

Drawing Maps 22: January 2021 - Sangfielle Characters #8: Chine and Marn Redux

Transcriber: MaxXM#5418

[00:00:00] Intro

AUSTIN: Hello, and welcome to another– and in this case a surprise, for me, anyway– Drawing Maps. I’m Austin Walker. I’m joined today by Ali Acampora.

ALI: [singsong voice] Hi, hello!

AUSTIN: And Andrew Lee Swann.

DRE: Howdy!

AUSTIN: Howdy. Wow, love it. **[DRE laughs]** We, uh...

ALI: [crosstalk] It’s the first time I’m seeing that out of you.

AUSTIN: We... I guess y’all decided to do this call, and were like, “Hey, do you wanna be on this call,” and I was like, “Yeah, and we should probably record it for content.” As people know, if they’ve been listening, we’ve been doing Drawing Maps where we’re doing these kind of one-on-one conversations about characters, the world, the different cultures and species and magic types and religions, and everything else that comes along with that. Technologies.

And I’m not gonna go through the whole spiel. You know what Drawing Maps is at this point, especially if this is a bonus, you know, eighth one, or whatever. [chuckles] But I guess I would say– And I’ll put it up to y’all... Why are we here tonight?

[all laugh]

ALI: So if you’ve listened to the other Drawing Maps episodes, I guess you’ve heard that there’s some question marks around the races that me and Dre are playing, and also some overlap of ideas? So here– here– [chuckles] Let’s hash it out. Hello. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Let’s hash it out! **[DRE: Yeah.]** Let’s figure out what you–

DRE: [crosstalk] Turns out Valence and Broun’s mind link is still left over **[ALI: Uh-huh.]** and Ali and I, without talking to each other at all **[AUSTIN: Yeah.]** made two similar characters. [laughs]

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Shoot. I mean, to be fair, there is intentional overlap on the classes [**DRE:** Mhm.] to some degree, right? The Cleaver and the Hound definitely are meant to reflect– be like two sides of the same coin, to some degree? Where the difference is– On the Cleaver’s side, it’s kind of wilderness and the Heart, and on the Hound’s side, it’s civilization, it’s havens, it’s people. Right? But you’re both–

Both of those classes, even in their broadest interpretations, are, like, “How do I use my strength and knowledge to help people solve problems,” right? Which I would say is different than something like Deep Apiarist, whose goal is, “I’m a big bug person–” [chuckles] “–filled with bugs. I want to bring order to the Heart.” [others laugh] Or the Deadwalker, who is like, “Ahhh! I’m haunted by my own death!”

The Cleaver and the Hound are very service-oriented in that way, and I think that came through with both of your character concepts and the ways you were– wanted to interpret that stuff around being knowledgeable and focused on, like, “How can I bring these talents to people in a way that is transactional but not necessarily in a bad way?” You know?

And so, you had a lot of similar touchstones, in terms of, like– You both were pulling on things like *The Witcher* in the way [**ALI** laughs] you were considering– the way your organizations, or your group of people, might work, and the way that they were thought of as semi-outsiders, but also well-respected for their knowledge.

And then also, I’d say, in terms of the particular stuff around species and culture and all that stuff, there was a degree to which you were, like– One of you was suggesting bird people, and then– it’s Ali– [**ALI** snorts] and then, Dre, you were suggesting shrew people [**DRE:** Mhm.] and then it... During... Was this during... This wasn’t during the call. This was after that last call, right, Ali? Where you were, like...

ALI: [crosstalk] This was... This was– You DMed me at, like, eleven o’clock, and you were like, “Um, anything on these bird people?” And I was like, “No, but I’m willing to talk about literally anything else,” so we just [**DRE** chuckles] started talking about stuff.

AUSTIN: And that’s when you proposed, what if you, instead of doing a bird person...

ALI: Yeah, because I was just reaching for different things, and I was like, “What if the thing that I did was, like– I was, like, very coolly cleaning my quills?” And you were like, “I have to talk to Dre for a second.” [others chuckle] “We have to loop Dre in,” and I was like, “Yeah.”

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] I think I said, “That’s very cool,” first [**ALI** laughs] and then I said...

ALI: [crosstalk] No, you’re very supportive, yes. Yes. Yes, yes, yes.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] ...and then I said... [**ALI:** Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.] I said, “Oh, that’s fun,” and then you said, “Wouldn’t that be a cool type of person to be?” [**ALI** laughs] And I said, “Dre was thinking shrew person,” [**ALI:** Mhm.] so again, I feel there’s overlap. [others giggle]

ALI: And then, you know, in talking to Dre about this now, it's just sort of been like, "Let's get each other up to speed," **[AUSTIN: Yeah.]** and then also like, "What is the way that we can cut the difference here?" Because I don't think that— The friction here is not that there's two different organizations that have a desire to be in the Heart, because I feel like that is going to be a— a group thing...

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] That's a common situation, right? Lot— There are lot—

ALI: [crosstalk] Yeah, yeah. Every character is— **[AUSTIN: Yeah. Yes.]** Yeah. Every character's gonna have that personally, and then, as an organization that they're a part of together, is gonna have a separate goal within that. So that's not the thing, and then I also think the organizations that we've presented are separate in their own ways, in ways that are interesting. So, like— **[AUSTIN: Totally.]** Yeah.

AUSTIN: I think the things that I would wanna hammer out on the organizational front is the, like— What do those groups think of each other, and what are your preconceived notions about meeting someone who's on the other side of this? And that can be a positive thing, or it can be a negative thing, or it can just be a— like, "Hmm. That's weird." **[ALI chuckles]** I think it's especially interesting depending on what callings each of you pick, because the differences there could line up really interesting.

The other part of that, too, is the, like— The space that I wanna make sure we elbow out right is like, "Where does the expertise of one of you end and the other begin?" Because otherwise it could end up feeling like toe-stepping to some degree. And not in a way that would leave anyone angry or something like that, but in terms of me as the GM, it is often nice to be like, "Oh, so you're the blank. That means I can throw to you in this situation."

And so having some **[ALI: Right. Yeah, yeah, yeah.]** line in my head about where one side's expertise begins and ends— and there can obviously be overlap. There's lots of overlap between these classes, and between character concepts, and all that stuff. You know, think about the fact that three characters have the Occult skill to start. That's clear overlap that I will have to deal with **[chuckles]** right? **[ALI chuckles]** But it would be helpful to still have that conceptualized.

So that's the organizational stuff that I have— wanna talk through. Have you two caught each other up on what the basic premises are of your characters at this point, or should we do that now?

ALI: I think so, but we can do it again now, just to, sort of, lay it out.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally. **[DRE: Sure.]** I think— Another— Just to color this for one more second, too, is that, like— I guess I don't know what the order was? When did... Ali, were you one of the first one of these? Dre, you might have been. **[ALI: I...]**

DRE: I was first.

AUSTIN: You were first. **[ALI: Yeah.]** And so...

DRE: [crosstalk] Which is ironic, because I was the person in the session before who was like, “Man, I don’t know!” **[ALI laughs]**

AUSTIN: You still came with good stuff. You still came with really good stuff **[ALI: Yeah.]** so... And so the— the— the thing I do wanna say there is, like— to color this a little bit, too, is, like— We’ve now had...

I’ve had seven of these conversations. I’ve written a big worldbuilding document. We know the name of the continent, or at least what this one empire calls it. We know vaguely what’s happened, in a broad sense. We have a loose timeline, and some cultures, and stuff to bounce off of, and I think that could help contextualize and fill in some of this stuff, to some degree, so... **[DRE: Sure.]** So go ahead. Ali, you were— Ali, you were starting, with the premise? Or was that Dre? Who was that?

ALI: [crosstalk] Sure, yeah, yeah. So, I guess where we had ended things, and where I have since sort of, like— I guess, trimmed at the fat of those ideas, right— **[AUSTIN: Mhm.]** was that there was...

There’s still the idea of, like— There are these... this specific group of people, from this specific part of the land, who can do this specific thing. And the... You know, in part of the structure of the Heart, or the change of the land, had something great happen to that place [laughs] in a way that was like, “Oh, okay. We...

This was damaged in a way that—” **[AUSTIN: Right.]** “—we maybe didn’t get back from,” and in response to that, it was this immediate response of, like, “Oh, we should share this. Oh, we should sort of... We should become people who are an interesting encyclopedia. We should be trying to use these skills as much as possible, so we can hone them, and also, because there is so much change in this world, we should be learning as much as we can about it.”

AUSTIN: It’s like formalizing a set of previously just, kind of, informal cultural practices, right? It’s like the move from knowing a home remedy to having— to recording all of the home remedies, and realizing that there’s a through-line between some of them, and extrapolating that in a way that you could share with other people across the land, right?

ALI: Right. Yeah, yeah. And part of this has been from, like— The thing that we keep coming back to when we talk about it is you being like, “We sort of need the quote-unquote academic part of this, and we also need a very practical part of this,” and like—

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] For what it’s worth, if you hate the academic part, I can jettison that. **[ALI laughs]** There are other scholarly direction— You know what I mean? If you did want to be a traveling band of informal...

