Tips at the Table 41: Stuck on Slugs (November 2020)

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[00:00:00] Intro

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AUSTIN: Welcome to Tips at the Table, an RPG podcast focused on critical questions, hopefully smart answers, and fun interactions between good friends. I am your host, Austin Walker. I am joined today by Ali Acampora.

ALI: Hi! You can find me over @ali_west on Twitter.

AUSTIN: Also joining us, Keith Carberry.

KEITH: Hi, my name is Keith J. Carberry. You can find me on Twitter @keithjcarberry. I made eggnog this week. [**AUSTIN** and **ALI**, together: Ooooh.] Yeah, I never made eggnog before. I made a real eggnog, [**AUSTIN:** That's fun.] with eggs in it [**ALI:** Wow.] and everything.

AUSTIN: With eggs and [flabbergasted] everything?

KEITH: Well, the one–

ALI: [crosstalk] How is it?

KEITH: [crosstalk] –you get from the store is fake eggnog. Did you know this?

AUSTIN: What?

ALI: Hmm.

KEITH: They're not legally allowed to put enough raw egg in your eggnog for it to count as eggnog.

AUSTIN: Is this, like, a French Academy thing? Who determines what eggnog is?

KEITH: Well, it's– No, it's like– It's like– It has to be less than half a percent raw egg by volume…

AUSTIN: Which is not enough eggnog for who? For who?

KEITH: [crosstalk] …and eggnog is supposed to have a ton of raw egg.

AUSTIN: I see.

KEITH: For the law. For the USDA.

AUSTIN: No, but you're saying– But who determines what's enough egg for it to count as eggnog?

KEITH: [crosstalk] Oh. Uhh, you know– I don't know, but I think it's a pretty easy sell to be like, "Less than 1% egg doesn't count as eggnog." I think that's–

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] I think that makes sense.

KEITH: [crosstalk] That's– It sold me on it. Pretty quick. I didn't…

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] I mean, how much… What's the percentage of alligator [**ALI:** Yeah.] in Gatorade?

[pause]

ALI: Wait.

KEITH: Well, that's spirit. That's about heart.

AUSTIN: Oh, you're right. Okay.

KEITH: Yeah. [**ALI** and **AUSTIN** laugh]

AUSTIN: Alright. We should do these questions instead of my bad jokes. [**KEITH** laughs] Well, we're gonna go through a few of them here today. First one is a follow-up–

KEITH: [crosstalk] A few bad jokes, or a few questions?

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] A few bad jokes. We got a few– [laughs] Yeah. Uh-huh.

KEITH: We got a few of each thing.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] A few of each. We'll mix 'em up. You tell me which is [**KEITH:** Yeah.] a bad joke, which is a good question. This one's a follow-up–

KEITH: [crosstalk] Ooh, who's this?

AUSTIN: That's H– That's Holden's–

KEITH: [crosstalk] [ecstatic] Oh, wait, I remember this!

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Yes. Uh-huh. Yes.

[00:01:49] Question One: Holden

AUSTIN (cont'd): Holden writes in, and says–

> I've been playing a game of *Scum and Villainy* with my friends for most of this year, and I've been having a really great time. Recently, my character overindulged on a Vice roll

and went missing, leaving a new character of mine to take his place when he got lost in his vice, which is hunting down rogue AI systems.

My new character, a bounty hunter AI system that my original character had trapped in his blaster, got a body and joined our current crew. My original character, who you actually a question about in a Tips episode from April 2019th– or, April, 2019– had been incredibly fun to play and a welcome change of pace for the type of character I normally play– Smooth-talking rogues.

AUSTIN: I believe the name of this character is "Snail Male"? Because it's– [laughs] Is this? [**KEITH** laughs] Is that how y'all would read this? [**ALI** laughs]

KEITH: Great band, by the way. [**AUSTIN** laughs]

AUSTIN: Is that how you would read this? Is that what– Is that– Am I off here?

KEITH: I would have just said– I would have just read "Snail" and assumed that the gender marker was there [**AUSTIN:** Uh-huh.] so that we could talk about Snail using pronouns.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] As… Okay, that makes– That makes sense except that [**KEITH:** But–] Snail Male is a fun…

KEITH: [crosstalk] It… It does rhyme, which means something.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] And it's a phrase! [**KEITH:** Right.]

ALI: Yeah… [**KEITH:** Yeah.] I feel like, if it was the other way, it would say, "Snail… apostrophe… he/him."

KEITH: [crosstalk] Do we have to look into the email archives for this?

ALI: [crosstalk] Not "apostrophe", but the… [chuckles]

AUSTIN: Oh, maybe. But– Oh, let's not do it right now. I'm gonna say "Snail Male".

Snail Male, my current character, is the Muscle, and is wonderfully terrible at charming anyone. My replacement character, and Snail Male's former gun, is the Scoundrel.

AUSTIN: First of all… Holden, to you, to everyone in this game, to your GM– Y'all are killing it? [**ALI** chuckles] The idea of playing a giant snail AI– bounty-hunting AI– or, sorry. A bounty hunter who goes after rogue AI systems, and then overindulging as the giant snail who bounty hunts rogue AI systems, and then picking up the AI that he trapped in his gun? [chef's kiss] You Love to hear it.

KEITH: [crosstalk] Yeah, it's really good. Yeah.

AUSTIN: This is– This is what a *Scum and Villainy* game is.

My replacement character was also a blast to play, but I'm left with a couple of questions I'm not really sure how to resolve. Once Snail Male comes back, does my new character go into the hands of the GM? I still feel I have more to do with the new character, but the stories of the two characters I have are so interlinked that I'm hesitant to let someone else handle his side of the arc.

I know that Jack and Keith have both had characters that were put into GM hands, more or less, but those characters, in my opinion, either completed a character arc or graduated to a position that didn't need them to be the focus on the screen. At the same time, I'm having a lot of fun playing the Muscle, and don't want to fall back on old tabletop play styles that I would play with the Scoundrel.

I guess my question boils down to this– How do you know when it's the right time to hand a character over to the GM, especially when you've stumbled into having more than one character that are deeply intertwined?

AUSTIN: Thoughts on this, y'all?

KEITH: I have an impulse here [**AUSTIN:** Mhm?] and I don't wanna… I don't wanna…

AUSTIN: Let's hear the impulse.

KEITH: [crosstalk] I mean, if I was a character whose main– whose main thing was hunting down rogue AI [**AUSTIN:** Yeah.] to the point that I went missing from doing it too much, and I came back and, like, my old crew was running with a rogue AI [**AUSTIN** chuckles] that I had previously captured? [**AUSTIN:** Yeah.] [**ALI** chuckles] [**AUSTIN:** That's funny.] That– That would be, I think, a big talk? [**AUSTIN** and **ALI** chuckle] And also that AI would be– I would try to put that back in my gun. Because it belongs in my gun.

AUSTIN: Or, that's a good excuse to stay as the rogue AI at this point, as a player [**KEITH:** Right.] and hand Snail Male over, for at least a little while, to be like, "Snail Male's on the hunt for this AI and the party is not down with that, and we're gonna run away," [**KEITH:** Oh…] and that's a fun arc, right?

KEITH: Can you imagine declaring your own [**AUSTIN:** Yeah.] former [**ALI** laughs] PC as your rival?

AUSTIN: That would be sick.

KEITH: [crosstalk] In *Beam Saber*?

AUSTIN: Yes. My other thought here is, like, you can have more than one character, even if they're not who you're taking on missions and who you're not focused on. You could just bench one of those characters for a while, if you'd like to. Or, the other half of it is, like– Nothing says only one person can, kind of, play the character. You can run that, whichever character you're not sticking with, as a– kind of, a negotiation with the GM.

You know, think about the times when I've had a former player character handed over to me, and I go, "They do this." And then I double check. I go, like, "Hey, is that– Is that something that makes sense? Would they do that?" Which I've done with Jack and Keith in the past– both in the past season, and even in seasons before, with Jack going back to Marielda, where I'd be like, "Is this– Does this– I'm gonna do this thing, does that work for you?" And having that… just that quick check-in, I think, is good.

But there's a way in which a character can become, kind of… you know, the, kind of– the territory of both people telling the story in that scenario. I think that that's acceptable. Ali, I don't know if you've– if you have any insight in that– into that sort of, like– trying to play multiple characters at once, or anything like that.

ALI: Yeah. I feel like, with something with tabletop RPGs, especially with a system like *Beam Saber*– or, sorry, *Scum and Villainy*– it really does have the dynamics of, like– If you found yourself enjoying really playing both of these characters [**AUSTIN:** Mhm.] and wanna just switch back and forth between missions, you absolutely have that option.

I think some of the question around, like, "How do I know it's the right time," or, like… [**AUSTIN:** Yeah.] "How– you know, if there are still… you know, certain story beats, or– or– um… desires that this character has that I want to be still present when I hand them over," that's a conversation you can have with your GM. [**AUSTIN:** Yeah.]

