

AUSTIN: Yeah, who could say? No one knows. Alright, I'm gonna keep moving. Keith, can you read this from Brendan?

KEITH: From Brendan, yes, I can. “Hi friends! While listening to this season, I was completely captivated by Dyre Ode, a person whom we heard on the cast only a few times, yet who we know has great importance to the way the story unfolded. Austin is incredibly good at creating and writing these types of people; I was wondering what the cast thinks of Dyre Ode, and more specifically, what caused Es to inquire Dyre Ode every time they showed up? Or was Austin playing it in such a way that intentionally steered her in that direction?”

AUSTIN: [CHUCKLING] Janine?

JANINE: [LAUGHING] Um... So, the last part of this is what makes me laugh, the ‘was Austin playing it in such a way that intentionally steered her, steered me, in that direction.’

[AUSTIN CHUCKLES]

JANINE: I, like—whenever we were just like, chatting about how things should go on Discord or something, I brought Dyre up what feels like constantly—

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JANINE: —because I wanted to make it very clear to Austin that I was interested in seeing more of this character—

[AUSTIN LAUGHS]

JANINE: [LAUGHS] —and that I specifically was like—I want to say quietly shipping, but like, not so quietly—

[SYLVI LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: It was not quiet at all. Are you kidding me?

JANINE: No.

AUSTIN: I mean, I guess we talk more often, but still.

JANINE: Yes, yeah. And also, like, you—

KEITH: I didn't pick up on it.

[ALI LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: You never do. [CHUCKLES]

JANINE: You—[CHUCKLES] Wow.

AUSTIN: I'm not being—just, that's not the way Keith engages with these stories. It's just not—

JANINE: You also, Austin—you know like, my type.

AUSTIN: [CHUCKLING] Yes, I do.

JANINE: Like you know how—even if you don't—I don't know if you deliberately set out to make a character that would appeal to me—

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

JANINE: But I think it becomes immediately clear when a character has appealed to me. And, I wasn't trying to be like—

AUSTIN: [OVERLAPPING] [CHUCKLING] I knew what I was doing.

JANINE: [LAUGHING] '—hey, by the way, this character appeals to me.'

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

JANINE: And that—so, it was just that. It's—sometimes it can just be that. Sometimes you can be into a character and be like 'hey, how about that guy shows up?'

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. Yeah. Yes, a hundred percent. No, and I think that that was like—I wish they had had more time together, but part of the thing that's tough is that like, Dyre's mystique is about being the sort of person who's off doing their own thing, right?

JANINE: Yeah. He shows up when you least expect it.

AUSTIN: He has to roll—exactly. He has to roll up in the middle of your terrifying 'I'm trying to rescue our friend from the authoritarian fascist magic cop prison' and be like 'actually, I'll pay you if you go down there and get something after you do that, and then I'll reward you with a fancy cloak.' [CHUCKLING] You know?

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: 'I have gifts for you,' it has to be—you know, that has to be out of nowhere for it to work. And so he was not someone who could just be around, right? I did think about having having them on the Jade Moon, but then I was like, 'ah, we just got Dyre.' That would be fun to have an opportunity to have more scenes with people, especially with Es, but Dyre is—Dyre's going over the mountains to go deal with some stuff over there. Dyre's prepping for this thing.

KEITH: I couldn't tell you one thing about Dyre Ode.

AUSTIN: See, this is what I mean. This is—yeah. It's fine.

JANINE: I do regret that we didn't get more brunch chatter.

AUSTIN: That's fair. Yes.

JANINE: Or more like breakfast-brunch-lunch chatter at the very very end there.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: I think I was more... it was a little unclear how much we wanted from those scenes.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: So I think if I had known, I might have like... languished in it a little bit more. [LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Mhm. That's fair. Well, we can just say they did. It's a shame that we didn't get to record that, but, you know, I'm sure they had a great time on their way.

JANINE: Mhm.

AUSTIN: We're gonna only do a couple more now as we wrap up. We are running out of time, people have hard outs, but I want to get a couple more in here before we finish. Here is one from Tara, who says: "This is the first year I've followed Friends at the Table, so I may have missed past discussions on social media, but after catching up on previous seasons, it seems like Sangfielle has had the most uncertainty about where it would end. What influenced that?"

