

Tips at the Table 02: Jennifer and Todd

AUSTIN: Welcome to Tips at the Table, a Q&A podcast focused on critical questions from you, *hopefully* smart answers from us, and, still, fun interaction between good friends. I am your host, Austin Walker. Joining me today, Alicia Acampora.

ALI: Hi, my name is Alicia Acampora, if you're listening to this, you probably know where to find me.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Also joining me, Keith Carberry.

KEITH: Hi, my name is Keith J Carberry, you can find me at Keith J Carberry (@KeithJCarberry) on twitter, you can find the lets plays that I do at youtube dot com slash Run Button (youtube.com/Runbutton) and you can find me atop my castle in Transylvania for I am vampyr.

DRE: [laughs]

AUSTIN: [laughs] And Andrew Lee Swan.

DRE: Hi, you could just find me on twitter at Swandre three thousand. (@Swandre3000). That's it.

AUSTIN: No one will know. No one will know what Keith meant, because it was not, in the intro to this podcast.

[ALI and DRE make "no" noises in the background to agree with Austin]

AUSTIN: Welcome to Tips at the Table, for, er, sorry not Tips at the Table, TipCast? Tips at the-

KEITH: Well, hey, hold on, maybe that's why you should go to Friends at the Table dot Cash and update to, fifteen dollars an hour.

ALI: [laughing] Pay for this-

[DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: An *Hour*?!

KEITH: (smiling) Wait. A month, not an hour, I'm- [laughing]

AUSTIN: God *Damn*.

ALI: (laughing more)

KEITH: If you've got, if you have some cash. Hey, if you're, if you're like a millionaire and you're listening to this show, like... uncinch that penny purse-

AUSTIN: Uh-huh....

KEITH: -and drop us fifteen dollars an hour.

AUSTIN: That's a lot of money (stretches money)

KEITH: If you're a millionaire you can swing it, unless you're a miser. Unless you're some sort of miser.

DRE: Wow.

AUSTIN: People are allowed to not- It's ok to not be able to give us fifteen dollars *an hour*.

KEITH: No. Righ- well, if you're a *millionaire* then they can, is what I'm saying.

AUSTIN: (smiling) ... We are gonna do some questions.... Last time joining me was Janine Hawkins and Art Tebbel and, in *that* episode, we determined that there were two questions that we really wanted to come back to on every episode, at least until everybody's answered them. And so, we're gonna start with those. This one's from Alex, and they say:

"For every friend at the table, what has been your favorite character you've played in a *non recorded* rpg, and what made them your favorite?"

AUSTIN: I've already answered this question. Someone else.

DRE: (sighing)

[ALI laughs]

DRE: I can- I can go... I played a gnome rogue named.... Horace StumbleDuck. And it was basically like.... it was coming off of, I think, I think, counter/Weight and it was a game I was just playing with some friends... And I just was like, I want to play a really ridiculous character.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: Because it's not a character I normally play and I just wanted- Like basically.... I mean this with all respect possible, I was like, I want to play a Keith character.... Cause I don't, I don't-

[KEITH laughs away from the mic]

AUSTIN: [laughs]

DRE: I naturally don't go to Keith and I wanted to push myself outside of my comfort zone.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: I don't see any way that that could be disrespectful.

[AUSTIN and ALI laugh]

DRE: Yeah, no. It was fun. It was fun as hell, I was like "oh okay, I see. I see this is why Keith plays these characters." [laughs] This is a good time.

AUSTIN: Totally... Keith, what about you as someone who plays a bunch of "Keith Characters"?

KEITH: Uh...

[ALI laughs]

KEITH: Yeah. They're all really fun, and they work kind of all the same way... I... I remember one time I... sort of- I did like a, sort of... I mashed together two classes in, I think D&D four... And got myself to be able to play like, this weird, big rabbit man....

AUSTIN: Ooo.... Who's that big rabbit man?

[ALI laughs]

KEITH: Yeah, yeah, he was like a rabbit man ninja. And his, his whole- I remember that his gimmick sort of was that I would just like... like, 'poof' into places. I would just be- I would just like, be there. And it was always very impressive to the people already in the room. Which I liked a lot, and I liked that he was a big rabbit. But like a- he was like.. a big, friendly looking rabbit, but you could tell he was a badass cause he could kick you-

AUSTIN: Uh huh.

KEITH: -and his feet are so big. Rabbit feet are huge.

AUSTIN: That was the- that the- okay.

KEITH: Anyway that's mine. Yeah. Yeah.

ALI: (laughing quietly)

AUSTIN: Ali? What about you?

ALI: I'm glad I edit this show 'cause I had time to prepare to be honest...

AUSTIN: Oh, fuck off. [ALI laughs] That's cheating.

ALI: But I have been playing a Jedi knight named Acia Ken for the last ten years.

AUSTIN: Oh yeah.

ALI: And because I've been doing it for ten years, I have to be honest and say that she's been my favorite character to play...

AUSTIN: Mhmm.

ALI: Yeah. Me and a friend-

AUSTIN: Tell me about her.

ALI: Me- [laughing] me and a friend of mine had a kind of obviously long running Star Wars RP that's like, set during the Mandalorian War. The initial like-

AUSTIN: Is it still- has been set in the same time period for ten years?

ALI: No it's like, well it's like, following that timeline.

KEITH: Ali's RP of the Mandalorian War has lasted longer than the Mandalorian War.

AUSTIN: Yeah! [DRE laughs] No it hasn't, it hasn't, I looked into it, it was sixteen years. The Mandalorian war for sixteen years. Six more years to go baby.

KEITH: Well hold on, well it dep- I guess it depends on if, if all are you playing a jedi, are you playing a Mandalorian, are you playing someone from the republic-

ALI: Okay so- [laughs]

KEITH: All of- it, it lasts a diff-

ALI: Everyone's there.

AUSTIN: What is the relationship to the neo, neo crusader movement?

ALI: I have one of each, obviously, cause I play six or seven characters.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's how this works.

ALI: Um, the initial pitch for the entire plot was, um, me and my friend Justin were, actually playing the characters in a different RP with like, a bunch of friends? And we were like, what if these two characters had like an alternate universe where they were fighting against each other in a war, but they fell in love with each other?

AUSTIN: Oh shit! [ALI laughs] That's that real shit.

ALI: That's that real shit. [laughs] So, we did that and then like created a whole plot around it and, like I said, there's like seven characters now, so it's obviously just not about them. But, um, yeah, it started, like, before the war, and then... during it and then like [laughs] coming out of it, and then like, now there's like, it's like, so far from what the actual Star Wars plot line is. But-

AUSTIN: Do you in your heart of hearts believe this is the real Star Wars plotline? [ALI laughs] Like when you *think* the word Star Wars. Has there been a time where you thought like, "Oh, of course, this is when that thing happened," and then you think, "Oh fuck, wait, that was not- that was only in our RP, not in the movies."

ALI: [laughs] Like-

AUSTIN: And I don't mean this in a judgemental way *at all*.

ALI: [laughing] So I haven't like- I haven't like engaged with the like, extended universe of Star Wars stuff much, outside of like, researching stuff on Wookieepedia. [laughs]

KEITH: Outside of roleplaying for ten years.

[AUSTIN and DRE laugh]

ALI: Yeah! I would like, research the places of like, the factions and stuff so I could use it for this like, writing thing that I'm doing but I haven't like, read an extended universe book, so I don't have that like, disconnect. 'Cause it's like-

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: -Luke Skywalker was like a million years later and like, whatever.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: And I think like, a lot of my affection for the Star Wars universe is because... I really like the universe? And-

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: Not like there- there's this one jedi there I really like who was in this book.

AUSTIN: I *do* want to be clear, it was 3,976 years later, not a *million* years later. Ali.

ALI: [sarcastic] Thank you. Thank you. Thanks-

DRE: [laughing] Fuck off.

ALI: -for that.

KEITH: Please, thank you for straightening that up, I appreciate it.

AUSTIN: You're welcome. That's of course-

KEITH: If-

AUSTIN: That's to say, that is when the Battle of- of- of- of Yavin took place, not the Battle of-

KEITH: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

ALI: Right.

AUSTIN: Okay.

KEITH: Well how else do we measure time if-

AUSTIN: I know, I know, I know.

KEITH: -not by the battles before and after the Battle of Yavin.

DRE: 00 ABY.

[ALI laughs]

DRE: Of course.

AUSTIN: Of course.

KEITH: Um. If- real quick Ali, I don't know if you're done or not. I do wanna say to that uh, my pool of favorite characters that I've ever played before Friends at the Table or in non-Friends at the Table stuff is pretty limited. I only played one full campaign, before *only* GMing after that, cause no one else wanted to GM ever.

AUSTIN: Yeah-

KEITH: So.

AUSTIN: That could be a problem.

[ALI laughs]

KEITH: I- I basically had. Yeah, so I really only had like, two or three characters to even pull from, and the full campaign that I played was when I was like, I think I was 17, and I don't remember a single thing about the character other than it was the first time I'd played Dungeons and Dragons.

AUSTIN: Right. I'm gonna actually answer this question again. This is a thing that's like, good about this question is, it means I get to just name other tabletop rpg characters that I've played, or rpg characters I guess in general. Um, the next one, the other one that I'll say is- so the last time I talked about Zanatos Woodshim. I *think* that's who I talked about here? Um.

[KEITH laughs]

ALI: Yeah. No that was um. You played- you talked about, um. You cheated cause you-

AUSTIN: [softly] *I cheated?*

ALI: -were talking about the, the character that you did for Adam...

AUSTIN: [realizing] Oh! you're right.

ALI: Yeah, which is like-

AUSTIN: Wait, which one?

ALI: [laughing] The question is specifically non recorded and you were like, "Oh, well for this other thing."

AUSTIN: Oh, I didn't realize that. You're right.

ALI: Yeah. Mhmm.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I'd only thought about, I only thought about- I, so here's one that uh, that I, has never been talked about probably, is that I played like a really disaffected... This is during undergrad. I was playing in a game of Call of Cthulhu. I played a lot of Call of Cthulhu in undergrad. 'Cause one of my best friends loved the Lovecraftian mythos and loved to run Call of Cthulhu games. And was just like, a brutal GM. And like, that game is built to fuck people up if you run it by the rules. Like, if you actually let the rules guide you, you can get just devastated very quickly. The first time I ever played it a dude got eaten by a big tree monster like, twenty minutes in. Um, and like, that wasn't fun for him. But because I've played it a lot, I started getting very good at gaming the system by one) playing characters who, like Lovecraft's own successful characters, were rich, or had access to rich people. Two) were kind of disaffected and disinterested. And three) refused to play by the rules of weird cultists? So I eventually made a character named like, I don't remember his fucking name, but it was like. It was some really shitty bougie name like Quintine or, you know, Asher or- [KEITH laughs] Liam, like some fucking rich dude thing.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: And I was playing the uh, tutor of a rich kid. And I was like, his like, he was like a high school student who was being played by my friend - by Sean, by friend of the show Sean, who Ali knows.

ALI: [in the background] Aww!

AUSTIN: And, maybe it was like, Quinten Finn, like it was the *most* bougie shit. And I was like, his tutor and like, homeschool teacher basically, and neither one- and we like, got in over our heads, and neither one of us had like, any time for cultist bullshit. So at the end of one of the arcs, we ended up, like, out in like a mansion where the cultists were trying to, you know, resurrect some ancient old ones, some great old god, and there was a bit where I was like, "I'm gonna go inside and explore. You just stay out here in the fields, and like just hang out, you know, call, give me a signal when things go bad." And so I wind up in like, a secret attic where all of the evil books are. All of like, the evil cult books. And the GM Anthony is like "I'm gonna start"-- he's like, "Ooh, the books are tempting you to open them and see what's inside." He says. This is how this always goes. And I had been that dude who's like, oh in every single scene like, my character lights a cigarette, my character lights a cigarette like, all the time, like that's what my character is. He's laying on a fucking, you know, extended couch, reading out, you know, *The Republic* for this young student and smoking a cigarette. So I was like, "I take out my lighter, and I set all these fucking books on fire." And I just burnt all the evil books so they couldn't fucking summon any evil monsters anymore. And the GM just had *no* idea what to do.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: He was just like. "Oh... okay." Like but he did the right thing, which was, they all burnt. None of them secretly had a spell in them that said "burn this book and then that'll summon Cthulhu quicker." Like, he didn't fuck me over on it. It was, like, one of my first lessons in, when the player comes up with a solution for a thing, just let them have it. Because it made me feel really good. And I would never try that trick a second time, because I *know* the second time, one of those books would've had a thing that was like, if you try to set this on fire, you just become a Cthulhu. [laughter] It was a really good moment. And then it ended up-

KEITH: That actually sounds like a win in that game.

AUSTIN: It was very close.

KEITH: Becoming a cthulhu.

AUSTIN: It turned into- the thing that was really good was like, the cultist leader at that point became, just so unhinged. Cause it's like, "Those were my b- I've spent *years* collecting these books!" And then he just tried to kill me in his fields with a shotgun. Which is like, a good conclusion to a story like that for me, it's like, the real threat was this dude that had a gun. So. thats my second character, Quinten Oliver Fuckin Finn Henry-Atticus.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Like whateer the fuck his name was. Sean, if you remember what his name is, get at me.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: All right the second question, that we all need to answer- I think again, this one I have already answered and I don't think I have a second answer to this one- is from MattsBlog or MattHighSchoolBlog or MtHSBuilding: what's improved about your play? Where would you like to improve? ... That's for you guys.

[ALI laughs]

DRE: It's a heavy question.

AUSTIN: It is.

KEITH: Ali should go first, she already knows all the questions.

AUSTIN: Yeah, fair.

ALI: I do know all the questions.

AUSTIN: Do you really want to follow her up after she already gives a good answer because she's been able to prep?

DRE: Aw. Shit.

KEITH: I don't mind giving a bad answer.

DRE: Turn the tables.

ALI: I don't know. I like, there's- it's tough because I think my trajectory of Friends at the Table has been like, assuming that I'm really awful at this, learning that I'm actually pretty good at it-

AUSTIN: Uh huh.

[DRE laughs]

ALI: -and then like trying to figure out like, the inbetween now. I think that I'm- I like, I still have moments where I feel like it's someone else's scene-

AUSTIN: Mmm...

ALI: -and like, I'll sometimes have moments where I get really nervous and I know what I want to say and I just don't say it. And then I, like, spend the rest of the session being like "Oh I didn't act in that scene, that really sucks." And I have to kind of get better at that. And like, yeah that's a big one. Yeah.

AUSTIN: That is a big one.

ALI: [laughing] That is a big one. It goes session by session, it goes character by character. I think... Yeah, I don't know. I feel like I really hit the- the iron hot with Aria and Hella and I still like-

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Castille and Tender are still like, I gotta figure this out, and there's like, a lot of pressure on those seasons.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: So it's hard to- it's been harder for me to like, kind of chisel things down. But yeah, I think those are my two big ones.

AUSTIN: Those are- those are two big ones I'd say, that I can say that I saw as GM too. For sure. Keith, what about you?

KEITH: I think that's, that's sort of the upside, like, anyone can go "Oh, that's a Keith character." Is that I don't really have the pressure of like, "Oh, I have to do this- make sure this whole new thing is as good as the last whole new thing I did." 'Cause they all have a pretty similar thing... which is also the downside, is that they all have a pretty similar thing.

[AUSTIN laughs]

[00:14:56]

KEITH: And then the other thing. I think my- my two things are the, like, the exact opposite of Ali's two things. Like Ali's concerned that the new character's not living up to the old characters and concerned that she's not, like, playing her characters by speaking up when she wants to because it's another character's scene. And I'm like, "Well all my characters are the same, and I speak up in everybody's scene all the time." [laughter] Which I think, [laughs] so it's just like, take what Ali said and flip it, and that's me. I'm like, I should sometimes shut up more, and I should sometimes do something slightly different than what I'm doing.

ALI: God. We should do seminars for each other.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: Yeah. Just give notes for each other.

[ALI laughs]

KEITH: Okay.

AUSTIN: Well we've talked- we've kind of talked about doing that, I think, behind the scenes this season, and we've started doing it.

DRE: True.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Like we've had conversations about stuff since the first set of episodes, now, otherwise we would be running, like. The ground game would be a completely different thing, frankly. At this point.

KEITH: [in background] That's true. [just talking now] Yeah. I feel like I'm... and, correct me if I'm wrong, 'cause this goes hand in hand with what I'm about to say, but I do feel like I'm good at taking notes. So-

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: Whether or not I follow through on the notes-

AUSTIN: *That's part of taking notes.* [laughter]

KEITH: -is different.

ALI: [sighing] Yeah.

KEITH: Well, hold on. But I do try, like I do try, like I don't feel bad when someone gives me a note. And if I don't change it, it's either because I disagree with the note or I'm trying and just haven't nailed it yet.