Just to be like… you know, "I understand…" [laughs] "...I have rules so, you know, organizationally and structurally I have to hand this character over," but I'm sure your GM would be happy to take notes in that way, even if, like Austin mentioned, they aren't doing those check-ins.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I think that makes sense. That style of go– sitting down with the… Like, there's a character in Heiron, a pretty major character, who leaves the story for a while, and when that player and I made that decision there was a long conversation about, like, "Okay. Well, let's fill in the gaps a little bit. What's going on here? What are the character motivations with that character with a couple of related characters? Let's author what happens next beat-by-beat."

Because if what you're thinking is that Snail Male has certain things that he wants to get done, you could let him try to hunt those things down, or do those things, in the background a little bit, while you continue on as your new character, or vise versa. You can– For me, the thing of going back to Snail Male but keeping the rogue AI in the gun is a little trickier because then you're in a situation where…

For me, the thing that makes that fun is banter. Is– You get to then be Snail Male, and Snail Male gets to talk to the gun [chuckles] AI? But it's hard to do that when you're the same player, right? When you're playing both of them? It's easier if you hand it over.

KEITH: [crosstalk] I should– Yeah. I should say that my idea to do this does not necessarily mean that Snail Male is successful [**AUSTIN:** Sure. Yes. Yes.] because presumably [**ALI** chuckles] the AI does not wanna go back in the gun.

AUSTIN: Totally! Yeah. Maybe they get away and they come up later. Exactly. The only– Yeah. My only thing there would be, like, I think the end state should not be a situation where you are regularly left talking to yourself [**KEITH:** Hmm.] at the table, unless you're very good at it.

But it's hard. I've done it myself. I've tried doing it myself in various situations over the years, and it's tough. I don't even mean as a GM. I mean as a player, you know? So… But also as a GM, it's hard as a GM to do that. Anyway, good luck. [**KEITH:** The–] Good– Check in again. Keith, go ahead.

KEITH: I was just gonna say, like… I think that one of you sort of touched on this, but just– you know… It's very easy, maybe especially if you're doing a show, to feel almost guilty about leaving one character behind to do a different character, just based on which one you think might be more fun to do? [**AUSTIN:** Yeah.] But you really should do what you think should be the most fun to do.

AUSTIN: Yeah! So if you're having a good time playing out-of-type by being the muscle instead of the kind of fast-talking scoundrel, then stick with the muscle. And the other thing here is– You don't have to arrive at your conclusion through the fundamental basic rules of *Scum and Villainy*. [**KEITH:** Right.] If what you want is… "And then one day, this rogue AI escapes and jumps into another thing," you can negotiate a kick-off point for that, you know what I mean? You don't need to have failed a roll for that to then kick into place.

You could say, "Ooh, I'd really love it if this rogue AI tried to escape, and then maybe–" [**KEITH:** Yeah.] "–we could still play around trying to recapture that rogue AI, but it starts at the alarms going off instead of starting at, 'You notice the rogue AI is trying to escape, immediately, in the room with you where everyone is able to just immediately shut it down.'" [chuckles] [**KEITH:** Yeah.]

You could even say, "It's been a week since they escaped." You don't have to play it out at all. It could just have happened because that's a fun and interesting thing for you. The table has fiat, at the end of the day, about what happens, and you can just make decisions [chuckles] it turns out? [**KEITH:** Yeah.] With telling stories?

KEITH: [crosstalk] And there's plenty of things you can do that… Like, I'm sure– Just limitless possibilities for something that is fun and interesting, and doesn't necessarily close you off from changing your mind.

AUSTIN: Totally. Totally.

[00:11:20] Question Two: Ryan

AUSTIN (cont'd): Alright, next question. This one is from Ryan, who says–

> I'm a sometimes-GM for my group of friends, and I'm personally a big fan of Forged in the Dark games. As you know, they make extensive use of partial or mixed success,

which I think is really interesting. The problem is that one of my friends just doesn't like this.

He feels like he's getting punished for not getting a six, and prefers systems like *Spire*, *The City Beneath*, or *D&D Fifth Edition* where success is a little more binary and numbers based. Any tips on how to get a numbers-focused player on board with a Forged in the Dark game?

AUSTIN: This is one of those things that I think, if you're facing this, it's pretty intimidating, because that's [**KEITH:** Yeah.] the whole damn pitch, you know? Though, I think *Spire*… Certainly *Heart*. *Spire*, I think, has mixed successes. I'm like 99% sure it has success with a consequence, and if that's a thing that this player is comfortable with in a different game, then it might be about the way…

This is one of those questions– I wish I had more information, because it might be about the way that the mixed success is being framed? I've definitely run into this while running Forged in the Dark games. I think I've gotten better at it? But I think that, over the years, there've been times that even I make a mixed success feel like a failure.

And sometimes, it's intentional. Sometimes you do want a mixed success to really sting, but there are times when it feels more like a failure than a success with complication, which is what it should feel like. A mixed success is not a partial success, really, right? It's not a– "Well, you didn't quite get what you want." It's, "You got what you want, but there is some condition that goes with it." And emphasizing that, I think, is half of it– is just…

Scum and Villainy, actually, has a great way of talking about this, which is– The characters that you are playing are fundamentally competent. A mixed success should not be them making a mis– should not look like them being fools. It shouldn't be them making a big mistake that anyone who's good at their job doesn't make. It should be that something surprising, or unexpected, or otherwise hard to account for undercut their expertise.

And so, on that level, it can be a lot about framing something, right? The difference between letting them be framed as James Bond versus being framed as Austin Powers, right? [**KEITH** and **ALI** laugh] No offense to Austin Powers, but he's kind of a fuck up. And so…

KEITH: [crosstalk] I didn't get that at all from that.

AUSTIN: No? [**ALI** laughs]

KEITH: No! [**AUSTIN** laughs]

AUSTIN: He gets the little car stuck! Isn't that him? Is that not him?

ALI: Wait…

KEITH: I was being sarcastic. [**AUSTIN:** Oh.] But– [**ALI** laughs] I mean, he does definitely accomplish everything he wanted to do. [laughs]

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] He does! He does– Well, they both do in the end, but… You know what I'm saying, that there's [**KEITH:** Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.] supposed to be a suaveness or something. When James Bond– James Bond still loses fights, but it's because the person or the situation ends up being just… there's some information that he doesn't know, you know? [**KEITH:** Yeah.] Whatever. Anyway. Go read *Scum and Villainy*. It talks about this better than I can.

The other half of it is– My other thought here is– The numbers are there. It might just be about making them transparent? I think about the big roll in the Auspice mission, where both of you were there for that, where it's like– The math is kind of transparent once you start talking about, "How do we game this to get that six we need?"

And once you're doing that, you can get math-y, and crunchy, and… Try to make that six be really fun to get. Put the odds in front of this player. Show them what it means to try to get one more die from helping, or an advantage die from using a skill to gather information first, or taking collateral die, or a devil's bargain, or whatever. You know? There are ways, I think.

KEITH: I have a slight angle on this [**AUSTIN:** Mhm?] I think, which is, like… I know that I've definitely talked to people about these kinds of games before, and I think that sometimes I have, and I've heard other people, get sort of caught up in the fascination of, like, "Ooh, there's whole new complicated nuanced ways to… to apply consequences to things," [**AUSTIN:** Mhm.] which is fun in a narrative way, for people who are interested in that, which is me [**AUSTIN:** Yeah.] but there's also just…

I think anyone who's ever played *Dungeons & Dragons* has had the experience of being in a room and the GM being like, "Okay, how do you get out," and everyone is like, "We don't know. We're trying." [**AUSTIN** and **ALI** laugh] "We keep trying to get out. We keep trying to figure out the next thing that we have to do to do the thing," and the thing that… that partial success or fail forward games have done is… It lets you keep going and not be just stuck in a place until you figure it out. [**AUSTIN:** Yeah. Yeah.]

And it does it without… It does it in a very natural way, which is… You know– the partial success– I think, Austin, you said something like this earlier, where it's like– It's the world reacting to you being in it. [**AUSTIN:** Yeah.] Which happens!

I mean, you know, you're in the Death Star, and they hear the blaster fire, and they come in over the radio, and they're like, "What is happening?" [**AUSTIN** laughs] Like, they killed all the stormtroopers that were there, but someone heard it. [**AUSTIN:** Right. Right.] It all– It works. It's consistent, and it doesn't leave you waiting for 15 minutes in the control room. "How do you get out without alerting the guards?" And it's like, "Well, they got alerted during the fight because of what you did in the fight," or whatever.

So. [**AUSTIN:** Yeah.] It doesn't have to be something where you sell it based on, like, "Look, all new ways–" [**AUSTIN** chuckles] "–to have consequences," [**AUSTIN:** Right.] because it does a lot of other things, too. [**AUSTIN:** Yeah.] I don't know that that's what's happening. I'm just saying that that's something that I've seen and maybe even done.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] The thing I keep coming back to is this– the word "punished" here. "He feels like he's getting punished for not getting a six," and I do think about times like… I think the first *Scum and Villainy* session we ran, which had…

There was a scene in a junkyard. I think that was Janine… Sylvi… and I forget who else was– Dre, I think, was that trio. And there's a sequence that was just, like, so rough. So many– Things just don't go well, and partly that's because I was playing mixed success– I was playing fours and fives way harder than I probably could've, but also it was because the trio broke up.

