

Tips at the Table: Austin Walker GM Bingo

Transcriber: Ella [@SRbackwards]

AUSTIN: Welcome to Tips at the Table, a Q&A podcast focused on... critical questions [someone laughs] ... hopefully smart answers and fun interaction between good friends, I am your host Austin Walker. Joining us today on this October 2017 edition of the show are, uhh, Sylvia¹ Clare.

SYLVIA: Hello... I'm Sylvia. You can find me on twitter [@captaintrash](#) and I'm also an editor over at [videogamechoochoo.com](#).

AUSTIN: Also, Janine Hawkins.

JANINE: I'm Janine Hawkins, I'm [@bleatingheart](#) on twitter and this month I'm doing a stream of a Japanese- it's like Harry Potter/Animal Crossing... kinda thing. So you can follow my twitter if you wanna know what the hell any of that is.

AUSTIN: ... Also Andrew Lee Swan.

DRE: Hey, you can find me on twitter [@swandre3000](#).

AUSTIN: And you can find me [@austin_walker](#), and you can find everything we do with the show over at [friendsatthetable.net](#), and support the show at [friendsatthetable.cash](#). Let's jump into it. Obviously some of these recurring questions, I think both Sylvia – no, no sorry, both Dre and Janine – have answered, but Sylvia has answered none of them, so Sylvia, hotseat time. [Dre laughs]

SYLVIA: Okay. [Janine laughs] [AUSTIN: For every friend-] Let's do this, I love pressure. [Austin laughs]

AUSTIN: Get some... get some game show music going, get some of, like, the... [Dre makes "game show music"] Yeah, that's really good.

“For every friend at the table, what has been your favourite character you've played in a non-recorded RPG and what made them your favourite?”

SYLVIA: God, so I haven't done a lot of stuff that's non-recorded... Out of stuff that I think people wouldn't know, um, years- like a while back, like before I was part of the show, I did a Monster Hearts game with some friends of mine. [AUSTIN: Mmm.] And I played a werewolf named Bryn??? [1:52] and it was – we only did a couple of sessions of it, but I do remember at one point we went to a ... it was like a house party... and I dunked and broke the rim, [Austin

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

laughs] and then I turned into a werewolf [Janine laughs] and mauled a dude who was bullying me at school.

AUSTIN: Hell yeah, [cross] that sounds good.

SYLVIA: [cross] It was really fun, because I was playing, like, this character who was like, wrong side of the tracks, rough family, um... a lot of that stuff. [AUSTIN: Right.] And that was fun to play through, but I didn't get to go too far with them unfortunately.

AUSTIN: Mm. So like, Dean Ambrose if Dean Ambrose was a werewolf?

SYLVIA: Dean Ambrose if Dean Ambrose was a gay werewolf [cross] having gender trouble.

AUSTIN: [cross] Can we-

DRE: [cross] I was gonna say Riverdale Jughead but Dean Ambrose also works.

AUSTIN: Right, true, true. Can we talk about – just real quick – Ali's not on this call but are you caught up on- did you all watch RAW last night?

SYLVIA: I did.

AUSTIN: When the boys showed up, that's [DRE: Nope] The boys showed up and they were so happy together and [SYLVIA: Can I-] it made my whole day.

SYLVIA: Can I be honest?

AUSTIN: Uh-huh?

SYLVIA: I'm not really feeling it.

AUSTIN: [swiftly] Alright, I'm gonna move on. [SYLVIA: Okay.] [Everyone laughs]

DRE: Next question.

SYLVIA: Anyway.

AUSTIN:

“What's improved about your play? Where would you still like to improve?”

SYLVIA: I think, generally speaking, it's just I've gotten more confident [AUSTIN: Mmm] is the big one. Like, you can tell, in early episodes of, like, each of the past- like early COUNTER/Weight stuff with me and then early Ephrim play [AUSTIN: Mhm] was really nerve-wracking. Aubrey was easier because I started her out as more of a comedy thing.

AUSTIN: Right.

SYLVIA: And that is more my wheelhouse. And then kinda- her character developed through that and it was very natural. But it's that and being able to be like- I have problems with, like, being a bit of a control freak at times.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

SYLVIA: And I've been very- I feel like-

AUSTIN: [cross] You've gotten better. A hundred percent.

SYLVIA: [cross] I've been pretty good about being hands off with stuff.

AUSTIN: It's tough. I think one of the first impulses everyone has when they start something like this is to... prepare a lot and then to own- to have a scene in their head that then they want that scene to happen exactly like that and they, like, write down a lot of characterisation ahead of time. I realise that I've brought together the four people who do this the most, which is me and the three of you. [Everyone laughs] Like... and that's not a judgment, like I think this is a thing we all have, these things, right? Which is like "I want this to go this way, and I"... or it's not even that, it's like "this is what interests me about my character, and so – or about this setting, or about this group, this faction – and so I'm gonna do a lot." And I think about, like, the early Odamas fleet stuff, Sylvia, [SYLVIA: [sighs] yeah] versus the end of the season Odamas fleet stuff, [SYLVIA: yeah] and like, even inside of COUNTER/Weight you grew so much as a player, because you went from like "okay I need to control everything, I need to basically, like, lay out what it is", to knowing how to communicate what was important about the scene that you wanted, so that your prep didn't go to waste, but also understanding pacing and understanding that, like, if you just- if you just lay it all out, then it's- it eventually all evens out, and you don't get to know, like- you don't get to communicate what's important versus what's noise. And you've gotten so good at that, and I think your personal play also has improved so much.

SYLVIA: I think something that really helped me improve with that, honestly, was Ephrim early on, [AUSTIN: Mmm.] because I was coming into something I wasn't helping to define.

AUSTIN: Right.

SYLVIA: So I was just like "Okay, I need to adapt for this setting that's already been made and figure out a way to both exist organically within that space, and then have something that's still kind of my own."

AUSTIN: Right.

SYLVIA: And I think we managed to do that really well.

AUSTIN: [cross] Oh, definitely. [SYLVIA: So, yeah.] I- Again, I was really happy with every character in...in winter of Hieron. And I think it's so cool to think about Ephrim – and obviously

Janine is here thinking about Adaire – as like, here are new characters. And at the beginning of the season, it's like "oof, okay." Like, especially with Janine coming on – and we've spoken about this on the show before on Tips, and before at the post-mortem for season 3 – which was just like, there's not only Janine were you coming on as, like, a new character, you're also basically a new player, you've done Marielda Quiet Year [Janine: Mhm.] but you hadn't played any characters. And so for me to see Adaire and Ephrim become like "oh no, I can't imagine, like, a Spring in Hieron without them" is- is a testament to both you becoming really, really strong players. Also Dre you did a good job too. [Everyone laughs.] I really think – and I don't mean that facetiously – I think Thrandir had an incredible season, that like, we've spoken at length about this so we don't have to, like, belabour it, but like, everyone-

DRE: Nah, I mean, but you can keep telling me it was great. [cross] You can keep doing that if you want.

AUSTIN: [cross] HAHA. Just ??? up [6:20], man. [SYLVIA: The rest of the podcast.] I do really think that, like, the three of you had incredible years with the show, and like, I totally can see the play improving and it's why I'm excited to keep working with y'all. Alright, last one for you, Sylvia. From this collection of things that we're asking everybody. From Jenny, who says: hey y'all, I love the show and that you don't stick to one system, but switch up even within the seasons.

"Of the many you've played on Friends at the Table, which tabletop RPG is your favourite, or least favourite, or most challenging, or 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 you play?"

SYLVIA: Ooh [laughs].

AUSTIN: [cross] I think the first one is easier.

SYLVIA: [cross] I'll start with the... I'll start with the easy one. I think my favourite is kind of a tie between... Microscope I actually really loved [AUSTIN: Huh.] because it was so freeform [AUSTIN: Right.]. It let us basically just do improvised storytelling [AUSTIN: yeah] in a way that wasn't shackled to systems so much. And we-

AUSTIN: [cross] I forgot that we actually technically used Microscope [SYLVIA: yeah] for those sequences. And we only ever used the kind of... conflict resolution a handful of times. Because we didn't need it. But we did use it [SYLVIA: Oh, for sure.] a few key times.

SYLVIA: Yeah, legitimately, like, honestly my favourite tabletop game I guess would've just been, like, just talking, then. [Austin laughs]. If that- Like- 'Cause honestly like, just that- just being able to just be like "okay, here's the setting, here's the characters that are here, let's go".

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: And maybe, like, then again now and then going “okay, here’s how’s this scene is gonna play out”.

AUSTIN: Right, right, like “does Grace do this or does this other thing happen?”.

SYLVIA: Exactly. I also really liked, uh, Firebrands.

AUSTIN: [cross] Oh yeah, Firebrands is fantastic.

SYLVIA: [cross] I think that’s the name of it, right? Yeah, I don’t think that gets- I see, like- I love the systems we use for the full seasons [AUSTIN: Mhm.] but like, I don’t see that one get a lot of, like, big-ups from listeners. [Austin laughs] I don’t know why I said that. I’ve been listening a lot to a band called Big Ups a lot today [everyone laughs] so I guess that’s it. Anyway, they’re good. Anyway. That’s just one I kinda wanted to mention because that has really in- [AUSTIN: Mhm.] I always go back to- I think it was a confrontation between Orth and Mako? [AUSTIN: Mhm.] where Orth’s assistants died.

AUSTIN: Yes. Yes yes yes, it’s like in the- [SYLVIA: and it-] it’s in, like, the factory, or whatever. [SYLVIA: yeah]. And unfortunately we lost a number of Migos that day [Sylvia laughs]. I think Offset, maybe, uh, maybe Quavo, I don’t remember exactly who, but a number of The Migos unfortunately have left us. [SYLVIA: [laughing] yeah.] That was a really good sequence.

SYLVIA: It was, and it really- it put, like, decision-making in the hands of the players in a really unique way, I found, and a really tough way.

AUSTIN: Well, that’s because part of that system specifically was that death for followers, or death for characters who associated with yours, was something where you picked which of your own characters [SYLVIA: yeah.] you would be sacrificing to do damage to the other person, basically. Like, yes, I’m gonna keep this fight going, and to do it I’m basically hurting my own characters. You then get to describe how you take out my character. It was so good, and I think it- the thing is, like, I’ve actually- there’s been a lot of talk online lately, I think partially because these things happen in cycles but I’ve seen a lot people who are friends of mine on twitter or whatever, talking about what’s a good tabletop roleplaying game with giant robots. I think partially also ‘cause Starfinder just came out – the new- the sci-fi Pathfinder – and it doesn’t have giant robots in it. So people have been talking about how do you do that right, and some other people have asked me recently – I think Molly may have asked me recently – what I thought was a good, um, Mecha system, and Firebrands is the one that gets it. Like, obviously we’re playing The Veil right now that has some rules about mechs, and The Sprawl had rules that we’re able to use for mechs, and Mechnoir obviously did, and I think they all do different things really interestingly. And of course you could go back to Heavy Gear and you can play- there are all sorts of mech games that you could play- the tabletop Battletech game... Right? Like... Mekton. Like, there’s a billion of them. And mostly they go one of two ways, which is like,

they are general, like, storytelling games, and so they're pretty good, things like Mechnoir and- and The Sprawl and The Veil, or they are simulation, they are like "my mech has this many heatsinks and this many missiles, and this is the range- this is their best range." I think that stuff is fun to look at and I really love poring over those books, but that's not why I like mech and mecha shows and mech stories. Like, even looking at like, Battletech, that's not why I like it, isn't, like, the heatsinks, it's like the clan warfare and the, like, the ancient history and the- all that stuff is why I like it. And Firebrands gets that the politicking and the- and the kind of flirting are the whole point of giant robots. So I think, yeah, Firebrands is good.

SYLVIA: Firebrands is really good. [AUSTIN: Um...] I mean like, the whole, like... ballroom sequence [AUSTIN: Yes, yes.] that you could do with that basically points to them, like, getting it [DRE: Oh god, yeah.]

AUSTIN: Listen, I- So I've been recently revisiting COUNTER/Weight 'cause I'm trying to figure out some Twilight Mirage stuff in terms of pacing, and in terms of, like, arc? And... that game is so good, like it's so... Firebrands helped us figure out how to close something that I for months did not know how to close. And like, shoutouts to Firebrands for that. Alright, I'mma keep moving-

SYLVIA: Uh-

AUSTIN: Oh, do you have something else? Oh wait [cross] you didn't say there's also- Yeah. Totally.

SYLVIA: [cross] Well, there's the second half of this question.

AUSTIN: Yes.

