

Gathering Information 10: Soundtracking a Miracle

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Introduction

Ali: Hello, and welcome to Gathering Information, your behind the scenes look at the setting the table for Friends at the Table. Um, I believe this is...I'm not gonna say. This is *an* episode of Gathering Information. Time is a, uh, abstract concept. Thank you for supporting us at friendsatthetable.cash and I hope you enjoy this episode. This week, [chuckling] I am joined by Jack de Quidt.

Jack: Hello! Hi Ali.

Ali: Hi! How are you?

Jack: I'm good, I'm good. When you said time is an abstract concept, I thought you were about to say, "time is...3:24 in the afternoon." [**Ali:** Sure.] And you were like, introducing it like the BBC World Service or something.

Ali: How does the BBC— oh, right, [deep voice] this is the BBC, and it is now, 3:25. Or whatever.

Jack: It is now 3:25.

Ali: Today's news...

Jack: And now for some extremely dull news.

Ali: [laughs] I hope that our news today isn't dull. I don't think so.

Jack: I hope not. Do we have news?

Ali: Um, do we have news? New Friends at the Table episode just dropped.

Jack: Oh my god it did.

Ali: It's finale season.

Jack: Does the listener know it's finale season?

Ali: I think so. The episode today, the episode that came out today, we announced that we're playing Questlandia.

Jack: Oh, okay. Sure. Good.

Ali: Yeah, and it was the, um, the first episode of the funny downtime, our little silly downtime that we did, our group downtime?

Jack: Goofy little downtime.

Ali: [giggles] Just a little, just laughs. Just, uh, fun amongst friends. What do we say? What do we say?

Jack: Ah, fun interactions between good friends, I think. Fun amongst friends.

0:01:48 - Constructing Lengthy Songs

Ali: Fun interactions, [laughs] fun interactions between good friends, you know? We're full of it, it's true. Um, but I, speaking of time being an abstract concept, *you*, um, have dedicated a fair amount of time to composing...I think the longest song you've composed for Friends at the Table yet. [**Jack:** Yeah.] Last episode, me and Austin actually went through the Friends at the Table discography to try to get to the bottom of this. I think there was like a six minute song in Sangfielle, maybe?

Jack: Yeah, and then um, “Four Conversations” was I think about seven minutes long, [Ali: Oh sure.] but yes, I think this track “Just One Second” which— we spoil the show, right? Here in this show? We do.

Ali: Yeah. Yes yes, yeah.

Jack: Okay so this track, in my project file, is just called “Mirage Bombs.” [Ali laughs] So that’s how I think of it. It’s about nine minutes long, which is chaos.

Ali: Wonderful. No, that’s how long songs should be.

Jack: See, see, I think I feel this way too, right? Because, what is your favorite extremely long song? Or rather, what is a long song that you have been listening to recently?

Ali: Uh, okay. So a long song that I’ve been listening to recently, is obviously the one that you just composed.

Jack: Oh sure!

Ali: Um, if I could really just show my whole self right now I think my favorite longest song— oh, this is only...this is only seven minutes. That’s barely a long song. Okay, [giggling] there’s “The Willing Well II: From Fear Through the Eyes of Madness” by Coheed and Cambria, or there’s The Dear Hunter, “The Lake and the River,” which I think is, maybe that has nine. That’s an *Act II* song.

Jack: [cross] Is this also a Coheed and Cambria joint?

Ali: [cross] I am a prog rock person.

Jack: Yeah, exactly!

Ali: No, this is The Dear Hunter, but dear with a D-E-A-R. Nine minutes and forty-six seconds. That’s how long songs should be!

Jack: Yeah, see, I think I broadly agree. I really like Godspeed You! Black Emperor a lot, which is also this kind of, kind of proggy space. And they have you know like 15, 15 minute songs. They had a song for a long time that was called, that they didn't put on an album I think 'cause it was too long, that listeners just ended up calling "The Behemoth" because it was 45 minutes long. [both laugh] Isn't that good?

Ali: That's perfect.

Jack: But then I also like, recently Keith put me onto Van Morrison and there's a Van Morrison song called "Madame George" which is nine minutes long and doesn't feel like it. I also, I really like, I really like long songs. I tell you what I also really like. I really like short songs. I think it's really funny when a song begins, and after about a minute and 14 seconds, they just give up and do something else.

Ali: [laughs] They're like, this was a really good idea.

Jack: Ah, we're done. We're done with it.

Ali: Yeah, we did what we had to here, they get it. [wheeze]

Jack: It's so weird because when you're, um, there's a great quote from Brian Eno who is an ambient minimalist composer who was asked to write, um, the sounds for a Windows version, I think it might have been Windows 98 or something? He did the like start-up noises and he did the like, little plinks and plunks that the computer makes.

Ali: Oh my god that's right, like imagine designing a twelve second song...[cross] that people are gonna hear every single day of their lives.

Jack: [cross] I know! Over and over and over. He was like, I had to think smaller and smaller and smaller and smaller and like pack as much sort of nuance and interest in these tiny chunks. And then he said that something very strange happened to him when he got back to writing longer songs again, which was, he said that he felt like he had oceans of time to work with. [Ali laughs] You know? Like, a minute suddenly feels like so much. But it drives me crazy because when I'm composing, and I don't know, you work

with audio too, so I wonder if you feel the same way. A second is a very long period of time.

Ali: Surprisingly, yeah.

Jack: And so when you look down the barrel of a track that is like eight and a half minutes long, nine minutes long and you get there by clawing your way through every second. [both laugh] You suddenly realize the constituent part of the song is like, this already quite large unit of time so you just... Oh god, I got to the end of it and I was so tired of listening to the same... [trails off chuckling, Ali laughs] ...to the same thing, right? **[Ali:** Uh huh.] But at the same time, you know, I think I knew that I wanted to write a really, really, really long song. And that's such a weird impulse to go into a scene with, right? Because when the, when the bombs go off, I think all three of us on the production team sort of knew that we would want some music for that. But what I was sort of initially intending to do, the first idea that I had that I then summarily rejected in favor of writing a really really long song was what we usually do, right? Which is like, pick out an individual moment and then soundtrack that, you know? **[Ali:** Right, yeah.] Place the focus in a certain bit of the bombs going off. But, something about the intensity of that moment, and the way that it felt like such a transformation. You know, we've joked behind the scenes about how the Mirage bombs going off kind of like blew up our own production plan as well.

Ali: [wheezing] I know! It's so weird that we got caught in it, like the...[laughs]

Jack: We got trapped! Have we talked about this on mic, kind of?

Ali: Um, I spoke a little bit with Austin about like, the decision around that and some of the Figure stuff, but I think that it's like, worth also considering from the music side of like, the way that that shifts what you're taking on. And then just also the smaller ways that we like, as we were going into the finale just being like, oh yeah like, I guess I'm gonna quote myself here but when we had that sort of like, 'we're not doing a faction game, [cross] let's just talk to each other' thing. [laughs]

Jack: [cross] Oh, the panicked meeting.

Ali: Yeah! And I came to the realization that like, we kept talking about how like, how we should structure this in terms of like, well we can have two episodes and they can have two episodes. And then I was just like, *why* would we even do that? Like, like, the, the, the fog of the Twilight Mirage is also covering the show and it should feel like, it should feel for the audience like this is a break in the status quo or the momentum or the like, structure of this thing, um, was a very good moment. But like, we don't get there without feeling like the Twilight Mirage allows for that.

Jack: Yeah. It's a space of like, radically reshaping how the form works, right? **[Ali:** Uh huh.] As well as how the story works. **[Ali:** Yeah.] And I mean, I think the biggest example of this is twofold, right? The first is that Twilight Mirage was an exceptionally long season, and that is part of the shape of it whether you like it or not. **[Ali giggles]** And the other thing is that sequence that we did in the middle called This Year of Ours, which is sort of like, like all three of us, y'know, when we all sleep in the three, the triple-decker bunk bed in Friends at the Table Production Headquarters, we will all wake up in the middle of the night and go, 'oh god! This Year of Ours!' **[Ali:** [laughing] Uh huh!] And then we all say, 'no, no, it's fine, it's fine, we're done, we're past it.' What a crazy thing we did. I mean it was, it was, it was like a delight to have made. To go, this is absolute chaos, you know? To, to, to...it's like watching someone say, 'and now, I'm gonna jump through the flaming ring!' And then jump through like, eight flaming rings in a row. **[Ali laughs]** That's a delight. But making it was exhausting. And so when we were talking about, when we had our little emergency meeting I think you both pitched and then immediately rejected a sort of weird sequel to This Year of Ours.

Ali: [laughs] There was, yeah. There were a bunch of times that I said to Austin, especially when I was deep in the mines of like, looking through Itch games for a finale game, where I was just like, let's just make fucking... 'Cause like, it was such a thing of like, the setting has changed but the characters haven't, you know? **[Jack:** Right.] And the ability for us to like, follow the characters through that transition I was just like...And also, there's so many fucking solo...[both chuckle]...solo journaling games on Itch now that it's impossible to find a game for eight fucking people. Then I was just like, let's

have everybody pick their own solo journaling game and you get back to me about what you wanna play. [giggles]

Jack: This Year of *Yours*.

