

Tips at the Table 36: June 2020

Transcriber: bijibu#3769

[00:00:00]

AUSTIN: Welcome to Tips at the Table, an RPG podcast focused on critical questions, hopefully smart answers, and fun interactions between good friends. I'm your host, Austin Walker. Joining me today, Keith Carberry.

KEITH: Hi, my name is Keith Carberry. You can find me on Twitter @KeithJCarberry. You can find me on YouTube where I do Let's Plays and stuff at youtube.com/runbutton. I got it all set. I got it.

AUSTIN: You got it. You got it there.

KEITH: I got it.

AUSTIN: Also joining us, Art Martinez-Tebbel.

ART: Hey! You can find me on Twitter @atebbel and if you live in Los Angeles' fourth city council district, please consider voting for Nithya Raman.

AUSTIN: I love it. I love— this is using your platform for good. I hope. I don't know that candidate 'cause I'm not from there but I hope you haven't just said something terrible. I have— I trust you.

ART: Nah, she's pretty great.

AUSTIN: Alright. Good.

ART: You have to like— she's pretty great. You have to ignore the fundraiser that's being held on Monday, is being held by, like, the Parks and Recreation people?

AUSTIN: Mm.

ART: But she is— she's good.

AUSTIN: It happens.

KEITH: Is there something wrong with the parks and recreation people in Los Angeles?

AUSTIN: I think that Art means—

[overlapping]

ART: Yeah, the— the— the TV show Parks and Recreation. It's being held by Mike Schur—

KEITH: Oh, okay, this is not a real parks— okay. Got it.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: —Adam Scott, and uh, Nick Offerman.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: Who, I'm sure as individuals, y'know. I did get a beer with them.

KEITH: The guy from there is weirdly on a politics show that I listened to, to be like—

AUSTIN: How was he?

KEITH: —I'm just walking around— um. I mean, he seems like he was kind of a...

AUSTIN: [amused] Wait, can we go back to what you were actually saying which was, "I'm just walking around"? What?

KEITH: Oh, he just was, like, in Kentucky and was, like, on this Kentucky show—

AUSTIN: Oh, okay.

KEITH: —which was hosted by a few communists and it was, like, "Tell me about Kentucky. I'm doing a—"

AUSTIN: That's funny.

KEITH: "—documentary about politics and being normal and it's normal that I'm here." I don't know. It was kind of weird but.

[overlapping]

AUSTIN: It does not sound [laughs] the opposite of—

ART: —it's normal that you're somewhere where it's not normal. [laughs]

KEITH: I guess I-I guess he, like, gets— I guess I'm giving him credit for being on this show but also he wasn't anything... his performance on there wasn't anything...

AUSTIN: He didn't add much to—

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah, okay.

KEITH: He didn't add much but it was not—

AUSTIN: But he didn't— he didn't blow it.

KEITH: It wasn't embarrassing that he was there.

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah, I gotcha. I gotcha. Um, you can find me on Twitter @austin_walker. You can find this show @friends_table. You can support us at friendsatthetable.cash. As a reminder, there is merchandise currently available which I believe you can get to with a TinyURL. It's fucking incredible merchandise, I think.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: tinyurl.com/fattmerch. F-A-T-T-M-E-R-C-H will take you to the page over on Fangamer. You could also just go to fangamer.com and go to our collection page. Do a search for Friends at the Table. We still have preorders up for the Boat Party shirt, the Aria Joie tour shirt, and the Partizan hoodie. Plus, we have some Deputie badge pins in still and some Marielda maps. We're out of the original COUNTER/Weight t-shirt but I would say go in there and be like, "Yo, notify me when more of those are available." Because...

KEITH: Oh, yeah.

ART: Yeah, if you— if you tell them you would buy one, it makes it more likely they'll make it although, like, don't hold your breath or nothing.

AUSTIN: Yeah, exactly. I mean—

KEITH: Um, I— no judgement, I just don't know—

AUSTIN: The stuff's been doing alright though so maybe they would right now. [laughs] I feel like this latest batch of stuff has gone well enough that I bet they'd be like, "Hm, maybe." [pause]

KEITH: Uh, no judgement—

AUSTIN: That was not meant to be insulting. Uh... what do you call it? Imitation, uh, o-of someone at Fangamer. I don't know why I slipped into my most insulting voice.

KEITH: What was the insulting voice? I didn't recognise it.

AUSTIN: [replicating previous insulting voice] "I don't know, maybe." It was like— it's like a—

KEITH: Oh, okay, yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: Black comedians white guy voice. Do you know what I mean?

KEITH: Okay.

AUSTIN: Like— yeah. We all got one in our back pocket ready to go.

[ART and AUSTIN laugh]

[overlapping]

AUSTIN: [laughing] Let me tell you, we've talked to a lot of white people.

KEITH: I didn't know that that was your— I didn't know that that was your white-guy voice.

AUSTIN: Oh, it's one of them. There are many of them. You could also go, like, [in a CEO white guy voice] CEO white guy voice. He's up here and he's making big business decisions.

ART: That— that's the Dave Chapelle white guy voice.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Exactly.

ART: Yeah.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And then what I was doing before was more nebbish white guy voice. Anyway, um.

KEITH: Um. Eddie Murphy white guy voice.

AUSTIN: Right, correct. [laughs] Correct! Yes.

[KEITH laughs]

[simultaneously]

AUSTIN: Um.

KEITH: Um.

ART: Are there questions about this? Have people... what's your favourite comedian white guy voice?

AUSTIN: Yeah, what's— yeah! We'll get there. We'll see if we get there today. We got a lot of [wheezes] questions that came in! It's probably number seven or eight. Normally we only get through, like, five or six. When we go really fast we can get to the questions people sent in about favourite black comedian white guy voices.

[overlapping]

KEITH: I mean the trick—and, Austin, you've nailed it here—is you need to have the self-important guy and the nebbish guy.

AUSTIN: You gotta have both. And often—

KEITH: You have to have them both 'cause they're both real.

AUSTIN: They're both real and sometimes it's the same person at different points in their career. Uh. [laughs]

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And, you know, with the rise of Silicon Valley, the nebbish guy often *is* the CEO and so you kind of, you know, you've kind of deconstructed the nebbish guy CEO binary in a real way? So.

KEITH: I've also got to apologise 'cause the Eddie Murphy white guy voice is also just the Richard Pryor white guy voice.

AUSTIN: That was just the era. You know?

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: That's—

KEITH: That's— that's a different era.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Uh, there— there's crossover, I guess. Right?

KEITH: There's crossover, yeah.

AUSTIN: 'Cause Murphy is, like, coming off the end of the Pryor career. Eddie Murphy looks up to— yeah, yeah, yeah.

KEITH: And said— and said, "I'll take that voice for me! That sounds—"

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's— that's a good one.

ART: Yeah.

[everyone laughs]

AUSTIN: Alright.

KEITH: Do you— do we do air conditioners on for Patreon stuff?

AUSTIN: I don't— normally I don't but it's too hot right now.

KEITH: Okay.

[overlapping]

AUSTIN: Is mine— is mine coming through in a big way?

KEITH: Okay. And I heard it and I was, like, I should say something just in case he doesn't realise.

AUSTIN: It's not on my file so... or it's not bad on my file so I don't... care. Today.

ART: It was a high of 115 in Los Angeles.

AUSTIN: Yeah, so you can— you should run yours. It's not as bad today. In fact, I looked at my phone today and was like, "Damn. It's cool that there's no heat right now in New York." [laughs] But right now for some reason, my room is getting hot. So. Y'know. It's fine. Y'know, this is not— this is not us doing art and drama, y'know?

KEITH: No.

AUSTIN: [from a distance] I say this as I move a fan to help redirect some of this air conditioning back towards me and away from the rest of this room where it's kind of pointed towards. Anyway! Um, we should get to these questions. How's that sound?

ART: Great.

KEITH: That sounds good.

AUSTIN: Alright.

KEITH: I feel like it's been so long since I've been on a Tips.

AUSTIN: I think it's just been that long since we've done a Tips, unfortunately.

KEITH: It does say June on that card there.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's 'cause this is the one from what we needed to get done in June so we're not that that far back? But, y'know. We're kind of far off.

ART: Wait, but it said June before you fixed so—

AUSTIN: No, June, that's correct.

ART: June was right. Okay.

AUSTIN: The last one we did was May. Uh, and Keith, you were on the April one.

KEITH: Yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: So you were on the one before this one? It's just that one was forever ago.

KEITH: Forever ago, yeah.

AUSTIN: That one was in April! That one was actually when it was supposed to be. Uh, see if you can tell when all of this shit really started getting to us. Anyway! This comes in from—

ART: It was April. It was late April.