I'm gonna actually roll this in from another question from Matthias who says: "Besides *HEART: The City Beneath*, what other games do you think could work well in a Sangfielle/Concentus setting? Were there other games you considered before settling on *HEART*?" Because those are two of the same question, IMO. Effectively.

What happened? I mean, from a broad perspective, there's a lot of moments—and this does happen every season, where I'm like, I don't—I think the season is over. I think—famously, I think I said that after the *Kingdom* game in COUNTER/Weight, or maybe one arc thereafter. I—

ART: It would have been weird in retrospect.

AUSTIN: Well, we would have done COUNTER/Weight Season 2 the way we did Hieron. Right? And that would have been a longer season than what followed. Right?

ART: Hmm.

AUSTIN: And so, it would be a different world, certainly. Like, we would live in a different world because who knows if—maybe we would have just finished up COUNTER/Weight last season. You know? It's totally possible that that would have happened.

KEITH: Damn.

AUSTIN: It's a weird world to think about. But I really didn't know how we were gonna end this season coming off of Sapodilla and Jade Moon, and was like 'I think we're gonna come back and have this confrontation with the Magistrates and maybe with Alaway and that'll be it.' And then, of course, then Marrowcreek happened. And then we had to get those characters back to Blackwick which meant that their travel had to happen, and so that meant there had to be a lead-in arc with the people who had already gotten back there so we got Just Returns, and then we had to have the Fallout from stuff going bad with Alaway, or like, mostly it being about stopping the Magistrates, and Alaway gets to win, and then was the real 'who the hell knows what we're doing?' I think we've talked—this is the most we've talked about 'what the fuck are we doing' at the end of a season, ever. Ever, ever, ever. [CHUCKLES] It just did not—

KEITH: Although, it seems like it is harder every time. At least for the last—

AUSTIN: PARTIZAN—was PARTIZAN this hard?

KEITH: It was the second hardest, I think. Right?

AUSTIN: Harder than Spring?

KEITH: Oh, okay. Spring.

[ALI LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Spring. And we did—I think Spring was way easier than this, but that's retrospective, right?

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: We originally were like—oh my god. We originally—

KEITH: I thought we did the longest season in the world, and it was really easy to come to an end because we had done so much, and then no one wants to do a season as long as Twilight Mirage again, and we end up with like, things that we still want to do, but also not wanting to go for 60 episodes.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I mean, again, the contrast between this and like, a Hieron season, where it's like 30 episodes, and we just know we're gonna not get as much in, is very interesting. Right? But, so, we get to—we deal with—everyone escapes from Alaway. Right? I think this is really the moment of like, 'okay, what's gonna happen,' right? Everyone escapes from Alaway, everyone gets back together, Alaway is going to go off and do something to become super powerful. Right? Alaway is going to go do the great big ritual. And at this point, it's like capital R ritual. I have not figured out the incredibly scored by Jack scene of Alaway stomping around eating a heart live. I have not figured out what that looks like yet. I have built the areas out in my mind and on paper, but I haven't like, figured out what confronting Alaway looks like.

What we end up doing is having a bunch of conversations off-mic that are like 'do we do two arcs where one of us goes to—one group goes to Altapasqua for help, and one group—' actually, let's zero back. The first thing we have the conversation around is 'is Alaway a good villain or not?' Is Alaway worth keeping for next season? Because if so, Alaway can just abscond with whatever it is that he needs or wants, and then we can just deal with that later, and then we don't have to have a big final confrontation because you've escaped, and that means we can come back to Alaway. But if not, we have to deal with Alaway. And that means—and Alaway has positioned—has gotten into a position of very big strength in terms of being ready to leverage the power of this place, the vein of the Mother-beast and all of that, to become a god, and that's a thing that I have to treat seriously, because gods are serious in this world. Now we have to treat it like, A: this is a real threat to deal with.

But it seemed like—I mean, we had sessions where it was like, 'okay, we're gonna record on Saturday,' and we tweeted about—like, Art, I think you were like, 'this Saturday we're gonna

finish Sangfielle,’ and then that turned into just a call to talk about Sangfielle’s ending, and not about recording it at all. And at this point, I want to be clear, the circus stuff hadn’t happened yet. None of that had happened yet. And in fact, at that point, I was like I’m gonna punt on this, because I want to make sure that’s a full arc of its own and gets to breathe and it’s not just like a rushed final downtime before you go confront Alaway. And then finally we’re like, ‘okay. We’re gonna finish this Alaway arc and it’s gonna be that one group goes—we’re gonna decide—’ this just happened naturally, it was like, ‘okay, one group’s gonna go to talk to Altapasqua, one group is gonna go—’ what was the other group gonna go do? Does anybody remember what the other half was going to be?