SYLVIA: The way I look at, like, picking, like, a world, and picking a system is basically just like, sit down, talk to your friends about what type of world- Like, if your friends have an idea [AUSTIN: Mhm.] about, like, what type of world they want to play in, find something that matches that. [AUSTIN: Yeah.] And then figure out how to make it work. But like, I try... I've been planning, um, a game just with some friends of mine for a while and I just kinda basically gave them a list of like, "okay, here's like, the systems that I own, here are the playbooks that I own that I can run for you guys... [AUSTIN: Mmm.] semi-confidently, because I've never really GM'ed before." [Austin chuckles.] And they ended up picking The Sprawl, so we sat down and talked about that. And that had- Like, a lot of these games incorporate collaborative worldbuilding in a way anyway, so, like, I think it's... I think it's mostly just kinda... [sighs] You can't just like, do one or the other. [Austin laughs] You can't just like, pick a system [AUSTIN: Right... right.] and then build around it unless you're really into DnD.

AUSTIN: Right, right. Well, I think the thing that you can- the thing- Right, you should be doing both, right? [SYLVIA: Right.] Like I even think for us, thinking about The Veil, you can see how The Veil has helped shape the world, right? Like, the onomastic – like, this is the lightest of- of

future spoilers – we’re getting to the point in our recording sessions where the onomastic is reaching the level where Janine, who’s playing the onomastic is going to be able to, uh, excuse me, open the cybertome? [Janine laughs.] And like, that is a thing in the world now. Or something like, you have a move that’s like, “oh, I can visit the... the... what was it? Like, the burial grounds of my ancient order, basically.”

JANINE: The, like, crypt.

AUSTIN: The crypt. [Janine: Yeah.] That invents that in the world, and it doesn’t just invent it, it puts pressure on us as storytellers to make it make sense in the world. So we had this great back and forth that people should listen forward to... or look forward to. Listen forward to, Jesus. [Janine and Austin laugh.] Which was-

SYLVIA: I mean, technically.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Which was like, where is it in the world? And you came up with a really good answer. And, like, we wouldn’t have gotten to that answer if not- That answer helped me, like, conceptualise what the entire order that Signet belongs to is. And kind of like, where would they choose for that? And how would they choose that versus the other orders? And the one that you came up with is really strong. So it was like, this great moment of, like, okay the book got us to this really memorable moment, that I think people- or not even moment, but like, detail about the setting, that is, like, rad, and, like, that alone is really fucking cool. And so- so you have to let the system push in a little bit, and give you a- play with it, you’re- you’re jamming with the system, in a sense. Okay. Time to move on to new questions. [SYLVIA: Yeah.] If you have questions, send them in to tipsatthetable@gmail.com. We, uh, obviously look forward to getting those, we have a ton still that we’re working through. Like, we have a huge google doc of everything we haven’t answered yet, so this is gonna be a mix of new stuff and old stuff, so if your question isn’t here, don’t worry, we have it. Sometimes I’ll pull something out because we’ve already answered something very, very similar, but otherwise I try to keep it in there. ‘Cause you know, you revisit with a different- different group. Anyway, this is... This one comes in from Tallulah, who says:

“Hi everybody, I’m currently working on a DnD character who is a high-ranking member of a small church. I’m taking inspiration from Hadrian and Ephrim, but would be interested if you had any tips or advice on how to play a character that is a member of a faith or how to represent a religious group in a game as a player?”

And I bring this up also because this came in before Twilight Mirage, but Signet [JANINE: Mm.] is also very clearly, uh, one of these things. [JANINE: (laughing) Yeah.] And Dre I don’t think you’ve ever played a churchgoing person? Have you ever been of the faith?

DRE: No. I mean I do think that, like, one of my touchstones for Even this season is, like, kind of paladin-esque (AUSTIN: Yeah.) in terms of, like, his devotion to the fleet and those ideals. But no, he’s definitely not a religious character.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Okay, so- so Janine and Sylvia, what do you two think about how you've done this and what your thought patterns have been?

SYLVIA: Um... I-I... So it kinda depends, like... I think, looking at this as... from just a broad perspective, like, generally speaking with, like, fictional faiths, you kinda have to make them feel real, I've found, [AUSTIN: Mm.] and that's kind of what I liked about the Church of Samoths... is [clears throat] it feels like a living, breathing church in a way- in the ways that are both good and bad. Like, yes it helps people and gives them guidance but there's also, like, the bad side to it. Stuff with like... In the first holiday special, with stuff like that... Um... The priest from that whose name I'm completely blanking on right now. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Uh... from the Rosemerrow church? From-

SYLVIA: No, from the- from season one's holiday special.

AUSTIN: Oh, uh... Lucius. Prelate Lucius.

SYLVIA: [cross] Lucius, yeah. Prelate Lucius. Like, stuff like him using that influence, and even Ephrim using that influence to their own gain. [AUSTIN: Right.] Like, the fact that there are politics interlinked with church... [AUSTIN: Mhm.] With the church, is important to take into account. But if you're playing one from a small church, I think the most important thing is just to, like, sort of figure out what the core beliefs are, and then find a way for your character to be in conflict with them [AUSTIN: Mhm.] and also follow them at the same time, if that makes sense. Because the most interesting thing I've found about playing a character who's based around faith is their struggles with that. [AUSTIN: Right.] So, that's basically my take on it, is like, kinda define a thing in a way that – like, don't build it around your character – but build it in a way that you can see your character's interactions with it, naturally.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally. Janine, what about with Signet, who I think comes from such a different faith. [JANINE: Yeah.] I mean... I said this at the top of Twilight Mirage but, like, I wanted to make a game where faith was not, like... I like- One of the reasons why I like faith in Hieron is that it is inconsistent, but that doesn't mean that it's wrong, if that makes sense? It's inconsistent and it's dangerous, and it does lead people to do things that are maybe not great, [JANINE: Mhm.] but it is not, like, fundamentally broken. But it is dangerous. And in Twilight Mirage I kinda wanted to do it- come at it the other way, which is, like, it's good. Like, the faith reflects a material, real history of good things having happened, but also, it is not in a vacuum. And like, so, [JANINE: Mhm.] I kinda do my best to flip it but I'm curious for you, when you came into it, what you brought in and kinda what you wanted to focus on and how it's been going.

JANINE: Well, so... [sighs] I think I've talked about it before that my big inspiration with Signet was that I didn't want to let myself play Adaire again. [AUSTIN: Right.] Because I'm not like [laughs] I'm not an actor or anything. I'm not super great at that stuff. I'm a writer, and I'm good at writing different characters, but when I'm portraying them myself, I kind of don't trust myself

to... to vary things that much, so I wanted to really, sort of, box myself in in that way. [AUSTIN: Mm.] And Adaire has a bad relationship with, um... I wouldn't say explicitly faith, but faith was the community and she had a bad relationship with her community. [AUSTIN: Yeah.] So that's what it came down to there. So with Signet I wanted to do something different, and a lot of that came from interrogating my own feelings about faith, which are very different than they used to be. I think... You know, when you're in quote-unquote "enlightened" quote-unquote, like [Austin chuckles] athe- well, not quote-unquote atheist, but when you're- when you're in [cross] sort of nerdy internet circles-

AUSTIN: [cross] Like secular spaces.

JANINE: Yeah, secularism, atheism, logic, all that stuff put on pillars and- ugh, exhaustively [Austin chuckles.] I think positive... positive depictions of faith are very rare. [AUSTIN: Mhm.] And also, they have been very rare in my life, because I was raised in a secular house. [AUSTIN: Right.] Like my parents went to church but that was- Like church was a place that when I was growing up I went to for weddings and funerals. And like, to tour. [cross] Like, historical churches.

AUSTIN: [cross] Right, historical churches. Yeah, sure, sure.

JANINE: So I sort of wanted to come at it from an angle of like, "why...why turn to faith?" Because people obviously don't turn to faith to be controlled [AUSTIN: [chuckles] Right.] or, like, to be... to be...

AUSTIN: [cross] Misguided.

JANINE: [cross] Or really terrible relationships with authority figures [AUSTIN: Right.] and all that. Like, what's the purest distillation of the benefits that faith can give you and that a leader in the faith can provide for someone. And a lot of that was thinking about, like, moments in my own life where, even as someone who – I would... I would call myself agnostic – but even in that way, like moments I could sort of feel myself wanting something there. [AUSTIN: Mhm.] And trying to... hone in on that. So I think, you know, it is a lot about determining both your relationship with the topic and also what you want... what you want that to say about the world, like what you want that character's relationship to say about the world and about... that faith and that community. I think especially actually that community because again with Adaire it's a case of... you know, everyone was struggling. [AUSTIN: Mhm.] So... There- It was hard for people to band together in the way that they can in a utopia [AUSTIN: Right, right.] where the struggle isn't the same.

AUSTIN: Like- And specifically in Adaire's case, as in some parts of real life, the thing that Adaire was facing was a faith that had abdicated its duty [JANINE: Yes.] to help people. Right, like [JANINE: Yeah.] and... and, I don't know, like, I have- I grew up super super super devout and then had, like, fallings-out and philosophical differences and came to rest in a place that I think I'm very comfortable in, with- with [JANINE: Mhm.] uh, in terms of what I believe- how I

believe the world is organised. And unsurprisingly it's a pretty materialistic belief system. [Janine laughs.] But what changed is that after I had fallen away from my faith, I... found people for whom faith was powerful [JANINE: Mhm.] and transformative. And I- And I forced myself to engage with a more complex history of humanity... It is a pretty- You know, I came up as a philosophy student and came toward to atheism through, like, traditional... very, like, metaphysical arguments about... God and what a God-being would look like and blah blah blah, and it was around the same time that the new atheism movement of like, Chris Hitchens and... and, uh, and Richard Dawkins and all of them were blowing up. And it- it bugged me, because [sighs] their vision of history has- reflects certain things as true, things like the crusades, and, you know... you know, local wars even through today between different sects of individual faiths... And all that is- that part of it is accurate, [laughs] but only insofar as... division between people is a real thing, and it's frustrating when that division comes from something that doesn't make any sense to you because it all seems like baloney. [JANINE: Mhm.] But the thing that I had to come to realise was two things, one was like... on one hand, I can't just tell that history, I also have to tell the history of the freedom march. [JANINE: Mhm.] I also have to tell the history of the ways in which faith has been, uh, an organising principle for the oppressed. And... I also have to tell the history of... you know, my grandparents' faith, and how that saw them through terrible, terrible things: abuse and poverty and all of this. And then more importantly, I also have to tell the histories of how what might seem like irrational difference between two sects of a religion that I don't understand at all, might somewhere down the line reflect a material difference about not just what they believe is happening in their version of heaven, but also about what you do on a Thursday... Or like, [JANINE: Mhm.] what you eat and how you pay your taxes. Because so many religious differences are just social differences. [JANINE: Yeah.] And so like, I wanted- I wanted- Like I think you're totally right that Adaire reflects the troubled side of it, and I love that Signet reflects this other side that we as a show just haven't dug into because... it's not what my background has been, [laughs] you know. [cross] Um, so...

JANINE: [cross] Yeah, so that was kind of... kind of the other thing there is that, like, faith... [sighs] People's faith and people of faith look like a lot of different things [AUSTIN: Mm, mhm.] and a thing that bothers- that bothered me when I was playing Adaire was I couldn't not imagine this sort of, fictional person – like this was not- there was not a person who ever came to me and said “hey, this makes me feel bad” – but, like, I couldn't help but imagine someone who felt like the way that Adaire reacted to faith was a judgment. Or was- was like- Because there are a lot people- there are a lot of people again in these spaces who say that, like, being religious is being stupid in some way. Or like, being- [AUSTIN: Mhm.] I thought a lot about people who maybe felt like the- portraying like a very complicated and often negative relationship with faith was saying that, like, being faithful is- is like a shortcoming or something. And we on this show especially spend a lot of time trying to represent people, like a lot of different kinds of people, and a lot of different ways that people can be in the world... and I wanted... I wanted to have a character who believed in things very, very strongly, and, like, that was good? [AUSTIN: Right.] That wasn't, like, [cross] that wasn't a shortcoming.

AUSTIN: [cross] You weren't cynical about it. Right.

JANINE: Right. I didn't wanna be- I didn't wanna be cynical about it. I wanted to give those people something- especially because, you know, again, in these spaces, I know people who are Christian, who are, like, a lot of different faiths, and they just don't really wanna talk about it openly [AUSTIN: Right.] because it always becomes "a talk". [AUSTIN: [laughs] Right.] And there's always someone in their mentions who's like, calling them assholes [Austin laughs] and making, like, flying spaghetti monster jokes. [cross] I didn't want us to be a place for that.

