

Tips at the Table 39: Hobby Burnout (September 2020)

Transcriber: MynarLenahan

[**Transcriber Note:** The patreon post mentions **a discussion of suicide as a game mechanic**, which occurs between [00:13:38] to [00:14:52] (Pages 10 to 11), and [01:04:02] to [01:04:49] (Page 37 to 38). The relevant text is colored [blue](#).]

[Secondly, **a question that touches on day-to-day life within the COVID pandemic** occurs between pages 21 to 30 (Timestamp [00:33:38] to [00:53:19]), and pages 32 to 33 (Timestamp [00:55:51] to [00:57:54]). The relevant text is colored [green](#).]

[A **Transcriber Note** will open and close all of the above mentioned sections and timestamps will be included in the below text. You can also consult the **Document Outline** to navigate between each timestamp.]

[00:00:00]

[**JANINE** laughs]

AUSTIN: It's fine, it's fine... It's fine.

ALI: [Supportive] It's okay.

AUSTIN: It's gonna be fine. Right?

ALI: Uh-huh.

AUSTIN: I hope. Excellent condition. Let's see if... Listen, we gotta- Last time we didn't even get through a stream, so we'll just- let's just hope [**ALI** laughs] that it holds out this time, y'know? Um, at all. So... Um, let me make this big... Okay.

Welcome to Tips At The Table, an RPG podcast focused on critical questions, hopefully smart answers, and fun interactions between good friends. I am your host, Austin Walker. Joining me today, Ali Acampora...

ALI: Um, hi! You can find me over @ali_west on Twitter and find the show over @friends_table.

AUSTIN: Janine Hawkins...

JANINE: I'm @bleatingheart on Twitter.

AUSTIN: And Art Martinez-Tebbel.

ART: Hey, you can find me on Twitter @atebbel and if you want to see any of our merch go to Fangamer or, apparently, Redbubble. Apparently, people are just [**AUSTIN & ALI** laugh] taking it-

JANINE: Do not go there. Don't do that.

AUSTIN: No, please don't do that. Please. And if you're a robot, please don't steal our stuff.

ALI: Yeah, c'mon, robot...

JANINE: Honestly, Fangamer puts in work to make those designs a reality and.. urg... it's a bummer.

AUSTIN: It's true. It's true.

ALI: Yeah...

AUSTIN: Um...

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I understand you want- you want more... more of them and, us too, but just go make the request on Fangamer, if that's the way... that it works.

ALI: I think it was just a bot that was doing that, so...

AUSTIN: That makes sense. That's what I said-

JANINE & ALI: Yeah..

AUSTIN: -I'm mad at the robots.

ART: Yeah. Robots, be cool.

AUSTIN: I thought robots were cool-

ALI: Yeah, c'mon.

AUSTIN: -but it seems like robots seem not to be cool. [**ALI** laughs]

ART: We do great work for the robot community.

ALI: I know!

AUSTIN: Art, don't say things like that. Don't- Listen... [**ALI** laughs] Let them tell us how we're doing, alright? We should not get out there and say what we do for the robots... [**AUSTIN** chuckles] I think that's a bad look...

JANINE: Remember when people discovered that if you tweeted "I'd love to see this on a t-shirt!" there was-

AUSTIN: Yeah...

JANINE: -a bot that would find it and put it on a t-shirt. [**JANINE** chuckles]

AUSTIN: I did, yeah...

ALI: Yeah...

AUSTIN: Maybe that's what happens-

JANINE: Spammed it with a bunch of garbage.

AUSIN: Maybe someone did that and we're paying for it...

JANINE: You can't respond to an actual t-shirt with that.

AUSTIN: Sure, you can. [**JANINE** laughs] Why not?

JANINE: That's fucked up.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I know. Well, you can do anything on the internet. That's what makes it... fucked up.

JANINE: Damn...

ART: You wouldn't download a t-shirt...

[**AUSTIN** laughs]

AUSTIN: Um... Ah, alright. Let's get into it, today. Um, hopefully won't be too too long of one, because who knows if my internet will hold out. And also because it's been a long year and we're all very tired. You can tell it's been a long year because it's [Tips At The Table \(September, 2020\)](#). We made it to fall. We're gonna make it.

[**ALI** chuckles]

We're making it to winter. We're making it there! Listen: October, November, and-

ALI: We are.

AUSTIN: - then we're here. That's it. We only have two more catch-up ones and then we're at December, so...

ART: That's only if we do them this month though, and this month half over.

AUSTIN: I can do three of these right now-

ALI: I believe in us.

AUSTIN: -Let's fucking go.

JANINE: This month half over, indeed.

AUSTIN: This month half over.

ALI: We've the power...

ART: This month. Half over. [**ART** chuckles]

AUSTIN: This month half over.

[**AUSTIN, JANINE, & ALI** laugh]

JANINE: This month. Question mark. Half over. Period.

[00:02:41] - Question 1

AUSTIN: Alex writes in, and says,

"I'm currently running a game for my nephew (aged eleven) and my brother/his dad (aged forty-one) and I'm having trouble coming up with scenarios/encounters that keep both of them engaged and entertained. My nephew seems to just wanna fight monsters and learn new spells, and my brother is more interested in roleplaying and the problem-solving side of things."

AUSTIN: This is... this is... I feel like there's an easy answer to this that, Janine, you raised off mic, but I get how you get here.

JANINE: I have a second easy answer also. [**ALI** chuckles]

AUSTIN: Okay, well do you wanna say your first easy answer?

JANINE: My first easy answer is like, I mean... To phrase it kindly is like, maybe find out how cool the dad... the forty-one-year-old dad is willing to be here if you're both doing this thing for his son. So his son has fun?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: Like, a lotta dads will kinda just go with it. [**AUSTIN** chuckles] And if this dad does not wanna just go with it... I mean... Look, it kinda sucks. Um, but... [**JANINE** chuckles]

AUSTIN: Yeah-

JANINE: -it's a conversation worth having.

AUSTIN: -start there. Right?

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Like, start at, like... [**AUSTIN** struggles to find the words] ...I don't know the dad's name. Y'know... Bill. "Bill, can we just..." [**ART** scoffs]

"I know you love saying forsooth. I get it. I get that you wanna RP right now. But... [**AUSTIN** chuckles] but... your kid's eleven and, like, we have to play at the eleven-year-old's level at least a little. We could like, y'know, we could play at a higher grade level so-to-speak than, than maybe... than maybe at just, like, kicking down doors and killing monsters. Um, but we gotta- we

have to, like, talk about things at that... in that framework just to make sure that the eleven-year-old is having a good time. [**AUSTIN** chuckles] Please."

ART: Yeah, there's a-

JANINE: My-

ART: -there's an extent to which this feels like going into, like, a middle-school textbook and being like, "I know all this shit."

[**AUSTIN, ALI, & JANINE** laugh]

AUSTIN: Maybe, and I think to stay on this answer before Janine gives her second answer... Um, y'know, maybe for the dad, you could talk about it being a little bit, like, lighter. Like, "Oh, y'know, you could treat this a little like a board game. We can treat this a little bit like, y'know, just like a fun time and not being the thing we're gonna scratch all the old roleplaying itches that we would normally get. And maybe one day the kid will be old enough to where that can be the thing, y'know?"

Um, but being, I think, y'know, kind of... leading in the direction of what the eleven-year-old is capable of and enjoys is going to make that table much more enjoyable in the long run than being like, "Alright, now you shut up while your dad and I do a deep RP about the politics of this town..."

[**ART, ALI, & JANINE** laugh]

AUSTIN: "We got some trade unions to talk about, Kid."

[**ALL** chuckle]

JANINE: So my other answer here is, like, sorta half-jokingly: Spell-based problem-solving. Um, but like, a thing that's fun is if the thing you like to do is learn now spells then seeing cool ways to apply the spell you just learned-

AUSTIN: Mmmmm... Totally.

JANINE: -is fun and kind of leans into the problem-solving thing. I mean, you can also kind of- if the thing the nephew wants to do is fight monsters, y'know, you can have a step before that that is like, "Okay, well, you-

AUSTIN: You get to the monsters. Yeah.

JANINE: "-you could fight this one monster, but this one monster actually wants your help and if you help him then there's this big fight and you get to fight with him. And then like he's got this thing for you and, like..." Y'know, I think it's a thing of, like, recognising... y'know.