They didn't work together. They weren't giving each other– You know, they weren't aiding each other, and you really do have to play that game towards maximalizing– maximizing. No maximalizing. [**ALI** snorts] Maximizing your dice pool, otherwise you will get those rougher things.

So part of it might be about explaining the tools that are in his hands, in terms of trying to get that six, and then part of it might be about making sure to frame mixed success as a success fundamentally, and not a failure with some positives, you know?

KEITH: Yeah… Maybe talk– So you're saying, talking about things like managing stress [**AUSTIN:** Yeah!] and pushed rolls, and co-operation rolls, and also positioning–

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] All of those things, yeah. That could help. Yeah.

KEITH: [crosstalk] All the– Yeah. We've talked a lot, I think, this season, about [**AUSTIN** laughs] the differences between the–

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] If we didn't fucking go Forged in the Dark before this season, I feel like [**ALI** and **KEITH** laugh] this is the one.

KEITH: The… God, I'm now– I– It's so rare that we roll it that I'm now… What's the– What is the word for when a roll is, like, "You're fine?"

AUSTIN: A resistance?

KEITH: [crosstalk] It's not Risky or Desperate, the only thing I ever roll. [laughs]

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Oh. Oh. Controlled. Controlled.

KEITH: Controlled. Right. [**AUSTIN:** Yes. [laughs]] Yeah. Like, rolling a five on a Controlled roll [**AUSTIN:** Right. Right.] is not bad [**AUSTIN:** No.] like, almost at all.

AUSTIN: Yes. Correct. Even rolling a failure on a Controlled roll gives you the option to try a different tack, and not have [**KEITH:** Right.] to… you know. Whatever. [**KEITH:** Yeah.] Ali, I'm not sure if you… You know, you've probably played the most Forged in the Dark stuff [**ALI** laughs] supporting it with us, right?

ALI: [crosstalk] Oh, sure! Yeah! I guess so.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Because you were in Marielda also. [**KEITH:** Yeah.]

ALI: Yeah. I think it's really tough. It's definitely an adjustment, with something like this. I… I feel like I feel it less because I started with *Dungeon World*, and then we went into Forged in the Dark? [**AUSTIN:** Mhm.] So I kind of grasped it? I think that– and I think we've…

I don't remember the context that we've spoken about this once, Austin, but I think that the difference there is really making sure the successes really feel like [**AUSTIN:** Hmmm.] shooting a ball across the court? [**AUSTIN:** Mhm.] So when… [laughs] When those good rolls really come along, it feels like a really big high, so the sort of middling lows don't feel as… you know. Like a punch. I feel like that's… That might help? [laughs]

AUSTIN: Yeah. That makes sense.

ALI: Yeah. [**AUSTIN:** Totally.] But yeah, beyond that, I– I– It's tricky! Good luck! [laughs]

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] I hope it goes well. [**ALI:** Yeah.] Alright. Oh, the other thing– The other one– The other thing that, like– to try to really emphasize, maybe, is…

This is going back to number-foc– numbers-focused. Make sure it's clear how much you can do, fictionally, with gear, and what sort of things open up from that, because I think until you feel the ways in which non-numbered stuff matters, because it opens up possibilities for solutions, it can be easy to look at your sheet and be like, "Well, all I have is a two in this and a one in this and a one in this. How the fuck am I supposed to get through this?"

And the answer might be, literally, declare a piece of C4. Declare a, you know, a poison kit. Declare an anti-poison kit! Whatever it is, you know what I mean? Because suddenly then, you're not rolling dice at all because you have the tool you need to do the basic thing, and if they have the tool, and it's not under threat, you can just let them do a thing as appropriate.

And so that gets you out of that, "I need to roll a six to make progress," move– or position, and into seeing the, kind of, breadth of what's availab– Excuse me. Available.

KEITH: I have a question, Austin [**AUSTIN:** Yeah.] as someone who runs this game a lot… When I was playing *Dungeons & Dragons* as a player [**AUSTIN:** Mhm.] and also when I was reading *Dungeons & Dragons* books getting ready to run a game, the vibe that I always got was… and from the official books [**AUSTIN:** Uh-huh.] basically– is like, "Here's your list of…" I don't mean to beat up on *Dungeons & Dragons*, but it's like– I've played a lot of it, so I know– I'm familiar with its downsides and how it works.

It's like, "Here's a list of things that will trigger." And they kind of trigger no matter what. Like, you open the door, and there's guards there [**AUSTIN:** Mhm.] and they notice you, and it doesn't really matter what you do unless you go, like– You can sneak around them. Whatever. But like [**AUSTIN:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.] does it change when– what the world unfolds as a series of reactions to… [**AUSTIN:** Yes. You're in–] to basically mixed successes?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah, totally. You mean in, like, *Beam Saber*, for instance.

KEITH: Yeah, right. Where–

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Yes. 100, 100, 100%. And, like–

KEITH: [crosstalk] Where you don't just have a list of encounters, like, "From A to B, and in between there, this, this, and this, and this happen…"

AUSTIN: Correct. So the thing that I'll say, specifically that *Beam Saber* has, is– and you can find these, I think, if you just do a search for "*Beam Saber* Mission Report". Austin Ramsay has a bunch of them posted on the *Beam Saber* site, and the way that you create a mission, basically– I think that *Beam Saber*, actually, has something that a lot of other Forged in the Dark games don't have, which is a really good template for putting together a mission for your table.

And the way it works is– What you need is a Briefing, which is, like– You know when I go, like, "Alright, so, Jesset City's in front of the room and says blah-blah-blah-blah-blah." [laughs] That's your Briefing, normally.

An Employer, which is just who you're working for– a Target, which is what squad are you going against– an Objective, and maybe a sub-Objective– some Rules of Engagement– and then it has Characters, which is a list of NPCs who could come up. I often write NPCs out who don't show up, or who show up very, very briefly, but aren't key players, right?

Complications, which are basically bullet-pointed things that could come up on a mixed success, if that makes sense. Right? So, like, let me just peek at this website and see an example of these.

So, like, Complications on this mission that I'm looking at here from Austin Ramsay's beamsaber.libsyn.com page– "The information that a major character who has been in hiding is found and handed off to somebody else." "One of the squad's rivals is in charge of security." "Someone from another– Another major NPC is there, at this event, in an important way." "There are more guards than you think that there would have been." "A different group specifically is trying to make you look like a fool at this event."

When I look at my own notes for things like this, I have things like– Let me go back to a really old mission, so that it's not… it's not a big spoiler. Okay, so… Let's talk about the first Rapid Evening mission from PARTIZAN, right? Do you remember that mission, Keith? You guys– Y'all go there–

KEITH: [crosstalk] Yeah! To go to the– We go to the hotel.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] –to go to the hotel to negotiate, right? So… Here are the Complications I wrote. You tell me which of these happened, and which ones didn't. [**KEITH:** Okay.] "No protection. When the party arrives, you're ushered into an inn at the center of town, separated from your mechs. You walk through the city streets and are met with glares from those who blame you for the week's affairs. Some threaten violence or spit on you during your escort through the streets."

KEITH: Oh, I don't think that happened. Did that happen?

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Did not happen, no. [**KEITH:** Okay.] I don't think anyone spit at you. I think you maybe got the, like– "Hrmm." A little bit of a cold shoulder, but it was not the…

KEITH: [crosstalk] You said separated from our mechs at an inn, and I was like, "I think that part happened."

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] That part was true, yeah. [**ALI** chuckles] [**KEITH:** Yeah.] This one definitely happened, which is– A character basically said, "You're here to pick something up, and you get exactly what you need, and then we get the rest of it." When you meet with Cas'alear, they tell you that they will deliver the Elect's body to you per the treaty, but their own research team is already there, so I did that one.

"Echoes of the past. The citizens of Obelle have reported ghost sightings as the impact–" [laughs] "–of the living library Past–" [**KEITH:** Wow…] "–has led to bits of the Perennial Wave taking on the character of past people, creatures, and things."

"The clampdown. Obelle is not only home to Apostolisians, but also many who do business across the border in the Prophet's Path. Local Apostolisian civilians, troops, and police have instantly become suspicious of these non-Apostolisians with accusation of dual loyalty being hurled their way. Cas'alear hates this. Dynamism is the heart of their sibling's new Apostolisian Empire, and Dynamism has no place for the bullheaded rigidity of racism or bigotry."

"Rock up. Ama'kahn, a local Talonite priest of Peace has been unable to safely leave his quarters or hold service in a small temple since the event."

And then the last one, which does happen, is that Horizon shows up to try to steal stuff. And so you can see that I didn't find a place for, and no one triggered anything that would have brought, the anti-Talonite sentiment [**KEITH:** Yeah.] into the forefront. The ghosts never showed up. A little bit of you feeling separated from your mechs shows up, but it's not really a threat in the way it's written [**KEITH:** Right.] but those other things are there.

