

Tips at the Table 14 - August 2018

Transcriber: Anna (anna_luna_anna#5584)

AUSTIN: Welcome to Tips at the Table an RPG podcast focussed on grappling with critical questions [DRE laughs] hopefully smart answers and fun interaction between good friends. I'm your host, Austin Walker and joining me today are Andrew Lee Swan.

DRE: Hi! You can find me on Twitter @Swandre3000.

AUSTIN: Jack de Quidt.

JACK: Hi! You can find me on Twitter @notquitereal and buy any of the music featured on the show at notquitereal.bandcamp.com.

AUSTIN: And Keith J. Carberry.

KEITH: Hi! My name is Keith Carberry, you can find me on Twitter @KeithJCarberry and you can find me tomorrow doing more of my Pokémon Nuzlocke at youtube.com/user/lives/runbutton.

AUSTIN: It doesn't- You can't just got to Youtube-

KEITH: [cross] You just go to- to the Youtube ch- you go to the Youtube Channel Runbutton and it'll be like, "Yeah, they're live."

AUSTIN: "They're live, click this!"

KEITH: "You can watch it! "

AUSTIN: [cross] "Watch it!"

KEITH: [cross] Yeah.

AUSTIN: [cross] Watch- Watch some more Pokémon- [KEITH: Yeah.] Die by mistake-

KEITH: 4:00 Eastern. Let's call 4:00 Eastern.

AUSTIN: Yo! You know what's fucked- [KEITH: What?] actually? Is those moves that just do flat 20 or 40 damage?

KEITH: Holy shit! Yeah, yeah! They're like-

AUSTIN: [cross] They're the worst!

KEITH: [cross] They- yeah- I have a lot of tombstones. I have a lot of lives cut short by a random Pokémon. It's a randomized Nuzlocke, so anything can be anywhere and just like, "Oh, this guy just knows 'Dragon Rage' [AUSTIN laughs] you have 20 Health and it does 40 Damage."

AUSTIN: You're done.

DRE: [cross] Jesus!

AUSTIN: It's brutal.

KEITH: It's level 2, it does 40 damage.

AUSTIN: It's been a joy to watch so far. People should go watch that over on the Runbutton youtube channel. You can also follow me on Twitter @austin_walker. You can follow the show @friends_table and, as always, you can support us and thank you for supporting us at friendsatthetable.cash. Housekeeping stuff really quick: There have been- I think this is actually we're up to date on Tips at the Table and I guess I could still theoretically sneak in a Drawing Maps this week. I don't think I'm gonna. But we're back on some of the Patreon stuff because we've been doing Twilight Mirage finale stuff. If you are a person who maybe only listens to the Patreon stuff and you are eager to get back to Friends at the Table for Hieron, well, good news, we're getting back towards Hieron. Ah- We will be there this fall. Um- No date announced for stuff like that yet but what I will say is that a date is that we have a postmortem ah- that's not true, we don't have a date for this yet. We don't have a postmortem scheduled date-wise yet, but it should be releasing sometime next week. It might not release on Thursday of next week, it might release on, like, Saturday or something like that, because maybe we'll stream it on Thursday. But it will be a free stream for everybody, not just Patreon backers. Um- so look forward to that. And then there will be some downtime between Twilight Mirage and Hieron because we are still in prep for that. We're kind of deep into prep for that at this point. But there will be stuff in the feed- in the main feed, that will not be- I guess I could just say it right now, it will be Patreon content for a few weeks that we're gonna put into the main feed. We haven't announced what yet but I think we have a pretty good idea what that will be. So, look forward to that and that'll be fun 'cause you can share it with people who maybe haven't heard some of that stuff yet. Um- Everything else- let's think, any other downtime stuff? Any other housecleaning- housekeeping- Um- Also you can support- you can follow One Song Only, another podcast that is behind right now @onesongpod. That's our Kanye West Podcast. It's me and Ali and Art, but we are again back on that because of travel and finale stuff. Also, hey! Go to- got to Ali's Twitter @ali_west and say, "Thank you for being a good producer who is bringing together the end of this- this Twilight Mirage season." She is putting a lot of work. Also shoutouts to Jack who is also putting in a ton of work to put together some great music for the final episode, which hits this Thursday. OK, we have- [JACK: [comically mournfully] Yeah...] No pressure!

KEITH: I have another side- I have another plug for just me.

AUSTIN: Sure.

KEITH: That Shenmue- that Shenmue HD remake came out right? [AUSTIN: Oh, yeah!] So if you're like, "I really wanna watch someone let's play this in regular D [ALL laugh] you can sign up to the Runbutton Patreon at contentburger.biz [AUSTIN: Perfect, good.] It's the best think I've ever done in my whole life. So check the let's play.

AUSTIN: [cross] It's a very fun- It's a very fun let's play. I love it a lot. Erm- alright, let's jump into the- we have six questions today. That's not true some of these- some of these emails have multiple questions. Like this one from Andrew, who's written such a long email that 1. I've edited it down and 2. It still barely fits. [KEITH laughs] Andrew says:

[reading] "I am currently the GM of a long-running campaign and overall I think we've had a lot of fun with it. However it's been going on for a long time now and it feels like every few sessions I experience doubts about whether it is worth continuing. I'll have a great session and feel totally energised and exited about where things are headed and then have an average session next week and feel like the whole project is a bust. Additionally the story is in such a place where it can either continue the globe-hopping plans I put forth- I put in place, probably a rookie mistake in and of itself, but kind of ingrained into the thing at this point, or it can potentially be shortened and condensed, potentially at the cost of really fleshing out character arcs and respecting some pre-established continuities. Two questions: Is this feeling of doubt and uncertainty about the game something you experience? If so, how do you deal with it? Either by ignoring it, channeling, turning it into action to end the- to end or change the campaign or something else? Second, how do you end a long game in a satisfying way that's honest to the world and the characters but also accounts for the fact that sometimes things have to be condensed and altered to adapt to reality? Obviously, you all haven't ended Hieron yet and Hieron is still looking to run longer than my campaign is/also feels like it has that urgent world-saving vibe to it at times, but you have ended other things, so I feel like you might be able to at least gesture at some advice and if so, I'd really appreciate it." The first thing I'm wanna say is, like, "You can take a break." You can be like, "Alright, we're gonna hit a natural pause point and we're gonna put this away and maybe we'll come back to it." That is totally OK and also it's OK to not finish it. It's- It's, you know- I will say there a plenty of unfinished campaigns from my college days and part of me feels like, "Oh, damn, what if- what if, I would go back to those", even now, but it's OK, like, there are an endless list of stories you could tell and so, if you really feel like it's time to hop off, let yourself hop off. Um... That's my first thing. Who had something- was it Keith? Was that you?

06:09

KEITH: Yeah, I've got- That was really good identifying my [clicks] noise. [AUSTIN: Yep. Yeah.] [DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: We've been on podcasts for a while now.

KEITH: Yeah, yeah. Em... so when I was first reading this question, I assum- I know people and have talked to a lot of people that have been, like, in the same campaign for, like, 10 years.

[AUSTIN hums approvingly] Like- and so when I was first reading this, I assumed that this was one of those, but when they said that Hieron is longer than their campaign I was like "Oh, OK that's not- that's not- outside of the..."

AUSTIN: [cross] Yeah, so I actually cut this. I cut this from the question. I was like- "Ah, probably don't need this detail." Turns out we needed the detail. Ah- That's a campaign that's been running since last march. Right, so. [KEITH: OK.] You imagine it's a weekly campaign, that's still, you know, 16 months of time. That's a lot of time.

KEITH: [cross] Yeah, that's a lot. Yeah. [AUSTIN: Um..] Um... It's always really fun to start a new thing. That's like- it is by itself like re-energising. So, if you're feeling- If you're feeling like- like, "Ah, this is getting a little long in the tooth, then, yeah try- even if it's, like... Austin you said you could always take a break, like, you could take a break and then when you start a new thing you can just go, like, "Oh well, I guess this is just what we do now because it is so much more fun." [AUSTIN: Totally. A 100%.] Or like, "Uh, I miss that other thing, maybe we should go back to it." [AUSTIN: Totally.] But yeah, like, ah... There is no- I think- There is people out there doing campaigns and still having fun with them after ten years and if everyone is still having fun for nine years why not go another year, I guess? I like to do new things, but like, there is nothing wrong with something being long.

AUSTIN: Totally. Erm- Jack and Dre, any thoughts here?

DRE: Ehm- I mean I think, like, at some point, you could always try and find a new story. I guess this is more of like, towards that second question, but like- [AUSTIN: Yeah.] You know- think of any TV show you've watched that's had like an ending, like, you probably still have questions about, like, "what happened with this character? Or this storyline? Or whatever". Like- I don't think the ending has to necessarily be, I felt like I have answered all the questions- [AUSTIN: Right.] It's just, like- when you all feel like you've done what you wanna do with it or you've, like, said what you wanna say. Erm- and sometimes it's hard to find that point. Like, I think, that kind of the ending of Twilight Mirage to me, like, it felt rushed for me, but then I also realized how long we'd been playing. [laughs]

AUSTIN: [laughing] Yeah, totally. Totally.