AUSTIN: It was late April and, hey, look, that's a good transition into this question about how all of this shit is getting to us! Rin writes in and says:

"I am the DM of a Brinkwood game—Brinkwood is a vampire themed forced Forged in the Dark game—and my players are all happy and we're creating a great story but it feels super toned down from what the book is. With the pandemic, protests, and other problems, it feels bad for me and the players to introduce super dark disease or corruption elements. It feels like we aren't even playing this game. But does that matter?"

I had to pull this game up because I don't know Brinkwood very well. I do get— I do get how you get to this concern.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Right?

ART: Sure.

AUSTIN: Um.

KEITH: I have a quick answer.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: If you're all having fun then it's not— it doesn't matter. I think.

AUSTIN: I agree with you? On first blush. Um.

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Which is important as a vampire game, blushing shows that you have blood in your system and therefore you're capable of interacting with vampires in every possible way. I guess you could be a vampire who's blushing if you have the right amount of blood and probably the—

ART: Yeah, I think that's a power in Vampire: The Masquerade.

AUSTIN: It is.

KEITH: [amused] Spend a blood potion so you can blush.

AUSTIN: Yeah. You're joking but you're also right, right? That's also a real thing?

ART: Oh, that's definitely real. I mean, I dunno, it's probably not. Blood potency isn't the right word for what you spend.

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah. Um. So, my follow-up, like, hm, but is it— is it fine? Is that I think if— when I think of the way we talk about other games like Dungeons and Dragons, one of the things we fall back on again and again is when we hear people say, "Oh, yeah, I know D&D is basically focused on combat stuff but that's not how my friends and I play it." What we say is, like, there are other games built for what you're doing. Just play a game that has its mechanics built around what the thematic or setting or emotional content you're looking for.

KEITH: That's an easy thing for me to say about Dungeons and Dragons which is a game that I know well but I also don't know Brinkwood. I don't know exactly how far off this is from the thing.

AUSTIN: Right. I mean, I'm looking at— I will read you the description of this which is,

[begins reading] *Mask up, spill blood, drink the rich. The world is not as it should be. The rich feed literally upon the poor as blood-sucking vampires who barely bother to conceal their horrific parasitic nature. The downtrodden people of the world struggle under the burdens of rent, payable through the sweat of their labour or the blood of their veins. Evil has triumphed. Many have given into despair but all is not lost. In Brinkwood, you take on the role of renegades, thieves, and rebels struggling for freedom and liberation in a castylpunk world controlled by vampires. Radicalised by tragedy, you have taken up arms and fled into the forest where you are taken in by unlikely allies, the fae, the forgotten features of myth who offer a different path and means to fight back against your oppressors.* [finishes reading]

I have a hard time—

KEITH: Sounds alright!

AUSTIN: This sounds good!

ART: Yeah, first things first, game sounds dope.

AUSTIN: Dope game.

ART: Great taste.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: You sounded thrown off by castle having a "t" in it.

AUSTIN: Uh, it's castylpunk. C-A-S-T-Y-L-P-U-N-K.

KEITH: Oh.

AUSTIN: This is—

KEITH: Yeah, that is weird.

AUSTIN: This is the only— this seems to be the only thing on the internet that I've seen, that I see using this genre name so, uh, seems like the genre name they've invented which, go for it. But the— the, uh, the, my thought here is, like, I don't know how you run this game without engaging with questions of protest and, you know, politic, you know?

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Um, uh—

ART: Yeah. It's like, if you're having fun, do whatever you want. But, like, if the game requires you to engage with stuff to, like, make the game engines work? Maybe that's where you're gonna get tripped up?

AUSTIN: Yeah, especially when I'm looking at some of the playbooks here where it's like +1 Potency when soothing the souls of the oppressed. Um, you know, stuff like that feels like it's going to be, at its best, the game will shine best when you're representing oppression in some way. Now, now, there are different tiers to how you represent ideas like this and maybe the conversation to have with your players is, "Hey, I want to start introducing more elements of things that do touch on what this last year has been for us but I want to make sure that I'm doing in a way that is tonally comfortable for all of us."

There is a broad gulf between the way questions of oppression and genocide and, y'know, controlling elites, and y'know, even just, y'know, vampires in general, are represented across a different range of things, right? Like, um, I just finished watching Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood. That show has genocide as a core element of its story and it's handled differently than, like, when it happened in Transformers, y'know? On Cybertron or whatever. There's a different—there's a different perspective on the way that stuff happens. Uh, you know, you can have a show or a story about an oppressed class of people and have that oppression be kind of genericized in a way that's comfortable for you because you're not depicting acts of violence on screen necessarily? You're just alluding to those acts of violence. Versus, kind of, you know, luxuriating in the depiction of those things. And maybe "luxuriating" is even too editorialised a word, like, depicting them directing, representing acts of violence from one class to another, from one group to another, etcetera.

I think, like, starting with that, having the conversation you've asked us to have internally is probably the way to kick it off. And if everyone is, like, "Oh, I don't really want to engage with any of that stuff," then maybe figure out what you do want to engage with and if it's just, like, a game where you have cool powers or whatever then maybe there's another Forged in the Dark game for you, y'know? Worth talking about it if that makes sense. Um, any other uh—any other thoughts here? Should we keep moving?

ART: It's pretty good.

KEITH: I have a quick thing.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Which is like, y'know, a lot of times if you're—this is just something that I've experienced—but if you're, um, like, if you're playing out things that are analogous to the real world, like, there's always a chance that it can be really exhausting, like—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: I'm always thinking about this stuff anyway, why am I playing a game that's doing this? Uh, but, sometimes it's really fun!

AUSTIN: Yeah!

KEITH: So if you're naturally shying away from—maybe shying isn't the right word—but if you're just inclined to not touch that stuff because it might be exhausting? Maybe the literally opposite thing could happen and it could be very cathartic or even funny.

AUSTIN: Yeah, it can be worth trying to dig into this stuff because like you said I think catharsis is definitely the thing. I know that Winter in Hieron is, like, a really tough season that we did at a really tough moment? But also I think week-to-week it was very cathartic to play in that space and, like, lean in a little bit? Um, I think the same thing is true for what's happening in Partizan to some degree? I can't speak for both of you but, like, we finished Kingdom the day that the—was it, like, was it one of the big days of the initial protests? I want to say it was, like, the day the police station caught fire?

[overlapping]

AUSTIN: The day that they—

KEITH: Uh, I think it was the day after that or something. Yeah.

[00:14:59]

AUSTIN: Okay. But it was in that moment in such a way that was, like, I don't— it wasn't about making that moment consumable for us or something? But I think it was one of those things where we were able to talk through things that were on the front of our minds anyway? Instead of having it just kind of rumble back there. Y'know? Um, sometimes you need a faucet for your brain. Let it all out sometimes. Um, alright.

KEITH: Yeah, it's a good place to pretend you have an effect on the world.

AUSTIN: [amused] Yeah, uh-huh. Yes. And to take risks when they don't go well, like, sometimes [laughs] it's nice to fuck up without it being something where the stakes are fucking up are life or death, or changing your life, or have a dramatic change of a real relationship that's going to last you beyond the, y'know, realm of the table, or whatever. Um, anyway, let us know how it goes! I hope it goes well. Next question comes in from Damien who says:

"For our new Beam Saber campaign, I started giving my players audio logs at the start and end of downtime. These are short in-character recordings set to music not unlike the intros of Friends at the Table. They like my first batch but I want to improve my

performance and my audio editing to make them even better. Do you have any tips on getting in character alone in front of a mic and/or tips for someone editing words to music in Audacity? I'm a broke PC user so I don't have a lot of options."

Um, the first thing for this is, like, awesome— I'm glad you're doing this. This is definitely the sort of thing that, like, and Art can attest to this, I was doing this shit before we had a podcast. Like, going back to college games I would open with monologues or, like, that style of found, y'know, like you found a document and here's a thing that it says and here's a speech I wrote out or, y'know, that style of stuff is totally a thing you can integrate into the style of play. So I—

ART: We never would've gotten music composed.

AUSTIN: I certainly didn't. I was a piece of shit. I didn't get— [ART laughs] Listen. Damien sent— Damien sent in an example of his audio log. Damien also didn't get music composed. I believe that they used, um, a song from Hotel Dusk, a fantastic DS game.

ART: Hm, yeah.

[KEITH laughs]

AUSTIN: Like, "Damn, this music's good! Where do I know this music from?" Then I was like, "That's Hotel Dusk." [laughs] That's just Hotel Dusk music. Um, uh, anyway, what I would say is, like, the biggest thing for me is, like, let yourself take multiple takes. Y'know, write it all out. Do a few readings. Try to find the character's voice. There's another question coming up about finding a character's voice so look forward to us discussing that in more depth in a moment. But really it's just, like, to do what you have to do, put in the work. I think that a lot of it comes from practice and coming to understand a song and what the rhythm is in a song and where you can kind of make your drop and where you can kind of change your cadence—your spoken cadence—up and stuff like that. For me it's just a lot of that stuff. It's just, like, it's just practice. And I know that it's not, like, a magic bullet answer but there just isn't one for this. I am curious for the two of you in terms of thinking about getting into character, like, for this style of thing. We've only done a few things where it's just me and you in front of a microphone where it'll be, Art, you've done letters as Hadrian, or Keith, we did stuff for the end the Hieron where it was just us two in front of a microphone— or I guess we did stuff throughout Hieron with Fero, right?

