

Drawing Maps 31: Marrowcreek - October 2021

Transcriber: robotchangeling

Austin: Hello and welcome to the Drawing Maps for October 2021. I'm Austin Walker. Joining me today, Andrew Lee Swan.

Dre: Hey. You can find me on Twitter at [@swandre3000](https://twitter.com/swandre3000).

Austin: Sylvia Clare.

Sylvia: Hey. You can find my Twitter at [@sylvibullet](https://twitter.com/sylvibullet) and listen to my other show *Emojidrome* wherever you get your podcasts.

Austin: And Keith Carberry.

Keith: Hi, my name is Keith J. Carberry. You can find me on Twitter at [@keithjcarberry](https://twitter.com/keithjcarberry) [with unexpected emphasis on every few words] and find the let's plays that I do at youtube.com/runbutton.

Austin: They're good.

Sylvia: Interesting cadence there.

Austin: Yeah, was that you trying something new out?

Keith: Gotta switch it up.

Austin: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Sylvia: Okay, yeah.

Austin: Break through their defenses.

Keith: I don't know if you've ever watched YouTube and all of the biggest channels talk like really weird. Like—

Dre: Uh huh.

Keith: They all talk like no one would ever talk, so I'm trying to get a little bit of that.

Austin: You're trying to become a better YouTuber.

Dre: You're gonna have to say, "What's up, guys?" more.

Keith: [even weirder and sing-songy] If you tell you guys to listen to Run Button in a weird way maybe people will listen to Run Button.

Austin: Have you thought about becoming a bad internet rapper? 'Cause all the YouTubers I see have gotten into bad YouTube rap in the last four years.

Dre: Okay. Okay.

Keith: What? Wait, who's getting into—

Sylvia: Oh. Keith, congratulations on joining Hololive.

Austin: [laughs softly] Oh my god.

Keith: Thank you. What is that? [Austin laughs] Also, thank you.

Sylvia: A VTuber group.

Austin: Shots fired!

Dre: Wow.

Sylvia: Don't worry about it. [Keith laughs]

Austin: You're firing shots out here. Just 'cause Calli didn't know what lean was doesn't mean that you... [Sylvia laughs] Anyway.

Dre: Wait.

Austin: Don't worry about it.

Dre: What?

Austin: Don't worry about it! Don't worry about it. [Sylvia laughs]

Dre: Jesus Christ.

Austin: Somebody— a Hololive person, a Hololive English person made a tweet that was about how she was feeling bad because she went too hard on that lean. And she just meant alcohol, Dre. She didn't mean lean, 'cause she didn't know what lean was.

Dre: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Keith: Oh, yeah.

Austin: Also, she's like a nerdcore rapper type. And so—

Dre: Well, I'm saying Jesus Christ, 'cause I figured if anybody would know who lean was—

Austin: Yes, or what—

Dre: I thought it might be Calli.

Austin: Yeah, uh huh, nope.

Sylvia: No, she's an MC Lars type, not like an actual—

Austin: Yeah, uh huh. Uh huh.

Sylvia: Anyway. I need to stop. [laughs softly]

Austin: Mm-hmm. We are talking about “Marrow in the Field,” “Marrow in the Bone,” aka the Marrowcreek arc today. If you've not listened to Drawing Maps before, it is our show where we answer your questions about the arcs that we do, a sort of live running kind of episode to episode or arc by arc postmortem. We have some great questions for this one. This is one of my favorite arcs that we've done in quite some time. People on this show right now have already looked ahead and seen the questions, so you know what topics are gonna come up, but I just want to start by by asking y'all, like, if anything stood out to you in memory from doing these episodes and what you thought. Was this one recording session or was this two?

Sylvia: This was...

Keith: Two.

Austin: This was two. Right?

Dre: Two?

Keith: Yeah.

Dre: Yeah, that sounds right.

Austin: But it was also— but it was also—

Keith: It was one really long one and then one shorter one.

Austin: Right, but it was still— it was only two episodes, which is a pretty rare small sized arc for us, right?

Keith: Yeah.

Sylvia: Listen, we're just a very efficient crew.

Austin: Oh, we're gonna talk about you three as a crew in a little bit. This comes up.

Keith: Oh, we are?

Sylvia: Yeah. Oh, good! [laughs]

Austin: Uh huh. Yeah. Uh huh. Um, so yeah, what'd you all think of this one? Did you have a good time? Do you have any strong feelings about it?

Sylvia: I had fun. I like the...I'm always a fan of dreamlike vibes and going to— I mean, we are doing a postmortem for this arc. I could— [Austin laughs] I was like, I shouldn't spoil it. We're talking about it.

Austin: No, we can talk about this. Though we should— we should, um...we should say in advance, we will do our best not to spoil future stuff for Sangfielle. There's only one other arc out, but we—

Sylvia: Yeah.

Austin: This small group of four has recorded another one. So let's be careful about that.

Dre: Mm.

Austin: And then, and then also, there will be at least one question that gestures at some past season stuff with a spoiler, very broadly, so— but that will be marked, so I'm letting people know in advance. Anyway, go ahead. Dreamlike, dreamlike vibes.

Sylvia: Yeah. It's just— I like the...like, being in a town that is a manifestation of what the people who are in it like want or like are thinking about—

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Sylvia: —is always interesting to me. And like, the vibe from the get-go was real— was real fucked up but in an interesting way, like when we got to the guy who was playing guitar and just getting shit thrown at him. [laughs softly]

Austin: Uh huh. [Keith laughs]

Sylvia: Like, it just— it had good hooks, and they got into me real easy. So I had a really fun time with it.

Keith: Yeah, that's...that is close to what I was gonna say, which is that I like an arc where we go somewhere, and it's not explicitly dangerous, and we've just like gotta— not like we have to figure something out like it's a mystery, but like, we don't know what's going on and we're all wondering what the fuck is going on. [Austin laughs] I like a— I like a “what the fuck is going on here?” session.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Austin: And this might be— this is a season of “what the fuck is going on?” but this might have been—

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: —the most “what the fuck is going on?” that we've seen, truly.

Keith: Yeah. This is the what the fuck is going on... [Austin and Sylvia laugh]

Austin: Uh huh. Yeah, for sure.

Keith: ...place.

Austin: Dre, how are you feeling about it? [Dre sighs] You had some pretty intense sequences here.

Dre: Yeah, no, it was...fun feels like the wrong word. [Austin laughs] But I felt like it was a good, um...a good just continuing to stretch or figuring out like, okay, of zeroing in on Chine for me.

Austin: Can you— can you say more about that? Because we get some Chine questions, but—

Dre: Well, yeah, I guess I can.

Austin: But yeah, I'd love to hear a little bit more about what you felt like you zeroed in on.

Dre: Um, some more opportunities for Chine to like interact with, like, more social groups.

Austin: Mm, mm-hmm.

Dre: 'Cause I think like, up till this point, the biggest group that Chine had been around was like, being interrogated.

Austin: Yeah. [Dre laughs]

Keith: Yeah. Chine, this— Dre, this was literally, like, Chine and Lyke's first thing together.

Dre: Yeah.

Austin: Oh, wow.

Keith: Yeah.

Dre: Yeah, it was.

Sylvia: Oh, huh.

Keith: I still— I also have not been in one with Marn.

Austin: Oh, that's wild.

Keith: Yeah.

Sylvia: Wow.

Austin: Well, don't worry. That's gonna be fine. You'll see. You'll see Marn soon.

Dre: Yeah.

Austin: And maybe we'll mix up some parties, and we'll get a chance. We'll see.

Dre: Yeah, but even Chine just being like involved socially with things and like, you know—

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Dre: —the tomato throwing thing, and being like, oh, okay, yeah. Like, how would Chine, a anti social norms character, react to something that is, to a lot of people, probably very distressing.

Austin: Right. And the answer was jump in headfirst?

Dre: Yeah, uh huh.

Austin: Just do that shit.

Dre: Mm-hmm. And hey, I resolved some Fallout in the process.

Austin: I...we've now talked about this somewhere, I think maybe just in an episode? It wasn't Drawing Maps, because it was about some of this stuff. So it was probably just the next— [sighs] where would it have been? I really love Chine in these episodes, because they really illustrate—maybe it was just our last Drawing Maps, Dre—this part of Chine that is really abrasive, really hard to—

Dre: Mm-hmm.

Austin: Chine is not someone...you've played a lot of characters who I'm like, “Aw, I'd like to be friends with them.” I don't know that I'd like to be friends with Chine.

Dre: No, yeah, no, you probably shouldn't?

Austin: Uh, I would like to like have Chine on my side in a fight, and I would like to have Chine be backing me up. Chine seems like a real one in that regard, though maybe commits—

Dre: Mm-hmm.

Austin: —to the fight a little bit more. Because we're not— this is not a Drawing Maps technically for the boat stuff, for *Jade Moon*. But we, you know, this is also the group that went and fucked up stuff inside of the train, [Sylvia laughs] on the *Jade Moon*, right?

Sylvia: Yep. [Austin sighs]

Keith: Wait, what did we do on the *Jade Moon*?

Austin: Y'all fought all that shit inside that train.

Sylvia: When we were at— yeah.

Dre: Mm.

Keith: Oh, in the train. Right, yes, totally. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Sylvia: Quote, unquote, “downtime episode.”

Keith: Yeah. Yeah. [Dre and Sylvia laugh]

Dre: That I ruined for everyone. [laughs]

Austin: Oh my god. Yeah, you brought the—

Keith: No, Dre, that Chine ruined for everyone. [Austin laughs]

Dre: Yeah, fair. Thank you. Thank you, thank you.

Austin: Oh, you brought— you brought character to it. It was good.

Dre: Yeah. But no, I think Marrowcreek was like me getting to play Chine the way I had always wanted to play Chine but maybe didn't get the opportunities—or didn't take the opportunities that were given to me—to more explicitly express that part of Chine, which is the like...

Austin: The kind of anti-social part.

Dre: Well, and I think even just like the not likable parts.

Austin: Mm-hmm. Yeah, there's stuff at the end of this episode that—

Keith: You threw fruit at that guy!

Austin: I mean, that's already— but at least there I was like, okay, well, maybe Chine is just trying to blend in.

Dre: Yeah, that's definitely the worst thing Chine did, was throw fruit at a guy. [laughs]

Austin: I think the violence Chine shows towards the other Chine and then— and the disregard for the creature who's clearly looking for a certain sort of guidance and parental figure or, you know, whatever, whatever the thing this creature's looking for. And like, there is a unfamiliarity with caregiving [laughs softly] that becomes very clear.

Dre: Yeah.

Austin: Or disinterest, maybe? I don't know. I think Chine...disinterest is wrong. Chine...I get the impression. Maybe I'm wrong about this, Dre, but I get the impression that Chine wants to do right by this creature. But I think the thing that you're playing really well is that like, you don't just wake up knowing how to be a caregiver.

Dre: Uh uh.

Austin: So.

Dre: Nope.

Austin: I'm very curious how this continues to develop. Um, any other—

Keith: My—

Austin: Go ahead.

Keith: My pitch for throwing the fruit being the worst thing that Chine does is that the rest of what Chine does is in very high tension situations.

Austin: Sure. [Sylvia laughs]

Keith: Very violent things are happening.

Austin: yeah.

Keith: Multiple— like, there's a direct threat to Chine also on the screen.

Austin: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Keith: The fruit was just like, “Oh, yeah, I’ll pelt this guy with fruit, with hard fruit.” [laughs softly]

Austin: Yep. Yeah. Uh, but again, we said this...uh, you know what it was, Dre? It was during the last...it was during the last Drawing Maps, ‘cause you were there for it but Sylvi and Keith were not, because it was for the “Hark! the Citadel Beneath” episode. And we kind of gestured at the ways in which Sangfielle has echoed certain things from Hieron and then twisted them. Or like, it's the classic like, we talked a lot about the like, oh, are *Bloodborne*, *Dark Souls*, and *Demon Souls* connected? They're not, but haha, here are ways in which it feels like they almost can walk up to the cliff and they should be. And we were talking about the ways in which, you know, Chine feels like a weird echo of— could have felt like a weird echo of Thrandir or could have felt like you were playing in the same space. This is the episode where it becomes very fucking clear [Dre laughs] that Chine and Thrandir are different people, right?

Dre: Yeah, mm-hmm.

[0:10:23]

Austin: And how you— how you respond to that is, I think, up to the listener. You know, I think that there is a lot of interesting stuff happening here. Anyway, unless there's any further thoughts, we jump into these questions and let them kind of guide us. But if we end up wanting to take a diversion, we can always come back and do that. I will read this one, which is largely for Sylvi. Jake says:

Hi, Friends.

One of the obviously important parts of this arc was bringing Hazard into the group properly. What challenges and actions do you all take to make a new character feel like they fit in with a preexisting group? I feel like some players might fear losing a character mid-play because it's tough to bring in someone when the other characters have gotten to develop for three arcs, let alone if you're introducing a new player to a preexisting

group. Love the show. Excited to see where things go after these last two absolutely wild arcs.

Jake, they/them.

P.S. I loved how the fight with the gandies slash Ravening Beast did a good job [Sylvia laughs] of getting Hazard to bond with the group and then Marrowcreek gave some excellent backstory and character to them while also never losing sight of Chine or Lyke.

Austin: Thank you.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Austin: I think balancing that was super important, and it...um, I'll take a little credit in terms of structuring Marrowcreek for this exact end.

Sylvia: [laughs softly] Yeah.

Austin: But I also just think, some of it, you just— you just gotta roll the dice, and players gotta line up right. And I think a lot of it ended up being really organic, so.

Sylvia: I think, yeah. I hope that we keep that up going into the next arc. I like to think we did.

Austin: Yeah, I think so. I think people have stuff to look forward to.

Sylvia: Yeah. The thing about introducing a new character to stuff is that like, I've done this before.

Austin: Mm.

Sylvia: With Ephrim, like...

Austin: Yeah.

Sylvia: Like, that was bigger than that, even. That was like...

Austin: You did this out the gate. Yeah, yeah, yeah, totally.

Sylvia: Yeah. That was like, oh, I need to...I need to...I haven't played in this setting before.

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Sylvia: Like, I played in Marielda, but that was like so many centuries or whatever before.

Austin: Yeah.

Sylvia: Um, and I like had a whole— there was a whole season of like character for the others.

Austin: Yeah.