AUSTIN: [cross] Right right right. That's the thing that's so frustrating. That's the thing is like, I'm a pretty- I'm a pretty open... uhhh, outside of family, I'm a pretty open atheist and that shit fucking kills me, because it's just like- [JANINE: Mhm.] [DRE: Yeah.] It's the worst. [JANINE: [cross] It doesn't help.] It's like- it's like shitty fandom, it's shitty fandom [Dre and Sylvia laugh] except about what you believe- [JANINE: Yeah.] how you believe the fucking world is organised. Ugh, okay. [JANINE: Yeah.] Ugh. Let's move on, because we have a billion questions still. [Janine laughs.] This one comes in from Jack @roshirai Shirai:

"Austin, have you ever played in or run a West Marches style campaign? Do you have an opinion on that, and open table gaming in general? I realise it probably wouldn't be the best style of campaign for the sort of podcast y'all make but I was curious anyway. Related to the above: thoughts on how to make an open/West Marches style campaign work in a sci-fi/Stars Without Number style setting without requiring sixteen hundred years worth of prep?"

The answer- There's two answers there, and one is that you just need sixteen hundred hours worth of prep. [Janine laughs quietly.] Sometimes to do it you just have to do it. And... But the second thing is, that style of game, which I'll explain in a second, actually just means you have to define stuff as you go... to some degree. And so, play fast and loose, don't pre-define a lot of the world, um, Jack, if you're going to do this. Let- let each session fill in the blanks, outside of some really broad things. I would actually avoid, to some degree, like, the super well-defined Stars Without Number style thing. Or, I guess, like, if you just played Stars as your world map so to speak, it'll be fine because it's gonna be self-consistent inside of itself. Or coherent inside of itself. For people who don't know, West Marches was a game that Ben Robbins played... Ben- Or made... Or a style of game Ben Robbins made... Ben Robbins who made Kingdom and Microscope and Follow, all games [laughs] that we have played. And then I think more people learned about it from- I think it was, uh, a Rollplay stream. The Rollplay: One Shots West Marches campaign... which I think... I wanna say Adam... Koebel... No, Steven, Steven- Steven Lumpkin, who's also great. Steven Lumpkin is who- is who GM'ed it. And the way it works is like... So I'm just gonna read this little excerpt from Ben Robbins' blog about it:

"West Marches was a game I ran for a little over two years. It was designed to be pretty much the diametric opposite of the normal weekly game. One, there was no regular time. Every session was scheduled by the players on the fly. Two, there was no regular party.

Each game had different players drawn from a pool of around ten to fourteen. Three, there was no regular plot. The players decided where to go and what to do. It was a sandbox game, in the sense that's used now to describe video games like Grand Theft Auto, minus the missions. There was no mysterious old man sending them on quests, no overarching plot, just an overarching env- or overarching environment. My motivation in setting things up this way was overcoming player apathy and mindless plot following by putting the players in charge of both scheduling and what they did in game. A secondary goal was to make the schedule adapt to the [laughs] complex lives of adults. Ad hoc scheduling and a flexible roster meant, ideally, people got to play when they could, but didn't hold up the game for everyone else if they couldn't. If you can't play once a week, that's fine. If you can only play once a month, that's fine too. Letting the players decide where to go was also intended to nip DM procrastination – AKA my procrastination – in the bud. Normally a DM just puts off running a game until they're one hundred percent ready, which is, sometimes, never, but with this arrangement, if some players wanted to raid the sunken fort this weekend, I had to hurry up and finish it. It was gaming on demand, so the players created deadlines for me.”

[0:30:15]

Uh, this is a long post, you should look this up. It's called [Grand Experiments: West Marches](#) and it's over on the... the Ars Ludi... uh, blog, which is Ben Robbins' blog. It is really interesting. It's a type of game that I would actually love to run, and it's something that I'm sort of thinking about for future Friends at the Table stuff. The thing that I [sighs] want the most from future stuff – and this might happen sooner than later, it might happen in- it might happen in three months or it might happen in three years, who knows – is to have player groups be more interchangeable. The three people on the call right now have never all been in the same group outside of Rose-... Outside of Bluff City and Rosemerrow. And I would love it for- I would love to see Signet and- and Echo and Even all in the same game, but as the games are set up right now, that couldn't happen. And there's value to that. There really is value. Like I think that- I think that Twilight Mirage feels broader because of- what's happening on Quire feels so far away from what's happening in the fleet, even though Quire is in the fleet. And I think that that means something. But I also do like the notion of having a more flexible thing, and also I like that it would encourage me to have smaller adventures. I... you know, I take a lot of- I take a lot of...uh, influence from storytelling in general – from film, from tv, from books – and sometimes you'll get an episode of a tv show where, like, two characters are together for the whole thing, and, like, they're the A-plot or they're the B-plot. And in our show, like, we don't get that that often, and if we do, it's the same ones every week for a year. And so, it's definitely a thing I'm thinking about. I also like player-organised stuff. It's just really hard sometimes, like... The Quire stuff went really well. The first branch of that is sort of one of these games... where Sylvia and Dre, like... y'all just picked spots on the map, like “I wanna go there.” [Laughs.] And that whole Quire game could be like that, but even in running it for one week, it was clear that like, okay we're making a show, and so there needs to be a slightly better thrust. Like I had a good time talking about weird statues and snakes and talking... [Sylvia laughs] you know, talking through

the whole, like, scavenging and building yourself weird, like [sighs] organic metal wings [laughs]. But I also know that, like, part of what makes our show good is it's a little bit more directed than that, and there's a point at which it's like, I should grab the reins a little bit. Um, would a game like that style appeal to y'all, in any way?

DRE: I mean, I think it- it would be really different.

AUSTIN: [laughing] Yeah.

DRE: So, I mean it's- It would be interesting just because it sounds, like, so radically different. [AUSTIN: Yeah.] Um... So I don't know.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: I mean-...

AUSTIN: I feel like Hieron is set up for it at this point. I kind of feel like [DRE: Yeah.] there's a notion of, like, [DRE: Yeah.] y'all are at this key citadel in the middle, right? You're in the... the university, and like, do you just- do we just do a game where it's like you wander off into the wilds. Like, it could be really cool. It's an idea I've absolutely had and made some notes on but I'm [softly] not quite ready to commit to it, so...

JANINE: Mm.

SYLVIA: I think it's a really interesting idea in terms of, like, freedom, creatively [AUSTIN: Yeah, totally.] what we do. And I think it's something we should really look into if I'm being real [laughs]. [Austin and Dre laugh.] Because, like, I mean just using Hieron as an example, Ephrim and Hella barely talked [AUSTIN: Right.] and that would be super interesting to have just an episode where those two interact, and then like, maybe they don't see each for [AUSTIN: For months.] five more episodes or something.

AUSTIN: [cross] Right, right. We cheated it, right? In the first season, we have a moment where Hadrian sends Hella a postcard... or not a postcard, but a letter. And like, it doesn't make any sense that Hella got that letter in Nacre, but like, it was really important that those characters have some interaction, because even though they'd only met once on that island, or maybe they'd met in backstory, you know, once or twice before that, they felt so connected in terms of what their arcs were, even then. And- right right right, also yes, it was sent from The Mark of Erasure, [Janine laughs] a place that no one had ever returned from, to Nacre, [everyone laughs] a city that had been erased from history.

DRE: [cross] Magic.

JANINE: [cross] Imagine if we'd been doing patron postcards back then.

AUSTIN: Fuck, that would've been so good.

DRE: [cross] Oh, fuck.

AUSTIN: [everyone laughs] But like- But like, also, that's canon. Like I wanna be clear: Hadrian sent Hella a postcard from the Mark of the Erasure, a place that had never been left ever before – no one ever- no one had ever escaped it successfully, as far as anyone in Velas knew – to Nacre, a city that had been, for all intents and purposes, erased from history. I don't know how that got there, but like, in my mind, it got there the way that Agent Cooper slipped from the red room into North Dakota, do you know what I mean? Like, that's how it got there, and what's important is that it got there, not the mechanics thereof. And I want more... I wanna be more flexible in that way, like part of me wants to run a season one time that is like... like a tv show, where, like, we just reset to neutral at the end of most episodes, and like... "Okay in this one, we just totally mix up the group." And, like, it's fine, it's totally fine, don't even worry about [Janine laughs] the fact that we ended the last- the last arc with you, like, in the hospital, and everyone gathered around your bed, like you're fine now, you're back to work. Like... [Dre laughs.] Just because I love seeing y'all interact and it's so fun. So...

SYLVIA: Oh, so my arm thing is gonna be fine...

AUSTIN: It's gonna be just, totally- no, don't even worry about it. [Janine laughs]

SYLVIA: [cross] Okay, cool.

AUSTIN: [cross] Who even minds? Any other thoughts here?

DRE: [cross] Hadrian's gonna be really excited to see Throndir at the beginning of the- yeah.

AUSTIN: [cross] Yep, uh-huh. [Everyone laughs.] Totally. Super. Uh-huh. They're not- They're- Uh-huh. Hmm.

DRE: No, nothing to disagree about whatsoever.

AUSTIN: No. Alright then, next question comes in from Jade, who says:

"So, I've been doing OOctober – O-C-tober – this month. [SYLVIA: oh good.] Original-character-tober. And seeing certain things pop up again and again across a collection of very different characters that I've created has got me wondering, whether consciously or unconsciously, which traits and quirks do you find come up in your characters time and again, despite them perhaps being incredibly different on paper? Character tropes or archetypes that you can't help but be drawn to, little bits of yourself that show up regardless of what kind of character it is you're playing, that sort of thing. Thanks for the stories, my life is better for having gotten to hear them. Heart. [DRE: Aww.] All the best, Jade."

Thank you, Jade, that means a lot. So yeah, what do you think?

DRE: Um, I kinda wanna, like, wrap in another question that we had gotten, but I don't think we ever- we had put it on these but we ran out of time, because we always run out of time, where somebody had said like, "Hey Dre, like, Thrandir and Sige are, like, pretty similar characters, aren't they?" And in my head I was like "whaaat?" [Austin laughs.] Because I think, um ... God, I forget who said this, I feel bad that I forget... That person had said, like, "Well, they're both, like, people who are really, like, pushed to do the right thing at the end of the day." And I don't feel that way about either one of those characters? [Austin laughs.] Like, like, Sige was a- was a pretty selfish person who- Like, I think part of the reason that he at the end was, like, fighting against everything happening was because there was like... This is gonna go bad 'cause that knife is, like, real bad. [Austin: Yep.] But like, he had made a deal to get off the island, and it involved not letting Samoths get killed. [Austin: Right, right.] And he was willing to do that even if it meant literally fighting everybody else that he had been, [AUSTIN: Mhm.] like, comrades with. And like... I think with Thrandir, like Thrandir definitely does what he thinks is the right thing, but like, I as a person disagree with, like, a lot of the stuff, that especially, like, season three Thrandir [AUSTIN: Yep.] has ended up doing. So I don't know, I guess, like, the only constant for me is that I really like... I like putting characters in places that I think are complicated and interesting, just to, like, really stretch, like... Okay, I know have two or three of these core beliefs for this character and what happens when they get put in a place where that stuff gets pushed to the limit, [AUSTIN: yeah.] and it's like, does that break, do they bend, or is it "no, I hold firm to this and this is just what I- this is like the ultimate test of what I need to- of what I need to do to be me"?

AUSTIN: Yeah...

SYLVIA: I think just in terms of, like, sorta unifying stuff that I have with my characters... is like... At the end of the day, it's less, like, what I do with them and what I'm not able to do with them, if that makes sense?

AUSTIN: How so?

SYLVIA: Like... I can't... With... So, Ephrim was actually a bit of a departure from this but if you look at... the way I played Aubrey and I've been trying to bring it into Echo a little bit too is that I'm trying to really get away from violence... in some ways. [AUSTIN: Mm.] And like, I don't wanna get too much into this 'cause, like, this is a big thing I've been thinking about where we've left off, in terms of- Not even where the episodes have been up yet [Austin laughs.] but recording for Echo [AUSTIN: Yeah. Mhm.] Trust me, it's a thing I've been thinking a ton about, but like- like in that first fight with, uh, the Doyenne, [AUSTIN: Mhm.] when the Doyenne was there, I made a purpose decision that Echo didn't kill someone. [AUSTIN: Right.] And Aubrey was a pacifist for the major- like, pacifist in that they wouldn't directly engage in violence. [AUSTIN: Right.] And sort of like a more extreme version of the fact that I can't really bring

myself to play evil characters... I guess. [DRE: Interesting.] [cross] And that's sort of like a very extreme version of that.

AUSTIN: [cross] And so you cast a... You cast a wide and, like, accurate... uh, net, to what, like, is too far for you, and it's killing people. Like, [laughs] [SYLVIA: It was kinda like-] which seems completely fair.

SYLVIA: Yeah, it's one of those things where it was like... I was looking back at like, playing like, DnD, like, when I was like, eighteen. [AUSTIN: Mhm.] And like, being like "Ah man I can't wait to fucking... hurt the bad guys," and then like, when I got to this, and I was like, "Well, what if... fucking what- these are people."