Ali: Yeah, you know, Austin can have all the time he needs and we each just go in our little corners and do something really fucking stupid and then move on. But I think that we've, we've found something that sort of meets in the middle there I think, which is very good. Um, the thing that I liked about Questlandia the most is that it like, really facilitates eight different characters having eight very distinct goals.

Jack: Oh, it's wonderful.

Ali: It's such a fun game, I'm really excited to play it.

Jack: Yeah, we haven't started recording that yet, but it's, it's comin'.

Ali: It's coming. It's, yeah. Oh, Friends at the Table. Oh, PALISADE.

Jack: But I think it was during that panicked meeting where I said, I'm gonna write an eight minute song. I'm gonna soundtrack the entirety of the bombs going off. And you and Austin were sort of like, well shit. I guess this is the finale, you know? We're just...okay!

Ali: Yeah, 'cause that is not our process. I would say that like, I will usually send you between a ten and fifteen minute section of the episode where it feels like music should be and with the expectation that the reason it's that length is so you can have context of what the scene is, and then sort of pick for yourself what you think the best, the most like rhythmic or, um, soundtrack-able moment is. So I was not expecting to hand that over and then have the whole thing be tracked, as it were.

Jack: And if I'm honest, that's part of why I did it. [Ali giggles] Is there is something so joyful to me in watching other media or in listening to music, and seeing someone attempt something so categorically ambitious and stupid and being like, how are they going to pull this off? Why have they decided to do this? And to be a listener listening to

this moment, right after Figure's died, I think the move said something like, 'you die in spectacular fashion.' Or like, something happens in spectacular fashion. And then for the music to start, I really wanted the listener to be going, this— it's still going! [Ali laughs] I haven't had a chance to breathe! At no point— how is it still happening? And the more I wrote it, the most I realized that as well, you know, I was making a specific reference of the kind of shoegazey, proggy feel that we've got going in, in, in PALISADE this whole time, right? Where it's like, this is a genre that very often trades in extremely long songs that kind of work through these really subtle changes throughout the song and kind of develop. And in that way, it felt like I was playing with the genre of soundtrack that we've kind of decided on. And saying, alright well since we're doing this sort of post-rock, or we're doing this sort of prog soundtrack, why don't I try and do the thing where, you know, you write something really, extremely long.

Ali: Mhm. And you did it. You sat down and you did it.

Jack: [cross] What sucks was—

Ali: [cross] [laughs] You set a goal and you did it!

Jack: Yeah, I, sometimes when I...usually when I'm constrained by a scene, you know when I've decided what I want to write, I sort of forget about the time. Because I'm like...y'know, the song will be the length of the scene. My job now is to write the music until the episode audio stops. [chuckling] As it were, y'know? [Ali giggles] And then I get to the end and I go, oh that was two and a half minutes or oh, that was three and a half minutes or whatever. But I really did feel like I was staring down a really unpleasant barrel here because I knew from the start that oh, this is going to be really, really long. And so I— you gave me an enormous gift by shuffling the episode around so that I was given longer to...I was able to start like, pre-production on it slightly over two weeks before it was supposed to come out which was lovely.

Jack: (cont.) And then I wrote it over just over a week. And I wrote it like a drill sergeant, where I would sit down and I would say, 'you need to write this much music today —' it was like Stephen King at his typewriter. And often when I write I try and,

because often we don't have a lot of time, I try and get stuff as finished as I can as I'm writing it, y'know? So I will like, write out the core idea and then I will add the orchestration on top, y'know before the rest of the track has even been written, y'know, I'll write in the harmonies or I'll tweak the bassline or I'll program the drums and then I'll mix it. And then that leads to these really funny moments where it sounds like you have a perfectly complete track that just flames out suddenly as I haven't written the rest of it. [Ali giggles] But here because I needed to keep the pace of writing, I was often leaving sections unfinished and keeping moving so I could get a sense of the whole thing.

Y'know, getting to the end of the...[Ali: Oh, sure sure sure.] Getting like eight and a half minutes written, y'know, on the page, and then I can go, alright what here needs improving? 'Cause I think a very bad impulse that I have sometimes is that I will write the skeleton of something and then discard it because it doesn't sound finished. [Ali laughs] And it's like, you idiot! Don't, don't discard it! It's like someone mixing together some flour and some eggs and some butter and saying 'this is not a three-tier wedding cake. I'm gonna throw it out.' [Ali laughs] It's like, come on buddy! Stir it!

Ali: Well, yeah that's such an interesting thing 'cause it's sort of a thing that I didn't realize about music is that you're not really like, outlining something the way that you would if you were writing it. Right? Is it like a thing of like, oh there's forty seconds of music and then there's sixty seconds, and then tomorrow I'm gonna do 120 or whatever. It's not like, oh I think I have a melody that can sustain ten minutes or whatever. Now just let me go fill in...

0:17:35 - Melodic vs. Ambient

Jack: Yeah it's weird! And it really depends on the stuff that we're writing, or we're working on in a season because something that has really tripped me up with PALISADE is that it is sort of closest to an ambient, um, soundtrack that we've done. PARTIZAN was also sort of semi-ambient, there weren't a ton of really strong sort of melodic ideas in that. But I was helped out by the fact that, you know, we were all in quarantine and, and I was so thrilled by like, the aggression, just sort of the like, the violence of that PARTIZAN sound, kind of playing in that space was so delightful. And

then writing PALISADE and having to be like, oh and I'm writing live guitars, or I'm writing, y'know, [Ali chuckles] um, guitar pedals and, and it's softer and it's gentler and it's a little more melodic but I still can't quite... For example, if you think about, like, the Hieron or the Sangfielle soundtracks, those things have like, tunes that you can hum.

[Ali: Mhm.] And to your point about like, outlining it, often when I'm working on those, um, things, I will start at the piano, right? And I will, I will like, outline the track, I'll block it out, you know, here's what the melody is here, here's how it moves into a midsection, here's how it does that there. But working with this ambient stuff here it really has been much more sort of, like, mutable and, and, um, sort of finding it as it comes. Playing with the sounds that are— y'know, when I'm writing ambient music, a lot of what interests me...put it another way.

Jack: (cont.) When I'm writing melody-forward music, the thing that always interests me is the melodies and the harmonies, you know? It's like, what is the idea at the center of this song? You know, what are the eight measures of a melody that I can write, that I can write really nice harmonies to, that I can work through. And then when I'm doing this PARTIZAN-PALISADE stuff, the thing that interests me is like, the sound rather than the melodies. You know like, what is the, what guitar pedals am I employing? Y'know, what is the weird sort of like shuffling rhythm that I can get across here? If a melody isn't going to be the thing carrying it. And so it was a lot of, especially in the early stages when I was writing sections without having finished them, sort of trying to work with a combination of like, intuition and experience of writing stuff like this before, of going like, do I think there is a germ of an interesting sound in here? Or like an interesting rhythm, or an interesting kind of movement? And then I can get the basics of that down, and then I can move onto the next section so that I know, y'know, that like I've got my, I've done my hours today, I've written...I think I was trying to write about a minute and a half a day, which is...doesn't sound like a lot, but is kind of exhausting.

Ali: Mhm. Yeah, that's— 'cause like, I, the thought of PARTIZAN being ambient is such a funny thing 'cause it's like, I understand what you mean melodically but like, there's such a presence of the instruments that it's like, it's like Motion is in the room with you, right? [laughing] There's not this sort of like, y'know, Muzak, sort of like, oh, this is, this

sound is just sort of happening in the background and it, y'know, it adds something but it's not interjecting itself. But like, y'know—[laughs]

Jack: It's music that happens to you, right? It was music that's happening at you, is the PARTIZAN feel. Yeah, I don't know where this comes from. I think, so way back when, like years and years ago when we'd finished *Twilight Mirage* and we sort of knew, when Austin posted that image of the wind turbine on fire and was like, 'we're gonna make a war season. This is the next show.' I really wanted to make PARTIZAN just, like, sound so hostile. [both laugh] I wanted it to be like barely music, you know? This kind of aleatory, sort of just like tones, weird harsh tones that would like intersect with each other. And the more I sat with that, I realized that I don't think I'm a skilled enough composer to write like that. That's so complex and, and, you know, requires such a control over the sound. And then, also, I don't know if we're in the business of that, you know? I'd write a one-shot that was really, *really* wildly hostile to listen to. But, y'know, we're making a show for a year, and, **[Ali: Uh huh! [chuckles]]** you know, I have to write music for scenes to happen over! Um, but I do feel that like, melody-forward stuff often for me feels like I'm inviting the listener into a melody. It's like, come into this space with us, you can work along with the melody in your head, you might be able to predict where it's going or whatever. And then by sort of diminishing that in the PARTIZAN and the PALISADE seasons, I really, I sort of want to shut the listener out of the music on some level. [Ali laughs] Or it's like, you sit there, now music is, you know, it's gonna happen. As opposed to like, aren't we enjoying the music together?

Ali: [chuckles] That is really interesting. Yeah, a thing that I've been sort of fascinated with is like, how much friction do you feel when it feels time to like, move seasons and like, change genres basically?