So the thing for me, when I was talking about academics— One of the things I wanna underscore is the moment that you start writing something down, and not just passing it down verbally, you will discover new things, because writing is a technology that allows for long-term study and the recognition of patterns, right? Not that you can’t do that without writing, but it’s much, much harder, and it’s one of the things that writing enabled us to do, was, like—

Everything got better when people picked up writing, in terms of farming efficiency, in terms of being able to recognize how medicines were working on us. Recording information is very helpful. And so once you start doing that, for me, it's like— that does shift you into a different category. Now, again, if you are disinterested in that [**ALI**: Oh, no, no, no. [laughs]] I am actually totally fine with jettisoning it.

ALI: No, no, no, and it seems like a natural place to go, because I think part of what's interesting in this idea is the idea of, like, how do you... you know, as a society, sustain yourself by being able to record these things? And what does it mean to, in a place that is gonna be uncanny, in a place that is going to be strange [**AUSTIN**: Right.] what does it mean to be able to diagnose things? What does it mean to be a person who can walk into a place and be expected to help someone because you have this sort of knowledge?

[chuckles] A big thing that actually sort of pivoted me into doing this is that I sat down with the... the class that I was playing, opened the *Heart* PDF in four different tabs [**AUSTIN** chuckles] and then opened a notepad where I literally writ out— typed out what I thought the translation of these rules were. [**AUSTIN**: Hmmm...] Like, out of *Heart* language? Just so I could understand what they were? [**AUSTIN**: Right.]

Because, in order to pull the cop out of these moves [**AUSTIN**: Yeah.] [**DRE** and **ALI** laugh] I really need to understand what they actually did, so I could figure out how to apply that to a person, and how they were viewed, and they acted, that wasn't, like [**AUSTIN**: Right.] [mocking] "Well, I'm gonna arrest you, and I'm a detective, and I like to drink a lot," because that's so not what's gonna happen.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] That's the flavor of the character— or, of the class [**ALI**: Yeah.] and it's not the flavor of your character.

ALI: No. No, no, no. [laughs] So, yeah. And then what ended up springing from that was the two very present touchstones, which is still, "the butchers that need to travel from place to place because families need to live through the winter [**AUSTIN**: Mhm.] and because they're good at this specific thing," and, "what does it mean to be good at one specific thing if it can feed people but also heal people?" [**AUSTIN**: Right.] Like, being able to do surgery in that way?

And then also the... What was the thing that I said? Oh, the, like— [laughs] This was an article I read, like, a year and a half ago, of school creating incentives for students to study certain parts of biology because Parks & Recs institutions, like... There are people dying out who can no longer identify plants? [**AUSTIN**: Oh, right...] And being able to tell the difference between two different types of ivy or whatever is a huge thing. [**AUSTIN**: Mhm.] People need to be able to do that, and you can't let that die out. So, like...

And, when we were talking to Dre— [chuckles] When I was talking to Dre, I remember you mentioning, like, plants was a thing that you were interested in, and that is a thing that I can back off of class-wise. I just think that structure within society is really interesting, but it doesn't have to be specifically, "I know different types of flowers," if that's, like, a Cleaver-y thing. But, yeah. That's where I'm at. [chuckles]

AUSTIN: It's also a thing that your character might not know, right? But your larger organization, maybe, still has some of that knowledge historically [**ALI:** Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Mhm.] you know what I mean? That way, we dodge the character overlap, but keep the narrative background-y stuff, if that's a thing. But Dre [**ALI:** Right.] you should pitch us— or, talk to us about where you're at with the Cleaver, and, kind of, talk [**ALI:** Yeah.] to Ali about— [**ALI** giggles] and then the audience [**DRE:** Yeah!] about your side of this premise stuff.

DRE: I'm gonna scroll back through our chat here... [**ALI** giggles] Okay. So... Kind of the elevator pitch on Cleavers is that they are... I really like the way that the... The comparison— or, the metaphor that you came up with, Austin, which is that Cleavers are kind of like the white blood cells for the Heart? [**AUSTIN:** Hm.] Without even realizing it? They are basically used by the Heart as a force to kind of keep things in balance.

[00:15:00]

And... So that can look like a lot of different things, but I think one of the other things that I wanna really lean into is that the Cleavers are just, like... since they start with that Cursed domain [**AUSTIN:** Yeah.] they are just way more comfortable, and way more into, messed-up stuff, I guess. [**ALI** chuckles] And not even like a— Like, "Oh, that's super gross! Blaugh!"

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] [shitbag voice] Edgy! Yeah.

DRE: Yeah, not, like, edgy, but just, like... I think— How did I put it to Ali? Somebody would see something that's like, "Oh, man. I'm not fucking with that," [**AUSTIN:** Right.] and a Cleaver would say, "Oh, I'm gonna go fuck with that."

AUSTIN: You're like— [**ALI** and **AUSTIN** laugh] You're, like, happy to be walking through the Escher painting, right? [**DRE:** Yeah! Yeah.] You're like, "Yeah, totally. Let's fucking follow these stairs that don't make any sense. Let's go."

DRE: Yeah. And probably, sometimes, that probably does come off as crude or profane or uncaring, but that's not the intention? That's just, like... [**AUSTIN:** Hm.] That's just what it is to have a very different relationship to something than most other people in a society have to that thing.

AUSTIN: Totally. And, I mean, maybe this is one point— one place where we can talk about the clear difference is— and, Dre, we talked about this a little bit around the ways in which we talked about, one, how does someone become a Cleaver, but then also, two [**DRE:** Hmm.] kind of, what is the organizational mentorship relationship stuff inside of Cleavers more broadly.

But it seems to me that the Hound situation, and we're gonna come up with a name broader for both— specifically, for the Hounds, and then also, more broadly, for whatever that organization that the Hounds are part of is? Right?

But the Hounds seem to be, as written by Ali, about collective, generational knowledge that's shared through explicit pedagogy teaching, and then also through encyclopedic recorded knowledge. And that doesn't seem as important to the way you framed the Cleaver in that [DRE: Yeah.] early conversation, Dre?

DRE: [crosstalk] I'm almost...

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] But I don't wanna take that— I don't know if that's— I don't know if that's me projecting.

DRE: No. That's... Yeah. That's definitely a big difference, and I'm almost... I've been trying to think more about... like, again, that question of, "How does somebody become a Cleaver?"

[AUSTIN: Yeah.] And I think where I've been going with it in my head is that...

Again, it kind of goes back to that idea of the Heart trying to keep thing in balanced? And I had kind of talked about, before, where I feel like a person who becomes a Cleaver is probably audacious, or way too curious, or arrogant, or something [AUSTIN: Hmm.] and part of becoming a Cleaver is ending up in a situation where those personality traits have made you get in too deep and you can't turn back.

But I'm almost wondering if the Heart makes those people become Cleavers, in a way of the Heart trying to make things stay in balance? Like, it sees somebody who has these particular traits or these particular drives, and is like, "That person could change things in a way that I don't want to be." And so—

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] "I" being the Heart?

DRE: The Heart, yeah.

AUSTIN: I see. So, in other words, it's almost as if the— We talked about them being the white blood cells, but it's almost as if the white blood cells of the Heart are working on you [DRE: Yeah.] in order to prevent you from being a danger to the Heart. [DRE: Yeah.] And instead—

DRE: [crosstalk] Or, like, maybe the Heart— it's saying, like, "I need that." [AUSTIN: Right, I see.] Right? Since, eventually, the fate of a lot of Cleavers is to become...

AUSTIN: Part creatures of... Right.

DRE: [crosstalk] ...the, kind of— Right, part creatures of the Heart. Maybe that's the Heart saying, like, "I need this."

AUSTIN: Hmm. Right, so it's a more positive thing, of, like, "Lemme— Lemme— Lemme pick this up and— This is good. This is rich. This is a rich vein of ore—" [DRE: Yeah.] "—and I can mine this, and make this part of me, in a way—" [DRE: Yeah.] "—that is productive." I think that's [DRE: Because...] a very clear distinction. I still think that it's hard for me to conceptualize... [DRE: Yeah.]

I mean, one, we now have a fun overlap, that I don't think we need to worry about, between you and Art's character, who has been [DRE chortles] similarly chosen [DRE: Great! Good.] [ALI laughs] by a... deity might be too strong, or too weak, of a word? The embodiment of order? [DRE: Hmm.] And, kind of like— You know, if the world of the Heart— of the Heartland is, like, chaotic and changing, and always evolving, this kind of spirit of order and orderliness—

Or, kind of, of a binary, simpler past, the good old days, where things just made sense and either were or were not— is the force that Art, like a villain in a cosmic horror story [ALI chuckles] stumbled into, eyes bigger than his stomach, and is now kind of chained to, but not to the degree that he is now a villain to the rest of the party, just to the bit where he has been consumed by bugs that are [DRE: Sure.] turning him into an embodiment of the sense of order and predictability and things existing or not existing, instead of this kind of Heisenbergian Both. Right?