KEITH: And, uh, Twilight Mirage.

AUSTIN: Yeah, and Twilight Mirage. Totally. Um, um, right. And I'm curious if there's anything there that's, like, something distinct about just kind of— a much more minimal thing or a much different thing than being at the table in the traditional sense where you're bouncing off of three other people or whatever. Fuck! It wasn't. Goddamnit! Damien's in chat. It was It's Raining Somewhere Else from Undertale. Also a good song. Damn it, I got it wrong. Thank you Damien in the chat.

[*It's Raining Somewhere Else* begins to play briefly for a few seconds]

ART: I don't do this but music helps a lot of people get into that moment.

AUSTIN: Finding that voice even?

ART: Yeah, like, finding that song that makes you think about your character and therefore the song makes you, like, get into that headspace. A lot of people do that. I know that, like, a lot of actors will have one line?

AUSTIN: Mm.

ART: It's especially important with accent work? Where you have a line that you know you can say in the accent so it helps you, like, fall into—

AUSTIN: Right.

ART: —the accent. And I think you can do the same thing with a character headspace. Um.

AUSTIN: Right.

ART: And I think for me it's a lot of just, like, y'know, getting— giving yourself that moment and finding the thing that the character— I've also peeked ahead at the questions so I know this is coming up later.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: A character is not as much about the voice as it is the point of view.

AUSTIN: Mm.

ART: And you have to find what that point of view is for you and, like, try to get there.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Um, Jess in the chat says, "Austin had a line for either Primo or Lazer Ted." I have lines like this for a lot of characters. Like, back when I was able to walk around my neighbourhood often, I would often just walk around blocks saying things in character to get, like, to find a voice or sit with a voice until I was comfortable with it. Y'know, Lazer Ted's easy 'cause it's just Riff Raff and there's a million things Riff Raff has said that you can just say [laughs] until you get it right.

ART: You only did Ted, like, once, so.

AUSTIN: That's not true. We did Ted a bunch!

KEITH: Yeah, yeah, Ted came back a few times.

AUSTIN: Ted's, like, important throughout the rest of that season.

[overlapping]

ART: No... he isn't.

KEITH: Ted was at two— we met Ted— Ted was at two parties and Ted was in the finale.

AUSTIN: What?! *What?! Okay. [laughs] Some of us have clearly not revisited COUNTER/Weight lately! Lazer Ted. COUNTER/Weight. Does wiki have episode appearances? Let's see.*

ART: "Ted is a main character" is certainly not true.

AUSTIN: *Oh my god*, you're about— you are about to make people *upset*.

KEITH: I'm going to say that Ted was six— five episodes.

AUSTIN: I think it's more than that. 'Cause Ted's first—

ART: I think Ted is in two episodes.

AUSTIN: You're out— no!

KEITH: [laughing] What?!

AUSTIN: [laughing incredulously] Oh my god! This is *unbe*— okay, actually, there's a way to check this. Sorry to people who are listening to a podcast and expected to see, like, a podcast that you—

KEITH: While you're searching I can do my quick answer which some of you mentioned—

AUSTIN: Please.

KEITH: —but you've got— well, there's two things. The first thing is, like, you've got theoretically unlimited time and no-one is listening to you. Just start it over and try again if you don't feel confident in it. Like, in the, y'know— it's not many times where I have to record something in character into a microphone but when I do, I kind of know after the first three words whether I have it or not.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: And just, like, start and try again and, y'know, even if you get it wrong ten times that's, like, under a minute of work. Um, uh, and then—

AUSTIN: Okay, wait, wait. It will be over a minute of work because if you're doing a minute long thing, you're going to repeat that.

KEITH: No, I mean if you notice— if you notice within the first eight seconds.

AUSTIN: I promise— what I will say is, I will do— some of my intros that are two and a half minutes will take me an hour of work before I feel like it's good. So I want to— I do want— what I said before, you have to do the work, that is why I say it like that—

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: —because I promise you it will take you longer.

KEITH: I— I just mean for the specific scenario of noticing in the first sentence—

AUSTIN: Sure. Yes. Yes.

KEITH: —you already don't have it. Um, uh, my other suggestion I don't know that everyone would agree with me, um, ditch Audacity. Don't use Audacity. It's not good. It's really difficult to move things around. Get a free, I mean pay for something if you want, but get a free DAW—a digital audio workstation. All the files are their own little things you can slide around on a timeline extremely easily. That's what it's made for—

AUSTIN: I mean, you can do that in Audacity also for what it's worth.

KEITH: Can't slide.

AUSTIN: Yeah, you absolutely can. I do this every week. I've done this every week for six years, Keith! [laughs]

KEITH: I mean, I've— I've also used Audacity every week for the past six years.

AUSTIN: You absolutely can slide!

KEITH: How can you slide? Like—

AUSTIN: The thing that's the slide! The Time Shift tool.

KEITH: Oh, you have to get a tool though.

AUSTIN: No, it's hit F5. It's the— it's super simple. I do this every week, Keith.

KEITH: I want to do it right now but I'm recording.

AUSTIN: [amused] You can't do it right now, you're recording. Don't mess up your file.

KEITH: It's— anyway, it doesn't matter. I promise you that it's different. It's different.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ART: My advice is to get an audio producer who takes the things you do and turns them into—

KEITH: Um.

AUSTIN: But I also don't do that.

ART: —the finished product.

AUSTIN: I edit all of these myself and I think that this is probably the right thing to do. Intros are not the same thing as the episode. Anyway.

KEITH: But if you're trying— if you're trying line up something with a song, a thing that takes everything and puts it as its own little package whether it's all in the same timeline or on a separate timeline that lets you slide things around—

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

KEITH: —and be extremely granular. I mean, it's— they're free. Some of them are free so look into DAW.

AUSTIN: So. 31, 33, 36, 38, 39. 39 doesn't count. 40 definitely counts. 41 counts. 42 counts? 43's big. 43 counts.

KEITH: Is that nine?

AUSTIN: Something like that.

ART: How many sessions is that?

AUSTIN: Five. Because each of those ending ones you know were— [laughs] were a session.

ART: But the finale is one session.

AUSTIN: No it wasn't.

ART: Psychically.

AUSTIN: No it isn't! [KEITH laughs] If you go to sleep it's not one session! [laughing]

ART: No! 'Cause I have to keep— I have to keep it all in my head.

KEITH: Art is on the field dragging the goalpost.

AUSTIN: Art. Then, Art, let me tell you [laughing] we've only ever done five games or something 'cause it's always all in my head!

ART: Alright, so then Ted's only in one— so you're saying Ted's only in one.

AUSTIN: Ted's only in one episode. [laughing] I'm saying Ted is still—

KEITH: [unintelligible] —all of the rights so congratulations.

AUSTIN: Yeah, it's a work back around. [laughs] Ugh. Anyway, yes. Damien in the chat says, "Yeah, my minute long took an hour." Yeah, there isn't a way to make that faster outside of having lower standards in which case that's fine. You can— that's the other half of this is I promise your players can be like, "Yo, it was dope! Cool," even if you spent thirty minutes on it and were not as happy with it. It's okay. It's okay to not do this perfectly. What's important is that you're, like, thinking about it and giving them cool stuff to work off of. Y'know. Anyway. Alright.

ART: Yeah, when was the last time that made you an audio log?

AUSTIN: [amused] Well, that's another question that we got coming up here. Uh, uh, is that—

ART: How many audio logs could I make—

AUSTIN: How many— yeah. I guess this is not this question. Where is it? Let's see. I'm going to jump ahead to it. Here we go. This question comes in from Ethan who says:

"I'm looking to start a game of Beam Saber with some friends largely because I've really been enjoying Partizan and have wanted to do some sort of mech game for a while now but I'm wondering how much I can ask of my friends before we actually sit down and start coming up with ideas for a setting and characters. I don't want to give my friends table-top RPG homework by asking them to read the whole book. We're all busy people and sometimes it's hard to find time for that. But it would also be nice if when we sat down I didn't have to walk through how the game works completely from the ground up because I know sometimes it's easier to learn and read how something works for yourself rather than having someone explain it to you. How do you all work with this sort of thing?"

ART: Austin, I need you to give me five minutes of amnesty.

AUSTIN: Yeah, go for it.

ART: I have *never* read a whole book.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I fucking know. What do you mean? Yeah, of course.