And then, on top of that, when you make a mission like this–

KEITH: There was a rush to get back to the mechs.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] There totally was, yes. But then–

KEITH: And it was the best. It ruled.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] On– Right. Yeah, totally! And on top of that, you also set potential Challenges. And so the way Challenges work is… These are the things that are… Basically, the potential clocks that you'll have to overcome? But even those, not all of them will show up.

[laughs] I can look at the most recent PARTIZAN thing, and I won't go into specifics on this one, but this– or, not most recent PARTIZAN. Most recent completed thing. Not the one that we just played, but the one that people have listened to. You know, I thought you were gonna do something completely, completely different, so it has things like, "Cross the no-man's land." [**ALI** chuckles] "Enter the quarry." Right? "Destroy these mechs," as a thing–

KEITH: [crosstalk] What just went up? I'm now like, "What just went–"

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] It's the quarry.

KEITH: [crosstalk] Oh, I do know what just went up.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Because you found a completely different thing, and I threw half of that out. One of these is a thing [**KEITH:** Yeah.] that has to do with a character–

KEITH: Oh, yeah. The shit that we did in that episode was [**AUSTIN:** 100%.] way out there. [**ALI** laughs]

AUSTIN: So yeah. So, yes. Totally. I don't even know… I have something written down here, and I don't even know what it means at all. But, you know, there's a Divine in that arc. Surprise, in this Divine Cycle game, there was a Divine that was supposed to show up. I know how many– I knew what tick the clock was, and I knew what it– like, it had a special ability.

So, yes. In *Blades in the Dark*– Forged in the Dark games, that prep does not… You're not just– It's not going from plot point A to plot point B. [**KEITH:** Yeah.] And I think–

KEITH: [crosstalk] So–

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Just– My semi-leading question– I was prepared for you to say, "No," [**AUSTIN:** Oh.] but I knew that you wouldn't because I know what show we do. [**AUSTIN:** Yes. [laughs]] And I know you.

AUSTIN: You've played this game.

KEITH: Is– There's also a sense– I know we've been on this question forever, but I know that there's a sense where if you're not rolling a six, you're getting hit with consequences [**AUSTIN:** Yeah.] but it's just as true that, in a game like this, rolling a six is preventing something that would have just happened in a game that didn't have [**AUSTIN:** Correct.] this sort of mixed thing. But–

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Right. You would have opened the door– In a lot of games, you have to open the door, and there would have been six orcs standing there, or whatever, even if you had detected the trap, or whate– You know what I mean? Like, you're gonna have to fight. [**KEITH:** Right. Yeah. Yeah.] And there's nothing wrong–

KEITH: [crosstalk] Or like– We run into trouble with the Divine, even if we perfectly snuck through [**AUSTIN:** Right. Right.] the thing.

AUSTIN: Or– Now you've reached the Divine Fight part of this dungeon [**KEITH:** Exactly. Yeah. Yeah.] that I've crafted basically. Right? Totally. Totally.

KEITH: [crosstalk] And so it is just as much of a tool of escaping consequences that might otherwise have been seet–

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Or not even consequences, just the– the pre-prepared content. [**KEITH:** Right.] Right? It's like navigating content more than… [**KEITH:** Sure.] more than– you know?

KEITH: I mean, in term– just, like, from this person's perspective [**AUSTIN:** Yes.] become a punishment of having to deal with… the game. I guess.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Totally. Alright. I'm gonna keep on moving. Helena writes in–

KEITH: [crosstalk] That was a good one to spend a long time on, I think.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Yeah, I hope so. I hope that was helpful.

[00:30:23] Question Three: Helena

AUSTIN: Helena writes–

> I've been playing with the same regular group– four, including me– of tight-knit friends for the past five years. We've had ups and downs over the years as people change jobs, their living situations, or went through other life changes, so there have been times when we missed tabletop sessions or compromised with, "Let's just hang out and watch anime or play a game," but this year, 2020– sad *Price is Right* horn– especially has kicked our butts over and over–

[sad trombone wah wah wah fail sound effect plays]

KEITH: [**AUSTIN** snorts] I don't have the *Price is Right* horn, but I did have that. [**ALI** chuckles]

AUSTIN: That's not– You know what? That wasn't bad. [all laughs]

> We have finally started getting back–

KEITH: [crosstalk] [dumbass] If it was bad, it wouldn't be on the soundboard, Austin.

AUSTIN: Sorry. [**ALI:** Hmm…] Apolog– Well, that's not true. Maybe you decided to put a really bad one on the soundboard for fun.

ALI: [breaking up] As a joke.

KEITH: [humorlessly] Ha ha, ha ha ha, ha ha. [**AUSTIN** and **ALI** laugh]

AUSTIN: That's so good.

> We have finally started getting back in the groove of playing regularly this past month or so, but I fear that our current GM, who has a lot going on in life in addition to tabletop, is going to burn out fast if we, as a group, don't do more to help make getting to the table and playing a game easier.

As I said, we're all really close, and talking through things usually isn't a problem. We've all GMed games for each other before, but the current GM is definitely the one with the most experience/willingness to GM. My question is this– Is there anything we can do to help keep her enthusiasm up and make GMing easier on her between or during sessions?

I've thought about offering to GM a second game so that we could alternate from one week to the next and give her a bit of breathing room from the plan from week to week, as well as be able to relax and handle life stuff with less worry. I really do worry for her, because she has a tendency to burn herself out on things in general, and as someone close to her I hate the feeling of seeing someone I care about in such a state of precarity. Any insight y'all could offer would be extremely appreciated.

AUSTIN: This is one of those questions where the biggest and most important answer is, "You should talk to her–" [laughs] "–and ask her what she would like help with, if there is anything that she needs." And I know that it can be hard, and that you might– she might say, "No, I'm good."

But that is the real starting place, because otherwise we're guessing about what someone else might feel, but having that direct conversation will, first of all, just show that you care, and that you wanna make sure that this is a fun and– you know, as easy-going as possible process, and also, you can say, like, "Hey, even if there's nothing right now, if, in the future, you need help with something, just let me know."

There've been times when I've had– going back to early Heiron, like– "Jack, can you just come up with a bunch of names–" Like, for the first Heiron detective holiday special, Jack came up with most of the names in that, because I was like, "Jack, I'm just… I have to figure out how this game works, and right now these are characters named A, B, C, D–" [**ALI** chuckles] "–because I have to map this whole town and figure out how it all interacts. Can you come up with a list of names, and I can just apply them as necessary, or tweak them?"

So that does happen, but Jack would never have suggested, "Well, let me come up with some names," because that would have been an insult to me, because they understand [chuckles] how I am about names! But– But by asking me, "Is there anything I can do to help," produced the opportunity for me to then step in and say, "Oh! This would really help."

That said, if there are thing you wanna suggest– I think anytime, anything– anytime anyone offers anything organizational is nice. And also, just, like, presence? Responding to questions. Reading more of the book than you have to. We got a question a few weeks ago– I don't remember, were either of you on that one? The, like– "Is it normal for GMs to be the only ones who know how a game works?" Basically?

KEITH: [crosstalk] Yes, I was there [**ALI:** Okay.] for that one. Me and Art were there? [**AUSTIN:** Yeah.] I were there, too.

AUSTIN: And I actually saw someone– I saw someone say, and I get this, basically, like, that we were surprised that we were so traditionalist in the feeling that, like– "Well, GMs have to do all the work. That's just how it is," which, I think, we did come off maybe stronger than– that way than I wanted to?

Let me be clear. I think I was being descriptivist [chuckles] more than prescriptivist. I don't think I was saying that's the way it should be. I was saying that has been the way it has been in my life as a GM for well over a decade now.

But that is a place where you could help, right? Saying, "Hey…" You know, "We're gonna play a new game. I'm gonna put a night aside to read the whole book and help answer people's questions about rules, or whatever. Would that help?" Wouldn't be misplaced. You know, I think– I suspect your GM would be thankful for that.

Or just, in general, that style of, like… "Let me try to figure out organization. Let me get the pizza–" I don't know if you're meeting in person, but, like, "Let me get the pizza. Let me get the snacks. Let me handle setting up the Roll20 call," or whatever it's gonna end up being. You know. But, I don't know. Anyone else have thoughts on this? This is obviously very–

KEITH: [crosstalk] It is a tough one, because all of my answers are… All of my good ideas for how to make things easier during a tabletop game are, like, what you can do in person, and there's a lot– [**AUSTIN:** Yeah.] There's a lot of not-in-person stuff happening, so… [**ALI** chuckles]

AUSTIN: That is true. Yeah.

ALI: Yeah. It's a really tough thing to anticipate someone's needs, too, but there's definitely a version of it– of, like… [brrm thinking noise] Trying to be sensitive of where those– those– those areas of friction might show up in terms of just being… You know, when we spoke about this last, there were other examples of, like– [mic cuts out]

AUSTIN: Oop.