Jack: Oh, I'm delighted. [Ali laughs] It's a gift to me. Right? 'Cause like, by that point— And I don't know, I don't know if you feel the same way about like, making the show, but usually when I get to the end of the season, I'm ready for the next one. And often, I will have started running out of ideas.

Ali: [laughs] Good, well, yeah.

Jack: And I pace myself well so hopefully the last ideas that we have are real doozies. But then it's—

Ali: Yeah, the bottom of the barrel ideas that you have to get at the end of the seasons have to really be...[laughing] strong ones!

Jack: They really have to hit. [cross] But you find them there at the end, right?

Ali: [cross] But you have the, yeah. You end up being able to pull from earlier ideas, right? To sort of wrap up the bow, right?

Jack: Yeah, you've laid the table for yourself and now you get to eat. [Ali laughs] But, but going into the next seasons and changing genres, it does feel a bit like, you know, when gears move against each other and they like grind into each other 'cause you're like, 'oh god I'm moving from one thing to another.' But yeah, I'm, I'm so excited. We can't really say anything about music for the next season, right?

Ali: No, unless you wanna make some very, very vague...[laughs]

Jack: I don't think I even can. I mean I'm, it's not going to be like PALISADE. Which is fun. But that doesn't really give anything away, because no season follows the, y'know. Every season I want to try and go as hard in the other direction as possible. [chuckles]

Ali: Sure sure sure. I guess, is there, the way that Marielda was defined by the clarinet, or the way that you were like 'oh for PARTIZAN I'm really gonna like, see, I'm gonna start learning synths because I wanna do that,' is there like, do you have an instrument picked yet for the next one?

Jack: Oh god. Um...

Ali: I feel like that's a fun enough teaser that's...[laughs] extremely vague.

Jack: It is a fun enough teaser, but I can't promise it, right? Because if you had asked me before PALISADE, I'd have been like— before PARTIZAN, I'd have said like, 'it's gonna be four sine waves put through an oscilloscope. It's gonna be extremely hostile,'

and then it's like, that's not what you hear. But I'd like to write something with flutes. Flutes and whistles and recorders. Have something like really light and airy. I mean like, I'm a woodwind player primarily with the clarinet, and there's a real sort of, y'know because you're playing a reed instrument with the clarinet, there's like a real push to get the sound out you know? And I'd like to, I'd like to compose something on an instrument that has just this lightness to it. Feels like breath. Is, is really sort of loose and, and sort of expressive in that way. **[Ali: Mhm.]** Yeah. I'm excited— y'know, we're in like the earliest, earliest pre-production, and I can't really start composing until I finish the other one 'cause otherwise, then, it's just a headache.

Ali: Right, yeah you have to get PALISADE out of your system before you can even...

Jack: Yeah, I have to update my computer because they don't like you updating your computer because, it's so funny, every time Mac releases one of the big updates I get an email from all of my synth companies saying 'No! Do NOT update!'

Ali: [gasp] They email you? [laughs]

Jack: Yeah yeah yeah. 'DO NOT update to the new Mac! All your synthesizers will break!'

Ali: That's so funny. Apple in one email is like, 'hey, come check out the new... [both laugh] Apple iMac,' and in the other email they're like 'No! Don't listen to them!'

Jack: 'Stop it! Don't click the button!' Um, yeah, so like I'm currently running Big Sur, Apple Big Sur, and I think that, when did that come out...

Ali: Apple Big Sur...

Jack: That was released in 2020. So my laptop is on the version released in 2020. And as soon as I finish PALISADE I'm going to say, you can relax. You can get updated. And then I want to take my guitar into the shop, because it needs some lookin' after.

Ali: Oh sure sure sure. Yeah, I'm actually in such a weird similar place. I have the computer that I've had since we started the Friends at the Table Patreon, so this is maybe...

Jack: 2017?

Ali: Seven or eight years? And it's been making a horrible noise. And I keep being like, when PALISADE is over I can start looking into getting a new one. 'Cause that is not a process I'm going to start until I, you know, all my hard drives are secure. [chuckles]

Jack: Yeah, 'cause it would just be an absolute nightmare.

Ali: [sigh] Uh huh. Uh huh. Uh huh. The folder, just the folder for PALISADE 16, which is the entire last arc, was like 100 gigs on its own? [Jack laughs] Just on its own. Um, [laughing] so that's kind of...

Jack: And your computer is making a baaaad sound.

Ali: I can understand why it would be upset. You know, I don't blame it. I ask a lot of it.

Jack: Yeah. Poor thing.

00:28:40 - Battleship

Ali: Yeah...it's funny 'cause, back to something that you said really early in the episode about a second being a really long time, it made me realize that there's like, a weird sort of Battleship that we play with each other now? [both chuckle] Which is that like, as, you know, composing comes up through the season you end up feeling like, you know, you have to have a song that fits the kind of an episode that I've given you. But obviously you add in sort of breaks or, you know, you can change the rhythm, as you need to. And then on the other side, I have this thing where it's like, when I'm doing the last time ons and we have like, an established intro and I'm like, I just need another twelve second clip [both laugh] to fit into this little slot in between these two things. Um, and it's just like twelve seconds can be way too short or way too long depending on...

Jack: Yeah. And I get the luxury of, I can cut episode audio but stuff starts getting weird if you start cutting the music.

Ali: Right. Yeah. Right, yeah, once a song is done we can't, it's— the structure is there, it's like the foundation of the home. Like, I'm not taking out those beams or whatever.

Jack: And sometimes we do, and always, y'know, it always makes for good stuff but it always feel like pulling teeth in those last moments where it's like, Austin will say 'I need twelve more seconds for this...'

Ali: Oh my god he does do that. [laughs] He does!

Jack: And I can see why he asks for it, but it's like, cut to me in a room that looks like environmental storytelling happened in it, and it's just y'know, paper all over the floor, I'm surrounded by the instruments, I have four separate cups of coffee, and I've just said to myself 'ah, right, close down the computer. I can look away. I'm gonna go and play a video game.' And then, but three of us like, 'we need twelve seconds at the beginning.' [Ali laughs] And it's weird, because so much, like everything frustratingly, so much of music is like math and if the numbers don't add up correctly like, the pace of the thing will feel odd. Or like, if I add measures they have to be in certain multiples of numbers, they have to be in multiples of two, or otherwise I will feel like a section sort of ends too early. And so I'm like, ugh, okay fine, we'll drag that out...But stuff like Marielda, right, had that lovely little ukulele intro that I think was loose. I think that was a loose audio file that Austin could like, duplicate, or you could duplicate in the episode to give a longer runup.

Ali: Yeah, I feel like he, yeah. I feel like we did have that with Marielda, because those intros were so...I mean, he's always introducing a character with the intros usually, but that was our first exposure to...whatever his name...[laughs]

Jack: Samol?

Ali: Samol. Uh huh.

Jack: The old man?

Ali: The old man. Ugh, god.

Jack: What a nice guy. RIP.

Ali: What a nice guy, yeah. [sighs] Marielda...

Jack: It was such a good season. When did we last do Marielda? Oh we did um, the play. [cross] For the National Network of Abortion Funds.

Ali: [cross] Oh that's right, we did Scene Thieves!

Jack: God that was so funny. [Ali laughs] I would go back to Marielda, y'know, at any time. And the music is so much fun to write. But it's so weird, right? Talking about running out of ideas, by the end of that Marielda mini-season, which is what, like nine tracks? It was like fourteen episodes or something? **[Ali: Mhm.]** I was like, I don't know how many more of these I can do. But now I'm like, you are a little baby.

Ali: [chuckles] Yeah...like, there's no way that Marielda didn't take a lot out of you, though. Because like, the clarinet fights with you when you're recording it, right? **[Jack chuckles]** I think we recently had the anecdote, I don't remember where you said this, I don't know if you were saying this privately, or...where we, we were talking about that pie recently that we had at um, Tom...? Question mark, Art's friend?

Jack: Oh right, yeah yeah yeah. That pie was great. That was lovely.

Ali: Oh god. I think about that pie, like I said, twice a year. What was the game that Austin did that he soundtracked?

Jack: [A\[s\]century](#).

Ali: A[s]century. Um, but yeah, you were talking about learning how to record the clarinet from him.

Jack: Scott. Scott Sheldon...no, Scott Sheldon is our cover artist. [Scott Hallam](#).

Ali: [chuckles] Yes. Shout outs.

Jack: [Gunslingbirds](#). Yeah, it was—

Ali: This account does not exist anymore. Shout out to Twitter. [cross] Glad he left Twitter.

Jack: [cross] Shout out to Twitter. Yeah the clarinet was— but I mean like, y'know, I feel like, in making anything, and I'm sure you feel the same way, there is always such a gulf between the thing in your head and the thing that kind of comes down your arm and out onto the computer. [Ali chuckles] And that's fine. That's how making things goes. And often, it's in the difference between those two things that the really interesting stuff happens. But whenever I'm recording with an instrument of any kind, I will want it to sound a particular way and then it is always just such a process of compromise [Ali laughs] with myself and with the instrument. Of saying like, well okay fine. I don't think it's gonna sound quite like that. And it's so nebulous as well, right? Where it's like, I'll be like, oh I want the music to sound, to have this kind of like, really dreamy tone. Or I want it to feel like you're hearing it through a wall. Or I want these guitars to feel like little glittering stars. And then it's, how? How are you going to do that? [both laugh] Tell me with the sliders!