[overlapping]

ART: I— I read enough that I think we can, like, start.

KEITH: Well, a lot of the books you're not even supposed to read the whole thing.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

KEITH: Like half of it is the GM section. You're not really even supposed to read that.

AUSTIN: No, no, but that's not what Art means and you know it. [laughs]

KEITH: Yeah, good point.

ART: I read enough where, like, we can get to where, like, I don't have conflict resolution happens. I've never come into a thing like, "I have no idea what this is."

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

KEITH: I— I've definitely occasionally read less or more of a book depending on the book. But, like, if you take out the GM section, you take out everybody else's character sheets and all of the explanations for that, they're not usually that long!

AUSTIN: I will say Beam Saber before you get to the Game Master section is 208 pages.

ART: But no-one knows how Beam Saber works.

AUSTIN: Oh my god.

[KEITH and AUSTIN laugh]

KEITH: Yeah, we were all just guessing this whole time!

AUSTIN: They're— [laughs]. Um, the— the— uh. Yeah, go ahead. Keep talking. You know what? You keep talking. You keep digging.

KEITH: Well— okay. I mean the more— the more— the better you know the book the easier it is to explain it to your friends who you don't want to have to read two hundred pages of stuff. Um.

AUSTIN: Uh, but Ethan is reading the book. Ethan, I promise, has read this book.

KEITH: But reading the book and, like, really knowing, like— you might want to read it twice and the second time go through and mark all the pages that you want them to definitely read.

AUSTIN: Yes. Yes. Uh, do you remember what I did for Beam Saber this year?

KEITH: No.

AUSTIN: This is great. I'm glad. I'm glad. I— that makes me feel good.

KEITH: I don't remember?

AUSTIN: I'm glad that no-one remembers the work I do. I feel very loved. Loved and supported.

KEITH: I mean I do remember it but tell me anyway for the audience.

AUSTIN: Oh, thank you. I built a—

ART: Give me a little— [distorted audio, unintelligible].

AUSTIN: [laughs] Do you remember that I sent everyone a document?

ART: You send us documents all the time. What are you—

AUSTIN: Oh my god.

KEITH: [unconvincingly] Uh, yeah, I remember it...

AUSTIN: Oh my god. Unbelievable. Give me a second. Let me just— here. Here's what I did for Ethan who wrote it. [reading] *Hey everyone! We're getting close to when I'd like to sit down with at least one side of this game to make characters. Ideally both if we can line it up. Right now I think everyone has chosen a playbook from Beam Saber.* [pauses reading] So that means, one, I sent you all playbooks. I said, "Here's a Forge in the Dark game. You know what those are. Here are the playbooks." [continues reading] *But there are some additional steps that we all need to consider ahead of recording character creation. We can and should talk through all of these ahead of time but if you can't quite figure it out, I'm happy to talk through this stuff on-air. You can fill these out in a Google doc or scratch paper or you can just directly use the spreadsheets, duh-duh-duh-dah.* [pauses reading] And then I sent you what is three pages. This is it. [continues reading] *Here is what you need. Basic details. Playbook.*

KEITH: Yeah, I remember this.

AUSTIN: *History, tragedy, opening. Drive. Here's how you create a vehicle* [finishes reading]. So, my answer to this eventually became— admit to yourself that they're not going to read the book and create something for them that will be a smaller document.

KEITH: Okay. Well you've got two different players 'cause one of us had already read the book when you sent that!

AUSTIN: Right, right, but I can't assume [laughs] that that's going to be the case every time.

KEITH: I do remember that now that you read it.

AUSTIN: Right. And so, and so— but this is something I've known for a decade or whatever, right? This is, like, GMin'g thing you learn very early on and this is why Ethan asked this question is: I don't want to assign homework so how do it— how do I— and I think the answer is just, like, assign better homework? Assign very specific homework. So, like, when I know we're going to play a live game, I say, "Hey, can everyone read through page 30? I know it's a 300 page book. I don't expect anyone to do that." And it's what Art said that he did already which is, like, learn how the basic resolution system works. Every now and then I do ask for more and it tends to be when I don't feel like I know a system really well. Like when we did Primetime Adventures, you two both did better reading— I mean, I read it but I didn't internalise it.

[00:30:30]

[overlapping]

ART: I read the whole book. I guess I'm lying.

AUSTIN: Yeah. You read the whole book. Keith read the whole book. Yeah, totally. Part of the reason why you did it was probably because it was a fun book to read. It's a good book.

ART: Mm.

AUSTIN: And the system is unique. But also because I did specifically say, like, "Hey. Can you read this stuff because I'm not one hundred percent on these systems." And so, there are times where you can lean on your players and say, "Hey." And I think that it— most of the time if they're there to have a good time and if the book is interesting they'll do that reading so you shouldn't feel super bad about it. Um.

ART: Yeah. Or, like, we got, y'know, uh, Jess just had her first game of Dungeons and Dragons this week.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ART: And I was like, "We're going to go get you a player's handbook. That'll make it more fun. You'll be able to, like, sit and look at all the stuff, y'know?"

AUSTIN: Yep, yep.

ART: And we get it and she's like, "This is really intimidating. This is a giant book. There's so much information."

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ART: No-one knows what's in that book. [AUSTIN laughs] I got my first player's handbook let's see...

AUSTIN: Twenty? Yeah, yeah.

ART: I was nine? I'm thirty-six now.

AUSTIN: Jesus. [ART laughs] Yeah.

ART: Twenty seven years ago. And I've never read a player's handbook cover-to-cover. If you have, I think you're— you're a bad person.

AUSTIN: Right. Right!

ART: If you're like, "I'm gonna sit down and memorise the load table today," you're—

AUSTIN: If you're gonna do it, don't bring it to the table unless someone raises it. Unless someone says, "Hey, what's up with the load? How does that work in this game?" Then you can say, "Oh, I think I read about that." But don't raise your hand and say, "Excuse me, you're doing—" See I'm slipping into that voice again. [laughs] "You're doing load wrong." Um. Yeah, I think that there is— so I think that—

ART: Well, that's a white person ninety percent of the time.

AUSTIN: I know. Yeah. D&D? Yeah. Uh-huh.

KEITH: Ninety is low.

AUSTIN: So. So, I guess what I would say is, give them targeted homework. Think about the game that you want to run and what really is important and just like running a game, figure out what their flags are, right? I know that when I first read Beam Saber there was stuff there that I knew Jack would eat up so I was like, "Jack, you should really read this stuff about rivals on this page." Right? Versus the sort of thing of like, "Hey, I expect you to have this done." In general, I

think it comes down to, like, what is the resolution mechanic? What can their class or playbook do? And then that's enough to sit down and, like, talk about setting and characters. Again, this isn't even, like, first session stuff. This is just ideas for setting and characters. You don't really need all that much. So, y'know. Probably less than you expect.

ART: I probably read most of the playbooks—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: —in anything you send us—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: —where it's, like, 'cause I have to know what the good one is.

AUSTIN: Yeah, uh-huh. [chuckles] I mean, we're going through this right now because we're in pre-pre-production for the next season and I very much have sent everybody, like "Hey, take a look at these books." But even in that situation I also came up with a document that was like, "Here's the quick and dirty from these five books. Here are the five ideas behind these books. Here are, like, concepts here. Um, uh, leaf through these if you want to but I don't expect anyone to, like, fully internalise them necessarily." So, I don't know. This is a classic dilemma of table-top role-playing games.

KEITH: Yeah, it's delicate because on the one hand you want a group of people who are willing to do enough work that they won't, like, bail on a—

AUSTIN: On a session.

KEITH: —campaign.

[overlapping]

AUSTIN: Yeah. They've invested because of—

KEITH: Because playing a table-top game is a lot of work.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Inherently. But the other thing is, like, that's one of the three main areas where I feel like people bail is, like, being intimidated by the amount of writing like, "Wow, this is two hundred pages of rules?"

AUSTIN: Mm-hm!

KEITH: And they're like, "Ah, no thanks."

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah.

ART: Which is why, like, the light games are so, y'know— I knew every word of Laser & Feelings. [KEITH laughs] Lasers & Feelings? Except the title. [AUSTIN laughs] Except the first word!

[AUSTIN and KEITH laugh]

AUSTIN: Oh, perfect. Alright, I'm going to go—

KEITH: Plural lasers.

AUSTIN: Yeah, plural lasers. I'm gonna go back here to Andrea who writes in:

“Some friends and I are playing Scum and Villainy and several times have now run into the issue that there is no action that fills the role of Wreck from Blades in the Dark. What is most appropriate in Scum and Villainy for players to roll when they're looking to break some machinery or mess up somebody's lab equipment? For a generalisation of this, what do you do in the course of action a player/character wants to— uh sorry. When the course of action a player/character wants to take doesn't fit with any of the actions available to roll. How do you know what move is best to stretch, to fit the thing a player/character wants to use?”