ALI: –notes for after session, or [**AUSTIN:** Hmm.] being willing to do the, like, "Well here's what happened last time," so that the next time everybody plays it can mesh a little bit better. Also just really being open about ideas that you have or things like that. Obviously you don't wanna take a lot of her time, or– [laughs]

This person's face– Already risked being burned out, and pulling them aside and being like, "Let's talk about a character all the time," but… [chuckles]

I think that in terms of having an open communication, just DMing your GM and being like, "Well, these are the things that I'm interested in exploring," or, like, "These are the things that I found interesting from the last session," are both encouraging in a morale way [**AUSTIN:** Yeah!] as well– in– Also being a good way to, like– She can set her sails to some of those [**AUSTIN:** Mhm.] specifications.

AUSTIN: That makes sense.

KEITH: There's also– It says in the first section there that they recently started getting in the groove of playing regularly, and there's– You know, there's a lot of benefit to having a weekly game or whatever, or… This is the– you know, "Every weekend we play our thing," and it's like… It is totally fine– It does not ruin a groove to take a week off. [**AUSTIN:** Right! Right, right.] You know, if that's what you will need– is to just not do it this week. "I didn't have enough prep," or, "I'm too tired."

But they, also– and this goes back to the original point of making sure you know what it is she needs from you and her other friends– as, like, the… There have been times where doing too much stuff with friends has been a burnout for me, and there are times when it has been the opposite. [**AUSTIN:** Yeah.] It's been the thing that prevents me from getting burned out, and it's totally possible that doing game prep and running the thing every week is literally enriching. [**AUSTIN:** Yeah.] So…

AUSTIN: No, listen. I didn't– I could not have gotten through the last four years without being able to come here and record a game and have a good time. Fuckin, Friends at the Table is what got me through Waypoiny, frankly. [chuckles] So… Speaking truth there, Keith.

[00:38:01] Question Four: JR

AUSTIN (cont'd): Alright, we can do another question. This one is very fun. Keith, you marked this one as one that you were curious about. JR says–

> Hey! So I am a tabletop roleplaying game designer, and I have a family who is incredibly supportive, and that means the world to me. However, my in-laws really wanna play my game, and I cannot imagine a more stressful experience– [chuckles]

KEITH: [crosstalk] Oh, god. This is so funny. I forgot. [laughs]

> **AUSTIN:** –than to introduce them to tabletop games using my game, but it is what they want.

> So, two part question. One– Do you have any great ideas for how to minimize the extreme anxiety this is going to put on me? And two– How do I help them make characters? Because my game is extremely about fanfiction and playing characters from properties and cannons that we don't own, and I'm not sure how to approach, "So I think based on what I know about you, you should play Richard Castle," without sounding like a clown

AUSTIN: Um… Good fucking question. My– The most important thing for me is– REALLY consider explaining to them that there's a better starter game, and that you shouldn't start with the game you made–

That you really appreciate that they want to play that one, but that it's a little too complicated, or it's not in a place where you wanna share it yet. But here's another game you really love that you've done some hacks to or something to make it seem like maybe you've touched it in a way that makes them excited because of your presence with it. Or just one you really like as a starter game that you feel more comfortable with.

Because you should not be seeding that you have to do this thing that you're not comfortable with, first and foremost. I get [**KEITH:** Yeah, I think–] that that happens sometimes, but I just wanna get back to the premise and be like, "You don't have to, actually, even if you wanna play something with them."

KEITH: [crosstalk] Yeah, I think that this is like… My serious answer to this was going to be, "If they feel like they can make you do this, then you have to go to the bargaining table and say–" [**AUSTIN** laughs] "–'Here's what you have to do first,' and pick a different game." [**ALI** and **AUSTIN** chuckle] And like, who knows? Maybe they might hate tabletop so much that they then [**AUSTIN** laughs] won't wanna play your thing, and then problem solved. [all laugh and cackle]

AUSTIN: Ohhhh. This is the way I think about life all the time, so I'm glad. Brendan McCloud in the chat says, "Um, Bessie, you're Sans Undertale." [laughs] [deep exhale] It's hard. I'm glad– [**ALI:** I have–] Go ahead, Ali. You go ahead.

ALI: I… What I was gonna say is not important, which is that I have the opposite advice, which is just dive headfirst into this and be proud of the thing that you made. [**AUSTIN:** Yeah.] Be enthusiastic about it. It'll be… you know, infectious [laughs] in that way. [**KEITH:** Yeah.]

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Yeah, maybe that's another part of it. Trust them! If they said they wanna fucking do it, let them do it! You know? [**ALI:** Yeah!] Maybe they can get more excited. [**ALI** laughs] You know?

ALI: Call THEIR bluff. [laughs]

KEITH: And part of that is that– You know, I think, Ali, you're right. It might not be as bad as it seems, and the other half of it is that it might be just as bad [**ALI** and **AUSTIN** chuckle] no matter how much prep you get them to do first.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Or it might go well! So, for the holidays, I went home. I got, as a gift, a copy of *Detective: Season One*, which is I think the third *Detective* product. P.S. Ali, you have to come over at some point when this is over so we can keep playing our game of *Detective*. [**ALI:** I know…]

But *Detective: Season One* is a much more streamlined version of *Detective*, and I also got another board game that I don't know enough to vouch for, but my dad was like, "Oh, we should play one of these. We should play the one you don't know to vouch for."

And I was like, "Well… No." [chuckles] "I don't wanna do either of these things. I don't wanna play a board game with anybody right now, but I know this means a lot to you, so let's play, because you wanna experience this– you wanna share this thing you know I care about," right?

And so I went home, and the next day I went back to his place with *Detective* and was like, "It's not the other one that I can't vouch for because I've never played it and don't know what the rules are, but I basically understand how *Detective* works. I've read the rules of this. I really like *Detective*, and games like this, generally. Do y'all wanna– We should play this. Let's play this."

And so I met them halfway, basically, with something that I was more comfortable with, and that I, you know, at the end of the day, thought, "Hmm. I'm confident, in this thing, that it will produce an interesting time at the very least." And so we did the first case in *Detective: Season One*.

That was nicely streamlined. It was very fun to hear people shout their theories about who killed whoever, and whether it was because of infidelity or because of professional rivalry or whatever, because that's how those games go, and we got to share that moment and have– they got to have a little glimpse into this thing that is important to me.

And even a game like that is still sort of like– is close enough to playing an RPG in some ways, where you're making decisions and you're thinking about big-picture mysteries and stuff like that, that I got to feel like I got to share– you know, I had all the cards in front of me, so I got to do all the reading just to keep things safe, and so I got to put on my character voices and kinda show off "GM Austin" to people who never would have seen that version of me. And so that was nice.

And who knows. I think to some degree Ali is right, that like– Trust them, at their word, that they're interested, and be proud of the thing you made, and if that's comfortable– If that's something that, once you've taken a step back and been like, "You know what? Yeah," be comfortable with it and go for it. But also you're allowed to draw lines. You are. So. [**ALI:** Yes. [laughs]] You know.

ALI: The second thing I think is worth saying is that I think that, instead of suggesting characters, you should really try to see what they pull out [**AUSTIN:** Yeah.] if it is [laughs] [**KEITH:** Oh, yeah.] about fanfiction, and playing characters from properties. Because you can just explain, "Oh, I'm gonna be Indiana Jones. Who are you gonna be?"

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Right. "Who are you gonna be?" Yeah.

ALI: [laughs] Having them reach into that hat and pull something out might be a really exciting process, so good luck with it.

AUSTIN: Oh, no. I wanna know so bad. [**ALI** laughs] I just wanna- I JUST wanna know so bad. [**ALI** chuckles]

[00:43:49] Question Five: Arp

AUSTIN (cont'd): Alright. Next question. I think this is our final one for the day. Arp writes in and says–

I'm about to join a campaign where I am going to be playing a character that comes from a very non-human species– different primary sense organs, different body plan, et cetera, et cetera– and I was wondering if you all had any advice for staying true to your character without it slowing down or interrupting play.

And if the answer is, "Just don't worry about it too much," then any advice on letting go or ignoring slip ups for someone that is exhaustingly particular? Like, "I once wrote into the newspaper when they misidentified a caterpillar," type of particular, or, "I've sent you questions about Gur Sevraq's ability to chew gum," type of particular.

AUSTIN: I missed that question. Gur Sevraq can chew gum. [**ALI** chuckles]

I can't help but get really overinvested in figuring out small details. It's fun to me, but it's not fun to probably anyone else, so I'm trying to prepare to fight the, "But wait– Is that even possible, because–" insert-overthinking-nobody-wants-to-hear impulses.

AUSTIN: I definitely get those impulses, in terms of, like… "Oooh, am I the only one at the table who cares about this?" So I don't think that you can– Don't beat yourself up for being nervous about this, I guess, to begin with. It's okay to be a little nervous, just generally speaking, about stuff. What's bad is when it becomes kind of a spiral.

Anyway, I don't really play characters ever, so, you know, Ali or Keith, do you have feelings about this? Playing characters who aren't quite human?

KEITH: God, I have direct experience with this. [**AUSTIN:** Right now! Yeah.] You'd think I'd have something [**ALI** chuckles] to say on it. I'll– I'm– I'll– I'm considering this, right now, currently. [**AUSTIN:** Okay. [laughs]] I mean, if anyb– I mean…

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Ali, do you have some thoughts? Yeah.