[ALI laughs]

KEITH: And disagreeing with a note isn't a problem. Like, some people get kind of bent out of shape just by getting the note? Like, having to hear a criticism of your thing.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: I don't mind that. I don't mind if someone doesn't like any of my characters. I would like to change that. If someone, if like there's someone out there that doesn't like any of my characters-

AUSTIN: Wait-

KEITH: I guess, no, that's not true. If someone out there listening doesn't like any of my characters, I don't care. [laughter] But if someone is like [breaks into laughing]

AUSTIN: But if someone is like-

KEITH: But-

AUSTIN: I-

KEITH: But if someone like, likes me, and likes my characters and was like, "Hey, here's a thing about this character," I would love to hear about that.

AUSTIN: Well, do you just like, when you say “like,” there are like, different meta layers of that, right? Like-

KEITH: Yeah, this is true.

AUSTIN: Lots of people... lots of people like Ibex. But no one *likes* Ibex. You know what I mean?

ALI: I liked him.

KEITH: Yeah, I know what you mean.

AUSTIN: [to ALI] I like you extra.

[ALI laughs]

KEITH: I guess what I- I guess the sort of thing that I mean- I don't like Ibex. I don't like him or- or *like* him. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Wait, you don't like Ibex?

KEITH: No, I do like him.

AUSTIN: Okay.

KEITH: I like Ibex but I don't *like* him.

AUSTIN: Right, yes.

KEITH: I was just being, I was just being funny. I was just being a goof.

AUSTIN: Gotcha.

KEITH: I think that uh... Yeah if there's someone- I kinda lost my train of thought, with the Ibex thing. [crosstalk] I think you had something to say though, Austin.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] I was saying- [end crosstalk] Yeah like, I definitely think its okay for us to make characters that people don't like, and we'll get into this, there's a good question about this, soon, so let's not get into it quite yet cause I like the framing of that next one. But we'll wrap back around to that. Is what I'll say. Dre, what about you?

DRE: I think the biggest thing that's improved about my play is that like, I... am more willing to come to you, or really anybody else and be like, “Hey I’m stuck.”

AUSTIN: Right.

DRE: "Hey, I feel anxious. Hey, I'm having trouble figuring this out." 'Cause I think at first I was like, I don't want to say these anxieties out loud. Because then I'll find out that they're true and actually I am terrible at this. Whereas, and I think that our- our internal post mortems after recording a season have been really helpful.

AUSTIN: Totally.

DRE: 'Cause I mean, I know before our last session I came to you and i'm like, "Man, I'm really stuck figuring out some parts of Even." And you're like, "Man, a lot of people are really stuck figuring out some parts of the season."

[laughter]

AUSTIN: Yes, me too, frankly.

DRE: And I was like, "Oh. Okay. phew, alright, cool, I'm not in this boat by myself."

AUSTIN: Totally. Which is like, I think reflects the fact that what we do is still kind of a new thing. That there is not-

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: -a lot of guidance on what we're, like... What your roles are as players is like, this really interesting blend of actor, and writer, and like, improv comedian and improv dramatist, and like, it's hard to- it's hard to know how to do that well. And it's really hard to do it when it's like, we record once every other week, sometimes more rarely than that. Which means like, we don't get to spend a lot of time in that headspace. It's often the case that like, this is true for basically for everybody, including me again, like the first hour of recording is *just* not as good as those middle two hours. Like if we record for four hours, those middle two are those good good hours.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Sometimes you can push it to be... that final hour to be really good too but like, people start getting tired and hungry, and you can see the light at the end of the tunnel and you're like, "Okay, how do we navigate there?" But like, it's definitely, I will definitely say Dre, you've been very good at getting better at coming to me and saying like, "Hey how do I- how can I figure this thing out about my character?" We did a lot of that with Throndir at the end of last season. Or the middle of last season. So.

DRE: Yeah absolutely. I think where I'd still like to improve, I mean this ties into this season too, but, playing characters that are more further removed from me.

AUSTIN: Right.

DRE: Like I think, by the end of Thrandir, Thrandir had a very different voice and personality than who I am as a person.

AUSTIN: Mhmm.

DRE: Thrandir kind of started a lot like me, but towards the end of that last season definitely got further away from me. And Gardener in this season is very different from me.

AUSTIN: Right.

DRE: Which is exciting to me, but there's definitely times where it's tough to approach things as he would instead of, you know, me the person would.

AUSTIN: Right. The way- we've talked about this before but like, the, almost like default- what is your character if this like a BioWare or CD Projekt Red RPG. Where you're like, "Oh this is how I would solve this quest, so I'm gonna do that." And like it is a different thing than to do that versus to say, okay, this a character with a military background, and who has a lot of trust in authority, but who also is going through some stuff with like, becoming a different type of being than what everybody else is. And how do those two things square up?

[DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: And like, I think we got some really good scenes out of the last recording that I'm excited for people to hear in, seven weeks or whatever.

[DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: Okay. So this next one I think maybe, and Ali is the one who suggested this, should be a recurring question also, and it comes in from Jenny. And Jenny says: "Hey all, I love the show, and that you don't stick to one system but switch it up, even within seasons. Of the many systems that you've played on Friends at the Table, which is the tabletop RPG that is your favorite, or least favorite, or most challenging, whatever you find most interesting to answer. Additionally, what is the balance between envisioning a world and picking a system that fits? And picking a system and allowing it to create or shape the game that you play?" Dre, let's start with you, let's go in reverse order.

DRE: Sure. I think my favorite one might actually be... Firebrands?

AUSTIN: Oh, yeah.

DRE: I just really liked, I liked how combat in particular worked in that game, because it's like, it's a negotiation between you and the other player.

AUSTIN: Mhmm.

DRE: And it's like, what do we think makes the most sense? How do we want this to end? I just thought that was a really cool system, I liked Firebrands a lot.

AUSTIN: Totally.

DRE: Do you want me to go on to the second part or do we [crosstalk] want to go through the first one?

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Yeah sure. Well- let's go to the second one, we'll have that second one as a second question sort of, like we'll...

DRE: Sure.

AUSTIN: 'Cause I have some thoughts there that can open things up. Keith, what about you, favorite system that we've played so far? Or least favorite-

KEITH: [big sigh] Oh boy-

AUSTIN: Or most challenging, or whatever you find most interesting to answer.

KEITH: Okay, so of- hmm... I uh... I think for me it might be a tie between- I didn't get to play it on Friends at the Table, but I really love Blades in the Dark.

AUSTIN: Mhmm.

KEITH: It's a great system I think. But I think, of the games that I've played on Friends at the Table, is probably, Dungeon World? I like that, there's something about Dungeon World that seems, really changeable.

AUSTIN: Mmm.

KEITH: When I was spending a lot of my time in- with table top games being a GM, I never found a system that like- cause I played most- sorry. When I was GMing I think I exclusively did Dungeons and Dragons.

AUSTIN: Sure.

KEITH: And I spent a lot of my time like, figuring out how to not play [laughs] Dungeons and Dragons *within* Dungeons and Dragons-

[AUSTIN laughs]

KEITH: 'Cause I just didn't know, I just didn't know about the fucking wide breadth of different games that were out there.

AUSTIN: Totally.

KEITH: And everybody that I was with was just like, "Yeah let's just fuckin play Dungeons and Dragons." So like I- my favorite time playing or GMing a game was when I was playing a sort of like, a very improv focused, like very low prep, game of 4th edition, that looked pretty much a lot like Dungeon World. And so playing Dungeon World for the first time like, was like, "Oh man, this is what I was trying to do the whole time!" And it's just right there.

AUSTIN: Uh huh.

[DRE laughs]

KEITH: And it also, even then lends itself more to, twisting stuff around in whatever way to get what you want out of it. So I have a very soft spot for Dungeon World.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I- it's a good one. It turns out. Ali.

ALI: I think it's hard to say which system is my favorite.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Because like, the systems that we've played for Friends at the Table are really the only game systems that I've played, and I really like them all for different reasons, and there's a few that I like, kind of like, when I read a new book I'm like, "Oh, I wish that I could like, play Hella in The Sprawl."

AUSTIN: Right, right, right.

ALI: [laughing] And have a weird cyber sword, or whatever. But I think like, in terms of the game that I would like to most to go back to, it's definitely Firebrands. Just cause I would like to pull more out of that system.

AUSTIN: Me too.

ALI: 'Cause it's such like a cool, intimate system. In a way that like, the games that we usually play aren't?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: And I think, in terms of just like, my favorite book that I've encountered through, like, the podcast, is Blades in the Dark.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Like there's definitely things in Blades in the Dark that are like, kind of clunky, and there's things from other systems that I prefer, but like. I think just reading through the tips and tricks parts [laughs] of Blades in the Dark [crosstalk] helped me be a better player and like, understand what your role was, and understand what my role was. Like...

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Yeah... that's a good point. Yeah. [end crosstalk] You know, I hadn't thought about that. There were moments before we started when you would just send in screenshots or post them on Twitter, that were like, "Oh, this is a really good way of thinking about playing RPGs."

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: That's a really good point. Totally... I think, and also a thing to note is; we did Blades- we did, uh Marielda, with a Blades in the Dark quickstart guide. We didn't even have Blades in the Dark, the game.

ALI: Oh yeah, that's right.

AUSTIN: We had literally a 40 or 50 page document PDF, of which now there is like a 300 page book. So like, it is definitely a system that I- we've talked internally about hacking that game to do other stuff with it. And it's something that I'm definitely interested in doing.

DRE: [crosstalk] Oh yeah.

AUSTIN: Blades is probably my favorite of the set that we've played too, because it hits the- it hits the right balance for me of who has narrative control in any given scene. Between me as the GM and the players. In terms- it gives lots of opportunities for players to put themselves into really interesting, and risky, risky standard situations.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: I generally like its setup for conflict resolution. In that like, it is, it is a little broader than a purely Powered by the Apocalypse World game, in which, you're looking for a specific move to

apply. But it does also still have specific moves, that do apply, at key situations that feel really good. And, importantly, there are lots of clocks.

[ALI and DRE laugh]

AUSTIN: I joke but like, the clock system not being in the base version of The Veil- my understanding is that The Veil: Cascade, that Fraiser is working on now, will have some degree of clocks in it. Specifically kind of like, player-driven clocks versus, kind of GM-driven clocks. Sort of like in Blades, where you were- when you were a player and you might say- like there was lots of, lots of- Aubrey did this where it would be like... "Oh I'm gonna start brewing a potion," or, "I'm gonna start building a new thing." and it would take X ticks on the clock to succeed. Like that sort of clock I think is coming into The Veil. But Blades had both that side and also the side that was like, here's what factions are up to, and these are the things that will happen if factions succeed. And it is just like, way fucking easy for me as a GM to conceptualize things when I have had to do the work of building out clocks for every faction, basically. That is- was a huge part of figuring out how counter/Weight would work. Like, shifting- a thing to remember that's kind of weird is clocks did not exist in counter/Weight until we switched to The Sprawl. And even though the Chime side of the game was the only side that had clocks in them, or in it, they also did help me guide the Faction side of the game because I knew what the clocks for each of those factions were. And so like even- when we switched to The Sprawl, even the Faction games got a little bit better, because I was able to like, "Oh hey, here's a thing, y'know, Dre and Sylvia¹, that this faction might be interested in doing." Because I know what happens when their clock advances by this- by that many ticks.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: And so like, that to me is definitely a... a good thing that I'm gonna try to figure out how to get back into this season. I might just, frankly, hack in some clocks [laughs].

[KEITH laughs away from mic]

AUSTIN: Especially for ground game, where there are lots of factions that do- that I know, in my head, have lots of goals, but that I have- and that I've spelled out in just words, but seeing them, needing to lay them out in terms of like, in what order will these things happen. That's part of what I really loved about Blades and about The Sprawl, so. "Additionally; what is the balance between envisioning a world and picking a system that fits? And picking a system and allowing it to create or shape the game that you play?"

Obviously I think this changes based on which game we've played. The Veil, I think, really did help encourage us thinking about a world in where the digital and physical blended in different ways, and helped us generally think about things in this more utopian light. This very, post-humanist, trans-humanist sense, depending on which direction you're looking at it. And

¹ The name in the audio recording is no longer in use, hence the audio/transcript discrepancy.

likewise I think the clocks in The Sprawl helped make that game a very, kind of, terrifying thing, right, like there was always something happening. So I think to a large degree the systems do help illustrate what the game world is for us. But does anyone have any examples of where it went the other way? Or another example of when it went that way? I'm trying to think of any key-- I think there's some big ones, which are like, Thrandir is the Ranger, right?

[00:30:17]

DRE: Mmm. [laughs]

AUSTIN: In Dungeon World. Like, it's an important distinction between that and, you know, Mako is not the only hacker.

DRE: Yeah.

KEITH: But Mako's a fucking dope one. [laughter]

AUSTIN: Mako's a dope hacker. Not the only hacker. Aria was not the only pop idol, was not the only pusher--

ALI: That's true.

AUSTIN: Like, very important.

ALI: This is true. I think this is an interesting question 'cause I think we've done a lot of both.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Like, with The Veil, like, we had a lot of like, mixed ideas, like kind of in the air about stuff, but as soon as we found The Veil, we were like, okay, this is the system for this game.

AUSTIN: Right. Right.

ALI: We are doing it as soon as possible.

AUSTIN: Totally.

ALI: This is- this is what clicks for us. But then we had something with Blades, where like, Blades is so prewritten, and--

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Yeah, true.

ALI: Blades has like a city built into it, and we were just like, get rid of that! [lter] We have this whole other thing.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: We're just going to stick to it. And I think that's really cool and really fun. So I think that like, if there's like a system that you really like, but you don't think that it fits the settings, like, all of that stuff is valuable.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally.

ALI: Um, but. I don't know, I think it depends on the people that you're playing with, and like, what's more important to you, like, do you need a system that's going to help you with that setting, 'cause that's hard for you and your players to get into? Like, 'cause people have problems with worldbuilding.

AUSTIN: Totally.

ALI: Like, it isn't easy.

DRE: Mm-hmm.

AUSTIN: And there's some dope worlds out there!

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Like, I get-- Art and I talked about Legend of the Five Rings last episode- last Tips at the Table, and like, we'd loved diving into that world and buying, you know, books about different factions and different secret societies, and the history. Like, it's cool to dig into that stuff. I came out of playing Vampyr The Masquerade, like listen, I fucking love me some lore. [lter] But also, what we do is-- like, we get a lot of questions about like, "Oh, would you ever play X game that is set in this setting?" And I'm like, (mumbles negatively) It's not what we do on this show. Like, maybe now we would do something like that for a Live show, or for-- not a Bluff City, but like for a Live show we might do one, right? Like a Live at the Table. But like, as much as I love, you know, Star Wars, or as much as I love, you know... I don't even- what else do I love? I don't know what else I love.

KEITH: [crosstalk] It's just Star Wars.

AUSTIN: It's just Star Wars.

KEITH: He told me earlier, he said, [crosstalk] "Keith, remind me later that I only love Star Wars." [laughter]

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Yeah. [ALI laughs] I wouldn't do a campaign set in the Star Wars universe. And I mean like, Disney, reach out, though, also. Like reach out. [crosstalk] Like maybe we could--

ALI: [crosstalk] Oh Disney, oh my god, Disney, do I have a script for you. [laughter]

AUSTIN: Uh, for the rest of these questions, they're not going to be recurring questions, but if you have questions that you want to send in, you can send them at tipsatthetable@gmail.com. Uh, first up, from Justin and Ben. Justin writes, "As a DM, I will often have players sit down at the table with a diverse cast of characters. Often, these colorful characters do not play well together, and if played honestly, may not even have a reason for adventuring. To Austin, what instructions do you give your players to have characters work well together? Players, is there a lot of player talking about their characters before sitting down, or is it just a willingness or flexibility at the table?" And then a similar question from Justin to help us guide this kind of discussion. "Something I'm impressed by throughout Friends at the Table is that the player characters often have competing goals that come at odds or even on entirely different sides of a conflict. I feel like in many groups, this could derail a session, if not an entire campaign. I'm sure an important part of making it work is a level of friendship and maturity. Nonetheless, are there any tips you can give to help keep a game on track while allowing for or even benefiting from conflict within a party?"

[ALI laughs]

KEITH: Um... if I- like on a super basic level, it really helps-- and this does not apply to almost anybody, but-- the idea that we're doing a show [crosstalk] keeps us from ruining the show.

DRE: [crosstalk] Mmm. Yeah.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Yeah. True.

KEITH: It's really easy to go, like, "Oh, let me just kill this other player character 'cause we disagree," unless you're like, "Well then what happens fucking next week though?" [laughter] I mean, what's going on? [laughter] So I guess the lesson that you could take from that is like, fucking treat your thing like it's going to be eventually a complete thing.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: Like, you've got-- you can't just- I mean you can. You can just take every moment like, as its own thing, and that works really well in a lot of situations, but like, keep in the back of your mind that like, this thing started and it's going to end, and then the finished product is going to be the entire bit in the middle. And you, you know, you should play your characters knowing that

they also, like- the world doesn't have no consequences for killing your buddy just 'cause you disagree, just 'cause it's a fake made-up world.

AUSTIN: Right.

DRE: Yeah.

KEITH: 'Cause in the fake made-up world, they also are like, "Hey, you shouldn't be killing your buddies."

AUSTIN: And if they're not, then like maybe have that talk with your GM about what type of game it is you're playing.

DRE: Right.

AUSTIN: And what your expectations are.

DRE: I do think--

KEITH: I think this is the GM.