Now it has been a little while since we all played Scum and Villany. [laughs]

KEITH: I genuinely didn't know there was no Wreck in there 'cause I've only played Scum and Villany once. Oh, wait, that's not true.

AUSTIN: That's not true. You're thinking Blades in the Dark.

KEITH: I read Blades in the Dark and got Blades in the Dark in my head.

AUSTIN: No, so there is—

KEITH: Um.

AUSTIN: Um. [clears throat] As a reminder. Doctor, Hack, Rig, Study, Helm (which is like piloting stuff), Scramble, Scrap, Sculk, Attune, Command, Consort, Sway. Attune is like magic brain stuff, right?

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Rig I believe— I believe? I believe that Rig covers some of that stuff in this system but I think that we—

KEITH: Scrap sounded like it also did.

AUSTIN: So my— we could probably fall really deep into this. So, um, when you Rig— I'm just gonna read those two because this can get us to an answer pretty, I hope, pretty directly. When you Rig—

ART: To undercut my previous answer, I had the Scum and Villany printed book within reach on the— [laughs]

AUSTIN: [laughing] Great! Good! [reading] *When you Rig mechanisms, you alter how an existing mechanism works or create a new one. You might disable a trap. You might repair a damaged ship system. You might crack a safe. You might overdrive an engine. You might Rig a door to get it open, though Hack might be better. You might Rig a bomb for later detonation.* [pauses reading] And then Scrap you said? [continues reading] *When you Scrap, you engage in pitched combat with the intent to harm. You might brawl or wrestle a foe. You might use a melee weapon. You might storm a barricade or hold a position in battle. If using a ship or vehicle weapon, you should use Helm instead.* [finishes reading] And then— and then the last one—

ART: I think Rig is right. I think breaking something is altering how it works.

AUSTIN: How it works. Except here's what I would say is: what if you wanted to do it without being caught? In that case I might say it's Sculk. And as a GM what I would— how I would try to make this work is that I would say, "Listen. Rig is— Are you trying to do this fast or are you trying to do it quiet?" Um, uh, because, y'know, if you're trying to do it quiet, if you're trying to, like, take the hinges off the door, I would say that's probably Sculk. You're not trying to make, y'know, a lot of noise. Otherwise, it's— it's go for Rig. But more— the other thing I would do is, I would say— Give them a consequence and ask if they want it to happen. Like, yeah, you can do it but it's gonna make a lot of noise. I'm not going to make you roll to do it. If they have the— what's the means by which they're doing it, right? Let's say that, y'know, we know that Scum and Villainy takes a lot from Star Wars. Let's say they wanted to wreck a door with a lightsaber, right? I would say, "Okay! You can wreck this door with a lightsaber. I don't need— you don't need to roll for it but it is going to take a four-step clock or a three-step clock or something." And then—

KEITH: Everyone's gonna smell the metal.

AUSTIN: [amused] Everyone's gonna smell the metal. Battle droids are going to be deployed to chase you down. Then the drama shifts from "Can you wreck it?" to "What are the consequences?"

KEITH: Do we want to deal with the Droidekas right now?

AUSTIN: Right. Exactly. Okay, you want to set a charge to wreck this thing? Awesome! Totally! It's gonna make a lot of noise. And just let them do it. Right? Like, that ends up being the solution in a lot of these situations is, like, yeah, of course you can do this. If I don't see the reason— if I don't see the dice or the skills to test on it then maybe it's okay to just have the ability or have the equipment necessary to make it happen. One of the things to remember about these games—y'know, story games in general—is that most of them are fiction first in the sense that if something is narratively coherent then it can happen. If you have the situation where you can knock down that door because you're playing a big burly character with a giant robot leg or whatever, well guess what? You can knock the fucking door down. And then find the drama in other places if that makes sense.

ART: Yeah, when they're on the Death Star and Hans Solo shoots into the garbage shoot? That wasn't a roll.

AUSTIN: That's not a roll! That's Hans Solo has a move that says: I can get out of anywhere I'm locked. [laughing] Y'know? Or it's just Hans Solo being the scoundrel and the GM going, "Well, yeah. You're the scoundrel. You can get out of tight places. You're the sort of character that can make this happen." Could Luke do it then? [takes a sharp breath in] Probably not.

KEITH: I mean, what you said earlier—

AUSTIN: Maybe.

KEITH: —is kind of true. Messing up someone's lab isn't even a skill. [AUSTIN laughs] Anyone could do that!

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

KEITH: You could do that by accident!

AUSTIN: Yes. Totally. Totally! Um, we run into this a lot. I think Keith, you and I, have had this conversation this season more than any other one about Bombard and Volley? I forget.

KEITH: Honestly? I'm ninety-nine percent sure this is true. But I'm pretty sure that because of some weird wording differences between how I worded something and how I worded it later—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: —you had given me an opposite answer that was partly because I think you interpreted—

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

KEITH: —something differently—

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

KEITH: —and partly because I phrased something differently that led to, like—

[overlapping]

AUSTIN: A point being in the wrong thing. Yes.

KEITH: —three sessions of confusion over these words.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: And we just were, like, well, it's not interesting to disagree on this.

AUSTIN: No. No.

KEITH: So let's just change the—

AUSTIN: Let's just change the point, yeah. It was Battle versus— it was Bombard versus Destroy or something like that.

KEITH: Yeah, yeah, Bombard versus, uh, Battle.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I think it was all three of those things because it was, like, sometimes you want to do it in a pitched fire fight, sometimes you want to do it where you're just blowing something up, sometimes you want to do it where it's against something that isn't— that doesn't have the ability to fight back, right?

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I mean I think the answer there is in those situations where it's more about the ambiguity. One, think about the tone of the game. If we were not playing Beam Saber or if we were not playing PARTIZAN, if we were playing a lighter setting than PARTIZAN, I would probably be looser on that stuff, right? Part of the reason I'm a hard-ass about it is because PARTIZAN is sort of a hard-ass world. Um, when we play— when we've played Spoken Magic or Bell Songs, when the three of us were playing Bell Songs? Fucking yeah of course you can sing your way [wheezes] out of this fight. That's the game, you know what I mean?

KEITH: Yep.

AUSTIN: The tone that we were going for fit that sort of—

KEITH: That game ruled.

AUSTIN: —loose-ness. That game absolutely ruled. Shout out again to Bell Songs.

KEITH: So the thing that I've learned—

AUSTIN: So, yeah.

KEITH: —in PARTIZAN about how to play the game in PARTIZAN and how to do, um, uh, Blades in the Dark games, what is the...?

AUSTIN: Forged in the Dark.

KEITH: Forged in the Dark.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: How to do Forged in the Game— uh, Forged in the Dark games. Maybe specifically with Austin as your GM.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Or maybe not. Which is just, like, y'know, if I want to do something and then go, "But then can I do— can I roll this instead?" Just figure out something to do where that's what you would roll instead.

AUSTIN: Yeah. That is— can I tell you Keith?

KEITH: It doesn't even have to be very different!

AUSTIN: That's the rule of— that's the way those games are written is literally, "Hey, if you want to use a different skill instead just come up with the other way to roll the skill."

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: You know if you— if you do want to use Bombard instead of Battle then talk about arcing your shot above a building or something instead of lining up a shot.

KEITH: I spent too long— I spent too long being like, "Well, but doesn't this make sense for Prowl?" And it's like, yeah, it does just less sense. But if I had just from the start—

AUSTIN: Framed it around— right.

KEITH: —said it more Prowl-y. [laughs] It could've been a Prowl.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally. Totally. One hundred percent. I think a lot about this stuff and obviously I do this but, like, in terms of how is this going to be framed in on the TV show version of this? Is there sneaky music playing? And if you can score something? If you look at the skills in any Forged in the Dark game, imagine each of those is the title of a track in the original soundtrack. Imagine there's a song called Prowl. Prowl.mp3. Does it make sense to play prowl.mp3 while the person is doing this thing? Does it make sense to play Battle versus Bombard? And if it lines up then you're good! That's my— y'know, people say there's a lot of math in these Forged in the Dark games. Eh. Pretend you have a soundtrack like an old seventies show.

KEITH: [unintelligible] ... in Forged in the Dark?

AUSTIN: Oh, yeah, absolutely. I was just having this conversation with a friend of mine who is a game designer who likes to play games that I think a lot of us think are crunchier? Not like D&D but, like, the other half of the independent games— like the OSR stuff basically. Old School Renaissance stuff.

KEITH: Yup.

AUSTIN: And he was saying, y'know, compared to something like Burning Wheel which is not an OSR game, right? But this is what we were talking about. Uh, in Burning Wheel, the resolution mechanic, I guess there's math after the fact but that's math that you do— I guess for Keith and for listeners, when you do a roll in Burning Wheel there's a lot of paperwork after you do the roll to keep track of— you know how you mark a desperate action?