[**JANINE** sighs]

JANINE: I think kids often have simpler wants in terms of story. Um, and if you can recognise those and then put, y'know, one thing for the older audience between them that's like a little bit light that, like, is light enough you can very clearly see the other part of it on the other side.

AUSTIN: Mmm-hmm.

JANINE: I think that could be a helpful motivator. Um-

AUSTIN: And also-

JANINE: -a carrot and the stick kind of situation.

AUSTIN: -yeah, and also, this is also just like... This is every table, in some way, right?

JANINE: Oh, yeah.

AUSTIN: Not that there is an eleven-year-old and a forty-one-year-old at every table-

ART: Well...

AUSTIN: -but players have different priorities. [**ALI** chuckles] Players have different priorities, interests, and styles, and, like, managing that when someone is eleven and forty-one is maybe, uh, y'know, a little bit more... intense?

Um, but that is a skill you have to develop and recognise, um... And yeah, I think linking those two things together, y'know. Problem-solving on the way to learning new spells. Learning a spell you don't know what it does and then... and then, the dad has to help, y'know, figure out- help the kid figure out who first crafted the spell...

[**ALI** makes a noise]

...and there can be a problem-solving thing there. And at the end you get a cool spell, y'know? So. Ali, did you have something there too? I felt like I heard you start to speak.

ALI: No, that's my phone. Sorry... [**ALI** laughs]

AUSTIN: No worries. [**AUSTIN** laughs] Any other thoughts about this- this situation? ...It's a great premise. I wanna listen to this podcast.

[**ALI** chuckles]

AUSTIN: But you shouldn't do that because the eleven-year-old can't really consent to being content in that way-

JANINE: Yeah...

AUSTIN: -so don't do it. But if you're an eleven-year-old who's in this... [**ALI** chuckles] ...start taking notes so you can turn it into a comedy routine the second you're eighteen. That stand-up would kill. I can't wait to hear about your mean dad.

[ALI, ART, & JANINE laugh]

JANINE: We don't- we don't know that he's mean.

AUSTIN: No... I'm pretty sure he's mean.

JANINE: [Uncertainly] Hmm...

ALI: Hmm.

JANINE: ...Probably fine.

AUSTIN: He's probably fine.

JANINE: Just having fun with their uncle.

ALI: If they're... [ALI laughs]

JANINE: Or their aunt. We don't really know.

ALI: ...There's one thought I had about this which I feel like is kind of an extension to the suggestion that you had, which is, like, just blending the way that the encounters work so, like, both needs get met. Um, but, like, my initial thought is thinking of this as, like, [ALI chuckles] Destiny classes, which is... is very... like, that's a little easier to map out 'cause there's only three of them.

AUSTIN: Hmm.

ALI: So it's, like, easy to think of, like, "Oh this is the person who's going to fight for the party. And this is the person who's going to, like, talk for the party." And, like, it might end up being awkward that those things feel so separate. But if they're, like, leading to the same path it'll still be something that feels, like, connected and combined.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: And they'll both feel equally engaged. Um...

AUSTIN: Yeah. It's, like, tough, 'cause I think at the end of the day... At a table in which one person is more interested in combat and one person is more interested in problem-solving and roleplaying... Um. What you want from both of them is to be empathetic when the spotlight is on the other activity that the other person is interested in. And that's just, like... again, that's every table.

But with the eleven-year-old and forty-one-year-old thing, it's a little bit harder to ask that empathy from the eleven-year-old. Not that children aren't smart enough to be empathetic, but you're also eleven and your perspective on everything including just time is so different...

[ALI chuckles]

The, like, "I can't do anything 'cause my dad is trying to solve this puzzle." Like, it must feel like an eternity in comparison to the forty-one-year-old, who's like stuck in the fight that- that, y'know, he thinks is kind of boring. Y'know? I don't know...

JANINE: You could always do stuff where, like, you kind of have the thing of like "Oh, someone has to hold the door open," or "Someone has to fend off the-"

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: "-the bandits while the other person is rolling for, y'know, persuasion or what not with someone else."

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: And have that, sort of... I feel like you can't overdo that. Like, if that becomes the routine, that gets old fast, but... um...

AUSTIN: Yeah. I hope it works out-

JANINE: Mmm-hmm.

AUSTIN: -and you find a good balance, because, y'know, I definitely hear stories about people playing, y'know, tabletop roleplaying games with their parents and older family members and stuff. It does happen, so it's not like it's unheard of. Um. Uh, one note is that none of us have eleven-year-olds, so I think we can't really speak from experience in that way. So..

ART: Hmm.

JANINE: And also a lot of us were weird eleven-year-olds.

AUSTIN: Yeah...

JANINE: So it's hard to use that even as a, like, a benchmark.

ALI: Uh-huh...

AUSTIN: Why don't you just simply take this kid to a poetry reading? What's the problem?

[**AUSTIN & ALI** laugh]

JANINE: Have you tried using more, uh, mythological figures-

AUSTIN: [Laughs] Right!

JANINE: -uh, from Hellenistic times... [Laughs]

AUSTIN: Mmm-hmm... Although actually that's actually not a bad idea, is like, what is this kid into outside of the realm of tabletop RPGs?

JANINE: Oh, yeah.

AUSTIN: Because it might be the case- it might not be the case that the eleven-year-old is not interested in roleplaying and problem-solving; you might just might not have found the vector by which they will get excited by those things. And so, like... Hey, if what they need is Pokemon or Destiny, maybe figure out a way to build in some monster-raising.

ALI: Yeah...

AUSTIN: Or some... engrams. I don't know. Destiny stuff.

ART: This is a great segue if it's intentional.

AUSTIN: Oh, is it? To the next question?

ART: Yeah. [Chuckles]

AUSTIN: Oh, well I don't know what the next question is. Let's find out...

[00:11:15] - Question 2

AUSTIN: Oh. Wow. Yeah. Noah writes in and says,

"I've been dying to try Apocalypse World..."

[**AUSTIN** chuckles]

"...but most of my friends aren't interested in a post-apocalyptic setting - they prefer sci-fi or fantasy - for their role playing games. How can I get my friends to join me in exploring the wastelands?"

AUSTIN: [Prompting] **Art**, **why do** you think this is a good segue?

ART: Oh, 'cause it's a similar question, right? You just have to find the things that interest them and sort of, like, use it as a bridge to your... your apocalypse setting.

AUSTIN: Yeah. So, like, if you've-

JANINE: I mean, this thing is called Hieron, right? Like...

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: The fantasy version of it, for sure.

JANINE: Apocalyptic fantasy.

AUSTIN: Yeah, you can do that. You can totally do that and play in that space, for sure. And... that can be really fun. I think actually playing a fantasy game straight up with Apocalypse World could be a blast. Um, minus the car stuff, because presumably you don't have fantasy cars. Or maybe you have fantasy cars. That happens sometimes.

JANINE: Uhh... enchanted construct horse.

AUSTIN: There you go.

ALI: Ooh...

AUSTIN: Enchanted construct horse. Um... yeah I definitely think that's my tip on this one. Is... find that overlap. Like, Destiny is already post-apocalyptic sci-fi in many ways, right? Like, that is a world in which you're going out into the ruins to see, like, what happened here in the past and who else is picking through these ruins and trying to get all this old tech and stuff like that. And I bet that would let you scratch the mechanical itch of wanting to do Apocalypse World, but bring your friends in a little bit on... y'know, setting stuff. Um...

The other half of this is, like... an alternative here for me when I've been in this situation is- And I've already used the treat-it-like-a-board-game thing, but, like... Just set up a one-shot. Just play, y'know, like a very short campaign. Say, like, "Hey, I really wanna run a couple sessions of this." Um, and don't ask anyone to come in with expectations of needing to play this for a year, y'know?

Um, and that way you could maybe scratch the itch a little bit. See if you even really, y'know- how you feel about the game. And not feel like you're burdening someone who does not necessarily like it. Um, and who knows? Maybe you have a good enough time that things roll on and people want to keep revisiting those characters, y'know, in the future. Um, but also don't go into it expecting that, necessarily. Um, but you know, I think that's an option.

Has this ever happened to someone else in terms of just, like, here is a game that I really want to play, but, like, getting a group together for it for the setting is a tough ask?

[00:13:38]

[**Transcriber Note:** The discussion of a **game mechanic that involves suicide** begins here. It doesn't get too detailed, but jump to [00:14:52], the next [Transcriber Note on page 11](#), or skip the [blue](#) text to avoid it.]