DRE: And I was like, "Oh, no, this hasn't been rushed at all! This has been going on for a long time." Time gets weird- [KEITH: Yeah.] When you're in the middle of something.

AUSTIN: Time is weird-

KEITH: I guess if you're gonna kill something, kill it while you still love it, right?

AUSTIN: ...Definitely. [DRE laughs] Definitely! Like I- [KEITH: What's that?] And the other thing, I'll actually say this too, which is, like, sometimes, ending a thing takes a lot of time. [DRE: [softly] Yeah.] We- we've known, like, in some sense we've been ending Twilight Mirage since October, right? Like- "Godspeed Glory" was a pivot into "Scum and Villainy" which we knew would be the final act of the- of the campaign. It would be a long act- it would be, you know, six months of that show- but you know, I've said this before, but, like, that was only three arcs, right, like, per player. Each player got three arcs of "Scum and Villainy" which is, like, nothing. And- and I think it works in the end and I think that the switch from- erm- from "The Veil" to "Scum and Villainy" worked and the end of the first half of the season worked because we gave it the time. We could have just been like, in the middle of erm- In the middle of like The Sculpture and the Privign arcs, be like, "Alright, switching systems, right here." And I am glad we didn't do that and instead we gave it the room for The Veil to kind of wind down and actually build up to a, kind of a crescendo, and then like, "Boom, here it is." And I guess, maybe here is another point-point of advice, that I would give here is, consider wrapping it up in a timescale and with a game that isn't your main game. So, this is a game of 5th Edition, Andrew said in the full version of the letter, erm- Consider something like Fallow or Kingdom or Microscope or The Quiet Year or something like that, to really make it feel like, "Ok, we're gonna zoom out a little bit" or "We're gonna zoom in a little bit and focus on just one corner of the world, for our kind of epilog, or our wrap-up." I think that has worked for us in a big way over the years and as a way of, kind of, saying "And this is the end." Because of course you can keep the story going, like, of course we could have continued to see what was happening to the characters of Counter Weight after we, kind of, closed the curtains on them. Those characters, you know, all of those characters still had lives. Erm- and probably had interesting ones. But- we- part of the reason that we used "Firebrands" there was like, "Alright, this feels like it's a different thing than just another day in the life of", you know? Jack, how about you, any thoughts?

10:59

JACK: I think that just as Keith said, that starting new things feels really good, I've talked a lot about how finishing stories is the best bit- [AUSTIN: Yeah.] Erm- and I say that as someone right now who is like, just desperate to finish composing- [AUSTIN laughs] Twilight Mirage. So, I am not in a place here where I am like "Man, I love finishing stories, that's my favorite thing", because finishing stories requires a lot of work. But I think putting yourself in that headspace and communicating to the people around you that you are entering the end of a story- [AUSTIN: Yeah.] Has a tendency to- to shift something in people's heads, into a place where they feel ready to- like, I think it's ea- if we- if Austin had ended the Skype call halfway though, you know-

AUSTIN: [cross] We haven't used Skype in- years.

JACK: And- [laughs]

KEITH: [cross] Just screw Skype.

JACK: [cross] You know, ended the Skype call. [AUSTIN laughs] Erm- Austin and I use Skype, it's really complicated- [AUSTIN laughs] for the same call. No- If we'd ended it just sort of, you know, like, one episode into "Scum and Villainy" and Austin had said, like, "It's the ending now!" [AUSTIN laughs] I think that would have been very, erm... confusing and difficult, but as we, kind of, slowly came to this realization that we should be moving our mindset into telling the end of a story- [AUSTIN: Yeah.] We began naturally to think about ways that you end a story interestingly or satisfyingly or try to. Erm- and so I think, to speak to the bit of your question where you're like, "How do you end a long game in a satisfying way?" I think a really key part of that is communicating clearly, "We are coming to an end- [AUSTIN: Yeah.] And now it's time for us to begin to think about how we do the work to make that feel good." And I think, that moment of communication leads to those conversations- [AUSTIN: Totally. I think-] or I hope it does.

12:49

AUSTIN: We- I- I basically said to everyone in the Twilight Mirage chat, like, "Hey, we are- I need to know from you all what you want from the next little bit." Right, this is back in- [JACK: Yeah.] Like, the end of June, beginning of July. I straight up sent a message and was like, "Hey, like, I need to know what your flags are.", right, "I need to know what things you wanna wrap up." And immediately, what was fun for me- was that from each of you, you all in hearing that, were like, "OK, I'm going to start making what Art ended up calling "third act choices". I am going to start playing my character to the hilt." Which is why I think you get Gig as like, really committing to reckless, for instance. And Even really committing to like, vengeance, and the feeling of, like, being willing to commit violent acts in a way that no other character on screen was, and you get Grand being Grand- and the same for every character. Everyone started making those choices that were in their back pockets a little bit, right? Like, when you- I think a lot about something, like, a 26 episode anime season, right? Like, "Cowboy Bebop" is such an easy thing for me to go to here, right? There is a point at which- at which Ed, the hacker, walks away and like, and she goes to join up with somebody else, and on paper, she could have done that 12 episodes in, but she doesn't because there is a show! [laughing] The show needs to exist- [KEITH laughs] Right? Erm- the conflict between- the kind of triangle between Spike, Julia and Faye, it's introduced very early on into that show, but like, Spike has to decide that the status quo is good enough for him for 25 episodes- 24 episodes because otherwise the show ends, the camera isn't able to follow him on his adventure and also stick with the Bebop and the rest of the crew. And so, this is, like, part of the structure of narrative and there are different formats, like there are shows- there are media in which in which it is- you are able to do that. You do have the six, you know, the six episode or six chapter run of one character leaving the group behind and you stay focused on them, that's not a thing that doesn't happen. But when the core of the show- on a show like ours especially is, like, "Here is a group of people who interact." Erm- we have to keep them together and so signaling to you players, like, "Alright, it is time to start making those big decisions." My guess is- [KEITH makes a noise] They'll jump into

it. Erm- my guess is they've already been thinking about things that way. They just haven't- they just haven't pulled the rifles of the mantelpiece yet, you know? What were you gonna say, Keith?

KEITH: I was gonna say it is really satisfying, like the- I hadn't considered it until... ah... until Jack- what Jack was saying but, like, at least for the way that I roleplay, there is a part in every season where it's like, you feel like your- like I'm just like, "Oh, I've been free falling for however many episodes and now we are ending and I have to, like, figure out what I have been doing." And like how to- [AUSTIN: Sure] Like a needle falling through clothes you didn't even realise that you'd stitched a pattern and you have to figure out what the pattern is at the end.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Yeah, it is like a- there is a long-form- It's a long-form improv thing, right? That's what the games are. [KEITH: Yeah.] And I know Keith, from your comedy stuff, right? Like, there is a point in any long-form improv game or a long-form improv show where you're, like, "Oh this is the s- OK, I know- I know what the big final punch-line is", and you don't know that until three quarters of the way though- [Keith laughs] And then you start building towards it, but you've been building towards it the whole time and it's recognize- there is this rule that it's in Action Movie World and in Worldwide Wrestling RPG which is, that my job as the GM is to make sense of things as if it was always already planned and- [KEITH hums approval] It isn't, you know? It's like, "Oh shit! OK, I can see how I can tie- OK, OK, OK." And that is true for you as players too, so- ah- so yeah, and it is a good answer for Andrew. OK, next question... from Julia, who says: [reading] "Hi! I've gotten used to playing party-face heavy-charisma characters regardless of the setting transitioning from playing tricksters to playing a more quiet character is a fun change, because it lets you explore a lot of different depths of character, however, loud characters who insert themselves into scenes have a much better opportunity at seeing their will enacted in the world, the plot and the "playing to find out what happens". Do you have any advice on how to watch a plot element move past you without seizing the opportunity to interact with it, just because playing true to the character would be staying mum? Thanks for everything you guys do, Julia" Ah, Dre, I am really curious from you, here, because I think a lot of your past characters- I think, I think Even is like- is like a pretty big split from Throndir who- [DRE: Yeah.] who- Throndir has- has his moments of action but Throndir is like very perceptive and very quiet, comparatively. So I am curious for you, how do you feel about this?

DRE: Erm... Man, part of it just comes from the fact that I'm not as extroverted- [laughs] [AUSTIN hums in agreement] So like, playing a more introverted- or maybe not an introverted but a character who isn't as the, like, the party-face role- [AUSTIN: Right.] Is just something that is more kind-of enjoyable for me as just a player, because it doesn't put as much stress on me. Erm... but I think it's- it's kind of changing you kind of goals for yourself, like, you know, this person say that- Julia says that loud characters, who insert themselves, have a better opportunity at seeing their will enacted. Erm... And I guess, for me, I find, I guess I just naturally go towards like, there's little small things in the plot that are kind of more... I feel like, "interesting" is the word I am looking for but I also feel that is putting a value judgement on it that I don't mean to. [AUSTIN hums approvingly] But like, I find kind of interest in the little small,

like, beats as to how they work out for my character and the little, like, nook of the world that they influence. So I think, like, looking at that as a more- in a more micro view in finding what sort of stuff in the micro would be interesting to you.