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: In Burning Wheel you're kind of doing that all of the time because you're collecting attempts. The way you level up in Burning Wheel—and I think also in Torchbearer, it's been a long time since I played Torchbearer—is you try things at different difficulties, basically. You try something that is very easy or you have to try something that is kind of hard and the only way you level up is by doing things that are actually harder than you can do. Like you have to fail at things or there's ways around failing but it's complicated. Anyway, the point is the player has to do some math and paperwork after you do a roll but the core resolution mechanic is just here is the difficulty, roll your dice, did you succeed or fail?

Whereas anytime I'm giving you a challenge, or I'm saying, "Well, that sounds like a roll to me," in a Forged in the Dark game, I'm saying here's, like, everything that's supposed to be going on in my head. Uh, alright, basic: position and effect. Right? But what determines those? Tier differences? Quality differences? The degree to which you are that class or that playbook versus someone that does not have those things? Scale in terms of size? How big you are versus the thing that you're acting against? How fast you're moving or what is the situation between those things? I think magnitude is one of these things? There's a— if you do a search in any Forged in the Dark game there is a— are you a small gang? How many numbers are

you? [ART laughs] Uh, yeah, scale, area, duration, range, mobility, durability, tier and quality, force. All of this stuff is stuff that could come into determining the degree of which you have a certain position or you have a certain effect.

Um, I think eventually as a GM, you get a really strong handle on it that is drama focused and fiction first and tonally in line with what your show or campaign is supposed to feel like? And I take a lot of shortcuts around things which are basically like, y'know, the arc that just finished. Hm, sorry, the arc that's ongoing right now, uh, Keith, I knew what the tier of your opponents were for the entire mission.

KEITH: Mm-hm.

[00:46:46]

AUSTIN: And already kind of said, "Okay, barring something that shifts this base level position. This is the position you're going to be in because of tier difference," the whole time through.

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: And you can earn your way out of that position or drop below it but that's the kind of baseline. And once you have done that math everything kind of flows smoothly but if you do Forged in the Dark, like, by the numbers, theoretically that point before you roll the dice— and I've seen people complain about this and honestly about, I just saw someone complaining about Powered by the Apocalypse games being that, like, the resolution is long because every time you roll the dice you have to go, "Okay. You swung to hit. What are you taking on the— but you rolled an 8. What do you take on the 7-9? Do you take damage back? Do you duh-duh-duh-dah? Do you duh-duh-duh-dah?" And there are a lot of people who are, like, that is way too intensive. Just say I did 6 damage and got 2 damage back. [laughs] Um, so. Y'know. Different tastes.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Anyway. Uh, Author X in the chat says: "I think Band of Blades has the most mechanistic guide to that compared to most Forged in the Dark games I've seen that are more, like, here's a list of things to consider." Yeah. And I should be clear, the person who I was talking to was coming off of playing Band of Blades which they liked a lot. Which he liked a lot. But, yes, Band of Blades is even more— what's the word I'm looking for. Uh, like, authoritative? It makes a certain demand of the table in that way? It's not "consider these things." It's "this is the system." And again, that's about Band of Blades being, like, five steps even more grim than PARTIZAN is. Band of Blades, a game I think we would have a lot of fun with but also I don't think could ever actually run on the show without it being too dark for most of our audience.

KEITH: Wow.

AUSTIN: People should look at Band of Blades.

KEITH: That's saying something.

AUSTIN: Eh. I— yeah. I think it is. I think that game is very grim. That game is very much, like, don't get attached to fucking anybody. Uh, so. Anyway, any other thoughts here? Art, uh, you— Keith and I kind of dominated this one.

ART: Yeah, but I mean I think that's it.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ART: I think you did it.

AUSTIN: Okay. That's good. Alright. This one comes in from Anne. This one's a little bit longer.

“Some background. In February I joined an already established local tabletop RPG group after having been without a regular IRL group for almost a decade. They are a fun group of folks. Super chill and welcoming and very respectful during the many instances where I have been the only woman at the table—a quality that was much harder to come by when I first started playing Advanced Dungeons and Dragons twenty plus years ago. They rotate GM duty and the game's system, setting, and tone depending on who's available that week so I've had lots of opportunity to try new systems and characters. I was having a good time getting to know them and getting back into the swing of playing with other people but then after only three times at the table with them quarantine started and we moved to playing through Discord and Roll20. I had a bit of a rocky start with learning the new technology but eventually settled in and now the online sessions with them as well as their group chat have become a bright spot the horror show that is 2020. Big mood. The problem: to my great embarrassment, I often find myself panicking and freezing up on the occasions where I am asked to speak in character. I have little to no training in acting or improv outside of the game table of course so any in-character work I do hinges almost entirely on my willingness to look extremely silly in front of other people even though I've been playing with these folks for almost six months now, I feel like we don't know each other super well due to mostly having moved entirely online and I'm still feeling that self inflicted "I'm the new kid and I need to do a good job" pressure. Everyone else has been nothing but kind and patient so I know that a lot of this is going to be me working on my own anxiety on my own time. I would also love to hear some words of wisdom from all of you, however, especially those who weren't immediately comfortable finding and using your character's voices. Any warmups I could try? Educational articles/videos/podcasts to check out? Other useful ways to get out of my own damn head and have fun RPing with these lovely nerds.”

I want to preface answers here to the fact or to the note that I'm going to keep this question in and ask kind of everybody 'cause I think this is a great question and because there's such a range of what I expect experiences around this throughout the cast. And I say that partially because I think Keith and Art, you two probably had the most experience in improv and in finding character voice coming into Friends at the Table. So I do want to say that, like, to some degree I think this trio of people is maybe the least helpful on the idea of "Hey I've struggled with this recently" but hopefully has some thoughts on "Hey I've gotten through this and I've come out the other side and now I am very comfortable" or at least maybe I'm projecting. Maybe both of you do still struggle with this in a way that I'm, y'know, wrong about assuming otherwise.

KEITH: I think Art had a really good answer to this earlier question already.

AUSTIN: Which was?

KEITH: Uh.

ART: Very wise.

[AUSTIN and KEITH laugh]

KEITH: It was the question about the voiceover, uh, thing and Art said that, like, more important than, like, doing a voice is, like, um, having a point of view?

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: Which is a lot less— if you're afraid of looking silly it's a lot less silly to just talk like yourself but to have a character whose point of view you're inhabiting.

AUSTIN: Right. And that way you're getting away from thinking "Oh, is this voice I've conjured up—"

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: "—getting in my way?"

KEITH: No-one else on the show ever did Fantasma besides Nick.

AUSTIN: Besides Nick. Yeah. Jack does voices now and then. Not super dramatic and also we're American scum which means when we hear British voice a part of our brains go "Wow, good voice."

KEITH: That's an accent.

AUSTIN: That's an accent.

KEITH: I mean, that's a voice.

AUSTIN: Yeah, they're doing a voice. They're doing a voice. I'm pretty sure.

ART: Jack's British accent is really good.

[AUSTIN laughs]

KEITH: And—

AUSTIN: But Kalar, Jack's newest character, does definitely have a different voice than Clementine, right? It does have a different cadence.

KEITH: My, well, my impression—and I could be wrong—my impression of British people is that they're very good at doing other types of British accents.

AUSTIN: Wait, is that true or is that just the same thing? Do they think that about us doing different American accents?

[overlapping]

KEITH: Well, I can't do a Boston accent and I grew up there.

ART: I can only do, like, two American accents.

AUSTIN: You could do a Boston accent. I almost just slipped into one just now by mistake!

KEITH: I can't hear it though.

ART: Yeah, I think every American can do Boston—

AUSTIN: New York.

ART: —New Jersey.

AUSTIN: New Jersey, yeah.

ART: Yeah, New York, New Jersey, and, like, a pigeon Southern.

AUSTIN: A bad Southern, yeah, exactly, yeah.

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Not a specific Southern from a specific culture. [laughs] Just a mix.

KEITH: It's also maybe 'cause all the British people that I know are Jack and comedians on British TV.

[AUSTIN laughs]

ART: No I do feel, like— I feel like most British people, I guess it's the same thing, they have a couple other regions, right? But like—

AUSTIN: We can't judge if those are good or not.

KEITH: I can.

AUSTIN: We don't know enough people. We don't know enough people! From those other places.

ART: That's fair.

AUSTIN: You know what—

ART: My Boston is terrible but I'll do it with all the confidence in the world.

AUSTIN: And if you're from Britain you're, like, "Oh wow."

ART: Sure yeah. Um.

KEITH: People peg me from Boston right off the bat sometimes and I'm like, "How do you know."

AUSTIN: You sound— you sound like you're from—

KEITH: How do you know?

AUSTIN: You sound like you're from New England to me.

KEITH: Yep.