And so I think that's a fun— [DRE: Yeah.] that's a fun reflection between these two characters. And I think that that's a pretty sharp difference, right, in terms of history between you and Ali's character. [DRE: Yeah.] So I think that— That part of it, I think now, makes— is very clean-cut.

Again, as long as we don't end up with it— It doesn't sound like you're going in that direction— is Cleavers as being a larger organization with a hierarchy and hundreds of— [DRE: Yeah.] Or, there might be hundreds of Cleavers, but there— you wouldn't say that there is an organization of hundreds of Cleavers, right? [DRE: Exactly.] Right. Okay.

DRE: Yeah, and I think I know, especially in the origin of how you become a Cleaver, I know what it's not. It's not like they're Grey Wardens, or like [AUSTIN: Right.] the Nightwatch from *Game of Thrones*, you know? This is not a thing where it's like, [macho] everybody here did something terrible, and this was the only way to— [AUSTIN: Right.] [ALI laughs] —get out, or make up for their sins, or something. There's probably a lot of people that are Cleavers that are really good people. It's... Yeah.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Do they— Do they— Is there a moment... [coughs] Excuse me. Is there a moment where you're like, "Oh, shit." [coughs again] Excuse me. [coughs more] Is there a moment where you start coughing, and you're like, "Oh, my god. I'm a Cleaver now." [DRE and ALI laugh] Like, do you... [DRE: Ummmmm...] When you conceptualize what these moments look like, it comes from... I get the abstract.

Someone [DRE: Yeah.] wanders into the woods that no one else wants to. Someone hears the howl of a creature and goes off to face it. Someone stands in the way of an oncoming free-floating flood that's risking the town, right? And it swoops them up and changes them in some way, or whatever. [DRE: Hmm.] But, like, what's that feeling like for the person on the other side of it? How do they know, "Oh, shit. I'm one of those Cleavers now"? [chuckles] You know?

DRE: Yeah, I think maybe...

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Is there a physical mark? Is there a— Is there a something that's like, "Oh, okay."

DRE: Mhm. I think maybe that ties into— and not to completely switch topics here— **[AUSTIN:** No, totally.] but one of the other things that Ali and I were talking was callings, because of course we also had, like— were thinking of similar things for calling. **[AUSTIN and ALI chuckle]** But looking at these, I'm almost wondering if— as I've done more thinking— if something like the Forced or the Penitent calling makes more sense, and especially the Forced one?

Because there are several of the things **[AUSTIN:** That's fun.] in the Forced one, as far as the things you can carry **[AUSTIN:** Mhm.] I think are things that were— that would be that mark that you're a Cleaver, you know? Whether that is **[reading]** a subjugation sliver implanted in your neck, a brand that appears on your arm... **[AUSTIN:** Right, right.] Um, you know...

AUSTIN: **[crosstalk]** **[reading]** A mark on your chest where your soul used to be. **[chuckles]** Your sigil...

DRE: **[crosstalk]** Yeah. Your had a fucked up dream, and then you woke up **[AUSTIN:** Sure.] and there was this weird book next to you. **[AUSTIN:** Right.] **[laughs]**

AUSTIN: Right. Well, and this is fun, because, you know, the Forced is very much written as, like, some baron sent you down here to do some shit **[DRE:** Yeah.] but when I look at the beats, it does seem interesting to frame the Heart, or whatever is behind all of the Heart's shit, as being your master in that way. Yeah. Penitent's also interesting. I don't know that anyone's gonna take Penitent, but...

I think if we— if you went Penitent, we would have to think about the being chosen a little differently? Because it would seem like it would **[DRE:** Yeah, sure.] be tied just to a misdeed, or a failure, or a... **[DRE:** Yeah.] I mean, it's possible that those things are personally interwoven, and not explicitly tied between class and calling. Like, maybe, in the moment you became a Cleaver, you... because of the moment that you were called, you know, something bad happened, you couldn't protect the person, or protect the town, or whatever the fuck it was.

But **[DRE:** Mhm.] I do think— I definitely lean Forced. I think that that's— I think that we can do good stuff with that.

DRE: Me, too. I— Yeah. And I think, again, that kind of... that leans into some of the... the weird stuff, of like, "What is really driving Cleavers?"

AUSTIN: Yeah. Totally.

DRE: Okay.

AUSTIN: Should we talk about culture and stuff? Unless there are still class divisions— I guess we should stay on class for a second, which is where is that line between one expertise and another?

ALI: Umm... Yeah. I mean, I think it depends on what it feels like we think the actions we take in play are gonna be? **[DRE:** Mhm.] I have— **[chuckles]** I have this thing of needing to think of what the actual hook of what the Hounds are **[AUSTIN:** Mhm.] to make them memorable or permissible in that way, and is it medicinal? Is it... just knowing foliages in that way?

Today I was like, “Oh, it would be really cool if they grew up in a place where there was a lot of rocks or seeds or whatever, and they survived off of nuts, and then they made really good tools because they had to—” **AUSTIN:** Hmm.] “—do these things.” And then I was like, “Cleavers are literal knives, so I should back off of this—” [all chuckle] “—before I talk to Dre.”

And— [laughs] It’s just like those sorts of things, and I feel like there’s— there’s enough... There’s enough possibility here for color in that way, where it could just be one of us goes left, and one of us goes right.

AUSTIN: Mhm. Did you find any through lines when you did your translation practice? Your, like... turning it from game speak and *Heart* speak into colloquial english? **ALI** laughs] You know, thing?

ALI: Well, it’s tough, because it is things that are really open. Let me actually— I knew that I... I saved it, because I was like, “Let me just copy and paste this—” **AUSTIN:** Mhm.] “—into a doc, because I’m gonna want it. Austin’s probably gonna wanna see this one day.” And then—

AUSTIN: It’s true. I did.

ALI: But it’s, like— It’s tough, because the core of it— the main move is... In situations where you would suffer harm— like, for real harm— **AUSTIN:** Mhm.] it is a hit to your Fortune. You’ve suffered bad luck in some way. And because you have suffered this bad luck, you are gonna perform better in other situations. And that is [chuckles] so translatable that **AUSTIN:** Mhm.] I feel like I could really do whatever I wanted. Because is that, like, cool echolocation? Is that just having knowledge of situations? Is it being really observant? Is it— you know?

AUSTIN: Is it literally just luck? I mean— **ALI:** Right! [laughs]] Is it being blessed by a goddess of luck?

ALI: Right, yeah, yeah, yeah. Exactly, yeah!

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] You could do— You’re right. You could do so many different things there, right?

ALI: [crosstalk] It’s just— Yeah. And just looking at that, and I feel like that’s really the thing that I have to start from, because that is the core ability. **AUSTIN:** Mhm.] But the rest of the things are really... It’s just being adaptable in other ways. There’s, like— You can take an extra skill, and you can take any skill that you want. **AUSTIN:** Right, right, right.] You’re better at sneaking, and because you’re better at sneaking, you create that for other people.

Or if you’re delving into a space, you can find a safe space, which— in that Delve— that gives you time to relax, or... [laughs] “Round the Corn—” This is exactly what I wrote. “Round the Corner: Gain the Delve skill. Better at traveling into unknown territory. Once per session, I find a hidden place to relax.” [chuckles] That’s it! **AUSTIN:** That’s it!] **DRE** laughs] I can just chill! [laughs]

AUSTIN: So... The thing that this keeps hitting me with, and like... I keep coming back to this with the broader cultural thing, too, is like— When I read moves like that, and hear your translation on that, and when I think about the, like, “We were living off of nuts and in rocky places,” or stuff like that, one of the things that comes to mind is the, like...

Is there a version of this that is about having been forced to be on the move a lot? And, instead of it being, like, “We know this one place really well,” it’s, “Hey, we’ve moved all over the place, and because of that we have come to recognize patterns in nature, and record them, such that we know where... Because of the way water erodes stone, there will be an alcove in a place like this...”

ALI: Right. Yeah. Exactly. Or, like—

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] “...and that’s a place I can get to.” Or like, “Hey, berries that are this shade—” **[ALI:** Yeah.] “—whether you’re in the Northlands or the south lands, don’t fucking eat them.” Right?

ALI: Uh-huh. Yeah. Exactly. It feels really— It feels really Ranger-y in that way **[AUSTIN:** Mhm.] and especially the thing with the [slurs] Delve skill always comes to mind, of being like, “Oh, I know...”

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Which one? Which skill?

ALI: The Delve one **[AUSTIN:** Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.] which I just mentioned **[AUSTIN:** Yes. Yes.] of the— the relaxation one— is like, “Oh, I know which side of a tree moss grows on.” **[AUSTIN:** Yeah. Right.] “And I can tell which way to walk because of that.” But then there’s also things like... Um... [laughs]

Here’s another one that I wrote. “Custodian: Gain the Repair skill.” In quotations. “Repair something or someone that is broken.” That’s in quotations because I wrote it from the book. **[AUSTIN:** Mhm.] The next sentence is, “People like me and let me into their houses.” **[AUSTIN:** Yeah.] Which is [laughs] part of the thing of that moves. **[AUSTIN:** Mhm.] And then there’s, like, “You can take any domain that you want.” I wrote after that, “I can be very adaptable, I guess.”