AUSTIN: Oh, okay. Yes.

DRE: Yeah. [crosstalk] I think the--

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Then yes.

KEITH: He's like, "My unruly friends are being assholes in the game to each other."

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Yeah. Fair.

KEITH: And just like, maybe just tell them that you want to be more serious about like, finishing the campaign.

AUSTIN: That is like, *the* advice for every question ever is gonna be like, yo, say the thing you want. Like, say the thing you want-

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: -straight up, because then you're all on the same page, and you- we don't need to dance around it. We don't need to dance around the thing we're trying to do.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Um.

DRE: Yeah.

KEITH: It's so easy to let a campaign suffer because you have different goals [crosstalk] than the people you're hanging out with.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Yeah.

DRE: Oof! Yeah.

KEITH: I remember- this is like, one of the worst moments in my entire life was, I had- so I used to GM campaigns from like, um, if you've ever watched Run Button and you've seen the Silent Hill... like one and two- I think two. We used to do it from an old barn. We would go in a spooky barn and set up a TV. I used to GM from that spooky barn also.

AUSTIN: Ohh.

KEITH: And, uh, one time we- I started a new campaign, and one of my friends showed up with like a bunch of weed and fucking hookah. [ALI laughs] And was like trying to [sighs] get high and smoke hookah while we're trying to play.

AUSTIN: My dude...

KEITH: And... yeah. And it was like, after that first session... So the first thing I did was the wrong thing. Which is that, he was not taking it seriously, and I did a thing to try to get his character killed.

AUSTIN: [resigned] Okay. [laughter]

KEITH: And- but the second thing was that, after that day, I was like, you've gotta stop- you have to play the game. 'Cause everybody else is trying to play the game, and you're not trying to play the game.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: And after that, it was fun and good. And we had a good time. And so if you tell- just like, even if you're not the GM, if you're just a character in the thing and you feel like there's people that are there that have different motivations, just talk to them about it and be like, what are you trying to do? 'Cause here's what I'm trying to do and it seems like it's not working.

ALI: Um, I mean like... But-

KEITH: His character tried to kill a guard in a shop, [ALI laughs] so it's not [crosstalk] crazy that I had the guard try to kill him.

DRE: [crosstalk] Yeah.

KEITH: I just want to say-

ALI: No, like...

KEITH: -that.

ALI: Yeah, I think that's a huge part of this, but I think also part of this is that like, to have an interesting game, you're gonna have people who disagree. And like, um...

AUSTIN: Yes.

ALI: In navigating that, I think that you have to be really honest with yourself of your character's motivations, and also like, the other player's motivations? Like, Hella's definitely kind of the character that falls under this thing, which is like, she's with these people and like, she doesn't really want to be there for the same reasons or do the same actions? But like, finding ground in her being just like, okay at the end of the- season one was like, at the end of the day, I just want to do this and go home. I don't care about any of this, so like, if they want to run around and look at books, that's fine. I just need to get this paycheck. [lter] Um, and then, [laughter] for season two to have her be like, okay I might- like, politics aren't great, but I like, don't like having my friends dead.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: Now I have to deal with that... is kind of a way to pull back from like, every single interaction being like, well I don't want to do that. Well I think that's dumb. Like, you should be honest with the battles that your character would actually take. Because they're not gonna argue with every single thing that another character suggests.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: Um...

AUSTIN: Or they might even argue, but then still go do the thing.

ALI: Right.

AUSTIN: Do you know what I mean? Like-

ALI: Yeah yeah yeah.

AUSTIN: There is a- there are ways to encourage that, partially as the GM just by saying- just by reminding your players that like, 'that person goes off and does a thing' is allowed to happen. Like, there is a moment in the early part of this season- not this season, though, season three, of Winter in Hieron, where Throndir and uh... Where Throndir was committed to like, doing a very violent thing, um, that involved a bomb. [ALI laughs] And Hadrian wasn't. And like, they didn't resolve that before going into town to like, decide what to do, right? They went into town because it was like, all right, there's time. Time is here. We have to move forward. And then the resolution of that came later. Because as the GM, you can kind of push things, you nudge things, towards the moment at which a real decision has to be made. And then at some point, you roll, right? And ideally... again this maybe goes back to thinking about it as a complete product, but like, as a complete story, like, try to engender in your players the notion that their characters are characters they're writing. And ask them questions between games about like, what sort of themes they want to explore with those characters, what they like and dislike about those characters, how to better work within their alignments to like, make interesting stuff happen.

And then, real talk, also, it might be worth considering playing games that help- that underscore that stuff too. So like, playing The Veil has been really good because it's helped us start thinking about character beliefs. And we had beliefs a little bit in Blades in the Dark, but we were not always super good about them. I think we're being way better about having discussions constantly about whether or not beliefs work this season. And those also help us get to the bottom of like, who is this character? And how do those beliefs interact in ways that are going to produce conflict with other characters, but more importantly are going to put the player in a mode that has them thinking about how their character would be in the world and how they would treat other people that they disagreed with. Dre, do you have anything here in your experience?

DRE: Um, I do think that systems that have stuff built in, like beliefs and bonds, kind of to what everybody pointed to. Like, so having those kind of things that drive character decisions put out in the open to-

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: -not only... I think one it helps make conflict between player characters feel, like, earned. Instead of like, you know, instead of just shit that comes up. So it stops it from being personal.

AUSTIN: Right. Totally.

DRE: I think that's another flip side to us doing this as a show, like, when at the very end of... of Blades, where Ali's character and my character have like a physical confrontation [ALI laughs]

Like, I know, and I'm sure Ali- I don't want to speak for Ali's feelings, but I'm pretty sure Ali didn't take that personally 'cause it's like, no this is just where these characters go. This is where the show goes.

AUSTIN: Right.

DRE: And... and yeah. I think it also... It helps people who are playing those characters get into a headspace where they're not gonna do stuff like Keith's character that's just like, oh I'm gonna kill this guard because I want to or for the lols or whatever.

AUSTIN: Right.

DRE: Like-

KEITH: I do that shit all the time [laughter covering the rest of Keith's sentence]

DRE: And I think like, going forward if I play- if I'm either playing games or especially if I'm running games with systems that don't have stuff like bonds and beliefs built in, I'm just gonna put it in. I'm just gonna hack it in. 'Cause I think it's so helpful for players. And GMs too.

AUSTIN: Totally.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I'm just gonna quickly show the chat the page on Roll 20 where like, this is the sheet that we play on. For people who are just listening to the archive, it's a collection of... It's like some art in the background, a really funny bad map we drew once in the middle, and then all around it are all the character beliefs. Everybody sees everybody else's beliefs. We roll dice on this page, right? Like, it's up there so that at any point, any player can say, okay but wait, what does Grand Magnificent actually believe and how will that influence what's happening? I also hid the chat, because there is an *incredible* spoiler in the chat [laughter] that is... [crosstalk] I'm so glad-

KEITH: [crosstalk] Who said the spoiler?

AUSTIN: I'm gonna post it in our private chat here. [DRE laughs] Over on Patreon... Uh, here we go- not on Patreon, but on our private Patreon- in our chat where we talk about Patreon things. [laughter]

KEITH: [crosstalk] Oh yeah. That's a- that is a *huge* spoiler. That is such a spoiler.

ALI: [crosstalk] Oh. Wow. This is a *spoiiiiiler*.

AUSTIN: This is a really good, big, important... Ah.

KEITH: We- we do not wanna tip that hand at all.

AUSTIN: No. That would be... You know. No.

ALI: That's new to me. I didn't- I have not listened to that footage yet.

AUSTIN: Oh, it's a good one.

DRE: Mm-hmm.

ALI: Oof. Uh-

AUSTIN: All right, we are gonna- next question. Or do you have something else, Ali?

ALI: Well I just wanted to say really quick that I think that that's a huge thing, 'cause like-

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: -having transparency about whatever, but like, since you mentioned Winter in Hieron, I think that the beginning of that arc was a really good example of like, when this specific thing clicked for me. 'Cause like, we set up the start of that episode as like, everyone walks out and sees this moth man doing this thing, and like, my immediate thing with Hella was like, who cares?

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: Like, it's time to go. But like, I knew as a player that's like, what this episode was gonna be.

AUSTIN: R

ALI: And like, showing discontent in the beginning is just fun and you can play your character, and then letting all of the good drama, like, conflict happen later is so much more rewarding.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: That like, as a player, you shouldn't be always making that fight that's like [in a deeper voice] "Hey, let's go do something else, 'cause I don't like anyone."

AUSTIN: There... We put up- people put up with a lot of shit, and it's often the case that when you're playing a tabletop game or roleplaying in general, you like, "I'm not gonna put up with this

bullshit." Like no, yes you would. Todd at the office is shitty and you never fucking stop going into those meetings. It's your job to go to those meetings, Jessica. You're going to that meeting!

KEITH: Goddamnit, Jessica!

AUSTIN: Like-

KEITH: For once in your life!

DRE: Well, I wanna give Jessica a break here, this guy- [laughs]

AUSTIN: Listen, Todd's no good. No doubt. And eventually, Jessica's gonna stand up and be like, "You know what, Todd? We should have never put you in charge of that project." But that doesn't happen right away.

[00:45:00]

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: You have to see Todd fuck up project after project. You have to see him just completely waste budget after budget. And just like, eventually, Jessica's like, "Yo. Receipts. Fuck this guy. Get this guy out of here." And like- but that doesn't happen in episode one.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: You gotta let Todd fuck up the whole moth man situation, that's all I'm saying. [ALI laughs]

KEITH: There's like the promise of roleplaying games where it's like, it's this whole world and you can do whatever you want. But it's like, really, when it's working the right way, it's like, it's this whole world and you have to abide by the rules of this different world. [laughter]

ALI: Exactly! Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Or like, if you're not gonna, guess what?

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Some shit might happen.

ALI: Right.

KEITH: Or there's the- or there's this world's version of consequences.

AUSTIN: Right. Exactly. All right. Next question comes in from Roswelians, who says, "I've been running games for my friends for the last year, and for many of them, it's early on in their gaming careers. I love telling stories with them, and they are some of my favorite people in the world. However, I sometimes get frustrated with their fear of taking strong stances or actions, or when they play their characters as watchers rather than people who act." This is like the opposite question. "I've tried over the course of the past few months to gently encourage them to make characters who feel more strongly about the world or to take an action rather than doing yet another Discern Realities check. Still, they seem scared of making choices that could be undone, or making choices that are wrong. I'm still pretty- a pretty green game master, so I know some of this, uh... might come from learning when to push and when not to push. For those of you who have run games, do you have any advice for how to make people more comfortable taking strong actions, besides simply reassuring them there are no wrong actions? For those of you who have only been players, was there any advice a GM gave you, Austin or otherwise, that helped you make more definitive choices? Thank you for all you've done. Friends at the Table has made the last year a lot better." Thank you, Roswelians, thank you for that.

DRE: Aw.

KEITH: Um, have them listen to the boat. [laughter] The boat from the first episode of Friends at the Table.

AUSTIN: God.

[ALI sighs]

KEITH: It's um... Yeah. It's just some- some time- like- when I play video games, I get like, super scared a lot. I'm very easy to frighten. And I have like, this really intense sense memory of like, the first time I played through Halo games and hearing the music for the hunters, which are these- like, the big bad enemies that you have to fight in pairs every once in a while. And like, I would get so terrified of this fucking fake ass idiot dying, and having to like, rewind time by two minutes, that I would just be like, okay I'm done for today. I cannot deal with two hunters right now.

AUSTIN: [laughing] Oh.

KEITH: Yeah. And so, I like- I don't know how to get- I don't know how to tell someone, like, here's how you can have this moment of clarity where you're just like, oh, well if something goes wrong, then it'll work itself out because the whole system is designed- it's like, the whole thing is designed to right itself. Like there's no, like- 'cause you're there to make sure, in the same way that video games systems are there to rewind time by two minutes-

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: You're there to make sure, like, like, okay well we wanna still have a session next week. [laughter] So, like... I guess that's- that's the best- that's the best I can do is be like, I understand the sense of like, we have to be- we have to be so fucking careful here because something bad might happen. [ALI laughs] And like, the line crossing over to like, we have to do something weird here because something interesting might happen, it's a very- it's a very fine line and it's hard to have people that are new get over that?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: But, it- either it will come in time, or have them listen to the first episode of Friends at the Table where everybody was like, ah, but if we leave the boat, we might be off the boat! [laughter]

AUSTIN: God.

ALI: Um, I think even something bigger than that in like, making them take like, really strong stances and stuff, is that like, even if you don't want to switch systems, have a thing like Blades in the Dark where a character has someone who's like really important to them-

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Or like a faction that they're attached to.

KEITH: Yeah.

ALI: Because that's really how I ground myself in the games that I do. I- I like either try to think of like, one really strong like, political beliefs that's like, either I hate this person, or I hate the way this organization does this thing, or like-

KEITH: Yeah.

ALI: I have this friend that I want to protect. And like, pushing those instincts and then like, as a GM, fucking that up somehow [laughs] to like, make your character like, feel a thing really helps.

KEITH: I have one quick thing to add- sorry Ali, if you're not done you can finish.

ALI: No, I was just gonna say, like, search through their- 'cause I'm not a GM, so I don't know that side of it, but like, there's- look through their fictional flags, and like-

AUSTIN: Yes.

ALI: -pull, like, pull on those strings as hard as you can!

KEITH: [crosstalk] Yeah. I-

AUSTIN: Flags is a- flags is a super useful... term. For people who are GMing and don't know what that means, a fictional flag is something that a player will fly, a player will have, that indicates what they're interested in, both as characters and as players. So like, when... I'm trying to think of a really good example. When... What's a move that one of you've taken recently that's cool? Or like- you know what it was, like Aria- Aria, fuck, Ali, [laughter] when you were playing Aria, there was a moment when you took some dope move, and I forget what the move was. I think it might have been the "share your vision with people," your vision for like the future or something like that?

ALI: Oh, yeah yeah.

AUSTIN: And to me it was like, oh okay, we're pivoting in who Aria is as a character right now. It's time to start going down that route, and like, and offering more story opportunities that help us explore that stuff, 'cause that's something that she's interested in. Or like, if a character takes a move that is like- or a player takes a move that is like, oh I'm really good at fighting, like, goblins, this is like the classic fictional flag example, that means that they wanna fight some goblins. [laughter] Like it doesn't- they might choose "Hated enemy: goblins". That doesn't mean that the player never wants to see a fucking goblin. That means the opposite, which is like, "Yo, you better let me fucking fight some goblins. Or at least like, put them out there, and then make me think about why I hate them," or whatever, right? Like, those are the- follow those things, and they can do that both with mechanical choices, and also just like, what moves are they using a lot? What abilities are they using a lot? Like, what NPCs do they always bring up as someone they wanna go talk to? Stuff like that can be a really clear way of identifying what is, like, the thing that they're interested in. Or even just, where are they putting their focus? So like, with Art in the most recent ground game of... Twilight Mirage, there's that great sequence of Grand Magnificent and Even Gardner designing the mech together? And it's like, oh shit, Art is really into this. As the GM, I'm paying attention and can hear him slip out of Art Martinez-Tebbel and into Grand Magnificent. I need to give him more opportunities to describe art making. And I'm gonna keep doing that throughout the season 'cause I've noticed that. So, pay attention to your players' flags, and figure out how to- how to give into them and help them out.

KEITH: Um. And I think- so the thing that I was going to say I think goes well with what both of you said, which was that like, if they're having trouble, like, deciding to do things, then you- I think that the choice that the- is being presented to them, like, maybe should shift from, do you- like, what do you want to do, to be like, it's either doing the thing or not doing the thing.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: It's- you know what I mean? Where it's like, maybe stop presenting them with a fork in the road and make not doing something the...

DRE: Mmm.

KEITH: -the thing that triggers-

AUSTIN: Yeah, at least as like, training wheels, right? Like, because then-

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: -that can get someone to at least consider that inaction is itself a choice, right?

KEITH: Right. Yeah. And-

AUSTIN: I'm curious- go ahead.

KEITH: And that's a shitty way to like, play an entire campaign. Like, I don't think anybody wants to play a campaign where it's either like, either do something or not do something, that's what you have.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: But, if you're having that big of a problem with it, and you don't want to just say outright like, hey you have to- you have to be doing stuff.

AUSTIN: Yeah. You know, there's um...

KEITH: Um...

AUSTIN: There's a really key- this was a thing that- I didn't mention this before, but Dungeon World as a book is super good at teaching you how to GM. Or, teaching me how to GM. It was a huge, huge, huge factor in like, all of these loose ideas I'd had about playing all of these different games over the years, Dungeon World helped codify feelings I had that I didn't even know I had or like, put into word loose ideas. And it was so- and introduced me to new ideas that I hadn't had already, obviously. And a big- a big part of it is that in Dungeon World, there aren't clocks, there are fronts. There are like, again, factions that have goals that they will achieve. And it's very similar to a clock system, just like, not called that, and it works a little bit differently, but the key thing with it, and the key thing with clocks too in The Sprawl and elsewhere in Blades, is: the characters can stop shit from happening. The world- I said this a lot in season one, and I don't remember if people remember it, but the world keeps moving even when you are not. Or even when you're moving in a different direction. And so, it's important to think about characters in a lot of games, maybe not every game, but in a lot of games, as the factors who could change things. And like, if you can communicate to them that, if not for them,

bad thing X could happen, that might push them to start making choices around it. Um... You know.