AUSTIN: [cross] Is where they would be speaking up and, like, really focusing in on that?

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Cool. Yeah. I think that's- I think that makes a lot of sense, like, what is the corner of the world you are gonna own and when you hit that, like, not only speak up but, like, you should have no problem taking the spotlight, because you know, like, "OK, I have been reserved though most of this stuff." Erm-

DRE: [cross] Yeah. And I think too, it's also, you know, like, on a DM side or a GM side... erm... a good GM finds places for that- [AUSTIN: [emphatically] Yes! Yes! Totally.] can still happen. Like I remember... like the first arc of Winter in Hieron, I had just taken the thing that let Throndir speak to animals- [AUSTIN: Yeah.] And then you were, like, "OK, here is a bunch of Animals [laughing] that you can talk to. [AUSTIN: Totally, totally!] So, even though, you know, I wasn't, like, you know, changing the world in a crazy way, you let me have that little moment of, like, "This is the cool thing that Throndir can do when the opportunity is right."

AUSTIN: Totally... Jack and Keith, thoughts on this one.

JACK: [cross] I don't know-

KEITH: [cross] Ah, this is sort of a kryptonite question for me- [AUSTIN: Aha!] Cause I'm-

JACK and DRE: [laugh]

AUSTIN: [laughing] You don't say...

KEITH: Yeah. Ah- I was laughing during the reading of it- [DRE laughs] Ah... because I don't know, I don't have any advice. Erm... I've never done it, maybe ever. I mean, I've had a character that is sometimes not talking. [ALL laugh].

AUSTIN: Oh... [patronizingly] It is good to know yourself, you know as like- as like a character trait. It's good to know who you are as a person.

KEITH: Yeah. Uhum. Jack?

ALL: [laugh]

JACK: I-

KEITH: [cross] I'll maybe think of something to say. But I don't know.

AUSTIN: Oh, yeah? Will you?

KEITH: [flipantly] Maybe.

AUSTIN: [laughing] OK.

JACK: You know those moments in Shane Black movies where there is a character who is doing something unrelated to the A-plot- [AUSTIN: Yeah.] And then the A-plot encounters them and they react with the kind of bemused excitement that you would when a Shane Black A-plot approached you. Erm... that is how I thought about playing AuDy a lot of the time. [AUSTIN hums contemplatively] Erm... AuDy doesn't say very much, erm... And when they do they are not very good at saying it... erm... or they are not very- they leave room for lots of different sorts of interpretations, I think- [AUSTIN: Yeah! Yeah!] And they don't necessarily intend that... erm... but- but something that I think AuDy took a lot of glee in, and I took a lot of glee in, was seeing the plot coming- lumbering over the horizon often pursuing Gig or Aria. Gig- Ah- [AUSTIN: [laughs] Mako or Aria.] Mako- often pursuing Mako and Aria.

AUSTIN: I called it the Kingdom Come the other day. Did you ca- did you seen this?

JACK: I did- ah--

KEITH: [cross] I saw someone saying that but I-

21:39

AUSTIN: [cross] We didn't catch it. I just slipped up and say the Kingdom Come instead of The World Without End.

JACK: We didn't change it? Oh, that's very good.

AUSTIN: [cross] No, we just didn't notice it, we just didn't notice it. It was not intentional- [JACK: Um...] for what it is worth.

JACK: But there is a joy in... as Dre said there is a joy in waiting for those small moments to arrive. There is also a joy in sitting back and waiting for the plot to eventually reach you. [AUSTIN: Right.] The A-plot. Knowing that it's gonna come crashing in and knowing that you're gonna have to react in some way. Erm... and that was even fun to play with- with Erm... Hitchcock in scenes like in Memoriam. Where I am off doing my own thing, and then suddenly up from the depth of the library- [AUSTIN laughs] Comes the elevator with everybody on it

having just had this like, fight with the Yellow House. And those moments of- of deliberately not engaging with an element of story because you know that the moment when it comes back to you is going to be so colorful and interesting, is something that I take a lot of pleasure in.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I'll say another thing that I think- actually think all of you do well, is that even when it's not your scene, and when you know it is not your scene a thing that you've all gotten really good at is illustrating who your character is in their response, in their often non-verbal response, right? Like, I always think- everybody does this really well. I think Janine has done it really well with Adaire and I think a lot of my favorite Cass moments are Art describing Cass's response to something in non-verbal terms. Erm... and there's- that is a degree of characterization that let's you say, like, "OK, hey, I am here. I am here! Here's like a little sketch of me, but this isn't my scene, so..." I get to like- [KEITH: Yeah.] I get to like put put my face on the camera a little bit, I get to make eye contact with another character, but I am not here to steal the show. And I think that is always a great way to kind-of keep yourself in the conversation but also kind-of to cede and be like "Hey, this isn't- I am not trying to be that- that's not who this character is. This character is quiet." But you can describe what type of quiet is it. Is it a foreboding quiet? Is it, are you rolling your eyes at the situation? Are you scowling? Are you judged-are you judging? Are you distracted? Like, all of those things can help communicate something about your character and give you, the player, something to say to keep you active at the table without making it be about you and your response and trying to, like, take the reins of everything, you know? Erm... and then yeah, as Thomas in the chat says, "and also emphasise the GM role in this, let the GM know that you want opportunities to participate in a reactive way." Which yeah, a hundred percent. If you are not getting those opportunities, then that is- that is something to bring up with the GM. Erm... it sounds like, based on the way you've written this, that that's- there are probably plenty of opportunities for you to react, it's just that your character has a set of interests or qualities that maybe makes them less likely to and so you should be flagging to your GM, "OK, here are the 5 things that would make me get out of my seat." You know, and if they don't arrive at it organically, there is no shame in being, like, "Hey, here are some things that my character is interested in, you know? Here are some things that can push me to speak up, so." Alright, next question. Keep it moving today. This one comes in from Paige and it's another similar kind of question about playing a character a certain way. [reading] "I have noticed with the last few characters I've played that I'm really struggling to feeling- feeling OK playing out non-violent negative character traits. The kind of RPGs I played growing up made it easy to get comfortable using violence as an answer for all problems and over time it was also easy to get comfortable with that as a bad way to approach things that at the very last- at the very least has the potential to say some negative things about a character's worldview or morals. I've been trying to stray away from this and focus on other negative traits like greed or cowardice, but I always end up pulling back on the consequences of those traits, because it feels like I'm taking something out of the game for others. It feels really bad to run away from my friends [laughs] while they are trying to fight or to steal part of our earnings for myself when others need that money more than I do. This is kind of horrifying. Objectively, killing someone rather than trying to talk around them is much worse than pinching some extra gold, but I still feel much worse as a player about doing the latter and I think part of the problem is that I don't

know how to have good table conversations about playing out these non-violent traits in a way that won't make others feel like I'm making the game harder for them. Do you have any tips for easing that guilt and starting those conversations?" Erm... I bring this up because I actually don't think anyone here has fully played into that stuff. We've had, like, some light character conflict for sure, where people have different- disagreements about things. Think about, "What do you do with the Gnosis Virus?" for the Chime or I think about, "What do you do to Arrell?" for Mountain Party, right? Or, "What do you do with ah..." you know- I think... Even and Echo had some of this in recent episodes, right? In terms proper response to conflict in Twilight Mirage. We never really had someone who was like, "and my job is to rob the party". [ALL laugh] But I am curious for you as players, when you do think about your negative traits, and how they will, negatively impact the party, how do you balance that and go about making sure that that's a thing that's like, "Hey, this is the game, I am playing my character here. I wanna make sure that this is clear, that I am not- I wanna make sure everybody else at the table is having a fun time." Let's start with Jack. As someone who has played a character who's gotten in Hieron kind of increasingly- [JACK: Yeah.] at odds with- with party success.

JACK: Yeah. Erm... It's tough, It's tough. I think that there is... something that I try and think about in situations like this is that there is breadth of cowardice and there is a breadth of greed [AUSTIN laughs]. Which isn't to say that there are, you know, there are ways of being cowardly in a small scale and there are ways of being cowardly in a big scale. But there are also ways of presenting huge cowardliness in a small, quiet way [laughs], rather than necessarily just straight desertion. Erm.. and I think that part of the difficulty I feel in not wanting to open up the party to negative consequences comes when I think of these very flashy acts of villainy [AUSTIN hums approvingly]. Whereas I think a lot of- a lot of the negative character traits that my characters have displayed have been at their best when I've tried to make sure that it doesn't necessarily throw the party completely off the rails, but just changes the focus of the camera a little- [AUSTIN hums approvingly] Into something that is more unsettling or more sinister or more uncomfortable. Erm... I think as always, dramatic irony is your friend here. I think it's always gonna feel hard, it's always gonna feel difficult to throw your character and throw the party into situations where you know that there is no joy down that road. Erm... but also it is- [laughs] It is very satisfying to line up a lot of shit dominoes and then watch them fall. [DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: Yeah, it totally is from my side too, to watch that happen.