ART: I got absolutely roasted by KB the first time I said "Wait on line."

AUSTIN: Instead of "Wait in line."

ART: "Wait in line" is correct and—

KEITH: Oh, on line like in a queue.

ART: "Wait on line" is a New York regional—

AUSTIN: Yeah, New York. Yeah, yeah, like waiting on the, yeah. Waiting in a queue. Waiting on a line. Yeah, I gotcha.

ART: On line, yeah.

AUSTIN: Anyway. Back to this question. Um.

ART: [laughs] Um, yeah, first, get a Boston accent real quick. [AUSTIN laughs] And all your characters are from Boston!

AUSTIN: That's it! You're good!

ART: Yeah. [in a Boston accent] "Hey, we got a wicked orc over here."

[everybody laughs]

AUSTIN: See?! Nailed it!

KEITH: [laughing] The problem is people from Boston sound so silly that it's impossible to tell if one is fake because they all sound like—

[overlapping]

AUSTIN: They all sound like the "We got a fucking whale!" kid!

KEITH: "No way that's the Boston accent."

ART: —a commercial with all the—

[KEITH laughs]

AUSTIN: My actual—

KEITH: "We gotta call Fox 25 News!"

AUSTIN: My actual thought here— to be clear what we're referencing here is a video of— video guy finds sunfish. This is what I'm typing. Yeah. Hilarious guy fishing from Boston freaks out when he sees a sunfish. Uh, explicit language. Know that if you do this search. Um, but, to some degree there's a degree of "Hey if you do want to practice—"

KEITH: There's meat on those bones, Jay!

AUSTIN: [laughs] If you do want to practice a voice, finding something like a video of someone doing something funny, doing something goofy, that you can then practice repeating those lines to yourself. And this is what we were talking about before about comedians sometimes having one or two lines or actors having one or two lines that they do until they find that voice. I think that's part of it. I do think, like, for me— I will say I do get like this when I'm trying to do a voice. I'm bad at doing voices. People know this about me. I have, like, three or four voices on deck and then sometimes—and you'll see this on a live where the stakes are lower—I can just do a weird voice, like, sometimes. I can just do something that I would never do in a campaign and the reason I don't do it in a campaign is because of the reason you've identified here, Anne. Which is, I feel silly doing a fake British accent 'cause my British is very bad. But I'll do one in another game.

We did Bro—uh. Spoken Magic. [laughs] Broken Magic actually probably is the right name for that little arc that we did in Spoken Magic. But I did, like, a very preposterous voice for that whole session and it's because the stakes were lower and I think that maybe part of what has to happen or maybe one trick is to try to focus on that idea that, like, it's okay if you seem a little silly. And like you said, that's an anxiety thing and you just have to put work into a little bit. Um, uh, Rain Storm in chat says that they thought I was Southern for a while for some reason. That's funny. Not at all. Zero percent.

ART: Southern New Jersey.

AUSTIN: Southern— right, yeah.

KEITH: That's more Southern than where I live, so.

AUSTIN: That's true. Uh, Dakota asks—

ART: The most Southern person on this show.

AUSTIN: That's not true. Dre!

ART: No, on this show.

AUSTIN: On *this* show. No, uh— are you? Are you more—? Here's the question. You're in southern California. That's the south right?

ART: I don't have a southern California accent.

AUSTIN: No you don't. Um, Dakota says: "What about when you took on one of the Hitchcocks?" I don't think I actually did a good British voice then. I think what you'll find is what I did is slow down and try to adopt some of Jack's mannerisms but that's not about a voice that's

about the thing I'm doing with my voice now. It's, like, "Okay how did Hitchcocks speak? What is their cadence? What is there duh-duh-duh-da-da? Uh, what is the rhythm of the way that they speak?" And that is different than finding an accent.

And again that goes back to Art's thing of, like, finding a perspective because from a perspective you can get to a cadence much easier than you can get to an accent 'cause an accent... Accents do obviously have, um, some degree— do have a politics and do have a perspective in them. Y'know, a working class accent is a different thing than— a working class New York accent is different than a posh New York accent or a posh London accent is different from a working class London accent, right? So there is that there. But, you can find the cadence of someone once you know who they are and that cadence can be very particular, very precise, and, um, you know, slow and considered or it can be rapid, it can be quick, it can be like you're delivering information that you're already thought of and duh-duh-duh-da-da. And that will do a lot of the work of getting you towards sounding like that character without needing to take the big swing of being, like, and also I sound French. I sound like a bad French accent. So I think that's part of it for sure. I think Art's dead on.

ART: Um, and I think to speak to, like, what helped me get over my anxiety about speaking in public—and I think it's important to note that speaking in your RPG group is lower stakes and I know it doesn't help to, like, "This thing is you're really worried about is really lower stakes." But, like—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: No-one goes— like, the thing my improv teacher taught me to help me is that no-one goes to an improv show to have a bad time.

AUSTIN: Right.

ART: No-one goes to, like, be really—

KEITH: It's not like an open mic [unintelligible] to have a bad time.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Right, yeah.

ART: But people go to have a good time and they want to laugh and they want to meet you halfway and it's the same thing with these people and your character work is they're not— they didn't show up to the thing to be like "I'm going to be so mean if this accent— if this character voice is wrong."

AUSTIN: "Oh, I can't fucking wait for Anne to fuck it up again."

ART: Yeah, then we're gonna— that's the whole— that's— "I have one page of notes and the second page of notes is make fun of Anne." Like that's just not—

AUSTIN: Right.

ART: —that's not true.

AUSTIN: But at the same time—

ART: They're there to have fun the same way you're there to have fun.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: You should take that generosity. That social generosity and try to internalise it.

[01:00:00]

AUSTIN: And trust it, yeah. It's tough. And I think it's especially tough with COVID and you need to adjust. I don't like doing like— it's funny, I'm good at doing or good at doing Friends at the Table but if you've seen me do other live streams with RPGs and stuff you can tell I'm not as confident when I'm doing stuff with people I don't click with or that I don't— or that I haven't spent time with in the past. And there are variations on that in terms of if you look at a group where I, like, you can see that I've clicked with someone who even though all we've done is play this one game together, we find a rhythm. Versus other people where it's like, "Yeah, all we've done is this and I don't have any other touchstone."

So it— I do one hundred percent think that you're right to say that part of this is just you're not in the room with them. You're doing it through camera. My guess is, like, it's also just awkward to be on camera. A note: we don't do stuff on camera. Friends at the Table is not a live streamed video thing. Like, we don't see each other's faces. We haven't don't that in five and a half years or something. I think we stopped during COUNTER/Weight. So, like, five years. And I don't think it's been a detriment to us. I think we found the rhythm and to some degree for me certainly it does free me up to some degree.

So, one thing is, you might want to say, "Hey, this week can I not have my camera on? Can I just watch ya'll or let me take a week off and see how it feels." And maybe you eventually get to the point where you're more comfortable turning the camera back on. But it might help you feel comfortable in voice a little bit more if that makes sense, y'know. So yeah.

I think the other thing I think is probably worth saying is we've talked a lot about accent work, we've talked a lot about stuff like that, but I do know, Anne, you're specifically kind of just talking about finding answers to what your character would say or do or think also? I think that still the answer there is Art's thing. What is the character perspective? How do they— how do you embody that character? And the answer to that is finding a short list of— not even a list but an understanding of who they are characteristically. I was saying last night on Drawing Maps that the way I build NPCs is really really just a handful of keywords. What they believe in?

What— how would you summarise their attitudes? Are they quick? Are they acerbic? Are they, y'know, romantic? And— and using those very broad brushes paint them in a little bit. And it isn't necessarily about, like, having a life story and trying to reference things and duh-duh-duh-dah-dah. It's much more: how would someone describe this person in passing if they were telling a story about running into someone that day? I met this guy and he was like, y'know, he was just, like, really sarcastic. He was, like, dripping with sarcasm. And that's enough to build— to start to build a character out of, y'know.

KEITH: If I could also share a tactic for, like, doing PCs.

AUSTIN: Yes.

KEITH: I spend a lot of time thinking through, like, what a particular character, like, in my off-time I will think about what has happened in a game and be, like "Alright, let me make sure I understand all of the ways my character would think—"

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: "—about these different things that are happening." And think about, like, how he would react to something.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: I did this a lot with Fero. Like, when— when— when it was very important to from, like, my point of view in the show like how Fero's feeling emotionally towards different characters.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

KEITH: I spent a lot of time thinking about, like, what different characters had done and were doing and how I felt about them and, y'know, when you are— when you're, like you said playing a lot of different games and changing settings a lot so it can be harder to, like, really clue into a character. But, something that I've learned since we started doing Bluff City and the live games is, like, the more we start over the faster I feel able to be comfortable, like, having a character's opinions as my opinions while we're playing.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: And if you can get— if you can get to a point where it's like, "I'm feeling in real time how I think my character would feel." Then, it starts to become like a one-to-one process of, like, well people are saying things and you're reacting.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

KEITH: And it's in character because you're already— you're already there, like, mentally.