KEITH: I-

AUSTIN: That has definitely helped, I think, a lot of- I've seen in a lot of players here.

KEITH: I also want to say that like, this is something that will just happen sometimes, even with people that have been playing these games for years. Like, there was- there was its own sort of boat moment in the first episode of ground game of this season, I feel like. And so, there's not- there's like- sometimes people will just be extra careful [crosstalk] because they feel...

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Especially at the start of a season. The start of a campaign.

ALI: Yeah.

KEITH: Yeah. Yeah yeah yeah.

AUSTIN: Because they're still feeling out their characters. I mean, so Dre, I'm actually curious, because like, I think about Throndir in season one, in [DRE laughs] fall, Autumn in Hieron, and then, Throndir in Winter in Hieron, and like, that went from a character who was very reserved and playful, and like, you know, kind of like afraid to touch anything, to someone who made some big decisions. [laughter]

KEITH: Yeah. [laughs]

AUSTIN: And then followed the fuck through. Um... So like, how did that happen for you? How did you go from someone who was, and I don't know that you were ever scared of making big decisions, but Throndir just wasn't in that space in the first season.

DRE: Yeah. Um... I think... Honestly, I think the biggest piece of advice that made not just Dungeon World, but like, I think my identity as someone and the way that I try to approach tabletop games now, is the series of tweets that I think it was Hamish that made, where he was talking about like, you know, in Powered by the Apocalypse games and specifically Dungeon World, like, don't say, "I'm going to use X move."

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: Just say what you want to do, and let the fiction dictate- let the Gm and you work together to figure out, you know, what move follows.

AUSTIN: Totally.

DRE: And that was really, like, that made it click for me? And like, really freed me up to, um... I have tendencies as like, a person who plays all sorts of games as to where, I want to find the most effective route. I want to find, like, the most complete way or the best way.

AUSTIN: Right.

DRE: And that's not good for storytelling. [laughs] Especially on a podcast. And so, that piece of advice really clicked for me that it's like, okay, it's not about- when I'm looking at moves, it's not about- like when I'm leveling up, it's not about, "okay, well, I obviously want to take the dexterity modifier, 'cause that'll put all of my attacks at a +3, and then this move will let me do twice as much damage, and blah blah blah." It's, "Oh man, I remember like, two sessions ago, if I'd had this move where I could talk to animals, this scene would have been totally different, and way cooler." And so just- I think Keith kind of said like, doing things in a place that make things weird and interesting. To me, that mindset took over rather than the idea of, what's the best thing I can do here? And instead, what's the most interesting thing I can do here?

AUSTIN: Totally. Yeah. I think that shift-

KEITH: Sometimes they're the same thing, too, which is great.

DRE: [crosstalk] Yeah, sure.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Yeah, sometimes they are, and often it's also, the most interesting thing is the worst thing you could do. [laughter]

DRE: Yeah!

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Just a super good meme, uh, that is one of the expanding brain memes, um... that is-

KEITH: Still on that one by the way. Not sick of it yet. Keep at it.

AUSTIN: Oh, I'm still on it. That shit is still good.

KEITH: Yeah. Yeah.

AUSTIN: I need to find it, 'cause it's like, the result of a- rolling a six in a Powered by the Apocalypse game. Powered... Or not a six. A-

ALI: Oh, I retweeted it on @Friends_Table so it should be easy to find [crosstalk] because there aren't that many tweets there.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Oh, okay, good. Thank you. Thank you.

ALI: Yeah, while we're looking for this though, I think like-

AUSTIN: Please.

ALI: Letting players really be able to revel in their successes and also like, their failures, really helps them take strong actions. Like, just in terms of playing, like the difference between Hella trying to lift a door and being like, "Oh, it's not lifted." [laughs] and Hella like, doing that death roll, or like, the thing with Castille where she... she failed this one roll, and it was like, yup, you believe that, is like-

AUSTIN: Uh huh.

ALI: -creates such a different response from me as a player that like, I think as a GM, if you really like, let the player have real consequences for stuff, but like, in a way that's really fun, definitely is going to make them be like, "Oh, I want to fuck this up too." [laughs]

AUSTIN: Yeah. Totally. Here is that image in question.

ALI: Yes.

AUSTIN: Small brain: you fail, la- you know, whatever, large brain: you fail and a bad thing happens, expanding brain: you succeed but a bad things happens, cosmic brain: you succeed and that's a really bad thing. [laughter] And like, yup! That's it! That's the shit right there. That's what we're talking about. Um... Briefly, I just remembered a thing, going back to- there was a conversation-

KEITH: I think I- I think I called out a moment where you did that-

AUSTIN: Oh yeah. [crosstalk] I've done that a bunch of times.

KEITH: [crosstalk] off screen. In the- in the-

ALI: Yeah.

KEITH: Well in the post mortem, I- I use that as like a, like oh I've never had a G- I've never seen a GM do that until Dungeon World, and like, you doing it. And I was like, woah. [crosstalk] That's a different way to play games.

[00:59:53]

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Yeah. Like, Dungeon World is really good about saying that. Yeah. [end crosstalk] I mean like, I even talked to Fraser about this recently, and there's a rule now in the most recent print- reprinting of The Veil, or the second printing of The Veil, that is just like, you can say- you can basically say out loud, yes it succeeded. And like, you're holding your- you know, when someone fails, you can make a move as hard as you want. And he's like, oh yeah, what if you just like, held that move, basically? Like what if you revealed what the bad thing was from the old failure later? And I don't know if I'll do it that often because I like being able to at least show that progress is happening towards a bad thing, but there have definitely been times when I have just have said, okay, it works, and also, here's the side of this that you haven't thought of, right? Like, Uklan Tel was the most recent example of that- [laughter]

ALI: Oh, yeah.

AUSTIN: -where you were like, "Oh, I want to convince him to do X," and like, all right, he does it.

KEITH: And then it works.

AUSTIN: And then by the end of that episode, you see like, oh, he's gonna keep doing it and it might be dangerous for him.

KEITH: To the detriment- yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: To the detriment of what he wants, he is going to keep-

AUSTIN: Exactly.

KEITH: -studying and helping.

AUSTIN: I just wanna- the thing that's wild to me is how far games have come, but also kind of how long they've taken. Going back to like, 2005, 2006 was like when I was in college, and I used to- there was a forum post I actually just found that is someone saying- it's someone with a Disgaea avatar-

ALI: [displeased] Oh. Hoo.

AUSTIN: -so that should immediately, uh, set this in terms of what time it is. And someone's like, "Three by three by three? I consider myself a game geek of the highest order. Smiley face. And was shocked to come across a gaming jargon that I wasn't familiar with in another thread. Three by three by three. What does this mean, and examples if applicable? Thanks!" Um. And three by three by three was a thing that was like, in pre- [sighs] The early- the early and mid-2000s

were wild because it was like, the start of a new independent tabletop roleplaying games movement, and a lot of that was building on message board forums, like rpg.net and The Forge and a bunch of other shit. And it was before the kind of like, story game movement, even though a lot of those creators were like, in these places. And three by three by three was this thing that I saw a lot of GMs at the time online say that they made their players do, which was, they have to name three friends, three enemies, and like, three contacts or three professional associations, or three... you know, exes, or three locations that are important. And the... TechNoir actually does something very similar to that? And you can kind of see the touch of three by three by three on that. And I like it when a system just has those integrated in a really big way, but I really love to think like, fifteen years ago, people were just like, "I don't know, just list out [makes an unsure noise] nine things about your character. [laughter] I need something to go with here that isn't just you're a bard." You know? [KEITH laughs] And we've come so far. Okay.

From Connor: "As a GM, I'm constantly thinking about playing the game, and when I'm not playing a game, all I can think of is when we're playing next. Unfortunately, with my group, it's a constant pressure to try and find a couple of hours a game, and this is the case with two of my players being unemployed. I can't imagine what it'll be like when we're all in our thirties with jobs and families. Luckily, you guys have a Patreon, but before that, how did you make the time? [laughs] I guess I'm just looking for general advice on scheduling and time management? Love the show y'all, you guys are my RP heroes. Thank you." Um... It's hard. It's even hard-

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: -with the, like it's hard to find time. But it's- it's- I think I've said this before, but... we live in a society that does not make certain types of play the priority. Like, it rarely makes play the priority at all, and when it does, it's a very specific sort of commercial, consumable play, often a sort of passive form of play, like going- watching the Super Bowl, or going to the movies, and I like those things. I'm fine with- I'm fine with those things. But it is rare that someone says like, oh no, it's totally cool for you to invite a couple friends over and for you to sit around a table and tell stories about orcs for four hours a week. Or eight hours a week. Or two hours a week. Or eight hours one session in a month, you know? And so, the first thing I would do is like, have that talk with your friends and say like, hey I really wanna do this, let's pick a day. What's a day that we are *all* good on? For us, we tend to always record on a Sunday because we can get enough people together on Sundays. I don't have work, and also it's the end of the weekend, which means I will have slept for two nights in a row for once. [ALI laughs] And that means that like, I will have enough energy to do it. And the second thing is like, we now just have a calendar for this. In which, Ali put together a really great spreadsheet-based calendar that lets us look at it and say, hey, who has a free- who has free days? And like, taking those steps might make it feel a little bit like work, but they'll also will force you to actually, like, decide if this is a priority for you, and then to kind of signal to your friends, hey this is a thing I really wanna do! And kind of, make everybody buy in a little bit more, I think. Thoughts from other people?

KEITH: Um, yeah, this is a hard question for me to answer 'cause I've been like, having to schedule podcasts and let's plays and stuff like that for... almost- like, almost ten years now.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: So like I have always had- I had like, years of experience of like, having to schedule time to do bullshit that I'm not getting paid for. [laughter] And then, Friends at the Table was like another thing where like, we all had the experience of being scheduling stuff together already before Friends at the Table even existed. So it's- I think it's a hard question to answer for, like, our group specifically? But- I think the advice that you gave works well for even other groups that I've been in that have not had the luxury of already having shit to schedule with together.

AUSTIN: Listen, Todd and Jessica can have a weekly board game night, okay? [ALI laughs] You, Connor, and your friends can totally get together to play some Dungeon World. Like, I believe in you.

DRE: Yeah. Yeah, I think like, I remember when we started really getting serious about Friends at the Table and like, being like, yeah no, this is a thing we wanna keep doing for a while.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: I was like- at that point, I was like, still dating and I remember having several like, first or second date conversations where it's like, okay so I do this podcast, but wait, it's not what you think! [ALI laughs] And like-

AUSTIN: It's worse!

DRE: It's worse! It's worse than you think!

[KEITH and ALI laugh]

AUSTIN: I play an elf. His name is Throndir. He has a dog. His dog's name is Kodiak. Ruff.

KEITH: The dog's very big.

AUSTIN: It's a big dog.

DRE: That- that reminds me of a story I should tell you. But, um...

AUSTIN: Oh word? Wait? [ALI laughs]

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: *Excuse* me?

DRE: It's nothing serious, it's uh- I was out a bar with some friends, like, last Friday and like, I was- like, I went to the restroom and I came back and one of my friends was explaining to somebody else, like, about our podcast [crosstalk] and the Patreon?

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] *Oh my god....*

ALI: [crosstalk] That's happened to me, uh!

DRE: And I- and I walk in on him going, he was like, "No, you don't understand, he plays a character! His name is Thrandir! People draw *pictures* of him!"

AUSTIN: Oh my god!

[everybody reacts at once]

ALI: [crosstalk] Mm-hmm, this has happened to me! This has happened to me.

KEITH: [crosstalk] That's so funny. I- yeah, I've had that too.

DRE: [crosstalk] Yeah, it was great.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Who put- what?

KEITH: I think that I have had that exact same experience of being like, no, people draw pictures!

DRE: Yeah.

KEITH: People are out there drawing pictures! A bunch of-

DRE: But- but-

ALI: My-

DRE: Go ahead, Ali.

AUSTIN: Ali? Ali? Please.

DRE: [crosstalk] Yeah, you go ahead.

ALI: [crosstalk] Mine was also really bad 'cause I was out with- I can edit this out or I can bleep this out- I was out with Gita Jackson, who is like, a really good friend of mine.

AUSTIN: Shoutouts to Gita.

ALI: But she... We were also out with like, her Brooklynite friends that [crosstalk] she really wanted me to like, know and be like-

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Ohh no..... Her like-

ALI: -wanted them to be impressed of me? For some reason?

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. This is really cute and good.

ALI: Um, and it was like, I felt like a like- like, someone in the background who had like, won a walk on set to like, an episode of Girls. [laughs] And she was like, oh my god, Ali's really great, she has this like, rp podcast, and like [AUSTIN sucks in a breath] she's amazing, she edits it, and it's like, so popular, and I just had to be like, [very squeaky voice] yup! It's great! [laughter]

AUSTIN: You just- we just all need to learn how to fucking own this shit.

ALI: [sighing] Yeah.

AUSTIN: We are the next level, y'all aren't even on our-

KEITH: [crosstalk] Yeah. Here's the thing. This is-

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] We're so fucking good that [end crosstalk] South by Southwest canceled our- my panel 'cause they- they didn't- they knew they looked old compared to-

DRE: Yup.

AUSTIN: They ain't on this new media shit.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: We out here telling stories. We're interactive.

KEITH: The Patreon really helps with legitimizing it, 'cause you're like, oh, well it's making 12,000 dollars a month. [laughter]

DRE: Right. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Ayo, fuck you.

DRE: I have definitely pulled that website out on like, a couple people, be like, no look motherfucker. [AUSTIN and ALI laugh]

AUSTIN: They *love* us! They love us a lot!

ALI: Yeah.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Thank you for loving us a lot, also.

ALI: I've-

KEITH: [crosstalk] Yeah, thank you, appreciate it.

DRE: [crosstalk] But before- before the Patreon, I think the biggest switch I made was like, I... I cut out some of the people in my life that didn't value, like you said Austin, that type of play.

AUSTIN: Right.

DRE: Who didn't see the value in that, and I was just like, nah man, I genuinely love this. I love doing this thing. And I want to have people in my life who also value that.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Right, right. Who actually... Like, they don't even need to listen. Right?

DRE: Right!

KEITH: No...

AUSTIN: Like, I don't need... I don't need everybody in my life to listen but I need them to know [crosstalk] that when I put time into this. Totally.

DRE: [crosstalk] Yeah. Or they don't even need to be interested in doing it, it's just that like, yeah, [end crosstalk] yeah, it's- okay, you love this thing, and I care about you, so fucking, do you man.

AUSTIN: Yeah, exactly, that's all.

KEITH: I- yeah. My general idea is that like, if you're my friend, and we- you get enough of me just by being my friend, you don't have to like dive into the [laughter] fifteen hundred hours of my voice that's on the internet. Like, it good. We're good. Like, all you have to do is, you know, not... be a jerk about it. Which is- you know, I will say, I don't think I've ever had anybody be a jerk about it. Luckily I've been doing this long enough that like, anybody that I knew-

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: -that would be making fun of me for having a let's play channel or doing a roleplaying game podcast, those people are dead, I guess. [laughter] Like, they're gone. I don't know. I've never even heard of those people, it's 2017, everybody has a fucking vlog, like, it's- yeah. I don't know that those people even exist in my world.

AUSTIN: And you can do that too, like obviously that doesn't mean cutting people out of your life all of the time, but it might mean-

KEITH: Right. Don't cut them out of your life. [in]

AUSTIN: But it might mean, like, being straight up with them, and saying like, this is really important to me, if you don't get that, like, that's totally cool, but I really want to set off like four hours a week to go do this thing. And- and- if they really care about you, like, they're gonna give you that time.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: It can be tough. It can be tough. It can be tough. So I- [crosstalk] I'm sympathetic.

ALI: [crosstalk] I have a thing [end crosstalk] to say about-

AUSTIN: Please, Ali.

ALI: -about this specifically, 'cause like, I think what a lot of what we're saying is like, if not everyone's passion levels are the same, but even when they are, it's like, super tough.

AUSTIN: True, yeah.

DRE: Oh yeah.

ALI: This is a thing that me and Justin run into a lot, 'cause when I was doing this when I was like, a freshman in college, I would be able to be in class and like, send him a whole paragraph about like, what's going on on the ship or whatever. And now-

AUSTIN: Ali, you should have been paying attention to your teacher [ALI laughs] who worked very hard on their lesson plan.

ALI: I dropped out of college, so it's fine.

AUSTIN: Word! [laughter] I mean, check that Patreon though, am I right? [more laughter]

ALI: But like, now he has a kid. And now I like, have a full time job plus running Friends at the Table, basically?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah.

ALI: So like, we don't have that time, but like, I think the thing that we do is... Like, when we have the time, we prioritize it.

AUSTIN: Yeah...

ALI: It's like, okay, if we're doing it, we're doing this thing for an hour, like, I'm not gonna talk to you about how cool Destiny is or like-

AUSTIN: [fake whispering] Okay, but.