JACK: I think like the moment in the stoneworks in the New Archives- [AUSTIN: Yeah.] That's definitely a moment of realizing, erm.. on the one hand, Lem is the only player character in that scene, so it feels- it felt like I had a little more license to move more broadly, but also my need-

29:24

AUSTIN: [cross] Right, but there are also players who could have been-

JACK: [cross] Oh God, that would-

AUSTIN: [cross] -immediately negatively affected. That would have been a conversation, at least, right?

JACK: Yeah! One hundred percent. And I think it would be a mistake if it wasn't a conversation, but at the same time while doing that, I was very aware that- you know- the Archives and the people in the Archives are not necessarily gonna be happy about Lem's decisions there and that is gonna have knock-on consequences for these travellers who have just arrived at the Archives in the form of Ephrim and Fero.

AUSTIN: [hums approvingly] Totally. Erm... I've briefly, I think, Grand has also I- Like just to have say, "Yes, have the conversation"

JACK: [cross] God, Grand was just like, the powerhouse about this.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I maybe have to re- work back around here with Art, the next time that he's available but, before Grand's act three decisions, we had a conversation off-mike in just our group chat and then again on-mike about where Art wanted to take Grand Magnificent. Not in terms of like, the finale, but I mean, you heard it, it's in an episode. Art says, like "Here's what I want to do with Grand Magnificent." Erm... and we all react to it there and it sets things up in such a way, I think, so that we as players get to be, like, "OK, here is where my headspace [JACK laughs] is gonna be about this. Here is how my characters are going to react to this." For me as GM it's, "Here is how I can tempt this, here is how I can bring to the forefront." And for players it's, like, "OK, here is how we're gonna react, you know, or our characters are gonna react." And I think that is always worth doing. It's something I think we learned actually in- Keith, maybe you can speak to this a little bit, but at the beginning of the year we ended up tossing an episode out. [KEITH hums approvingly] I don't know that we would have had to've tossed that out if we had thought- if we had thought that through and had the conversation ahead of time. I mean what- if we'd had the conversation ahead of time we probably just wouldn't have made Coin Stollard, right? [KEITH: Right.] You would have just gone a different direction- [KEITH: Yeah.] But there is a world in which you say, "You know what? I am interested in playing a character who walks that line, and where the camera will sometimes paint them villainously and will vilify them and other times will show them as useful, and that will be part of what I am doing this year." And we didn't have that conversation. That was a mistake on my part as the GM and it's something that we should have done because that could have- the whole table could have gotten our heads around some of the issues with having a character who can like, go into your mind, you know? Instead of just thinking- [KEITH hums approvingly] We are all on the same page and that is, I think, a great example of how having that table talk, can open up a whole new style of play and not just be about shutting something down. But I am curious, Keith about your take on it, not only with Coin, but like, you know, someone said today the- in one of the chats- in discord, was like, "I know I love a season the first time Keith has a bad idea." [laughs] [DRE laughs] I like to think what they mean is "a fun idea" [laughs]. The like-

KEITH: Yeah, I can't think of any bad ideas...

AUSTIN: Me either, not of the top of my head, at least [Keith laughs]. But i am thinking about- for you you do- there is- is lots of like, "OK, Keith had an audacious plan." [KEITH: Yeah.] At the very least, right?

KEITH: Or is just being like, kind-of a shit. like-

AUSTIN: Yeah... [enthusiastically] aha. [DRE laughs]

KEITH: I just bought- just my character's say things that invite consequences even though-

AUSTIN: [cross] Aha. For everybody.

KEITH: For everybody, yeah! There is- like I can't- I can't count them, I can't like name a specific time, but if, like, Fero or Mako were more polite, I am sure there- things could have gone better for us at certain parts of those campaigns.

AUSTIN: [decisively] Sure. Fero yells a lot at people- [KEITH: Yeah.] And just like speaks his mind- [KEITH: Yeah.] because he's a- he turns into birds and shit, right?

KEITH: Yeah. 'Cause he's just like, "I can just lea- I can just leave." [laughs]

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: I- Just me. Could just lea- could leave, If I wanted- when I want to.

AUSTIN: Which is like a deeply selfish thing, that is the character, to some degree- [KEITH: Yeah.] Right? Yeah. Totally.

KEITH: But I never stole gold, 'cause I would feel bad. [laughs]

AUSTIN: So even you have this problem. Like, this is something even you would be like-

KEITH: [cross] Yeah, yeah! This is something I very classically have a problem- well and then- so, my solution to this is that... erm... like if something makes me feel bad or guilty about doing- like on a video game or at a table- on a tabletop game, I just don't do it. [AUSTIN: Right.] Erm... and so if I- You know, if... if part of what I want to do is make a- is have a character that, like, makes choices that are- like, invite complications, I have to figure out a way to do them that doesn't make me feel bad. That's why I don't- you know I've played- I've played KOTOR 2, you know, a hundred thousand times and I've- I've made each bad decision, but I haven't ever done the bad guy playthrough because I can't handle that much of being an asshole, even in this

game that I know backwards and forwards. 'Cause it just makes me feel bad, I don't wanna [laughs] feel bad.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I think that that's definitely a thing that I see in a lot of players, where it's like, well here is the line that I won't cross. Which is fine. [KEITH: Yeah.] That is the other thing I'll say is like, this is genre fiction and genre fiction has conventions and boundaries, often. And I am not saying you can never play a bad guy in a game, you know. I am not saying don't do that or if you are not interested in that it's not worth the work to put in to do that or something like that. Some of my favorite moments at tabletop games have been playing with other players who are interested in going down those roads in a way that is agreed upon and safe and all that. Erm... but is- but at the same time, like, you know, there is a degree of- of- erm... there is a degree of convention at work in which you have a party of adventurers who cares about each other and it's OK to do that also. I know that's like so many of the answers to our questions is just like, "Hey, it's OK to feel that way." But it is OK! I wanna validate that a little bit. Dre was that-

35:09

KEITH: [cross] There is also-

AUSTIN: Oh, that was Keith.

KEITH: Yeah, that was me, sorry, I wanted to-

AUSTIN: [cross] I got that one wrong.

KEITH: KOTOR reminded me- erm... yeah, yeah, you are two for three, which is fine. [AUSTIN snickers] Talking about KOTOR reminded me because, especially with KOTOR I, like the things that I think are the bad choices, have changed so drastically in that game, for me, since the first time I played it, to now, that like- And that same thing is true when you're doing tabletop games, what you're, you know, eventually you'll have different ideas about things and some things you thought were, like, interesting and complicated decisions that you were not cool with, suddenly you'll be fine with them and sometimes vice versa, stuff that you thought you were OK with, you are not OK with anymore. Sort of like, the initial thing is, using violence as an answer for all problems versus now, not wanting to do that. [AUSTIN: Right! Right!] Ah- and then, you know, I am not saying that, "Oh, you'll eventually grow into wanting to steal [laughs] from your- [AUSTIN laughs] friends... [laughs] Which, you know, isn't something that is true or something you have to do, I- again, don't- I don't think any of my characters have ever stolen from another character- another player character- [AUSTIN: Totally.] But, like, at some point, you'll just decide that something you thought was bad, you think, "Ah, that's fine, actually."

AUSTIN: Dre, I am curious for you, because while you haven't played a character who is the bad guy, who steals from their party, or whatever, you did play the number one example of party interference that we've ever had in the game. Right? [DRE hums in agreement] In Marielda, like you- [DRE: Yeah yeah yeah.] The only time it's really come to fucking blows, was one of your characters, so, I am curious-

DRE: God, yeah, I guess that's true-

KEITH: I- I do also want to remind about the bullet eating as Even.

DRE: [cross] Oh, that's true-

AUSTIN: [cross] Oh, true! True, but that was-

KEITH: [cross] That's another really big one.

AUSTIN: [cross] That was a roll that-

DRE: [cross] Am I just the biggest asshole in the cast?

AUSTIN: Nonononono, Dre, that was a roll- [DRE laughs] That you leaned into narratively.

DRE: Oh, that's true, yeah, that was just a-

AUSTIN: [cross] That was not a choice, that was a bad roll, that fucked up. But-

KEITH: Oh, that was a bad roll, OK.

AUSTIN: [cross] That was a bad roll. That's a bad roll- [DRE: Yeah. OK.] Siege on the other hand, made a choice.