[00:29:55]

There’s also the thing of, like... Also, in terms of major abilities, there’s the thing of, like, you can— If you take the time to prepare for something, you will gain extra benefits. **[AUSTIN:** Mhm.] And if people do that with you, they will gain extra benefits. And, like, the minor abilities for that are, like— You can take an extra thing by consuming a resource, or you can do this in less time. It’s slightly less effective, but you can still do it.

And things like that, again, feed back into the quote-unquote “academia” thing of just having— of having the generational knowledge, of having someone who is willing to tell you about the space that you’re exploring.

AUSTIN: Right. Or even just, almost— I like that move a lot, because it's almost like you have a bit of a playbook? **[ALI chuckles]** Do you know what I mean? Not that you're gonna be quoting strategems or something like that, but I do love the idea of you quickly opening a notebook that you— from, you know, your— a year before, you had a lecture on how to deal with moving through tunnels like this, and so now...

Or, you know, one of those moves is, like, "Checked and Triple-Checked: One piece of Delve equipment gains the Trusty tag if you've had an hour or two to spare at a Landmark," and that's like, "Oh, right! I remember that someone taught me that, in this place, you have to make sure to coat all of your..." You know, or, "—coat your grappling equipment with this special oil so that it will spark when you hit a thing, so that there's a little bit of a flame, and that dries out the area, and you can get a better grip," or something like that, right?

And I love that for that version of the generational knowledge, plus— Generational, like, informal knowledge becomes formalized, and you have it all collected in front of you, right?

ALI: Right. Yeah, exactly. And there's also—

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] And so— Go ahead.

ALI: Sorry. There's just a part of the texture of what the Hound is, or at least the way that I've tried to make it, which is in terms of, like... I don't want to make it too much of a Jack-of-all-trades things, because I don't wanna, like— We're so early in the, like... **[AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.]** character process that I don't wanna be like, [pedant voice] "Well, I'm doing everything! Mre-mre-mre!" [laughs]

But there's... Like, in the version of having— having a rank within the society, where it's both, "You are creating a specific group of people who you want to have a specific amount of knowledge so that they are survivable, and you know that there's a version of this that you have contained." **[AUSTIN: Mhm.]** "That you can have control of. That you know if a bad thing happens again, you have created a failsafe," as much as it is, "We need people who— to create— to be at a certain level, so that they can become representatives for what our organization is."

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] What our organi— Right, right, right.

ALI: That is you— The...

AUSTIN: You go ahead. No, no...

ALI: [crosstalk] Just keep going. Sorry. [laughs] I was gonna say, the— the— you know, if I— I'm thinking of it as, like, a Red Cross thing. Like, you don't send someone who can't...

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Set a bone, or whatever. Right. Yeah.

ALI: [crosstalk] ...bandage someone correctly. Yeah. With a doctor's hat out of like— Yeah.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Have either of you played *Assassin's Creed: Origins*? The Egypt one?

DRE: I actually just started playing that, like a month ago. **[ALI laughs]**

AUSTIN: Awesome! Wow. So you know, Dre, that there is this idea— there's this— there's this, you know, adapted idea called the Medjay, which is like a med— like a magi, right? That is not historical... It's a historical thing. Ironically, the Medjay were historically more like a police force than anything else in Egypt.

DRE: Yeah. I mean, that's... That kind of feels like what it is. [**AUSTIN:** Well—] I mean, you basically just feel like you're Walker, Texas Ranger [**AUSTIN:** Totally.] in Egypt, kind of. Because that game— [all laugh]

AUSTIN: But the bits of that game that I love are when you're not doing police shit [**DRE:** Mhm.] and instead— and this is where I think the game really shines— is that the Medjay are also, in that interpretation of them, meant to be wandering service offerers. So like [**DRE:** Yeah.] one of the early quests in that game is someone shows up— You meet someone, and they're like, "My wife died, and the occupying Greeks," or whatever, "won't let me have access the funeral book, and so I can't do my funeral rites."

And so you get the funeral book back. Obviously, right? But then you also, like, help him move bodies, and help him with the funeral service, and that sort of thing happens again and again— helping people on the farm, helping people in the dye areas, where they're doing these incredible big dye pits.

And that style of, "How do I just help people get through the day," is when I think that that main character, Bayek, is strongest— when it's not, "I'm here to investigate and kill people," [**DRE** chuckles] and when it is more like, "I'm here to—" I mean, that game— In some ways, this speaks to part of what I wanna get at, maybe, with, debatably, both of your cultural sides, but also specifically with the organization you're talking about, Ali, which is...

Part of the thing that makes the Medjay sing, and makes Bayek and Aya and all the, kind of, stuff in that game work so well for me, is... That's a game about occupation, and even about... occupation and history. You're playing in an Egypt that is classical, but not ancient. If I'm getting those terms backwards I apologize.

Which is to say that, like... I wanna say, like, 12 hours into that game, you get to a place, and it's like, "Eugh. This is what ancient Egypt is," and it's covered— It's, like, Covered in sand. There are ruins buried in the sand, and there's a local guy, who's like a governor or mayor, who's promising people they can come to this town, help dig out the old ruins, find homes for themselves, make a living out here separate from the Greek overlords that have occupied Egypt.

And there's something about the Medjay that is about historical knowledge— cultural knowledge— that is under threat, or that would have been lost, as part of the occupation of Greece that gives Bayek this extra little push of interest.

And so, part of what I would love to figure out on the Hound side of things— and, again, this might be cultural, if you do end up both being from whatever this an— this larger bucket, maybe, of animal-y people are? [**ALI** chuckles] And maybe it's not just animal-y people. Maybe there are humans in this mix, too. We don't— I haven't figured out humans yet, outside of, like...

I— My guess is that the evil empire that conquered this place is human, because that's **[ALI: Yeah.]** where my brain goes, but I don't have an argument for that. In fact, I have arguments, in some ways, against being like, "Let's just draw the line between human and animal people in that way." I think that's very coded in some ways, though we also know there are definitely animal people and a big evil empire, so like, who the fuck cares.

But, the idea that, like— Are you from a people who used to live in the Heartland a thousand years ago, right? Before Aldomina, which is this big magic empire, came and conquered it, and turned it into Their Heartland— turned it into their breadbasket, their big agricultural center— and were you driven away?

And, as part of that, that's when you become this group of people who has to maintain cultural knowledge, has to become incredibly adaptable, has to learn how to live in a new environment and figure out what skills apply here and what skills don't. There's this great cultural trauma that's happened, and in response to that do you start developing the recorded techniques in a way that you hadn't previously? Is that a direction you're interested in going in, both at the Hound level, but also at that cultural animal people level?

I'm casting animal people really broad, because I know right now you're still between bird and hedgehog, and then shrew **[ALI chuckles]** and I don't know that it's all one group. We know that goat people exist. Now— Now that we've recorded all of these, and I've done some synthesis, we know where they are from historically, and it's not the same place as you. **[chuckles]** So... **[DRE: Hmm.]**

We know that there is... Or, I'm guessing it's not the same place as you. They're from a very particular place. They're in that north... cop-land? They're in cop-land to the north, Magic Copland. **[DRE laughs]** The Pale Magistarum. And my guess is you're not from there. That place seems like it sucks.

ALI: **[laughs]** Yeah. I mean, it's an interesting question, right? Some of the— Some of what I've been thinking of... It's easier to think of some of the... like, trauma of that happening as a environmental one, just because it **[AUSTIN: Right.]** feels like it's gonna be a big theme of what the season is. So part of the— this— the organization's history is being part of the change of the—

AUSTIN: **[crosstalk]** In the Heartland, right.

ALI: —of... Yeah, yeah. Is— It—

AUSTIN: **[crosstalk]** In which case, it's— which I guess we never talked about— was, "Does this or— Did this organization pre-date the Heartland, and— or the Heart—" whatever the thing that happens here is called. We don't have a name for it yet. **[ALI: Right. [laughs]]** And, in my mind, they sort of did, but I hadn't— but— but...

In this interpretation, y'all were here, and then things went bad. **[ALI: Right. Yeah.]** And then you became the organization in response to things becoming the way they are. **[ALI: Right.]** Okay.

ALI: And then, also, when I think of it as, like, “What’s an interesting animal,” and, “What’s an interesting way to write a society in a show?” [laughs] When I think of environmental disaster in that way, I go back to— What’s personal for me is losing things to flooding. [**AUSTIN:** Right.] I live on my island, so just [**AUSTIN:** Mhm.] the amount of losing family pictures, and stuff like that, is a personal thing and a thing that I have, you know, experienced.

And the idea of having a group of people who either— if it’s a bird thing— slowly going higher up in different seasons [**AUSTIN:** Mhmm.] or just in general because that’s sort of what they’ve been forced to do. Part of the class thing is having that home base that’s sort of unused, because it can’t be used to its full potential [**AUSTIN:** Mhm.] but is still a living space... sort of?