ALI: We're not gonna order pizza and like, go see a movie or whatever. Like, we have this hour, we're gonna write this thing, and it's gonna be awesome. And then also like-

AUSTIN: Do you know the name- briefly, do you know the fucking name of the Waypoint Destiny clan?

ALI: No?

AUSTIN: It's Friends at the Tower.

ALI: [crosstalk] Oh, I did know that, that's adorable.

DRE: [crosstalk] Oh, yeah yeah yeah.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] It's extremely good.

ALI: I love it.

AUSTIN: Anyway, continue Ali, sorry.

ALI: Uh, the other thing was gonna be like, if you only have three hours once a month to do this thing, be willing to be flexible with the like, arcs that you're doing.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: 'Cause like, if you're like- if you go into this dungeon, and like-

AUSTIN: Yes. God.

ALI: You know, there's this combat, and it's kind of interesting and you know you have to get through it, but like, you don't want to just be doing that for the thing.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: The next time you can sit down and be like, okay, let's kind of just talk out about what happened here and then we can move on to this other thing, which is like, a thing that me and Justin do constantly. Like, we'll just sit down in Starbucks and be like, [laughing] so um, the next scene that we write, what's it gonna be? And it's like, that's a lot easier-

AUSTIN: That is- and it's so fun to be able to do that. Like, that has been one of the biggest things that has led to Friends at the Table being successful as a story for me, is, there was a point at which we started saying privately or off mic, what types of scenes do we want to do? And we're really trying to do it this season, where I'm like... I don't know, like, what sort of scene do you want to frame? And like, a lot of that actually has come from us playing more story game style things, like Fiasco, like Downfall, Kingdom, games like that that have been like, okay frame a story. Frame a scene. What's a thing that we really wanna focus in on? And, you know, I think that started with me being able to be like, okay, we're gonna end this combat here, like, there's a resolution here that I can see. Like, very early on actually, in Counter/WEIGHT, there was a moment when, I remember, one of you being like, "It feels like you're giving this to us." And I was like, yeah. Like, this is boring. Like, this isn't an interesting sequence anymore. Like, you found a really cool outro. Aria turned on those- the fireworks, and started playing fucking Soldier Game. [ALI laughs] They're all distracted. You get to leave. Like, this isn't what we're here for. We're not here to make the enemy HP hit zero. Like...

And- and being able to have those conversations, not just during a sequence like that, but ahead of time, the way Ali's talking about, is like, that's what leads to a scene like Arrell and Hadrian and Benjamin on the hill. Is like, this is Art saying, here's a scene I really wanna see. Here's a thing I wanna do before the next game. And like, having that conversation means that then we can start those gears turning, and thinking about how to frame a scene like that. And we've done it this season already, where it's like, well what do we want to do with this downtime? Like, again this episode isn't out yet, but we recorded the first ground game, and it was like, here's the map. Where do you wanna go on it? What types of scenes do you want to do? There's a moment where Sylvia just says like, I really want a scene where blank, and then,

you know, they and I have that scene together. And that is a really useful way of telling stories with each other. And really goes back to that earlier though about transparency, like. We often think about tabletop games like they're video games, in which one person- in which, one side presents content that must be, like, worked through, and in fact it should always be a conversation, and it doesn't even have to be a conversation at the same meta level. You can zoom out one level and say, this is the thing I'm actually interested in, and then go to that right away, instead of needing to slog through, like Ali said, the dungeon. You know. [sighs] Sorry. I've been thinking about this a lot.

[01:15:08]

[ALI laughs]

KEITH: I also- I wanna say, this is some basic level shit, but like, if you feel like you can only get together once every, like, few weeks, or once every month, and you're the person who's hosting the thing, fucking make your whole shit a place where someone can spend four hours of playing a game without feeling tired or hungry or like they wanna go home.

AUSTIN: True.

ALI: Oh, yeah yeah yeah.

AUSTIN: Have food, have snacks.

KEITH: Like-

ALI: Yeah. [crosstalk] Set that stuff up in advance.

KEITH: Yeah. [crosstalk] I, like- It sucks-

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Make it- [end crosstalk] Make it clean.

DRE: [laughing] Yeah.

KEITH: Yeah. It sucks to- [laughs] It sucks to be like, hey, you know, if you wanna be a GM and you wanna run this game, and you have everybody come over to your house once every three weeks, like, you've also gotta buy everybody pizza. Like, that sucks. But it also... [crosstalk] It also creates [indiscernible]

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Just ask Todd and Jessica- yeah.

ALI: [crosstalk] Just create a system where everybody puts in five dollars or whatever.

AUSTIN: Pitch in, Todd.

DRE: Yeah.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Yes we're tipping, Todd! We tip! This is a tipping household! [laughter]

KEITH: [crosstalk] What- okay. You're- you're [crosstalk] you're right. Everybody- people should tip in. But. If you're having a problem where, hey, I'm not playing this game as much as I like to. It might help to put in extra work and potentially extra money to make wherever you're playing the game feel like a place where you could spend hours and hours playing the game.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Totally.

ALI: Right. Yeah.

KEITH: -'Cause you can only do it once a month-

ALI: Yeah.

KEITH: Like, I used to buy pizza every fucking time because I know that people will get hungry and sick of playing the game if there's not also, like, something to drink and something to eat.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Uh, in the chat-

KEITH: And it sucks. That's annoying. It's annoying. But. [crosstalk - indiscernible]

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] In the chat, Bri [end crosstalk] Bri R says, "It's *Tips* at the Table, Todd." [laughter] And also, really quick, if you're not interested in doing like, deep character dives and like, scenes of your player characters looking out in the sunset and considering what it means to be human, and are just like, I really wanna get into some deep combat shit, like, don't be afraid if you're only going to play every now and then to just, spend a lot of time prepping really fun combat encounters and then like, getting into those combat encounters instead of dressing it up with like, a really big thing. Like, it's okay to just play a tabletop war game!

DRE: Yeah!

AUSTIN: It's totally okay to do that. Like, one of my favorite things when I used to play Warhammer 40K was like, just enough of a framing device for it to feel like there's a loose narrative before my Tau Fire Warriors and their crisis suits stomp out into the battlefield and destroy your shitty, uh... space marines.

KEITH: Did you paint your figures?

AUSTIN: [whispering intensely] Yeah, I fucking painted my figures. [laughter]

ALI: God.

AUSTIN: [still whispering] God damn. [crosstalk] They had stories. She had- mmm.

DRE: [crosstalk] Seeing big numbers is satisfying.

AUSTIN: It's true. Uh...

ALI: Uh-

AUSTIN: Ali?

ALI: Before we move on, super quickly, I just wanna say, for the question answer, if you are the person who's constantly thinking of this all the time, really be the person who's doing what Keith is doing, even if you're not the GM. 'Cause that's like-

KEITH: Yeah, yeah yeah.

ALI: -a huge part of what [laughs]

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: -makes Friends at the Table work? 'Cause like, half- half of the things I do for the show is like, what's gonna save Austin five minutes? [crosstalk] He only has two hours a week to do this, like.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] It means so much. Like, Ali- Ali- we have a lot of questions already pulled, and Ali like, took- had- they're already in a doc, Ali added the new ones to the doc, highlighted good ones that like, would fit for this group. I was like, yo, those are good questions, that will be a good show. Let's do that.

ALI: Yeah. But constantly-

AUSTIN: Huge. Ali made the- Ali made the doc that is our calendar. Huge! I can look at it. I was able to look at it and go like, oh, we're not going to be able to record two Twilight Mirage sessions in the next three weeks, we need to know what else we can record in that time. I need to know what else to prep. I know not to waste time prepping stuff we're not going to run, and like- I don't- you know, most tabletop games don't have a producer. But maybe they should? [ALI laughs]

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I think a lot about- or they do, in ways that are not... they're informal. Right?

ALI: Right.

AUSTIN: Like it's- it's- it's emotional labor, it's creative labor, it's reproductive labor of just like, somebody's gonna bring the chips. Someone's gonna bring the soda. Someone is gonna bring the dice, and... I almost said again, the bluebooks, because- I haven't told this group this, but- I guess I said it in the last Tips cast. I had a GM that like, made us write like, retrospective notes on what happened in a session and what our characters learned.

KEITH: [laughing] Yeah, you've mentioned that before! [sighs]

AUSTIN: And like, someone had to bring those bluebooks! It was not always him.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And that person got 1 XP. [laughter] Next question. Christina. "Hello assorted Friends. I am planning to run Costume Fairy Adventures, a fairly light improvisational game"- that has a dope title. We should look into this. Someone write this down. Ali, as a producer, [laughter] could you write down Costume Fairy Adventures real quick? Put it on that list of games we should play. Uh, "I'm planning on running Costume Fairy Adventures at a con in November and was looking for tips on how to be a good GM for a con gaming session. I listen to a lot of podcasts, but these tend to be ppl who all know each other and the system. What should I make sure that I'm doing to ensure that my group of likely strangers has a great time?" Um, I've never run a game at a con, so-

DRE: Ooh, yeah.

AUSTIN: -I'm already at a bit of a disadvantage here? Have any of us run a-

KEITH: Have you *played* a game at a con?

AUSTIN: Yes [draws the word out for emphasis], and I've seen them go bad. [ALI laughs]

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's a good way of framing this. Keith, have you played a game at a con?

KEITH: I have. I've played several games at cons, yeah.

AUSTIN: What's the worst thing that a con game has ever done?

KEITH: Uh, not known how to play the game right.

AUSTIN: One, check. Fucking, if you're gonna run a con game, [crosstalk] know the game pretty well.

KEITH: [crosstalk] Know the book. Yeah. Know the book.

AUSTIN: Two, if you don't, *fake it*.

KEITH: [crosstalk] Fake- yeah.

ALI: [crosstalk] Oh yeah yeah.

AUSTIN: Like, you don't need to know grapple rules. I know they're on page 64. You don't need to stop the game and turn to page 64 at the convention-

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: -so that you know how you're doing grapple rules. If you don't happen to know them, it's okay. Focus on like, whatever story's emerging at the table, focus on whatever the players seem excited about, and like, let them focus on those things. I think that's a big thing.

KEITH: Honestly, the best part about knowing the game really well is that like, you can know what you can do that isn't part of the game. Like-

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: Like, you can- a thing that comes out of knowing the game super well is faking grapple rules if you don't remember them.

AUSTIN: Totally.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: If I didn't know off the top of my head how... you know, some very important- in a PPT-PBTA game, how some esoteric move worked, I would totally be able to fake it because I know what 2d6 plus stat looks like. And like, what sort of results might come out of it. We have to do that anyway sometimes in a game, because we forgot that there is a move that applies at a certain situation where it's just like, I don't know, roll, like, Defy Danger, basically. [laughs] Um... so those are two big ones. I will say that there- I've run lots of games that are one-shots that are very similar, often with limited time crunch, with... players who haven't played the game before. Like Ali, we played *Blades in the Dark* like this for the first time.

ALI: Yeah yeah yeah.

AUSTIN: Where it was like, you and me and a couple of our other friends, including someone who hadn't played anything in years. And the big things- the big notes I'll say there: pregenerated characters, maybe make more than however many players are going to be there. But like, here are six characters you can pick from four players, or three players. Like, pick them, you can rename them, you can aestheticize them up, but here's a sheet that already has everything you need on it. Two, know the session you're going to run really well, whatever the main points of spectacles, whatever the big set pieces are, have those really firmly in your head if you're running a game that includes that sort of GM prep. Otherwise, have a really good starting scenario that you've thought about a lot that can help push the game in one direction or the other. Um... what else? [crosstalk] Ali, you sounded like you had a thing.

KEITH: [crosstalk] I have a-

ALI: Um, yeah, I was thinking- like, I haven't GMed before, but I think especially in a con atmosphere where like, levels of experience are different-

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: -just do the waitress or salesperson thing of being like, "Do you have experience with this? Have you been here before? Have you played here before? Have you played this game before?" Because like, just baseline asking that question directly and knowing that information about whoever's sitting there, like-

AUSTIN: *Huge*.

ALI: -will help you know what attention to put on which person, and kind of pull them into the fold, so to speak.

AUSTIN: Yeah. You can quickly identify players sometimes who will help you. Who will be your like, your keener student, who will be the person to raise their hand, who knows what to do. [ALI laughs] And that means one, you can rely on them when you have some weird, esoteric thing that you fucked up and you put it in your prep and you realize you needed someone who

understood the system well enough to do it. Like okay, oh thank god, Jessica's here, she knows the system super well. But there's also- it also means that maybe you don't need to give Jessica as much attention as other players, like Ali is saying. You don't need to walk Jessica through 'roll 2d6 plus stat', Jessica's got that. [laughter] Todd, on the other hand.

KEITH: Todd...

DRE: Fuckin' Todd.

AUSTIN: "What's a d6?"

KEITH: Who fucked up every fucking thing.

AUSTIN: Todd! Todd, those are d20's. Todd, put those down. [laughter] Todd, you did not get a 32. Todd, you didn't. [more laughter] Todd, you didn't.

KEITH: He's rolling behind cupped hands, like, "No I did!"

AUSTIN: Todd, in this system it doesn't even matter. Anything over a 10 gets- "I don't get a bonus?" No. You don't get a bonus. You didn't get... Todd.

KEITH: So something I think- something is like, I had this really bad English teacher when I was in... when I was at UMass Boston, who had this horrible habit of always saying that everybody was right, even when they weren't. And would then just try to sort of hamfist the correct answer into what this person said that was wrong. Which is a terrible way to teach an English class. [laughter] But it's a really good way to be a GM with people that have never played a roleplaying game before, where you can try to help them do the thing they want to do that doesn't work in the system.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: Instead of being like, "No, that's wrong," you can be like, "Okay, well I see what this person is trying to do, and here's how they could do it."

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: And here's even how I could make what they already did work without having them to like, waste time redoing it.

AUSTIN: The DW session that Adam Koebel ran for us, for Waypoint at the 72 hour livestream was me as Jessica, who knows the game really well, and three players who had literally *never* played a tabletop RPG. And Adam's job of "yes, and"-ing his way through that game-

ALI: Oh, yes.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: -and letting people, like, do the wacky shit that came to mind was incredible.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Was like- completely shook me out of bad habits that had developed after... that had developed coming out of specifically Marielda, I think. Which, I loved Marielda, but also by the end of Marielda, I did want to start kind of closing things in a little bit in terms of the possibility space because while it was important that- what's true that's like, the outcome of Marielda was totally up in the air, I fucking really needed people to go down to where the forge was at a certain point. [ALI laughs] Like, I didn't know what was gonna happen at that forge, but [gritted] I needed people to go to the forge. [back to usual register] And so, to play with someone who again, was just like, "I don't know, fucking who cares? Yeah, yeah the skeletons hate farts. [Keith laughs] I can work with that." Like, it worked!

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And it was funny. And like, that was good. Um... Which brings me to the last thing I want to say here, which is like, if this is a one time thing, you don't need to be precious. Like-

ALI: Yes...

AUSTIN: Whoever your big bad NPC was, if they fucking fall off a building in act two, they fell off a building, you'll be fine. [laughter] Change like, fucking. You know, uh...

ALI: Yeah, that person isn't gonna have like an arc that's like, oh, they're gonna be the big bad for like, a month, like, it's fine.

AUSTIN: Right. It doesn't matter! They're gone.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: That person is gonna be having a Pepsi in twenty minutes after they're done with this session. [laughter] Like, they... Throw out your prep, be willing to completely improvise stuff, and prep with that in mind so that you don't need to- it doesn't feel like you've chiseled the serial numbers off of the final boss fight and switched it over into a different thing, or the final confrontation or whatever. Um, yeah. Everyone- everyone should go watch that Waypoint [crosstalk] DW game, 'cause it's so good.

ALI: [crosstalk] Yeah. I think that the- [crosstalk ends] the Waypoint thing is such a specific thing too, 'cause like, even just knowing like- being able to suss out the, like, temperature of the table-

AUSTIN: Yes.

ALI: -the tone that they wanted the game to be, is like-

AUSTIN: *Totally.*

ALI: -*so important.* 'Cause like, if Danielle had pulled out that, like, ridiculous accent, and Adam just kept being like, "Well, you're fighting this mob, and it's very serious." [laughs]

AUSTIN: Right. [laughter]

ALI: "It's so- [laughing] a very big thing. Like, he's enslaved in this place." And like, that would have been the worst thing!

AUSTIN: Right, and she's just like, deep Rhode Island accent, even though it's grimdark fantasy.

ALI: Yeah...

AUSTIN: Actually I kind of want to live in that world, [ALI laughs] where I just get to drop Danielle into shitty grimdark fantasy games. [laughter]

KEITH: She tries to order a cabinet.

AUSTIN: Yeah, exactly! [KEITH laughs]

ALI: [sighing] God...

DRE: Oh boy...

AUSTIN: People should go watch that game, it's super good. Uh, I think we only have a couple more, um... 'Cause it's getting late. I'm just trying to see if this is one that I have time for...

DRE: Oh, can I say one really quick for that last question?

AUSTIN: Yes absolutely, sorry, apologies.

DRE: If you're reusing certain sheets, fucking laminate them.

ALI: [crosstalk] Yes!