Ali: There's not...there's no post-processing that you can do on that? The old, uh, you're listening to this Beyoncé song but it's the apartment next to you, sort of...?

Jack: God I love that— and I mean, there is, right? But stuff like that, you kind of have to find your way into it. Unfortunately none of them are labeled like, 'Beyoncé next door,' [cross] or are labeled like 'beautiful glimmering stars'—

Ali: [cross] [low voice] Sure, yeah, that's too bad.

Jack: —although, when I edit my synthesizers I get to rename them which is a real treat. And usually they're called things like 'Twilight Mirage bells' or like 'Motion scream' or, um, like 'soft breathing.' Um, but recently when I did, when Conadine shows back up and is talking about, basically is talking about Crystal Palace, I had the same like drum part from Twilight Mirage come up and I realized that I hadn't saved the Crystal Palace drums, so i had to go back into all my Twilight Mirage files and dig that up and then I

saved it, except I did a typo when I named it so it's 'Crystal Palace dryms' — D-R-Y-M-S. [Ali giggles and snorts] And I was like, okay this is just fine for the file browser. But I had not realized that every time I use it in a track, that track name is by default called 'Crystal Palace dryms' and at that point I had to change it. I was not...[Ali chuckles] But it was really fun to go back to all the Twilight Mirage synthesizers for the big track. And to be like, oh they're exactly where I left them, and can I remember how I played them back then. Or like, oh that was a particular irritation about this, like the bass in Twilight Mirage has a bug where its volume suddenly drops after I play like a hundred notes on it, so I'm just like waiting for it to fall apart.

Ali: Oh? [laughs]

Jack: Yeah, I don't know, it's like there's something weird going on in the actual synth itself that you have to compensate for. But it was, it was, it felt like going back and seeing old friends. Because some of the synths from Twilight Mirage I've carried over just 'cause I like them so much. [Ali: Mhm.] I have a synth called 'Mirage Bells' that I think was in Twilight Mirage, this dreamy, soft, y'know, but I ended up just finding them to be so versatile that I, the PARTIZAN theme is played on them. It's like sort of like, ringing little electric piano. And they've been showing up all over, but then there's stuff like the weird, like weird bubbly Twilight Mirage Synthesizers or the electric drums or the super liquid sort of fluid bass that shows up. That was a real delight to be like, ah, 'I get to go back and play these instruments again.'

Ali: [giggles] Yeah, I mean I've spoken with Austin a little bit about how, you know, careful with his hand he's been. To return to some of that Twilight Mirage stuff for PALISADE, did you feel that sort of like, that sort of same gravity or like, carefulness or like, oh there's potential here that I could overdo this and I still want this to feel like a PALISADE song at the end of the day? Or were you just like... 'we're in it. [both chuckle] The clowns are here.'

Jack: No, it was definitely the former. I think, y'know, we've, the three of us have definitely spoken in the past about like, the thing that would be least interesting, I think for this as a story and for this as a soundtrack, would be to say 'oh it's just Twilight

Mirage 2017 now.' Like, oh, wasn't it fun to be in the Twilight Mirage, and here we are again. When I think that, y'know, this is a story about PALISADE, y'know, it was on the border of the Twilight Mirage and now it's in the Twilight Mirage so that means that was definitely in play. But the focus of the story and the focus of the things that are interesting to us are on and around PALISADE, and where the Twilight Mirage meets that, it has to be in ways that A] are relevant to PALISADE and the kind of project of PALISADE, and B] don't just feel like a retread of what we were doing in 2017. In part because that would be a real betrayal of what is interesting about the Twilight Mirage.

Jack: (cont.) Like, so much of the joy of that season was some new bananas thing coming around the corner and going, what the hell is that? And so to go back and to say like, oh right we're gonna explore X. That, that, that we saw earlier. Or like, we're gonna get really back into like, um, the, the, the Doyen and the Crown of Glass. Or we're gonna tell a story about Independence. Or we're gonna tell a story about Provign, or, or, um, y'know, the, the remnants of the Notion or something. That would be really uninteresting. And so the thing that I sort of rejected in my own composing from the start, as joyful as it would have been, was like, I can't just upend Twilight Mirage synthesizers – upend the box — onto PALISADE and say, 'ooh, wouldn't it be kind of sick and twisted if we heard the PALISADE theme played in Twilight Mirage synths?' Or like, 'ohh, wouldn't it be kinda sick if you heard the Twilight Mirage theme which is all like utopian and happy, like played really aggressively on PALISADE or PARTIZAN sounds,' like that's not interesting. It's fun to do for like, y'know, oh what does it sounds like if we're all just like—

Ali: I mean that does sound sick. [laughs]

00:40:26 - Recurring Themes

Jack: The thing is it does sound sick, but I don't know if it works for the show that we're making, you know? It's something that I would do if we were all, like if we were all hanging around in a house and we went 'oh what would it sound like with this?' And y'know, I can write that. And so the game became, how can I incorporate the sound of

the Twilight Mirage meaningfully in a way that doesn't take away from the fact that this is a PALISADE season. So from the start I sort of threw out any... I'm not gonna touch the theme, y'know, the Twilight Mirage theme isn't gonna come burbling up in the soundtrack or whatever. The closest that you get, actually, is um, as Perennial is sobbing and there are these sort of like long extended string chords, these sort of distorted synth strings, she plays something that is sort of like a mirror, like an inverse mirror of the big piano chords that open the Twilight Mirage. And then as the bombs themselves start to go off, you get these like, swirling, analog shoegaze guitars working through that chord progression just once, and then from that point on it is just like... it has to be new. It has to feel like it is serving PALISADE but the, the instrumentation has arrived.

Jack: (cont.) Something that was really fun actually, and this is, I think I did... I don't think it's the most subtle composing but I think it's neat, is that if you listen to the whole track prior to the bombs going off, you can hear these tiny little moments where like, you hear Mirage instrumentation kind of just like, glimmer very slightly in the arrangement. There's like, a tiny bit of the distorted voices that were soundtracking the Iconoclasts in Twilight Mirage, you can hear this tiny little click of the like, timer of the electric drumset. And then like, bits of the sort of like soft breathing of the Twilight Mirage. It's as though, it's as though you look over and you can see Twilight Mirage sort of setting itself up in the corner of the room being like, 'here I come!'

Ali: [laughs] Welcome!

Jack: I'm on my way!

Ali: Yeah that is interesting, and the, the, um, the mention of Perennial there also brings to mind something that I wanted to talk about which is that, you said before that um, originally, Figure's death and the entrance into the Twilight Mirage were supposed to be the same episode. But that ended up just being a nightmare for you. A very mean thing to expect you to do. [both chuckle] Um, and just like weird for the pacing of that arc a little bit. I do think, like on a production side, I feel like I wonder if I regret it or if I should have pushed harder for like, additional pickups around the death moment because I

think that it felt like...you know, the Twilight Mirage thing is such a response to Figure's death that, um, feeling for the audience like those two moments are separate maybe... I don't know. I don't know how it felt waiting for those two episodes to drop, I guess. And I guess speak for the audience with that. But I, you know, how much in composing that, especially when you were outlining thinking that it was gonna be the same thing, were you thinking of those together, right? **[Jack: Oh, yeah!]** Because it does feel a little bit like, you know there's the Future song and the Twilight Mirage song but they're like, they're joined together. We can't have this without Future despite being [giggles] this antagonist. Or even sort of making sure that both moments are also about Figure. **[Jack: Yeah.]** And I'm curious of how that, how you make those considerations as a composer.

Jack: Yeah, no that's a— and I was definitely thinking of them together. I think the easiest stuff to soundtrack for me is, um, montage, and always has been because there is something about the structure of montage that lends itself to like, working through a series of ideas, you know? Austin in the show saying, y'know, here's A, B, C, and D, and they are stylistically or emotionally or thematically linked. But they are, you know, these different camera perspectives on an individual moment. And when I'm composing for montage I can do the same, right? I can say, like, here are four or five musical ideas, and what I'm ultimately doing is like, talking through how they are related. How they are similar or how they are different, how they get us to the end of the montage, et cetera. And then, something like Figure's death and this kind of like awful revelation of Future is really fulfilling to compose for but it is...difficult. It's complex, right? To say, we're sitting with this character and we're sitting with this moment and it needs to feel consequential, and it needs to feel, um, like it gives enough focus to all the very sort of like, disparate elements moving in it and you sort of have to develop this one idea in this one place over this one period of time.