DRE: [softly] Yeah. Erm... I mean I think, like, I think Paige's, erm... like their kind of instinct of, like, "I wanna make sure other people at the table are having a good time." Is very commendable. [AUSTIN hums approvingly] And I think, like, you know, I think we've all played with people in our private games that don't have that instinct and it- it's bad. So, first of all, I think that having that instinct and wanting to have this conversations is really good. And I think it really just comes down to, like, having that conversation and figuring out what kind of game everybody wants to play, because, like, having conflict amongst our characters, like, I don't worry about that as much, because I know that is just kind of the game we are playing because we are more of a story based game. Like, that's kind of the main draw in our games, is those character interactions, and so, being true to the character, to me, is easy, even if it is going against the rest of the party because it is just like, "OK, it's not about what I would do in this situation- [AUSTIN: Right.] It is about what my character would do." And sometimes it's just

looking at, like, "What are the beliefs I have on this sheet?" And what, like, "If I am honestly acting this out, what happens in this situation?" Urm- but I've also played in games, where it is like, that game is supposed to just be a dungeon route where all we are doing is fighting and getting loot [AUSTIN laughs softly] and making the numbers go up [AUSTIN laughs] and like- and if that's the kind of game that everybody says they wanna play, yeah, like, going against the party, would make that game not as fun, 'cause- [AUSTIN: Totally.] Like not the point, the focus of that type of game.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I'll hit something else you just said too, though, which is the beliefs thing with Siege- to work back to this, like, why are you playing a character that robs the party? What are they robbing it for? What- like, is it- Because it is almost never because they want more money... Almost never... Sometimes it's because they feel insecure with the amount of money they have and feel like- and they come from a background at which they never had wealth before and so, it constantly feels like they are on the precipice of failure and that means that they're gonna, you know, pocket a little bit here or there. Sometimes it's because they have something they wanna save up for and buy out, you know, from under the party's nose. Sometimes it's because they are more devious than that and are secretly working for somebody else. But like, it's rarely just, "I wanna pocket a couple extra bucks." There is some psychological something happening there and so, try to write a belief about it. Try to write a belief about why and when you will steal money from the party. Try to write a belief about the sorts of fights you are unwilling to have as a coward and why. What caused you to do this? Because then, one, it makes that thing material in the mechanics of the game world, and lets them be something that you can address. It kind of puts it into the time- into the timeline and says, "At this moment here is what I believe, here is how I act as a character." In the future maybe that changes, but it puts it in there and then lets you address it. Keith, really quick, as we- before we move on...

KEITH: Ahh... yeah. Dre reminded me of something when he said, like, "Paige wanted to make sure people are having fun at the table"? [AUSTIN: Yeah.] It reminded me sort of a- of a- you guys have played "Dead of Winter"? The zombie- I guess it's not important, but, you know, there is plenty of games where people are having fun together knowing that one person is, like, a traitor character- [AUSTIN hums thoughtfully] Or that different players have, like, ulterior motives. [AUSTIN hums in agreement] An so like, there is a clear difference between making things harder for the player- for the characters and making things harder for the- your friends that you're playing with.

AUSTIN: [cross] Your friends at the table. Right.

KEITH: Right. Because if- [laughs]

AUSTIN: [laughing] I didn't- That wasn't intentional. [KEITH laughs] That was not intentional.

DRE: [excitedly] Uhh...

AUSTIN: It wasn't intentional!

KEITH: [laughs] They said the- They said the title! [ALL laugh]

AUSTIN: Oh, boy...

KEITH: Erm... But yeah, so like- if everybody is, like- if everybody is, like- if part of what people want from the game is to, like, have, like inter party conflict, or have, like, characters that are, you know, maybe not a hundred per- like, their main goal isn't the party's goal. Like if that's what everybody has decided is fun, then you're literally, not working against them, you are just working against the characters that are pretending they are upset. [AUSTIN: Right. Totally!] So...

AUSTIN: Alright, let's move on. This one comes in from Brian and is again a pretty long one. [laughs] So long long that it broke the format entirely. [reading] "I am the main GM for me and my friend's regular group- game group. We've played games from 5th edition D&D to Dungeon World and we are planing to start a campaign of Scum and Villainy in a few months. In our past few games, I've developed what I would refer to as an Austin-Walker-Fa- Austin-Walker-Faction Syndrome where I end up designing 30+ factions for our game worlds and I absolutely love doing it. Problem is I can't decide whether or not it's too much. Scum and Villainy is a game that puts heavy focus on factions but Dungeon World and D&D really aren't. And yet, I've went and done the Marielda thing of making more factions than will reasonably be featured in those games. Yet in games that put factions in a leading role, and then stories about groups of people and the way they interact, I feel there a responsibility to create enough factions to facilitate that type of narrative. Those are the stories that my friends an I have tended to want to tell among ourselves so that's what I've done. What ends up happening though, is that I feel compelled to shoehorn in some of those excess factions into the game to make the most of my prep, especially when I have an affection for those factions I've designed. So my question for Austin as I prepare to go in a homebrew of "Scum and Villainy" setting, is this: how do I go about making enough factions to satisfy the game system and the demands of the narratives my table enjoys we are still living in enough metaphorical blank spaces on the metaphorical map. Is it better to have too many factions and throughout the superfluous ones or too few factions and design new ones as the plot demands? Is making excess factions like this just my guilty pleasure? And other Table Friends do you have any insights into this as the people who interact with those factions at the table. Sorry that like my faction list this email has become a bit too long. Thank you for humoring me." I think Austin-Walker-Faction Syndrome is real. I think you should talk to a qualified physician about. It is- it is a thing I love to do. I- I- but I also- I think the key thing here for me the number one sentence you have in this email, and I hope you're right about it, is I've lost- "those are the stories that me and my friends have tended to want to tell among ourselves so that's what I've done." [emphatically] That is it. Right like- I- when we go into these games- when we go into a game like COUNTER/Weight or like Marielda or like, eh- Twilight Mirage, especially the second half of Twilight Mirage, the pitch I make to everyone is like, "There's this dense world of all of these factions interacting and people are at a high-level kind of, pushing and pulling on the events of society and that is the focus." And when

I pitch Hieron I don't say that, right? [laughs] I don't say, "Oh and there's like 17 different groups and they're all trying to get this thing" and no, there are Fronts there are different focuses, there are different characters who have power and different cities and stuff like that. But, like, there's no faction sheet so to speak for Hieron again, there are Fronts and there are NPC lists and all that, but I'm not tracking what the power level of Rosemerrow is, right? It's just not how it works. And the key to that is just, like, directness and honesty about what type of game you wanna play. On the kind of craft level of how much is too much, the first and most important thing I'll say around over-prep is, when you prep a faction for a "Forged in the Dark" game do not include any more- do not fill in the blanks beyond the three or four sentences, at most you put down for a faction until they need to be on screen. So, like, when I look at my faction sheet for Twilight Mirage, like, I have the Earth Home Economic Concern, for instance, right? They showed up a couple times very briefly we know that Bea Temperance, who is the one of Grand's rivals- works for them. That's all I know. Like, I know that they, like, control trade in- in the N.E.H. I don't need to know who Bea Temperance reports to unless we're doing an episode in which we go into, like, the secret space, you know, station where the E.E.C. is run out of. And then like, I do need to know what's going on with them, right? And the problem ends up being that like- or that someone that- there's the Machine, Arbitrage, right? Which is like a space shadow broker type machine. Cool, sounds great, I don't know what the name of the troops who work for the Machine, Arbitrage are named, right? I don't know what the layout of that space station is the way that I can talk to you about The Brink which has shown up a number of times. And it's so tempting to fill in those blanks ahead of time. But one, if you do that you prevent your players from being able to, when you can say something, like, "I don't know, tell me what it looks like?" or, like, "I don't know- what do the troops- do the troops have anything distinctive on them?" I can ask Art as someone who Bea as his rival, I can say "Grand, you've run into Bea before, like, what type of gear does she keep on her?", you know? That's a thing that I can do and if I try to fill in that blank ahead of time then- then I take that experience away from the table. So I don't think there is a magic bullet like special number I don't think it's like- it is 27. 27 Factions-

KEITH: [cross] It is 27.

46:24

AUSTIN: [laughs] -no more, no less. But it is- but it is thinking about- for me it's way more about like filling the- the possible buckets that you need to reach in and pull something cool from, right? So when like- when in Marielda, they went up against the Fontmen, right? They could have gone up against like four or five other potential groups of similar things but given what had happened in the course of play, the Fontmen made the most sense. And so- I moved the number such that they ran into the Fontmen basically. And it was cool to have that bucket, even though the Cult of Wolf and Dragon or whatever never came up, right? Like I was cool to have them- The Hospitaliers du Tristero they didn't show up ever, you know? But I had them there and it- it was something that as a GM is that sort of very light prep that can in a moments notice let you reach in and grab something that makes sense and just something just so. Spreadsheet

help a lot, filling in spreadsheets definitely help as Josh says in the chat. The number one thing for me is like- Maybe not the number one- One of the big ones that- One last piece of advice here before I turn it over to the player side is resist at all- at all points the urge to hint at the mere existence of another faction. If you've decided that for instance the Method of Apotheosis in Twilight Mirage is the group that- that could change- could either resurrect Divines or could turn an Axiom into a Divine, right? They end up being kind of a mayor player despite actually never succeeding at much this season. But they ended up being someone who I had to explain because I needed those characters to be on screen. I needed, you know, for certain characters to be- I needed them to be in certain sequences and on the table as an option in certain- at the end of certain arcs and throughout certain arcs. That was important. But em- I did my best never to be, like, "Well there is a fraction of people fly around in a spaceship and put on plays" And that's interesting, but they were like, never gonna come up, so I didn't say that faction, didn't bring them up. I didn't just like hint at them lightly and I think most of the problems with Twilight Mirage's pacing in season two- in the second half of the season. A lot of them rather, do come down to moments where I slip up and do want to gesture at a grandeur that is- that I know I- I should know I won't have time to show. The other thing is, if you run a long enough campaign, we'll get there. If we ran another four arcs of Marielda, you would have know about the Cult of Wolf and Dragon for sure, you know? So yeah- that's my advice as a GM, but I'm curious for you all, as someone who's been in these games, what are your thoughts?