I guess I have to really think about that again [**AUSTIN:** Yeah.] but it’s sort of both. “It’s a thing that people in this society still return to, but does not have the same structural power that it did,” [**AUSTIN:** Mhm.] is kind of the pitch on what that space is for the Hounds, I think?

AUSTIN: That make— Yeah, that is totally in line with what we were talking about before, for sure.

ALI: Okay. Yeah, yeah, yeah. And the idea of, like, a place that’s being susceptible to that because it’s in a place that is vulnerable to high tide [laughs] or something in that way, or like... I guess we’ve been talking about dust storms [**AUSTIN:** Yeah. Yeah.] as these, like— Two hours ago [**AUSTIN:** Yes. Yes.] [laughs] I suppose, is when we started [**DRE** chuckles] having this conversation.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Which is a dope image of, like— [**ALI:** Yeah.] Imagine having a place that just gets torn through by very sharp dust and sand that literally decimates a building and the things inside of it, you know? Like, coming through the hallways and stuff like that, almost as if it’s a supernatural force? [**ALI:** Right.] Could be fun.

ALI: Yeah. But that still leaves me in the place of being, like, “Oh, is this a bird person, or a hedgehog person,” because I could either— [laughs] Because, then, either “go higher to the branches” thing, or burrowing thing. [**DRE:** Mhm.] And then—

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] And then for me, the thing that I’m gonna end up asking after that, is, like— Regardless of both of those things, how are you integrated into what this was before the Heart became the Heart, when this was the agricultural center of this big, kind of terrible, empire? Do you know what I mean?

ALI: Yeah, sure. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Uh...

AUSTIN: Because if you lived here at the time, you were part of, or marginalized inside of, in some way, that structure? That social structure, you know?

ALI: Yeah. The... I— This is maybe a bad idea, but it’s maybe worth saying out loud. When I was thinking of the version of, like, “Oh, they’re shrew and hedgehog people. They live underground.”

Unfortunately, the place my mind immediately went to is the... the Jonians? In *Star Wars*, which is, like— There's the Naboo palace on the surface. [AUSTIN and DRE, simultaneously: Ohhhh.] You have another culture below [chuckles] [AUSTIN: Right.] that is, like— active, legitimate culture, but the— you know, there's a separation there because [AUSTIN: Right. Yes.] of the billion different reasons...

Which we didn't have to touch on, but I just want to say that there's a mind hallway that I walked down.

AUSTIN: You walked down the— [DRE chuckles] What if Jar-Jar Binks was the same species as your species in Season Seven? [ALI cackles] [DRE: Yeah! Uh-huh.] What if you were the Jar-Jar Binks of Friends at the Table? I get it.

ALI: I mean, but that's a way for societies to exist [AUSTIN: Yes.] side-by-side in media, and it's, you know, worth bringing up.

AUSTIN: It is, but I also... They don't live side-by-side. They have been pushed to not... I can't do a season called— about a Heartland [ALI laughs] in which we've talked about there being a kind of re-frontier, without also talking and thinking about indigeneity, and the ways in which— [ALI: Yeah.]

We already— I've already— and this hasn't come up in these conversations that much, but we've already talked about slavery in this space, and in my mind we have to think about the ways in which whoever was here before... Whoever was here along with the era of settlement and conquest— which was 1000 years ago, right?

Or, however many— that wasn't a recent— an especially recent thing. I guess maybe it could have been a more recent thing. I guess it could have been 200 years before the Heartland stuff happened, so it doesn't have to be that far back, but it does precede the stuff that turns everything uncanny and strange.

Who was there originally? What happened to those people? How were they marginalized, killed, integrated, assimilated? What was that relationship like? And any of those things are all on the table, right? Like, maybe the bird people end up being... Maybe it ends up looking more like, you know, the ways in which Italy came into being. We've talked about these Italian butchers a lot, right? [ALI chuckles]

[00:44:43]

And so maybe the animal people end up looking more like a group that comes under the power of a rival, you know, tribal leader, in the sense that— You go far enough back in Italy, and also this is about different familial family units conquering the countryside and then eventually [chuckles] speaking upwards to the Pope and the big merchant families, and all of that shit.

There's a world in which it's that, and it looks more like that, and less like the American conquest— or, the North American conquest by Europe, and [ALI: Yeah.] we can go down that road, but it is something we can't— I can't just be like [ALI: No. No, no, no, no.] “There's another, second, civilization here—” [ALI laughs] “—and they were chill as this empire came in and stomped on all this.” [ALI: No.] “They didn't have to worry about any of it. They got to just duck their heads.” You know what I mean?

ALI: [crosstalk] No, no, no, no. And it's like— it's like— It's an interesting pitfall, because it's something that I wanna take seriously, because there's also part of the class thing of being like, “Oh, we're like, you know, the nature and spiritual guiders of this space, and the thing that we do go from town to town and teach our...” [AUSTIN: Right.] And that's, like— that's... that's a—

AUSTIN: Which— And [ALI: Yeah.] there's this part of— on the Cleaver side of it, that we wanna be careful with, right, which is the, like, “Ah, yes. I'm— I am nature's response to civilization,” or something like that [ALI: Yeah.] which—

On your side, that's probably something to be thoughtful about depending on how we end up characterizing stuff. Though, the Cleavers are not tied to any particular culture or species, right? Anybody could be chosen [DRE: Yeah.] by the Heart based on their characteristics. [DRE: Mhm.] So I think that insulates us from that a little bit.

Dre, have you had shrew thoughts since our initial conversation?

DRE: [sighs] Not really. I think that is still the place where I'm kind of the most stuck. I will say, I have realized I cannot be a hedgehog person [ALI laughs] [AUSTIN: Okay.] because I'm gonna take the shapeshifter move, and I don't wanna [AUSTIN: Right.] be sued by SEGA. [ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Right. You can't be a werehog. That's illegal... from the jump. You're right. [ALI: Um...]

DRE: I don't wanna infringe on Keith's... you know, RunButton Sonic stuff [AUSTIN: Of course. Of course.] either. You know?

AUSTIN: I think that— For what it's worth, I can think of there being animal-y people that it— are not— I mean, you were already pulling from *Redwall* stuff, right? Where there is, like— [DRE: Right.] Shrews and mice live together inside of a larger culture, and I can imagine that being the case in this space where, like, hedgehogs exist. You're not a hedgehog, but you know some hedgehog people. You know? [DRE: Yeah.] I don't wanna close that door between things, you know?

And I think I'm more interested in there being, like... if we end up with a bunch of little mammal people, there being just little mammal... like, a little mammal civilization that's a mix of all those things, than there being, like, [DRE: Yeah.] “Here are the hedgehog people. Here are the shrew people. Here are the mice people. Here are the possum people.”

Because then you end up, I think, falling into *Zootopia* pretty quickly? [ALI: Yeah.] [DRE laughs] And being like, “Well, the shrews do this, and the mice do this, and you can’t trust the possums! They’re always lying.” [ALI laughs] “They’re always playing dead.” [DRE: Mhm.] “Which means they’re deceivers.” And that’s Bad. We can’t go down that route, right?

ALI: Yeah. Also, it— One of the animal race things that I said to you, which was one of the first things that I wrote down in the doc, was that I find it interesting— and it’s not to say that, for hedgehogs in general, that there’s a space that they’re primarily based out of—

But I feel like it’s easier, especially in a podcast, to have it be, “Here’s an arc. There’s a hedgehog person who can be here,” rather than it being like, “Here’s the arc where we’re in the hedgehog town.” [AUSTIN: Yes.] And then we have to fit in all of our hedgehog characterization to this arc, because [AUSTIN: Right.] this is the only place that we see them.

AUSTIN: Totally. 100%. I think that’s also just true, both to the setting we’re imaging, and the way *Heart* talks about their own setting, right? One of the key things in *Heart* is like, “Hey, it’s too fucked up down here for fundamentally good people to not work together, even if they come from oppositional backgrounds in other parts of the world.” It’s, like— One of the things about this space is that it’s a space of exception.

It’s sort of— Despite being a really fucked up game, takes the much more optimistic perspective of the, like, “Hey, when there’s an actual crisis, people do come together in certain ways.” Which, you know, has history borne that out? Who could say? [ALI and DRE chuckle]

But I’m not especially interested in a game in which— I’m interested in a game in which structural racism and depression are still things in the broadest sense in the world, but where, like— I don’t want there to be a moment where, like, Jack’s goat character looks down their nose at you because you’re a hedgehog person. You know what I mean?

Like, that’s [ALI: Right. Yeah.] not the game I’m interested in running, and I think that people who live out here have, in the hundreds of years since this has happened, become their own culture over time, that is not one-to-one with the outside powers that are all kind of peeking in and trying to occasionally— Like, in some ways, the line that’s drawn is, “Are you from outside or inside,” more than, “What part of inside—”

Or, you know, maybe there are new division inside that we can also talk about, right? I’m sure the bug people versus the Cleavers is a thing we will end up hashing out in some way, but that’s not the same thing as, like, “I don’t trust the fox people because—” [ALI chuckles] “—they’re devious.” [DRE: Yeah.] You know?