JACK: We briefly pitched a train chase that we were excited about for like—

AUSTIN: A train chase. Yes, we were gonna—

JACK: So, there was a point at which we were coming up with ideas so fast and discarding them so fast, that we were just like—is it—‘ah, we’re doing a bit with a lot of birds now. No, no, no, alright.’

[ALI LAUGHS]

KEITH: Did we already mention the skeleton queen we were gonna do? Did that come up?

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah, the underwater skeleton queen Altapasqua.

JACK: Oh, shit. We got stuck in this horrible hole where we were like ‘okay, listen. We need to—’ [CHUCKLES] ‘We need to put Alaway in some kind of container.’

AUSTIN: Oh my god. Yeah, ‘we have to contain—’ right. Yes.

JACK: ‘And then we need to take the container somewhere and destroy it.’

AUSTIN: Yeah. Uh-huh.

JACK: And we had bits of the plan where we were like ‘we’re gonna take the container down to Altapasqua. No? Okay, we’re gonna throw that out. We’re gonna take the container on a train. Yeah, okay, but then why are we putting him in a container? Where do we get the container from?’

AUSTIN: [LAUGHS] Uh-huh.

ART: If you’ve ever seen the thing from the old Adam West Batman movie where he’s running around with that bomb and can’t find a place to throw it, that was the conversation we had.

[KEITH LAUGHS]

JACK: That was exactly what it was like.

AUSTIN: That was deadass the plan. I was like, 'well, what are you gonna do with this thing? Like, you're—it's not—what do you do?' Also, where do you get something strong enough to contain Alaway?

JACK: Yeah. We kept—

JANINE: I'm still bummed because I had the perfect gift for her, to like—

AUSTIN: For Altapasqua, right.

JACK: Oh, yeah.

JANINE: And like, perfect. It was just perfect. It was just like a thing of like 'oh, this is amazing. She's gonna love this. It's all lining up, baby.' [CHUCKLES] And then just, no.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. And then it just didn't. Anyway, and then what happened is, Lyke did not stay below the—Lyke went to grab the heart, and everything spiralled from there, and everybody was like, 'oh my god, what are we doing?'

[ALI LAUGHS]

KEITH: Well, what happened instead?

AUSTIN: What happened instead was better, but.

KEITH: Yeah!

[AUSTIN LAUGHS]

KEITH: But it specifically wasn't that we *decided* not to do those things.

AUSTIN: Of course. This is what I'm saying. We decided to do them, and then Lyke was like 'I bet I can get the heart. I bet I can just win this by taking the heart.'

JACK: It was so good.

AUSTIN: And then you pushed your luck, and I said—

JACK: But then we went back to hell again, right? Because we were like, now—

AUSTIN: Yes, yes, yes. [GROANS]

JACK: So, again, we sent Pickman and Lyke up to Alaway as step one of a plan that we didn't know—classic Friends at the Table. Not just like—in production, we had no idea what was going to happen, but we were like, 'okay, it's probably good to get this confrontation in the can.'

AUSTIN: Yes.

JACK: And we went up there, and then it all went to hell, and we had like two hours of really good Friends at the Table. So we were like, 'okay, Christ, so this stays. We like this. Now what do we do?'

AUSTIN: Do we cut all those other conversations about these other missions that are now not missions we're gonna go on? Because why the fuck would we go—it's not happening now, because Alaway has the heart and has Aterika'Kaal. This is now a different situation, so we're not gonna go talk to Altapasqua or the train chase, which I don't even remember what the train chase was for.

JACK: That was getting the container.

KEITH: We thought we could destroy—we could put Alaway in the train, or we could destroy the thing in the train. One of those.

AUSTIN: Sure. I don't remember this.

JACK: Ali, had you tweeted 'stay away from numbers and dates' at this point or was that way in the future?

ALI: [LAUGHS] No, I tweeted that around the vignettes time.