Jack: (cont.) And so even as I was writing the Figure track, which is like a minute and a half compared to like the nine minutes of "Mirage Bombs," [Ali laughs] I was thinking this one's the tricky one. This one is really tough to write. And the next one is just gonna be long. It's like the difference between stamina and, y'know like, individual complex

application. [Ali laughs] Where it's like, the difficult bit in the Mirage Bombs track is gonna be, how do I make this thing work over, y'know, eight and a— I thought it was eight minutes at the time. And the difficult thing in the Figure track is like, alright we have one idea to explore here and you have about a minute and a half. Um, and that was really tough. I knew that I wanted to write something really, really simple as well. In part because I wanted it to contrast with what I knew was about to happen with the Mirage Bombs. Which I knew was gonna be this kinda like, climactic, busy, sort of overwhelming eight minutes.

Jack: (cont.) And so with Figure, I was trying to compose something really, really simple and really...that's that classic Friends at the Table combo, it's as scary as it is sad, and it's both of those things at the same time. And, and, and, and that was hard. Writing stuff that is simple is always really difficult because I second guess myself, right? Because I say, this can't be it. This isn't really anything, y'know? This is just three instruments playing against each other. There's no, 'I can't lean back on like, here's a big wall of sound,' or 'here's a really funky synth track' or whatever. Just being like, you have so little room to play with and you have to be so straightforward with it. And so, I wanted to write something that felt like an air, like a, like a sort of dirge. [chuckling] You know?

Ali: Yeah, it— I remember being so impressed with that track on how much it feels like a funeral march?

Jack: Yeah. It's sad! It's so sad, and it, that I think comes out of something I said to you and Austin in the production chat when we really started working on that scene together, which was, this scene is about Figure and is about Figure's death, but a lot of that is being rendered out through a description of Future. You know, [Ali: Right, yeah yeah yeah.] there's kind of two things happening. We're learning a lot about Future and the actual moment of death itself, is, in the 'text of the episode, quite slim. And so the thing I really wanted to do with the music was have it feel funereal. Was, was sort of be speaking musically about Figure's death throughout the whole thing even as the episode is sort of explicitly talking about Future. And yeah, just long, slow, sad chords.

Jack: (cont.) Whenever I, uh, I think just because I'm obstinate, whenever I have to write music about an awful Future, which I do regularly at Friends at the Table, [both chuckle] whenever I have to write music about, y'know, like, a dreadful, um, approaching state, my temptation is always, I wanna get some warmth in there. Or I wanna get like a, like a sort of compelling or alluring little melancholy in there, y'know? And so as Future is obliterating, y'know, Figure, as you listen to that track, all the chords that kind of could resolve into the minor just sort of keep turning towards the major key, and that's a really fun challenge because if you tip your hand too far it just ends up feeling incongruous. It ends up feeling like, why am I listening to this jolly little song about this guy getting obliterated? And so I needed to balance, y'know, this needs to feel really sad, it needs to feel really inevitable, it needs to feel really frightening, to, to— 'cause it's so scary whenever the Zeal shows up in Friends at the Table.

Ali: Yeah! I— yeah...

Jack: I love that little thing.

Ali: [chuckling] I fucking— I, y'know, you gotta hand it to Future. [laughs]

Jack: You gotta hand it to Future. After a, after a—

Ali: I really just, yeah. I'm, I'm so compelled by Future as a character and I'm really glad that we, y'know, we sort of never put the, the lens on Gur Sevraq at all in this season. It was really easy for us not to. [**Jack:** Yeah.] So for that to finally come into light and for us to sort of like know the state of this being is...

Jack: And for Future to, it's so good as well, and I'm just realizing this now, against...y'know, Perennial has been trying all this time to, sort of, y'know, in the show we say 'break the wheel' and sort of more explicitly like imagine a new kind of liberatory future for herself, through the use of these avatars. By picking people and saying, 'oh, maybe it's you. Maybe you can help guide me to this,' and imagining the future in that way. And to have Future itself appear as this, y'know, we first saw Future in when it was called Ambition and Zeal, and, now Future has said 'I'm gonna do this for myself,'

y'know, 'I'm gonna enact future myself,' is such a lovely mirror to whatever Perennial has got going on as well.

Ali: Yeah, I'm curious how that felt composing, 'cause, um — this is also a conversation that we had the other day — that the realization that, y'know, as far as antagonists have gone in PALISADE, y'know, you had Connadine as this really clever threat that we sort of just kept... [laughs and snorts] Just kinda beating up...

Jack: [laughing] Kept squashing my boy.

Ali: Uh huh, yeah, that we really targeted and ran off the planet, basically. And then, y'know, the Motion revival has been really interesting and really adds to the, just like, disgust one might have for [cross] Exanceaster March.

Jack: [cross] Oh, March.

Ali: Yes, yes, yes. And then, y'know, obviously, Gentian and Clem are also in their sort of own corner there. For Future to have... been there the entire time, but for it to have not felt like a threat, and then the first moment that we see them, [Jack laughs] they make eye contact with the camera or with a player character and they die. It's like, 'oh, yeah, this is the new bad. This is the new set of clothes.'

Jack: It's great.

Ali: 'This is the new worst thing that you could have ever, you know, interacted with.'
[laughs]

00:53:03 - Selling the Feeling... and Worms

Jack: And, you know, my goal as a composer when we have moments like that, in general, right, is always... sell the feeling, right, you know, like we have worked on something together in the show and in the same way that as an editor you're like, 'what is the way that I communicate this to the audience in the best way? Or in the clearest, or in the most interesting, or in the funniest, or in the scariest way,' right? [Ali laughs] As a composer, I am also trying to dial into that feeling and pull it out. And it was so easy with

someone like Motion, who plays on so many immediately instantaneous revulsion of this body that has to keep, that has to keep moving in the Black Century. And the way that that whole scene was structured as a horror moving, right, with the fog rolling in and then the Black Century coming over the hill. I felt like my job as a composer was so easy because the immediacy of that horror was just right up in my face as I was trying to do it. And, you know, Motion has that really distinctive sound in Friends at the Table that I figured out really quickly, and that was like a gift because at that point the synth is doing a lot of the work for me and I just have to figure out the beautiful bow to wrap the synth in. But Future, you know, knowing that we need to... Future is awful, and is kind of like, has... Something that I kept coming back to with Future's theme was worms, I kept thinking about worms.

Ali: [erupts with laughter] Yeah?

Jack: And I kept thinking about worms chewing through the future, you know, **[Ali:** Oh...] like, these things moving, like, grubbing blindly through the dirt to try and find, and act on, and make good little gems within the dirt, you know, the nutrients, the whatever it's trying to pull out. And then, you know, moving silently under there, you know? Not ever quite realizing... And then in the same way thinking of worms as attached to decay, attached to something that has fallen and died. And so, the thing that I eventually sort of settled on for, like, 'how do you write a theme for a villain like Future?' especially with the idea that we want to sell it as this threat and I want to leave myself room to work with this again, was like... 'Write something super simple, write something super gentle,' and then have these sort of wormy, unsettling little synths sort of moving through it, **[Ali laughs]** and like, grubbing up through it, you know? And as soon as that clicked, I started feeling much, much better about the track. Prior to that point, I was sort of like, 'ah, this is fine.'

Ali: [laughing] Sure, yeah. I — yeah... I'm a Future stan, you gotta hand it to 'em. That's all I gotta say.

Jack: You gotta hand it to him [sic] forever, 'cause Future is what makes Counterweight, right?

Ali: Sort of, [cross] yeah.

Jack: [cross] Uh, Future, sorry, Future is what makes Weight.

Ali: Right, yes, yes, yes.

Jack: Way back when.

Ali: Right, yeah. Also this concept of, like, 'I've spent millenia and millenia doing things for other people and now I'm gonna make these decisions for myself and they're gonna be the worst decisions... [both laugh] I've decided that conquest is the thing, actually, yeah. All these ambitions I've seen throughout my life have failed and I think that the way to do it is to be evil [cross] and mean.'

Jack: God, it's so good. I love how over and over again the thesis on Friends at the Table has been both 'A Divine can be anything' [Ali laughs] and 'Divines are just lil' guys. [Ali: Yeah.] A Divine is a type of guy.'

Ali: And, you know, guys have so many opinions and, you know... ah, yeah, it is what it is. [laughs] Shifting topics a little bit, unless there's anything you want to drill into with the most recent music at all, is I'm curious about how things have shifted for you as a player moving from the Faction Turn — Obviously Art isn't here so you can't speak for him, and at some point I will have Art here again, hopefully before the end of PALISADE. How — I guess with the, you know, we've sort of said goodbye to the Faction Turn at this point, right?

Jack: I think so.

Ali: No longer would — There's, I mean, we joke in that episode that there's a possibility that we play Questlandia and go, 'You know, what if we did another? [laughs] What if we pulled up all our and played another five weeks, [cross] another three weeks,' or whatever.

Jack: [cross] 'Yeah, what if we just start again?'

Ali: And I would love to know the circumstances that would lead us to that decision, but I don't know that we're [laughing] actually gonna get there.

Jack: God it would be so funny.

Ali: Could you imagine? Like, what could the spell possibly be? What are the... [both laughing] Like, what would we get so taken by in the next three weeks to completely... just lose our minds collectively? 'Cause like, all eight of us would have to be exactly as irresponsible. [laughs]

Jack: Right, which has happened, you know, that's not... Okay, I'll pitch one right now.