ART: Oh, for sure. Even with apocalyptic settings.

AUSTIN: Yeah... Is there something-

ART: That, like, super edgy Burning Wheel setting-

AUSTIN: Oh, yes. Yes yes yes yes yes.

ART: -that, like, now I find embarrassing...

AUSTIN: It's almost like a Dune... the one that was almost like Dune? That one? Or a different one?

ART: Oh... What was it called? It was like... It was the one where, like, it was really about suicide?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Uh-huh. Sure.

ART: And now, as an adult, I'm like, "Well, gee..."

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

ART: Um, but like as a younger person I was like, "This is- this is awesome." [**AUSTIN** chuckles]
But no-one would like to play that.

AUSTIN: Under A Serpent Sun was the name of that.

ART: That's it.

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Not the Dune one. Um... I don't even remember that game, but yes. Even I was like, "Ahhh... I don't know..." I would've been up for it if we had gotten a really good group together, but this was college and we were... No one was ready to play that game. No one was like, "I'm out here for this."

ART: No, it would have been terrible. I was wrong, they were right.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Uh-huh.

[**ALI** laughs]

ART: Like, there's cool mechanics in the game. But it wasn't enough.

AUSTIN: Yeah...

ART: Like, I was drawn into the shiny and didn't see the crust, y'know?

AUSTIN: Sure, sure.

ART: That's what people say, right?

AUSTIN: Uh-huh...

[00:14:52]

[**Transcriber Note:** The discussion of suicide as a game mechanic ends here.]

[**ALI** laughs]

AUSTIN: Hmm. Anyone else?

[00:15:00]

ALI: No, I mean, I feel like we kind of hit it. The thing I was thinking of when I read this question, I... I didn't want to be too dismissive. But, like, what's the, like... what's the, like, real structural difference between, like, Apocalypse World and Dungeon World, right? Where, like, games that would be, like, a hack of Apocalypse World, so you can, like, scratch the itch of, like, basically playing a game, but, like, making these other compromises.

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm. I do think that there's some stuff there that's functionally different that if... We haven't run Apocalypse World, but I do think you would find Apocalypse World- Here's a question: Do you feel like there's a difference between The Sprawl and Dungeon World, mechanically?

ALI: I mean, yeah. For sure. But, like...

AUSTIN: And I could imagine that- Like, the difference for me, like- I think the difference between something that has, like, HP and something that... doesn't, is like a big leap.

ALI: Oh, sure sure sure. Yeah, yeah...

AUSTIN: Right? Or, like, especially Apocalypse World Second Edition has a bunch of stuff around, like, having a settlement and running a settlement, mechanically. To the degree that I almost hacked that stuff into the final season of Hieron.

[ALI chuckles]

AUSTIN: Um, but then decided to keep it a lot looser because... it felt like there weren't enough player characters interested in that stuff, necessarily. Um, and because it felt like I didn't want to leave up to the systems where the camera was going to go, because we were so late in that story that the whole season was sort of a finale in some ways, in terms of like, "Alright, we have to get this shit on screen." Um, but if what you want is, like, a game about a place that's under threat from different directions... The most recent edition of Apocalypse World has stuff that's like really tuned for that.

But to that end, yes, you could totally hack that stuff in. Or like we said before, run that, but run it like a fantasy game. Run that, but run it as a sci-fi game. So much of that stuff is flavour, in many ways, y'know.

ALI: Yeah, for sure.

[00:17:02] - Question 3

AUSTIN: Um... Alright. Next one, comes in from Sim:

"I've been having trouble roleplaying my characters faithfully as a player.

Every character I've ever played (for example: a weird librarian in Fate, a kenku hermit in 5th edition) have been timid and risk-averse because I project my fear of consequences into my characters. This isn't inherently bad and, until recently, I could comfortably play into it, adding nervous ticks and my stutter for popular effect.

I started a Beam Saber game recently with a Beaurocrat that I'm very much excited for, but quickly realised that while I intended to play her as assertive and gruff at times, I came off as timid and flustered from the start... and not just because the guard was mean and hot. And that this character is just me again.

This is very disappointing to me given that I've been spending the last months trying to mentally prepare to break this cycle and doing a good job of it in a play-by-post game of Scum & Villainy with a morally-driven and conflicted Pilot. Is this a noobie roleplaying/improv thing? What do you do to play your characters faithfully?"

AUSTIN: Open to the table.

JANINE: Can I just say, like, right out of the gate here... like... you are always going to be you to an extent and you should probably forgive yourself for that a little bit. Um, and like, I'm saying this as someone who... I always try and do something- y'know, every character I make is defined by my previous characters and my desire to play differently. And sometimes I succeed at that and sometimes I don't.

I think in a broad sense I usually succeed, but in the minute-to-minute interactions it often feels like I don't, because my knee-jerk reaction is often just *my* knee jerk reaction. Which is why I do a lot of... I'll say a thing and then I'll be like, "Thisbe doesn't say that."

AUSTIN: Mmm-hmm.

[**AUSTIN & ALI** chuckle]

JANINE: Or "Signet wouldn't say that." Y'know, stuff like that. Um. And a lot of the time some of that stuff does just get wrapped into what those characters actually say, because we have to keep moving and those moment-to-moment things... don't matter as much? [Laughs]

AUSTIN: Mmm-hmm.

JANINE: Um, y'know, like those big character moments it is worth taking the time to really find the character in them... but for a lot of the... just, like, turn-by-turn stuff it's not really worth beating yourself up about playing a character if, y'know, you're getting the big picture. Or if you're getting those broad-strokes. Um, so I think like... y'know. If you're not a professional actor or, y'know, improv comedian or whatever, those things are not gonna come naturally to you and you shouldn't expect that even after playing a bunch of characters you're just gonna be good at it all of a sudden.

Like, y'know, I... I am not an actor. I am not an... y'know... Um, I don't have a lot of experience with improv or anything like that. Those things are just true of me. I will get better over time at them, but at the end of the day, my reactions are gonna be my reactions, and they're gonna work their way in. And that's okay.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally. Um. Ali and Art, I'm curious as people who have both played some pretty assertive characters in the past how you think... Um, but also are not necessarily, like- you're not strong-arms, y'know? You're not- [**AUSTIN** laughs] I've hung out with both of you...

[**ALI** laughs]

AUSTIN: ...you're not, like, y'know, intimidating your way into places in real life. How do you draw on something there, um, to embody that when you do?

ART: [To **ALI**] Do you wanna go or should I?

ALI: I'm fine either way. I can go.

ART: Um. Go for it.

ALI: Okay- [Laughs] The thing with this question is, like, I... Even when I'm playing characters who are, like, very different from how I would act or react to things, I feel like I pull the same punches. Or, like- No. I said that the right way. [Laughs]

There's still, like- There's still things I don't like to do. Like... I don't know. Hella and Broun both save people more often than they probably would despite their attitudes and things like that. Um, so like I don't think there's like a huge difference in... um, being able to play someone who's assertive while... while not- sorry, while not being that way. [Laughs]

But I do think that there's, like... You can give yourself time throughout the campaign to, like, get better at that as that goes on. Um, y'know, from the question sort of sounding like you're feeling like you've started out on the wrong foot here. Like, that character will still continue to have interactions with other people and, like, at a table with your friends, I don't think anybody will be like, "Well, the last NPC you spoke to you were very nice to and now you're trying to be mean. What's that about?" Also, there's just such a huge difference between improv and play-by-post-

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: -to begin with that I wouldn't-

JANINE: Mmm-hmm.

ALI: -like, compare those performances at all, because, like... With play-by-post, you have the time to, like, sit down and think about it and do another draft. Whereas, like, playing in a tabletop game is definitely just like, what comes to mind first. Um, so... It's tough.

[**ALI** chuckles]

ALI: The other thing that I do while playing mean people is thinking about mean people that I know in my life. [**JANINE** laughs] Or reactions that I wish that I had had, and, like...

AUSTIN: [Big sigh] Oh yeah... [**ALI & JANINE** laugh] Let me tell you about Crysanth Kesh... Uh...

ALI: Uh-huh.

AUSTIN: Yeah...

ALI: Um, yeah. So, like, pulling on those, like, alternate versions of myself is usually how I get there. But, like, y'know... To play people who, y'know, form bonds with people and have people who they have in their lives that they care about, so I feel like I meet in the middle there. But, like, yeah. Practice makes perfect.