Sylvia: I'm sure like Janine would probably say the same thing.

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Sylvia: Where it's like, oh, that's kind of a daunting thing to do. So this was a lot easier, in that I was like, oh, I've been playing in this system. I know how it works, so I know like some fun character hooks I could do, which like, I think shows up in Hazard's like use of the...

Austin: Right.

Sylvia: Inflict and collateral, I think is the skill?

Austin: Is that the...the damage dealing one that you used on the...?

Sylvia: Yeah, the one where I can transfer Minor Fallouts and stuff.

Austin: Yeah. Right.

Sylvia: And so like—

Austin: Which you used on the Ravening Beast or in that, the gandy fight, whatever. I forget what point.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Austin: Maybe the gandy king part of the fight. Extremely fun to see.

Sylvia: I try and transfer the Ravening Beast over to the gandy king, or the ravening howl to scare it.

Austin: Right.

Sylvia: And that's what makes it turn into the beast, I believe.

Austin: It was fine, you know, in the end, wasn't it?

Sylvia: Yeah. But like, that's like a thing that like I...like, I think I did an okay job building out Ephrim, but like, I also didn't have a familiarity with the system that let me like build hooks into the character there.

Austin: Sure.

Sylvia: And just having some of that stuff ready to go kind of helps build a personality just in your head, 'cause you're— I'm like, what type of person would have this ability?

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Sylvia: What type of person would use this ability? Like, what do the skills that they have tell me about them? Stuff like that. And, um...the group itself, the thing, it's...the thing about the Blackwick Group is that they're all a bunch of weirdos.

Austin: Uh huh. [laughs softly]

Sylvia: So it's like, not super hard to fit in.

Keith: [feigning ignorance] What do you mean? [Austin and Sylvia laugh]

Sylvia: But like, it was more just like, okay, once I find a...once there's a hook for me getting off the boat with like anybody, it's...

Austin: Yeah.

Sylvia: I'm sure it'll be easy enough to be like, "Hey, we work well together. Let's— I'm in the group now. Hi."

Austin: Yeah. And I think that we are just not too...I think this is just true for a lot of tabletop groups from a character change happens. [Sylvia laughs] You hand-wave it a little bit, and it's fine.

Sylvia: Yeah, absolutely.

Austin: It's fine, isn't it? It's...sometimes a TV show, a new actor has to get introduced 'cause another actor got a different gig and left, and then you go like—

Sylvia: Yeah.

Austin: Okay, uh, there's a new character here, and now they're part of the crew. And like, you do your best to send off a past character or whatever, which I think we did great by Virtue. You know what I mean?

Sylvia: Yeah.

Austin: I think there's no question there. And then what's important is not to over— you know, don't overwork the character in. Don't try to give them— give the audience or whatever the hard

sell. And again, I think part of this is...we are very conscious that we're making a show, but for me as the person at the, you know, at the table with my friends, the number one thing is like getting Sylvi into a character that she's excited to play, and then the party's— I think everyone else at the table is just like, all right, this is Sylvi's new character, let's just kind of like find a way to get the door open, and then we'll get to have fun again.

Keith: There's no world where...there's no world where the character gets introduced, [Austin laughs] and then we go, "Oh, well, couldn't find a way to make it believable that we're hanging out—"

Sylvia: Fuck.

Keith: "—with Hazard now, so, sorry Sylvi, you're out of the season."

Austin: Yes, exactly. [Keith laughs] Well, like, this is the thing, is there was always an—

Sylvia: Taking a sabbatical.

Austin: Right. [laughs softly] There was always an escape valve for me, which is like, from the jump, the *Jade Moon*, it's announced, it's going to get scuttled at the end of this ship.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Austin: Hazard was gonna need a job, right? We're gonna find some way to hook Hazard into this crew, and I think we found some— we found multiple good ways here in this arc by introducing what Hazard's backstory is, tying it to a group that the party— even though Hazard doesn't know it yet. [laughs softly]

Sylvia: Yeah.

Austin: Because that's a thing we recently realized was like, Hazard doesn't know that the party also has beef with the Wrights of the Seventh Sun, during this arc that like, there's never conversation about Uno. There's just this— it just happens, right?

Sylvia: Yeah.

Austin: But like, figured out, "Okay, we can tie these things together," just worked.

Sylvia: Mm-hmm.

Austin: So.

Sylvia: Yeah. I think we did a pretty good job with it.

Austin: Me too. All right, let's keep moving. We don't have to— we don't have to, uh, overstay our welcome here. All right, this is two questions in a row, or this one and the next one. I'm gonna read them both. Actually, Keith, can you read this one from Rufus?

[0:16:30]

Keith: Sure.

This arc was incredible. For me, this season's at its best when it's exploring the alien aspects of the protagonists: Es floating around with her flagella-like lashes, [Sylvia laughs softly] Duvall's at best questionable agency over himself relative to the bugs, Hazard's stripped down nature, et cetera. In this arc, we had my favorite so far: Chine as compared to the farmer and the angel. This theme in Sangfielle is interesting to me, because it seems to be the inverse of a pattern I've seen as the core of every other season of *Friends at the Table*. The dehumanized sentient life forms in other fiction are just as much people as anyone else. The pala-din, goblins, gnoll, and orcs of Hieron and most of the inorganic life in the sci-fi seasons—my favorite example being Fourteen Fifteen—all demand that the audience look beyond their preconceived notions of humanity to recognize personhood wherever it appears. This theme seems very important to y'all, and I wanted to ask how you balance developing the protagonists' more cursed traits without undermining their personhood. Thank you for an incredible show.

Rufus

P.S. I've been relistening using the Onion Method, and it's great.

Austin: All right, now, we'll get to the Onion Method in a second, [Sylvia laughs] because it's gonna come up again. Sylvi, can read this from Annie?

Sylvia: Uh, yeah.

Temporary slash digital slash magical construct personhood is a recurring theme in *Friends at the Table*. Have your thoughts about it evolved over the years, or is there a steady throughline that guides you in writing it, Austin, or reacting to it, players?

Austin: I'll add that there's another part of Annie's question that I cut because it spoils—

Sylvia: Oh.

Austin: —some stuff in previous seasons. But Annie does say that the group that was doing the onion listen had just listened to— I'll just say the name of the first— in Twilight Mirage, they did the Ache arc, which I think in this group...I know Keith was there, because part of the thing that ties to a temporary digital or magical construct personhood is tied to a Keith character.

Sylvia: I think I was there too.

Austin: Maybe all three of you were.

Keith: Wait, sorry, what is tied to a Keith character?

Austin: The Ache arc in Twilight Mirage?

Sylvia: We were down on a planet for that, right?

Keith: [crosstalk] Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Austin: Yeah, you were down on Skein. It was, yeah, it's a Skein—

Sylvia: Yeah.

Austin: It's one of the two Skein arcs. In fact, I think it's all three of you, 'cause the other group was Jack, Ali, and Art doing the milk arc, the milk run arc.

Keith: Right.

Austin: So it's the three of you plus Janine, were the Ache arc. And then there's another, end of season of Spring in Hieron, towards the very end of the main season of Spring in Hieron there's another instance of this type of temporary/digital/magical construct person that's kind of a big spoiler. But because of the way the Onion Method worked, they had to listen to those back to back. [Sylvia sighs] That group listened back to back. Like, not back to back but very close together. Which, we all know the Onion Method, right? So.

Sylvia: We all know it.

Austin: We all definitely know it, right?

Dre: Is this where you want me to say that I don't know what the Onion Method is? [Sylvia and Keith laugh]

Austin: Yeah, this is where I was gonna ask if you— did you— you don't know, huh?

Dre: So is this like a machete cut kind of thing?

Austin: Yeah. What do you think it is?

Sylvia: A little bit.

Austin: What do you think the machete cut of *Friends at the Table* is?

Dre: [sighs] Jesus. I don't know.

Keith: There's no way to guess.

Austin: I want you to guess.

Dre: No. Because I'm guessing it probably also involves like jumping mid season, so it's probably not just as simple as like you listen to Marielda and then fall and then Winter and then Spring. I'm guessing that you like...

Keith: Yeah, you're right.

Dre: ...cut.

Austin: You're definitely right. All right, I'm gonna link you to it.

Dre: Okay.

Austin: This is peel-the-onion.tumblr.com. Let's just drop this in here. I know we have real questions to answer here, but let's talk about the onion, [Sylvia sighs] 'cause the onion just finished up.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Keith: Yeah, by the way.

Austin: Congrats to the onion group. This is— I'm just gonna read it here. [reading] Optional: begin with Bluff City and end with Road to PART— Road to, slash, PARTIZAN. They don't fit as nicely into the layer scheme. One: start at Twilight Mirage 00 and listen up to episode 27, [laughs softly] the end of the midseason finale when the PCs will be apart for a year.

Dre: Okay.

Austin: To really experience that time passing, go back and start COUNTER/weight and listen up through the end of the *Kingdom* game when the Hieron anime is mentioned, episode 21. [laughs softly] Start Autumn in Hieron, and listen up through Winter in Hieron 26 when Austin says, "If you haven't listened to Marielda, which was like our micro season between COUNTER/weight and Winter in Hieron, [Dre laughs] now's the time to do that." Listen to Marielda. Finish Winter in Hieron. Listen to Spring in Hieron.

Keith: Well, I want to just—

Austin: Uh huh?

Keith: Quick shoutout to the Ultimate Marielda.

Austin: What's—

Dre: Uh huh.

Austin: Oh, I forget. What's the Ultimate Marielda?

Dre: It's right there. It's next to it.

Keith: It's right next to it.

Austin: Oh, sorry.

Keith: It's Marielda 1, Marielda 2, just the parts of [Austin laughs and claps] Spring in Hieron 27 where Lem is...

Austin: Is another character—

Keith: Where Lem is Snitch.

Austin: Uh huh. Well, okay. Great.

Keith: Then Marieldas 3 through 10, then the Gen Con live show, then the Live at the Table *Misspent Youth* game, and then 11 through 14, and then Winter in Hieron holiday special.

Austin: Yeah, uh huh. Then Winter in Hieron, then Spring in Hieron, then COUNTER/weight, then go back and finish Twilight Mirage. You'll start with the "This Year of Ours" episodes and get a nice rundown of where everyone's at. So they did that over the last year, this big group of people [someone sighs] including, I believe—Annie's in the chat, correct me if I'm wrong—six people who listened to *Friends at the Table* for the first time this way.

Sylvia: [distressed noise]

Dre: This fucking rules. This— [laughs]

Keith: That's what I said.

Sylvia: Okay.

Keith: That's what I said last time we did a Drawing Maps where we talked about the onion.

Austin: It hurts me deep inside, but it's kind of good at the same time. Like, what are you gonna do?

Dre: No, I...I love the deep— the deep chaos involved in here. The ordered chaos, but deep chaos.

Austin: It's ordered chaos. It is.

Dre: Yeah.

Austin: It is. It is.

Sylvia: I appreciate how ambitious it is. [Austin laughs softly]

Dre: Yeah.

Austin: I think it's a fun way to listen to seven years of a show or whatever. So.

Sylvia: Maybe not the first time through, though.

Austin: Yeah, I don't know. It's wild.

Dre: What, are you coward? You a baby?

Sylvia: [laughs softly] No! [Dre and Keith laugh] I just get better at this over time, damn it!

Austin: You get better at this over time.

Dre: Yeah, no, that's fair.

Austin: Okay, but would you— but I guess, does this method...this method starts with you doing a really great character. Not that— I think all your characters are good, but you're doing— you're Echo. That's how they introduce themselves to you.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Austin: That's...that's not bad.

Dre: Yeah, that's pretty good.

Austin: I think people should listen to this season first, and then once they know us and love us, should go back and listen to the rest. I think that's...

Sylvia: The Sylvia Method, which is you just listen to the stuff from after I came out.

Austin: [laughs] Yeah, uh huh. Correct. [Dre laughs] You know what? Fuckin' fair enough. [Sylvia laughs] Anyway, the actual question here from Rufus and from Annie. We got a lot of questions basically like this. This is a thing that we just do again and again and again, and it is very important to us, or at least to me. Like, I feel like I take a lot of...I take a lot of the blame for this arc, or this notion recurring, because it's a lot of NPCs and groups of NPCs that are like, hey, this is a type of personhood that counts, even though you would think it doesn't. This is all over Blough City and Bluff. This is all over—I mean, this is like the way the metaphysics of those worlds work. This is all over...all the other seasons have some—I would say every season probably has some instance of this sort of thing, especially when you look at the way Annie frames it as like temporary or digital or magical construct personhood.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Austin: I think every single season has something that fits into this.

Dre: Mm-hmm.

Austin: [sighs] I think it's important to me because it is...when we were making *Twilight Mirage*, a thing I said over and over again was like, no alibis. You...and for me, that was a guidance for that whole season, because I really wanted us to avoid not having the most difficult and direct version of the conversation. I didn't want, like, the thing that happens in fiction where it's like, "Ah, by a stroke of luck, these two people miss each other, and so they can't have the fateful conversation that would bring them together or put them at odds." Because I really wanted that season to be about the fact that there are real, true differences that are not about bad timing and not about, you know, you know, poor luck or whatever. That you can have two people who you like, who you agree with, are decent people, who arrive at different conclusions about the state of the world and their place in it and that that can lead to conflict. Um, you know, we are... [laughs softly] We are making that season in 2016-2017. I believe that that's *Twilight Mirage* era. Maybe it's 2017-2018?

Keith: I don't think so. I think it was longer ago.

Austin: I think it's 2016-20—I mean, there's a real easy way to figure this out, which is—

Sylvia: It was a long season too, so it might have even been 2016 to 2018.

Austin: It was a full year. Yeah, it's 2016-2017, I think, because Frank Ocean's *Blonde* comes out August 20— [laughs softly]

Sylvia: Okay, yeah.

Austin: I could have searched for *Twilight Mirage* 00 to find out, which was— no, it was 2017-2018. It was a year after that. I was fucking thinking about that show for so long. We were like in pre-production for *Twilight Mirage* for so long. But I felt like there was a real...there was—

and I don't want to say I felt like. There was a real notion at the time, in those early Trump years, of like...and we're still in the middle of it in a real way, right? That just like...

Dre: Yeah.