So- So, shrew— On that note, you were back to shrew, then— or, not back to. You never really left shrew. [DRE: Yeah.] Can we talk about what appeals to that from that form? And that, like... I know you— I know it’s partly just, like, that’s where your head is, and that’s how this shit works [DRE: Yeah, yeah, yeah.] because that’s how it works for me, too, but I’m curious if we can talk through it a little bit [DRE chuckles] and maybe find some... somewhere to hang a hat, so to speak.

DRE: Hmm... The most honest answer to that question, besides just, like, "I've been talking about *Redwall* with a bunch of people," [**ALI** laughs] was, like— I was looking up a bunch of mouse-like creatures? Because I kind of like that idea? [**AUSTIN:** Mhm.] And I was just like, "Man, shrews got a cool nose."

AUSTIN: Shrews got a cool nose.

DRE: [crosstalk] Shrews got a big, big snout, and I like that aesthetic.

AUSTIN: There's another angle that we have not talked about, which is, like— Could you have become a shrew person because of the Cleaver shit?

DRE: Oh, that's interesting.

AUSTIN: Do you know what I mean? Which is much different, and is an interesting element that we've not considered. Does becoming a Cleaver mean you take on, kind of, increasingly animal-like features?

DRE: I mean, that is definitely... not explicitly how it's written in the book? [**AUSTIN:** Right.] But that, like... You know, some of the things are animal-like, and some of the things are like, "Hey, you've got a bunch of glass in your skin!" [laughs]

AUSTIN: [chuckles] Yes! Maybe that's the thing, of like, "Oh, yeah. This starts in a very..." The *Bloodborne* version of this, right, is like, "These big crows are creepy," and then by the end of that game, those big crows... But then you're like, "Did that crow bark at me? Crows aren't supposed to bark." [**ALI** chuckles] And by the end of that game, those crows that you see on the ground— these, like, big hulking weird crows that hop around the ground and are kind of splayed out— end up blending with other stuff.

So is there a world where it's like— Oh, yeah. You're a Cleaver. You're like, uh... you have, kinda like, animal-like features in some ways, and there's probably a broad range of that, but then, as you increasingly go down that route, those features intensify, right? I mean, even looking at the image of the Cleaver, I don't know what species that person is from— [**DRE:** Yeah.] I don't know what ancestry that is. Is that gnoll? That doesn't look anything like many gnolls...

DRE: [crosstalk] Yeah, it honestly looks like a goat man.

AUSTIN: It does look like a goat man! I guess that's probably a drow with fucking horns, right?

DRE: Yeah, that would be my guess, but [**AUSTIN:** And that's—] yes. It does— It looks more animalistic than one of the identified core races in the book, for sure.

AUSTIN: Totally! And so maybe there's a world in which that's an interesting direction? And that completely gets us off of there being these mammalian people, and instead you were something else and have become increasingly shrew-like. And I don't know if that's an interesting angle for you, but...

DRE: No, I'm into that!

AUSTIN: But that might give us the, like... That gets me back to, like, "You like the big nose." You like— You know what? This big nose is interesting... [**DRE** and **ALI** chuckle] and that way, we can scratch that itch, and also start opening up the, like— What's a transf— What's a changing transformation look like over the course of play [**DRE:** Yeah.] as you start to get more major moves, et cetera. [**DRE:** Mhm.] Right? That's fun.

And that also gives me a lot of palette to play with in terms of what other Cleavers look like. You know, it gives me a— A thing that I'm always thinking about is, like, "I need languages. I need— I need playbooks and vocabularies to communicate something about the world in a stylish way."

And so being— having the idea of, like, "Oh, yeah. Part of being a Cleaver is you take on some element of the Heartland onto yourself," and that becomes an increasing part of you until it ends up— You know, maybe it starts at animals and plants, and, like you said, by the end of it, it's glass, or it's, you know, the notion of reflections. It's the way, you know, water falls down a waterfall, and that becomes part of the way you are a person.

Not to get towards the Branched too much again, but those style of, you know... What is it from the Heart, that you're taking into yourself and becoming more like, can become more diverse as you continue to level up as the Heart's defender. I think that's good. I like that a lot, actually.

DRE: Okay. Cool.

AUSTIN: So let's do that. And then you can think, like, "Am I a human? Was I a human? Was I something else?" [**ALI** laughs] [**DRE:** Yeah.] And in that way— That frees you up, Ali, in some ways, to do whatever the fuck, because now we don't have that double dip. [**ALI:** Sure.] If you wanna go back to being a cool bird without it feeling like [**ALI** laughs] we're doing two different big animal groups, that ends up being viable. You know?

ALI: Okay, sure. Yeah.

AUSTIN: I dunno. Or, have you— Did you, at some point, come back around on hedgehog in a big way?

ALI: I dunno. It's tough, because the reason I went to hedgehog is because, like, I thought— again, it was visually really interesting to, like, think of having to clean quills [**AUSTIN:** Yeah.] to keep quills as, like, a weapon [laughs] or, like, whatever. [**AUSTIN:** Yeah.] And that's pretty fun.

But I feel like— Yeah. I don't know. I feel like some— part of the conversation here would be, like— if me and Dre were playing the same race [**AUSTIN:** Right.] what— in what ways would that create easier shorthands for you? [**AUSTIN:** Right. Totally.] And also in what ways would we have to, like... Because, you know, we're out here doing different things, but, like, how... In what ways do we describe the society turning, one of us going down one path, and one of us going down the other? [**AUSTIN:** Exactly.]

But it sounds like that's [laughs] not an issue!

AUSTIN: It sounds like we solved that just now by stumbling— by— because I asked Dre, “What is it about shrews you like?” And Dre said, “Cool noses!” **[ALI: Sure.]** That’s— This is why you gotta ask players questions, GMs. **[DRE: Mhm!]** You don’t know when you’re gonna stumble into the real answers. The true shit. **[ALI laughs]**

So that leaves us with you needing, Ali, a race— a species, figuring out big picture name of what the group is **[ALI: Yeah.]** figuring out what the Hounds are called inside of that group, and then— and then I guess, still, I am curious about the Cleaver/Hound... what that relationship is like? Or, what the... To what degree do they feel there is overlap, and what do they think about that overlap? What do they think about the skill set of the others? **[DRE: Mhm.]** Is it weird? Is it tense? Is it positive? Are they— Are you fast allies? Are you... You know?

ALI: It feels... It feels separate enough that it doesn’t feel like redundancy, though. Right?

AUSTIN: No. I don’t think there’s a redundancy— Well... [sighs] I think that there’s an— I think part of the overlap that’s interesting to me is that the Cleavers now have this deep personal relationship with the world that is not... you know, it’s experiential. It’s learned over the course of their lives, and they probably do also... Like, Dre, I bet your character can read a book, you know? [chuckles] **[ALI laughs]** **[DRE: Hmm.]**

And I’m not saying you don’t look at the book that says, “Here is what the, you know, antidote is for this bug bite,” or whatever. But your fundamental relationship with nature feels intimate, whereas the intimacy of the past for the Hounds— not that you don’t have a closer relationship than the average person, but it feels like you’ve traded some of what the Cleavers might have for generational knowledge passed down through books and teachings, right? **[DRE: Yeah.]**

I think that is a... It’s not redundant, but I do think that that’s a point of difference that I’m interested in exploring, if that makes sense.

ALI: Well, yeah. I mean, it’s— Some of the overlap— like, again, that I said —is sort of expected by— throughout the party, which is why... Why does everybody wanna be doing this? And I think for...

What Dre said before, of the Cleavers seeing something strange and being like, “Yeah, I wanna fuck with that,” and most people being like, “I’m good, thank you.” [laughs] There’s a version of the Hound that’s like, “Yeah, I would also like to fuck with that,” [chuckles] “because it relates to a thing that I wanna look into,” or, “I want to understand this in a bigger way,” or, “Somebody in the next town said, ‘That weird thing is freaking out my pigs. Can you help me with that?’”

[AUSTIN: Right. Right.] Right?

And there’s overlap in the, like, “Sure, let’s go do that,” right? [laughs] That doesn’t have to be this tense or very, you know, serious thing. Because, you know, that’s just part of what the party is gonna be doing. **[DRE: Mhm.]** But, you know, I...

AUSTIN: Which is a con— Which is— Here's an interesting contrasting point. Are there times, Dre, where someone will come to a Cleaver and be like, "Hey, this thing's fucking with my pigs. My pigs are scared," and you get there and go, like, "No, this is good. This is fine, actually." **[ALI laughs]** "The Heart is supposed—" **[DRE: Yeah, probably!]** "—to fuck with these pigs." **[DRE: Yeah!]**

[00:59:45]

And that is a pretty big dividing line in terms of the way the world might think of the two... the Cleavers versus the Hounds, is the Hounds feel like you would hire them because there's an outcome that you want, and you can tell them the outcome that you want... or, you can tell them the— sorry. You can tell them the problem, and trust that they'll find an outcome that's in line with your needs, whereas with a Cleaver, you need to be very clear about what you're— what you are **[coughs]** working with them for? **[chuckles]** Excuse me. **[ALI chuckles]**

What you are... You need to say, "I need to get to— from point A to point B, and I need you to protect me when I do that. That is the job," and that way, if— It's not, "I need you to kill everything on this path," because they might not do that if the thing on the path is something the Heart tells them is not a bad thing, or would unbalance the Heart in some way if it was killed at this moment, or something. Right?