AUSTIN: Totally. Um, my other two things here are... One: It can be really useful to find... if this is something you're committed to despite the answers that Ali and Janine just gave... Um, it can be really useful to find an excuse to practice taking on risks and losing or taking on consequences that are hard for characters. That means playing one-shots [laughs] where you go into it thinking, "I'm gonna get this character killed."

[**AUSTIN & ALI** laugh]

AUSTIN: And it also means potentially GMing, where you end up being able to disclaim the outcomes, because it's good for the table when the assertive shithead you voice gets what's coming to them. [Laughs]

JANINE: Or, hell, do your renegade run of Mass Effect or something, like...

AUSTIN: Totally. Exactly.

ALI: Oh, yeah yeah yeah.

AUSTIN: Totally. Um, that playing into that a little bit. But the specific thing that I want to zero in on is this sense of consequence, because the core of what Sim is saying is about being risk-averse and being timid because of fear of consequences and, I think practicing consequences is the difficult, but real step towards learning how to do this.

Because you can't fake... You can fake- You could raise your voice, but that's not gonna help you not be afraid that your character raising your voice is gonna make you have a bad time in an hour when they're hurt and they've gotten the party into trouble and you're worried about how did you make everyone else at the table have a bad time or something. Do you know what I mean? Um.

And so I really think that to some degree the thing to practice is not how to emote at being more assertive. It is to get a different- It is to work on being able to have different relationships towards consequences in a tabletop setting. And that does take work and time and, y'know, certain people are just not going to have certain types of relationships.

But I suspect most people can have a range of them, including some that they prefer to be in in some modes and sometimes in other modes are fine for, like, a one-shot, again. Or for like, "Hey, I wanna play this one character where I'm going to, y'know... play them like they're a stolen car, right?" And being able to bounce between those things is, um... something that takes practice, for sure.

JANINE: Can I actually just add on to that...

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

JANINE: 'Cause that's, y'know, that's the thing with Thisbe, right? Is that, like, I played several characters very cautiously and we were going back to a system that, one: Revels in its consequences, and two: That I hadn't had a lotta fun with before. Playing cautiously. Um, so I said, y'know... "I set out with Thisbe to just play the hell out of the system and that involves

taking a lot of risks and doing a lot of stuff, like, that other characters I've played as absolutely would not do. Like, basically, throwing... Thisbe throwing her entire self at a problem-

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

JANINE: -until one of the two things breaks. Um, and a big part of why I've been able to do that is that I trust you as a GM, Austin, to... if something, y'know, if something is really going to break bad, that's going to be a conversation. Usually.

AUSTIN: Right, right.

JANINE: Y'know, consequences are things that we have authorship over as players to an extent, especially when it comes to our characters and I think that helps. Having that relationship with your GM makes it way way easier to swing hard and swing big, because you know that, like, even if something goes wrong you'll be able to make something interesting out of it. Having that conversation.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Also, Beam Saber is a great fit for that.

JANINE: Yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: Because of being able to resist consequences. Literally. Right?

JANINE: Yes.

AUSTIN: Being able to say, "No no no no no." Like, "Hey, you're not only-" Y'know, it's one thing to even... You can have the conversation with your GM about it, but then also, even if the GM insists on a really hard outcome, you can resist that outcome. So long as you have the stress for it, right? And even if you don't have the stress for it, you can resist it. You just... You take a scar. Um, and so in terms of choosing, like, a space to start trying that out in Beam Saber is a pretty good fit.

Art, I don't know if you had something to go through.

JANINE: And I think, like-

AUSTIN: Oop, go ahead.

JANINE: Can I just say really quickly, um...

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: Like, have that conversation with the GM not even necessarily at the table. Like, if there is-

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

JANINE: -if there is a thing you're specifically... If there is a concern you specifically have about, like, I... If you have a specific, y'know, an X-card kind of issue of a thing you-

AUSTIN: Yes. Yes. That's...

JANINE: -above all else do not want to have happen to your character, have that conversation. Y'know, there's a lot of things that can happen that don't have to be that.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I was saying, basically, the- When I said Beam Saber is a good fit for this, what I was trying to intend, was like-

JANINE: Oh yeah, yeah. No, I know.

AUSTIN: -on top of normal safety tools that should be at every game et cetera... Um, anyway... Art: Whose Hadrian has been equally, or had been equally assertive and meek throughout, y'know, that campaign...

ART: Mm-hmm.

[**JANINE** chuckles]

AUSTIN: ...I'm curious what you think about this.

ART: I think that is it? Right? Like... You have to- I don't mean to sound like some sort of, like, weird guru or something here, like some fake... thing, but like, you have to just let go of the character before you even start. It's like... It's when I feel too attached to a character. It's when I feel like I can't lose a character-

AUSTIN: Mmm-hmm.

ART: That's when I've done... a bad thing.

AUSTIN: Yeah. So with Hadrian, is that something you feel you can almost track in terms of, like, as you got better at letting go...

ART: Yeah, Season Three Hadrian isn't rushing around the goblin camp with no armor on.

[**AUSTIN** chuckles]

AUSTIN: Wait, does that mean that you were more attached or less attached at that point?

ART: Less attached, then, right? Like, by third I'm like, "Well, Hadrian is gonna have to make it through, now."

AUSTIN: Right. I see.

ART: So Hadrian's gotta like...

AUSTIN: Yeah...

ART: ...Be careful in a way that, like, isn't right.

AUSTIN: Right.

ART: And it helps that, like, narratively it all fit, because of the....

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: Mm-hmm.

ART: Yeah. But, like, that's... You have to let go in that way.

AUSTIN: Makes sense.

ART: In terms of, like, acting, it's so... It just, like, occurred to me, I think, like, this week that, like, we're all essentially professional actors at this point.

AUSTIN: Yep. It's weird.

ART: Um... And that, like, maybe that's what I should tell people I do for a living instead of explaining what a podcast is? Um...

[**AUSTIN & JANINE** chuckle]

ART: Like-

JANINE: No, because then they're going to be like, "What have I seen you in?"

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: True.

JANINE: And then you're never getting out of that cab alive.

[**AUSTIN** laughs]

ART: Yeah, that's true. Um, but like I tweeted this week that, like, while doing prep for the new season I'm realizing that I'm going to have to, like, act this year. And how, like...

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

[00:30:00]

ART: ...That's really fucking me up, because I don't... I don't like it. But some people really do. [Chuckles] And, like, if you have this, like, set of ticks that you like to do as a character, because that, like, makes you feel more at home in your performance... like, maybe it's try to figure out how that does something else, too. Y'know?

AUSTIN: Yeah... I think I do. Can you expand on that a little bit?

ART: Like... Let's use a historical, um... We had a friend in college named Matt.

AUSTIN: Yes.

ART: And what Matt liked to do was a Scottish accent for his dwarf character, right?

AUSTIN: Right. Yeah. True. Yeah.

ART: And I wouldn't tell Matt to not do that.

AUSTIN: No...

ART: Even though it was really annoying.

AUSTIN: It was really annoying. But I never... I don't think we ever...

[**ALI** starts laughing]

ART: But, like, that's what he came to do...

AUSTIN: Yeah. [To **ALI**] Not the Matt you know. Different Matt, Ali.

ART: Yeah, not that Matt.

ALI: Oh, sure sure sure.

AUSTIN: That Matt also played a dwarf. Did not do the accent.

ALI: Sure, okay...

ART: Yeah. Uh...

AUSTIN: That Matt did like, just, like, [Gruffly] a gruff guy... "It's me. Dardek Ironforge."

[**ALI** laughs]

AUSTIN: I can't believe I still know his fucking character name... We were boys. Anatose and Dardek went... We fuckin' ruled deep. We were for real. Let me tell you.

ART: [Knowingly] Yeah.

AUSTIN: Can I name other characters from that campaign? [Short pause] No. Fucked up, actually, huh?

[**ALI** and **ART** laugh]

AUSTIN: Fuck. Anyway...

ART: But yeah, you wouldn't tell someone not to come in and do their Scottish accent, so if, like, what you like to do is this, like... y'know, if your nervous tick or your stutter are like what you're... There are assertive people who stutter. Like, you don't have to give up on your thing, just, like, sort of change the point of view a little bit.