Ali: Okay.

Jack: Millennium Break decides to invade the Twilight Mirage. [chuckles]

Ali: Sure, that would be weird.

Jack: 'What if we throw away all of our revolutionary and liberatory impulses and decide to go get those guys instead?'

Ali: [laughing] Yeah, what if... what if Volition, you know, responds to one of the Questlandia turns and is evil again, and then we all have to go [laughing] — I feel like that is a thing we have to be really careful with, is we did Twilight Mirage.

Jack: We did, yeah.

Ali: And we made answers there, we, you know, there were games and accomplishments that were made in that season that we don't want to throw away, while having these other stakes. But, yeah, I guess the feeling that there is sort of a post-mortem that can be done on how you felt interacting with the season as the Faction Turn, and now having to be in this position. And, you know, I don't want to say who you're planning on playing for Questlandia, I will at least say that you've played Morningbride in this sort of upcoming Faction Turn.

Jack: Oh, uh, no, um... Mourning... [cross] General Mourning.

Ali: [cross] Mourning, yes, General Mourning. [laughs] Oh my God, could you imagine? If you were like, yeah I'm playing, uh, Mourningbride.

Jack: I'm playing Mourningbride. Mourningbride is here.

Ali: Uh, yeah, you didn't know about that? The big... [both laughing] Is Mourningbride even still alive?

Jack: Uh, let me see, where did we leave Mourningbride?

Ali: With the Red Light when she [**Jack:** Yeah, yeah.] destroyed Oxbridge with...

Jack: I believe that's where we last saw her.

Ali: ...the Divine Law.

Jack: Yeah. Wow.

Ali: [giggling] Stay out of the Twilight Mirage, please, ma'am, sorry to say. [laughing]

Jack: Wow. God, talking about old Divines, Law is also, kind of Order, [cross] and Order is a very old Divine.

Ali: Yeah, it was Order and, um... I have a postcard about this, I have them somewhere else on my desk...

Jack: Courage.

Ali: Was it Courage? Courage is the one with all the flags? That makes sense. That sounds like that makes sense.

Jack: Man, we got so many cool Divines in this show.

Ali: [laughing] We have so many. [snorts, both laughing]

Jack: And the thing is... there's more to, you know, we'll keep making Divines up.

Ali: You know, there's still gonna be words out there, and words and concepts and ideas, and... [laughs]

Jack: But, I mean, I think to your point about the, you know, 'how has it been in the Faction Turn?' I think this has been a really difficult season for me. I think that I would feel very differently about it if it was a difficult season for me and I felt that we weren't making good work. I think we're making great work, I think this season has been a huge amount of fun and has been producing really good stuff. And I also don't really think we make bad work as a... you know, [both laughing] we've been working together for so long.

Ali: That's so nice of you to say.

Jack: I suppose what I mean is like, you know, yeah, it's been really hard. I have felt sort of separate from a season of Friends at the Table. Which is, you know, that's the way it goes, and I think that I trust and I love the people I work with to an extent where that doesn't bother me in a way that I sit up in my bed in the middle of the night, like I did when I thought about This year of Us. [Ali chuckles] But I do think that that it has been tricky and that it has been tough to sort of attach that to composing, right? So much have I think [sic] where I'm able to compose best comes from having a proximity to my colleagues and comes from having a proximity to the ideas. Being there in an episode, and thinking, you know, I feel like it's a thing that I do all the time when I'm in scenes with people as I pull up my notes app and I write down, 'this is gonna need music,' you know, like 'here's where music starts and ends,' and whatever. And something about hearing that on the dailies has felt like a degree of remove, and that's been tough because I worry whether I'm right or not, that I'm not composing at my best because I don't feel like I have a grasp on it in the same way that I have in the past. But I think, you know, I always run a risk in saying this, in being like 'oh, Jack had a bad time and didn't enjoy making the show.' And it's like, I think we've made really, really good work here and I care for the thing that we make and the people I make it with, such that it's not the end of the world. But I do think this has been a harder — I've found this to be a harder season.

Ali: Yeah, that is interesting ‘cuz, like, you know, there used to be this sort of ping pong, or this collaboration, of like, you could be a part of the recording and be like, ‘you know, I really feel like I want to soundtrack that, once we sort of hit stop for the night,’ where, instead, this time it has been sort of like, ‘[with a mellow tone] Hey, Jack, [cross] [laughing] we did something.’

Jack: [cross] It’s like we got a big package of paper. God, it was so funny when Figure died and both you and Austin came into the chat and were like — ‘Music. We’re gonna need music.’

Ali: ‘Hey, clear your calendar. I hope you’re not busy this next month, um... just, uh, just a heads up, we don’t know what we’re doing, and uh...’ [laughing]

Jack: What’s really fun, and what I do like, is that you don’t tell me what happens. [laughing] I just listen to the episodes. [snorts, Ali laughs] That is fun. And it’s been really nice listening to Friends at the Table as, you know, as a listener. But, yeah, I’ve had a lot of anxiety specifically about the music, right, about feeling like I haven’t been able to get my teeth into it in the way that I have in the past. And, you know, I moved house mid-way through this season. I think that there is like a lot of stuff up in the air that could contribute to me, maybe incorrectly, feeling less confident about... about the thing — and part of the reason that I wanted to write a really big, a really big, wild, barnstorming track was like, ‘look, I’ve got to get my head around this,’ you know, ‘as we move into a finale.’ [Ali laughs] But, yeah, I don’t know. As someone playing on the ground team, has this experience felt similar to just, like a regular season of Friends at the Table?

01:06:22 - Hot Exclusy

Ali: Um, I guess so, um... yeah, I don’t know that it’s felt different. I think in the beginning we would say, ‘oh, we feel really good making this,’ I feel like, especially on this show, *this* show specifically, we would be like, ‘you know, this has been the easiest season to make, we’re really killing it, it feels like the group dynamic is really good,’ [chuckling] and then, the Combustor stuff came, and it just sort of feels like we’ve...

we've, you know, had our foot straight down on the pedal for like, five months straight.
[laughs] And so like...

Jack: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Ali: And, like, the Counterweight break was supposed to sort of feel like a downbeat. And I know Austin in the last episode said that he felt like, with the Dust arc, like... it sort of felt weird because it had reached a climactic point, that, like, it didn't want to feel procedural or that we weren't staying at that level the entire time. So, yeah, I don't know, I feel like Brnine has been a really easy character to play, I guess, I think that even in... even in places where I, you know, haven't been confident about the decisions after the fact, or sort of been lost on where to go next, I feel like Brnine is a little bit like a dog that can lead the leash a little bit sometimes, [laughing] [**Jack:** Yeah.] which is good...

Jack: Do you enjoy playing Brnine?

Ali: I do, yeah.

Jack: Despite trying to kill them?

Ali: [laughing] Uh huh. Yeah, well, yeah, I feel like, 'cause, well Brnine is really easy to play because they're a character with... that has a lot of big ideas inside of them, but they're all sort of, like, these interpersonal ideas that can sort of, like, you don't have to zoom in really far, and you can zoom sort of out and you can just sort of feel like those are still present. And then the actual, like, playing them is just doing, like, just a goofy guy [both laugh], that's also like, I can riff as Brnine for a while just because that's, you just being a silly little guy is fun to do.

Jack: Swagless fish.

Ali: Right? [laughing] So, it's good that it feels natural in both cases, where it's like, I have... I feel like I always have a really good idea in my mind of where Brnine is mentally, and then sort of a good idea in my mind of like, what's most entertaining in this scene, where that isn't really true with every character I know. You know, feeling like I knew who Marn was or how best to get to their goals were something I struggled with,

or like sometimes with Tender, it was sort of these like, actually playing the game and feeling like I have no idea [laughing] what I'm doing or what to do next or whatever. And that was really frustrating, and I don't really feel that with Brnine, but I do feel like as the season keeps going, especially post-Dahlia stuff, it's like how much of a... how much of a leg is there? You know, how much is left? How much do I have... is there a third act to this, or am I just finishing up the second act? And it feels like it's a little bit of a third act, just because of moving past that moment and, you know, not being defined... You know, we've moved far enough from the moment of killing Dahlia that I don't know that the final bit we see of them is defined by that action, and, obviously, is going to be defined by what Questlandia takes out of them. But, yeah, I don't know, it is what it is.

Ali: (cont.) I guess that's how I'm curious with you. Do you feel like it's a... like you're changing teams, [both laugh] like you have to think about this from another perspective because you're coming to the other side of it? Or is it just still, like, 'oh, you know, I've had these narrative threads that I was interested in, I sort of had the color of the pain that I was adding to the structure is going to stay the same in the next part of it?' Or does it feel like this weird change [laughs] where you have to drop some of those things to put your focus other places?