DRE: Man, I'm the opposite when I GM. [AUSTIN: Yeah?] Especially 'cause I- I think I've talked about this a couple of times on here before. But I am running a Blades in the Dark game with local friends. [AUSTIN: Right.] And uff, man, I have the opposite of Austin-Walker-Faction Syndrome- [AUSTIN laughs] Where like, I feel, like, I get kind of tunnel vision where like- when we're in a thing, I kind of have, like, my prep involves looking at like the handful of fractions that, like, I'm pretty sure we're gonna bump up against. [AUSTIN: Right.] And then just kind of having to, at times wing it- [laughs] Bump into a place where another faction would make sense. [AUSTIN: Right.] But I- I kinda like that part of it and I think my players kinda like it too. Because I- I do what you said, where I can be like, "Ok, which one of you all would know the most about this weird faction?" [AUSTIN: Right.] Like, "You tell me about them."

AUSTIN: About the ghost dance troupe or whatever.

50:02

DRE: Yeah. Uh-hu.

AUSTIN: PS. starting a new Blades in the Dark game where we all play as ghosts- a ghost dance troupe. [DRE laughs] I hope everyone is ready. [KEITH laughs] [DRE: Born ready.] One other note that I just thought of briefly because I was thinking about Forged in the Dark games and factions and things we've done in our various faction stuff to make it more persible as both GM as player, is do not be afraid of grouping your factions. I have been reading Beam Saber

recently which seems like a pretty cool game that I'm doing my best not to read enough of, so I don't get too hyped on it before I get to play it in a real way. It's a game by Austin Ramsey, you can search for it. It's a Forged in the Dark mech game and a thing that that does is something. It does it formally, a thing that I did in Twilight Mirage and a thing that we did in COUNTER/Weight which is, it says, "OK, there are big buckets, there are big faction buckets", right? There is an authoritarian faction, there is an oligarchic faction, there is a theocratic faction and then underneath those buckets, there might be, you know, eight squads, or five or six squads and that's what we ended up doing in Twilight Mirage which helped so much to be like, "Oh, the Advent group is these four factions." Cool. Like, I don't need to think about the difference at this- at the highest level I don't need to know what the Volunteers of Seiche and the Advent Discovery and Salvage Society and the Concretetown Particulars all do as individual units, I just need to think about the Advent Group. I don't need to think about what all the subdivisions of the N.E.H. do, I just need to think about the N.E.H. And even if I- for a particular reason I need to zoom in, I have the nuance and, kind of, granularity to let me do that. But I don't need to do it. I can just paint in that broad brush. I can communicate to my players, "Hey, the Advent Group, they are fucking bad. They suck." [laughs] Without going into the very, very hyperspecifics. I can say, "Oh, the Advent Group showed up." Instead of being, like, "OK, here are the five different sub-factions or whatever." So, yeah. But, how about for you Jack and Keith?

52:00

JACK: I feel like the thing that- that is most important to me, not only when I think about how we've interacted with factions but also when I think about collaborative storytelling generally, is exactly what you said, Austin about like, write one sentence. Really just write one sentence. Maybe know in your head some ideas of more of what's coming up but- [AUSTIN: Right.] But as someone who writes stories I feel the temptation constantly to just fill the page up. To just go like, "I can tell you all about the, like, sister of the faction leader who they had a fallout with and then they- [AUSTIN: [laughs] Right.] They moved to another side of the city and then there was that bank job that went wrong" and it's like, it is so hard for me to- to restrain myself at that point, but really what I should be writing is like "specializes in bank heists, rogue sister"

AUSTIN: [laughs] Right. Right.

JACK: And like- And that seems hard when you've only written one, but once you've gone real deep into Austin-Walker-Faction Syndrome, and you've got 20 factions and each of them have one sentence. You've got 20 amazing sentences and that's all you really need at that point. So I would caution against, speaking from experience. I would resist that urge to fill up the page and every time you write more than one sentence [laughs] for your faction entry you go, "No, no, no, no. [AUSTIN: laughs] Cut that back, [laughs] cut that back!" We can learn about them later.

AUSTIN: Right, the other thing there is just, if you write a lot you will have a lot to throw out, right? Because one of your players would be something better than what you wrote down, and you'll be like, "Yeah, I gotta do that now. Sorry- [JACK: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.] Sorry sister

rivalry, gotta get rid of that- [JACK: Got a dog rivalry.] because this other thing that just happened so fucking better that we're just gonna go in that direction", right?

KEITH: Or- Or you'll be tempted to use the thing that you wrote that you know is worse.

AUSTIN: Which you know is worse! Don't do it, it's worse!

KEITH: [cross] Don't do that!

AUSTIN: You know? And I do that all the time. There's- there's so much that I've written down that, like, I've to throw it out, like- I don't know, "Keith said something way better, let's go with that", you know? [DRE snickers] And that is so much of what makes this show work is- is people having better ideas than me and me being able to be like "Yep, that's better I am glad I did not overprep on this thing. This thing- this direction is so much more interesting than what I thought it was gonna be and let's go with that." Otherwise- otherwise we'd be in a just- in a just worse place. All right next question, as we continue down the list. Boom! This one comes in from Morgan, who asks [reading] "How do you get people excited about a homebrew setting? I'll be starting a new game soon, hopefully with a group of online friends who mostly play in prepackaged official settings how do I pitch collaborative world-building to them?" Big question. Dre, you said you were running a Blades game, are you running in just Duskwall or are you doing your own setting?

DRE: We are Duskwall, but we have done like a pretty- I would say like a 50-50 mix of- [AUSTIN: OK.] Like, taking what is there in Duskwall but also kind of doing, you know, inserting out own flavors or factions or our own twist on stuff.

AUSTIN: [hums approvingly] [KEITH: Ah-] How did you convince them that was a thing you wanted to do and not just use the book?

DRE: Erm... It was kind of both, like I remember early on in world-building two of my players had this idea of, you know, "We want to have these two characters have this previously established relationship." And they had this relationship like in this faction that they were making for themselves- [AUSTIN hums approvingly] And I think like, them, kind of- because we did most of our kind of prepping and like talking stuff like, in a discord channel and I think them kind of putting that out there- [AUSTIN: Right.] Kind of, like turned the faucet open for other people- [AUSTIN: Yeah if you-] To be able to say, like, "Well I know the book says this about this thing but what if it was- [AUSTIN: Right.] You know, 'bla bla bla' instead"

AUSTIN: Dancing ghost troupe, yeah, totally. [KEITH and DRE laugh] Like grounding it in player- in characters that the players have is already a great- I think a great solution because then it immediately says like, "Ok, like, we know that your character is from a guild of assassins. What's that guild like?" And they're going to want to reach for the book. I know is 'cause I've been that player. When I was an L5R player, I very much- and GM, I was very much the like buy

every- you know, ah- splatbook I could find, buy every, you know, supplement I could find and learn all about this specific world that other people had created. And that was a lot of fun! I don't like that, but what ended up pushing me further was definitely once I was in a place where I was playing- playing the game with people online and they were people who would be like, "OK, well like what's your what's your home? What is fantasy samurai's home life like?" "OK but like- that's not in the book, how do I know?" "So why don't you just tell me?" "Like, OK, I can come up with this, I can do this, OK, I'm like from like small village and there is like some sort of rivalry between the kind of mayor of that village, or like the headman of that village and my character's parents-" And suddenly that stuff comes to life. So I think yeah, grounding it in your- in the characters is a great way. Jack and Keith, how about you?

57:18

KEITH: I think- Dre gave a really great example for my, like, my gut reaction to the question- [AUSTIN hums approvingly] Which is that, all of tabletop games are based around players having ideas and it's just about, like, if for- I think for me just because of the way that I first started playing role-playing games it was always in homebrew settings- [AUSTIN: Right.] And then when I started GMing, I was just, like, a natural transition to be like, "Well I've never- I literally have never played in an official setting in my whole life." [AUSTIN: Right, sure.] And so- but for people who are used to that, I just think it's like, well fuck- like, playing the game is having ideas. It's just about having ideas about different sorts of things. [AUSTIN: Right.] And I think that it's all- it's exciting for people to play in the world that they helped to make.