JACK: Oh, christ. [CHUCKLES]

ALI: Because it was like—

AUSTIN: Oh, I hadn't even—oh, my god, I hadn't even thought about the vignettes.

ALI: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, because it was like, the conversation that you're talking about with Lyke, Pickman, and Alaway was like two hours.

AUSTIN: Yes.

ALI: So it was like, that's definitely going to be a whole episode, and then there's gonna be more episodes, and it was like, don't say anything. [CHUCKLES] Literally nobody knows.

AUSTIN: Well, because then we were like—then we were like 'let's do a final farewell. We'll do the circus comes to—' I told Ali and Jack I didn't want to do the circus comes to town. I was like, I had this whole thing planned, the Carnival of Moted Light, but this is just not the way I wanted to do it. Like, I wanted to do it big. And this isn't gonna be big. We can't do a whole session here at this point. We can't do like, a whole arc here. We can only really do the downtime, and then from there, we have to kind of go into denouement, and that's the end of the season, and that's not—that's a bad way to go out on.

You know, we had talked about like, oh, we wanted to do kind of a festival, we wanted to build into the festival of looping back around to *The Ground Itself* and it's been a year since that happens, and blah blah blah, I remember we end with the festival getting there, or the carnival getting there, and then the big fruit falling, and it's all fucked up inside. And so like, even at that point, we didn't *really* know. And then, even when we had the carnival recorded, we didn't know

what happened next. And a big part of that is I have no fucking clue what Sangfielle Season 2 is. I think I'm in a better place with it than I was at the time, you know, there is a leading game that we might play, but I'm not—I wouldn't put my name next to it. I wouldn't say that that's the game we're gonna play at this point.

But for me, when we end a season, I like to know—this is how stories work. You know, you want to foreshadow things, you want to set things up. Before we even did this part, before we even got to 'the Blackwick Group's about to get fired,' the big conversation was 'are y'all gonna be teammates after this? Are you gonna work together? Because if so, we should set things up for a game, like—' and I'm just gonna read the whole list of games we've considered. I'm just gonna read the whole list really quick. Some of these—you know, I'll read them from—here's the ones that we were considering besides *HEART* last—like, before we started this.

We had considered *Beneath a Cursed Moon*, which is a *Powered by the Apocalypse* sort of *Castlevania* themed game; *Legacy: Life in the Ruins*, and then some variations thereof, there's lots of variations on *Legacy: Life in the Ruins*, a much different game that is very very factional, very much 'zoom-out, talk about factions, zoom-in, talk about individual characters,' *Songs for the Dusk*, a game that is a little more science fantasy, but that has lots of great community building rules, lots of interesting stuff around exploration, you know, it's a *Forged in the Dark* sort of science fantasy destiny-ish, maybe some parts of Twilight Mirage you could imagine, like, the ground game of Twilight Mirage you could do in *Songs for the Dusk*. And then from this original set I guess we probably talked about and then dismissed *Blades in the Dark* basically immediately. But *Blades* still—

KEITH: I think that actually stuck around for a while. We were like, 'why don't we just do *Blades*?'

[ALI CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: Right, yeah, I think you're totally right. So then, now, looking at the finale, and being like, well, what do we want to do next season? That list is *Songs for the Dusk*, *Blades in the Dark*, *Legacy: Life in the Ruins*, *Beneath a Cursed Moon*, *Brinkwood*, *Fellowship*, *Voidheart Symphony*, *Unknown Armies*, *The Between*, *Spire*, *Chamber*, *Miserable Secrets*, *Port of Blades*, *External Containment Bureau*, and *City of Mist*. And I don't know that any of them are right. I actually truly look at this list and like, 'aaah.' I don't know. And I think you could do Sangfielle in Concentus games in basically any of them, but I don't know—for various reasons that we don't have the time to get into—if any of them are right for what we did this season or for what we would want to do next season. Right?

And so—and don't pick your favorite and start advocating for it, people who like, start DMing me 'you should do this one,' you're only going to discredit the game that you want done. Like, it's only going to be an annoyance that makes me not want to do it. So just like, let us arrive at it ourselves. It'll probably be something not even on this list, who knows? And the—for me, we needed to come up with at least a general direction around 'are these characters remaining tight co-workers at the end of this, or are they going their separate ways, and if so, what sort of—'

KEITH: Answered.