AUSTIN: Right... [cross] Right.

SYLVIA: [cross] Like, in any fic- Like I like when in fiction... character life means something?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: So I try to bring, like, that in. And then with Ephrim, I tried to sorta reverse that in a way, where he, like, has a literal god complex at times.

AUSTIN: Where like- But is still not a particularly...

SYLVIA: [cross] He's not murderous.

AUSTIN: [cross] ...murderous.

SYLVIA: But he's not afraid to- Like he will get his hands dirty.

AUSTIN: [cross] Right. So, do you think that you were in that way- It's- The recurring thing is that you are exploring different degrees of willingness to commit violence?

SYLVIA: [cross] Yeah, it's like-

AUSTIN: [cross] More than that, you're like- it's not that you played pacifist, it's that you played characters who have relationships with violence.

SYLVIA: I mean, yeah, I think this comes from a lot of, like- I looked ahead and it kinda comes into some stuff that we'll talk about in the next question too, [AUSTIN: Mhm.] but I'll save that. Just like, personal experiences with violence in general, exploring, like, what is the point where what you've done to someone is... just as bad, or worse even than... [AUSTIN: ...Mhm.] killing them. Like look at, [laughs] like, one of the last big things that happened with Ephrim and Arrell at the library. At what point is that... At what point would death had been a mercy, right?

AUSTIN: Right.

SYLVIA: And like... This isn't- These aren't new questions, these are questions that tons of shit explores, but it's just something that I've found-

AUSTIN: [cross] That's o- Yeah but-

SYLVIA: [cross] Completely naturally [AUSTIN: Yes.] I've found myself gravitating towards, like this wasn't a conscious decision, I was just like "oh this is a thing with all these characters, [AUSTIN: Right.] I should lean into it."

AUSTIN: Well, it's better that than, like, know that that impulse is there, and then you still resist it. And like, [SYLVIA: Yeah.] you don't engage with it, like, it's okay to resist it, it's okay to lean in, but the thing that would be bad is to ignore it, and that would be just like... Then you're not getting out- out of this what you could put into it, you know?

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Uh, Janine, what about you?

JANINE: So I... [laughs] You know, I talk a lot about how Signet is- is a response to Adaire, but I hadn't thought about this before and I just, like, just now, just sat down while everyone else was talking and just thought of like, "okay, what are some common lines between basically all of my characters but especially those two?" And immediately came up with [laughing] three really strong, like, kind of irrefutable things.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JANINE: Uh... which is interesting. I might have to save these for later, for a character I need to make in the future.

AUSTIN: [laughing] Uh-huh.

JANINE: [laughs] So for one thing, I think all my characters end up being, like... or at least starting off as like, worldly and savvy [AUSTIN: Mhm.] like they know how the world really is, or they've seen... they've seen stuff, you know? [AUSTIN: Mhm.] I don't think I've ever played a character that- Like even when we played Golden Sky Stories, I made my character the oldest of the group, [AUSTIN: Right.] and she kinda like hung back. Um... She also – this is another- this is the other thing – I always need a box of tricks, don't I? [AUSTIN: Yeahhh, true.] [Sylvia laughs] I always need access to lots of-

AUSTIN: [cross] That's a good thing, frankly.

JANINE: I guess, but it does always lead to a very similar kind of play where it's like, I feel like I should have a solution to something that I usually don't. [AUSTIN: Mhm.] Like Adaire is really guilty of this, Signet, you know Signet has a mech? [laughs] [AUSTIN: Uh-huh.] She's used it

once. [AUSTIN: Yeah.] You know, and again, Golden Sky Stories, I picked the class that could transform into a bunch of stuff and turn leaves and dirt into money, and like, brought all those tricks out when we played. [AUSTIN: Mhm.] The other thing I think is that all my characters are interpersonally bad but I don't know that that comes off when I actually play. I see them that way but I don't think they all necessarily come off that way... from the outside. Maybe they do. But-

AUSTIN: In what way?

JANINE: They're all- Like with Adaire, I don't think Adaire really thinks of people she knows as friends in the way that friend should mean. She's always doing a kind of math in her head about how... how... You know, I think a good way to explain it is like, when you are building a relationship in a video game, like Harvest Moon, it's like, "okay, well I give you a mushroom every day and then you'll like me, and then I can get whatever I need out of this relationship." [AUSTIN: Riiight, right.] Very transactional. With Signet, it's always very one-sided. Like she wants people to talk to her, she doesn't want to talk to them so much. [AUSTIN: Mhm.] Like about herself. She doesn't want to... You know, the times that she... that she talks about herself are usually times where it's like a move, where I need to, like, bare her heart and soul to get something. Which is, again, kind of transactional. It's not supposed to be, in the way that it is for Adaire, but it does end up that way. You know, Tawny Buck is another example of like... Her relationships with other people kind of boil down to her being some sort of long-suffering, like, mature friend. [AUSTIN: Mhm.] With, I guess, the exception would be Maggie Darcy... who's her boss, [cross] so it doesn't count.

AUSTIN: [cross] Right, but that's a different- [Janine laughs] Yeah I was gonna say that's a whole different situation. [JANINE: Yeah.] Right.

JANINE: So there's a lot more through-lines there than I actually realised. And also ones that aren't really that hard for me to unpack... on like a- like a personal level. Like [cross] I understand where all these things come from.

AUSTIN: [cross] Why do you think that you needed the question to see it, if that makes sense?

JANINE: Because I think I focus more on the differences. [AUSTIN: Okay.] Like I focus on- I think I- Yeah, I focus on the things that make the characters stand out in a way that blinds me to the ways that they are similar. [AUSTIN: Mmm.] I just- It's just one of those things that- I just hadn't considered it before. Because I defi- I... You know, again with Signet and Adaire, I define them by their differences to each other.

AUSTIN: Um... Yeah, that adds up. I have... I have my- I have my own. [Janine laughs]. Like obviously I don't play characters here. Um, [laughs] but, you know, I do have my own... issues, I'd say. My own go-tos. Here's Austin Walker GM Bingo: We've got... You know, people on the call have to- have to tune in for this one. Imma just post it in the Discord for y'all. Uh, what have we got, we got "Mid-tier bureaucrat" [Janine and Dre laugh].

SYLVIA: Yep.

AUSTIN: We got “Long distance lover”. [Janine laughs]. We have “Charming bumbling academic”. We have “Distant god”. We have “straight-talking criminal”, which is like a Jim, I think there. Anyone who would say “I would like a bribe.”

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: “Verbose and honourable general”, which I think is like, Sister Rust or the leader of the... the Netted Wave, or etc. “Fast talking criminal”. [laughs] Just everyone who is not Jim. “Southern gentleman”, various. “No nonsense killers”, which are characters who, uh, Keith says anything and I say “this character is going to hit you”, [Janine laughs] and then Keith says “no they’re not,” and they- they hit him. [Everyone laughs.]

DRE: Or shoot. Or shoot.

AUSTIN: Or shoot! “Jilted ex”. “Free space”, right there, “free space”. “Perky fan”, which is a lot of people. “Old person who is a badass”. [Everyone laughs.]

SYLVIA: Are you directing Red 3, huh?

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. [Everyone laughing] “Charming leader”. “Charming” in quotes, of course. “Animal what makes noises”. [Everyone laughs].

DRE: Yeah, uh-huh.

AUSTIN: And world-weary shopkeep. [Everyone laughing and sighing]. So that’s-

DRE: Who made this?

AUSTIN: Me, just now. Me, just now. A second ago.

DRE: Oh, okay. [Janine laughs]. Alright, good.

AUSTIN: I could print thirty free cards or I could pay this company [laughing] ten dollars to print more. I think I’m okay. I think I’m just gonna- Can I just get a bigger version of this?

DRE: [cross] It looks like, uh, Janine doesn’t have to make the postcard this month. [Everyone laughs] You just- You just made it.

AUSTIN: [laughing] Yeah, that’s it. Oh my god, okay. I’m gonna- I’m gonna- Oh, there’s a bingos caller- bingo callers card in here, too. Alright, I’m gonna close this and we’re gonna go back to answering good questions [Janine laughs] from our good good fans. [Sylvia laughs] I’ll post this on- on the thing. Somehow. Alright, this one comes in from Nathan, who asks:

“Austin mentions bringing his experiences with cancer into the last season. I was wondering about that process. As a GM, do you try to bring your players’ personal lives into the story also, I would assume with their permission? As players, do you use these games as a way to work through any issues you have? Have you had experiences playing tabletop games that hit too close to home?”

Um, I don’t go out of my way to bring in people’s personal life stuff. What I do do my best to do is know what they’re interested in and bring that stuff in... which is a similar but broader collection of- of things, I think. Right? Oops, I’ve left the- I’ve turned the page by mistake. In which, you know... I’m not saying like “oh okay, I know this person has this thing going on in their life right now,” and instead I’m kind of saying like “hey, this person really likes... to- likes animals. This person likes- Seriously. This person really is interested in architecture. Like, how do I get them into a scene where they can talk about architecture? Or painting, or something.” And so what I do is I make paintings that come alive [laughs] and chase them down [Janine laughs]. Like that’s- That is what I do, I don’t... I don’t use games as therapy, because I’m not a licensed therapist. Like, I think games can be therapeutic, and they can be therapeutic without me needing to be the- the person who does that work. Especially because it’s a show for an audience, and there’s like... I think I have a great deal of trust and respect, and I think that goes both ways with everyone who’s on Friends at the Table, but like “hey let’s work through this big thing in your life, live for tens of thousands of people,” [Dre laughs] [JANINE: Ugh...] yeah, is like a big ask. And I’ve had bad experiences with it. I’ve been on the other side of it where I’ve had GMs who, like, very much dig into shit that they know is going on with me, or with other players, and see it just get gross, and just get bad. [cross] Even though it’s-

JANINE: [cross] That sounds so invasive.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Oh my god, yeah. If Art was on this cast we would go deep into some shit that we saw during college that was just like... It’s super invasive, and it’s super paternalistic, and like... It’s very much like... about raising you as the GM to a level that you think that like “Oh yeah, I can solve that pro- I can help you work through that stuff.” It’s bad. And frankly, like, I just don’t- I think that games are really good because they’re media, because they are- because play is good, because storytelling is good for helping someone work through stuff. But there’s a big difference between that and what- especially today on Mental Health- International Mental Health Day, like between that and actual, you know, therapy, or- or counselling, or, you know, even meditation, or even- even, like, other mental health practises. I think gaming is really good for my personal mental health, but I- I would not advocate jumping headfirst into that for somebody else, honestly even with their consent, because it is... If you’re not trained to do that, that is a big ask, and it is... a very risky proposition. So... But Sylvia, it sounded like you had something from the last question that you did want to bring in here.

SYLVIA: Yeah, so, it's just sort of like... A lot of my characters in some way, just because of who I am – and honestly, I forgot that it was World Mental Health Day, this is kinda...[Austin chuckles] fits into it – a lot of my characters either have parables- parables for it... or parallels for it, that what I'm thinking of... Parallels for it, or just like, in my head experience some sort of mental illness. [AUSTIN: Mhm.] Usually the kind of mental illness that I have, because that just kind of comes into my play, so like, depression, anxiety... [laughing] some other shit that I'm not gonna disclose. [AUSTIN: Sure.] But like, because of that, it's- it's sort of... it does become that sort of therapeutic thing, but also it's... Because you're playing a character, there's a buffer there [AUSTIN: Right.] so you can back off if it gets too close to home. [AUSTIN: Yeah.] Like, we've talked a little bit about Echo's family stuff. And I've implied stuff here and there. And I have been very prepared for whenever that comes up to be able to press the eject button, [AUSTIN: Right.] because that is, like, [swallows] the closest to my own, like, bad home life [AUSTIN: Yeah.] that I've gotten in a fictional thing, but I think that like, at the same time bringing in these real world experiences are how you make things feel real... and like, living? And like, people... Like, people who've gone through bad shit should be represented in this type of thing too, [AUSTIN: Mhm.] you know?

AUSTIN: Yeah, definitely. Well, I think that that is... That's the thing- That's like a- a different thing, right? Which is like, [sigh] the difference between... For me, working through the deaths in my family from cancer was about exploring that issue in the way that you described exploring violence. It wasn't about cleansing myself from the grief. That grief didn't go anywhere because... of some good scenes with Samol, do you know what I mean? Um... I wish that is where that went, but that's not what my intent was, and it's not what I ever would expect to come from this. But what I do expect to come from this is exploring things that do have important real analogues in people's lives – including our own – and thinking about them the way that writers think about them, the way that actors think about them, the way that any storyteller has ever- or artist has ever thought about something like family or violence or death or... specific types of death, or... you know, all of these things. Like, in the same way that we have love onscreen in a very distinct way that we don't see represented in a lot of places. In the same way that we have... you know, some- some friendships of a type that I don't see represented in some places and that can be very stressful and exhausting. I hope that we can be a vehicle for that stuff, even if it isn't like... You know, even if it isn't like proper therapy, it's a way for us to reach out to people and be like "okay, hey. here is your story... or here is not *your* story, but here is a story of something that you can relate to and that you can see yourself in to some degree." And if that helps people then that's the fucking best. So... That is- That's what I've got. Anybody else have something on this one?