AUSTIN: [cross] It can be- I think that it can be stressful, I think. [KEITH: Yep!] I think that there's a lot of like- [DRE: Oh, yeah.] [KEITH: You can play-] I've definitely noticed this from players before who say like, "I don't wanna get it wrong. Like, what if I say the thing that's bad? And then it is stuck for it to be real forever?" And I think that is a totally sincerely- like, I get that fear because my job in this show is to say things and sometimes I get them wrong. Like, I get it. So I don't wanna just say, like, "Oh yeah, it should just be fun", because sometimes it just isn't for people because it's so stressful. I think part of it then- given that is to try to emphasize that nothing you say can't be unsaid. Like, at some point obviously if you're, like, 12 sessions in, you're like, "Oh no, I said they were an assassins guild, what I meant was they love puppies. [DRE and KEITH laugh] They're a puppy rescue." Maybe you can't take that bit back, but I've you're like an episode in or a session in and you're like, "Oh man, you know what? I said this was a group of vampires who kill young people, I really hate that. Why did I say that? That's not- They're a group of vampires who kill [emphatically] old people" [KEITH laughs] Then like, OK, you know, have that conversation at the table, be like, "I am not comfortable with what I said before." Or, "Maybe we can add to this, maybe we can develop it out. Maybe it's just a certain sect of vampires, maybe there is a larger sect-" You can always try to continue to kind of work on your ideas and sometimes you get- you say bad ones and it's OK and the game will move on from that, you know?

KEITH: There's also like, for our group, I know and for other groups that I've been in like part of the fun is like, when you have an idea and then people ask questions about your idea and then you're like, "Well no, it's more like this" or like, "Oh yeah, [AUSTIN hums in understanding] It is kind of like that." And it's almost like a self correcting thing- [AUSTIN: Right.] Where it's like, "Well we're all working together to explain what this means in a way that- that we can apply to the game."

1:00:01

AUSTIN: We just - You and I just did this for some thing that people will hear this week, right? [KEITH: Yeas, yeah!] Like there is an outcome for something in the Twilight Mirage finale that it took us like four days of going back-and-forth on potential outcomes for it [KEITH: Yeah.] Then we were like, "Yeah, that's it! That's good, let's go with that!"

KEITH: [cross] But it also happens in actual play.

AUSTIN: Oh, a hundred percent! Yeah!

KEITH: Like in- on a micro stage. Where it'll be like, I'll say something and then Jack'll be, like, "Oh, so it's sort of like this, when this and this and this?" and I'd be, like, "Oh, yeah. It is sort of like that with that and that." [AUSTIN: Right.] And it just like- When you say- when you first have the idea and then you say it, like, it's not then set in stone. Like, even if you- even in the world where you couldn't then go back and correct it- [AUSTIN: Right.] like it's still- once you put it out it's not like- it's not like paint. [AUSTIN: Right.] Like, It's you can, like- everybody else that's there with you then also has their own ideas about what you said.

AUSTIN: And you kind of collaborated on the painting, yeah. AuthorX on the chat has a great one who says: [reading] "For me the solution was to find other games where they could have some input on their characters and relationships but the world was not their responsibility." And I think about something like Technoir where that game opens with y'all being like, "Alright, here are my relationships with the NPCs." That I've created, right? Like, I created the list of potential NPCs you could have but immediately you started in with, like, "OK, but my character has a crush on Paisley Moon and my character-"

KEITH: No, we ended with that. That was the very last one, I think.

AUSTIN: [laughs] You know what I mean though, right? [KEITH: Yeah, I know what you mean.] Like as soon as you start drawing those connections and filling in the relationships and filling in bonds and filling in beliefs, suddenly that stuff gives you ownership of your little corner of the world. And from there, the rest of it kind of follows. So, Jack, do you have any thoughts on this one?

JACK: Erm... We're gonna keep coming back to this a lot, but play smaller games, maybe?
[AUSTIN: Yeah. That's a good idea.] Play Fallow, play Microscope. The idea of- the idea of sitting down and saying, [conspiratorially] "We're gonna play Dungeonworld and we have to make it up. [excitedly] Let's go! Let's go! Where's the ocean? Where's the Ocean? [AUSTIN laughs.] Who lives here?" That's kind of frightening but to say like, "All right fine, we're the crew on a spaceship, what's the spaceship called? Where is the spaceship going?" And start with smaller and- I don't wanna say easier question because it becomes clear pretty quickly that they are not necessarily easy, but more accommodating questions, maybe? Than like, [seriously] "What were the orcs doing 750 years ago?"

AUSTIN: Right. Right-

KEITH: And every year since.

AUSTIN: [cross] One at a time-

JACK: [cross] And every year since.

AUSTIN: [cross] It's a step by step thing, right?

JACK: [cross] Let's write it down.

AUSTIN: It's a you gotta walk before you can run, you know? And it's like I think-

KEITH: [cross] Start with 27 years of work history.

AUSTIN: Right, exactly.

JACK: [cross] Right!

AUSTIN: [cross] I mean Marielda-

JACK: [cross] For 6 minutes. [KEITH laughs]

AUSTIN: [laughs] Marielda is actually a great example of this, right? Which is like, "Oh, yeah, Marielda was The Quiet Year." I think part of the reason why people were not as overwhelmed [cough] by some of the factions of Marielda, despite there still being thirty something, right? It's just, "Hey, there was a whole game The Quiet Year where so many of those factions get introduced by this character or that character or the basic concept of an Alchemical Group or whatever makes sense." Starting with a game of The Quiet Year, starting with a game like Kingdom or Fallow is a great way to introduce your players first of all just to world-building and then secondly building on what they did in order to- to do some world-building. Alright, one more question, how's that sound? I guess good-

KEITH: [cross] Sounds good. Yeah.

AUSTIN: This comes in from Mixqueen, who says: [reading] "I'm gonna be taking a break from running my year and a half long Blades in the Dark campaign to let one of my players run a game that he's been dreaming up. I'm not done with exploring my homebrewed city with my players and it's gonna be a while till we get back to it. Knowing that you're headed back to Hieron, I'm wondering if you all have any thoughts on how to return to a setting and characters after taking some time off." I am re-listening to the episodes. I am literally in the middle of the second one now, from Winter, but I guess for most players in the world that's not a thing 'cause you're not recording your sessions.

KEITH: Yeah, good point, I actually was- I read this question and I was like, "Oh, well I'm- I'm in the middle of re-listening to Autumn. [AUSTIN: Right. Sure.] I'm like three quarters the way through Autumn and I was like, "Oh, well there is my answer." and I was like, "Yeah, that's a terrible answer." [ALL laugh] No one else records themselves-

AUSTIN: [cross] I doesn't work for most people, It doesn't just work. [KEITH laughs] But like, if you have notes, if you have- if you have character sheets and stuff like that, like, definitely start to reacquaint yourself with that. And for me it's always just like and I'm gonna reread the book. I'm gonna reread the source book and get those game rules in my head again because that will help remind me of how certain encounters and stuff happened. The other thing-

KEITH: [cross] Or you could do- you could do a recap- you could do it together. Like, "Hey let's- [AUSTIN: Oh, yeah, definitely.] spend a week- let's just spend an hour/two hours, I don't care- like six- like spend six hours. Just be like-"

AUSTIN: [cross] Get a pizza.

KEITH: "[cross] What the fuck is going on?"

AUSTIN: [cross] Get six pizzas.

KEITH: "Yeah. It- For a year and a half we played a game and that was a year ago. What were we doing?"

AUSTIN: Right. The other thing is like, right now as you wrap this up, take notes now. [emphatically] Take notes now. So that you can in a year when you get back to it, you can open up that notebook and be like, "Oh, right this was my bullshit." Because otherwise, you are gonna get to it and be like, "I know I said in my head I'd remember this, but I don't remember it." It's like the Fisherman says, "Take notes." So-

KEITH: Check the wiki.

AUSTIN: Check the- [KEITH laughs] Make yourself a wiki. Erm- [laughs] Keith and- Sorry, Jack and- Faro and- and Lem, go ahead- [KEITH: Lem?] No. Jack and Dre any thoughts on this one as you start heading back towards Hieron?

DRE: [moans] Man, just grapple with the ennui of picking up the like, fall out of what your actions were in the finale? [AUSTIN laughs] So this is different 'cause it sounds like they are gonna be taking a much longer break, but like, again the local game-

AUSTIN: It's been an hour and a half- It's be- an hour and a half- a year and a- Austin Walker knows how time works, I meant to say "a year and a half" and I said, "an hour and a half". So- [DRE laughs] love that trope, but-

DRE: Yeah, um- again in the local game I play, like, we only get together like once a month, maybe once every two months- [AUSTIN: Sure.] And so we have kind of taken to doing like little time skips. So like- [AUSTIN: Oh, cool.] It's almost like, if we go a month between games we pick up like a month after the last game and we kind of start each session by saying, "OK what-" Me as, you know, I ask all the players, "What have your characters been doing in the past month?" Almost as, kind of, like a extra sort of downtime type thing but like with, like you know, less rules and stuff around it. And then I also kind of give them updates, "OK here's what happened in the city during the past month", you know? Either reflecting what actions they took in their downtime or, like, you know, what happened in the last session and stuff like that so- I mean, maybe a way to keep up with that while you're doing your break is kind of if- if your players can agree that like, whenever we get back to this world, it will be like a time skip, maybe you kind of, like check in to your GM doc like every month or so and be like- [AUSTIN: Yeah.] Maybe this what happened during this chunk of time and so on-