And I think that's a fun differentiation between the way the world sees these two groups, because that's something I can play with, I think. If that makes sense.

ALI: Right. Yeah, the— I mean, there's something so court the way that the Hounds should operate— and the way that, I guess, I'd like them to operate— that's just, like...

It's about Havens. **[AUSTIN: Mhm.]** It's about society. It's about reaching out to people. It's about finding solutions for things. It's about being able to know things and spreading that knowledge in either, like, a dice bonus or, like, **[AUSTIN: Mhm.]** a... like, you go into a town and you have access to information for yada-yada reason, right? **[AUSTIN: Mhm.]**

And then part of what we were talking about, in the Enlightenment calling space, is that... I think Enlightenment is tough because it's such a specific, like **[movie trailer voice]** "This is an impossible test that people are gonna keep you from doing!" **[laughs]**

Which is, like— means that there has to be a really specific hook there, but is also the thing of, like, "Oh, I really wanna be doing this because I think that there's something that I can gain from it." **[AUSTIN: Mhm.]** Either to prove a specific thing, or learn about a specific thing, or, you know, be able to fix it in some way.

Which is that, I— you know, I don't know that that's... I guess I... Like, the Cleavers aren't in service in that same way. You could give a Cleaver five bucks to help you cross a river, but isn't the way that, like, "The Hound's in town today!"

AUSTIN: I think Dre did talk about, in your— In our initial conversation, Dre, you did talk about the Cleavers as being people who wanted to— You wanna help people. That is part of the way you framed the Cleaver to me when— or, at least, your character to me. Maybe that's a difference between Cleavers and you character, but... **[DRE: Yeah.]** Am I misremembering that?

DRE: I mean... I—

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Or has that changed, is maybe the other question.

DRE: I think that's still... part, but I don't know if that's all of it. **[AUSTIN: Mhm.]** I think what we had talked about was that when a Cleaver shows up in town, there is a mix of relief— because it's like, "Okay, somebody who can deal with whatever nonsense is going on—" **[AUSTIN: Mhm.]** "—is here," and there's also a sense of, "Oh, shit, why is there a Cleaver in town?" [laughs]

AUSTIN: Right. Right. "What fucked up thing is here that would have brought a Cleaver here?"

DRE: Yeah. And I think... [sighs] So I think Cleavers— probably a lot of times, they do come in town and help, but that is not their intention. Because sometimes they come in town, and somebody says, "Hey, this thing's killing my pigs," and the Cleaver says, like, "You should probably move your farm. I don't know, bro." **[AUSTIN and ALI chuckle]** "That's kinda your fault." [chuckles]

AUSTIN: Right. Right. Right. Totally. Which, I guess, also— and here's the other big— The other big difference between the two, and here is the spot where the overlap ends, is... Cleavers are pretty violent. Right? **[DRE: Yeah.]** At the very least, they're eating things in a way that's very... **[ALI chuckles]** that's very... aggressive, let's say? **[DRE: Uh-huh. Yeah.]** And the Hounds have moved away from that.

Not that you won't have a gun, or a sword, or what the fuck ever, because **[ALI: Right, but the—]** everyone starts with something there, but, like...

ALI: The things of the class are so much about avoiding conflict in that way, right? It's like you have good luck. You can **[AUSTIN: Mhm. Ehh...]** evade good. **[AUSTIN: Yeah.]** You can find a place to relax. You can repair a thing. You can... You perform better in different spaces if you decide that you can. **[AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah.]** Right? Right? There's not— There's not— It's not a violent class in that way. I mean **[AUSTIN: Hmm...]** there's something where, like, you can kill—

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Kill Counts. **[ALI laughs]** I think the character who takes— I think the character who takes Close Quarters, Kill Count... what's the— "Look at me..." Condemn. **[ALI: Sure.]** That version of the character? And even Forewarned and Forearmed, but towards the murder ones, and Trench Fighter. I think that's the stuff that's violent, but you're not interested in those moves— or framing those moves in those ways, at the very least, right?

ALI: Right. Yeah. So, I mean, I don't think that we're ever gonna have to talk about, "Whenever I kill someone, I remove a stress." Like, that's not— [laughs]

AUSTIN: You're not taking that move, is what you're suggesting.

ALI: [crosstalk] That's— Yeah, that's not **[AUSTIN: Sure.]** really it for me at the moment. So it's like, we can— that's a yin and yang situation. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Right, right, right. Totally. Totally. Whereas, like, Cleavers are pretty— And I mean, again, I think you could probably make the version of Cleaver that is not as interested in that stuff, but... You know.

DRE: It's pretty intrinsic to the class, though. **[AUSTIN: Yes, definitely.]** I think we should, you know— Since you talk about aggressively eating things, I think we should also point out a big difference here, probably, between the two classes and the two characters, is that, like, literally Cleavers can eat anything. **[AUSTIN: Mhm.]** It's not just, like, food. **[AUSTIN: Right.]** But like, I could eat a fence post, or something. **[AUSTIN: Yup!] [ALI: Uh...] If I wanted to. [AUSTIN: Yeah.]** And that lets me, like, get—

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] That would give you the— I would say that would give you the Haven domain—

DRE: [crosstalk] That gives me access to a domain!

AUSTIN: —is what I would say **[DRE: Uh-huh!] [ALI chuckles]** that gives you access to. Yup!

DRE: So, yeah. Ali's character might be like, "Oh, yeah. Let me consult a book," or, "Let me—"

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] This is what— Yes.

DRE: [crosstalk] "—reach out to my network of other people."

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] This is what I get to when I'm saying—

DRE: [crosstalk] And I'm like, "Cool. Imma eat a Pebble." [laughs]

AUSTIN: That's— When I say that there's an intimate knowledge of the world that's different, that is what I mean. Right? **[DRE: Yeah.]** The connection that Cleavers have is fundamentally almost physical in nature. Intrinsic, not in the sense that they have a pool of knowledge that is built into them, but in the sense that they can reach out, touch a thing, and know it.

And when I say, "Touch it," I mean, "Devour it." I mean— I mean— **[DRE: Yeah.]** "Digest it." And that is very different than... Yeah. That is very different than remembering what your old mentor told you in that one speech they gave, or whatever.

ALI: Right. Yeah, yeah, yeah. The— Yeah, the skill that I— because, like, I— The Hound thing isn't intrinsic in that way, but it's generational because it's based in skill. It's based in muscle memory. It's based in, you know, ceremony and in having the right texts—

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] And training.

ALI: —forefronted at the beginning. And training, and, you know, practice. And all of those things, but not, "Oh, I've eaten this fence." [laughs] **[DRE giggles]** "And I now understand something about this fence," **[AUSTIN: Yeah.]** right? It's— It's— I... It's, you know, maybe I—

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Dude, it's so much weirder than that. It's that you ate that fence, and now you understand a thing about how people work more. **[ALI laughs]** **[DRE: I do... I do—]** It's like, deadass, you will get to roll Haven in that situation when you're talking **[DRE: Yeah.]** to someone or something, right? And that's...

There's something fun about that metaphor, right? Like, "Okay, what do I know about people? Oh, they like to build fences to separate themselves from things." **[ALI and DRE chuckle]** "I've internalized that metaphor by digesting this fence, and so now when I roll Compel— I can roll— I get a bonus die when I'm trying to Compel someone inside of this Haven," or whatever. That's fun. **[DRE: Yeah.]** I love it.

Alright. Is there any other final stuff that people had on their plates, that they were like, "I need to work this out still?" Again, besides, like, names and stuff, which are all difficult things to begin with.

ALI: Yeah... Um, yeah. I mean, I wanted to have this conversation because I wanted to start [laughs] naming some things **[AUSTIN: Yeah.]** tonight. But it sounds like, because there's not gonna be an overlap, it doesn't have to be... a fixed decision.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] As final? Yeah, yeah. Yeah. You can make **[ALI: Yeah.]** that decision, I think. Again, barring Dre deciding that he wants to play a bird person now, or something which **[ALI: Yeah.]** **[DRE: [Nah. Nah.]]** would now suddenly be... No. Right. Then yeah, we're good. Or—

ALI: [crosstalk] Are you a bird person who's slowly turned into a shrew [laughs] over time? **[DRE: Aw, shit!]** Or a hedgehog person who's slowly turned into a shrew over time. **[AUSTIN: Right. Exactly.]** It's so funny how my thoughts have ping-ponged through this whole experience, because I've been like, "Well, I should— you know, I should give Dre the space, and I should, you know— I should think of something else," and then also just being like, "What if me and Dre were brother? Fuck it." [laughs]

AUSTIN: That'd be sick. Listen! **[ALI and DRE laugh]** I would fucking eat that shit up, 100%. The thing that I almost pitched was, like— Why aren't you in the same organization to begin with? But the Cleavers have developed into their own thing in such a way. But like **[ALI: Yeah.]** you could've been— I mean, here's the deep lore.