JANINE: Um... [sighs] I think if I had more experience playing tabletop games – like, not being recorded [AUSTIN: Mhm.] – my answer to this might be different, [AUSTIN: Mhm.] but because my experience has been pretty much exclusively on mic, for an audience, there are a lot of things that like... there are- there are like topics and there are things that come up that just kind of shut me down. [AUSTIN: Right.] And the idea of having something like that come up and then

also... having that coexist with the pressure to entertain people [AUSTIN: Yeah.] is just not something I think I'm interested in. Like it's too- it's too much, it's so much. [AUSTIN: Yeah.] So there- there are things that like, I think would totally be interesting games and stuff but... and like, difficult and challenging, but the idea of having to do that in a way that... in a way that feels like I'm pulling my weight on a team that's entertaining someone on their bus ride or something. [Austin laughs][DRE: Mm.] Like, I just- that's just, like, [laughs] I don't know. [AUSTIN: Yeah.] That's some advanced level shit that I don't think I'm quite at.

AUSTIN: Not there yet. [Dre laughs]

JANINE: No.

AUSTIN: That's fair, honestly. Um, brief update: I've added some more things to Austin Walker GM Bingo. [Janine and Sylvia laugh]

DRE: Perfect.

AUSTIN: I've added "verbose and dishonourable general". [Janine laughs] I've added "shitty CEOs". I've added "conspiracy theorist", and "just a regular guy!" This one here is "just a regular guy, exclamation point". So...

DRE: [cross] Oh yeah, that's Lazer Ted.

JANINE: [cross] You should, like, add "Back of neck scratching dialogue". [Everyone laughs.] Like someone saying something while they're like [makes "maah" noise].

AUSTIN: [laughing] I- Yeah, yeah. "Person who breathes through their teeth." [Janine laughs.] "Teeth breather".

DRE: [laughing] Oh. That's not a good combination of words. [AUSTIN: No, it's not.] I don't like that.

SYLVIA: I'm glad we're continuing the body horror on every single type of show we do.

AUSTIN: [cross] I rewrote it as "awkward friend". [Janine laughs] So... Alright, next question. Um, this one comes in from... uh, Kavi? Kavi or Kay-vi:

"Hey friends, I'm curious about how you deal with unique experiences of marginalisation. As someone who is often the only person of colour or tra- or trans woman or both in a group, I'm often anxious about requesting that we handle certain topics differently when they come up, and I'd like to know if you have any techniques or tips for starting these conversations and handling them well? This question is primarily for Austin but I'm happy to hear other people's advice based on their unique experiences as well."

I- I- It's funny because on our show, I actually think the thing... like, because I'm the GM, like, I think we do race okay. Like, I do my best to make race good. Not perfect ever, right? And I still think we get really useful notes from fans who say, like "hey, can you address this thing, because here's a thing that- you know, just because you're black doesn't mean that you have, like, the magic wand for representing race well." Um, and so I'm really happy when people send stuff in. But I actually think that like, Sylvia I'm really curious for you, as someone who played in COUNTER/Weight, in which we built a society that was non-binary, and I fucked up with it a lot, like... I did my best, obviously, but still would default to he/him or- or she/her because in my mind, I'd cast some actor or actress in that role... and just like, didn't get it right. So I'm kinda curious for you, like when those things happened, and like, correcting me, or correcting other players... Not that, like, this is, like, your- It's not your job to do that. [SYLVIA: Oh yeah, for sure.] But like, I'm curious how... you know, in some ways you relate to Kavi here more than me because you're a player in a group and not the GM.

SYLVIA: I think the most important thing, like, in this situation is just comfort with the people – and I know that that's hard to get to, and I know that anxiety, for example, can make that really hard – but... the most impor- like, I have never felt like I can't bring something to you or to like, [AUSTIN: Right.] anybody else in the group... if something slips up. Um... And I think you need to, like... If you're worried about this, maybe talk to your GM one-on-one, [AUSTIN: Mmm, mhm.] and be like, "hey, can I come- can I talk to you if I ever have an issue with the way we're handling certain stuff that's- kinda hits close to home?" Because like, your comfort should come first in a tabletop game, like you're supposed to enjoy it, [AUSTIN: Right] and... you can explore tough ideas, but make sure it's still within your comfort zone, you know, if that makes sense? [AUSTIN: Yep.] Like you can get to the outer edges of it, but make sure you're never pushed out of it by someone else without your... like, consent, with that, I guess.

[1:00:10]

AUSTIN: That is, like, such a big thing is- being able to be- play with people who you're comfortable with having those conversations with. And I know that that's, like, not a thing that's super easy. You can't snap your fingers and make the group that you play with really good. And I also wanna say, like, that anxiety is fair to have. Like, it is fair to be anxious about making that request. I know, like, tha- And this is not, like, a good answer, but this is the answer that I, um, had when I was coming up and just playing in games and not GM'ing them, and wasn't always playing with people who I loved, was that I navigated those situations the way you always have to navigate spaces in general, which is to say, there's lots of negotiation, there's lot of alibi, there's lots of you picking a character, or directing the story in a broad way... as a way to avoid stuff, or to slowly encourage your group to do things a different way. And it's exhausting, and it's not a thing you should have to do, but like, it's a thing that I definitely did in college, was like, "Okay, like, I'm gonna make sure that there's black characters on screen, and if I get into a situation where there are other black characters – "on screen" obviously in quotes – who are being, like, set up in a weird way, then at least I still have my own representation, right? Like,

which is a weird thing to say, but like, that was something. Um... And the other... The other big one here is to, like, insist on a veto and veil system early on, across topic matter. I mentioned this story before but playing in a game of Burning Wheel with Adam Koebel... um, sexual assault came up, and it was, like, at a point in my life where I was, like, extremely sensitive to sexual assault... um, as a- as a topic... And it had been something that we had not explicitly said "don't do this" because I think there had just been a... unspoken rule that we didn't wanna go down that road? But there was not an unspoken rule, [laughs] and so he included a character who committed sexual assault, who committed- who was a rapist... and, uh... it like, completely ruined my night. And it's a thing where it's like, I should've had that conversation with the GM, because the GM can decide the direction of things so much, and what I did have was the conversation with him afterwards, and I said "Ah, this is too heavy for me right now, I can't- I can't go down- I think you did it in a way that was, like... not in a way that was like, demeaning or- Not demeaning, but you know what I mean. Not in a superficial way. Not in a way that was, like, cheap. But I still felt deeply uncomfortable with it, can we not go down this path again?" And having that conversation with him, one, was really good because it helped build trust between us as player and GM, and two, like, meant that we wouldn't go down it again no matter what the other players wanted, right? Like, if another player had told him privately "Oh I really wanna just, like, make this game one where we go after shitty guys who are rapists," Adam would not have made that game that, because I'd drawn... I'd said no, I'd put down my veto. So put that stuff down. Or same thing the other day, we started playing our next Bluff City game, and early in the recording, Ali was like "Let's not get too graphic with violence," and I think that that's a completely valid thing to say at the sta- at the start of any recording or the start of any play session. It's like, "I don't wanna do... It makes sense here but it doesn't make sense here, so let's not do it." And that... Getting the practise of doing that thing will help you make that- that experience a lot more enjoyable for you. I think.

SYLVIA: Really quick, before we move on, I do wanna give a shoutout- The Veil. Actually, doesn't they- Don't they have a built-in mechanic for this? [AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah, they do.] As well? They have the veto cards.

AUSTIN: Yeah, the veto- yeah that's, like, a pretty common thing inside of the independent gamespace. [SYLVIA: Okay.] The Veil, one thing I will say is that I actually talked to Fraser Simon about the... one of the classes, one of the playbooks, the empath, which in a recording that we ended up canning, like the first- I mean, two of you were there, [laughs] Sylvia and Dre. We canned that first recording because [DRE: Yeah.] as written, the empath can very easily – if you're not being- if you're not being careful, and if you're playing to, like- if you are playing in a way that includes you wanting to use your abilities – you can very quickly step into issues of, uh, ignoring consent, and escalate things in a way that are not good, and there's nothing in that playbook – or there wasn't in the first edition – that was like "hey, heads up, no matter what you do, this playbook is going to be about consent. Like, it's automatically about you fucking with people's brains, and like, getting in there. And even if you're trying to do good things. Even if you're just trying to calm someone down, doing that without someone's consent is like, you've stepped over a line." And the way the book was written – that playbook was written – was also

just like- encouraged you to do it in ways that were not just “I’m gonna calm somebody down”. [laughs] It was like “Oh, you’re a little happy, let me take a point of your happiness so I can fire my psychic gun.” Um... It was bad. And like, I ended up talking with them for a while, and now there’s even a consent subsection in the empath playbook, if you download the current playbook, there’s a whole subsection on consent... that’s short, it’s like a paragraph... But then the thing it does that’s interesting is it says “Hey, consents an issue here, and also, what’s your character- like, where are their lines? Will they do this under threat of violence? Will they use their psychic powers under threat of violence? Will they use it to help people who know, and have given their verbal consent for them to do it? Will they use it to help people who have not given their consent?” And like, even understanding your character that way will help you treat that as a real thing instead of it just being a thing that you handwave away and say “Oh, I’ll know when it’s good and when it’s bad.” Because you don’t, until it’s in play, so... Yeah, I think that- I think that The Veil has done a pretty good job of that, all said. Uh, next question? ... Okay, this one comes in from Ryan, and I added it because [laughs] Janine is on the call. [Janine laughs].

“What’s your strategy like for taking notes and recording information during a session? I like to keep things pretty improvisational and keep track of developments as they come up but in the heat of roleplaying, it can be tough to get everything down without slowing down play. My players also take some broad strokes notes but I don’t wanna rely too heavily for that. I’m also curious about the organisation of your note-taking. What separate documents do you use for info, like plot details, characters, factions etc.? Thanks so much for your time, love the show, love being a patron, always excited for what’s coming next.”

Janine, you take better notes than me, so I wanted to ask you how you do it.

JANINE: I’ve never seen your notes, so I don’t know that that’s true.

AUSTIN: I... I know what my notes look like. [JANINE: Hmm.] I take notes- Most of my good notes come between sessions, not during, is what I’ll say.

JANINE: Yeah, um... I know you- you use Scrivener for a lot of the worldbuilding and stuff, right?

AUSTIN: [cross] I think I’m done with it.

JANINE: [cross] ‘cause it let’s you cross reference and- Really? It seems so good.

AUSTIN: [cross] Yeah, it’s- it’s- If I had more time, if this was my full time job, I would use it-

JANINE: [cross] [sighs] Yeah...

AUSTIN: If this was my full time job, on like Wednesdays, I would go in to Scrivener [long i] or Scrivener [short i] [cross] and like, update it.

JANINE: [cross] There's, like, a layer of complexity there to exploit that requires time.

AUSTIN: [cross] Well, the thing is, it's not super useful for when I'm playing. When I'm playing I really just need a Google doc [JANINE: Yeah.] with all the info for this session in it. And, um... it's not good for that. You can kind of do it, you can set up a draft, but it's just like so much messier. Also, it's not- I have it working with Dropbox, but it always just feels like it's about to break.

JANINE: Oh, that's a shame.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Um, so...

JANINE: Um... I think [sighs] my answer to this... My answer regarding, like, a lot of notetaking things and a lot of... things like that is gonna be, like, you really need to know yourself and your style very well. The reason that I take notes specifically is because I have a hard time retaining information that I'm just hearing. I usually- Normally, like, reading things isn't that much better for me but it's the act of writing things down that helps me retain it. So from that point of view, I'm- basically I'm creating my own visual aids, which are the thing that I need to- to understand what's happening. But that's not true for everyone. Like, for some people, taking notes is kind of like a step you don't necessarily need, if you still have... if you have, like, the- the notes you used to guide people in or [AUSTIN: Mm.] you know, your player notes. That might be- It might be fine, like it depends. You just need to kind of know yourself and also, you need to know what you're looking for in your notes most often. The way I take notes has changed a lot. If I look at- So I keep all my notes in, um, I use an iPad, I use a programme that I think is just called Noteshelf and it lets you make a virtual shelf of virtual notebooks, and you pick the covers; very cute. [Sylvia and Dre laugh]. You can pick the paper. Um...

AUSTIN: What's it called?