AUSTIN: That's a good idea. I think of the time skip in general is a really useful thing, because it lets you reset the board a little bit. It let's you say like, "OK, it's been long enough that the thing you want to be the thing is the thing, you know? We did that from from Fall to Winter in Hieron for sure, where it's like, "All right there's been a few months- It's been three months and that's enough time for your characters to have developed some new skills or have refocused their lives in this direction or that direction or to've start to kind of wrap-" Even if you didn't necessarily resolve everything from the last time you played to be like, "OK, coming out the gate here is something to keep in focus. Like for Hella in in Winter, we open with Hella finding the book about the history of Ordenna and so like, you know, I knew that Ali as a player was interested in the history of Ordenna, but at that point Hella had not gotten the opportunity to dig into that stuff at all. And so instead of picking it up and being like, well I guess I'll have to wait for an opportunity for Hella to have an encounter with someone who could say something about what Ordenna is, we just opened up with a love letter that was like, "And also you found this book about Ordenna. Can you decipher it?" And the answer was, "No she rolled a four." [KEITH laughs] But then she had that book- she had that book with her and so she was able to whenever she wanted to, revisit that part of who her character was. And so that's where a time

jump and taking a break and coming back can let everyone, with it's be- a year of experience extra, to thinking about., "But like OK, here is how I wanna refocus my character. Here is the stuff I care about for this character in this upcoming part of the campaign." And that just helps a whole bunch in my experience. Jack, I am curious about for you as you get ready to go from Fourteen Fifteen, who is such a different character- [JACK laughs] Than Lem. Back into Lem, how are prepping for that? And do you have any tips here?

1:09:07

JACK: Erm... I try and think about ways in which I can ease myself back into the sort of wider head space [AUSTIN hums understandingly] of where I was- Music helps a lot, you know, what am I doing when I'm- where was I when I was playing these characters last in the real world? What was I thinking about? What was there working on? I was like, finishing up school in Norwich. And I was like, sitting on the floor writing music in my house in Norwich and listening to a lot of, like, the playlists that Austin makes for us. And- and I think part of the process for finding myself back in that world again is returning to those feelings and returning to those ideas. They always say that, you know, a good way to try and remember something is to go back through what you were doing at that time. And it'll come back to you as you spend your time in that place. And I think for me trying to sort of marinate in the place that I was when I was telling that story is useful. I think it also helps when I'm- when I'm doing the music as well. [AUSTIN: Yeah, sure.] I've just been listening kind of like nonstop to, like, synth pop for the last year and a half [laughs a little] [AUSTIN: Right.] [DRE?: Alright, cool.1:10:34] And I am like, finding myself listening to more acoustic, you know, music with actual instruments again. [AUSTIN hums approvingly] Actual instruments- Instruments played into a microphone. [DRE laughs] [laughs] [AUSTIN: Thank you.] And I think that's helping. I think that that's helping.

AUSTIN: That's a really good answer too, I think like, we've said it so many times that we have a Discord open where we just put links for things that we think are relevant to any given season and that is so helpful to just getting the headspace right even if it doesn't necessarily mean the details. You know, our Spring in Hieron chat is not just, like, "I remember this is the thing the Hella did." It's like a bit- It's a picture of lightning striking-

JACK: [cross] Oh God, I am looking at it now-

AUSTIN: [cross] It's a picture of some enamel- enamel pins, it's a picture of bees, various types of bees. The difference between a carpenter bee and a honey bee and a bumble bee and hoverfly, etc...

KEITH: There is also a butterfly man.

AUSTIN: There is a butterfly man. That's a little Iconaclast to me personally, but it's pretty good.

JACK: Doesn't it- it pops out of his back in a way that is really good. The butterfly wings?

AUSTIN: It does. They do. They're like wobbly, they're good. They're good.

JACK: God, I love wobbly butterfly wings.

AUSTIN: Wobbly butterfly wings. [DRE laughs]

JACK: The season- The Spring in Hieron chat is really great, lots of weird cloud formations.

AUSTIN: God that fucking- [DRE laughs] the clouds, the clouds, clouds- junctures of clouds.

JACK: Oh, here is an anteater in a denim jacket.

AUSTIN: [appreciatively] Uhhh!

JACK: Here is a portrait of Queen Elizabeth I [laughs].

AUSTIN: You know, that's her- [DRE laughs] that happens sometimes.

KEITH: Here's a- Hera and Apollo statues with a blood moon between them.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's more of a season seven thing to be honest but we'll get there...

JACK: Damn.

ASUTIN: [laughing] We'll get there.

JACK: "This giant demon plaid gives you burns if you touch it", says that headline.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Perfect. And did we already talk about this amazing anteater with clothes on? Did we already-?

JACK: Yeah, aha. [DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: Alright, good. It's a good one. It's a good one.

JACK: There is a crow that asks by-passers [accented] "You alright, love?" in a Yorkshire accent.

AUSTIN: [laughs]

KEITH: Does he really?

AUSTIN: That's good! Did you not hear that one?

JACK: [cross] I don't know, let's see... let's see...

AUSTIN: God, did I not put- did I not put- I didn't, I wanna put-

KEITH: [cross] Oh, my Gog! It does!

AUSTIN: Ah... Wait, where is that at?

KEITH: [laughs]

AUSTIN: I am gonna search for "crow" over here.

KEITH: Erm-

AUSTIN: "Crow."

KEITH: Search for- if you search for-

AUSTIN: I got it, I got it. [KEITH: OK.] We're good. We're good. We're good. I don't know why, but discord opens things in the Twitter App now? It's weird...

KEITH: Urgh! I had to uninstall the Twitter app-

THE CROW: [cross] [with background noise from a recording] You alright, love?

KEITH: [cross] Today- literally right before we did this-

AUSTIN: This is good.

THE CROW: [cross] [with background noise from a recording] You alright, love?

KEITH: [cross] Uninstalled it.

AUSTIN: [high pitched] Look at this crow!

THE CROW: [with background noise from a recording] You alright? You alright? You alright?

JACK: [cross] What's the crow? I can't get audio, it is legit saying-?

KEITH: It is actually saying it, yeah. For sure.

JACK: That's amazing.

THE CROW: [with background noise from a recording] I'm alright. I'm alright. I'm alright.

AUSTIN: It just said, [as the crow] "I'm alright. I'm alright. I'm alright." Very good. [JACK laughs] The other one that I need to put in here- [JACK: That's great.] right now before I forget for any longer is the amazing [laughs] clip of Ben Schwartz and-

JACK: [cross] Ohhh... and Larry King.

AUSTIN: [cross] And Larry King. Which is really truly- [DRE: I don't want to direct anybody-] just Faro and Samol so I hope- [KEITH and DRE laugh] Everyone is excited for that. I was go-

KEITH: Oh, I am- I need to watch the rest of that.

AUSTIN: [cross] You need to watch-

1:13:58

DRE: [inaudible] the game on.

KEITH: [cross] I linked the Sonic impression-

AUSTIN: [cross] I did the wrong one. I missed- I liked the wrong one.

KEITH: [cross] You linked the Q&A.

AUSTIN: There is a great Q&A, there is a great Sonic impression, I think, on that note, that is gonna do it for us, today- [DRE laughs] As we- unless we devolve into just watching fucking YouTube videos together. Which is fun- that's a fun thing we could do.

DRE: Friends at the Table react to...

AUSTIN and KEITH: [laugh]

AUSTIN: Totally! As always-

KEITH: [cross] Eight million views.

AUSTIN: [laughs] I wish! God! [DRE: God!] I don't wish. I don't wish. [KEITH: No, no, no.] No.

DRE: The monkey paw curls, Austin.

AUSTIN: 800,000, maybe? 80,000? 80,000!

KEITH: Yeah, 80,000.

AUSTIN: 800,000 is maybe too many. If we did-

KEITH: Well, there is eight of us, so it's the- it's a hundred thousand each.

AUSTIN: That's true. That's true.

JACK: Six.

AUSTIN and KEITH: Six views?

JACK: Yes.

DRE: It's a good number.

AUSTIN: [cross] Check. That would mean, that two of us weren't watching our own-

JACK: Yes.

AUSTIN: OK. [DRE laughs] That's fair, you know what? That's fair. That's fair, you know what?

JACK: Oh, God, I nearly tipped my cup over-

DRE: [cross] Sometimes I get busy-

KEITH: [cross] It's Ali. 'Cause Ali edited it and then who else?

AUSTIN: It's Ali three times, 'cause she edited it- [ALL laugh]. As always, you can support the show by going to friendsatthetable.cash and you can send in questions for the next episode of Tips at the Table by sending it to tipsatthetable@gmail.com. Thank you so much, as always, for hanging out with us tonight. Again enjoy the- the- the finale- of Twilight Mirage which will hit this week and then next week sometime will be a postmortem, when I am back from PAX and I guess probably when Janine is back? A lot of people are out traveling right now, so I'm hoping it'll be mid-week or late week next week, but we'll be- we'll be letting people know over on the Twitter page. So, look forward to that. Until then, that's gonna do it for us. Peace.