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Yo, laminate them, get dry- yes. Good. Yes.

KEITH: [crosstalk] Yeah. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Dre, high five.

DRE: And get markers- get character sheets that are laminated, and get makers that can write and then be erased off the sheets.

KEITH: Oh, dry erase, yeah! That's a great idea.

ALI: Yeah. Ooh! Get some post- like, cards? Like, cards to give to people? Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yup.

KEITH: Get bluebooks, make them write an essay after. [laughter]

ALI: Yeah, it's the same thing as last question, like, if you're gonna be the thing facilitating a thing, like think it out and make it convenient-

DRE: Yeah.

ALI: -for the people that you're doing it with.

AUSTIN: Hundred percent.

ALI: 'Cause it is gonna make it so much easier!

AUSTIN: Absolutely.

KEITH: 'Cause like, especially in a con situation where your goal isn't to have a good time with friends, your goal is to like, get people interested in the game that you're showing.

AUSTIN: Totally. And that's-

KEITH: Like, you want- yeah.

AUSTIN: That's another really brief thing. You don't have to show the whole of the game. The first Burning Wheel game that I ever played was a scenario that the creator of Burning Wheel, Luke Crane, now at Kickstarter, always demo-ed back in the day. And it was called like, 'The Negotiation' or something like that? It was about a bunch of dwarves meeting a bunch of elves, and like... basically having a... a kind of- not a debate, but a negotiation over some sort of resources. And it was like, 100% based around a single conversation and had like, a little bit of

lead up, and a little bit of after, and there's really only basic conflict resolution and then this one interesting system about debating. No combat was in that demo, no interesting shit around the magic system in that game, very little bit around some of the weird stuff that the different cultures and races can do. Like, it didn't need to do, "Here is what all of Burning Wheel is." None of the leveling up, you're not there to do that. Or if you are, then you can build a different demo around that stuff. But with a lot of games, like if we were running The Sprawl at a con, I wouldn't... I would have clocks, but I- I might even have clocks set at the top of the game, where I'm like, "All right. You're in the middle of this mission."

[01:30:24]

ALI: Yeah...

AUSTIN: "Here are where the clocks are already at. You know, OriCon already has- they're already at 1500, and you know, the Righteous Vanguard is at 1900, or whatever. And like, these are the people who are on your case, here's what you're doing, go." And I wouldn't spend a lot of time doing, like, tracking money, for instance. Already something I don't spend a lot of time tracking in games anyway [ALI laughs], but I wouldn't do that for like, showing off what The Sprawl is super good at. I wouldn't worry too much about vehicle rules. Like, I wouldn't be like, okay well now we have to have this section where one of these people has to drive, and I have to talk about what the aggressivity score of this car is, or whatever. Like no, that's not- I don't- the power score of the car is not a key part of why I'm trying to show people that The Sprawl is dope. So yeah, focus in on what you want to show. Uh, this next one I'm gonna skip, not because it's a bad question but because we're running low on time and there's another one I want to get to. Um... briefly though, there was a side question here from Sam who says, "Who names the episodes? Austin? Ali?" Generally, Ali comes up with like, three or four really good episode titles, and then me, Jack, and Ali kind of decide which one is really the best one there. Sometimes it's hard. [ALI laughs] Sometimes it's like, "Austin, listen to this twenty minutes, I bet you there's a good phrase in here, but I spent the last eight hours on this episode and I can't find it."

ALI: The amount of times that I've finished editing an episode and then listened to it twice just to find a title-

AUSTIN: *Uh huh.*

ALI: -is too many!

AUSTIN: Totally. Uh... This one is the last one that I definitely want to hit- actually let me just peek ahead really quick and see- god, there's a lot of really good questions. All right. But this one is the last one I think we're gonna have time for. This one comes in from Virginia, who says, "I'm pretty new to tabletop RPGs, though I've been playing Pathfinder with a small group of friends for nearly two years. It's been super fun, but I am having an issue with some of the

alignment stuff. Maybe it's because I'm a newbie? The problem is this: my friend decided to play her lawful good paladin as racist, sexist, and homophobic. The paladin's bigotry comes from a place of ignorance. She grew up in a small town with a cult-like atmosphere. My friend's intention is that the paladin grows out of these beliefs. I've argued to my party that because the paladin's alignment is lawful good, and always has been, on some level we are saying that bigotry falls under the category of good in this world, and that seems super fucked. I think good is subjective, for sure, but evil in our campaign has been mostly played as what is traditionally thought of as evil as in Pathfinder. It seems unfair to allow the paladin to be on the same side of the alignment as my chaotic good ranger, who is queer and mixed race and not a human unthinking- and not a *huge* unthinking asshole. Should I have a long talk with my campaign about what we do to define as good, or just let it go? Virginia." That is a good question.

KEITH: That is a very good question.

ALI: This is such a doozy.

DRE: I think um...

ALI: Oh god.

DRE: Yeah. I think- like, obviously this is like, hindsight 20-20, but one of the things I've noticed in some newer tabletop books that I really like is encouraging GMs and groups to have that conversation about like, what do we want and what do we not want in this game. You know, where are our lines? What is stuff- do we wanna play a game where we just say like, "Yeah, I really am uncomfortable with or am just tired of like, racism in terms of like, oh goblins are gross and stuff like that, and I just don't want to deal with that anymore." But obviously that's a hindsight in the- like a next time thing.

AUSTIN: Totally. The... The notion that you kind of hit on there briefly, Dre, of lines- there's a pretty common phrase inside of tabletop communities called lines and veils. Lines and veils are both like two different ideas around how you can handle, kind of verboten topics that you don't want to deal with on screen. Veils are like, hey, you know- obviously there's- maybe there's sex in this game, but we're not gonna show it. We're gonna pull the veil closed, we're gonna fade to black here. In which we're saying it's part of the fictional world, it's really here, but we are not going to put the camera on it. I think something like- there's a character who gets executed in one of the seasons of *Seasons of Hieron* that is like, there's a scene that is really hard for me, and I pull the veil on that because I'm not interested in showing that- I'm not interested in putting the fictional camera that we have on that scene in any way that could romanticize it or fetishize it or like, even aestheticize it in any way. There are also lines where you can say like, this is not a thing we are going to do. Uh... A thing that we've never done on the show, as far as I can think of or remember, is like, sexual assault. For me, that is a line. I am not interested in- that doesn't mean that I don't think there could be good fiction that explores sexual assault. It doesn't mean that I don't think that there could be a roleplaying game that does. I know for a fact that there are

lots of roleplaying games that actually are designed to engage with that sort of thing, especially in Nordic LARP and a lot of new story game stuff. But it's not something that I feel like I'm confident in my ability to handle without a lot of preparation, with a lot of preparation on the parts of my players. And so like, to have that as a clear line, it means like, that event isn't going to come up. I'm not going to have an NPC that does it, like, it is not a thing that I'm going to reference offhandedly as like, uh, here's a shitty joke. And having those conversations openly can be a lot of- can help a lot. I didn't have that conversation, actually, in the Burning Wheel game I played with Adam Koebel, and it was a real bummer, because sexual assault did come up in that game, in a way that was well handled on his part as GM, and well, like- he was being... He was not being a shitty dude by including it, but it hit me out of fucking nowhere because we'd never even loosely had that sort of conversation. And it just fucked me right up. And so like, I really do advise you having those conversations, or at least saying, "Can we have one of these conversations?" Opening the door so that your players or your GM can say, this is the stuff I'm interested in or not interested in.

ALI: Um. I think another really big thing for this is especially since your player, like, already has an arc planned for this character, of her learning that the way that she feels is wrong, like, you should be telling that person, like, "Okay, that's cool that you want to do that, I am willing to explore this if people at the table are, but like, that character's clearly not lawful good right now."

AUSTIN: Yes.

ALI: And like, that's cool. I had a hard time- I had a hard time deciding that Hella was gonna be evil.

AUSTIN: Yeah!

ALI: Leaning in to her being evil and then like, as we were going into Season Three, I was like, I have to commit to this for a little bit, but I like- I know that when the time comes, she is gonna change to chaotic or neutral. And like, I sort of already know what Hella's, like, chaotic phrase would be if she made that change. And like...

AUSTIN: Ooh. Hit me up off mic, I wanna hear this shit! [laughter] It's time to start planning.

ALI: I think I told you once, but like, yeah.

AUSTIN: I've got a Season Five doc, shit.

ALI: [laughs] But like, yeah, I- if- especially like, if your player's looking forward in that way, you just have to be straight up with that player and be like, "Okay that's cool. But that is not what we're doing right now. It is clear that we're not doing right now, and it's not fair to the world or to the other players to pretend that that's what's going on." And yeah. I would just like, I would be really blunt about that. 'Cause like, this doesn't seem lawful good to me. [laughs] And like...

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah. At all.

ALI: Like, a person can be a paladin and like, you know, really firm in their beliefs, but like, especially when lawful and good are supposed to reflect society as much as they do, like [crosstalk] have that hard talk. Yeah.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] It's a fucking- I mean, this is the problem with lawful [crosstalk ends] This is the problem with that whole schema, is like, it... I mean, there was that meme going around recently by Darius Kazemi that said...

ALI: Oh, I saw that.

AUSTIN: Briefly, the meme is Darius Kazemi, who's this great bot maker and internet person-personality, I guess, made a meme that was like, all of the... It was lawful good- it was all of the [laughs] all of the DnD alignments where they actually are? [laughter] Um.

KEITH: Yeah. It was the- it was the meme of like, here's the thing that this is-

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: Here's the alignment of this thing. But the thing was other alignments.

AUSTIN: Which was so good.

ALI: Yeah, I just, I couldn't process it. [laughter] Looking at it, [crosstalk] it is like, so intense.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] I need to find it.

DRE: [crosstalk] I'm with you, Ali.

KEITH: So that's- I was gonna- I thought it was really good. I agreed with almost all of them. But. But. But. Here's the thing. So, I think there's a lot of steps, and I'm glad that like- I feel like what Austin said was sort of like the first step of engaging with this, and Ali's thing was like, the second step of engaging with this? I think that it's- an important thing is like, really gaging where your friend- like, how much fun is your friend having being, like, a racist, sexist character?

DRE: [laughing] Yeah.

KEITH: And like, that could be a huge problem. And, let's just pretend that your friend is well-intentioned and not-

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: -like having fun playing a fucking piece of shit. But, after you have the conversation of like, "well your goal is to change, so your alignment should be different and then should become lawful good," but- I guess at a sort of shallower level, I think it's worth exploring the differences then between lawful and chaotic and not stre- like, not not stress the difference between, like, two good characters. There's obviously a way- what I'm saying is, I think that there's a way, at a certain level, to be like, okay well, here's what this world values in someone who's lawful.

ALI: Yeah yeah yeah.

KEITH: And what it's valuing has nothing to do with how actually destructive this person's beliefs are. And- I had another point but I can't remember what it was. But if I remember, I will interrupt.

ALI: Yeah. I think that that's an important point though, 'cause you don't want to like, completely talk this person out of it, 'cause like, I baked xenophobia into Hella and like, I really like playing that character. And like, that's a thing that I wanted to explore, but like... Being honest with the world and also honest with the people at the table is such an important thing here that you just like, really have to be very blatant with the conversation around this that's like, okay what's the solution here, 'cause this isn't it.

AUSTIN: The... The other thing there for me- I've also pulled up this good chart, which I'll get to in a second.

KEITH: Love it.

AUSTIN: The other thing here for me is like, you can have part of this conversation that is, like... [sighs] about how you want to frame this. I've talked already off- you know, in a previous thing, about how we ended up like, completely canning the first recording of ground game because it went in some places that we weren't really into, in terms of the way the Empath worked in The Veil and the way a scene played out with Keith and with Coin, his original character. And like, part of what came out of that conversation was like, for this character to be played in this way, we can go down that route, but it's not going to ever be framed as "and Coin is a fun goofball." Like, if Coin uses his empathic abilities when someone says, "Don't do it," and that person, like, doesn't have a gun, I'm going to frame that as being someone who is taking- who is like, not taking consent seriously. And I'm not gonna frame that positively. And like, part of this conversation should be with that- with this player character who says like... and the GM, like, is there a way at least that we can- not even at least, like, if we're gonna do this, I can't be comfortable if we're playing this in a way where, like, my character who is trying to do good things is framed in the same heroic light as- or has to share the same heroic light- as this shitty, quote-unquote lawful good paladin that is treating people like shit. We need to figure out ways as GMs- like, and this is shoutouts to all GMs out there right now, we're hustling. [laughter] We

need to figure out ways to talk to our characters about how they can be protagonists, or how they can be... active members of our games, and also how they can be, like... It's okay to frame those characters as, frankly, bad. And shitty. As characters who are not the heroes, and I don't mean that in like, a goatee stroking, "Hahaha, I'm the bad guy now" way. Because like, playing Dark Side KOTOR is frankly- you are framed as a greater hero than you ever are if you play Light Side KOTOR. Like, you get all of the great bombast, and all of the great, like, swelling orchestral things, and you get even more surprising outcomes than you get as if you played the good guy version. A version of this for me in games too was always huge was like, in... "don't take it personally babe, it just ain't your story," which is an early Christine Love dating sim- or, not dating sim, visual novel- in which you play a teacher who can like [strained] vaguely date your students! [returns to standard voice] There is original art for the "you break down and date your students" route, and not for "you are like, their good mentor who does not cross that fucking line." And maybe this is because I'm a teacher, but like that was like, "Ooh, this hits me in a spot." I like Christine a whole bunch, Christine and I are friends, but like, it was important for me to see that of those two things, the thing that had original art assets created for it was that path and *not* the other path. And there are ways to do that in tabletop games in which you can say like, hey, if you're going to play this character who is xenophobic, like Hella, I'm gonna frame that xenophobia in a way that like, is constantly reminding everyone watching who's fucking side you're on.

ALI: [laughing] Yeah.

AUSTIN: Like, this- these are the people- you are- you are, not to make it like tied to the day we're recording this or nothing, but my dude, Donald Trump, you are on the fucking nazis' side. [laughter] Like, whether or not you wanna be, every word you're saying is, like, adding fuel to that fire. So when Hella Varal, the Queen Killer [ALI snorts] steps into town wearing black and gold, like, you gotta know what she's representing. And it's part of my job as the GM to show what that means, and like, I don't know, maybe this is a Pathfinder game where the whole world is fucked and everybody in the world is homophobic, racist, and sexist, and like... that just sucks. Like, it's- it's- [crosstalk] it's totally fine if-

KEITH: [crosstalk] Yeah, that sounds exhausting.

[01:45:04]

AUSTIN: It sounds exhausting, and like, if that's a game you wanna play and you wanna be in that world because you want to play a game of struggle, that is *totally* everybody's right to do that. But I want you as a player, Virginia, to know that like, it is also your right to say, "You know-

KEITH: It doesn't sound like that's what Virginia wants.

AUSTIN: It doesn't! [crosstalk] It doesn't sound like that at all!

KEITH: [crosstalk] It does not sound like that.

AUSTIN: At all! And it is Virginia's right to be like, "You know, this just isn't where I'm at right now. I don't want to spend time doing this. I would like to find some place in this world that does not feel like this." Maybe it's like a special city- maybe it's not special- maybe it's like, a faction in this world that is actually making things better and I wanna see a world that's actually treating people nicely, and... I don't know. I don't know. Anyway, I'm gonna pull this meme up now, 'cause I love it. [laughter]

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: This is from Darius Kazemi, who says, "I've figured out the D&D alignment of the various D&D alignments. I've long maintained that chaotic good is the most lawful neutral alignment." [ALI sighs] I love it so much.

ALI: [frustrated mumbling]

AUSTIN: So. Let me just break it down. Let me just break it down. I'm gonna open up in a new tab. Here we go. True neutral is lawful good, *because* in reality, what we consider the lawful and what we consider the good holds the default position in society. And that is the key to unlocking this whole chart. And everything else falls from that. That's all you really need to know. [DRE laughs] All right. I'm gonna close this chart. It's very good. You can follow Darius over at tinysubversions, which is a dope Twitter name also. From Tomas! "A friend and I have been idly talkign about starting a podcast for some time, and have recently brainstormed a few interesting ideas about how we could find a unique niche product/presentation for our ideas. However, neither of us have any experience with audio engineering or production. Do you have any audio recording software or hardware suggestions? Helping us sort out the differences between Audacity and OBS, et cetera, or how important having free standing mics are for audio quality on a budget, and those sort fo things would be very helpful. We would also appreciate pointers in the direction of any learning resources, training video series, et cetera. In many respects, we don't even know what questions we should be asking about what we need to know." Keith! Do you have any tips?

KEITH: Hi. Yeah, dude, I got so many fucking tips for this exact question, it turns out! All right, so, rule #1 about- okay, so, I'm gonna make a blanket rule. If you wanna start a podcast, don't get a USB mic. Get a XLR microphone. You don't wanna fuck with USB shit.

AUSTIN: Okay, but wa- wa- wait. Real quick.

KEITH: Hi.

AUSTIN: What if you have no money?

ALI: Yeah, I-

AUSTIN: Like we did when we started this podcast!