[ALI LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Yeah, answered. 'And if so, regardless, what kind of world state do we need to support a season in various things here?' And I actually think the world state that we're in still supports most of these games, right? But like, the *Spire* pitch was like 'oh, we could do *Spire* in Zevunzolia.' And we decided we don't want to do—we don't want to do a resistance game for Sangfielle 2. And we don't want to do *Spire*. We don't want to do a Zevunzolia-specific game. At this point. Who knows? Maybe six months from now I have a great idea for a Zevunzolia game, or somebody else does. and we end up all getting excited about it and we do it, or we find a game that would do it and so we do it.

But this was truly like *The Long Night of the Soul* for me. Like, losing sleep for weeks over not knowing how to end Sangfielle because I don't know what Sangfielle 2 is, feeling super separated from the fan response from this game in the way that Dre was talking about before, where like, Dre, you were saying that like, you would see people get hyped on *Chine* and you were like, 'yeah? *Chine*?'

[SYLVI LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: That is how I felt about Sangfielle until we were done Sangfielle. Right? You know? 'Her? Really? Okay, sure.' Because it's like, I was not—I was so tortured over not knowing how to end this thing. And so finally, we make a decision, a tentative decision, on the kind of world state we're hoping for, we do what I think is a really great finale, or proto-finale, pre-finale with—*Done in the Dust? Down in the Dust? Dusted and Dead?* What's the actual name of that final arc? *Dead in the Dust*. And then we do the—and then we realize that we could do the vignettes, and of course, I pitch these as what else? [CHUCKLING] 'I think they'll just be like 20-minute little vignettes between me and one other player. We'll just like, knock 'em out really quick.'

SYLVI: Yeah.

JACK: I'm terrified of doing *This Year of Ours* again. I'm just like—

AUSTIN: 'Little abstract Delves, whatever, maybe 30 minutes, all said, I'll have to explain the rules.'

ALI: Yeah, three characters per episode, it'll just be two episodes...

JACK: Three characters per episode!

AUSTIN: Three characters per episode! Bop, bop, bop, done.

ALI: I think it's worth saying alongside this, I had created a spreadsheet calendar of like—

AUSTIN: Yes. Oh my god.

ALI: 'Hey, Jack and Austin, let's just talk about when PALISADE is gonna start because I feel like we should know this,' and just the feeling of like, being like, 'oh, I want to finish Sangfielle so I can like, clean my apartment,' and then Sangfielle just becomes seven weeks longer, like overnight—

JACK: Just keeps going.

ALI: And I'm just like, 'everybody has to stop talking about how long Sangfielle is.' [LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: And you—yes. Publicly. And you have to understand that like, the first time the joker hit, it was like, 'oh, that's kinda cool.'

JACK: 'Oh, cute.' Yeah.

AUSTIN: 'That's neat how that's gonna turn this from a 50 minute episode to a 2 hour episode.' I think that happened—

[DRE LAUGHS]

ART: That was—I drew the first joker, right?

AUSTIN: It was you. It was Art. Yes, exactly, yes.

ART: And I had what I thought was a really out-there idea with 'let's bring in someone who's not on this episode,' and then the other two jokers were like—really made me look like I wasn't reaching hard enough with the joker card.

AUSTIN: You reached exactly as hard. You made the right choice.

KEITH: And it was only because I knew what you did for your joker that I knew what to go harder than.

AUSTIN: Right. Right. Yes, exactly. You set a bar. You set a high bar, Art, and then we had to clear that bar twice, and then all of the jokers hit before we got through a single thing! None of the jokers are on turns 2 or 3 of the trip! They're all by the first turn of the trip! All of them! All three of them!

KEITH: I wouldn't have done it any other way, though.

AUSTIN: No, it's great, it's fantastic, some of the best material we've made, fantastic, love it.

ART: Think if you'd done a third of it and then you'd had to do a two and a half hour—

AUSTIN: [GROANS] We just wouldn't have done it.

KEITH: Honestly, it wouldn't have even felt—

AUSTIN: We would have done something else. Well, maybe.

KEITH: [OVERLAPPING] Because, well, no, I think we would have, because it ended up being three hours even without it. So it was like, 'oh, it's 3 hours and 20 minutes, like, you know.' What even is that?