AUSTIN: Also, let me tell you, someone at the table might be like, "Urg, I can't believe they're doing this annoying thing..." But let me tell you, fifteen years later, I'm thinking about Matt doing that, uh, that Scottish accent, I feel it makes my heart warm. I'm glad he did that accent. [**ALI** & **JANINE** chuckle] It was right to do that accent. Now I have a feeling in my heart that's nostalgic-

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: -and powerful. Damn!

ART: There were performance choices the people at that table made that I don't like, but I'm not gonna talk about them on the radio fifteen years later...

[**AUSTIN** laughs]

ART: ...Because people deserve to live past their twenties, y'know?

AUSTIN: Agreed, agreed. Cheers to that.

[**ALI & AUSTIN** laugh]

AUSTIN: I talked about the... the White Wolf game very broadly—which you were not in, Art—on Waypoint Radio...

ART: I wasn't in that one, yeah.

AUSTIN: ...but you may have at least caught some of the... aftershocks of that fuckin' thing, right?

ART: I only know of it as "The White Wolf Game". It was not something people liked to talk about.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's right. That's accurate.

[**ALI** laughs]

AUSTIN: Learned a lot of lessons through that game.

ALI: Wow...

AUSTIN: [Exhales] That was not an Austin Walker joint. That was not...

ALI: [Laughing] Okay...

AUSTIN: I was in that game. I was not running that game. I was also not running the game with either of the Matts. Anyway...

ALI: We'll talk after...

AUSTIN: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

[**ALI** laughs]

AUSTIN: I got stories on stories. The shit I remember... Goddamn... Alright, this next question is... a little long. Oh, do you have anything else- does someone else have something else here? Was that a-

ART: Oh, I was just gonna say I did recently have to unfriend the other Matt on Facebook, it was a... One of those.

ALI: Oh...

AUSTIN: Wait, which, which- Scottish Matt or other Matt?

ART: Scottish Matt, yeah.

AUSTIN: Bad politics?

ART: Yeah. Bad politics. And he never learned to spell.

AUSTIN: Okay... Well, we don't have to... Okay. [**AUSTIN** chuckles]

ALI: Wait... I think I know the Matt.

AUSTIN: You know the Matt. You've met that other Matt, for sure.

ART: There's a little red squiggly line, y'know? You can't-

[**ALI** laughs]

AUSTIN: I know. It does show up. It does show up...

ALI: [Laughing] Okay, we're...

AUSTIN: Okay, next question. This one's long. This one's from Byzantium. It's a two-part... It's not a two-part question, it's just a long question. It takes up two slides:

[00:33:38]

[**Transcriber Note:** The **discussion of life during the pandemic** begins here. Jump to [00:53:19], the next [Transcriber Note on page 29](#), or skip the green text to avoid it.]

"In the face of this current pandemic..."

AUSTIN: Also, head's up, this is a question about... That touches on Covid stuff, so just head's up about that. You can jump ahead some amount of minutes. I would say probably fifteen minutes would be safe. That's my guess. We'll see.

"In the face of this current pandemic, my group and I-"

AUSTIN: It's not a dark question, just to be clear. To go back to that content warning really quick: This is not a content warning about, like, death because of Covid, but it is about the contemporary time that we're in.

"In the face of this current pandemic, my group and I have been playing more often. Often times once a week or every two weeks as opposed to the monthly-ish sessions that we used to have and, while that's really great, it also put a lot of strain on me as the

GM to be planning and running sessions much more often than we usually do. This has been really fun, for the most part; it's good to be able to tell a story with more cohesion and continuity, and it's really helped all of us have a set time for socialisation and creativity and has been helping us all to cope with not being able to have in-person hang-outs.

However, it can feel a lot of times like I'm the only one motivated to start anything. I'm often the person starting discussions, the one sharing character inspirations on our discord server to get the ball rolling, the one taking loose ideas from players and shaping them into more playable sessions, and also the one taking on a lot more of the more producer-y aspects of playing tabletop RPGs (finding systems, learning rules, and planning times and dates for sessions) also usually falls to me.

This was true even before the pandemic, but it's wearing at me a little more sharply with the frequency of having to chase everyone down week after week. I've had a lot of conversations with my group about what we all want from these games and we all align on the amount of investment and work we all want to do for the most part, and we have a great time when we are actually playing. As said, it's been a welcome time for socialisation and collaborative creation to all of us and everyone leaves happy and excited to play again, though the verbalised excitement outside of that end-of-session drops off pretty quickly.

We've also actually switched off GMing duties for the last couple of games and have been playing smaller games and more one-shots (taking cues from *Live At The Table* and *Bluff City*), but even then, it can sometimes feel like I'm the one my group tends to look to to be the organisation guy and often the rules guy, just on the merit of being the person who takes the notes and has a head for the books in that way, so I end up kind of gently GMing anyway, even in games that are supposed to be a break for me.

Additionally, I have pretty bad anxiety and depression among other things that can make this whole situation, especially the lack of initiative from players, feel like no-one cares enough about this, besides me, despite explicit confirmation to the contrary. I know rationally that people do care, but are busy and engage with character development and world-building in different ways than I do, but it is often times that I feel like if I stop, no-one else will have enough initiative to start stuff back up again.

I apologize for the lengthy preamble, but my question is basically this:

As a group who plays frequently and maintains stellar storytelling and production quality from week-to-week, do y'all have any advice on how to deal with GM and player burn-out, especially compounded with this current world situation and general mental health stuff?

How do you deal with a lack of investment outside the game or encourage people to participate collaboratively (writing the campaign via character development and world-building, etc.) without feeling like you're assigning/doing homework?

Do you have any tips on generating motivation for players to continue developing the campaign outside of sessions? Have you ever had a situation similar to this that was resolved in a way that wasn't just "Get a new group"?

I know that there's at least some baked-in motivation for you guys on the merit of Friends At The Table being a show that needs to be completed and has a material benefit for all of you (as mercenary as that sounds) in addition to being something you all enjoy doing and are invested in, and that you guys aren't recording with the full cast every single week, but I would still be curious to know if you have any advice on this situation."

AUSTIN: Whew...

ART: Austin, did you write this?

AUSTIN: I didn't-

ART: Is this your, like...

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: -but I-

ART: ...stealth call-out of all of us?

AUSTIN: No... But the thing I- You know it's not, because we do not record every week. [Laughs] Because I wouldn't be able to do this, ah... [Laughs]

ART: [Laughing] It's true...

AUSTIN: Which is, like, my big tip for this is, like... pump the breaks a little bit. Um, I guess I have a lot. I have a lot to say here, but very broadly, one is like, this is not a unique... thing. This is a thing a lot of GMs go through and it's certainly something I go through. Like, I don't- As Art suggested, like... Maybe from the outside looking in the suspicion is that, like, we are all constantly posting things [Laughs] in our discord about, like, directions we want the next session to go in or something like that, but, like, the thing you've described is being a GM in my experience both at Friends At The Table and previous. Um, the fact of, like, needing to organise and needing to be the person who, like, tries to set times, chasing people down, etc.

The great thing is... Ali, as a producer, takes some of that scheduling off of me in a big way. Of, like, managing that stuff and also, obviously, managing a lot of the Patreon scheduling stuff. This session would not be happening if Ali hadn't said, "Hey! Could we do a Tips At The Table tonight?" [ALI laughs] That's an Ali decision.

So that is one big help that we have and that's something you could pursue and offload if you had someone in this group who was maybe like, "Hey-" That you felt would be able to step up and do some of the scheduling stuff. That sounds like it might be helpful.

Um, but I do want to underscore mostly that, like, this is not a... You are not in a situation that you should, like, feel like you're messing something up. Um. I feel like if you're doing this weekly

like this and you have a very high expectation of yourself, in terms of cohesion and storytelling... um... This feels like a pretty organic place to end up.

Um, and I think that you should, in some ways, listen to your own advice in what you say... Y'know, you know that people are busy and engaged with character development and world-building in different ways... And, y'know, being a GM gives you a completely different relationship to the material because you have to consider so many other things and you have to, like, hold so much stuff in your head.

And then also you have to, like... When someone says... I don't know... "Who's the character you just said, GM?" You have to just give them the answer and not be like, "Oh, how do you not know this character? This character is important to the story." Because, they have a different relationship than you do to the story.