KEITH: Okay. [crosstalk] So, here's the thing-

ALI: [crosstalk] Before we let Keith say anything [end crosstalk] I just wanna say really quickly that like, podcasting is really great. The, like, barrier for entry is the lowest that it's ever been.

KEITH: Yes.

ALI: There are literal iPhone apps that you just download, and you talk into your phone, and then it uploads it to a place for you. Like...

KEITH: I- So.

ALI: You are-

KEITH: So here's the thing.

ALI: [laughs] Wait, one more.

KEITH: I'm- [crosstalk - yelling away from the mic] vibrating! Vibrating!

ALI: You are capable of eventually making, like, \$12,000 on Twitter from having a podcast that sounds like shit for like, a year. So like, Keith has very good advice-

KEITH: Yeah. Okay.

ALI: -and you should listen to it, but if you just want to start a thing, start a thing. Don't spend like, \$200 to start.

AUSTIN: Get off the boat.

KEITH: Okay. Okay. Here's the thing. Please listen to me. No one's gonna listen to your podcast if it sounds bad. [crosstalk] Straight up.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Not true, we have a podcast [end crosstalk] and it sounded bad for a long time.

KEITH: Yeah, and then now it sounds good, and now a lot of people listen to it. Okay. But there's a barrier. Like we sounded worse than the barrier to entry for a little bit, but we also had a carryover audience, which is different.

AUSTIN: Yes.

KEITH: So. You can- if you go to any list of, "hey, what are some cheap microphones I can get to start myself off on a podcast," they're going to give you USB microphones that are basically about or- if not more expensive than like, cheap XLR microphones and an audio interface that you can get for the same price or less that will really, really, really, like, perform better than the USB stuff. The way that USB works is it takes an analogue signal, translates it using shitty electronics to a digital signal, and then sends it into your computer, where then you can not really play with it at all. If you get a shitty little mixer for \$30, and you get a shitty XLR microphone for \$30, you're under \$100 significantly, and you've got yourself something that sounds better than like, a Blue Snowball or whatever, which costs like 60 or 80 bucks.

ALI: Yeah, do not waste your money on like, what's the high end Blue thing? [crosstalk] Yeti? Yeah.

KEITH: [crosstalk] Yeti.

DRE: [crosstalk] The Yeti.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Blue- the Yeti? *Do not.*

ALI: [crosstalk] Just get a mixer. Just get a mixer.

KEITH: That's like the one that they- yeah, just get a mixer. Make sure that you have: pop filters.

AUSTIN: Yes.

ALI: Yes.

KEITH: Do not make a podcast if you don't have a pop filter.

DRE: Mm-hmm.

KEITH: Audacity is your enemy. Use it, but be careful. [laughter]

AUSTIN: Like you would use an enemy!

KEITH: Right, so- [laughs]

AUSTIN: You are the turtle and it is the scorpion.

KEITH: Yeah. You- so, there are things that can replace Audacity if you're either willing to spend money or willing to gamble on other things, but for the most part you want to record in Audacity, and try to find something else to edit in. Um, editing- Ali still edits the show in Audacity and it literally hurts me. It like, is killing- it kills me every time.

AUSTIN: Listen. [KEITH laughs] Ali does a fantastic job.

KEITH: Ali does a great job, but I just want her to have [ALI laughs] better tools to make it easier for her!

ALI: I found a system with Audacity that I really like. I didn't come from any, like, audio background?

KEITH: Yeah.

ALI: The first episode of Friends at the Table that I edited, it was the first thing that I've edited in my life. Like, I was just like, I'm gonna look at these YouTube videos and like, see if this works. And it kind of did.

KEITH: Ali's very lucky that Audacity behaves for her. On my computer, the most- and I have a nice computer- the most basic Audacity functions take forever. And, it's a problem. So if you have- especially if you have a computer that does not handle Audacity well, please get yourself something like- something perfect would be, like um... There's a version of Sony Vegas that is like, a limited thing that, like, has all the audio stuff that you would need, and none of the- some limited video stuff, which you don't need for a podcast. So I think it's like, a \$70 thing for like, the Sony Vegas thing. Start in Audacity, if it's not working for you, consider upgrading. I know that it costs money. It's almost the only other thing that you will need to spend money on.

ALI: Yeah, if you literally do not have any money and you wanna stick with Audacity, split up the things that you're doing.

KEITH: Yes.

ALI: The way that I was able to do Audacity when I still had a computer that ran at like, shit, was that I had a specific day where I cleaned up files, and that was the thing that I was gonna do 'cause it was gonna take me an hour. I had a specific day where I would listen to the episode and cut out the, like, talk that I wanted to do, and leave all the like, coughs, or like people bumping their mic, and the little background noises, 'cause what I was doing is figuring out, how long is this episode gonna be-

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: -and what is the talk here that's not important? And then the third day, I would go back, because it's way shorter, and now I can pause and mute all that stuff. So like-

AUSTIN: Which- you just hit the third thing though, that is like super important, which is: spend time editing.

ALI: Yes. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Like, it is not enough to record a podcast and then put the files together and say like, "Uh! That's it! That's a podcast!" Especially if it's a podcast that is going to be more than just people sitting in a room talking, where like- especially if they're together in a room, where there's going to be a natural flow, and any pauses are going to be brief enough, and like, there's not gonna be any crosstalk because people are making eye contact. Like, Ali and Keith- and Nick, when Nick produced the show too, like, they put time into the production of the show... Which is an ask. Like, it's as important an ask as spending X dollars on equipment.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: In fact, it's a cost that you have to keep putting in every time. It's not just a thing that you do for a few hours a week. It's a thing that you spend real time on.

KEITH: And-

AUSTIN: And it's like- I don't know, like, commit to that if you're going to do it.

KEITH: Yeah. Like, make sure that the thing that you're doing seems tight. I get- I have a lot of people that make jokes on Twitter about when I edit Friends at the Table, I go "Keith never edit anything out." I edited so much shit out. The only stuff I didn't edit out was the stuff that people said, "Oh, edit this out," or me saying, "I'm going to edit this out." 'Cause I thought that was a funny joke. But like, blank spaces, weird noises, noise removal, like there's so much work that goes into editing something. Even some of it seems as straightforward as a few people talking for a few hours. Like-

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: It's nuts how much stuff you're just like, nitpicking out of there. And that's really like-

ALI: Yeah.

KEITH: -the job is like, be nitpicky. Don't be, like- the worst time to be precious is when you're editing shit. But, I just wanna- just like, if I can bullet point the fundamentals: get an XLR mic, get a cheap mixer, find an editing software that works for you if you can't find a free one that works for you, and when you're trying to figure out how to level your sound, you wanna get as

loud as possible without ever- without ever blowing out the microphones. Make sure you're at a constant level for your main mix. Keep the gain as low as possible. And keep your level as close to the center as possible. Those are the sort of rules for having something that's loud enough that doesn't sound weird. You might- if you have a particularly boomy voice, or you have a particularly, like, tinny voice- like, Kylie² and I for Run Button need different microphones, because she has a much boomier- she has a much bassier voice than I do. And so, she needs a microphone that has a more natural sound, versus mine that is like, inherently geared towards, like a bass-y sound. Because otherwise we will sound- it'll sound like she's like, [cups hands over microphone] talking though a fucking thing, like duh duh duh.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: That's how she sounds actually to be- I've met her. And she sounds like that.

KEITH: Yeah, but we- so we wanna- but we want a microphone that cancels that out. 'Cause we don't want people to know that she sounds like a person [crosstalk] that is talking in a train tunnel.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Like a yeti. You can say it.

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: That's why they named that microphone that. After-

KEITH: [laughing] They heard Kylie, they were like, "We need something that captures this!"

AUSTIN: [laughs] The essence of it.

KEITH: So don't be afraid to spend- this is time. This is also time. Don't be afraid to spend time looking for the things that will work for how you sound and how you act. Like, I have lower- I have- my shit is less sensitive than everybody else's, 'cause I talk louder than everybody else and I yell more than anybody else does.

AUSTIN: That's accurate.

KEITH: So my levels sound different than everybody else's. Now, we did find- we all basically have the same microphones, 'cause there's so many of us that we wanted to sound as uniform as possible. And there's just no way to, like, be like, "Okay, you have this microphone, it costs \$50. You have this microphone, it costs \$150, 'cause that's what we need." Like, do what will work for you, but, like, you need to put in the time to make sure that the equipment you have will

² The name and pronouns in the audio recording are no longer in use, hence the audio/transcript discrepancy.

make you sound as good as possible right away, even if you don't have a lot of money. And there's ways to do that. And it's not USB mics!

AUSTIN: Yes. Yes.

ALI: My three big things that are like, you have to do this, even if your equipment is really shitty, no matter how many people you have on your podcast, are, one, record locally.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: Mm-hmm.

ALI: I know that you might just want to upload like a Skype output, don't do that. Just like, take the-

KEITH: Oh.

ALI: Take the two or three hours that it's gonna take to put everything together, 'cause it's so worth it. Have-

KEITH: Ali, thank you for saying that. It didn't even *occur* to me that someone would try to upload Skype audio to iTunes. Get out of here.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Lots of people do it. Lots of people do it.

ALI: [crosstalk] Um, lots of people do it. And like...

KEITH: [crosstalk] I know.

AUSTIN: Including National Public Radio. Including, like, real ass places do it all the time.

KEITH: You're totally right...

ALI: Second thing is- Okay, first, record locally. Second thing is have someone who is recording everyone.

AUSTIN: Yes.

ALI: 'Cause you're gonna have to use that one day. [laughs] Especially if you have a podcast with deadlines, and someone records a thing, and then they fly to a different state and they don't upload their file, you're gonna wanna have that, like, file of [crosstalk] them talking somewhere.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] *For instance.*

KEITH: Yeah. Oh. [ALI laughs] With that, I want to say again real quick, I want to re-emphasize: make sure that you're not blowing out. I have been going through, and helping the first episodes sound a little bit better, so that we can reupload them with better audio, and the episode- like, the second recording session with Art is blown out, and there's just no way to fix that. You can not do- if someone is blown out, it just will sound so bad, and there's nothing you can do about it. You can always make someone sound louder. But you can never make someone not blown out.

ALI: Um, my-

AUSTIN: Third thing. Yes.

ALI: -third thing is... If you are recording in a room where you have background noise, and you are, like not talking, don't mute your file. I know that you think that you're helping-

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: -your poor producer, and being like, "Oh, they don't want to listen to this weird air conditioner that I have," but like, muting yourself- only having audio when you're talking, especially when you have something in the background, is so bad for that file, because then there's no way to take that stuff out.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

KEITH: Yeah.

ALI: So make sure that you have a, like- the levels are consistent and that you are recording the entire time. Like, if you want to mute because you have to go, [crosstalk] like, pee, or 'cause you're like...

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Yo, that's a good one. [crosstalk ends] Don't change your volume either. Levels are consistent.

ALI: [laughing] Yes.

AUSTIN: Super important.

KEITH: And. And, also, part of what Ali was saying, when you mute your file and you take out that inherent background noise, and there's not, you know four or five people on the file- oh, excuse me. It's like, really jarring, for there to all of be sudden be this sort of light background [hisses].

AUSTIN: Yup.

KEITH: And then all of sudden- and then it's gone. When you start talking. Or like, when you start talking, all of a sudden you can hear, like, a drip drip drop, and then it cuts out as soon as you stop. [crosstalk] It is very jarring. It's bad.

ALI: [crosstalk] Yeah, it's so bad. It's really bad.

KEITH: If you have background- if you have a background, like, [hisses], and you can't take it out, don't worry about it. Because it's worse to like, cut around it then to, just like, allow it to be this part of the episode.

ALI: Yeah.

[01:59:20]

AUSTIN: The... We do- So the intros for this current season of Twilight Mirage, I will often create fake background noise, because in the Twilight Mirage theme that Jack created, during the opening seconds with the tape recorder, there is background noise in that recording, that like, is meant to be there, right? Like, there's supposed to be the feeling of room and, like, space there. And if I want to do a longer intro before the first piano chord hits, if that's not there, you can literally hear the background noise drop out from the music track. And so I will extend that background noise out by sampling and like, extending out the middle area, where there's not anything no- you wouldn't even notice that it's been extended. There's no looping sound or anything like that. But like, like, ugh, you have to pay attention to that stuff if what you're trying to do is make it- also it's fun to do that sometimes. It can be fun to solve that sort of thing. I had the worst- so I produced Giant Bomb Presents for a year, and like, there were some issues. There were some times when shit went so bad. Um. But... Figuring out how to fix that stuff was really fun? Because... Solving an issue like that can feel like you've done a little bit of magic. I know we make a lot of various pattern magic comparisons, but like, figuring out how to turn some garbled nonsense into something even remotely listenable is a good feeling, is what I'll say.

ALI: Yeah. [crosstalk] The way-

KEITH: [crosstalk] Um, and if you don't have fun [end crosstalk] editing, try the other person. Maybe the other person will have fun. 'Cause like, I love editing, it's a lot of fun. If you're having a bad time editing, ask maybe someone else to try it and see if they like it.

ALI: Yeah. Um, a thing that I- the way that I learned most of the stuff that I did was just by willing to sit down and take the time to fix things?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: The first couple of episodes of the faction game that I did, I was pulling too much noise from Dre's file, and I was super stressed out, so I was like, "I don't care that Dre sounds bad, whatever." [DRE laughs] And I would be like 80% into editing the episode, and then I'm like, this episode is actually really good, and it's shitty that he sounds bad. So what I would do, is I would go back to Dre's file, literally take a clip of everything that he said, and paste it back in, with better sounding audio-

AUSTIN: Wow.

ALI: And that was a *nightmare*. But it like-

KEITH: Oh my god, I remember that. I remember you doing that. [ALI laughs]

DRE: God, what episode was this?

ALI: [crosstalk] Uh, it was like, three of them, so don't worry about it. [laughs]

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] The first couple faction games.

DRE: Yeah... Oh boy.

ALI: And like- but like, that is how- figuring out how to line up voices in that way is what made me be able to do the stars thing? 'Cause I was just like-

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: -Oh, if you like- if you level- if you put voices on top of each other like this, it can sound really cool. Then you can fuck with it later. And then also, it just made it way easier in, like, situations where- Audacity will do this thing where like, if there's silence for a long time or if it's a really long recording, it'll just cut out seconds of that silence. And suddenly someone will be...

AUSTIN: [whispering] Audacity sucks.

ALI: ...off sync. Like, five times in an episode. And it's like, five seconds each time, and it's really frustrating. But like, knowing how to cut up the file and like, re-align it, 'cause I did all that shit with Dre, is like-

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: -why the show still has- happens. And like, we don't skip as many weeks as we have to.

AUSTIN: The... yeah. It's- there are a lot of really good tools out there, and also a lot of- there are a lot of like, I hate that it's all YouTube now, because I like to search things for text.

ALI: Yes...

AUSTIN: But there are a lot of YouTube guides-

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: -that will help you do very basic things in terms of like, how do I... how do I do noise removal? Like, what am I even looking at when it looks like a noise removal setting? What does- what does it mean, like, what's the- the one for- that I always fuck with the noise removal on the intros? Or no, it's not even noise removal, it's auto-ducking. It's like- intervals. Like, what does this mean by interval- like, silence interval? Like, well, okay, here's the breakdown of what the silence interval is. Like, you can look this up and it'll help you get there.

KEITH: Noise removal is tough, by the way.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Like, it's not an easy thing to figure out what that- what the sliders mean, what the values mean, what affecting one thing will do to it overall, [crosstalk - unintelligible]

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Back up your files. This is another one.

ALI: Yes.

AUSTIN: Back up your files-

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: -and fuck around with a different file than the one that is, like, your master file, until you really know what the stuff you're doing is. 'Cause I've definitely fucked around on a file before, and been like, "Oh, I almost overwrote this original recording and closed this program and then I'd be fucked forever. [laughter] I don't know how to go back to the old one." So like, having the- like, have that original one saved, and then open up a scratch file that you can like, fuck around in, if you're trying to learn how to do an effect or like, or something like that.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Any other big, big tips? Um... For the record, I record into Audacity. Either Ali or I will record the entire group audio by just hitting record on an OBS file with set to output to MP4. And then we can load that MP4 into Audacity or other editing programs and just pull the audio out of it, as our big entire Discord call audio, if we ever need that for anything.

KEITH: It's also really good for syncing.

ALI: [crosstalk] Yeah.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Yeah. Totally. Totally.

ALI: Yeah.

KEITH: I will say- hold on. I know that we love time.is. [crosstalk] I know that we love it.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Time.is is good. Mm-hmm.

KEITH: Time.is is good. There are [laughs] There are better ways to sync the audio-

AUSTIN: Not true.

KEITH: -than time.is. I know that... some people think that that's not true. But. Especially if there's a low person count, I would recommend a 3-2-1-clap.

AUSTIN: No...

KEITH: I would recommend a [crosstalk] an alternating count.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] A 3-2-1-clap is so much worse than [end crosstalk] the time.is. Alternating count I can fuck with, I can't fuck with 3-2-1-clap as being better than time.is.

ALI: Really?

KEITH: Um... well not for- for us-

AUSTIN: One *hundred* percent.