Austin: There's the bad guy, and then there's rational people. And I really wanted to do a season in which quote, unquote, "rational people" had serious differences with each other about the state of a failing, you know, nation basically. And so, for me, the temporary/digital/magical construct personhood, as Annie says, or as, uh...let me come back over here. Or as Rufus says, this idea of people who would be— types of characters that would be dehumanized in other seasons being recognized as people, having recognized personhood throughout, is a no alibis thing for me. With just like, all right, we really want to treat people as people? All right, let's do it. Like, where are you gonna draw the— where are you gonna draw the line? Because I don't want to draw that line. Or I think it's more interesting to force us to say— there's a moment at the very end of this episode, Keith, [laughs softly] where we get into this a little bit, and you say, like, "Okay, but are these people real?" And you're like, well, you say something like, "Well, I know that when I'm having a dream, the people in the dream aren't real." And I just say, very flippantly, I was like, "Are you sure? How do you know that?" Um, which is rid—

Keith: I am sure, though.

Austin: Yeah, I know you're sure.

Keith: (I'm sure they're not. ??? 27:04) [Sylvia laughs]

Austin: And like, we, um...for me, I'm not sure. I just operate as if I am, because that's the only way to get through the day. In the same way that I don't actually know the sun is gonna come up tomorrow, but it's ridiculous to operate under any assumption other than: yes, it fucking is. At some point, we have to give into inductive reasoning and say, like, okay, it's gonna— it's, you know, I'm gonna operate on some...some empty promises here, because otherwise I just won't get to do anything. And so it's like, this is...one of the things that's so good about fiction is I don't have to...I don't have to do that. I don't have to say, well, you know, let's just take the easy answer and move on. I can say, okay, but what if the people in your dreams were real? How would that change how you act? Or would it change how you act? And if it didn't, is there something particularly touching or sad or something memorable to think in that mode? What's that reveal to us and our relationships to people and the way we think about people and all that other stuff? So I think that's a big part of it, is this no alibis thing of like, the bigger you can swing with "a person can look like anything," the more you can really insist that you fucking mean it. Right? That like, I...I do not care how someone dresses or lives their lives, they are people, right? I don't care how, you know, I don't care if you are someone who practices a different religion. I don't care if you are someone— and this is like extremely liberal brain shit, but like, that is, at some degree, the sort of like ext— in some ways, I think that I am always frustrated with the limits of liberal identity politics, right? Which is these are people who will vote for gay marriage, but like not want to see gay people kiss on TV. Do you know what I mean?

Sylvia: Yeah.

Dre: Mm-hmm.

Austin: And for me, the way that you get to—

Keith: Unless it's in an ad for a bank.

Austin: [laughs] Exactly! [Dre laughs] Yes, exactly.

Sylvia: Well, no, they don't kiss in the ads for the bank. They just put their hands on one another's shoulder, and you kind of imply that they might—

Austin: Yeah. Yeah, exactly.

Sylvia: There might be something going on there.

Austin: A hundred percent. These are the people who are like, you know, progress doesn't look like you know, blocking the street in your Black Lives Matter movement. Progress looks like a biracial couple in a Cheerios commercial, right? [Sylvia laughs] These are real people who I know, right? And it's like...

Sylvia: No, for sure.

Austin: For me, I want to blow up personhood so badly that it...you don't have a fucking leg to stand on anymore to draw a line and say this person isn't a person. What ends up being interesting about that is Sangfielle is 100 percent about the anxiety around not knowing what a person looks like anymore or not knowing what the— it's like, when you insist upon that as a truth about the world, how do you work through your own anxieties when you do stumble into a situation that makes you uncomfortable or that surprises you or that shocks you? Because I won't not insist upon it, but I will say that like, I am a person who grew up in America, which means I have a lot of fucking...I have a lot of other stumbling blocks. Like, I'm someone who has...who has learned a lot and has fucked up in various ways over the years and who recognizes the kind of anxiety of postmodernity is that, how do you right yourself and insist upon good politics or a good philosophy or worldview, when part of your worldview is everything is unmoored and everything is created socially and that while there may be structures of power, those structures aren't grounded by anything universal or absolute? And so that is like, that is the heart of so much of this stuff for me. And it's been really fun to do it, because also, you just get to like...there is a real, when you're in a space like this, you can make those characters do anything. You can just have a little fisherman who's going to do his fishing. And does he know that he's stuck in this weird, weird dream world? Why not? It's more interesting that he knows he's in it and that shit is weird—

Sylvia: I love that guy.

Austin: —than if he was like, [distant, ghostly voice] “Oh, I’m fading away, ‘cause the dream is fading. Bye!” [Sylvia and Dre laugh] That’s not— that’s easy.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Austin: That resolves the tension. Do you know what I mean? So. Anyway, that’s my long ramble about this shit. Have y’all felt like you’ve changed in the way that you play against when I bring up these kind of weird, you know, people who are at the edge of what traditional personhood looks like?

Sylvia: Eh, I don’t know. I think that like, we line up a lot with our interests on this.

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Dre: Mm-hmm.

Sylvia: And like, I...I don’t know, I like characters that get to stretch that definition and like, sort of challenge that. A thing like I’m thinking of right now is that I’m listening to the audiobook of *Ancillary Justice*.

Austin: Oh, hell yeah.

Sylvia: And there’s a lot of talks about like, between the main character and this like doctor character.

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Sylvia: About like, whether or not like, what like living a human life is and like, what if, like...a lot of pointed comments about like, why do you want— you’d rather me— what— [sighs] I’m stumbling over this.

Austin: No worries.

Sylvia: Uh. What you think is a good life is what you also think is acceptable.

Austin: Mm.

Sylvia: And you don’t know— you don’t think my form of existence is acceptable. It’s very interesting.

Austin: Yeah.

Sylvia: There's a lot of other questions that come with it, baggage wise, but like that's something.

Austin: I will say that that makes me think of a way in which I have changed, which is, I think if you go back to, you know, Autumn in Hieron, the breadth of this, the furthest out it gets is goblins are people too. Orcs are people too. Right? That, like, there is a...there is this idea of a holistic person, and that set of behaviors is broader than what we might think. Or if someone is rendered into this fantastical goblin form, there's a reason behind it, but fundamentally, they are just like humans. And famously—in my own mind, not actually famously. But I once said on the show or in a post mortem or something, that the thing, the trick about Hieron is it's all humans, that there are no fantasy races, they're all just humans, basically. But the thing that I think has changed from that notion of this is the desire to not just reduce down to “well, basically everyone's a human,” and instead broaden out to say, even beings that— that there is, inside of the realm of personhood, there is a greater breadth than, quote, unquote, “humanlike” behavior.

Sylvia: Mm-hmm.

Austin: And so you end up with characters like axioms in Twilight Mirage, or the Divines in general, and then like lots of bit characters here and there, who do not look or speak or behave or think or process information in ways that are humanlike in this normative sense, but are nevertheless demand and should be given personhood. It's just that there's a broad— or, and by personhood, what we mean is like, or what I mean is like, a collection of behaviors and rights around autonomy and care and space and basic needs and stuff like that, right? I think that's a way in which this has developed, because you go back to Hieron, to Autumn in Hieron, and it's mostly just “the people who look like monsters are people too,” which is fine, [laughs softly] but it's nowhere near as good as like, “What do we do about this weird cloud god that showed up?” or whatever, you know? [laughs softly]

Sylvia: Yeah.

Austin: So I think that that's a— that's an actual development. I hadn't thought about that until Annie asked this, so thank you. Um, any other thoughts on this stuff? Or should we keep moving? I know I just rambled a ton. [brief pause] All right.

Sylvia: Yeah, you kind of covered my thoughts.

Dre: Let's roll.

Austin: Let's roll. Ada.

Sylvia: Let's go.

[0:34:47]

Austin: Uh, I'm gonna read this one. This is for you. [Sylvia laughs]

Dre: Mm-hmm.

Austin: For you Chine, for you Dre.

Dre: Mm-hmm.

Austin:

My question is: so you know that Japanese game show where people are in a room where one object is secretly made of chocolate and they have to find the thing by trying to eat other things? Do you think Chine—

Keith: No, but that sounds great.

Austin: No, I don't know about that either. I read this question, and I loved that it was phrased, "So you know that Japanese game show?" 'cause I didn't.

Sylvia: Oh my god. I need to find this while you go— yeah.

Austin:

Do you think Chine would be good or bad at that game?
Thanks, Ada.

Dre: [sighs] I think it depends on how the rules work.

Keith: Right. If the rules are how fast can you bite everything until you find the chocolate, then I think probably you'd do pretty good.

Dre: Maybe. But I think in the last Drawing Maps, we established that Chine doesn't taste, like, mostly?

Austin: Yeah. Yeah.

Dre: So, I don't know how good they would be.

Austin: Can they—

Keith: Well, unless there was some sort of texture trick going on.

Austin: That's what I want to— yes.

Dre: Yeah.

Keith: Where I think you'd still be able to be like, well, I can tell that this is chocolate from the texture.

Dre: Oh. Okay, here's—

Austin: It's melting. It's— yeah.

Dre: I think this show was called Candy or No Candy?

Sylvia: Yes. Uh, I found a image gallery of some GIFs, but I'm trying to find a video of it.

Austin: Mm, mm.

Dre: If— so, from what I'm looking at in these, in these pictures, I think Chine would be good at it, because they're...they're literally just— like, I pictured there would be like, you know, four objects on a pedestel.

Austin: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay.

Dre: And like you pick, you pick it up. And no, these people are literally like putting their mouth on a doorknob or like biting a table on the floor.

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: Yeah.

Keith: This is— this is totally what I had in my head. I thought it, like, in my head it was, uh, like those viral videos of like, this is an object.

Austin: Yeah.

Keith: Is it a cake or not? And then you slice into it, and ope! It's a cake.

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Keith: Even though it looks like, you know, a book.

Sylvia: I remember the guy eating the door handle from this—

Dre: Uh huh. I just found that GIF

Sylvia: —being like kind of a viral thing on Tumblr for a while.

Austin: Ohh.

Sylvia: Yeah, like a few years ago.

Austin: [laughs] His smile is extremely good.

Sylvia: His smile. It's the smile, yeah, it's really good. [Keith laughs]

Austin: Yeah.

Sylvia: He makes a great face.

Austin: Uh huh.

Sylvia: Like, it's well deserved.

Austin: Yeah. Yeah.

Keith: That's very funny.

Austin: It's weird that there seem to be two modes for this show. One is person is in a room and they have to find it. And the other is it's set up like a panel show, and people are just bringing stuff to them while they're wearing suits with fancy ties and stuff.

Dre: Mm-hmm.

Sylvia: I wonder if it's like a segment called Candy or Not Candy.

Austin: Oh, maybe.

Sylvia: 'Cause, like, the stuff I'm looking at is a compilation of things.

Austin: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Sylvia: And I know that there's like panel shows and like, like talk shows and stuff that do different segments and stuff.

Austin: That do that style of— yeah, uh huh.

Sylvia: I don't know.

Keith: I would love to be in the room version of this. That's really what I want.

Austin: That's the fun.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Austin: I want to be in the room version of it and it to be not just chocolate and it to be like five things in the room. You know what I mean?

Dre: Ooh.

Austin: I want to zero— I don't want to— I don't want it to be one thing. There's too many things in a room.

Keith: Oh my god.

Sylvia: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Keith: Okay. All right. At one minute in...

Austin: Uh huh.

Keith: This is so good. There's an aloe plant that I looked at.

Austin: Yeah, it's so funny.

Keith: And I was like, that's definitely gonna be chocolate. And the guy bites into it, and it's just a full bite taken out of it. [Austin laughs softly] And I was like, I was right, it was chocolate. And then, nope, it was not chocolate.

Austin: It was not chocolate!

Keith: That guy has a big aloe bite in his mouth. [Keith and Sylvia laugh]

Austin: Yeah. 'Cause you can still just bite aloe. It's not that hard to bite through aloe.

Keith: No, no.

Dre: Yeah.

Keith: But I— I was like, that's so shiny. That's gotta be chocolate, like, with a thing on it.

Austin: Oh, it's so funny.

Sylvia: Ah, the one right after it's really good too.

Austin: Yeah. Uh huh. [Keith laughs]

Dre: I'm watching a different video, and it seems like some people like just have never had chocolate or any other food in their life. [Austin laughs] Because they like take a bite, and they start chewing, and there's— they still don't look sure. [Austin laughs]

Keith: It's gotta be— that has to be like faking for the camera. Like, doing a weird (??? 38:33) thing where...

Austin: Playing it up, yeah.

Keith: Yeah, you're trying to play up if you got it right or wrong, like a fake out. Right?

Austin: Yeah.

Keith: There's no way that that shoe guy didn't know right away that that was chocolate. [laughs]

Dre: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Sylvia: You know, it looks like it was like kind of tough.

Keith: It did look...

Sylvia: I think he was just trying to get (??? 38:46)

Austin: It's so funny. Anyway.

Keith: This is great.

Austin: I think— that's the question. Does Chine have—

Keith: America has the most dogshit game shows.

Sylvia: I know.

Dre: Yeah, we do.

Sylvia: It's— ugh.

Austin: Ah. Okay, but I did spend a week watching *Price is Right* recently.

Keith: Ah...

Dre: Okay.

Austin: And not just today's *Price is Right*. Like, an episode per decade, going back to when it was the 1950—

Dre: Wow.

Sylvia: Mm.

Austin: Do y'all know about the old *Price is Right*? I have to read this.

Sylvia: No.

Keith: Not really.

Austin: Okay.

Keith: I will say that my—

Sylvia: I guess I just didn't— I didn't really like see ever.

Austin: Okay, we have to get—

Keith: We've talked about this before.

Austin: Yeah, uh huh.

Keith: But I basically think that *The Price is Right* is really boring.

Austin: You're wrong.

Keith: I don't underst—

Austin: There's lots of mini games. It's great.

Keith: I don't understand the fun. Like, where is the fun part of it?

Austin: All the way through.

Keith: Because it just seems like you can always do the famous *Price is Right* thing where you just like go a cent higher.

Austin: It's not a—

Dre: Well, but then you gotta go play the game.

Austin: Yeah, the pricing game.

Dre: On your own.

Austin: Yeah, the game— that's where the fun is.

Keith: Okay.

Austin: The fun is someone's yodeling as a guy is climbing a mountain, and you're trying to keep him from falling off the edge of the mountain, and it's based on you guessing prices right.