Y'all don't remember this, because— I mean, Ali, actually, theoretically could, but no one else could on this entire podcast, because it was from... I mean, I guess you could have read through the entire chat from— our Season Seven chat— from when we literally first created it, but in Season Seven chat... **[ALI chuckles]** I think if you do a search for— Do you know where I'm going with this, Ali? Is... **[ALI: I don't know.]**

Do a search for "class" in Season Seven chat, and go back to the— all the way. One of the original pitches for this was... Um... Let's see here. I've been went through all this and it's fucking wild. **[ALI snorts]** Here's two ideas that I said early. "Some groups stick to the out—" Oh, sorry.

“Continent sized city that gets denser and denser as you go inward, like a jungle.” [ALI: Hmm.] “Some groups stick to the outskirts—” Which is just *Heart*. That’s not what we’re doing, but it literally is the way *Heart* works. “Some groups stick to the outskirts and travel from port to port on ships, where the ports are comparatively bright and safe. Center is either heart of tyrannical regime, or haunted capital, or both.” And then, down here... “I don’t wanna do just Yharum, but...” Uhh... duh-duh-duh-duh-duh...

Where is the school bit? [sighs] I think, Ali, you say, “*Harry Potter*’s a thing we should be careful of pulling from.” [ALI cackles] This is— I’ll note, this was like three years ago. “But stuff like Diagon Alley or Platform 9 ¾—” I don’t know what those are. I’m not a *Harry Potter* person.

ALI: Oh, shit. Yeah, don’t worry about it.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] I actually then responded, “Boy, have I read no *Harry Potter*—” [ALI: Good.] “—but I will Google that stuff.”

DRE: Yeah, you’re alright.

AUSTIN: Yeah. And then! And then! Here’s where it— I said, “I actually like the idea of students dealing with this, too. Not teen students, but like grad students as magic detectives.” [ALI shorts]

You say, “Being in a class is a great reason for a group to be together. I’m surprised we don’t use it more.” [ALI: Mhm.] We can’t do this now, because TAZ just immediately did [ALI: Ohh...] school shit, and people would say we’re biting it. [ALI: Yeah...] Unfortunate. Even though we sent this— I sent this message to you January, 2018. So [ALI laughs] literally three years ago. [ALI: God.]

And then I said, “It’s a cool cross-disciplinary project thing. As part of your degree, you’ll get the certificate that says you also worked with a witch or whatever.” [ALI loses it] And then I said, “Should I watch *Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood*?” And then I sent a single image of a castle [breaks into laughter] six times! [everyone laughs] It’s that really good—

ALI: [crosstalk] I’m really, really dying.

AUSTIN: It’s that really good image of the... It’s the Ian McQue piece that’s, like, the big castle in the distance and it’s all red and smokey [ALI: Oh.] and in the near distance it’s like— There’s, like, a person on a hill? [ALI: Yeah. Uh-huh.] I sent that one six times!

ALI: [crosstalk] Yeah. It should be there—

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] I think unintentionally, but [ALI laughs] it is what it is. And that’s Season Seven, baby!

ALI: When did we start this sh— I remember, like, you started the Season Seven chat in a time that was wildly inappropriate, and we would...

AUSTIN: It was three years ago. **[ALI: [laughs] Yeah!] I mean—** The first conversation was... The thing that happened was I saw someone share a video on private of an optional *Bloodborne* fight **[ALI snickers]** and then I had to find a version of it that I could share, because it wasn't the— it wasn't on— you know, it was someone's private Twitter. **[DRE: Right.]** So I found that, and linked that... Let's see here, December 24th, 2017.

And that is when I said, "Hmm. Is there a time— Is there a *Bloodborne*-y season we could do as our next big multi-year fantasy series? The fight is in the second video at 1:48. That's what made me go 'Hmm.'" And the thing about that fight is you're fi... There's a character that you meet... I wanna say it's in the... What's the little witch village called, Ali? Did you go through that yet? Hemwick? Is that right?

ALI: Oh, it is Hemwick. I haven't been there. When— When was this, by the way?

AUSTIN: This was December 24th, 2017. **[DRE: Phew.] [ALI: Phew.]** And it seems like it was in a group chat and then I copied and pasted? I think it was with you and Janine, and I don't remember if that was a... I don't know why the fuck we were in a group chat on Christmas Eve, 2017.

ALI: [crosstalk] So, when you started this, what we were releasing was The Miracle of the Mirage **[AUSTIN: Yes.]** episodes. [cackles]

AUSTIN: But, I mean, counter argument to this, right, is... We are way behind in terms of conceptualizing all of this stuff compared to where we were with Partizan, for instance. **[ALI: Oh, sure, sure, sure.]**

Or even Twilight Mirage, which we over— We over-prepped for Twilight Mirage, and it shows, and this— I'm not saying we're under-prepped, but we're coming in fucking hot. **[ALI: Yeah.]** The closest thing to this that we've ever had is Heiron, probably. Or Marielda, maybe? Marielda had... Marielda was a— is a weird thing because of how it's already situated in Heiron.

I guess COUNTER/Weight. COUNTER/Weight is the closest thing we've had to this, where it's like, "Alright. I got some big faction ideas. I got, like, a premise for the world." **[ALI chuckles]** "Let's fucking go." You know? **[ALI: Yeah.]** The only difference is that we haven't rolled 32 different planets or whatever, and we're not gonna talk about them one at a time for four hours. So.

ALI: Yeah. I learned between Twilight Mirage and Partizan that there are certain points when I'm looking to the horizon of a new season that I just have to say, "I'm not gonna keep having more ideas." **[AUSTIN: Oh!]** For the Hound stuff, I've had three sort-of ideas for, like, two years, and was like, "I'll think about that in two years—"

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] In two years.

ALI: —and now... I'm doing that. **[AUSTIN: Yeah.]** But no, it's funny to conceptualize us being so stressed out from Twilight Mirage, just being like, "Fuck it. Let's just talk about *Final Fantasy IX* for a little bit."

AUSTIN: Let's just talk about it. Let's just go. [**ALI** and **DRE** laugh] Let's just talk about the intro to *Devil Summoner: Raidou Kuzunoha vs. the Soulless Army*, you know what I'm saying? [**DRE:** Okay!] That shit slaps.

ALI: [crosstalk] It's gonna be... Yeah, it's gonna...

[01:14:51]

AUSTIN: There's a bit in this *Bloodborne* video where... Basically, it's a guy that you meet in Hemwick who's just, like, a real clear creepo, and he moves to the... He moves to, like, the graveyard outside of your little chapel area? The Oedon Chapel? And, if you go over and attack him, he goes...

First of all, he turns into a big fucking monster, is the thing that he does. [**ALI:** Mhm.] And then he goes [soulsborne voice] "Have you got a screw loose? Or is it your... animal intuition?" [**DRE** and **ALI** cackle] And I was like, "That's a season! That's a season. We can do that." We can— We can—

DRE: [crosstalk] It's me. I have— Yeah, me. My animal intuition.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] It's you. It's your animal intuition. "You hunters have got more blood on your hands—" It's great! Fantastic. So... So, there you go! That's... That's us. That's this. Dre, do you have any other questions? Before we wrap?

DRE: I don't think so. [**AUSTIN:** Alright.] I'm definitely hitting brain-empty time of the day. [laughs]

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] No. It's 10:30. I have to eat... dinner? Still? Because I'm a dumbass?

ALI: Mhm. Um... Same!

AUSTIN: So.

DRE: You all should both eat dinner [**ALI** and **AUSTIN** make indecipherable excuses] is what I say.

ALI: Um... Yeah. I'm gonna go eat dinner, but Austin, I'm probably gonna DM you just so we can finally— we can just hash—

AUSTIN: Get some name shit? Sounds good.

ALI: And Dre, thanks so much for your time! [**DRE:** Yeah, of course!] Even though it ended up being like, "Oh, this isn't an issue anymore," it was really good to, like, talk about it.

AUSTIN: We wouldn't have gotten there otherwise, though. You have to have this. [**DRE:** Yes. I agree.] You have to talk through it. You know? [**ALI:** Yeah.] So... Alright.

ALI: Bye!

AUSTIN: Bye-bye-bye! [**DRE:** Bye!] Thanks for joining us, everybody! This is probably the last one of these, so thanks for joining us [**ALI** laughs] for the entire run of them, and...

DRE: [laughs] Unless we have an emergency one tomorrow morning, I guess!

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Listen, it's totally possible. It's totally— It's deadass possible that we do the game? We do the worldbuilding game? Tomorrow and Sunday, or whatever? And then we're like, "Oh, shit. We need to still have more Drawing Maps because there's still stuff missing," you know? [**DRE:** Sure.] So that happens. We'll see. [**ALI:** Okay.] Alright. Bye-bye-bye!

ALI: Bye!

DRE: Bye!