Um, so it feels like you're locked on in all of the ways that understand the scenario that you're in. And so for me, my tip at that point is to consider that the relationship you have to the amount of time that you're putting into this and the- or the ways in which... The degree of, um, labor you're putting on your back alone might be something you should change.

Um. However nice it is that you've been able to have this constant weekly session... Y'know, you could have that same group get together every other week to do this and, on the off-weeks, play... Phasmophobia [AUSTIN chuckles] or Jackbox or watch a movie together. And that way you still have the social component, but you can take a little bit of a breather when it comes to doing the work of running a campaign like this.

Um, but yeah. That's like my big picture thing here is definitely like, "This is not an abnormal thing. And if you're running into it, think about changing your relationship to your scheduling around it so you have a little bit more time to breathe..."

Um, before the alternative thing happens, which I've seen happen with other GMs, which is there can become a- You can get a resentment. You can get a bitterness. Because it can feel like you're doing all of the lifting, despite knowing, as you say, rationally, that this is just about different relationships to the content.

Um, and so, catching yourself now, I think, changing your relationship to the games that you're playing and the load of work is super important. And you should not ignore this impulse that something should change.

I don't know if anyone else here has a different relationship as a facilitator, as someone who's run stuff for other people before, etc. Or even just from the player-side of the table.

ART: Um, can I just be, like, really real on this one?

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

ART: Because, like... You don't need to apologise for describing this as mercenary. This is a job-

AUSTIN: Oh, this is a job. We would... this would have fallen apart.

[ALI laughs]

ART: -and we do it for money.

AUSTIN: Yes.

[ALI & JANINE laugh]

ART: ..and if there wasn't any money, we wouldn't be doing it. I mean, we did Friends At The Table before there was money, but, like, we certainly weren't doing this much. And if it was still a hobby in that way, that's what it would be.

And when people in my life ask me to play tabletop games with them on a consistent basis, I usually tell them no. Because it's a... It's a lot of fuckin' work for fun. Especially when it's also your job.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally. Totally. Um, yeah, I don't think-

ART: Don't- don't compare your group to us.

AUSTIN: Yes. Um, because the-

[ART's doorbell rings.]

ART: Ding-dong!

[ALI, AUSTIN, & JANINE laugh]

AUSTIN: ...Because the idea that, like, the- Have you ever had a situation similar to this that was resolved in a way that wasn't just, "Get a new group"? No. But I've had a situation similar to this that resolved in "Don't play tabletop games for seven years," y'know?

JANINE: Yeah...

AUSTIN: Or five years or whatever it was.

JANINE: Hobby burnout is real.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally! Totally. That's... Y'know... Or like, "Oh, this game just doesn't happen and I'm just not gonna..." So, again, I just wanna underscore how normal this experience is.

JANINE: There's also... um, y'know, you mentioned a lot of, like, "They might have a different relationship to the content than you do." And that's, like, true. When you're the GM, you have perfect sight of the world. You have perfect sight of all of the characters, basically. Like, you have this full picture that your players often do not.

And... sometimes it can feel a little bit weird as a player because it feels almost, sometimes, like you're stepping on the GM's toes, especially when things are a little bit, like, when you're planning things that are going to happen versus reflecting on things that have happened. There is a degree of that depending on how you run the game and things like that.

But the other thing I wanted to say is that it's not just about, like, their relationship to the content versus yours. It's about your style of enthusiasm. Like, as a person.

AUSTIN: Mmm-hmm.

JANINE: Like, for me, a thing that I'm really, really sensitive about is that when I get really into something, I get REALLY into something, and I will just... talk about it. And I will just... I will just, like, get really into it and I get very aware because, y'know, it's a thing that's happened before I was aware of it, where I'll get too into it and then people in my life will just be like, "Oh my god, please just shut up about that thing." Or like, "I am just not interested. I don't want to hear about it anymore."

Um, so... There is a degree to which it's really, really easy when you have a style like that or... y'know, when you have whatever your enthusiasm style is, when you see other people not being enthusiastic in that same way, you just assume they're not enthusiastic at all.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: Whereas they might just have a completely different style of being enthusiastic about something that isn't as intense as you or that is a little bit more of a background thing, because, sure, they do have a lot of stuff going on. Like, it's not always about them being busy or being stressed or other stuff. It's just that they might just have a style that, to you, looks like they aren't enthusiastic, but, to them, is genuine enthusiasm. It's just a different manifestation of it. So you have to be careful about judging other people based on...

AUSTIN: Mmm-hmm.

JANINE: ...the way that you express things? Because it's not always going to be true of them.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I think it's probably worth saying also that...

[00:45:00]

AUSTIN: To the degree that this is not about judging someone else's enthusiasm, but is about workload...

JANINE: Mmm-hmm...**AUSTIN:** ...you should not assume that they would say no to taking some of your workload off of you. Um, you should make that ask. You should feel comfortable saying to your players- to the rest of your table, rather... that, "Hey, this is a lot for me right now. Could someone else take summary notes after a session so that we can jump right back into it next time." Or whatever it is you need to help speed that process up? Um, feel- Be willing to do that.

Valos in the chat notes that, um... Valos in the chat says, "There's a natural tendency when playing a game where the GM is seen as responsible for creating the world for all the players to fall into the trap of thinking all they need to do is show up and play. Friends At The Table helped me see... that work-balance as being able to be more evened out (ask players to describe the world, be a more active part of the game) they'll start feeling more responsible for some of that workload."

I definitely think that that's true. Um, but I would be cautious about the degree to which you think that might actually be a relief? Um...

And I say this as a GM who plays in that mode pretty much all the time... That's just a different type of work. It moves the work from pre-loading it before you sit down for the session where you can plot everything out and end up with a document that will be very clean and clear for you as the GM to work off of as you run your game- as you run the game... to needing to start juggling what players are telling you at the table.

I do think that if you are- if you have the sort of thought processes that make that sort of information something you can play with at the table with little mental load that that is a benefit. I like playing in that mode a lot, but I do think we should be cautious about saying that is, somehow, a lighter lift or even frankly... y'know, spreading the workload out, because it isn't... It isn't a dial you turn down and, like, "Oh, yeah. Here, now... Since you described the tavern that's three percent less workload for me!"

[AUSTIN & ALI laugh]

Because now you have to suddenly take that description of the tavern—which you did not have a description for before, because you were counting on this person giving you one—and then you have to tie that one into the neighbourhood that it's in. You have to tie that to whoever's in there. And you have to think about- "Oh wow, actually that works out perfectly because it connects to da-da-da-da-dah..."

All that stuff is work and I unfortunately don't think that is a magic bullet for this situation as someone who has played in both of these modes and does prefer to play in that more collaborative space where I'm not just looking at a document and being like, "The tav- The Prancing Pony Inn is a tavern well-known for its large mead cups and, like..." Y'know. That's not who I am...

[ART, ALI, & AUSTIN laugh]

AUSTIN: ...But, but, uh... But at the same time, I... just... I don't think that there is... I think the route of this issue is just a real issue that comes from the work that goes into running games. Um. And especially running them consistently. Especially as consistently as once a week.

[AUSTIN sighs.]

I don't know if anybody else has thoughts on this one? On burnout or facilitation or... Anything like that.

ALI: Yeah, I feel like a lot of my solutions sort of, like, end- Are sort of like add-ons to what's already been said. Like, the... Like, dismissive reaction that I have reading this is that, like... Having people who sit down to do this once a week is already, like, such a high level of engagement that is hard to get out of, like, a friend's group anyway. That, like, expecting these other sources is tough and really hard to do. Um, and isn't- You recognise this too in that it's not the... Not really a one-to-one of them not really being interested.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: That being said, it doesn't make it any easier for you and... y'know. [**ALI** laughs]

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: It's something worth figuring out. Um... I think-

AUSTIN: I genuinely think cutting down the number of sessions would help, but anyway, sorry, continue.

ART: Mmm-hmm.

ALI: Yeah, for sure. I think that would definitely help or even, um, doing the thing that Austin suggested of, like, switching them, but having the week off being these other things that you want to talk about if you want them to be engaged in that way. Um, again I know the perception of Friends At The Table seems to be really different, but there's definitely times when in between sessions, we've been, like, "Okay, let's make this decision between two things..." [**AUSTIN** chuckles] And not everybody responds.

AUSTIN: Oh, yeah.

ALI: And sometimes, yeah, sometimes it's a point where, like...