Keith: There's a mountain?

Austin: Yeah, see, this is...

Sylvia: Yeah, and then they go *womp, womp, womp, womp*.

Dre: Yeah, mount...

Keith: I've never seen anything with a mountain.

Austin: It's called Cliffhanger. Plinko. Come on. I know how much you love Lucky Hit. Lucky Hit is in *Price is Right*. [Sylvia laughs]

Keith: I think maybe you don't know how much I love Lucky Hit. [laughs]

Austin: You love Lucky Hit.

Keith: I definitely love *saying* Lucky Hit.

Austin: [laughs] What is—

Sylvia: Keith, you love Lucky Hit.

Austin: You love Lucky Hit. [imitating] "Do you want to play *Lucky Hit*?"

Dre: Hey, if you want to find out how much Keith loves Lucky Hit, you should go subscribe on Run Button.

Austin: Yes.

Keith: Yeah, you can go to contentburger.biz.

Austin: Contentburger.biz.

Keith: And watch, um...I think we played four hours of Lucky Hit in that *Shenmue* LP. [Sylvia laughs]

Austin: Easy. Easy! Easy.

Dre: You fucking love Lucky Hit.

Keith: Well, because multiple guides were like, "Yeah, this is the only way to make money in this game," [someone laughs] and they were just wrong.

Austin: They're just wrong.

Keith: It's the absolute worst way to make money in this game.

Austin: [laughs] It's the worst.

Sylvia: Kind of seems like a series where everybody just has it wrong a lot of the time.

Austin: Yeah. Yeah.

Keith: Yeah. If you want to make money in the *Yakuza* games, get good at the fighting, and do like 45 minutes of fighting.

Austin: Yeah, and you're good.

Keith: That's my *Shenmue 2* thing.

Austin: You said *Yakuza* just now.

Keith: Oh, sorry. It's the same to me.

Austin: It's the same.

Sylvia: It's like, you know. You don't get one without the other.

Austin: Yeah.

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: Yeah. It's not the same. I think *Shenmue*'s better at having like, you're actually like doing the life sim stuff, at least *Shenmue 1*.

Keith: Totally. Way better, yeah.

Austin: But anyway.

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: Anyway, here's the thing. *Price is Right*—

Keith: But *Yakuza*'s better in literally every other way.

Austin: Yes. A hundred percent.

Keith: It's actually extremely fun almost all the time.

Austin: Yeah. Uh huh.

Sylvia: (??? 41:07)

Keith: Instead of *Shenmue* that takes a lot of conceptualization to make it fun in your brain.

Austin: Yes. So, *Price is Right* contemporary started in the 1970s? 1972, it looks like. But before the '72 version, there was a, uh...which is where Bob Barker came on. There was a version with Bill Cullen who hosted it, where instead of having the like, "come on down" rotating, you know, people, you had a traditional panel style, like quiz show style game show, where you had four contestants every episode, and if you came on and won, you could stay on to the next day. And it was just guessing prices.

Dre: Oh.

Austin: It was just the thing Keith thinks it is, of guessing prices. But here's where it's different. [reading] While many of the prices in the original *Price is Right* were normal standard game show fare like furniture, appliances, home electronics, furs, trips, and cars, there are many instances of outlandish prizes being offered. It was particularly true of the nighttime version, which had a larger prize budget. [Sylvia laughs] Some examples: a 1926 Rolls Royce with chauffeur. A ferris wheel.

Dre: What?!

Austin: Shares of corporate stock. An island in the St. Lawrence Seaway.

Keith: No. No way.

Austin: A Piper Caribbean airplane. A submarine. Sometimes large amounts of food, [someone sighs] such as a mile of hotdogs, along with buns and enough condiments, perhaps to go with a barbecue pit, were offered as the bonus.

Sylvia: Okay.

Dre: That rules.

Austin: Some other examples of outlandish, exceptionally unique bonus prizes: accompanying a color TV, a live peacock—a play on the NBC logo—to serve as a “color guide.” Accompanying a barbecue pit and the usual accessories, a live angus steer. Accompanying a prized package of items needed to throw a backyard party, big band legend Woody Herman and his orchestra. [Keith laughs] Accompanying a raccoon coat worth \$29.95, a sable coat valued at \$23,000. A bonus prize of a 16 x 32 inground swimming pool installed in the winner's backyard in one day's time. A bonus prize to a trip to Israel to appear as an extra in the 1960 film *Exodus*, which is a whole can of worms. [Sylvia laughs] In the early 1960s—

Dre: Hmm.

Austin: —the dynamic of the national economy was such—and there's a lot being elided there—was such that the nighttime show could offer homes in new subdivisions, sometimes fully furnished, as prizes—

Sylvia: Oh my fucking god.

Austin: —often with suspenseful bidding among the contestants. In the last two segments of the nighttime run, this series gave away small business franchises.

Sylvia: Huh?

Austin: Yeah.

Keith: Okay. Here's the thing, though.

Austin: Uh huh?

Keith: If you're giving away a small island...

Austin: Yeah. Uh huh.

Keith: That's all for show.

Austin: Oh, I mean, yes.

Keith: You can't win that and then pay taxes on an island.

Austin: No, you have to sell that island and use the proceeds to pay the taxes you just owed.

Keith: But in— but the problem is—

Austin: Uh huh.

Keith: —that a lot of these, like, win a big like expensive prize thing, they don't even let you collect the prize—

Austin: Mm.

Keith: —unless you can prove that you can pay for it.

Austin: Right.

Keith: And so, you'll win these prizes, and then they'll go like, “Okay, and now you have to prove that you can like pay, like, the property taxes on this house.” And then you're like, “ah,” and then they're like, “Okay, well, then you didn't win anything, actually.”

Austin: This island may have been kept. ‘Cause it's called Price is Right Island. [Keith laughs]

Dre: Oh.

Sylvia: Okay. [laughs softly]

Keith: Kept by *Price is Right*?

Austin: I really want to— I'm trying to figure it out, Keith.

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: I'm trying to figure it out.

Keith: And it's the same thing with the coat, ‘cause it's like, okay, you just won a \$23,000 coat.

Austin: Oh, a hundred percent.

Keith: Now you have to pay the \$2,300 taxes on the \$23,000 coat.

Austin: Taxes on it, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Keith: And it's like—

Austin: But you could always— I mean, maybe this isn't the case then, but today, you can always take the cash value instead of taking the prize. So if you win a car on *The Price is Right*—

Keith: Okay.

Austin: —and you can't pay the taxes, you can take the prize money.

Keith: Yeah. Okay.

Austin: And still— you still have to pay taxes on the prize money, but then you're, you know, if it's a \$20,000 car and you end up paying \$8,000 in taxes, you still come out 20k ahead.

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: Right?

Keith: This is— this is probably a *Price is Right* rule. This is like a case by case thing, where it's like—

Austin: Yes.

Keith: If you win a car in a mall, like from—

Austin: Right. Yes.

Keith: You know, in every mall, they've got like three cars. Like, they don't give you the option to get the cash.

Austin: If you got that car, you gotta pay those taxes. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Keith: Right. You gotta either get the car and pay the money and the insurance or you lose out on any prize.

Sylvia: I hear, uh...oh, I was gonna make a joke about Bob Barker being dead, but he's not actually dead.

Keith: No, he's just old.

Austin: He's just old.

Sylvia: [laughing] I was gonna say Bob Barker's not really dead, he's living on Price is Right Island. [Austin laughs] But he's actually alive still, so never mind!

Austin: Oh my god, he's 98.

Dre: Wow.

Austin: Bob Barker used to be an asshole. That was the other thing about watching old episodes of it. He used to be kind of a jerk on that show. He mellowed out as he got older. Anyway.

Sylvia: I only knew him from *Happy Gilmore*, when I was like six.

Dre: I was about to say, I've seen that.

Austin: He was an asshole in that too, right?

Sylvia: Yeah.

Dre: Yeah, I've seen *Happy Gilmore*. I believe he's an asshole.

Sylvia: The price is wrong, bitch.

Austin: Right, of course.

Keith: He's 98.

Austin: He's 98.

Dre: Mm-hmm.

Sylvia: He's 98.

Austin: All right. We should keep going.

Dre: Did you know *Price is Right at Night* is back? It's back.

Austin: Drew's doing a good job.

Dre: It's a thing.

Austin: I watched some Drew episodes, and I think Drew looks real good. I think he has a beard.

Keith: He is actually dead, and the real body's buried on Price is Right Island. [Sylvia laughs]

Dre: I had not seen Drew Carey in a while, and when I saw him like last week, I was like, oh, he looks different. But yeah, no, the beard works.

Austin: I saw him when he lost all that weight.

Dre: Yeah, same.

Austin: And he's put it back on, and I like the way he looks now with it so much more. He also has a big beard. He kind of looks like Gabe Newell.

Sylvia: Oh.

Keith: He has a beard?

Dre: Yeah, he does kind of look like Gabe Newell.

Austin: Yeah. It's wild to think—

Keith: He does kind of look like Gabe Newell! Wow! [Austin laughs]

Sylvia: Oh my god.

Keith: That's bizarre.

Austin: I saw him on *The View* a couple of months ago. [laughs]

Sylvia: Oh, (??? 46:42)

Austin: I went home for Thanksgiving, and my mom had *The View* on, and I watched 15 minutes of it. And then someone was like, "Well, Drew, you've always da da da da da." I was like, "Oh my god! That's Drew Carey!" I didn't recognize him with the beard at all.

Sylvia: He also kind of looks like Steven Root, the character actor.

Austin: Yes.

Keith: He also does kind of like Steven Root. Yeah.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Austin: Yeah. I can see it.

Dre: Man.

Austin: Wow.

Dre: He's very avuncular.

Austin: Yeah! Yeah. Anyway, shoutouts to Drew Carey. We're gonna keep going.

Dre: Anyway, Chine would be really good at this game, because he wouldn't bite like a coward. That's my official answer.

Austin: Yeah.

Sylvia: [laughs] Chine would just eat everything in the room!

Austin: Yeah, it all tastes good. Was that the game? [Sylvia laughs] The game was it was good? Yeah, it was good.

Dre: Mm-hmm.

Austin: I'm stuffed. I have the Haven domain now.

Sylvia: My domain changed to chocolate, so I know that I found it at some point. [Austin laughs]

Dre: Yeah, I have every domain now. I'm unstoppable.

Austin: Ahh.

Sylvia: Ah.

Austin: Hey, does this, uh, does this glass coffee table count as a resource? [Sylvia and Keith laugh] All right. Andrea writes— actually, Dre, do you want to read this one from Andrea?

[0:47:40]

Dre: Sure.

Austin: You've not read one yet, right?

Dre: I have not.

Austin: All right, yeah. Go for it.

Dre:

How jarring of a surprise was it to the player characters in narrative that all of Marrowcreek was fabricated? Does weird shit—like a whole town being conjured by the

Course—of this scale happened frequently enough in the Heartland for this kind of thing to feel unexpected but not unheard of? Or does this just not happen?

Similarly, insofar as this question is answerable, how much are the NPCs we see in Marrowcreek aware— Marrowcreek aware of being somewhere [laughs] not what it appears to be? For instance, Uno mentions just finding himself there but not knowing how he got there. But does that mean, from his perspective, the whole situation is amiss? Or does that happen to him frequently enough that this is business as usual?

Broader question regarding play in this situation—maybe this was answered already, and I forgot.

Dre: I don't think it was.

Austin: Mm-mm.

Dre:

Were any of the players aware what was going on in this situation prior to the reveal, or was this a surprise for the players as much as the player characters? How do you all manage players' consent in having hidden unknown Fallouts?
Thanks, Andrea.

Austin: I'm gonna skip the middle paragraph here, 'cause I think we already kind of touched the characters, some of the abnormality of, "Hey, is this situation real or isn't it?" But also because things like, how much do the NPCs, how much are they aware or abnormal about being in a weird place. If that's ambiguous, it's meant to be ambiguous, and I think maintaining that makes sense. And to the first paragraph, which I think is much easier, is like, uh... "unexpected but not unheard of" is exactly right. Sangfielle is a place where rules are not rules, fundamentally.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Austin: Right? So, um...

Sylvia: I mean, you've talked about the, um...you talked a bit about it with...I'm forgetting her name, the, um...the Cleaver who had transformed and like the trees and stuff.

Austin: Katonya. Yeah.

Keith: Katonya.

Sylvia: Yeah. You like talked about it being like a place that's like kind of known of and like feared because of that, if I'm remembering right.

Austin: There's some— yeah, I think that there was some, some mention of something like that.

Sylvia: Something about...

Austin: And I think, you know, the way that the fisherman talks about it at the end, as being a place that kind of comes into and out of existence as necessary, was similar. Right?

Sylvia: Mm-hmm.

Austin: And, and again, it just, it's core to Sang— I think I didn't explicitly say, for instance, that did come up from the *Jade Moon* arc before this one. I'm going to say just like outright here to really underscore it. Is y'all meet Kaitankro briefly, or some of you met Kaitankro briefly.

Sylvia: Mm-hmm.

Austin: And had dinner with Kaitankro. Kaitankro shows up there to really underline that this whole arc we just had about how this is how gods work—Gods need to consume always, and they're gonna keep growing until they don't grow anymore—it's just not true for Kaitankro. Kaitankro, that just has not happened to Kaitankro. Kaitankro is a god. That's Sangfielle. Sangfielle is we spent six episodes [laughs] dealing with these are the rules of gods. This is how gods work. This is why this is a threat. And then you meet one who takes you to dinner.

Keith: It's the season that's unable to be plot holed.

Austin: Right. Fundamentally in that way. [Keith laughs] It's like, oh, is there a contradiction? Like yeah, there is a fucking contradiction. That's Sangfielle. That is the— and that is the threat that Sangfielle poses to the rest of the world outside of it. That is why every nation, whether you are a shitty empire or the bastion of kind of political hope for the future, built a fucking wall around it, because that's very scary to let into your world.

Keith: I like that, uh...I think it's...I think it's not surprising that a concept like that emerges as season seven of a show.

Austin: Uh huh. [Austin and Keith laugh] Listen, sometimes you write yourself into corners, and you're like, ah fuck, I fucked up. I gotta switch this character from one party to another party in the middle of the finale arc in *Winter of Hieron*, [Sylvia laughs] 'cause I said something different six months ago in an intro, and now I have to make that right. Yeah, here, much less. You know, I'm not even sure if a listener should feel confident that that was *Uno Riscano* for real for real, for real for real. Right? Like, there should even be some ambiguity there.