AUSTIN: 'What's the difference?' We're past that now on the fuckin' post-mortem, so. So that's it. That's what happened. That's why it took so long. We don't know what Sangfielle Season 2 is gonna be. I have a loose idea broadly of a game I'd love to play. I don't know if we want to play it in Sangfielle or not. And again, it's gonna be a while before we get there. Maybe something new that I want to play will come out, and we'll play it, you know?

ART: I forgot that's what the question was. I'm really in the weeds on this.

[SYLVI AND ALI LAUGH]

AUSTIN: Yeah, it's because I went to the Matthias one. Alright, last question comes in from Bri.

KEITH: This is a good one.

AUSTIN: "For each player—also Austin if he wants to answer for an NPC—what is your character's gas station snack and beverage order?"

I think everyone thinks because of the way that he holds himself Alekest orders a single black coffee, but actually, he's very excited to use their bad hot chocolate and cappuccino machine in the back corner, and get himself something a little too sweet, and then he gets one of those little pre-packaged cherry pies.

[JACK CHUCKLES]

DRE: Ooh.

ALI: Nice.

JACK: Pickman has a single—

ART: Do y'all have this? Does everything have like, the thing that they get at a gas station? Is this like, a normal thing a person has?

KEITH: Yeah.

JANINE: I did when I was a kid. Not so much anymore, but like, you know.

SYLVI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: If we were on a road trip—okay. In this scenario, these characters are on a roadtrip. The train stops and they're at—and there is a gas station there. What do they get?

DRE: The gas pump.

[GROUP LAUGHTER]

AUSTIN: Lowering the gas pump—

SYLVI: Chine is so expensive!

AUSTIN: Lowering the gas pump and opening the valve so It can just douse itself in the gasoline happily, drinking it as it comes in. Perfect. Sorry, go ahead, Marn.

ALI: Oh, I—well, 'cause I had such a strong reaction to this question, I don't know if you guys have seen the meme that's like, [LAUGHING] 'I'm a little drink girly. I love to go to a place and get a new drink. I love drinking new drinks. It makes me happy.'

SYLVI: Yes! Oh, yeah.

AUSTIN: Marn is.

JACK: This is me IRL.

AUSTIN: Marn is a little drink girly. Yeah. A hundred percent.

SYLVI: Drink girlies rise up.

JACK: Yeah. Uh-huh. Only way to be. Pickman would have one black coffee and like, just a plain glazed donut. And a single cigarette.

[ALI LAUGHS]

ART: Is this a gas station that sells loosies? What—

JACK: Sangfielle is a beautiful place.

SYLVI: Hazard has the rest of them. I have one for Hazard and one for Virtue. For Hazard, I guess it depends on if they have a slushie machine there. I remember when I was a kid some gas stations would, and just getting every flavor possible in one.

AUSTIN: Yes, that makes perfect sense.

SYLVI: As well as mystery flavor Airheads, because I think that's a fun joke.

AUSTIN: Oh, funny joke!

SYLVI: And Virtue would have the gas station attendant.

AUSTIN: Yes, good. Yeah. Uh-huh. Perfect.

[ALI LAUGHS]

JACK: Oh, yeah. Okay.

ART: Great.

AUSTIN: Who are we missing? What are we at? We need Duvall, we need Lyke, we need an Es, is that right?

ART: Yeah, I think Duvall gets a cup of coffee, puts sugar in it, then sort of walks away and then comes back and puts sugar in it again, and then walks away, and comes back, and puts sugar in a third time, until you're like, that truly must be the most disgusting cup of coffee anyone's ever had.

JACK: That anyone has ever made.

JANINE: So you're telling me the ants are in control that day.

ART: Uh-huh. The inspiration for this is *Men in Black*.

AUSTIN: *Men in Black*, yeah, uh-huh. Of course.

ART: And for like a—I don't like this about him, necessarily, but I think Duvall eats a packaged sandwich. Like, a deli wrapped sandwich.

AUSTIN: Eugh, yeah.

ALI: Oh, yeah.

ART: And in real life, don't do it.

AUSTIN: No.

ART: They're not good.

JACK: Unless you're in the U.K., where they're very slightly better, but not much.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Bucho—I'm answering a second character—Bucho gets three hot dogs. One of them is only mustard. One of them is only ketchup. The third one is everything they have available. He eats them in a particular order. And then he gets a big gulp—

[JACK LAUGHS]

SYLVI: Bless. Do you have the order?