JANINE: I think it's called Noteshelf? And you can pick different paper types, so I like to pick a paper type that I think reflects a little bit of what I'm doing in there. Like for Adaire's notebook, it's just a plain blank page, whereas for Signet's notebook, I use a dot grid, because it feels a little bit more... um, not sci-fi-ish but kinda sci-fi-ish. [AUSTIN: A little bit.] It feels a little- Yeah. But- but basically... What I'm saying is, like, Adaire's notebook, I tried to write down, like, everything that happened, and that is a totally tedious thing to do. It also wasn't super helpful when I was actually looking for information, [AUSTIN: Mm.] because I just had everything? And I had everything point form, so it didn't really make a lot of sense in relation to each other. I kind of switched colours at random to differentiate one point from the next but there's no consistent colour theme. There's no... You know, there's sketches every now and then but nothing attached to them. Like, so I had to figure out that the stuff that I was usually looking up was...

things like new characters that were introduced, [AUSTIN: Right, right.] and like, the basic description that comes right after that. And that becomes helpful even if you aren't writing down, like, why they're there or whatever, it helps because you can situate who was where and when, even if you're not, again, writing that down. Like I used to write all of that down explicitly, but having things in an order, you can kind of infer a lot of- You can fill in a lot of those gaps yourself and it doesn't need to slow you down, basically. [AUSTIN: Right.] One of the big things that I use notes for is... uh, setting tone at the beginning of a session.

AUSTIN: [cross] Well that's like- You have like key phrases, right?

JANINE: Yeah. Yes. This is I guess more- I guess this would actually be useful for a GM too. I start each session with a picture of- Well it's not a picture of my character but it's a picture that I think represents where my character is at, at that point. [AUSTIN: Hmm.] And over that picture I write... Um, I write things. So for the last session that we did, over that picture, um, I wrote "restore Belgard", because that's important. That's an important thing [Dre chuckles] that I think is at the front of her mind. [AUSTIN: Uh-huh.] And then I wrote a couple notes that were things that were things that are- have been at the top of other... sort of headers for sessions, which is "Be loving", "Be cool, yet warm", [Austin laughs] "Service is peace, faith is strength"... "Faith is strength, comma not judgement". [AUSTIN: Mm, mhm.] Which is something that-

AUSTIN: That's come up. I don't-

JANINE: Yeah, that got- that got- that's specifically come up- It use to be "Service is peace", and then "Faith is strength, not judgement" got added after that interaction with Sho.

AUSTIN: [cross] And Fourteen not knowing the- the Divines?

JANINE: [cross] I also- Yes. Yeah. I also use it to keep track of things like pronouns.

AUSTIN: Yep.

JANINE: Because we have characters and I'm really bad about that and I really hate that I'm bad about it.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JANINE: So I will write in big letters who uses what pronouns, so I get it- so I keep it as straight as I possibly can. I still kind of fuck up but I'm- I do try actively. But yeah, a big- The best thing you can do is just figure out what you're actually looking for when you refer back to your notes. Because if you're just- If you're focussed on taking down all of the information, and then you're spending time taking down information that you don't actually ever refer back to, [AUSTIN: Yeah.] like, that's the info that you have no problem with, then you are just kinda wasting your time and making a big tangle of stuff that doesn't really help. Um... So that I think is my big advice. Also, like, know what you like in terms of writing. I'm kind of like a paper... [cross] paper and pen snob.

AUSTIN: [cross] Oh, you mean like, literally... Physically.

JANINE: [cross] Yes, no I mean like the tactile act of writing. Like, if you want to type, then find a way that you can type, if that's the way that you like to get that stuff out. If you want a physical copy, find... You know, figure out what kind of... tools you need to make that experience, um, the best it can be. If you want- If you wanna value organisation or whatever but you still want the writing stuff, maybe you do want, like, a tablet [AUSTIN: Mm.] with a stylus or something like that. It's, you know...

AUSTIN: I do a lot of my midgame notes tend to be new NPCs introduced... Uh... New, like, player flags, when I notice that a player has, like, really decided to lean in and go after a certain thing, I'll sometimes make a very quick note that's just like, a player's name and then a thing that they seemed to respond well to. Obviously, just like, basic stuff, in terms of like, updating factions, updating like... [sighs] literally just like, has this character been in this scene? Is this character hurt? [JANINE: Mhm.] Hey, when was the last time that, um... What was the relationship between, you know, Cascabel and... Grand Magnificent when they were first on screen, just in case that comes up again? You know, like stuff like that. [JANINE: Yeah.] And that- that's generally it, and I do almost all of that- so I did- I tried to use Scrivener for like, for all of the last two months of Twilight Mirage, and then the last two recordings I've gone back to just using a Google doc, and I just like it more. Like, I just like having everything on one page. I think I might try tw- twiddlywiki? Or something like that? [JANINE snorts] Someone recommended it in- in the Discord?

JANINE: Sorry, what was that?

AUSTIN: Twiddlywiki?

JANINE: Okay?

AUSTIN: Twiddly- [cross] Twiddlywiki?

SYLVIA: [cross] That- That's not a real thing.

AUSTIN: Tiddlywik-li. Tiddlywiki.

JANINE: Tiddlywikli.

AUSTIN: Nope, just Tiddlywiki.

SYLVIA: Aw, that's my favourite Teletubby. [Janine laughs]

AUSTIN: [cross] [sighing] Okay, I'm gonna move on. It seems cool. It's like a non-linear, like, wiki, that I think would give me the... the cross-referencing stuff in Scrivener, but also still just be

in a web browser that I can update from anywhere, and like, deal with that, so I'm gonna look into that maybe this weekend.

JANINE: Oh, um, another thing I'll say in- in reference to Notesshelf, it lets you tag pages... And also import PDFs, [AUSTIN: Mm.] so I also import the PDFs of the books that we're using, and I tag them with [cross] the relevant things.

AUSTIN: [cross] What is this? Notepage? Notepages?

JANINE: Notesshelf.

AUSTIN: Notesshelf.

JANINE: The tags are univ- are like, global, so if you search a tag, it will search the tag through all of your notebooks, [AUSTIN: Yeah.] not just the one. So if you have stuff spread out, and you wanna, like, look into, you know- Find notes on a particular character or particular whatever, [AUSTIN: Right.] that can be pretty handy.

AUSTIN: How much is this? What- How-

JANINE: I don't- I bought it, like... when I had [cross] an iPad 1 forever ago, so I haven't kept up.

AUSTIN: [cross] Five bucks... Oh wait. Wait, it might be ten bucks. Ten bucks on iPad, maybe.

DRE: [cross] Yeah, it's ten.

AUSTIN: I'll look into this. I'll look into this and see if this is... This seems cool... Yeah, okay. Stuff to look at. Stuff for me to look at [Janine laughs] as notetaking. Alright, let's- let's keep moving. This one comes in... I mean, unless Sylvia and Dre have notes questions, but... answers...

SYLVIA: Thank you everyone who contributes to the wiki. [Janine and Austin laugh.]

DRE: Yeah, uh-huh. [cross] Yep. That.

AUSTIN: [cross] True facts.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Absolutely. Seriously. Okay, next question. [Everyone laughing] Wait, that was- is that the right one? Wait, one second. Uh okay, so here we go. This is from John, who says:

"Hi friends, this question is primarily directed at Austin, but also applies to anyone who has run a game before. In most of the fiction that I consume, the antagonists are usually

individuals or small groups either acting directly or through some proxy: evil megacorp, corrupt government, mad monarch, demon lord etc. I find that this tends to bleed over into the games I've run or played in. In *Friends at the Table*, y'all have done a great job of addressing the ideas that fuel antagonists, or even treating ideas themselves as antagonistic. I'd like to be able to widen my narrative scope in terms of what an antagonist is or can be in my writing and in my tabletop games. What sort of things have inspired you to think outside of the villain box? Are there any particularly- particular writers, philosophers or other creators that have helped inspire your villains and villainous doctrines? Thanks so much."

Um, I think there's, like, an answer to this question that is just like me going over the list of books that I've read, and I think that's a boring answer. Like, I- I have- I think that's an interesting answer that's like, let's go get coffee and I'll talk to about what my inspirations were for these various seasons, like, especially right now. I sent- [laughs] I sent Janine a text, or a DM in the middle of the night last night that was just like, trying to work through what *Twilight Mirage's*, like, antagonistic split was, versus the *COUNTER/Weight* one. That like, if on *COUNTER/Weight* you have Ibex and Rigor who are like, uh, kind of capitalism on one side and like, unchecked – not even unchecked, like... but- but like, deeply... committed – revolutionary politics on the other, what is happening in *Twilight Mirage*? And like, kind of, worked through that. And like, that's an interesting conversation. I liked that conversation personally, but I think it's a secondary conversation, because the... [sigh] The things that you've listed – evil megacorp, corrupt government, mad monarch, demon lord – are already things that.... are and should reflect ideas and ideology. Like, what happens I think in most games is you just get evil megacorp. You don't get, like, why is that megacorp evil? Right, like, what is the thing that's fueling that? And you don't have to look far for inspiration, you don't have to look to like, philosophers, you have to look to Mark Zuckerberg doing an Oculus Rift, like, fucking disaster tourism in Puerto Rico yesterday. Right like, where does that come from? And so like, for me the actual answer in terms of what sort things have inspired me to think outside of the villain box, in terms of, like, presenting characters who are driven by ideas and goals instead of just being "the bad guy", is to look at people who I think are bad. [laughs] Um, [Dre laughs] are to look at journalism, is to look at history, and to recognise that like, people have ideas and goals and... are driven by their visions of the world. Like, I think it's kind of like, not trite or played out, but like, common at this point to be like, no one thinks that they're evil, and we all know- Like, we all know that basically no one thinks that they're evil in the grand scheme of things, especially in the grand scheme of people who do bad, and even evil things, they don't- their vision of the world is such that they are not the evil ones. And so, you should be building your characters and your evil megacorporations and your, you know, your despotic, you know, dictators to reflect that they h- that they come from a place and that place is what makes them see the world like this. Otherwise what you have is, like- Or- Or you're- Or be happy playing a cartoon. Like, be happy playing a Saturday morning cartoon that has, like, villains who don't have a purpose outside of being villains, and like, I'm not here to judge you for wanting to play that version of DnD. Like, that's a fun thing to do sometimes. Like, I- It's why I play strategy games and, you know, tactical RPGs and stuff, like I don't always necessarily need that to- There's an itch that you can scratch

like that, but if what you're trying to do is tell a story, like, start with- start with, like, the history of red lining in America, where like... Oh, the reason that shitty politicians kept allowing there to be really racist red lining practices is because there were lobbyists who were paid by landlords. Like, that kind of stuff doesn't come from nothing, right? And like, you just follow that line, and eventually, you get to the reason why pharmaceutical companies charge more than they should for pills, or why they hoard, you know, um- drugs and drive up prices. Things like that. Like, that stuff doesn't come from nothing, and you'll wind up somewhere if you start treating them as whole objects, the way that you treat your – hopefully treat your – player characters. Um, has anyone else- Does anyone else here have, like, an experience of running a game and writing a story and kind of trying to make sure that their villains are more than just kind of placeholder “they're the bad ones”?

SYLVIA: Um, not actual experience but I've got an idea if someone wants to steal it, because I've never been able to run it myself. [Austin and Janine laugh.]

AUSTIN: Sure.

SYLVIA: I've always wanted to do a game where... it's a two part campaign, where the characters from the first part end up being the antagonists for the second part.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I have that written down. That's a thing we're gonna do at some point, I promise.

SYLVIA: Okay, just because-

AUSTIN: There's a chat you're not part of, [Sylvia laughs] seriously, in our Discord that's about this already.

SYLVIA: [cross] Alright.

AUSTIN: [cross] Not just you, it's a lot of- [SYLVIA: Good.] It's just me and Ali. [laughs] Like, are working on that idea, so...

SYLVIA: I mean, it's... [Austin laughs] The main reason I bring it up is just 'cause it's an interesting writing exercise in general just to, like, treat your antagonist like they're the protagonist [AUSTIN: Yeah] while you're developing them. [AUSTIN: Yeah.] And that way, you can flip that on their heads. [cross] Flip it on its head. Yeah.

AUSTIN: [cross] That's like- You just said what took me ten minutes in twenty seconds, [Janine laughs] which is treat your antagonist like they're the protagonist. [SYLVIA: It's-] Like, they got there somehow. It's really good. Um...

JANINE: Yeah, I was- I was gonna say that, like, this is again kind of what's already been said, but like, if you start making your villain by sitting down and writing “villain” at the top of the page, [Austin laughs] it's really easy to just fall into old traps. [AUSTIN: Yeah.] Like, if you think of them just like a character, just like, you know, the- the baker that your- that your one character has a

crush on or whatever, like, put them in that exact same space and then decide, like, what do they want that the people don't want, [AUSTIN: Yeah.] and why.