Sylvia: Yeah. For example, he said his name was *Uno Riscano*.

Austin: Yeah, for instance. [Sylvia laughs softly] Which is a classic— *Uno Riscano* is the first time I've done this since *Oscar Season*, which is, uh, there's a cop in *Action Movie World*, I want to say. Dre, you were in that.

Dre: Mm-hmm.

Austin: Named Oscar Season, which I wrote down without thinking of the phrase Oscar season.

Sylvia: Oh my god. Right, yeah, I remember that.

Austin: Uno is 100 percent that again. I wasn't think about Uno the card game.

Sylvia: Perfect.

Austin: Literally at all.

Sylvia: I love it.

Austin: Literally at all.

Sylvia: Just so you know. I think it's perfect.

Austin: For me, the pun was risk, is Riscano being about the word risk, like chance.

Sylvia: Yeah. [Dre laughs]

Austin: Or like the board game *Risk*. I was like, well, is this too close with risk? Uno didn't come into my mind literally at all. Have I built a tabletop game based around the rules of Uno called The Tower? Yes. [laughs softly] Did it enter my mind literally at all? Absolutely not, so. Ah. Anyway, this third part of the question I think is—

Keith: Chutes and Lonopoly, you know, like Monopoly. [Austin and Dre laugh]

Austin: Yes. It's just mouthfeel. It's just good mouthfeel. It just, Uno Riscano.

Sylvia: It's fine. The word Hazard comes from a card game, so it's thematically consistent.

Austin: See? It's all—

Sylvia: It's fine.

Austin: There we go.

Dre: There we go.

Austin: This third thing I'm interesting about—

Sylvia: Or, dice game.

Austin: I'm interested in— okay, sure.

Sylvia: Sorry.

Austin: In terms of just how y'all feel about this sort of stuff, if you as players have thoughts on this sort of hidden information stuff that happens sometimes.

Sylvia: Yeah, it rules. [Austin laughs]

Keith: Yeah.

Sylvia: Like, I don't know. Personally speaking, I...I like have the level of trust with like pretty much everybody that we do the show with to like, if there's a reveal, I'm probably going to be like...it's not going to be something like upsetting, first of all, kind of addressing like the second or I guess last paragraph of this question.

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Sylvia: And also that it's probably gonna be tight. Like, we— you guys make cool shit, and it's fun. [Austin laughs] Yeah, no, surprises are great. Like, I don't want to know everything that's going on with like, the game we're playing, like, ever, really. [laughs softly] And it's nice having those moments that are like big, like, pulling— like, kind of pulling the rug out from under you, but, mm...

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Sylvia: Less so, like more just like revealing the magic trick type shit.

Dre: Mm-hmm.

Sylvia: That stuff's really fun for me as a player. Like, it keeps things very fresh, and this was a great example of that.

Austin: There are times when I'll ask someone something when it's tied to their character.

Sylvia: Mm-hmm.

Austin: Where I'm like...or, I mean, the biggest answer here is we do a conversation at the top of the season that's like, everybody reads this book and earmarks stuff that they don't want to show up.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Austin: A good example of this is the Hound has completely changed in terms of what the Hound is, through Ali reworking it to be the Keen, and a big part of that has been a lot of the alcohol-related stuff has shifted away from that. Fallout was something everybody read through also, and we talked about, hey, how much blood do we want? How much gore do we want? How much of this or that? So I think there was opportunity for that. But in a bigger way, I think that there is...I don't think that the— okay, so [laughs] here's the number one thing. There's no such thing as a perfectly safe table. You can— you can't aim for that, because you will end up hurting people and then getting really defensive when you say, like, “Oh, but I did all the right things. I had all of the right protections in place. It's not on me that you were hurt.” What you can have is a culture of care and respect and a set of practices and behaviors that anticipate where harm might be done and that work to...to help heal harm when it is done and to give the equity at the table necessary in order to recognize when someone has done harm to somebody else and to find a way forward from that leaves everybody, you know, involved in a place where they feel comfortable and safe and secure to continue playing. I don't think that the world, that the way that you prevent harm is by like signing a contract up top that says, “First, do no harm.” [laughs softly] I don't think that's enough.

And so I think that while there— it's super important that we have that conversation of top where like, if someone had said, “Oh, I really don't like this Fallout. Can we not do this thing where a character is misled into a place where like they think it's one thing and it's another thing? That really, you know, is a touchstone for me that is some— makes me feel really bad. It triggers me. It's just not something I'm interested in narratively. I hate when stories do this,” it would have been off the table, a hundred percent. But likewise, if we had done this, and then an hour and a half in, someone was like, “Oh, Austin, this just doesn't feel good to me,” we would have stopped playing, and we would have figured out what to do. We would have just recorded a different session. We would have— I would have prepped something else. We would have gone a different direction. We'd have talked through like what people are interested in. And the only way to achieve that is through what Sylvi just talked about, which is like developing trust at the table that you can speak up when something goes wrong. And we've re-recorded a session before.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Austin: You know, we've gone down that road. You know, we've seen that happen. And we still turned out a really good episode when that happened. [laughs softly] You know what I mean?

Sylvia: I think all of us were there for that as well, actually.

Austin: You all were there for that. That's very funny. Jesus.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Austin: This—

Sylvia: No, but like, that's part of it, though, is like, doing—

Austin: Yeah.

Sylvia: Having done that with you guys is like, oh, I know how this is going to be resolved or like how we would resolve something like this.

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Sylvia: Like, the big thing, like you said, is like you're not going to be able to avoid...like, just a fact of life is you're not gonna be able to avoid, like, upsetting people now and then.

Austin: Yeah. Yep.

Sylvia: But your reaction to what, like...like, your reaction to that and how you like handle it and care for the people that were harmed or hurt like while you were playing? Like, that's kind of more what matters to me, personally? I don't know. I hope that makes sense.

Austin: Yeah. I'll say I've definitely developed a relationship with every player here to have a pretty strong idea of what types of surprises they're in— they enjoy and which ones are stressful, for instance.

Sylvia: Mm-hmm.

Austin: Jack is a player who like cannot wait to throw their characters into the pit head first. [Sylvia laughs] And I can trust that. Whereas I think there are other players who want to have emotionally prepared themselves for like a really heavy episode or an episode where there's gonna be a lot of stressful combat or that type of tactical thinking. Or will...will want certain types of surprises, are excited by certain types of surprises, and I lean towards that stuff. And that is just knowing your group of players and knowing everybody else at the table pretty well and thinking through what has excited them in the past. But it's really hard to go to this complete...I think it's really hard to map consent onto a collaborative storytelling process, because it's really hard to imagine a world in which every instance of surprise is fairly and equitably reconsidered. And I think it has to be much more about figuring out ahead of time where you need to go to that second stage of deeper conversation about stuff, which is why like, you know, character death is one we're very open about talking through that in a...in a out of character way. We know that that's a thing. We know that, you know, major acts of violence done to characters or in-party agreements, stuff like that. Sorry, in-party disagreements, you know, between player characters, are places where we hit the brakes and start talking about what sorts of stories we want to tell versus which ones we don't.

But there's a lot of area here where the joy of play comes from not knowing what the other person is about to say and operating inside of a framework of consent versus explicit consent, if that makes sense. Like, a...because the thing we're doing is telling stories. Different sorts of human behaviors require different sorts of consent. When I have an artist who works for me on my day job who is like doing 12 different explorations of a character description I had, I want that artist to just like send me 12 things. I don't want to see 12 like sketches and then have to approve each of the 12 sketches, right? And that's a much different thing than an intimate interpersonal relationship, or business relationship between two people who, you know, co-own a business, or a familial relationship, or even just like cooking dinner. Like, the difference between me being like "Oh yeah, can you give me 12 pieces of art about this character?" versus like me having a partner and like I've just decided for us together what dinner is and prepared it without any input, much different, you know, much different relationship there. [laughs] Especially if it's like, I don't care what you want for dinner.

Keith: Make me 12 different dinners.

Austin: Yeah.

Keith: And I'll pick. [Austin, Sylvia, and Keith laugh]

Austin: And I'll pick. Yeah, that's the worst. Yeah, uh huh.

Sylvia: Prepare me a tasting menu right now.

Austin: [laughs] All of which is to say, like, this stuff is— I don't know that this stuff is as simple as do it the way that that is...do it the capital R right way, and there is one right way. I think if you look at some of the stuff that folks like Jay Dragon have written about, about why their games don't use the lines and veils specifically. And like, if you go read *Wanderhome* and the way that *Wanderhome* talks about care at the table, or go read some of Avery Alder's stuff about what the sort of like people who are playing games together, what care looks like in those circumstances. It is not this simple neoliberal contract. It very much is this more complex set of behaviors and beliefs about how people should be treated humanely and how you should work together with people. So I would advocate for a complex relationship to this stuff, if that makes sense. Which often means sometimes people get hurt. And it's, again, it's just about— it's about doing right by people who are in pain, not about anticipating every possible and policing every possible moment where pain might be felt, you know? I hope that that all makes sense. Any other thoughts here about surprises? Or can we keep on rolling? All right.

Keith: I thought that was the last question.

Austin: No.

Keith: Oh, no. No, there's...

Austin: Light spoilers for past seasons ahead.

Keith: There's a light— I saw this light spoilers page—

Austin: And thought it was our classic—

Keith: —and just assumed that it was the...

Austin: Yeah, yeah.

Keith: Yeah.

[1:02:43]

Austin: Light spoilers for past— very light. I don't think you have to tune out for this one. Ko writes:

Hey, Friends.

This might be Twilight Mirage and Spring in Hieron spoilers, but the last two times your three characters have been a party together, you also had to deal with incredible powerful foes: the long dark winter in Hieron and the Herringbone Flotilla in Twilight Mirage.

Dre: Jesus. [Sylvia and Keith laugh]

Austin:

What about your characters do you think draws them into long odds like this? Is it just—
uh, is it just a luck situation?
Infinite Love, Ko.

Sylvia: Just underdogs, baby.

Keith: Is it just—

Dre: Yeah.

Keith: Is it luck?

Austin: Is it?

Dre: I think—

Austin: I don't think it is.

Dre: I think the three of us have never met a plan that we don't like. [Sylvia and Austin laugh]

Sylvia: Yeah, we do like to do stupid things.

Keith: Uh...yeah...

Sylvia: Or not stupid. We just— like to just— maybe not even do stupid things, we just like to do things. [laughs] We are just very much like that.

Dre: Yes, yes, yes.

Keith: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Sylvia: If we stopped— [Dre laughs] we're like if, you know the myth of like if a shark stops swimming it'll die?

Austin: Yeah, uh huh.

Sylvia: I think that's a myth.

Keith: Yeah.

Dre: Yeah, uh huh.

Sylvia: That's us.

Austin: That's— that is.

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: That is you.

Sylvia: We're the Street Sharks of *Friends at the Table*.

Austin: Oh, the Street Sharks.

Sylvia: That's what I'm saying now. [laughs]

Dre: Mm-hmm.

Keith: There— for as upset as I was and still am that that boat was not anchored there the entire time that I was gone— [Sylvia laughs, Austin sighs]

Dre: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Keith: There was zero chance that I was gonna stay on the boat.

Austin: No, of course.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Austin: Yeah. I've always counted on you three for this. Always. And I don't— this isn't a diss on the other half of the show. But if I had to do like one of those quadrant maps of players, [Sylvia laughs] and one side was like reflective and like responsive versus active, all three of you would be deep on the active side, the proactive side. [Sylvia laughs]

Dre: Mm-hmm.

Austin: In terms of, like, I just need the party to get off the boat. Like literally, the three of you are the get off the boat party, in my mind. And that is what gets you into shit.

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: Also, I was just saying like Jack plays hard and throws their characters headfirst into shit, but like the three of you also play fucking hard with your characters.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Keith: Mm-hmm.

Austin: I think it tends to be that Keith ends up with really strong characters that can weather that?

Keith: I do. I don't know what— I don't know what it is, but I literally—

Austin: You're a pro gamer.

Keith: —can't stop making really effective characters. [laughs]

Austin: You're just a pro gamer. [Sylvia laughs] It is what it is.

Dre: Mm-hmm.

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: But like—

Keith: Like, I don't sit there trying to like min max a character.

Austin: Mm-mm.

Sylvia: No.

Keith: Like, I've not spent one minute doing that.

Dre: Mm-mm.

Austin: No.

Keith: In the last eight years or whatever.

Austin: No, but there's an intuitive sense that things work together well and that like, oh yeah—

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: This could work with this.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Austin: And it's not even like—

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: I don't think you have to be a genius to make combos in the games we play, you know what I mean?

Keith: Yeah, that's fair.

Dre: Yeah.

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: But like, I think one of things that's so fun is stuff like the Herringbone Flotilla arc in Twilight Mirage is where it doesn't matter how well you've built a character, sometimes the dice are just gonna like turn on you, and you're gonna get thrown into some shit. And also, in that arc, the three of you all just had to make some hard choices.

Keith: Okay.

Austin: You know?

Sylvia: Yeah.

Keith: You know what it also is?

Dre: Mm-hmm.

Keith: It's also— do you remember way back in COUNTER/weight? I literally don't remember. It must have been...it must have been the, uh, Iron Choir?

Austin: That sounds— that's a thing. That is a thing. Yeah, uh huh.

Keith: Okay, okay. I was just making sure that I got the name right.

Austin: Yep, you did.

Keith: We were like standing up high on something.

Austin: Oh, yeah.

Keith: And I was like, I was like, well, why don't I just like jump down and like ride like a drone or something.

Austin: Yeah, this happens.

Keith: Yeah. And I think that you were like, "If you do that, you'll die." [Keith and Austin laugh] And so we ended up not doing it. And I think that— I think part of it is that there's a— there's a part where I never stopped suggesting plans that I would die if I did.

Austin: No.

Keith: You just stopped saying, "You can't do this or you'll die." [Austin and Sylvia laugh]

Austin: Uh huh. Well, like, and I think there's a— there's an important difference here, which is, I mean, it's a couple of different things. I think my GMing style has loosened up, because it's fun to let you do wild shit. But I also think COUNTER/weight specifically is a world where Mako would have fucking died. [Keith laughs] Everyone was replaceable. This is a [clapping for emphasis] core tenet of *The Sprawl* and *Technoir*.