AUSTIN: [Chuckles] Are you kiddin' me?

ALI: ...It's like, yeah! Exactly! [**ALI** chuckles]

AUSTIN: This is the thing, I get where Byzantium is. Trust.

ALI: Yeah, like if only two or three people have responded and they've... y'know, shared their opinions those are the opinions that are going to matter this week and if it was important to other people they would have said something earlier.

Um... [Laughs] Another shortcut to engaging with people on discord, if that's what you're using. If you're using, like, a chat-based program, is like... If you really want two or three options in front of people, like... make the, like emoji voting system, like... [Laughs]

AUSTIN: Totally.

ALI: Because then people can, like, hit a button and you can kind of see that they've checked in without it having to be this, like, whole conversation.

AUSTIN: Totally.

ALI: That works for, like, "Should we play Monday or Tuesday?" Or, like, "Do you wanna go to, like, the... dungeon next week or the... tavern, or whatever?" [**AUSTIN** laughs] Or, like, whatever the decisions are.

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah.

ALI: Um, but yeah. It's super tough. I... Playing once a week seems unfathomable to begin with [ALI laughs] that I think that, like, either slowing down the expect- Uh, the expectancy or, like, slowing down how often you... get together, but- How much you play but not how much you get together might actually... [ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Oh, sure.

ALI: My bookclub does this, too, where, um, we'll meet once a month to discuss a book, but then also, the next weekend talk- Like, watch a movie together. So, like, if people can't read a book they can still, like, come for the movie night-

AUSTIN: Right. That's cute.

ALI: You can set something like that up. Um...

AUSTIN: Yeah, I like that a lot.

ALI: 'Cause, yeah. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Um. Yeah, the... Final... Uh, another thought I guess that kind of hit me here, too, is just, like, don't- If you have particular needs of like, "Hey, I really need to know what your character is going to do..." Y'know, or... "Which of these two characters your character is going to bring the secret spell we found to?" Or whatever. Right?

Um. DM that person and say, "Hey, could you get me an answer on this by, like, Tuesday night?" Um, and that's gonna sound like giving homework. And it is giving homework, but it's not... it's not that much homework in some ways? That's something that player will have to have decided by the time they sit down at the table. Um, and asking them ahead of time... Maybe their schedule lines up such that they're able to do it.

And if they can't then they'll apologise and you can deal with it when it's time to go, but giving specific asks, instead of just, like, "Hey, can check in about this session in a more broad sense..?" I think is... Has always gotten me more results. Saying, "Hey, did you level up yet? What moves are you taking?" Y'know... "Can you tell me so we can clear this up?" Or "Hey, have you decided if you're doing Mission A or Mission B?" Or whatever the specific thing is, um... Has always given me better results than a sort of general... "Can we check in about that last session?" conversation. Or hope that someone will post something about... inspiration or whatever.

Y'know what I mean, like, that stuff... Specific asks- You can't imagine that people are reading your mind. And so making specific asks to specific people is always going to get you closer to what you need than just hoping that someone meets you halfway, y'know?

Um. I hope it works out.

Alright. I think this is the last question. It's a good one.

[00:53:19]

[**Transcriber Note:** The **discussion of life during the pandemic** ends here.]

[00:53:20] - Question 4

Katie writes in,

"What is your favourite pre-podcast, energizing food? Mid-podcast, hopefully-quiet snack? Any other rituals from your five-plus years doing this that help you get in the podcasting mood?"

ART: I would like to say that I'm currently eating an entire sushi dinner.

ALI: Wow...

AUSTIN: That's impressive.

ALI: Oh, was that the doorbell from before?

ART: Yes.

AUSTIN & ALI: Wow.

AUSTIN: What'd you get?

ART: [Eating] Sorry, I'm...

[**ALI** bursts out laughing]

AUSTIN: Mmm.

ART: [Eating] [Unintelligible]

AUSTIN: Well-timed.

[**ALI** continues laughing]

ART: We got from Sugar Fish, and we- I got the Nozawa Box, which is, um... Just an assortment of fishes.

AUSTIN: Love a nice assortment of fishes.

ART: I got a little bit of, like, tuna sushimi. A little bit of edamame. A couple cut rolls.

AUSTIN: Mmm.

ALI: [Softly] Wow...

ART: And then, yeah, uh... One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight pieces of nigiri?

AUSTIN: Okay, that's big.

ART: Yeah, yeah. It's a whole... It's a meal.

AUSTIN: That's a whole meal.

[**ALI** chuckles]

AUSTIN: Is this, like, normal? How often are you eating sushi while we record?

ART: This is the first time, but I saw this question after I'd ordered food and I was like, "Oh. This is gonna..."

AUSTIN: "This is gonna kill! This is good material!"

[**ALI**, **AUSTIN**, & **ART** laugh]

AUSTIN: Anyone else have food that's not sushi to talk about?

ALI: I feel like I know that I'm sitting down to do, like, a real Friends At The Table recording if I have two different drinks.

AUSTIN: Huh.

ART: [Agreeing] Mmm.

AUSTIN: Is it, like, a water and then something hot?

[**ALI** laughs]

JANINE: Yeah...

ALI: Yeah, yeah.

JANINE: Hot drink and cold drink.

AUSTIN: Hot drink, cold drink. Yeah, that's fair.

JANINE: Yeah.

ALI: It won't always be that, sometimes it'll be like iced water and, like, a glass of orange juice, but most times it'll be like iced water and some sort of tea situation.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Um, but yeah. That's really- I know I'm gonna be sitting here for a little bit. I know I'm going to be feeling differently minute to minute... [**ALI** laughs] And I have to get myself prepared.

[**JANINE** laughs]

AUSTIN: Mmm-hmm.

ALI: Um. I'm really bad with podcast snacks because, like, I'll be like, "Oh, I have this, like, bowl of almonds right next to me to help me through these four hours." [**JANINE** laughs] And then it'll be done when the intro is over and I'm like, "Yeah..."

AUSTIN: Yeah, those almonds were good, uh-huh...

ALI: Yeah... [**ALI** chuckles.] Um...

AUSTIN: I do a lot of... I do caffeine. Caffeine is my thing. I often will drink a flat white during... that is, like, my go-to drink in terms of giving me the energy I need to get through a four-hour recording. Um, and then I'm normally a...Hopefully...

[00:55:51]

[**Transcriber Note:** In his response here, Austin returns to the **discussion of life during the pandemic**. Jump to [00:57:54], the next [Transcriber Note on page 33](#), or skip the green text to avoid it.]

In my ideal, which has not been the case this year, which we didn't even talk about, but, like... Yo, this year specifically- Just to go back to that previous question: All of this would be easier if COVID wasn't happening, which I hope you understand that-

ALI: [Agreeing] Mmm.

AUSTIN: -about this. Every... We are all so fucking exhausted all the time and upset and depressed and, like, anxious... even more so as someone who deals with those things even in a year where there hasn't been a global pandemic. This year has made all of that shit worse and has taken away lots of coping mechanisms and taken away a lot of things that I would rely on to relieve the stress of doing all of the work that you set up in part one of your question, Byzantium. Um, uh... So just to reiterate that: It's hard. It's really fucking hard. So don't underestimate the degree to which this is a particularly difficult year on top of everything else. And the same is true for your players, who...

JANINE: Mmm-hmm.

AUSTIN: ...Every little lift is a little bit harder this year, so...

So the reason I think of that is because... In the dream, my favourite Friends At The Table sessions are... I go eat brunch. I come home. [**JANINE** chuckles] I have coffee or, y'know, a latte or a flat white, and cold ice water. And then I just go. And it's important for me to eat a big meal first, because I will not get to snack during the session, because of how often I have to speak. Um, and it's not, like, I can't really, like, dig into a snack on the side because at any moment I might have to jump in, um, pretty often. And then what I do is collapse onto a bed for an hour and then eat again.

[**ALI & AUSTIN** chuckle]

So, like, that's like... Or if I didn't eat first. This year, specifically, I'll often sit down to record and it'll be dinner time, but instead of eating dinner or whatever, I will lay in a bed for an hour to recover from doing a podcast, [AUSTIN chuckles] then be like, "Urrrgg, I have to figure out dinner..." [AUSTIN chuckles] So.

JANINE: Mmm-hmm.

AUSTIN: That's me.

[00:57:54]

[**Transcriber Note:** The discussion of life during the pandemic ends here.]