AUSTIN: That's a good- Keeping it material like that helps a lot too. [JANINE: Yeah.] Like, what is the thing that they want? 'Cause they don't want to- They don't- It's not that they want- In most cases, it's not that, like, they want your character- the protagonists to be dead. It's that they want something that the protagonists are unfortunately in the way of. [cross] Or the thing-

JANINE: [cross] Mhm. Or they maybe even want the same thing but [AUSTIN: Right, right.] through very very different means.

AUSTIN: Which is like the Ibex thing, [JANINE: Mhm] at a certain point, for sure, right? And I think that the other thing too is like, let your villains arise naturally. The thing that I did as a- The thing that I did wrong as a teen and, like, twenty-something running games was design villains before I started the campaign. Ibex exists as a seductress, as we know, [DRE: Yeah.] in Stars Without Number. And we go "Aw man, what if there's a scene with this- with this seductress, and this guy ends up on this-" To be clear, for people who maybe haven't listened to COUNTER/Weight, we had a faction-side game that was me, Sylvia and Dre, where we played a game called Stars Without Number and used its faction system to do combat. And Ibex, who was one of the major antagonists for much of that season, was a unit type called a seductress that one of the factions had. And we just, like, moved him to a planet once, like, "oh, yeah, this guy seems cool, this guy seems interesting, I bet you there's something here, what if somebody starts, like, uniting the- these factions down here? Like, let me look at the map, and see, oh weird, there's not, like, any strongholds down here, there's a bunch of, like, loose organis- loose, disorganised groups. What if someone organised them?" And that ended up being way more interesting than, like, if Grace had developed into becoming the number one villain of the season, from the- Because from the jump, like, she was on-screen and seemed like could be a villain, you know? Let that stuff happen naturally. It's one of the things games are really good at. And- and you should, like, lean into that whenever you can.

JANINE: Classics example- example: also Red Jack and the moths.

AUSTIN: Oh, totally. [cross] Yes yes yes yes. Definitely.

DRE: [cross] Oh yeah.

AUSTIN: Alright. Uh... Miguel wants to know what to do when a game crashes? [laughs]
[SYLVIA laughs]

"My latest game of The Sprawl crashed and burned for two reasons that you seemed to navigate extremely well. Trump. Lol, yeah, our topical-ish game was extremely depressing after the election. Two, a player left on awkward terms. Both of these things drained all energy from a world we had created together and loved. The way you

managed Fantasma and the dour political climate were inspiring for me but I love some tips on how to deal with both of those.”

Um... Weirdly, like, I don't know that we did a great job [laughs] of dealing with Trump. Like, I think – we've talked about this – but like, last season got dark, because I think we were all in a really dark place. I was, certainly, so I'll take a lot of credit for that, a lot of the darkness there. Um... But I also just generally think it- It's hard me to find, like, a really good, solid answer, outside of having that conversation with your players and saying how much do we wanna get into this? Do we wanna pivot and play something else? And like, maybe my big takeaway here is like, it sucks that that game you were having a good time with burned out... Pick it up, or pick up a different game with that same group of people who you like, and like, who you didn't- who didn't leave on awkward terms, and start building a new world together.

There are as many worlds as there are minutes. Right? Like, come up with something new that you can love now, maybe with a little distance, um, maybe with a different group composition, and build from there. Which maybe is not the reclaimative... um, positive message, but it's what I would do. And it's something we'll maybe have to deal with at some point, in terms of like, this isn't- this season isn't working, let's start- let's end this season and go to a new thing. Like, I guarantee on a long enough timeline, we will start a thing that we think is gonna be good, and then it isn't, and then we bail on it and we try to wrap it up as tightly as we can, but we move on. Like, time is long, [laughs] as I'm fond of saying. And like, things like that do happen, and the best thing to do is to roll with it. Any other thoughts about this stuff?

SYLVIA: I think you kinda summed it up [laughs].

JANINE and DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Um... Okay, try to get through a few more of these before we- we finish. Nick writes in to say:

“How do you balance running a game with canon fodder monsters with the principles of Dungeon World “give every monster life”? I don't wanna lean on Tolkenien tropes where the monsters are mindless slathering hordes, but I also want there to be real evil in the world, that possesses a direct threat- that poses a direct threat. Is the answer to this question just “go play Shadow of Mordor”?”

DRE: Nope. [everyone laughs]

AUSTIN: I don't think it is, because Shadow of Mordor... Shadow of Mordor fucks up, like, one hundred percent with the slavery angle, obviously. But I also think it fucks up because it doesn't give you ways to interact with those characters of the orcs, who are the most interesting thing in that game, in both the first one and in the new one. Where like, all I want is to talk to, like, Ushgar the rat king, or whatever, like... I wanna know “What's Ushgar up to?” And the thing that

Dungeon World's "give every monster life" mean- like means, is the same thing that we said in the last question, which is that like, these so-called monsters, even when they are, like, not sapient, even when they couldn't carry on a life – [laughs] or, not a life, a conversation with your player characters – they live lives offscreen. They hunt for food, or they- they, like, have hoards of gold for some reason, right? Like, and those things are not, um- there's a reason for whatever those things are, I think that's what separates Dungeon World from, like, traditional DnD. Like, that rule of "give every monster life" means that you have to think about what their- what their habitat is, and you have to think about what their, like, what their Thursdays look like. And that's, to me, what guided me to be able to make some- some answers around that stuff, and include- include quote-unquote monsters in a way that's still- Like the moth people, like Red Jack, like the goblins in the first season, [cross] who still had culture.

DRE: Yeah. [cross] I'll even say- I'll even say in the first season of the, uh, of the, like, Erasure party, I think our first two, like, combat encounters were, like, a giant owl bear, and [AUSTIN: Right.] like that ice- that ice creature? [AUSTIN: Yep.] And I think those both, like, kind of set a place that's like, you are in the woods, [AUSTIN: Right.] and you are in this place where, like, magic and powers exist that like, don't make sense and are very strange and foreign and dangerous. Like, [AUSTIN: Right.] it wasn't just "here's this big monster for you to fight", it was, you know, this feeds into the theme that you were trying to create with- with that setting.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Um, I also wanna shoutout the Planarch Codex... The Planarch- or Play-narch Codex? Um... Which is, sort of I believe inspired by kind of the Planescape kind of... um... kind of DnD setting. Which is a tiny little- like tiny, little pamphlet for Dungeon World that is super worth seeking out. I'm just gonna find the- [typing] the first page of it, or whatever. I think I have it here somewhere, let's see.

[1:30:00]

Because it's a- It's a- It's kind of a microexpansion on Dungeon World that is, like, a mini supplement, that is built around the notion of giving monsters life, and like, not treating them as if they are quote-unquote monsters. And now I can't find my copy of it, which is a shame. Oh well. Uh, it's like five bucks on DriveThruRPG. [pause] No it's not, it's free on- on- Uh... It is now free on DriveThruRPG, so go check that out. There are some good, like, Dungeon World-y principles around this, so that you can say, like, "hey, like, how should I be treating my- my NPCs, my monsters?" These, like- some basic rules around things that help you keep in mind that they are- that they have names, that they are people first and foremost. I found it. I found it just now. The agenda – the added agenda – is "reflect the variety of real life", which is like, so good, right? [SYLVIA: It's really good.] Like,

"The countless planes of existence are filled with an infinite catalogue of people, places and things, as well as experiences, sensations, emotions, happenings, controversies, vistas and rituals. While GM'ing or playing this game, or preparing to do so, try to be a student of the world in all of its diversity and details, giving yourself a deeper well to draw

from, not just the “OMG that’s weird” sense, but recognising that the range of human experience is broad and heterogenous.”

And then the principles, on top of the traditional ones, it says,

“However, rather than giving every monster life and naming every person, draw on the following principles to create a rich social world: Give everyone personhood. Reveal greater diversity.”

And these are things that you should think about as a GM while playing, is like, “this is a thing that I can do in this sequence, is I can reveal greater diversity.” So like, f- like in this write-up it says like,

“First, whenever it’s time to say something about the setting, don’t always say the first thing that pops into your head. Try to say something slightly stranger instead, ideally something that evokes the diversity of the planes. For instance, your political contact isn’t just a royal emissary, but a member of an asexual third gender entrusted with the diplomatic duties, because they can’t be carnally seduced and compromised by their kingdom’s enemies.”

And like, it’s still inside of the tropes of, like, high fantasy, but like, “okay, they’re gonna use they/them now”, and that’s not going to be... the thing that is like... um, your default, which is like, it’s gonna be, like, an old dude. Right? And then the next two are:

“Juxtapose the incompatible.”

Which is really good at breaking down what you traditionally think of as really binary things, right? Which is like, combine elements that seem divergent, so instead of having, like, the warrior culture that hates learned- like, learned people, have the warrior culture that’s also a culture of historians, that like, “oh right, of course they have great schools, because they have great battles.” And then:

“Cultivate anthropologies. Assemble the social and cultural knowledge generated by play into larger and constantly changing picture of life. Ensure that these behaviours and ideas are backed by institutions of power, and because it is a fantasy game, the possibility of violence.”

It’s a really interesting read. It was written by Walton hm... someth- Jonathan Walton and a handful of other people of various races and genders, and that is a huge, like, [laughs] help. Like, this wasn’t just a white dude wrote this. Um, so, that is a pretty useful... useful addition for when you’re trying to dive into this stuff.

DRE: I will also just add, like, a way more basic mechanic question, like if you have players whose characters take moves that let them do [AUSTIN: True.] non-combat stuff, like the ranger's Talking to Animals or, you know, a lot of the bard moves in Dungeon World, really reward [AUSTIN: Yeah.] players for using that stuff... um, because like, that's- I think that's a really easy way to- to build character and to add depth to even just, like, basic creatures that you're talking about that might- you might technically or stereotypically think of as, like, the cannon fodder monsters. If your characters are able to know special things about them, or straight up talk to them, that'll give them a lot more depth. [AUSTIN: Totally.] And encourage your players to, like, engage with stuff on that level.

AUSTIN: Well, and treat those interactions with the same amount of drama and importance as a fight, right? Like, one of the things that, um, I think we got there to in Hieron last season was, um... there were sequences that had nothing to do with combat that had all of the danger and intrigue of a, like, new enemy encounter. Like, things like Lem in the stoneworks or- which is like, "oh, this could all go really bad," but all Lem is doing is, like, using his basic bard moves, you know? And that just ends up reflecting back on the- like, so that once you do get into a fight, it reflects something larger, like I think about all last season, there was all that shit with Ordenna. And like, you get into two fights only, with Ordennan things, like, you get into – or I guess two and a half, right? – you get into the big fight with the moth people – you get into a little fight with the moth people that lasts, like, a second – and then the big fight with the moth people, and then again at the very end of the season, the big fight on the island. And like, but they're there the whole time, and you meet with various people as part of their culture, and you meet a bunch of people who- who have dealt with them in positive and negative ways. And so, you kind of get a bigger picture of who they are, so that eventually when they show up for like, the big final confrontation, it's a little weightier, not just in terms of like, "ah, it's the final showdown", but also in terms of, like, this is the... this is a thing that's informed by treating them like people for the last- Because they are, right? But like, also just, it would be easy for them to just be, like, Nazis, and it was important that they also not just be Nazis [laughs]. Because you know, there- there are... It is easy to spot someone wearing an armband, it's a lot harder to spot someone who has relationships with people you like, and like, offers them things and offers them protection and builds political relationships. And even like, "hey, this one part of this per- of this culture seems okay," like, yeah, but you've gotta deal with the part that super isn't. Like, you can't pick and choose, it turns out. So... Um... A couple more and we will be done. Uh... Oh also, I think the other note here is the Iconoclasts are the first ones that we've ever come close to, and Janine and I had a- had lots of talks about that.

JANINE: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Which is like, the fir- the closest we've gotten to mindless, quote-unquote, has been the Iconoclasts, and a lot of that is from the On- the Onomastic. But I think-

JANINE: [cross] But weirdly enough, they have- I would say they are- [deep breath] I guess because of their mutability, they- there is, like, an extreme, um, not personality for the

Iconoclasts, but like, identity? [AUSTIN: Yeah.] They have a very strong... Yeah. They're not- They're not cookie cutter by any means, even though they are the closest, maybe, to it in a- in a technical sense.

AUSTIN: Totally. Um... Okay, I think we actually have one more. [quietly] Does that work? Let's see. Here, one second, let's do this. [louder] Okay... I figured out a hot trick, let's see if this works. It didn't work. [Sylvia laughs] Let's back this out really quick. There we go. And then I'll hit present again. And then I'll do this. [Janine laughs] Notes. And then I'll make this big again. Okay. Uh... Lightning round! That's what I added, I added a thing that says lightning round. [Janine laughs] Uh, so these all come from Angelina, and I'm just gonna answer them super quickly.