KEITH: [crosstalk] If anyone has some tips for me playing a non-human character [**ALI** chuckles] I would love to hear it.

ALI: Well, there's… Something that's specific that comes to mind for me, especially within the context of the specific anxiety of this question– of being like, "I'd like to think about these things, but I'm afraid of slowing down sessions because of it." [**AUSTIN:** Mhm.]

I think that looking over the book, looking over your moves, looking over not just your character class moves but also the… if it's a type of game that has separate action moves, like *Beam Saber* or Forged in the Dark games do, thinking about– like, "Oh, okay. This is how I expect this character to act. These are the sort of items that this person is gonna be expected to interact with in the world."

"Let me just brainstorm these things before I sit down, and have them have notes so I'm prepared to talk about it when I actually get at the table, and prepare it in a way that I can sort of get to the…" The sparknotes version of it, especially. [**AUSTIN:** Right.] If that's what you want to provide for other people at the table… Yeah. I don't know. [laughs]

AUSTIN: That's good advice, because that's something you can totally prep for, in the sense that… you know, if you know the type of game you're playing, you know basically the sorts of actions you're doing. You could probably anticipate that you're going to need to talk about how your character interacts with a computer, or a boat, or a ballroom. Those are the three genres of tabletop roleplaying game. [**ALI** chuckles] Computer, boat, or ballroom.

But, you know, you're gonna be like, "Okay! Well, how would my character interact with these things? What is the basic function?" I think that's really good advice. My advice is, of course, very Austin advice, which is to think thematically, because you're going– Accept that you're going to have contradictions and mistakes, that you're not– It's impossible to s– We all play characters–

Let me just back up. We all play characters on this show who do things that no human could, or should, do. [chuckles] Or we make decisions that are difficult–

KEITH: I endorse everything I've ever done.

AUSTIN: Okay. [**ALI:** [distraught and laughing] No!] Things that are– [**KEITH** guffaws] that we are not capable of doing physically, in many cases–

KEITH: I can do… everything– [can't make it through that word without laughing though] [**ALI** giggles]

AUSTIN: Can make every noise that any character has ever made. [**KEITH** laughs]

ALI: May turn into birds. [**AUSTIN** laughs]

KEITH: Dare me to get rid of the sand! [**AUSTIN** and **ALI** laugh]

[huge outside honk]

AUSTIN: Someone outside dared you [**KEITH** laughs] with a huge honk! An 18-wheeler drove by!

But– But– But– But for me, thinking about things… I mean, Fero is actually a great example of this. When… You know, Fero is a Druid from the Seasons in Heiron seasons of the show, and… you know, we don't really zoom in on the mechanism of druidic animal form stuff. We don't talk about, "Is it like a werewolf, where your body morphs? Is it a big blink, and then there's magic, and then, you know…" We don't really care about that so much.

Instead, what we really ended up focused on is, "What does it mean for Fero to become a different type of thing? What does it mean for the world when that happens, in the long run, without getting into spoilers?" But also just, like, "How does that communicate something about Fero? What type of beings does Fero like to turn into?"

There's a reason why Adelaide called Fero "little bird", and that's because there is something kind of flighty and bird-like about Fero in season one that Adelaide zeroed in on, right? And for me, thinking about those elements of whatever this character is– I just realized, I'm– [chuckles] I just realized that as I read this [laughs] I keep thinking of Snail Male, the cool [**ALI** and **KEITH** laugh] space slug.

But whatever those aspects are for this non-human being, you're going to run into those contradictions, but where I think it's important to stay as dead-on as possible is, like– Well, what are you trying to communicate by playing this character? What is it that you're interested in beyond the fact of them not having a nervous system that's like our nervous system, or having different sensory organs? What is it about–

Let's say this is some– a character who, maybe, has sight, but primarily observes through hearing, or something. What are you trying to do with that? What is the… What is the way in which you suspect– or want to talk about how that changes their relationship with the world…

And, you know, just to be careful about it, what are the traps, ahead of time, that you can think of in which you'd fall– that you could fall into by saying… by being kind of biologically essentialist about something like that, and getting ahead of that a little bit. Or thinking about the ways in which you think something there is an interesting element of the character.

But not just trying to be like, "I'm going to simulate this slug being–" Not that you're playing Snail Male. Not that snails are slugs. You get what I'm saying though. [**KEITH** chuckles] And instead thinking, "What are the things I really wanna emphasize?" Like, if you're playing a slug person, maybe the thing that you're really interested in is the slimy goo that a slug leaves behind. [laughs]

KEITH: "Can you fucking believe, in the latest Tips, Austin called snails slugs?"

AUSTIN: I– [**ALI** laughs] "Oooouuughhhhhh! I've been called out!"

KEITH: [laughs] Rages! [laughs]

AUSTIN: "Oh, nooooooooooooo! 32 page Tumblr post! Snails and slugs are different!" I actually don't know what the difference is. Like, as a– Like, on a biological…

KEITH: They're both molluscs.

AUSTIN: Right… [**ALI:** Hmm.] Is it just the lack of a shell?

KEITH: …Yeah. I think– I think that they– I think that they are– they are moll– they share a common ancestor… They– they– clo–

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] But you know what I'm saying though.

KEITH: [crosstalk] Yeah, but, like… How close? I don't know.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] If you– If a slug happened to move into a snail shell, it wouldn't become a snail.

KEITH: …no.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Are snails slugs?

KEITH: [crosstalk] Also, that's not how slugs work, either.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] [slandered] I know. I know. [dripping with malice] Keith. [**KEITH** wheezes] I know slugs. I've met slugs.

KEITH: Oh, god. There's these slugs that eat the food that I leave for Squiggle, and they're massive. [**AUSTIN:** I bet.] I think it's the taurine.

AUSTIN: What?

KEITH: The taurine.

AUSTIN: Why are you giving slugs taurine? [**ALI** laughs]

KEITH: Because taurine is in cat food. That's what makes cat food different than dog food.

AUSTIN: [baffled] What?

KEITH: Yeah, cats need taurine. They need it.

AUSTIN: [laughs] To get– like– Red Bull?

KEITH: Umm… No. It's just in– I think it's just in red meat? And cats are more carnivorous than dogs, and so they need…

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] I'm looking here at a– [**KEITH:** I'm–] I'm looking here at a web.– archive.org page– "Taurine and its importance in cat foods..." "...an essential amino acid." Huh.

KEITH: Yeah. Um… So I… I basically– [**ALI**'s mic fucks up and she sounds like she's underwater] Eugh– Blup– Your last–

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Ali, go ahead. Ali, go ahead.

ALI: [laughs] So, wait, wait, wait. So, you're feeding the slugs [**AUSTIN:** No.] to feed to the cats?

KEITH: No, I'm feeding the cat, and then when he leaves stuff– He's an extremely messy eater because he's a wild animal [**ALI:** Okay.] and so there's just, like, kibble that gets left on the ground next to the bowl, and the slugs are all over it.

AUSTIN: And they're Jacked.

KEITH: And they're huge. [**ALI** laughs] They're the biggest slugs I've ever seen in my life. Yeah. And I'll find them in the bowl when I have to clean the bowl. They're like four inches long [**AUSTIN** ewww sfx] and they are, like… I don't know, like a– like a–

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] [baffled and disgusted] Slugs?

KEITH: [crosstalk] –full, like– They're like three-quarters of an inch diameter? [**ALI:** Huh.]

AUSTIN: Hmm. "Slugs, as a group, are far from monophyletic. Scientifically speaking, 'slug' is a term of convenience, with little taxonomic significance."

KEITH: Ooh, I'm sorry slugs!

AUSTIN: "The reduction or loss of the shell has evolved many times independently, within several very distinct lineages of gastropods. The various taxa of land and sea gastropods with slug morphology occur within numerous higher taxonomic groups of shelled species, such as independent slug ta–" Er, "Such independent slug taxa are, in general, not closely related to one another."

So it's not like, "These are the slugs and these are the snails." It's that things that you would call a slug exist throughout… Slugdom. [**KEITH:** Right.] Throughout Gastropoda.

KEITH: [crosstalk] –podia.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] –podda. –podia?

KEITH: [crosstalk] Gastropodia.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Gastropodia. The Kingdom of Gastropodia. Season seven, everybody. We're finally here to tell you. We're doing slug game, where it's about the Kingdom of Gastropodia. [laughs]

KEITH: [crosstalk] God, I saw… What's that guy that does the animal videos that was then the president of Buzzfeed or whatever?

AUSTIN: Oh, uh– uh– uh– Frank Ze? Frank Z? Frank– Frank…

KEITH: What was he from Buzzfeed?

AUSTIN: Fra– Frank… Ze Frank! Other way around. [laughs] It's not Frank Ze. [**KEITH** chortles] It's Ze Frank.

KEITH: [crosstalk] Anyway, I saw a killer slug video–

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] From Ze Frank. Yeah.