Jack: I don't... I don't know, I mean, I think the stuff that I'm interested in in the Faction Turn, I will always be interested in similar things, you know, depending on... Regardless of which side of the table I'm on, you know, like, I like spies, I like going down into a big, weird pit. I like putting really obscure, or rather obtuse, violent stakes on my own characters and seeing how they respond to it. I like trying to find the bit of play that I find uncomfortable or weird and shy away from, and try and dig into that. And I think that, you know, I hope I'm going to be doing that stuff on the other side. The thing I really feel is twofold; I am relieved and I am excited to get to be working with everybody again. [laughs]

Ali: Aw, yeah... [laughs]

Jack: You know, I love Art and Austin so much, and none of this is like I'm sick of working with them — far from it. It's like, I want to be on the side of the party where

everyone's sitting around the big fire talking, you know? [Ali laughs] Rather than the people on the other side with the pen. And the other thing is that I think I am really out of practice, I think I am... you know, I haven't had to play scenes in the same that y'all play scenes, for like a year, and that's really scary. You know, we play scenes in the Faction Turn, but we play, firstly, when we play them, we play so few of them, and secondly, they're mitigated through the really great Armour Astir conflict games, that sort of [D. Vincent and Meguey Baker, like, Firebrand sort of style games, to the point where, like, I'm going into this and I'm like, 'oh, shit, I have not ridden this bicycle for a year.' [both laugh] Which I haven't really done on Friends at the Table before, right, like generally we go from one season straight into the other, and, you know, don't have like, a gap of not playing characters for a year. So that's scary, I was not happy with how I played in the first half of that, um... what do we call it? The Funny Little Downtime? [laughs]

Ali: [laughing] The Silly Little Downtime — yeah, I guess we can say, because the audience will have heard it, it was the first scene with August Righteousness and General Mourning, and then we have the Clem August, Gucci Mourning scene. [cross] But they were both fantastic, yeah.

Jack: [cross] Yeah, I came out — I thought they were fun scenes, and, I mean, the other thing is like, we've been doing this so long, and I don't know if you feel the same way... Often, I will finish a recording and go, 'I'm really... I don't feel good about how I played, I feel out of practice, I didn't feel like I was sharp,' and then I go, 'well, look, the show's getting made,' [Jack bursts out laughing, Ali laughs] you know? You know? 'This is... this is, you are essentially... you are looking at a project that is a year long, and you're mad about thursday afternoon, right now, you know, everything's gonna come out of the wash.' But I do still feel like, like I ran really fast up against the wall of, like... oh, man, when we make seasons, I'm, like, playing characters all the time. [Ali laughs] And having been on the Faction side I'm playing characters so much less. So, in that way, I'm really excited to be coming back into the fold, as it were for Questlandia, and then also being like, 'look, buddy. [both laughing] This is... you gotta... okay, put your hands on the handlebars, focus on a point on the horizon.'

Ali: Well, you're in a good place because it's, you know, you're sort of playing a bureaucrat, right?

Jack: Well, yeah, sorta...

Ali: [laughing] That's not what Mourning is, but that is a... [cross] role that she could play.

Jack: [cross] God, I don't know if I'm gonna play Mourning in the finale.

Ali: Oh... [cross] hot exclusy...

Jack: [cross] I've been thinking about this... I might play August Righteousness. [Ali gasps excitedly] I might... I have two people that I want to play, and I'm going to say them into the microphone.

Ali: [laughing] Okay!

Jack: I want to play August Righteousness and I want to play Mustard Red.

Ali: Oh, my God... That's so... you know what, have fun. [laughing] If you feel like you can take the mantle, by all means, please.

Jack: Oh, God. Well, the thing about Mustard Red, right, is that it's like... you shouldn't pick minor characters that you want to interact with.

Ali: Oh, sure, yeah, that's fair, that's fair. Yeah, that's the tough thing about August Righteousness, like I feel like we didn't get enough of him this season, and I find him to be such an interesting character, like, the setup that I had for him in the Wagon Wheel Game [question mark], as this, um... this, like, chef who was starting this revolutionary movement and, like... I remember that first scene I had with Austin, where it was him talking to the Elect he was playing.

Jack: Oh, right, yes, uh... Bounty.

Ali: The Bounty, yes, yes, yes. And the sort of, like, you know, having... for a lot of that, having Bounty feel like the authority in the room with our other PCs, and then August comes as this character who is immediately like, 'you do not understand the situation that you're in,' you know, 'the sort of revolutionary ideas comes from places you've not considered, and I've been the one who has been able to sort of nurture them and make these campaigns...' It was really interesting; that's why I've always been fascinated by him as a character.

Jack: He's wonderful, yeah.

Ali: I guess also, not exclusy here, is that I was planning on giving Integrity to August Righteousness. I might have said that in the episode, before Thisbe was like, 'yeah I want it,' and, of course, Brnine would be like, 'yeah, if Thisbe's jumping off a bridge, I guess I will, too,' [both laugh] it's sort of how I play Brnine. So, um, yeah. I'm curious of what you will end up doing there because that will be really interesting.

Jack: We'll see. It does suck that the thing that I am the most fascinated by is also, like, just an unbelievably difficult question to answer, right, which is like, 'what do you do once you have these people at your mercy?' Or, 'something way closer to at your mercy than you were before,' you know? Like, what does Millennium Break do... following the end of a war, [Ali laughs] in a particular location, with the principality?

Ali: Yeah, I don't know. It's such a funny thing because we're the most concerned with the Blue Channel, and I feel like that's a really good place that we've been in with the season, in terms of like, these characters care about each other the most that we've sort of, um, seen in the show so far. They all, you know, feel like — you know, they're all organizationally together in a very specific way, but also have these all, very expansive goals for themselves, but also in ways that overlap. But then it's like... but, on the other hand, you have to assume that Millennium Break, at large, is having engagements like this all over the place.

Jack: Yeah.

01:19:49 - Finale Season

Ali: And, you know, PALISADE was, obviously, a huge investment in their resources, but, like... you know, that they... [laughs] You know, as much as Millennium Break is probably shocked by this, I don't know that it's like a hit to their forces to have lost, you know, people that they've already committed to a different engagement, right? Like, it's not... [**Jack:** Right.] it's not going to affect the war on a different front, but it is really, really, really going to significantly change the lives of everybody who was in that explosion. This sort of, like, the contrast of that is going to be one that we have to work through. [laughing]

Jack: The war, yeah, the war is still ticking away out there. Oh, man, we shall see. I mean, I would feel more nervous about this were Questlandia not, kinda like, purpose-built for exploring this stuff.

Ali: I'm so fucking glad we found this game. [laughs]

Jack: You found this game, don't sell yourself short. You were the one who pitched it, right?

Ali: I was. It helped that, like, when I pitched it to Austin, he was like, 'yeah I've been wanting to play this for a while,' because I... I was like... Well, we were still in the place of, like, are we going to play one Faction minigame and then another Downtime minigame and then do a big finale? Or are we going to do a big finale? Or are just like really gonna try to do another arc of Armour Astir, and sort of feel like what that feels like and then move into this finale? And in the last episode of Drawing [sic] Information, I read out every game that I bought that we're not playing. [laughs]

Jack: Oh, my God.

Ali: So for a lot of those, it was like, is there something mechanically here that, if we were going to do like Microscope plus these other ideas, like the way that Futura Free was, Microscope — no, it was...

Jack: It was The Quiet Year, it was, it was... [cross] was it The...?

Ali: [cross] It's The Quiet Year plus... what's the... the mech game with the kissing?

Jack: Firebrands.

Ali: Firebrands, yes. That's what Futura Free is, right? It's those rules but with The Quiet Year in it, right? [cross] I believe, I think.

Jack: Let me see, Futura Free... Futura Free rules... Yeah, it's The Quiet Year by Avery Alder and Mobile Frame Zero: Firebrands by D. Vincent and Meguey Baker.

Ali: Right. So, I kept looking at games, being like... 'Does half of this game work?' [both laugh] Is there something here that we can pull out to make it work in this other sense? And, when I first read Noirlandia, I was like, there's such interesting things here about the way that you play your character that I knew that we could use. And then just like, especially things like where you select how lucky you [cross] were recently. [laughs]

Jack: [cross] That's amazing.

Ali: Or the way that you're... the word I'm looking... what is the word I'm looking for? It's something similar to... I don't want to say 'addictions.' [laughs] Let me just pull up Noirlandia. It's like weakness, but it's like, stronger than weakness.

Jack: It's not vice is it?

Ali: The vice was the word that I'm looking for but I don't think that that's the thing for, but it's like the, you know, selecting how a character responds in their worst moments and [Jack: Yeah.] having that sort of, have this like narrative effect, is like... chef kiss. It's beautiful, [cross] I can't wait to play with you. [laughs]

Jack: August Righteousness' chef kiss. I don't think he's a chef anymore, I think he is fully a revolutionary general.

Ali: Oh, well, yeah.

Jack: But he cooks a great meal.

Ali: He's gotta eat, yeah, he just seems really busy right now. But, yeah, it would be really funny if you, next week, were like, 'I'm doing this third thing.' [laughs]

Jack: I know. [laughs]

Ali: 'I wanna be Kalar, actually.'

Jack: Oh, my bird man. Ah, my lovely bird man. I definitely have characters who I'm like, they're a real headache to play, and they're very tiring and irritating. I'm looking at you, Clementine. [Ali laughs] And then Kalar is just so joyful and fun and easy, maybe because he was built to counter Clementine. But yeah, yeah... we'll see. There's probably a future for Kalar. There's probably a future for that fun bird.