AUSTIN: Yeah, it's mustard first, because it's like spicy and it hits you, and then it's everything, because that's the bulk of it, and then it's the ketchup is a little—it's a dessert hot dog, because it's so sweet.

SYLVI: [LAUGHING] A dessert hot dog.

JACK: Oh, shout-out to Bucho.

AUSTIN: And then finally—and also it's a big gulp. It's a Big Gulp of Mountain Dew. No, it's probably not Mountain Dew. What's Bucho drink? What's the Bucho soft drink of choice? It's a Big Gulp of ice water. [CHUCKLES]

[ALI CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: All the flavor's in the food. Alright, we still need an Es, and we still need a Lyke.

JANINE: I think for Es, it's like—it's gotta be either like a pineapple Crush, or like a Tahitian Treat soda. Like, something really sugary and fruity, but also a little bit weird, like not just a plain orange or grape or whatever. And a pack of cinnamon tooth picks, and then—I feel like those—the pre-packaged frosted—the chocolate cupcakes with the little swirl on top.

ALI: Hostess.

AUSTIN: Hostess, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yes. This is Es to me. Lye Lychen.

KEITH: [CLEARS THROAT] A bag of hot fries, large peanut M&Ms, a king-sized Payday, Swedish Fish (the full-sized bag), original flavor beef jerky, four or five dollar lottery tickets, a raspberry iced tea, a lemon iced tea, two chocolate snack cakes, and a thing of whole milk.

[GROUP LAUGHTER]

ART: Oh, I'm so glad. That was exactly what I wanted. Ohh.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I'd say—Keith, just write that down as d12 Snacks - Haven.

[KEITH LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: You can break it up later, we'll deal with it.

KEITH: Legendary snacks.

AUSTIN: Yeah, legendary snacks. It's—yeah. Uh-huh.

Alright, that is gonna do it for us. We get to go home now. We've done this now for almost four hours. Four hours if you count from before we actually started streaming. Thank you all for joining us. Thank you all for joining us for all of Sangfielle. You can send questions for our tips and Drawing Maps show on Patreon to tipsatthetable@gmail.com. I feel like we run out of tips for a little bit still between seasons, so get some questions about running games, playing games, tabletop games in general, tipsatthetable@gmail.com. As always, you can support us by going to [friendsatthetable.cash](https://www.patreon.com/friendsatthetable).

We will be back with some stuff eventually. We are going to take a break in the main feed. Like, there will be nothing in the feed for a minute. I suspect. And then there will probably be something in the feed just pulled from the Patreon before we even get to putting the Road to PALISADE in. I have an idea, but I want to clear it with Ali first. So I don't want to—you know what? No. We'll clear it off-mic. I don't want to make it a thing.

[SYLVI LAUGHS]

ART: Well, I'll pitch you my idea right now, which is we just do unedited improvised PALISADE trailers.

ALI: No.

ART: Every week a different cast member will just make up a whole trailer that has nothing to do with what the season's actually gonna be.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I feel like that's—

ART: Like, just—[IMITATING SYNTHESIZER] *bwo-o-omp womp womp womp*—

AUSTIN: We'll just find it on the way. We'll just figure it out as we get there.

ART: Yeah.

KEITH: Can I plug an extra something real quick?

AUSTIN: Yes, please. Now is the time.

KEITH: The latest episode of our *Uru* Let's Play—

AUSTIN: U-R-U.

KEITH: Yes, U-R-U. Went up yesterday. It is the first part of two parts of one of the best things we've ever put on the RunButton channel, so you should definitely watch it. It's wild. Totally upends my opinion of what *Uru* is fully. So you should check out that. *Uru* is the weird live action sort-of-MMO *Myst* game.

AUSTIN: Yes.

JANINE: Not live action.

AUSTIN: It's not live action.

KEITH: Not live action. Like, a real—

JANINE: Like a surface MMO?

KEITH: Like permanent game states, is what I meant to say.

JANINE: Ah.

KEITH: Like, a persistent world.

AUSTIN: Oh, it has a persistent world. I see, I see, I see.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Ali, I'll say it now. Do you want to say it now? If you're good with it.

ALI: [LAUGHS] Okay. Sure, go ahead, if you want.