Dre: Mm-hmm.

Austin: Like, [clapping for emphasis] y'all are all replaceable. This is a hard metallic world where people go fucking splat.

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: And that is not what Twilight Mirage is. It's not what Hieron is. In Hieron, you have characters like Thrandir who are The Ranger, capital T capital R, you know?

Keith: Right.

Austin: Fero was The Druid. That's a different world. And even here in Sangfielle, where like, it's...you know, it's grim in lots of places. It's important for me to play up your expertise and your— and the fact that you kind of wriggle out of it so often, and to give you that space. And also, your dice have just been good in Sangfielle. You know?

Keith: Mm-hmm.

Austin: And here's the other—

Keith: I had a—

Austin: That's the actual big thing, real quick, that we did change, is we started playing a lot of Forged in the Dark games and games like this.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Austin: Where instead of me saying, “Uh, no, I don't think you can do it,” I have the tools to say, “That's dangerous. You want to fucking roll the dice, go for it.”

Keith: True.

Austin: But in COUNTER/weight, in *The Sprawl*, there was a sense of like, I could give you negatives, I can give you a minus to— minus forward or something. But the difference between that and a dangerous roll in a Forged in the Dark game or in *Heart* is night and day, you know? Anyway, you were gonna say something else.

Keith: Me?

Austin: Yeah, I think.

Keith: I've totally...it's gone, so it's fine.

Austin: I'm sorry. I should've let you say your thing first.

Keith: No, no, no, no, no. No worries, no worries.

Austin: Apologies.

Sylvia: I think the switch to the Forged in the Dark stuff is kind of like a big key to having unlocked that part of my brain though, of just like, what if I just— what if I throw this toy down the stairs? What would happen? [Sylvia, Austin, and Dre laugh]

Keith: Yeah.

Sylvia: Like.

Austin: Crash your characters like they're stolen cars, like I said that time.

Dre: Uh huh.

Sylvia: Yeah, no. Like, playing...tabletop games are just playing with action figures, is the thing.

Austin: Uh huh. Yep.

Dre: Mm-hmm.

Sylvia: And so like, jumping into— like, we did the faction game, which was also a different type of like connection to characters.

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Sylvia: But like, I just— I mostly jumped into the dynamic with *Friends at the Table* in Marielda and was immediately just like, oh, okay, I'm supposed to just do fucking— I'm just doing things.

Austin: You're just doing things, yeah.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Keith: Um, yeah, I think that's...it is definitely really true for me that the first half of...I just think I play games differently now than I did pre Forged in the Dark. And part of it is like playing games that, where you can like get bonus dice on things.

Austin: Uh huh.

Keith: And so you can do wilder shit. And I honestly think the other half was the *Friends at the Table* live show where you were like, "Blow up your characters. It'll be fun."

Austin: It'll be fun.

Sylvia: True, actually. Yeah.

Dre: Mm.

Keith: I was just like, damn, that was fun, and there's—

Austin: Wait, this is also that group, isn't it? But Art was there.

Keith: Yeah.

Sylvia: We also got that talk, yeah, and um...

Austin: Yeah.

Keith: Yeah.

Dre: Yeah, uh huh.

Sylvia: Art as well.

Austin: Yeah, Art was there.

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: Art was there for the episode we threw out. This is— it's this group plus Art has been in some fucking shit. [Sylvia laughs]

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: What is hap— what is— oh my god. I mean, that's the other thing, is Art— again, we talk about people being willing to throw themselves, throw their characters into shit. I think Art's very contemplative as a player.

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: But how often have we heard Art say, "Kill this character today, I'll have a new one next week," [laughs] like it's nothing.

Dre: Uh huh.

Keith: No one thinks harder about blowing up their character than Art does.

Austin: Ahh.

Sylvia: Also knows— like, picks extremely good spots to do it.

[1:10:12]

Austin: Yes, yes. A hundred percent. God. All right, I'm gonna keep moving. I think we're almost through it. Matthew Guz writes in and says:

The Marrowcreek arc has such a vibe, and part of that, for me at least, is how some of the players went along with the more dreamlike qualities—Chine throwing the fruit, Hazard playing a hand with question mark, question mark, question mark. How did you make the character decision to play into or not play into the unreality of the situation? Best wishes, Matthew Guz.

Sylvia: Uh, kind of easy to do with Hazard, honestly. There's not like a ton of backstory stuff I have prepped for them, but like enough to back up the calling and some stuff that comes out in our next arc—

Austin: Right.

Sylvia: —that makes it very, I think makes it clear, like, why it's kind of easy to go along with that for them. But also it's just like, I'm playing a character who's on a revenge mission, and the person they're trying to get revenge against is here. Dream or not, they're gonna go for that.

Austin: They're gonna do it. Yeah.

Dre: Mm-hmm.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Austin: Anyone else have feelings about how they played this?

Dre: [sighs] I mean, I think for me, my answer to this kind of also circles back to the discussion about, like, player surprise. I feel like one of the things that I appreciate about when we have like situations like this, where we don't know everything that's going on, is that I feel like I...I avoid my tendency of kind of having like, paralysis analysis—

Austin: Mm.

Dre: —about like, what a character should do. Whereas I felt like a lot of Marrowcreek was just like, okay, I don't have time to overanalyze this. What is my first instinct as to what Chine would do [audio cuts out] situation?

Austin: Right.

Sylvia: God. That is actually like so real. [Dre laughs] Like, actively trying to get rid of my, the like bad habit of not being able to decide on things that I have outside of games, while I'm playing games.

Austin: Yeah.

Dre: Yep.

Sylvia: Oh, that just clicked.

Keith: I have to add a little bit in. I have to add in a little bit of... [Dre, Sylvia and Austin laugh]

Austin: It's a little bit— you need— your characters all...

Dre: Can you borrow mine and Sylvi's, Keith? [Dre and Sylvia laugh]

Austin: Uh huh. Do you find yourself— Keith, do you find yourself needing to pace yourself in that way and like be like, all right, wait, am I jumping into this too much?

Keith: Oh, literally constantly. I mean, I feel like, uh...it was...I have always known that I talk a lot. I've been talking a lot for my whole life. [Sylvia and Dre laugh]

Austin: Yeah. Big same over here.

Sylvia: Uh huh.

Austin: And there has never been...maybe the first season. I'll say maybe— yeah, I'll say the first season, I didn't. But I think every other season of *Friends at the Table*, I consciously try to not, like, do too much talking, more than my share of talking. And even so, I think it was...yeah, it was in Twilight Mirage, about probably halfway through, where you were like, "You're talking too much." [laughs softly] Do you remember this?

Austin: I remember— privately, or was it in a recording?

Keith: Privately. Yeah, privately.

Austin: Yeah, I was gonna say. [Dre laughs] I don't think I've ever done that during a recording. That would be really rude of me.

Keith: No, no.

Austin: But I do think privately at some point I did, we did a— not a pull-aside, but we just talked about it.

Keith: Uh, yeah, it's just—

Austin: I remember there was a particular grouping that was like, I need other people to be able to finish their ideas sometimes.

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: You know?

Keith: Yeah.

Keith: So I had to...I basically just doubled what I already was doing, which was trying not to talk over people. Well, that's not fair. I didn't— trying— there's times when trying not to take up too much space talking is not the same as trying not to talk over people.

Austin: Yes.

Keith: And so I had to— I had to combine those.

Austin: It's really hard. Keith, I'm— this is like— for people listening, this is like a...so, when I record *A More Civilized Age*, I have a note, a notepad thing up on my screen that says “say less.” [Keith laughs] Like, this truly is...I cannot abide dead air. It hurts me to not be—

Keith: Yeah.

Dre: Mm.

Austin: To have a podcast where no one is filling the air after like a second of nothing.

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: And I am thinking seven thoughts ahead all the time. And I'm just like, my brain is try—

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: My mouth is trying to keep up with my fucking brain. It's a nightmare.

Keith: I've done this my whole life. I do it— I did it in school too, where it was constantly like...

Austin: Same.

Keith: There's classes where literally the entire year was like a dialogue between me and the teacher.

Austin: Yep.

Keith: Where it was just like, ope, I—

Austin: Which is like, I know that was deeply annoying for other people. And then, here's the other thing, is then, where did I do my podcast training, truly? Giantbomb.com, [Dre laughs] a website filled with people who talk over each other.

Keith: Right.

Austin: And where you have to force yourself into a conver—

Keith: Right. [Sylvia laughs]

Austin: 'Cause you're on a podcast with Jeff Gerstmann or Vinny Caravela—

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: —who are just the biggest personalities in the world. And so you get in that habit. And, and they are showmen, who are like, we're here to make the show.

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: And if the way— the thing you have to do is talk over me to get to the bit, do that. To the degree that we have those conversations before you record a podcast, where you like, everyone gets on the same page in that sense. And—

Keith: Yeah, that's definite— [cuts self off]

Austin: Totally.

Keith: (??? 1:15:23) [Dre laughs]

Austin: And so these are, you know, Aster says “I cannot abide dead air. It is really hard to give people this— uh, it is really hard to give people the space to think on their responses sometimes.” That's exactly it. And it's like—

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: You— we— the reason I give you that note is 'cause I give myself that note, which is to get good stuff from people, people need to be able to think and feel like they're not under time pressure and can just really think through their decision as best as they can. And so I think if you actually analyze the...I don't know, maybe this isn't— maybe this wouldn't hold up. But I've tried my best to not fill in the gaps of our show with just like poking and prodding until someone makes a decision as much as I used to.

Keith: Yeah, that's really what it is, is where it's like, I've already had stuff where I was, you know, I took the lead on this thing, and, you know, I...it's the same sort of thing where doing Run Button with Kylie since we were kids, basically.

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Keith: We both have the exact same...

Austin: Right.

Keith: Speech habits.

Austin: Yep.

Keith: So we're talking over each other. [Dre laughs] We're interrupting each other. It's not a problem. My whole family does this. We're always interrupting each other.

Austin: A hundred percent.

Keith: We're always talking over each other. I've had that sort of relationship with almost everyone in my life growing up. And like, it...it's, you know, since I was probably a teenager, has been learning like that and trying not to do that when I know that I'm with people that don't do that—

Austin: Yep.

Keith: —and need or like to have a second to think and don't like being shouted over [laughs softly] because they took more than half a second to respond to something.

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Keith: So.

Austin: It's hard. It's tough.

Keith: Yeah. And so that's the real thing, is like, I don't— I also don't like the dead air. I don't like being in class and the teacher asks a question—

Austin: Yep. And no one says anything, yeah.

Keith: And then it's like 12 seconds of silence—

Dre: Uh huh.

Keith: 'Cause no one wants to talk to the teacher.

Austin: Uh huh.

Keith: And that's how a class becomes the class where I spend as much time talking as the teacher does, to the teacher. [Austin laughs, then sighs] But in *Friends at the Table*, that's the wrong thing to do.

Austin: Yes. Yes.

Keith: Even if it's like still my impulse, is just to like fill...

Austin: A hundred percent. I mean, this is...

Dre: Mm-hmm.

Austin: The thing that happened to me is I had to start editing. So, there was a period where I was editing a lot of the episodes here at *Friends at the Table* for...I want to say it was Road to Season Six stuff, Road to PARTIZAN stuff, where I was doing the edits on those. It may have been some of PARTIZAN too, a little bit of PARTIZAN before Ali took back over. And there it was like, ooh, I want to give people more time to respond. I really feel like I'm stepping on stuff. But also, I'm always gonna be the person who talks the most in *Friends at the Table*, because as the GM, if we— if I have a conv— if I have a scene with all three of you, I'm in all three of those scenes, you know?

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: Which we're gonna talk about in a second. The...doing the *More Civilized Age* edits was like, oh, I just— I have to fucking die. I am not allowed to talk anymore ever. [Keith laughs]

Sylvia: Aw! [laughs]

Austin: This is— I'm a bad person.

Dre: Aw, buddy!

Sylvia: [sympathetic] Yeah, oh my god.

Austin: It was like really fucking bad. And I already— I think this is true for a lot of people who, uh, who make content. I already had a really hard time listening to my own content, because it's like, I just don't like my voice that much and like needing to hear it for that long period of time.

Dre: Mm-hmm.

Austin: And then like needing to like do edits and like clear space on it and all of that. Making sure that there's not too much dead air or making sure that like, oh, if someone gets spoken over, we can edit it so that they don't get spoken over or whatever. That process was like huge for me to be like, oh, I need to have visual reminders to make sure.

Keith: Mm-hmm.

Austin: And I— it was something I'd always already worked on. You know, going back to Waypoint, and like, we would get letters at Waypoint that were like, "Austin keeps talking all over everybody." And it's like, I promise you, I hate myself for more than you do. I have to live with it. I'm the person who fucking does it, and I don't like doing it. I don't like when it happens. But you know, it's a different situation when you're just focused on doing it versus when you get to have a computer in front of you and have like a big literal sign that's like, "Hey, slow down. It's okay." Another big eye-opening thing for me for this was the Idle Book Club where Chris Remo and Chris Remo's partner Sarah Argodale did some, like, book conversations after reading, you know, conversations about books they'd read. And that was a show that had tons of dead air, and it was better for it. You could really hear both of them thinking through the exact important thing that they were going to say about like, I don't know, an important book. [laughs softly] You know, *Wolf Hall* or something, right? [Sylvia laughs] And it's like, oh yeah, there is something really intimate about having these two people who are clearly dialed into each other in a way that is like thoughtful and space giving, so that each of them can work through their thoughts in a real way. And it's not just I can't abide dead air and instead is I can't abide half thoughts, which is the other half of it, right? Which is like, I think I've talked about this on a Waypoint Radio before with Rob. I know we're just really getting into fuckin' inside baseball shit. But like, a thing I really hate on podcasts that are like media criticism podcasts or sports podcasts or gaming podcasts is when someone starts a sentence and you can tell they don't know where the sentence is going. They're gonna find it on the way. [Sylvia laughs] They're gonna find a point, and then they're gonna triple down on that point as if it was a deep thought they've been having for a long time. And if you— you know, you can't shit a shitter. [Sylvia laughs] I've been that person. That's how I know it when I hear it. Sylvi, you're laughing.