JANINE: For me, um. I tend to like having a coffee before I start. I mean, even- My thing with Signet at the time was to have tea and that was a thing I hit most of the time, but a lot of the time I would still kinda just go with coffee, because coffee was, like, my... go to. I like a kinda lukewarm, almost-on-the-side-of-cold coffee, which works out really well when you're doing a podcast. [JANINE laughs]

AUSTIN: Mmm-hmm. It'll get there. [AUSTIN laughs]

JANINE: Uh, because you can sit down with your hot coffee and then nurse it for a couple hours and it's fine. [AUSTIN chuckles] Y'know, I also will sit down with two drinks just so I don't have to move, because I'm also a, y'know, I like to always be drinking something. Um. But in terms of snacks, I'm actually not a big snacker during the podcast under normal circumstances. Sometimes we'll record at a time that's really awkward. Like, we eat dinner quite early in my house. Usually between five and six. Um, or between five and seven actually and so if we start recording... y'know, we have time zones to worry about, so if we start recording at, like, three...

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: ...then I'll usually either have to have a really late dinner or just, like, a chicken breast will show up in my room and I'll have to [AUSTIN chuckles] kind of like, covertly [JANINE chuckles] eat this, y'know... I'll have to covertly eat my... um, meat and veg while muted, like... So it's not really a snack... [JANINE laughs] ...uh, so much. It's just, like, an awkward timing thing.

AUSTIN: [Laughs] Fair enough. Art, do you have one? Because, right now, I know your sushi is a one...

[ALI laughs]

ART: A once-off.

AUSTIN: ...A once-in-a-lifetime...

ART: Yeah, this is a bad idea, too. This probably isn't gonna be another recording snack-

[ART sneezes]

ALI: Mmm-hmm.

AUSTIN: We've learned. Together.

ART: Um. Yeah, I mean, I think part of me was hoping this would come after I was done.

AUSTIN: Fair.

ART: Um, I'm a- It sucks while I'm on a Yeti [microphone] right now while I'm between computers, but... I'm a crunchy snack person. I'm a- "Let's get a bag of chips." I also have coffee. I usually have a big glass of water. And it helps that, y'know, I live with some- I... Y'know, I'm married.

[01:00:00]

ART: I live with someone, so, like, oftentimes if my recording goes long, like, just... a full-on dinner comes to me.

AUSTIN: Thank you, Jess.

ART: Sometimes Jess will just, like, cook while I'm recording and, like, now I have Chalupas. Now I have, y'know, whatever.

AUSTIN: Incredible.

ART: Yeah. Um. I do the same for her when she's teaching. It's a... great thing. Um, I think an important thing when you're snacking is to have some protein. Have some protein with your snacking. Gives you more energy.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I've actually moved-

ART: Carbs are an easy snack food. And try to, like...

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: ...Push past that a little bit.

AUSTIN: I've moved to—this year—doing more, like, meats and cheeses as a little side thing-

ART: Yeah, sure.

AUSTIN: -at the beginning of a recording, believe it or not.

JANINE: Protein, fibre, and fat. Those are the things you need for a thing to be- Like, actually, that's the ultimate thing, right? The ultimate podcasting snack is a mini-charcuterie board.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: This is what I'm saying.

JANINE: A little bit of fruit. A little bit of cheese, crackers, meat, like...

AUSTIN: Mmm-hmm.

JANINE: ...that's the dream. That's the ideal, because that's satisfying. You can have very small bites-

AUSTIN: It's quiet.

JANINE: -between things you have to say stuff. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Let me tell ya... You get a little soppressata, that's not going to make any noise in the mic.

[**JANINE** laughs]

ALI: Can we, like, company expense, like, a monthly... [**ALI** laughs] ...A monthly charcuterie box for...

AUSTIN: For all of us?

ART: I mean, if you find it and they'll take a debit card, we can Company Expense anything.

[**ALI** laughs]

AUSTIN: Damn.

ALI: Just make sure everyone has their monthly cheese and meat.

JANINE: I think Good Food actually does do, um... Good Food is, like, a mealbox service. I don't know if they're in the states. They're in Canada. But they do absolutely have charcu- Like, pre-done charcuterie, but also... [**AUSTIN** chuckles] ...just like, "Here's a bunch of meats and crackers and cheeses and fruits. And you can just put it together yourself."

ALI: Mmm.

JANINE: You could make it happen.

AUSTIN: Good Food seems to be goodfood.ca, so.

JANINE: Ah, probably...

ART: That's where we're gonna get in trouble is getting a good thing for everyone with all the countries.

JANINE: Yeah.

ART: Same thing with all the damn microphones.

[**ALI** laughs]

AUSTIN: Oh my god, these microphones...

[**JANINE** chuckles]

AUSTIN: Uh... They're fine. They're good. I sound good. I like how I sound on this thing. There's just the one issue. Um, we got new microphones for folks... Rolling out over the next month or so. So... Look forward to that.

ALI: Yeah, this is gonna be a Season Seven situation.

AUSTIN: Yeah, none of the-

ALI: Well, I mean, you're hearing it now, so...

AUSTIN: None of the Partizan stuff will have these new mics, so... Or, I guess yours [Ali's] is here. Yours and Dre's?

ALI: I had new-

ART: That was new interfaces.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Oh... That was new interfaces. Okay. So no new mics until Season Seven.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Makes sense.

[**ALI** chuckles]

AUSTIN: Alright-

ART: We're gonna need it with all the stuff we're doing...

[**ALI** laughs]

ART: That's not-

AUSTIN: That's right!

ART: Don't take that to mean anything.

AUSTIN: That's a clue! Try to unravel this, motherfuckers!

ALI: Yeah!

AUSTIN: We gotta have to have microphones next season!

[**ALI** laughs]

AUSTIN: We've been doing all this shit on a tin can!

ART: It's so... Soundy.

AUSTIN: Yeah! [Laughs] God...

Alright, as always, you can send your questions in to **tipsatthetable@gmail.com**...

Please do, we have a few more of these to catch up on and we're not- I don't wanna say we're running low, but we're running low on stuff that we haven't touched on during some episode. Y'know there's, like... We get a lot of... Not repeat questions, but people asking us very similar things and I do my best to try and spread out and hit stuff that's, like... y'know, new things. Things we haven't addressed before, if possible, so, send us some questions. Um, maybe we won't answer them right away, but I would love to get more stuff in that inbox.

tipsatthetable@gmail.com is the address and, as always, thank you for supporting us at friendsatthetable.cash. Means a lot. Uh, and I hope everyone has a good week. And, y'know, whatever comes after that. Another week, probably. **[ALI chuckles]** I haven't checked, but that's my guess.

ART: It's weeks all the way down.

AUSTIN: Fuck.

ALI: It's a crime.

[AUSTIN groans]

AUSTIN: Okay. It's fine. We'll get through it.

[JANINE chuckles]

ALI: Uh-huh...

AUSTIN: [Exhales] Okay. Um, alright. We should do a clap.

JANINE: Mmm-hmm.

[01:04:02]

[Transcriber Note: A brief aside occurs about **the discussion of suicide as a game mechanic**. As before, it ends at [01:04:49], it is in [blue](#) text, and you'll find another [Transcriber Note on page 38](#) when it is concluded.]

AUSTIN: Also, Art, I just checked and you cannot even get Under A Serpent Sun anymore. Uh, and there's posts on the Burning Wheel forums that basically say, like, "Yeah, no. It wasn't good." **[AUSTIN chuckles]** "We got rid of it."

[ART laughs]

AUSTIN: Ah... "It doesn't work." is basically what- The argument that the folks there say, basically, is like, "The book- The rules of that game are about..." Because it's Burning Wheel,

and Burning Wheel is about adventure. And about, like, following your beliefs and trying to build, um, the in-game resource that's about, like, doing the things you dream of doing. And that is not in line with this, like, nihilistic... y'know, uh... Post-apocalyptic game about self-destruction, so...
[AUSTIN laughs]

ART: That seems true, yeah.

AUSTIN: Doesn't exist anymore.

[01:04:49]

[Transcriber Note: The discussion of **suicide as a game mechanic** ends here.]

AUSTIN: Um. Alright. Let's do a clap at... Fifty-five?

JANINE: Sounds good.

[Pause, then **EVERYONE** claps.]

AUSTIN: Alright. Thanks for joining us, everybody!

[01:05:09]