AUSTIN: We're gonna put Mall Kids, one of the funniest games we've ever done in Bluff City, we'll just put all of Mall Kids in the main feed.

SYLVI: Yes!

ART: Wow.

AUSTIN: It's so good. I know it's—

SYLVI: It's so good.

ART: I thought Mall Kids is more expensive, that we should have put Mall Kids on its own Patreon.

[AUSTIN, KEITH, AND JACK LAUGH]

SYLVI: Can we at least cut out all the stuff with the neighbor family and the doll and have that as like a \$50 tier?

[ART AND ALI LAUGH]

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's a DLC. Yeah, you have to—people who have not heard this arc, I think it's probably one of our funniest arcs. It's—truly you have no idea where it's gonna go. It's so, so, so funny and good, so I hope people enjoy it.

KEITH: It's the Bluff episode that feels the most like a Live at the Table.

AUSTIN: A Live, yeah. And it's also the Bluff episode that feels most like a season because of how long it is.

ART: Like ten hours or something total. [LAUGHS]

[KEITH LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: It's absurd.

SYLVI: A little bit Marielda-esque, yeah.

AUSTIN: It's absurd. Yeah, is that Young by the Shore? Is that what it is? No, Young by the Shore—is that right? Is that what it's called? No, because Young by the Shore is—

JACK: It's America's Playground.

ALI: Oh, right.

AUSTIN: It's America's Playground. Young by the Shore is the intros by my character in America's Playground. Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Young by the Shore is—

[KEITH LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Are you just remembering one of our bits, Keith?

KEITH: Yeah, someone's saying one of the bits in the chat.

[SYLVI LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: I've never laughed as hard as something that happens in one of these bits. In one of these episodes. So people should look forward to that.

ART: Oh, it's so funny. Oh my god.

AUSTIN: [LAUGHING] Sorry, I have to not think too closely about it. It's so funny. Alright.

JACK: It is really like Bluff City made by weirdos more than usual.

AUSTIN: More than—we were really weirdos on that one. So look forward to that. I mean, we're all playing on other things. If you like hearing me talk about roleplaying games, I was recently on Games Studies Study Buddies. Cameron and Michael invited me onto JSB to talk about William White's book about the Forge, which is a extremely influential and somewhat maligned forum from the 2000s in which a lot of the developers or designers of games that we ended up playing were part of that community. I think that conversation was very good, and if you need to fill a podcast hole, you could go listen to that episode, so. And go listen to all their stuff. Stuff's great.

KEITH: I'm behind on that, but that's a good show.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Alright. I think that's it. Any other final plugs before we do a time.is and say goodbye to Sangfielle?

SYLVI: I was gonna, but I don't know when it comes out, so it's fine.

AUSTIN: Emoji Drome 2.0.

SYLVI: Emoji Drome 2.0. Also, I guess I'm gonna be on a JoJo podcast. Dogs Must Die with Chip and Ironicus sometime next—

AUSTIN: Oh, hell yeah.

SYLVI: We recorded it, but I don't know the specifics of when it'll be released. It's about Golden Wind. I really like Golden Wind.

AUSTIN: Incredible. Chip and Ironicus were just on a Just King Things bonus pod to talk about the movie *Thinner*, so.

SYLVI: Yeah. And we played one of Grant's games for the Road to PALISADE.

AUSTIN: We did play—yeah. We totally did play one of—when we played—

SYLVI: *Last Shooting*.

AUSTIN: *Last Shooting*, of course. Named for the *Gundam* sequence. A hack of *Final Bid*.

SYLVI: Yeah, that's my last-minute plug.

AUSTIN: Love it. Love it. Alright, no more final bids. Or, no more final plugs. [CHUCKLES]
Time.is, to do a clap. We good? We ready?

KEITH: Yeah.

[VARIOUS “YEAH” AND “MHM”]

AUSTIN: Alright. 15 seconds.

[PAUSE]

[EACH PERSON CLAPS]

KEITH: Nice. That was a good time.

AUSTIN: That came through really good. Yeah. I don’t know if it was actually good.

JANINE: The punch spooked me a little bit. I don’t know what it was, but it scared me.

[ALI CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: Alright. That’s gonna do it, everybody. Thank you so much for joining us. Bye, bye, bye.

[VARIOUS GOODBYES]

[MUSIC OUTRO - “[Sangfielle](#)” by Jack de Quidt]