Sylvia: I feel like I've been that person on this stream.

Austin: Of course! It's hard! It's hard! [Sylvia and Keith laugh]

Dre: Mm-hmm.

Austin: It happens! But I— it is— but it's different when you're doing it about like this, versus someone who is like, I'm gonna weigh in on politics, on why Biden has, you know, has been a great president so far. Or like—

Keith: Yeah. This is a point I'm gonna have to defend for three weeks.

Austin: Right, exactly. That's the other thing. It's different if you're like, "I just said some shit." But then if you're gonna go on Twitter and triple down on it and be like—

Sylvia: Oh, no, never.

Austin: "Uh, no, I definitely meant that stupid ass shit I said last week." [laughs] If you're just like. I do my best, when I was doing Waypoint Radio, if someone was like, "Hey, Austin, you said this shit on a podcast," I'd be like, "Well, I was fucking wrong, obviously." [laughs] So. Anyway, here are my tips to other podcasters. That's it.

Keith: It's also different when we have to— you have to pretend to be other people.

Austin: Oh, it's so hard.

Keith: So all the feelings that you're feeling are fake, so you can't like be...

Dre: Mm.

Keith: You know, you can react from a real place, but you can't know from a real place. Like, you can't like— you don't know the world like you know this world.

Austin: No. Yeah.

Keith: So you have to make shit up. I mean, literally.

Austin: All the time. All right, we should get off this question. Unless, sorry, if Sylvi and Dre have anything else to add on, on this.

Dre: I mean, the way I fixed this problem for myself was spending a lot of money to learn to be a therapist, where my job is to—

Austin: Oh.

Dre: —just mostly shut the fuck up [Dre and Sylvia laugh] and let people finish their thoughts. [Dre and Austin laugh]

Austin: Shut the fuck up all days, it turns out.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Keith: It'd be so funny to have a therapist that's constantly interrupting you. [Keith and Austin laugh] The funniest...

Dre: I don't know if funny is the right word. [laughs]

Austin: No. Ahh.

Keith: I mean, it'd be funny to watch it like on a show, I guess.

Dre: Yes.

Keith: It wouldn't be funny to be a patient.

Dre: It would be a good bit on like...god, what was the fucking show with the movie critic? Was it just *The Critic*?

Sylvia: I think that's just called *The Critic*.

Austin: *The Critic*. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Dre: Yeah.

Austin: Yeah.

Sylvia: (??? 1:22:51)

Dre: I feel like that'd be a thing on *The Critic*.

Austin: Oh, yeah.

Dre: Where like he'd be trying to talk about it, and his therapist would just keep interrupting him.

Austin: Was there—

Dre: Or *Frasier*. I don't know. I haven't watched *Frasier*.

Austin: Oh. Fraser seems like the sort of person who would interrupt you, to me.

Dre: Yeah.

Austin: I haven't seen it either, though, so.

Sylvia: Ever?

Austin: I've seen like two episodes, maybe?

Sylvia: Okay.

Austin: Maybe? I don't know.

Sylvia: Okay.

Keith: Anyway, I said this the last time that we talked about this, but if I'm ever talking too much, you can tell me to be quiet. I'm not— it doesn't hurt my feelings. I understand who I am. [Dre laughs softly]

Austin: I will say that was like a big part of that actually, Keith. For me, when we had that conversation, I learned that you took notes super well. Because you understood that I was not coming at it as like a diss about who you were. You understood it was 100 percent about making other people feel like they had the space and then making a good show.

Keith: Mm.

Austin: And like, you took it— you took that note like a professional, and like, I— let me tell you, I have been in the business of giving notes for a long time, as an editor and as someone who like started Waypoint. And you can give a note to someone that is like completely grounded in reality, and they can completely reject it in a way that is like aggressive and bad for other people in their workspace. And you were not that, so I really appreciated that and was like—

Keith: Good.

Austin: —so relieved, because—

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: You know, I don't want to fucking come and be like, “Hey, Keith, shut the fuck up.” Like. [laughs softly]

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: “Keith, say less,” is not— that's—

Sylvia: Shut the fuck up Friday.

Austin: Shut the fuck up Friday. We're recording that day, and I need you to shut the fuck up.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Austin: No. And I think I probably gave that note in a...hopefully a nice enough way. Anyway.

Keith: It was, yes. It was not— you didn't— you didn't send me a message that just said like— it wasn't like rot13 and I translated it [Austin laughs] and it said “Shut the fuck up.” [laughs]

Austin: Can you imagine? [all laugh]

Sylvia: You should do that sometime, though.

Keith: But this is why I like Lives so much, is 'cause it feels like lower stakes, and it feels like if I am letting a little bit more loose, I'm not like ruining anyone's multiple season long character.

Austin: Yeah. [Dre and Austin laugh] All right, we should keep moving. We still have, I think, at least one left, maybe two left.

Keith: Two left, yeah.

[1:24:55]

Austin: Anonymous says:

This arc has a lot of players running off and doing their own thing, which can be challenging in a tabletop RPG. Can you share some tips on keeping those scenes interesting and engaging, both in private games and in actual play podcasts?

Austin: Yeah, y'all all went off in different directions, huh?

Keith: Mm.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Dre: God, we really did. I don't even think it was that much, but yeah, we really did, huh?

Austin: That—

Keith: We split up at the fruit, right?

Austin: You split up at the fruit.

Sylvia: Yeah, pretty much.

Austin: Yep. Uh huh. I was—

Sylvia: That's 'cause we were also like trying to treat it like a regular, like a downtime thing kind of, and get some healing done, if I'm remembering right.

Keith: Right. (??? 1:25:27)

Austin: You were doing that.

Sylvia: I think you were at the very least, Keith.

Keith: Yeah, I was.

Austin: I also extremely made it so that you would fucking split up.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Austin: The first Fallouts, or first Stresses— so, I don't think it was actually Fallout. I think I really twisted the rules here and said that as part of getting Stress you got separated. It was super—

Keith: Oh, yeah, you're right.

Sylvia: Right.

Austin: I'm 90% sure this is true. And I don't know that—

Keith: There was like a— there was like a crowd or something, and...

Austin: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Keith: And I had to leave, because I failed a roll.

Austin: Yep, a hundred percent.

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: Which is playing fast and loose with the way Stress and Fallout work, but I've been thinking a lot lately about the ways in which Fallout limits me to give responses, and a classic split the party thing is like, this is a great example of a story where getting the three of you separated into your little mini vignettes, which I totally had kind of pre-prepped sort of? I had known, for instance, the three stories about what Marrowcreek is. I didn't know who was getting what, but, um...

Sylvia: That part was good.

Austin: Actually, that's not true. That's not true. I'm looking at my notes now, and I have it written down here. "Do you know why this place is called Marrowcreek?" and it says, "Hazard: Because there's a slaughterhouse up on the top of the north hill. Lambs and goats, mostly; the

occasional cow,” da da da da da. “Chine: The fields to the east. Little green gourds like zucchini, long green things. They’re sour because of the soil, you know?” and then, “Lyke: This town was named for the founder of the town, Dr. Yersa Mallow. She came from a long line of gardeners and chemists.” So it’s like, this whole...those little three vignettes were fully formed in my mind, and I was so desperate to get the three of you separated, because I knew we could zoom in on each of you in this way and have these remarkable little mini stories if I could just fucking separate you, and I just so badly needed you to make— to miss some rolls. And I decided pretty early on that I was like, I just need to do it, even if you don’t explicitly get Fallout that separates you. I need to just say the crowd gets between you and you wind up in a different place. Which I— which I think that’s the right choice and I think speaks to how I’m eager to get out of *Heart* as a system, because it can feel like I’m restricted to— I can always come up with my own Fallout, you know? But it’s really hard to do that on the spot for me, when it feels like what I’m supposed to do is pull from this collection of Fallout. And I do very much miss making a move as hard or soft as you want, because it’s very... [Dre chuckles] It’s a great thing for me to leverage for tone in either direction. I cannot— when you get Fallout, there’s not very many whatever Fallouts. You know? I can give you ominous only so many times, you know? [laughs softly]

Keith: Mm. [Sylvia laughs]

Austin: Or especially if it’s like, if it’s Blood Fallout, for instance.

Sylvia: There’s also Forboding.

Austin: There ain’t good Blood Fallout, you know? Sorry, say that again?

Sylvia: I was saying there’s also Forboding, instead of ominous. There’s a few. [laughs softly]

Austin: There’s also Forboding. Sorry, that’s that’s the one I mean, not ominous, Forboding.

Sylvia: Like whatever.

Austin: Yes. Yes. Did— as players, did you find the other scenes were able to be like engaging as listeners?

Sylvia: Yeah.

Dre: Mm-hmm.

Keith: Yeah, I was— I mean, I...I’m always trying to figure things out. It’s my worst movie habit. [Austin laughs] Constantly.

Dre: Oh, same. Hundred percent.

Keith: I’m constantly guessing the end of movies in the first 10 minutes.

Austin: Yeah, same.

Keith: It drives me crazy.

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Keith: Because I wish I just had watched the movie [laughs] without trying to solve it.

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Keith: Um, but I was doing that same thing while we were playing, and I was like, obviously something is weird here.

Austin: Yeah.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Keith: I don't know if I— I remember saying— maybe I'm wrong.

Austin: You said it.

Keith: I remember saying I had no idea that this was what...is that true? Did I say that?

Austin: I think you said both of those things. You said— you said very early on that you were like, "Uh, this place is fucked up," you know?

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: Like, you could tell that something was wrong.

Keith: Right.

Austin: But I do think that at the end of that episode you said that you were totally surprised by what it ended up being.

Keith: Yeah, and I remember— I remember sort of vaguely being like, oh, like, we're in like a dream or something.

Austin: Mm.

Keith: And then for some reason, really early on, discarding that.

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Keith: I don't know if it was something that you said or just something that happened and I was like, oh, well, this doesn't seem like a dream. Or maybe it was like Sylvi's card game.

Austin: Right. Sure.

Keith: Or something. Or maybe it was Katonya being there. I don't know. But something happened where I was like...

Austin: Yeah, you say— so, 20 minutes in. Shoutouts here to, uh, robotchangeling who did this transcript. You go, “Am I dreaming?” and then I say, “And then you—” and you go, “Are we dream— is this a dream?” and I say, “You feel like that, right? Like, there's a sense of, I feel like I might be dreaming. That's a hund— like, it's a dreamlike quality as you begin to move through these streets that gets enhanced the deeper you get into town.” And remember, I talk all about the thing of like, you start to lose track of distances. Distances are wrong. Time feels wrong.

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: You're out of time. So, I am signaling that hard. And then in the next episode, [laughs softly] um, an hour in, you say, “Literally the last time we played, I remembered that Fallout, or whenever the Fallout came. And when the town showed up, I was like, oh, that's Sylvi's Fallout, is this fake? Is this place that's fake? And—”

Keith: Right, I forgot!

Austin: [laughs] “And then between when we played then and now, I had totally forgotten. [Sylvia laughs] We step off the boat, and you're like, ‘This is basically a dream, but you can't prove it.’ And I still didn't remember!” [laughs]

Keith: Yeah. Yeah. Now I remember that whole thing happening.

Austin: [sighs] Uh huh.

Keith: I don't know why I forgot about that Fallout.

Austin: Marrowcreek. You know, Sangfielle, the...

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: When you touch the Course directly, it touches back, you know?

Keith: Yeah.

Dre: Mm-hmm.

Keith: Little bit got through the mics.

Austin: It got through the mics. You gotta be careful out there, folks. Button up.

Dre: Don't cross the mics.

Austin: Don't cross the mics. It's so funny. It's so, so funny.

Keith: Mm-hmm.

Austin: And I would say, so, in terms of tips around keeping it, keeping things engaging. I think pacing is everything, knowing when to cut a scene. I think there are definitely scenes where we had like, Lyke go off and like meet a character. And I really was thoughtful about not trying to fit all of anyone's little arc into a full segment where it'd be like, okay, we're gonna go with Lyke to the weird alchemy shop and then down to the hospital or the clinic before we come up to anybody else. Really find those moments of like...especially for a game like *Heart*, where you can cut away at a really tense moment or an interesting moment, like where the camera cut would be in the sequence that would make you go like, oh shit, some shit's about to pop off or something weird is happening here.

Dre: Mm-hmm.

Austin: And the other one is really just like, I think this arc was really strong for a lot of reasons, partly 'cause everyone played so well. Partly because I think it was one of the most clear...I had clear images of a place I had, I could talk about big vibrant things, like looking out from the hotel north and seeing these sand dunes and seeing the abattoir up in the sand dunes is like, that's a fucking weird thing. Um, that's not...that's not the way a thing is supposed to be. And that's gonna keep listeners and keep your other players engaged, is just giving them stuff to chew on a little bit. I also just realized I don't think the Drawing— or the Mapmaker for this, Jesus. I really wanted to combine Drawing Maps and Mapmaker, but it's...the money thing is weird. It turns out that like trying to figure out how to condense a Patreon into less tiers, after it's been running for like four or five years at those tiers—

Dre: Mm-hmm.

Austin: —is just a too scary thing to do, because you're just playing with too many people's rent money. Where you're like, well, if all these people end up dropping from 15 to 10, and then they drop— they go, “Eh, I don't really want the \$10 thing, I'll just drop to 5,” suddenly someone might not have rent money. And so everything just kind of stayed where it was. But I really want to combine Mapmaker and Drawing Maps at some point, 'cause it's very— I hate having both of them. I hate having both of their names, and I hate that they're different tiers. Anyway. The thing I was gonna say is I don't think I showed this map anywhere yet. I don't think anyone's seen it. Let me figure out how to quickly do this.

Dre: Ooh.

Austin: You've seen it, 'cause y'all have played on it, right? Obviously. And so—

Sylvia: The, um, the map of Marrowcreek?

Austin: The map of Marrowcreek. [computer chimes] I think what I can do is I can take a screenshot.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Dre: Please, it's Mawowcweek.

Austin: Mawowcweek. [Keith laughs]

Sylvia: (??? 1:33:49) No.

Austin: And then I can come over here, and then I can open it over here. Open original. Here we go. Um, the other thing was I just had a really good physical sense of where everything was and that I was stealing a trick from *Pathologic*, which is that it's not a map of a place, it's a map of a thing. It's a picture of a thing, and it is this tree.