"How much prep do I do?"

I do a lot of prep, but I also make a lot of shit up at the- on the fly. Like, a good amount of prep to do is enough for you as a GM to have an understanding of the material and the people and the places. Like, for you to be able to bullshit your way when you need to, without contradicting yourself. That's the right amount of prep. Um... Fronts are weird... Uh... Send me a DM on twitter, I'll talk to you about fronts, because they're weird, and they're hard to develop. There's a special thing in Dungeon World. It's- One of the things I like about clocks in Blades and in The Sprawl a lot is that they help me codify fronts way better.

SYLVIA: [laughing] Bring back clocks.

AUSTIN:

"Do you have motivations for every NPC you make, and if not, how do they come about during playtime?"

In Dungeon World, one of the things you do when you design an NPC or a monster is you give it an instinct. So in Dungeon World especially, yes, I have motivations for every NPC, even if it is just, like, to make money, or to trick someone. Which is like, oh, this person just- this person just likes tricking people. Like, that's what they like, it's their favourite thing to do, they like proving themselves to be the smartest person in the room or whatever. Um, and I do not have go-to moves for seven to nine, outside of when a game does. And I think there's another question in here that's like – yeah, there it is, the discern realities one – is similar in that, like, it's hard to know, like, what the good stuff is in that seven to nine. It's hard to know, like... how to take something away from somebody that's still fair. We did a- a sequence the other day while we were recording that was like, I keep taking away everyone's weapons. Like, the seven to nine is like, "you can do it but you lose your gun. [Janine laughs] You can use it but you lose your... other weapon." And it worked out and it turned out to be good still, but like, the first thing I'd look at when I look at a GM- or when I have to have a seven to nine, is like, "you could do it, but..." And I look at what the inventory is on people. Like, is there an item they could lose? I look at, like,

any sort of gear they have that has weird traits, where it's like, "oh, this gun is unreliable, or it's loud, or it's messy." And so, like, oh something happens that you didn't intend to happen. But you do it, like you- you manage to pull it off, but, um... then it goes bad. And then the last one is just like, I look at stuff that has to do with them specifically – so their beliefs, or their bonds – and I say, "okay, how can I put one of *those* at risk?" So like, the Hella Hadrian seven to nine was "you can do it but you're going to have to, like, break Hella's hand too." And that would have been bad, right? And so like, those are the things that are- that are- help me to decide seven to nine. The next lightning round thing really quick is from y'all: [laughing]

"How do you know whether or not you should answer in or out of character?"

... When I... say a thing? Or when you do, like, discern realities and I say, like, okay, um, how do you do it? Or like- Or when I say, like, okay, you're trying to sway this person? How do you do- how do you know when to do it in character versus like, "oh, I basically say this."

SYLVIA: I mean, personally speaking, I do the, like, "oh, I basically say this, like, or get this idea across," when I am just, like, failing at improv at the time [laughing]. [AUSTIN: Mhm.] [JANINE: Yeah.] When I know the sort of broad strokes but don't have the actual, like, dialogue [AUSTIN: Yeah.] in my head. [JANINE: Yeah.] Um, but otherwise, it's sort of just like, what is more interesting? Or what gets my point across better? [AUSTIN: Yeah.] Um... to make it more interesting.

AUSTIN: [cross] The one for-

JANINE: [cross] I think it's a confidence thing.

AUSTIN: Oh really? [cross] In terms of your characterisation?

JANINE: [cross] For me. Yeah. In terms of me as a player, [AUSTIN: Yeah.] like I think with Adaire I did a lot more, like, "here is exactly what I say. Here is exactly what I do." But with Signet, um, there have been several occasions while recording that I'll, like, have a gut response, and then go "wait, Signet can't say that, like, that's not who she is." And then I have to dial it back and do the "basically, she says," or like, you know, "this is what she... whatever." [AUSTIN: Right.] Um, and it- A lot of it is- is a confidence thing of, like, being in that character, like Adaire is really easy because Adaire is not that far from I think just me. Like she's a meaner me, but basically... And Signet is much farther, [laughs] [AUSTIN: Right.] in a lot of ways. And it- so it's a lot harder for the- There's no, like, natural knee jerks there, it has to go through a filter, and that filter is often just telling you what I want the impression to be? [AUSTIN: Mhm.] Rather than the- Rather than going through it... um... first-hand.

AUSTIN: It can be tough, like especially I think with- [DRE: Yeah.] With um... With characters who are different from us in major ways. Dre, what about you?

DRE: I- I'm pretty much with Janine. Like it's- It's very much, like, how comfortable I am with the character. Like, Sige for me was a character that was, like, very different from me [AUSTIN: Mm.] and a lot of stuff I had to do with Sige – I mean, especially with the amount of violence and the way that Sige inflicted violence [AUSTIN: [sighs] Yeah.] – was like, hard for me as a person to do? But it was also easy for me as a player to do because it's like, "oh, this is- this is Sige, [AUSTIN: Right, right.] this is what he does." Whereas Even is a character that's like, more comfortable for me to be around, but is also harder for me to play, so I think there is more me, kind of talking out of character through stuff before it happens.

AUSTIN: Right. I think that- that all adds up. The ones for me end up being because- It's funny, for me it's a little bit different. I have NPCs who most of the time I've had- been able to have time with... and can have- already have, like, a voice, like, written down for what they should sound like. And sometimes I'll even have specific dialogue prewritten – right? – in terms of like, "oh, okay, this is the lore dump." Other times I won't, right? So like, I think this episode they get a big lore dump in- in- on the Quire game? I think that's this week. And that was not pre-written, but I knew all of it enough and had found the character. I knew it would be fun to deliver all of that stuff about the history of Quire in... in my own- or in that character's voice, versus just giving you an overview. But there are other times, and it- for me, it comes down to, like if I had to organise it into a list of priorities, it's comfort: am I comfortable delivering this? Sometimes I'll have a character voice and I'm like [breathes in through teeth] "ah man, this isn't there," or like, "there's something about this that feels gross," – or not gross, it's rarely gross – it's like, "Oh, I don't think I'm doing this voice right, I think this voice could be-" Like I was really afraid with the voice of the, um, the doorman in the m- what was the mast-? Not the masthead... The, um... The bar in the buoy. The guy who you talked to, Janine, [JANINE: Mhm.] as Adaire? Where it was like, "oh, boy, should I eject on this?" Like I'm trying really hard to make it clear that he's awkward and, like- But like, trying his best, [Janine laughs] and has like, some social anxiety and like, and it's, like, a totally- Like I'm not- I really hope I'm not punching down. Like I'm really not trying to punch down. But I might be? And so sometimes in situations like that I will, like, pull out and like, "oh god, nope, bad, gotta move on. Um... I'll just drop the information." So comfort is the first thing. And the second thing is pacing, which is like, "okay, I'm just gonna give you this information." Like it doesn't- I can just summarise what is being told to you here instead of using Acre Seven's really slow [laughs] and- And like- it's an interesting voice, I like speaking as Acre Seven, but it- sometimes it's not worth it to get across that there were twelve people here, you know? So instead I go, "she tells you there are twelve people here, blah blah blah blah blah, we have to keep moving." And the last one is fun. Which is like, sometimes, especially if I'm working with, um... in like an improv-y scene, in a scene where it develops into a- into like, comedy, and we're bouncing off of each other... Which everyone on the cast does. Like... Like, I think people jump to things like Lazer Ted, or like, um... You know, things like that, where it's like, "oh this is really funny, classic scene," but everybody on the show has had a scene where they talk to a random NPC that turns into a really funny bit. And that sometimes is like, "Oh, I'm just having fun, so I'm just gonna talk in first person instead of- instead of giving it the old third person treatment." Um... I think that's it, I don't think we can- we have time to ask- to answer this other

question, Jack. Sorry Jack- Jack Shirai, on tonal shifting. It is hard to shift tones in games is the thing I'll say, as someone who- we are coming up on like, the holiday se- the holiday special again, as always, is a big moment [laughs] for every one of our seasons. And this season we didn't even plan a holiday special. And yet, I think it's shaping up to be a holiday special in terms of timing for some of the Twilight Mirage stuff. Um... And I think the result of that could be a big tonal shift, so, uh... We, uh... It can be tough is my quick answer. And like, talk about it, instead of just, um... instead of taking that on to yourself as a GM, like, talk to your players about what they want the tone to be... Um... And how to ensure that you kind of stay in that space. That's my very quick advice, Jack. [exhales] Alright, we got through it. We did it. [Janine laughs] Tips at the Table. If you have Tips at the Table questions, send them to tipsatthetable dot gmail dot com. Nope. tipsatthetable@gmail.com. And if you are supporting us now and like to up your pledge, or send it to somebody else, or if you're listening to this over at a friend's place, or on a- in a car... or maybe you're in the subway and someone just has their phone out and they're just playing it, which, like, hey-

JANINE: [cross] Using an Atari Speakerhat.

AUSTIN: Oh, if you're using the Atari Speakerhat.

DRE: [cross] Rude.

AUSTIN: Those weren't even *in* Blade Runner, by the way. They made this whole big deal about it, and I don't- I don't think I saw one in that fucking-

JANINE: [cross] No, they just like, made a Blade Runner styled one that has Atari written in, uh, katakana. [AUSTIN: Oh my god.] And it's like, blue. [AUSTIN: Bad.]

AUSTIN: [friendsatthetable.cash](https://www.patreon.com/friendsatthetable) is where you can check out our patreon. [Janine laughs] I'm Austin Walker, you can find me on twitter [@Austin_Walker](https://twitter.com/Austin_Walker). One more time for our great, great... panellists. Where can people find you, Sylvia Clare?

SYLVIA: You can find me on twitter [@captaintrash](https://twitter.com/captaintrash) and you can also find some video and writing stuff I do over at videogamechoochoo.com.

AUSTIN: Uh, what about you, Janine Hawkins?

JANINE: You can find me [@bleatingheart](https://twitter.com/bleatingheart) on twitter, and you can find my video game writing across various sites, including Waypoint and Polygon.

AUSTIN: And last but not least, Andrew Lee Swan.

DRE: Hey, you can find me on twitter [@Swandre3000](https://twitter.com/Swandre3000).

AUSTIN: Alright everybody, that's gonna do it for us on this episode of Tips At The Table. We will be back, um-

JANINE: We gotta clap.

AUSTIN: We do, but I'm just shouting out that we'll be back... [everyone laughs] in the future. Um, oh, actually- actually you're right, thank you for reminding me of a much more important thing, which is I finished Austin Walker NPC Bingo everybody. Uh, let's bring it over here. [everyone laughs] That's actually- That's not it, that's an exclusive limited deal. Best- [laughs loudly] People should check the stream on this call right now, because I, by mistake, instead of opening up Austin Walker GM Bingo, I opened up what was my first Discord icon, which is this dog holding a knife and a gun. [Janine laughs]

SYLVIA: Holy shit! That's the real big dog.

AUSTIN: This is why the name of- This is why the name of, uh, the- in our Friends at the Table Discord, this is why it's called the Dog Pound, it's 'cause we all had dog avatars and this one was mine. [laughs] We all have-

DRE: Aw man, I forgot about that dog.

AUSTIN: A good dog. Alright. [SYLVIA: [laughing] Fuck.] Austin Walker NPC Bingo:

- 1) Perky fan
- 2) Verbose and honourable general
- 3) The nineties, but a person [Sylvia laughs]
- 4) Awkward friend
- 5) Charming, bubbling ac- bumbling academic
- 6) Secretly a terrible person [Dre and Sylvia laugh]
- 7) Ex, still deeply in love
- 8) Ex, jilted [laughs]
- 9) Animal what makes noises
- 10) Charming leader
- 11) No nonsense killers
- 12) Straight-talking criminal

Free Space

- 13) Good hair [everyone laughs]
- 14) Southern general- Uh, nope, Southern *gentleman*
- 15) Mid-tier bureaucrat
- 16) World-weary shopkeeper
- 17) Long distance lover
- 18) Verbose- Verbose and dishonourable general
- 19) Conspiracy theorist
- 20) Shitty CEOs
- 21) Just a regular guy!

- 22) Fast-talking criminal
- 23) Distant god
- and 24) Old person who is a badass

“Old person” is probably not the- the correct lingo there. There’s our dog. There’s our best value. There’s us at Tips at the Table. [Janine laughs] Let’s go to time.is and clap our hands. [everyone laughs]

SYLVIA: [laughing] The fucking energy, Jesus.

AUSTIN: You gotta keep it, [cross] you gotta keep it hyphy.

SYLVIA: [cross] Yeah, I know, I’m fucking loving it.