KEITH: [crosstalk] –killer sea slug video one time, and that was fun. [**AUSTIN:** Okay.] [**ALI:** Hmm.] Slugs are wild. They, like, eat you. From the inside out. If you're– I mean, if you're smaller than a slug, and live in the ocean.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Brendan in the chat says, "How is Austin already reading the Tumblr post?" [all laugh] Y'all are quick!

KEITH: Um… Austin, you were talking about the line of, you know… Anyway, this is starting– The last bit that you were talking, there, is sort of what I was going to say, which is, like… The question that is going to be answered by the way you play is, "Are you going to say that this is a different thing than the rest of the people in your party?" [**AUSTIN:** Hmm.] Like, how different of a person is this? [**AUSTIN:** Right.]

Which can get really mucky and weird, and I guess if there's a way that I play Phrygian it's just by trying to consider [**AUSTIN:** Mhm.] what a person with vastly different experiences is going to feel about different things that are happening, that other characters might take for granted. And I guess that that's pretty much–

If I try to do anything intentionally, it's– and I don't think that this is just a Phrygian thing, but it's to, I guess, kind of… be, like… just, trying to come from a different angle on what is, maybe– Everyone has agreed on something and I'm annoying about it. [chuckles] [**AUSTIN:** Yeah.] I guess is the… [**AUSTIN** and **ALI** chuckle] [**AUSTIN:** Uh-huh!] But I think that's important!

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Yeah. I think one of the most important things in– just, for getting any character down, much less a non-human one, or a human one, is really trying to consider… Even if it's– if you don't go over every faction in your game, or whatever, but really considering the broad strokes of, like, what did they think about this specific thing?" [**AUSTIN:** Hmm…] This specific antagonist, or this specific organization, or… you know, about the place they live?

If you have three or four of those, and have really specific opinions [laughs] down [**AUSTIN:** Yeah.] I think, characterization-wise, you can probably… [**AUSTIN:** Yeah.]

KEITH: That's a good point. You don't have to try to do something big, because something big will emerge out of all the things that you do throughout playing it. A picture will take shape on the– You don't have to–

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] It will. Right. Yes. [**ALI:** Yeah.] Trust yourself there, right? Trust yourself that you are that person. Because it sounds like you're that person. You will find the ways to make that interesting, and… You know.

I think part of it is knowing where your spot is– to emphasized that stuff and not slow down the game, if you're worried about that– is to just think about it generally. Where would you already be trying to do… You know, like, "Hey, here's my spotlight moment. I can talk about my character in a fun and interesting way. Hey, the GM has turned to me to do something," and working it in naturally in those spaces.

And then, if there is a rule of… If you feel like you really need to give yourself a little bit of wiggle room here, there's two things. One is– draw yourself a pretty hard line, and say, "Once the spotlight is off of me in a scene, I won't go back and retcon something." Because you know, one of the things you say here is, "But wait is that even possible because–" and then you think of a reason why it's not possible. If the moment has passed, that thing that's happened has happened.

And then, two– Try to think through whether or not you either, one– say, "Okay, that was a mistake and the next time it comes up, I just won't do that same thing." You know, maybe it's that, like, "Oh, yeah. Of course we all know that slugs can't do X-Y-Z–" [laughs] "–and as a big slug person I can't do X-Y-Z."

Or two– let the play define what it means to be the species you are a little bit, instead of coming in with it ready-made, because then when the slug does the thing the slug isn't supposed to do, you go, "Wait a second, I guess I'm not exactly just… I guess this is not just the biology of an Earth slug."

"I guess there is something else happening here that says that even though a real slug can't reach the jam on the top shelf, my slug can! And that must mean that I'm different– or, our species is different than whatever its inspiration was." And then roll with that going forward, instead of being worried that you're breaking some completely pre-built rule around what that is, if that makes sense. You know.

Let the species come to being at the table, instead of being fully scripted ahead of time. And that's fun. Because then you're also making it up as you go along, which is part of why all of this is fun anyway. I don't know why I'm so stuck on slugs. [**ALI** chuckles] "Stuck on slugs…"

KEITH: This has been an extremely slug day. [**ALI:** Shh– Hmm…] Wow, those slug days.

[typing]

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] That's it… Wow, there's only three mentions of the phrase "stuck on slugs".

KEITH: In the world?

AUSTIN: On the internet.

ALI: Huh.

AUSTIN: One is a meme, and it's a boy who says, "Do you like my eyebrows? They're just stuck-on slugs." [**ALI:** Oh…] There's…

KEITH: Which isn't really what you meant by "stuck on slugs".

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] No. One of them is… someone giving advice for how to get slugs off of something. And then… I don't know what the third one is because it's Twitter. It's someone else saying eyebrows that look like slugs. So... That's not what I mean. I mean that I'm stuck on slugs. [**ALI** laughs]

KEITH: Try, uh… Try feeding your slug character taurine. See what happens.

AUSTIN: See what happens!

KEITH: Just see what happens! You might get big.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] If you had a slug character, and you were always just drinking Red Bull to get big… [**KEITH** and **AUSTIN** laugh] it would be very funny…

KEITH: Red Bull and cat food!

AUSTIN: Let's gooooo!

[01:00:40] Outro

AUSTIN: Alright, that's it. That's our last question. [laughs] You can send your questions in to tipsatthetable@gmail.com. We have one more of these to finish catching up this year. We also have a bunch of other stuff that we're catching up on. Ali, I think some of the Pusher posts have started going up, right?

ALI: Yeah, yeah, yeah! I– As explained in that post, there's another trio of movie conversations [**AUSTIN:** Oooh.] and the first one just went out. I think the second one is drafted to release Wednesday?

KEITH: I had such a good time with those.

ALI: Oh, they were a blast.

KEITH: I had a blast, yeah.

ALI: Um… We–

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] I also– Sorry. I didn't say that I did, but I did so much that I'm now re-watching– or, I'm watching the current season of *Fargo*, because I was like, "Yeah, we sh– I should fucking watch this current season of *Fargo*." [**ALI** giggles] I'm thinking about *Fargo* a lot. Chris Rock is good.

ALI: [crosstalk] Is it good? I think I wanna watch it. Okay.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] I like it. It's like a mob– It's like a mob show, more than the kind of traditional *Fargo Fargo*. It still has it. It still is It, you know? There's a character named Doctor Senator in this show. [**ALI** laughs] And he's not a doctor or a senator.

He's a… [**ALI:** Lawyer.] black dude who was a lawyer for the army in World War II, who is now the consigliere in the black crime family in Kansas city. He's great. Doctor Senator is– is– That's who I report to. I don't report to the fucking head of the family. [**ALI** laughs] I'm a Doctor Senator guy.

KEITH: [crosstalk] I think I for– I think I haven't seen that.

ALI: [crosstalk] I feel so–

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] He's great in it. It's good.

ALI: Yeah. I really did not expect to, but in August I think that I watched all three seasons of the *Fargo* show in, maybe, two or three weeks– [**AUSTIN** chuckles] Maybe–

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] You should watch this most recent one. I'm curious what you would think.

ALI: I'm– Yeah. I'm glad that you like it, because I might now. [**AUSTIN:** Mhm.]

KEITH: Is the one that's up the *Tampopo* one? Is that the first one? That one?

ALI: Yeah, that was the first one, and then we're doing *Fargo*, and then one episode of *Better Call Saul*. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Great.

KEITH: It is great. That has been long on my to-watch list, and having it– having you bring it up was finally what… I mean…

ALI: I'm really glad. It's a really good movie, and we did really good.

KEITH: Oh, yeah. It was a bl– It was so good. It was the best movie I saw that whole year. [**ALI:** Wow.] I didn't see a better movie in 2020.

AUSTIN: Weird! [**ALI:** Well…] With so many out? [all laugh]

KEITH: Well, I had the whole history of film. I– I'll– [**AUSTIN** laughs] Admittedly, did not watch too many movies in 2020. [**AUSTIN:** Fair enough. Fair enough.] [**ALI:** Oh.] But.

ALI: I've watched more movies this year than I feel like I have in my entire life.

AUSTIN: Hmm. [**KEITH:** Oh, wow.] Big movie year. Okay. That's good.

ALI: Yeah. I really went through and watched a few.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] I watched, um… What did I watch? I watched that most recent Charlie Kaufman movie, which is surreal. Very Blough City movie. Uhh… *I'm Thinking of Ending Things*.

KEITH: [crosstalk] It's called Surreal, or it is surreal?

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] No, it is surreal. The– A woman from *Fargo*, season four, plays the lead in it actually, now that I think about it. So, Ali, when you watch season four of *Far*– or, season four, is that the right season? Is that the season we're in?

ALI: I think it's four.

AUSTIN: The nurse is in this movie I'm talking about, and she's fucking great. She's fantastic. [**ALI:** Huh.] Anyway, we should stop. This isn't Movie Talk. Movie Talk is for pushers. [**ALI** chuckles]

ALI: Yeah, and I've not sent it out, but I'll be sending an email… a update about the postcards in January, which, spoiler alert, will go back to being sent out in January. Same for the… our top-tier. I don't even remember what that's called. [laughs] But we have a–

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Paladin? What is it?

ALI: [crosstalk] –an extremely premium thing. Yeah, it's the Paladin.