Dre: Ooh.

Austin: Right? Like, it 100 percent is this tree feeding on this lake, growing up with little branches. I won't spoil what the *Pathologic* one is.

Sylvia: Oh. That's good.

Austin: But if you know *Pathologic*, you know what *Pathologic* is.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Austin: And like, this had always been, I wanted it to feel like you're in the midst of a living thing in a way. And like, this doesn't really matter, you know? [laughs] It doesn't come across in an audio format in any way. But it really helped me to stay in the mood of it all. And to have this big, weird brain at the very top, this dark red, you know, slaughterhouse just kind of sitting at the top of this tree makes this whole— especially then we're doing the Aterika'Kaal stuff with it. There was like so many good little thematic like tonal overlaps that didn't necessarily need to be said into a microphone but helped keep my headspace right, if that makes sense. So, anyway, I think that's my tip. All right, last one here, uh, from Vivian. Keith, do you want to read this one from Vivian?

[1:35:11]

Keith: Sure.

Howdy, Friends. As a longtime fan of the Heart beneath the city, I find such joy seeing concepts from the base setting remixed and reinterpreted within the world of Sangfielle. With the shocking yet obvious truth of Lye's Aterika'Kaal sanctum. Austin—

Keith: Oh, this is a quote. Austin: how—

Austin: No, no, no. This is— these are two different questions, one for me and one for you.

Keith: Oh, these are two questions. Okay. Sorry, I thought this was like a...

Austin: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Keith: Like a transcript-style.

Austin: Transcripts, yeah, yeah. Sorry. I broke these out for better reading.

Keith: And it's you asking a question, which is what you do, so.

Austin: I do do that, yeah. [Sylvia laughs]

Keith:

Austin, how long did you have that concept brewing in relation to the worldbuilding involving the re-flavored Sanctum of the Stone Chorus? And Keith, how has the mounting connection to your unintended patronage flavored how you play Lye? Best regards, Vivian.

Austin: It was when we started realizing you could re flavor one of your moves to be Aterika'Kaal-based. That was like, ah.

Keith: Mm-hmm.

Austin: We've found who your god is, in that way.

Keith: Yeah. Yeah.

Austin: That was it for me, I think.

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: That was the moment.

Keith: [rereading] How long did you have the concept brewing in relation to the... [trails off]

Austin: For you, it's mostly just like, how do you feel the— fuck, I'm doing this. Like, I don't want the dead air. You're reading; I should just let you read. [laughs]

Keith: [laughs] It's okay. It's okay.

Austin: Aaaah!

Keith: I can tune you out. I'm fine. [Sylvia laughs] I was— this is my whole world, is tuning people in and out when I need to tune them in and out.

Austin: Oh. Right, sure. Uh, huh. How has the mounting connection to your unintended patronage flavored how you play? Have you been playing Lye differently as the Aterika'Kaal stuff has gotten deeper?

Keith: Um...yes and no. I've been, like, more Aterika'Kaal stuff has leached its way into, like, my moveset.

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Keith: And like, also sort of what I'm doing. But the thing that hasn't happened is Lyke has not been forced to or asked to, like...besides briefly at the Oratorio, has not been asked to like defend what he's doing.

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Keith: Which I don't...I don't think, like, I don't know. I have this idea in my head of like, for— like, it's not gonna be a big deal. Like, what are you talking about? It's not a big deal. Like, like... [Austin and Keith laugh quietly] This is just what I do. Why are you mad about me doing what I do? Uh, but who knows. But I feel like it hasn't been, like, put up as a source of like a sore spot.

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Keith: Because there's been so many things going on. Where I had it in my head before, while I was working on it, that like the stakes were gonna be about the same level when I was...when the Aterika'Kaal stuff sort of was revealed. And, but the stakes have got— have been raised, so.

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Keith: And then the first time that we had to use it was with people who didn't know or didn't care who or what Aterika'Kaal was.

Austin: [laughs softly] Right.

Keith: Um, and it was just by chance. And so I guess the thing that I've been leaning more into is like, the...I don't know, I guess it kind of makes sense is that I had Lyke sort of grow into what the book said that a junk mage would grow into.

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Keith: But at a level that was like, I think maybe if they, like, you know, they have you start at a five and end at a ten. I don't know where we're ending, obviously.

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Keith: But I feel like I started more at like a two.

Austin: Right. Right.

Keith: You know.

Austin: And you're in the mix there, though, now, somewhere.

Keith: Right. And then, and then supplying why it would be true to the setting instead of letting the book decide—

Austin: Right.

Keith: —that it's true, just based on the lore of the world.

Austin: Totally.

Keith: But I don't know...I actually don't know...is Patronage— 'cause it's capitalized here. Is Patronage a thing in the book? Is that like a mechanic?

Austin: I don't think so. I think this is just, you know, thinking about it in that way.

Keith: Okay. I wasn't sure if it was capitalized because it was like a noun in the book or something.

Austin: I'll check. I'll check, but I don't think so. I won't check, 'cause my book isn't open. [Austin and Dre laugh] There it is. Uh, I don't think so. [“no results” ding] No. You know, patronage. Unintended patronage. That's all.

Keith: Yeah. Yeah.

Austin: I will say I had the idea of the dead bodies in there around when we did Oratorio, because it was such an easy connection between Oratorio and Aterika'Kaal as forces, as like...

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: Yeah, dawg, like, Aterika'Kaal will also kill some fools and suck their life out of them. That's a thing.

Keith: Which is great, because it's— it was so perfect in that arc, because when Art brought that up...

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Keith: I legitimately hadn't considered the parallels.

Austin: Right.

Keith: But then immediately was like, there's no...there's no...there's no contest here. This is so much worse and bigger and more awful. [Austin laughs] Which I also think is true. Like, there is not really...there's a, you know, an extremely thin line you can draw between, uh, you know. I don't think Lyke loves that one or two people—or maybe three or four people—got sucked up by Aterika'Kaal by mistake.

Austin: Uh huh.

Keith: Maybe something will happen there to be like, I wonder if we can prevent this from happening. I don't know.

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Keith: But I do know that that is different than drinking the ocean!

Austin: Uh huh. I mean, have I done the ocean bit on a podcast with y'all yet? I think I just did this.

Keith: What?

Austin: I just did this on a Patreon. I just talked about this, this thought I've been thinking about, on *More Civilized*. On *A More Civilized Age*, I mentioned this on a Patreon podcast, but I have not stopped thinking about it since I said it, which is that there was a time in human history not that long ago, hundreds of years ago, where the ocean was a force so vast and powerful that we couldn't do anything to change it fundamentally. And that's just not true anymore. [laughs softly] We have now truly fucked with the ocean in ways, and the way the currents work, and where there is ocean and isn't ocean, and the livelihoods of entire ecologies in the ocean. I

know this is all like 101 shit in the micro, when you're like, "Oh yeah, humans have ruined animal ecologies," or "The polar ice caps are melting," like, we know that. But when you really put it into the— for billions of years—

Keith: Mm-hmm.

Austin: Nothing but the kind of natural climate of the world—

Keith: The moon.

Austin: The moon could fuck with the ocean, right? [Keith laughs] And now we kind of fucked it up in like 100 years. [laughs]

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: Like, pretty bad.

Dre: [sadly] I'm gonna...I'm gonna go lay down. [Sylvia laughs]

Austin: It's fucking wild! Anyway, my point is: you're right, Aterika'Kaal only eats two or three people right now. And maybe that was true for the Oratorio at some point, but now it can fuck with the ocean or fuck with the giant lake that's an inland ocean. And like, I think that that is a fun path to start—

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: —putting Lyke on and thinking about how do you—

Keith: Well, Lyke trusts Lyke, and Lyke didn't trust Virtue.

Austin: And that's kind of where it comes down to, isn't it?

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: It's, it really does. So.

Keith: No offense, Sylvi.

Sylvia: Oh, no, it's fine. I made—

Keith: But Virtue is untrustworthy. [laughs]

Sylvia: Literally the most untrustworthy character I've ever played on the show. You're fine.

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: That's a question that doesn't come up here, but I'm gonna ask it before we wrap up. Sylvi, how's it feel to switch to playing someone who's like, just the opposite of Virtue in so many ways? [laughs]

Sylvia: I mean, it's refreshing, right? It's like, it's nice to be not at odds with the party as much.

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Sylvia: I think that like...Hazard's pretty nice so far. There's some shit going on there—

Austin: Sure.

Sylvia: That like, is gonna come out, and I think part of it has, but like, we haven't had a ton of conflict, only really the stuff with Uno in this session we're talking about.

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Sylvia: But yeah, no, it's nice to be able to just be like friendly, and—

Keith: I like that the names are backwards. That's fun for me.

Austin: That Virtue is named Virtue.

Keith: Sucks but is Virtue.

Austin: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Keith: And then Hazard's nice but is Hazard.

Sylvia: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. I didn't even think about that.

Dre: Oh.

Austin: That's fun.

Sylvia: I didn't even think about that.

Austin: Yeah.

Sylvia: Actually, cut— uh, edit that. [faking] Uh, that was intentional. [Keith laughs]

Austin: Oh. Oh, yeah.

Dre: Uh huh.

Keith: I *did* think about that.

Sylvia: I did think about that. Yep. Um, yeah, I don't know. It's nice. It's a fun change of pace, in the way that like changing up a character is always a fun change of pace though.

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Dre: Mm-hmm.

Sylvia: When we've been doing recordings for a while.

Austin: I'm ready.

Sylvia: But yeah.

Austin: This is the thing, is y'all get to do that mid season sometimes. Like, oh, I'm playing a new character.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Austin: Keith, you've done— I think, have all of you done this now? No, Dre. You've not changed characters before, right?

Sylvia: Dre has.

Austin: Yep. Yeah, Dre has absolutely done this.

Sylvia: Famously did that.

Dre: Yeah, uh huh.

Austin: Has absolutely done this.

Dre: I was about to say, what the fuck, Austin? [laughs]

Keith: Yeah, me and Dre did it at the same time.

Austin: Yeah, well, I remembered the Keith one because the— for rea— for other— it's, you know? We're not gonna get into it 'cause of spoilers, is what I'm gonna say. [Dre laughs] So you all three— wait, are you the only three players who've also done this?

Sylvia: No...

Keith: Uh, no, Jack did it.

Austin: Jack did it.

Keith: Also at the same time.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Austin: Jack also did it. You're right, Jack also did it.

Keith: Yeah.

Sylvia: I feel like someone else did it too that I'm remembering. Am I misremembering?

Keith: Although, it's— it was the hardest thing I've ever done in *Friends at the Table*. I don't— there was nothing—

Austin: Well, you swung big with that character.

Keith: There was nothing more stressful than...than going from one character to another in PARTIZAN.

Austin: Huh.

Keith: That was the hardest thing that's ever happened to me on *Friends at the Table*.

Austin: Damn.

Keith: Easily. Like, not even— no contest.

Austin: They're very different characters. And PARTIZAN is increasingly looking like a short season compared to some shit we've done, so like...

Keith: Yeah. It felt short at the time.

Austin: Yeah. We had done the Road, and I was— I think it came to a pretty natural conclusion. But I think we're— are we past it now? I don't know if we're past it in hour count, but PARTIZAN was 47 episodes. We are currently at 41 of Sangfielle. And then what we just recorded—

Sylvia: I think we'll end up there.

Austin: —is another two, probably. Maybe one, but I think it's two. I'm pretty sure it's gonna be two.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Austin: So that'll get us to 43, and I don't think we'll wrap up in less than four episodes. There's no way. I don't think it—

Sylvia: No, I...

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: I don't— we could be going for another 30 episodes. We could be going for another five episodes. I truly don't fucking know, at this point.

Keith: Yeah.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Keith: As time goes on, I think that my preference for like longer seasons is solidifying.

Austin: Yeah.

Keith: I think it was Twilight Mirage felt...felt long at the time.

Austin: Uh huh.

Keith: And then when we started doing shorter seasons than Twilight Mirage, I was like, why is every season that we do so short?

Austin: Uh huh.

Keith: And I think it's just 'cause I liked how long Twilight Mirage was.

Austin: We had a lot of space with it, you know?

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: Um, so.

Dre: Hahaha.

Austin: Oh, yeah, whoops.

Sylvia: Boo. [Keith laughs] Fuck off.

Austin: I didn't mean that. That's not...yeah.

Dre: Bye.

Sylvia: Wrap this show up right now. [Dre laughs]

Austin: Wrap it up. All right, I'll wrap it up. Thank you so much for listening, everybody. [Sylvia laughs] Well, my point was I think I'm ready. I'm like ready. I don't get to change characters. I mean, I do. I get to use a thousand different characters.

Sylvia: Oh, yeah.

Austin: But in terms of that same like core mindset swap where you're like, oh, I'm gonna be playing— like, I used to be playing the Vampire Queen of Sapodilla, and now I'm playing this, you know.

Sylvia: Funny little guy.

Austin: Fun little guy.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Austin: Card dealer with a mysterious past and a cool mask.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Austin: That's a different vibe and, and different headspace, and like for me, we have to change seasons for me to get into a different headspace like that. So.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Austin: I'm getting ready.

Sylvia: Also, I will say I am also very excited to get back to sci-fi.

Austin: Me too. Me too. Big time.

Dre: Mm-hmm.

Keith: Yeah, me too.

Austin: I'm ready for it. All right, well, that's gonna do it for us. Tipsatthetable@gmail.com is the address you can send your questions, to send us questions, please! about the forthcoming, uh...I guess at this point it would be the Just Returns arc. That's the name of the arc. So, send us questions about the Just Returns arc. And likewise, if you have questions for that side of the of the party, of the game, about the *Jade Moon* stuff, you can send that stuff there too. And we look forward to you listening, and that's gonna do it for us. I hope you all have a good weekend. Bye bye bye!

Dre: Bye bye bye.

Sylvia: Happy Halloween. It's October. Bye!

Austin: Happy Halloween. [someone chuckles]

Dre: Mm-hmm.

Austin: Bye. Stay safe out there.

Keith: I just put out a *Silent Hill* episode, where on the episode, we were like, "We're recording in October!"

Austin: Oh my god.

Keith: I just released it.

Austin: Oh, so we're synched up, actually.

Keith: Yeah, we are synched up, yeah.

Dre: Yeah.

Austin: All right. Bye.