Ali: Yeah, we shall... we shall see, we shall see. I'm very excited, it's good to be in this mode. It's lovely when we're confused and we're like, [in a silly voice] 'what are we doing? What's our next option? What are we gonna do?'

Jack: I said it after we had that emergency meeting when we realized that [both laughing] we couldn't do the Faction Turn. We all fucked up. It was so funny because it produced this really weird, sort of production team war table where you're not in the Faction Game, but you sort of showed up to be like, you know, rolling up your sleeves, and Art is not in the production team, but he showed up because he was like, 'I'm in the Faction Turn and we gotta figure this out.' [Ali laughs] So it was like a real weird, weird energy. But I went into that meeting of the, like, 'we don't know what we're doing, we're stuck,' feeling so anxious and, like, frustrated by the railway line that we had unintentionally been laying in front of ourselves and not realized. And then I came out of that meeting with, like, still just as confused and still just as unsure, but like, it's like you said, it got transmuted into the kind of fun that it feels when we're like [more excitedly] 'What are we doing!? What's gonna happen here?' [both laughing]

Ali: Yeah, I think 'cause it was like, initially it was this like, oh my God... this just doesn't work. This doesn't work. But by the time we got out of that meeting, it was like, oh

there's a reason why this doesn't work, and leaning into those ideas is our best option, instead of like, [shyly] 'we're gonna sit down and record Friends at the Table this week.' [laughing]

Jack: Do you think that we...

Ali: Because I remember we had that conversation, I think it was like 30 minutes before Austin was like, 'what are we doing?' And I had sort of... I had a little bit of a plan. I sort of thought, like, you know, [Jack chuckles] I could talk very zoomed out about how the vibe of the Blue Channel would have affected the cause at large, and, like, some of thinking through that was interesting, and if we had sat down and done that, I'm sure it would have been fine. But like, realizing that it would have been kind of like, not like a failure, but it would have been... it would have not been meeting the moment the way that it should have if we had not been like, 'oh, the Twilight Mirage also affects the syntax, it affects the medium, it affects, you know, the paper that things are printed on, and the scale of the words that we want to put down.'

Jack: Yeah. We can't just... [Ali laughs] We cannot play business as usual. I wrote down, I was doing prep for the episode as though we were just gonna sort of move on, and it's absurd to read these notes now because it's like, of course that wasn't gonna work! [Ali laughs] What did I write down? I wrote, um...

Ali: Yeah, do you feel comfortable reading those? Because I'm so curious.

Jack: Yeah, okay, so I wrote down: "Faction Turn off to Mirage Bombs." And I want to be clear that, as I was writing this, I knew that the bombs had gone off and I knew that it was going to change the state of the world, but much like the person in the 80's apocalypse movie, who, after the nuclear bombs have fallen, still puts on their suit and goes to the office, you know, I was like, [both laughing] 'I'm just gonna try and prep.' So I wrote down, "State of the world: Everywhere is now in the Mirage, cut off from the outside. The Twilight Mirage is now on their home turf. False Gur is asking to open channels of diplomacy. The Temple of the Threshold fell, question mark." This is an idea that didn't make it into the episode. There was a point where we were like, 'what if the

Temple of Threshold, like, plunges into the Diadem?’ And then we were like, ‘how many things have we just pitched into the Diadem because we need to change the pace?’ And it’s like, we can’t keep doing that.

Jack: (cont.) “Fire Support,” which is Lucia Whitestar’s sort of, like, fucked-up robot, “is down, because it’s not a Divine, it doesn’t work. All of her Landers, her fleet has come to ground, the Iconoclasts have broken out of containment. Motion is question mark, question mark, question mark.” The Whitestar Fleet has a passive move where, every turn, they give Austin three that he can spend in the next engagement to make life harder, so I wrote down here: “Whitestar, having been forced to descend to the planet, goes all in on making the lives of the rebels miserable. Mandatory checks everywhere. Night raids. Kidnappings. Subsuming the Fabreal Duchy into an armed occupation.” With what army? You’re in the Twilight Mirage! [both laugh] And then I write down: “Opportunities for scenes.” [laughing continues] This one’s real optimistic. [Jack snorts]

Ali: What thorough notes, my God.

Jack: “Somehow, put the Blue Channel on the run. A chase to discover where it’s docked. Our enemies are being affected by the Perennial maneuver in the same way we are.” And, another opportunity for a scene: “Rendezvous with Exanceaster March in an unfurling plan and look into Lucia weaponizing Motion. Covert op to lure Millennium Break into a trap or take a hostage or sabotage the Blue Channel. [Ali giggling] Try and launch a ship out into the Mirage to get an advantage on future advancement,” and then, “Try and kidnap Mirage citizens, brackets, Mirage navigators, question mark, anything to get a leg up.” [exhales] It would work if you weren’t trapped in the Twilight Mirage with your mortal enemies, Lucia. [laughs]

Ali: Uh huh, yeah, you know, she’s an ambitious lady. [laughs] She should really think everything through, or has, because we did, right?

Jack: God. None of that.

Ali: It’s amazing. Yeah.

Jack: But, you know, you write prep and then you throw it out. That's the fun bit.

Ali: You sure do, you sure do. I think with that, that this has been an episode of Gathering Information, unless you have any final... [cross] words that you wanna say...

Jack: [cross] I don't think so.

Ali: [cross] ... any wishes, any... [laughs]

Jack: [cross] If you... if you were a chef, who became a revolutionary...

Ali: Uh huh.

Jack: When the war ended, where, if you were able to sort of end the revolution in your favor, would you want to go back to being a chef, or do you think you would be like, Aria Joie-style, 'my life has been so transformed by, sort of, my capacity for idealism and power,' [Ali laughs] that... no more chef business.

Ali: Well, I think that... yeah, I feel like there's... it's the same thing as what you said before, right? I think that, like, you know, we consider the war over from a production stance and from a narrative stance, to zoom in on these other things. But I feel like, if you were on PALISADE right now, I think it would feel a little bit like you poured out bread and [laughing] flour and butter and eggs —and then said, 'oh, that's...'—

Jack: [cross] Yeah. It's not a cake!

Ali: [cross] —'why does it look like it isn't done, yet?' Because it isn't.

Jack: No, no. It's not — They don't know that we know that the season's gonna end.
[both laugh]

Ali: Right, yeah, I feel like, you know, in that, you know... once you can feel the clay in your hands, and feel like you've made a shape out of it, I feel like pulling your hands away would be really difficult.

Jack: Yeah. I think you're right.

Ali: But don't, you know, don't cheat and ask me these questions. [laughing]

Jack: Wait, what do you mean? Oh, oh because... [bursts out laughing] Aren't we collaborators, Ali? [laughter continues]

Ali: Mmhm.

Jack: Oh... Okay. Well, this has been great!

Ali: [cross] This has been fun, this has...

Jack: [cross] I love doing Gathering Information!

Ali: [laughing] I'm glad... I'm glad you came here. I'm glad that we talked and got to talk about the Twilight Mirage for a little bit and spoke about your process and... [singing lightly] it's finale season!

Jack: Oh...

Ali: [singing] It's finale season! Spring has sprung! Spring is springing! [cross] Happy Easter!

Jack: [cross] You know the thing that's... Happy Easter. The thing that's fucked up is that, for us, finale season, much like winter is followed by spring, is followed by premier season, which is its own... it's sort of the same.

Ali: It sure is. [laughs] It sure is.

Jack: Are we gonna do this again?

Ali: You know, I... I feel like I have a handle on what April and May are gonna be like. But don't ask me about what's — [wheezing] I don't know when our next season is releasing, I know that we're probably gonna take a break at some point after PALISADE the way that we usually do, there's gonna be like a, you know, an empty feed for a little while.

Jack: Oh, we know what the season is, though, that's nice.

Ali: That's so nice. But, you know... [laughing]

Jack: We gotta make the thing.

Ali: We have to make it. We do have to make it, unfortunately. You can't just have good ideas, you have to... [laughs]

Jack: God, I saw a tweet once, and I wish I could remember who made it, 'cause I think about it all the time. Which was, someone tweeted: "Nobody told me that when you make a thing, you have to make all of it."

Ali: [laughing] Uh huh, yeah, uh huh. You do, you do have to put it in the oven after you mix it up.

Jack: It sucks.

Ali: Oh... we're fine. We're fine. [cross] We do a great job, and... [laughs]

Jack: [cross] We'll be fine. We've done this for a long time. I mean, that's the other thing, right? Like, I think we have a confidence in our process, but it does still, it does still sometimes feel... difficult. [laughs]

Ali: Uh huh. Uh huh! But, yeah. I'm happy to be excited about it, instead of confused about it, and...

Jack: Oh, yeah. Always.

Ali: Okay. [laughs] But yeah, I think that's... we're going to time.is, I think is...

Jack: [singing] time dot is!

Ali: Ugh! Friends at the Table!

Jack: friendsatthetable.cash!

Ali: friendsatthetable.cash, thank you so much for supporting us.

[End of episode]