KEITH: Double Pusher.

ALI: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Keep your…

AUSTIN: How did Hadrian get the top tier?

ALI: I don't know.

AUSTIN: Who made these decisions?

KEITH: [crosstalk] Try and change it to…

ALI: You did!

KEITH: Change it to Druid. 2021. [**ALI** and **AUSTIN** laugh]

ALI: This is an Austin night.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] That's our next stretch goal, is just renaming… [**ALI** and **KEITH** laugh] God.

ALI: But yeah. We're, like, send–

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Wait, that's not even on here. Wait a second. "Pal, Friend, Mapmaker…" So, Mapmaker, I guess, is retroactively Adaire. "Hacker–" Who is th– Mako is the Hacker. Mako is the Bard. Aria is the Pusher. And the Pala-di– Oh, actually, this is the Pala-din, not the Paladin, so…

ALI: [crosstalk] Oh, so I guess it's Castille.

AUSTIN: Yeah, uh-huh. Castille. Yeah.

ALI: I feel like it makes sense because, like, Paladins are the most loyal, quote-unquote [**AUSTIN:** I see.] which is what… You were the one who came up with it! [laughs]

AUSTIN: I think retroactively I'm making Gig Kephart the Friend? [**ALI:** Ooohhh…] [**KEITH:** Okay.] Who's the Pal? Who care– Or, make Gig the Pal, because Gig cares the most about the Clapcast. Gig feels like a big Clapcast fan to me.

ALI: Oh, sure, sure, sure.

KEITH: Yeah. If– If– If the–

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Oh! The Friend is– Oh, my god. The Friend is Gur Sevraq! Duh! [**ALI** laughs]

KEITH: Oh, yeah. That… Oh, that tracks!

AUSTIN: Yeah. Uh-huh. [**ALI** giggles]

KEITH: If.. What was the name of the– What's the name of the ship? This is a very Gig question to ask, but what is the name of our ship in that?

AUSTIN: In what? In Twilight Mirage?

KEITH: In Twilight Mirage.

AUSTIN: Uhh… It is… People are gonna yell– Uh, World Without End.

KEITH: Right. In– On the World Without End, if they had their own podcast, it would be the Clapcast, so…

AUSTIN: It would be the Clapcast, yeah.

ALI: Oh, yeah…

AUSTIN: I think about you saying, "This big new ship we have," or, "This big new ship we're all on," [**KEITH:** Yeah! [chuckles]] at least twice a month. At least. [all chuckle]

KEITH: It's because he didn't know the name! He couldn't remember the name. Maybe because I couldn't remember the name in the moment, but I'm pretty sure that it was just a bit.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] You know what? Twilight Mirage, fuckin– I like Twilight Mirage. I'm back around on it. That was alright. That was pretty fuckin good. It was long, but… You know.

KEITH: [crosstalk] Yeah! It was fun! It was long. It got better as it went on.

AUSTIN: Some people disagree! Some people liked that open-ended stuff at the beginning a lot. That's how it is!

KEITH: [crosstalk] People are wrong about a lot of different things.

AUSTIN: Oh, my god. Keith. Those are the people we're talking to. [**KEITH** laughs] Just say that they're right…

KEITH: [crosstalk] I had a lot– I had a lot of fun with the first part! [**AUSTIN** laughs] But I do think that it went better as it went on. I think all the seasons get better as they go on.

AUSTIN: We just get bet– It's like a videogame, where it's like– You get better at making it as you fuckin figure it out, so that's probably why we're [**KEITH:** Yeah.] coming back to– back to PARTIZAN.

KEITH: Although, maybe… Maybe PARTIZAN is the season that had the most consistent beginning to end, that's just–

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] I think that's true. Yeah. [**KEITH:** Yeah.] [**ALI:** Oh, yeah.] I think that's true. I think it's the most [**KEITH:** E–] consistent, even season we've done.

KEITH: Easily our best first quarter of a season. By far.

AUSTIN: Oh, because we didn't change systems [laughs] rapidly? [**ALI** giggles] Because I didn't–

KEITH: [crosstalk] No! No! I just think– you know–

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] have a breakdown and think, "We have to think this?"

KEITH: There was not as much get– I just feel like it clicked really, really fast.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Yes, I also think that. Yeah, I agree with you. I do. [**KEITH:** Um…] Alright, well now we're doing PARTIZAN Post-Mortem shit, which– We don't have a date on that yet, right?

KEITH: [crosstalk] Post-Mortem, yeah. We got a lot of stuff leaking in, too.

ALI: We don't have a date on that yet. Um…

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] That's coming. As a reminder–

ALI: [crosstalk] It is coming!

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] –no episode this week, probably. There's a chance that I scratch something together, but I doubt it. Definitely next week for the beginning of the PARTIZAN finale.

ALI: Yeah, PARTIZAN finale is gonna start January 7th, and it's gonna be…

AUSTIN: Three weeks.

[short distant honk]

ALI: It's gonna be the end, and yeah, it's gonna be three weeks.

[long distant honk]

AUSTIN: A cop is honking [**ALI:** Oh.] so I'm gonna hang up and run.

ALI: [laughs] Yeah, be careful!

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] I'm gonna lean back from the window. I don't like this motherfucker at all. Alright, that's gonna do it for us. Remember, you can send your questions [laughs] to tipsatthetable@gmail.com. [**KEITH** laughs]

Thank you, as always for your support. I hope that you enjoyed this, and we'll be back soon with another one, and that'll be us being caught up on these, basically, so that's exciting. Or, almost caught up. Depends on when we do it I guess. [laughs]

KEITH: We might have that month's to do.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Right. To do. Exactly. [**KEITH:** Yeah.] Exactly, but that's fine. That's fine!

KEITH: Yeah… Hey, that's how time works.

AUSTIN: That's how time works… [**KEITH:** Yeah.] We should go to time.is… [**ALI:** Oh!] speaking of time working.

ALI: Speaking of time!

KEITH: When you said that we don't have a date yet for the Post-Mortem, I almost made a joke about, "Do we have a prune on it?" [**ALI** makes a disgusted noise like a wet metal stool sliding across a recently waxed cat floor] Because then it's like date, like the fruit? [**AUSTIN** exhales] [**ALI** laughs] And then I was like– Well, I didn't make it, and this is why. You don't have to make every joke you think of.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] You don't. You don't. [**ALI:** Mhm.]

KEITH: But I did Google, just in case– Do I know what a date is? Is a date always dry? [**AUSTIN:** Is it?] Does it become a date when it dries? Like a prune?

ALI: [crosstalk] No, it's, like, a fruit.

KEITH: [crosstalk] It becomes– or a raisin. A raisin becomes a raisin once a grape dries. [**AUSTIN:** Correct.] [**ALI:** Right.] But I just wanted to make sure that I was– wasn't wrong about the date, but I did find–

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] And a prune is a– A prune is plum. That's– That's–

KEITH: [crosstalk] A prune is a plum. Right, exactly. [**ALI:** Ooooh.] [**AUSTIN:** Right?] But I did find an article called, "Things you should know about dates, the most fascinating fruit." I don't know–

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Aw, shut the fuck up.

KEITH: [crosstalk] –what this person thinks makes dates–

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] The Most Fascinating? [**ALI** laughs]

KEITH: [crosstalk] –the most fascinating– [laughs]

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] You don't know that!

KEITH: [crosstalk] The Most Fascinating Fruit!

AUSTIN: I promise–

ALI: [crosstalk] What's fascinating about it?

KEITH: [crosstalk] I don't know.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] [exhausted] They're gonna talk about the wasp thing… which–

KEITH: [crosstalk] I'm gonna CTRL-F. [**ALI:** Ohhhh…]

[windows error noise]

AUSTIN: Oh, wait, that's figs. That's figs. That's figs, not dates. [**KEITH:** Okay. Okay.] That's figs, not dates.

KEITH: Well, it sounds like figs have a pretty good argument [**AUSTIN** laughs] for being more fascinating, because there's something to do with wasps. I don't even kn– I've never even heard of this. I think… I think that this person, from gardnerdy.com, thinks [**ALI:** Oh…] that the thing that makes dates fascinating is that the cultivation of the date palm dates back to– [identifying the pun] Dates back– to [**AUSTIN** groans] 4000 BC. [**ALI** cackles] Because that's the sub head.

[**ALI** loses it for a while]

KEITH: [humorless, almost mocking] Ha ha, ha ha ha ha, ha. [**AUSTIN** laughs] [**ALI**, who almost recovered, breaks again]

ALI: [through wheezes] Sorry! Sorry, you saying, "Dates back–" [**KEITH** laughs] Ahhhh. We're funny here.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] We're fun! We got fun. Alright, we should do a clap. [**KEITH:** Okay.] [**ALI:** Yeah.] Uh, 45 seconds. [**ALI:** Mhm.]

[three simultaneous clap]

AUSTIN: Damn good clap. [**ALI** sighs] Alright, have a good night–

ALI: [crosstalk] We've done it.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] –everybody. I hope your week is good. Happy New Year!

ALI: Bye!

AUSTIN: Bye!

KEITH: Bye.