KEITH: For- for us, it's arguable that you're right. 'Cause there's so many people per recording. But if [crosstalk] you have two or three-

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] No, I even mean with [end crosstalk] with- with- So with Waypoint, uh, Waypoint Radio, we did 3-2-1-clap for like, six months, and it was bad. And then finally, I was like, "Everybody go to time.is." And we did, and it's been great. So.

KEITH: Yeah. I get- I get better results with me and Kylie on a 3-2-1-clap than a [crosstalk] than a time.is. So I...

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] But you're- aren't- oh I guess you're not- yeah that's true. Yeah.

KEITH: [crosstalk with ALI] So I- yes. When we're not local, I mean.

ALI: [crosstalk] You guys have also been talking to each other for like, [end crosstalk] twelve years, and like [laughs]

AUSTIN: Yes.

[DRE laughs]

KEITH: Yeah. So- Well, I- so I guess the point is, try different things.

ALI: Yeah. Yeah yeah.

KEITH: See what works best for you in terms of syncing stuff up.

ALI: Um, yeah. Be willing to be flexible, be willing to spend a lot of time on a thing, and be willing to just google the answer. You're gonna find like, twelve YouTube videos that say, um... I can't really like, I can't recommend a good guy on YouTube, 'cause I've always just randomly [crosstalk] googled and I get...

AUSTIN: [talking over ALI] 'Cause there are none! Boom! Got eem! [laughter]

ALI: I've always just randomly gone to a thing and then like, I click on this file, and the guy who's talking sounds like shit [AUSTIN laughs] so I'm not gonna listen to him! What the fuck!

KEITH: Yeah.

ALI: What does this guy think that he's doing?

KEITH: Absolutely.

ALI: And then like, there's another thing, and it like, is better. And then like, I don't save that, 'cause I've learned it, and then I move on. And that's like, how you're gonna learn a lot of this, unfortunately.

KEITH: As... So the reason that theoretically, 3-2-1-clap might be better for you is because it inherently ties the sync to the latency of the call, versus like the actual global time. And you know, if it works for you, it works, if it doesn't, it doesn't.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Uh, the alternating thing can be fun.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: 'Cause I like alternating numbers.

KEITH: Can- let's- if you haven't heard of this before, it might not make immediate sense. Do we wanna do like a quick, like [crosstalk] two people- yeah.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Yeah, you run down the alternating, yeah.

KEITH: Okay so Austin, you can be the second person here. Pretend that it's just a two person podcast. One.

AUSTIN: Two.

KEITH: Three.

AUSTIN: Four.

KEITH: Five.

AUSTIN: Six.

KEITH: That's the-

ALI: You guys did that really poorly, [laughs] I feel like.

AUSTIN: Listen.

KEITH: Well Austin did it slow-

DRE: Wow.

KEITH: -and so I matched the speed.

AUSTIN: No I did it fast! I did it fast.

ALI: You were pausing. You were pausing.

AUSTIN: The first two were fast, the last one was paused because he was pausing on my side. This is why 1-2-3 doesn't fucking [ALI laughs] alternating doesn't work as good as time.is! Because like, the lag on different people's sides will be different. 'Cause on my side, it was like,

Keith says a thing and I say a thing immediately after, but for everybody else on the call it doesn't work that way. This is why I do time.is.

KEITH: Yeah, well that's- this is why it's dependent on how many people you have and how- just, find the thing that works best for you.

ALI: Yeah.

KEITH: There's multiple options.

ALI: Um...

AUSTIN: Having a- having the one that works for everybody is having a global file that you can sync to. So.

ALI: Mm-hmm.

KEITH: Yeah. Yeah.

ALI: Though I don't- I don't use that super often. But-

AUSTIN: But it's a good back-up to have just in case.

ALI: Yes. Just do it.

KEITH: Yeah.

ALI: If two people record it, that's even better. Have at least one person do it, 'cause like, there are episodes we would have just straight up lost, if [crosstalk] we didn't have that.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Totally. Our clapcast [end crosstalk] was really good to even listen to [ALI laughs] for me on the OBS side [laughter] for this episode. God.

ALI: Um. Can I have final word here on this just really quickly?

AUSTIN: Absooo-lutely.

ALI: Because- can you go back to the question? 'Cause there's a way that it's worded-

AUSTIN: Sure.

ALI: -specifically that's like, um...

AUSTIN: [muttering] Just trying to get some time.is on screen. [crosstalk - still mumbling] Trying to shout out some friends at time.is.

ALI: [crosstalk] I know I know I know, shout out time.is. [end crosstalk] But the- the beginning of this question was like, we're still trying to find a topic, or find like a niche or whatever-

AUSTIN: Mmm.

ALI: -and like...

AUSTIN: True.

ALI: Be willing to learn this, but also be willing to understand that podcasting might not be for you? 'Cause if you're not like, coming in passionate about this thing, you're not going to be willing to spend like the four- the three or four hours to make something sound really good. And like, that's fine.

AUSTIN: True.

ALI: Friends at the Table grew out of Stream Friends, which is like, we all still occasionally do Let's Plays, and we all had- we all made connections from that, and we all had a lot of fun doing that, but like, at a certain point, a bunch of us were like, "Okay, we don't want to spend, like, five hours a week doing this anymore."

AUSTIN: Yeah.

[DRE laughs]

ALI: And like, that was a fine decision that we made. And there's like, a bunch of hobbies that I've like, tried to get into that I eventually, like, put down, but I still put out an episode of Friends at the Table every week?

AUSTIN: Right. Right.

ALI: And like, be willing to like- either have, like, a podcast that isn't a whole sprawling thing, have it be a finite thing just to figure out if you like it. [crosstalk] Like, it's just a like-

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] That's a really good one.

ALI: Just like, I'm gonna watch 20 episodes of a thing, and we're gonna have 20 episodes of the podcast talking about it.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: Just to learn what a podcast is like. Be willing to do that, like, not- Your first project doesn't have to be your masterpiece, or the thing that you're going to be doing for five years, and like, make a bunch of money off of. 'Cause like-

KEITH: And don't be afraid to record ten episodes and not put them out, and then record an 11th episode and go, here it is, here's our first episode.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: That's- like frankly, that is totally... a big part of what I think a lot of... People don't know this, but behind the scenes, real podcasts do that *all* the time. Like. I think it was Idle Weekend, did like, seven behind-the-scenes Idle Weekend podcasts, just to get the flow down right. Patrick and I definitely did a couple beforehand that were just like, "What's this- what is this thing that we do?" for Waypoint Radio when that was first starting. Like that sort of pre-recorded, feeling it out- I recorded one recently for a Vice culture podcast that we were trying to figure out, and it's like, okay well like, what does this look like? And how do we get comfortable talking in a way that is not just us talking regularly, but thinking about what if there was an audience? That goes into making it. If you want it to be that thing. But just to re-echo something that Ali said right at the beginning of this question, which was, make a podcast. Just- just get in front of a microphone and start recording stuff. You can do that stuff if you're gonna really do it, get the good equipment that's not that expensive, and learn how to do the audio stuff, but like. The first thing you need to learn how to do, and this is something that we all got to do because of Stream Friends, was like, learn to talk with those specific people on a microphone together. Get the flow right. Get the back and forth down. And then just, start practicing that side of it, because you can do that with very little investment if you're already hanging out on the internet together. Like, that equipment is enough for you to put together some mock episodes while you're scrounging up money for a better microphone, while you're learning how Audacity or Sony Vegas or Reaper or whatever work. So. So do those.

KEITH: Um, I- I also would recommend... listen to something that's improvised. Listen to something- somebody- listen to people intentionally improvising. Hearing people improvise and going like, "Okay here's what a conversation sounds like with no floor," is, I think, a really useful tool for like, how to keep talking... how to keep a conversation interesting and keep talking when you have the floor of being a real person with an actual life and opinions.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: A podcast lives and dies by the chemistry of the people who are on it. So like, what Austin was saying before, like, being able to just have a conversation with people and like, find a thing

that you're passionate about should be the first thing, before you buy a microphone or learn Audacity or whatever else. Like.

AUSTIN: Yes.

ALI: Just- just do the thing 'cause you wanna do it and not because you want to have a podcast that makes a lot of money or because you think having a podcast sounds really cool. Like.

KEITH: [laughing] There's like 20 podcasts that make a lot of money.

ALI: [laughs] Yeah, don't- don't, like, put the horse before the cart in that way, and like, have fun with it. And if you have to spend two months just recording it on your phone, do that, 'cause you like to do it and you like to have conversations with people-

AUSTIN: Totally.

ALI: -and like, do the thing that you're doing. Um.

AUSTIN: Also- I want Ali to have the last word here, I didn't mean to open up that inspect page. [ALI laughs] Um... It's okay if you just wanna play games and have conversations and not turn them into podcasts.

DRE: Mm-hmm.

AUSTIN: The fucking villain of our second season was a machine that wanted everything everyone did to be productive and profitable. It is okay to not find a unique, niche product or presentation for your ideas. It is okay for those ideas to be things that you have as friends. I have no idea how long Friends at the Table will last. I couldn't imagine. Like, I want it to be a thing that's in my life for decades. There's a moment during- during the kind of business-paperwork side of this where we had to figure out, like, how long it would take before someone who is part of Friends at the Table could legally sell their stock in Friends at the Table, and Art was like, "Well, how long do you want to be doing this?" And I was like, well fuck. Like... A long ass time. [ALI laughs] Like, in a way that I don't think that's true for a lot of other things in my life. Like, it's hard for me to commit to things often, and this is something I want to commit to for a long time. But, my guess is, there will come a day when Friends at the Table wraps. It might be 30 years from now. I don't fucking know. But things end. I don't think playing games with my friends will, until I am fucking dead and in the ground. And like, that part of it is something that we should recognize as being valuable *in and of itself*, before a market is involved, separate from any sort of market. In fact, uniquely... qualified as something that is- that is- doesn't need to think about what is good for a market.

ALI: Yes.

AUSTIN: We have to do that now to some degree, not as much as we thought we might have to do because you're supporting us to be experimental and figure out what we wanna do, but like, you know. You as players at home, when you go over to your friend's house, when Todd shows up with pizza, when Jessica is there and she's like, "I know all the rules to this game," like, that is a special thing for y'all, and take serious thought before you decide, "What we wanna do is care about whether or not other people are enjoying it by listening." Like. If you wanna do it, cool, because it's fun, and good, and I like doing it a whole bunch. But also, like, it's okay for a thing that's yours to just be yours.

[02:15:10]

ALI: Yeah. Friends at the Table wouldn't be what it was if we hadn't spent the first year being like, "Let's not make any decisions that we do-

AUSTIN: Yup!

ALI: -based off of growing an audience."

AUSTIN: One *hundred* percent. For real. All right. I think that's gonna do it. Thank you so much for writing in, everybody. As always, you can send your questions to tipsatthetable@gmail.com and you can- if you're watching this or listening to this now, you already know this, but go to friendsatthetable.cash to support us on Patreon. Um... New episode on Thursday... Any other announcements? Any other big things that we have to talk about?

ALI: Um...

AUSTIN: That's kind of it.

ALI: Oh! Oh oh oh oh okay. So tomorrow- not tomorrow, because it's midnight right now. On Thursday-

AUSTIN: Ay!

ALI: -the [laughs] the Marielda zine [rhyming with fine] is starting its [crosstalk] like, funding campaign?

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Zine? [rhyming with teen] Zine? [rhyming with fine] Zine? [rhyming with teen]

ALI: Um... Zine [teen]. Zine. [fine] I say zine [fine] 'cause I'm an ass, but it's supposed to be zine [teen].

[DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: Okay.

KEITH: I say zine [teen] 'cause it's like magazine.

ALI: Right. No, I know it's supposed to be like that, but I re- I just like to say zine [fine]. Um.

KEITH: That's fine.

AUSTIN: Zine [fine] is a good Counter/WEIGHT name.

ALI: Yeah...

AUSTIN: I kind of like zine [fine]. Anyway.

ALI: Um. But yeah, so like... keep an eye on that. It's gonna be dope. We don't have a ton of involvement with it, we're actually not-

AUSTIN: What is there- is there a website? Is there a website that people can go to for...?

ALI: You can go... to... maridelazine [fine] on Twitter. And then their Twitter links to... marieldazine.tumblr.com?

AUSTIN: Ay!

ALI: But yeah, check it out. I think they're going to start, like, doing the fundraising part of it, and um, I wanna say specifically that we're like, not making any money off of it, 'cause all of the-

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: -the proceeds for it go to... the Homeless- Avenues for Homeless Youth?

AUSTIN: Yup.

ALI: Which is a-

AUSTIN: A Minnesota charity that provides emergency shelter, short term housing, and supportive services for homeless youth, and a safe and nurturing environment.

ALI: Yes.

AUSTIN: So. Check that out. Again, that's marieldazine [teen] or marieldazine [fine] on Twitter [DRE laughs] and marieldazine [teen] or marieldazine [fine] .tumblr.com. Do not type the 'or'. It

is one spelling or the other- or. Mmm. It's the same spelling, it's one pronunciation or the other. Uh, there is another thing. There's something that just went out in mail, right, Ali?

ALI: Yeah! The postcards were mailed yesterday. I um...

AUSTIN: *Hell yeah*. Postcards on their way.

ALI: Yes, they're on their way. I have... labored over these things. [laughter] I spent all of yesterday, like, watching the doorbell camera that I have to make sure that they were A) safe before the post office lady picked them up, and B) that she didn't look confused by them and she actually took them, and she didn't. She apparently isn't used to mail-

AUSTIN: Uh huh.

ALI: -in a way that I am not, which is good. [laughter] So...

KEITH: [crosstalk] Can I say how good it is?

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Is she gonna open up the mail, bunch of- [end crosstalk] "Whoa! What is *thi-is?*"

KEITH: "I never expected there for-

ALI: So many of them! There's like-

KEITH: -for there to be something that I have to mail!" [more laughter]

ALI: There's like-

AUSTIN: "I deliver the mail! I don't pick up the mail!"

ALI: There was like, 155 of those, which is [crosstalk] an insane amount, depending that- Yeah.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Yo. Shout out to the people that- [end crosstalk] who give us money for cool postcards!

ALI: [crosstalk] Um, if you're hearing this- yeah. Oh.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] The postcard is [end crosstalk] is so good! I'm gonna interrupt you-

ALI: Yes. Yes.

AUSTIN: -because Janine Hawkins did incredible work on this fucking first postcard design.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: It is the first entry in a little bit of a story that Jack and I have cobbled together. It's gonna be cool. So. So look forward to those. [crosstalk] Ali, you were gonna say something else.

ALI: [crosstalk] It's so good. I'm so excited for this. [end crosstalk] I was gonna say, when you get it, um, send a picture to me and Janine-

AUSTIN: Word.

ALI: Tell Janine how much you like it, 'cause it's *amazing*.

AUSTIN: It's so good!

ALI: Second thing, if you're listening to this and you're like, "I didn't get a postcard. I want a postcard." The postcards are at a level 25 and above, if you don't know that, or if you're listening to this Tips at the Table right now and you're like, "This is really interesting, but it sounded like Austin was laughing about a thing, and I, like, don't know what that is. Or what was that vampires thing Keith was talking about?" If you donate \$15 and above, you can watch this live! So...

AUSTIN: True.

ALI: If you're like, doing \$5 and maybe just got a raise at work, and you like us, you can bump up to \$15 and...

AUSTIN: And as a reminder, if you're a millionaire, \$15 an hour. [laughter] [crosstalk] Fucking get on it.

KEITH: [crosstalk] Yeah. Yeah. [end crosstalk] I said this- I did a stream with Art on the Run Button channel, I talked about this same thing. All these millionaires listen to my shows, these fucking misers, donating at the regular levels. No. Irregular levels only for millionaires! Go above what we have listed, please. Thank you. [DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: Or, if you're like a super millionaire, just be like "Yo, here—

KEITH: A billionaire. They're called billionaires.

AUSTIN: -I wanna buy Counter/WEIGHT and turn it [voice softens] into an anime."

ALI: Yo, hit me up. But especially if you're the producer who made Gundam 083. Double-o eighty-three.

AUSTIN: True.

ALI: 'Cause you're gonna be the key animator on that, thank you. [laughter] Also if you're-

AUSTIN: Zine [teen] or zine [fine] is a dope name. Yes. Good.

ALI: [laughs] Also if you're listening to this and you really are only scraping together the \$5 a month, thank you from the bottom of our hearts. [crosstalk] 'Cause like, we absolutely-

DRE: [crosstalk] Seriously.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] *For real.*

KEITH: [crosstalk] Absolutely.

ALI: Like, the millionaires out there, please give us a million dollars. [crosstalk] For everyone who can't, like-

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] But also.

ALI: -it is, it is, like- The money that we have so far is, like, legitimately life-changing?

DRE: Yes.

ALI: [crosstalk] And I don't want to downplay that by, like, asking for more.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] It is meaningful in a way that is [end crosstalk] like, hard to even put into words.

ALI: Yes.

AUSTIN: So, shoutouts to you for supporting us. It, like- I've said it again and again, there's this really good Scott Benson post on Twitter that just says like, "Make art, make rent, help others do the same." And like, y'all are on it right now. Let me tell you.

[02:20:38]