AUSTIN: Right. Another thing I tried out here is that you should feel comfortable asking whoever is GMing if you can have a scene with, y'know, doing x-y-z thing. Ali just messaged me earlier today and said "Hey, doing this downtime I want a scene with such-and-such. Here is what I want. Here is basically where I'd like to see this go." Y'know, maybe it doesn't go this way but here's there— this is the image in my head and... that means that she's thought around a type of characterisation she wants to show a character having and that means that she can think about the ways in which she wants to deliver that work and get herself into that character's head and can prep for it almost, right? In the same way I would prep for a reveal or a conversation on my side.

And that's something you can do. You can say to your GM, "Hey, I really want a conversation with such-and-such in this next session. Can we set that up?" And you can spend that time—hopefully not fretting over it but thinking about it like, "Oh, how do I want that to happen. Hey, I want to have a scene where I confront so-and-so about their relationship to my sister or whatever." And then you can have that scene and can think about it ahead of time and in that space where it's your character and a NPC's character really feel like you can practice embodying your character in a way that's different than you're out on an adventure, or a mission, or whatever, and needing to bounce off of three other people at once. So that's definitely a thing you can also do.

KEITH: Yep.

AUSTIN: So tips from the chats I want to shout out really quick. Rain Storm says that they would keep a journal as a character to try to get into their own head. And then Author X notes: "My personal trick: establish that your character speaks slowly or pauses between sentences or stutters when nervous. That stalling literally gives you more time to figure out what to say next." That's totally— you know I've definitely done that with NPCs before in order to just, like, okay have to figure out enough time to find who this person is. That's not a bad— that's, y'know, you can't do that with every single character maybe but in terms of getting— in terms of having a set of training wheels which are a good thing to have available to you to practice this more general skill, I think that's totally good.

KEITH: Um, there's another way to do that. To give yourself more time which is: to vocalise your decision making progress—

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: —so it doesn't sound like empty— we just did this— I just did this in a session the other where I was like, "Oh I was— I don't— I don't know how this character works yet—"

AUSTIN: Yup.

KEITH: "—so I'm not exactly sure how I'm reacting to this."

AUSTIN: And that stuff's really good because that was characterisation. People hear that stuff in four weeks or something. But you know.

KEITH: Yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Um, alright, I hope that helped Anne. Thank you for sending in the question. Let us know how it goes. I think this is the last one. It is... Teagan writes in:

“My crew has finally figured out our next campaign setting and the system we'll be playing in. It's currently in development and a new version is set to be released soon but on a vague enough timeline that it's hard to plan for. We have been putting off starting for a while as we wait for the new version but I'm starting to worry we'll just keep waiting for the next version and the one after that etcetera and never actually play. As a group of people who started new systems mid-creation and switched stuff up mid-season, should we keep waiting? What sorts of things factor into deciding what game to play or when to switch to a new system? Any suggestions on how to roll with the changing system while playing?”

Um, we've done this a bunch! I think Dungeon World is maybe the only— Hieron is the only campaign where we didn't do this? COUNTER/Weight Tech Noir was out but The Sprawl wasn't. Twilight Mirage we started with an early version of The Veil, like a play test document or a, y'know, I think we used a PDF version of The Veil before it was final and then switched to Scum and Villainy while it was also in play test. Maybe Bluff—

ART: I'm still not sure I'm using the right version of Beam Saber.

AUSTIN: Well, yeah— [laughs]. It's probably 2.

ART: Every time I open Beam Saber I'm like... "Is this the right one?"

[KEITH and AUSTIN laugh]

KEITH: I— we actually just had that. I was using the wrong version for a few weeks.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally. That did just happen. Um, uh.

KEITH: It didn't affect anything.

AUSTIN: No, it was fine. Yeah, totally. The other half of this is it speaks to the fact that a lot of games now don't ever finish finish? Um, you look at something like The Veil and The Veil changed because of notes we sent the designer of The Veil about one of the classes. You look at something like uh, um, y'know, Quest which we're prepping for some live shows for Live at the Table soon. Not live shows. We're not doing a live show this year. We are not— we have not

lost our minds. [laughs] We have not decided to do live shows during Corona. The— but we're prepping for Quest and Quest specifically dropped a new version, like, two weeks ago that fixed a lot of kind of problems with some of the games moves around questions of consent and some other stuff and just in terms of tone and stuff. And that game's out. That game's like— I have a printed version of that game in my room right now. Obviously that printed version is now out of date and doesn't have this most reason errata. So to some degree that's going to keep happening.

Um, my gut on this is that it is— it's kind of a decision for you and your crew about how much— how comfortable you are rolling with mechanical changes. I *really* like it. I think it's really rewarding to follow a game as it's being developed. To be able to give feedback to a designer and say, "Hey. This is how this is working for us. This is how it isn't working for us. Hey, this is a cool situation we came into. Or a tough situation we came up to and we didn't know what to do in this situation." So many designers are available to send messages to at this point with games that are still in development, still in design. And I think that it's— I think that it's a really rewarding experience.

I do think that there is a moment where you have to decide: is there enough here for us? And that has to do with what you want from a game, right? I will say there are games we've looked at for future seasons where I've been like, "Damn! I love the vibe of this. I love these three playbooks. Also, there are only three playbooks. That means we can't run this with seven players." So you do need to make a decision about whether or not there's enough there for you for what you intend. But if there is and if you're compelled by what's on the book or in the book on the line, um, then I say go for it. I don't know. But Keith and Art, y'all have lived through, y'know, us changing into systems that are still mid-development. How do you feel about that situation? Have you ever run into something where you're like "Ooh, this isn't quite done enough for us"?

KEITH: Uh.

AUSTIN: I think it's always been good?

ART: Yeah, I've never— I've never thought that the game wasn't there, y'know?

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ART: Certainly not enough to play.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I've had questions about things. Going to Scum and Villainy and doing a mech-based game or a game with mechs in it where that game technically has, like, exo-suits and stuff but didn't really have rules for it? Um, was one of those things where I was like "Ah, I wish this was developed a little bit more." But that final version came out and it's still not developed more in that, so.

KEITH: Yeah, in terms of playing a system and having, like, rules change or, like, systems get tweaked in the middle of a game it has pretty much never been a problem.

AUSTIN: Yeah, we've done it a bunch this season, right? I think about—

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: —Forged in Fire. The most OP move in Beam Saber that says—

KEITH: Yeah, we had a— we had our best move get nerfed in the middle of—

AUSTIN: [laughs] Yeah. Like twice or something!

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: It feels like playing an MMO. And it's like "Oh yeah that ability got nerfed." I, y'know, I think what you can do is you can have the conversation when those changes hit that go like "Oh, is this interesting to us? Is this something we are excited about or does this feel like it undoes something that is important for us and we don't want to do it? Or is it we don't want to do a lot of work to incorporate this thing?" I think that— the thing is feel free to ask the designer the degree of changes that are on the way. Most designers I know will say that.

KEITH: In the last downtime session we did?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Did we forget to factor in Forged in Fire in anything?

AUSTIN: No. I don't think so.

KEITH: No?

AUSTIN: 'Cause that's not— there's only combat.

KEITH: No, the last non-downtime.

AUSTIN: Oh, is it possible? Maybe? We vote a lot. That was one of the most rolling intense—

KEITH: We rolled so many times.

AUSTIN: Y'all have to look forward to these next two episodes because, *oh my god*, the fight is *wild*.

KEITH: Oh, that's not out! God! Yeah, yeah...

AUSTIN: Yeah, dude! The literal last session is, like, the jump-off point. The end of the last episode is the jump-off.

KEITH: Well, there— I'm just wondering, like, I don't remember thinking about Forged in Fire. I didn't have it in my head during that session.

AUSTIN: I feel like you—

[overlapping]

KEITH: And I'm like, "Wow did we miss a bunch of rolls? Of Forged in Fire opportunities."

AUSTIN: I haven't edited those episodes yet but I'll listen and I'll let you know. My guess is we did it, um, but maybe I'm wrong. I don't know. They're good episodes. I, y'know, I don't regret anything about how that all went. It's— it's— that— for people who heard the or who missed it there's a tweet that we put up a couple weeks ago from this recording session that is about how good Beam Saber is and how much it's into the breach in terms of, like, or Chess. In terms of like "Alright, I have these pieces. How do I make this work?"

KEITH: Yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: "How do I figure it out?" It's so good.

KEITH: If you didn't see the tweet we said it in the episode.

AUSTIN: [laughing] Yeah, well, that is— you will hear it eventually. So, yeah, Teagan, I say go for it. I say message the designer and say "Hey how big are the changes coming in this next edition? Are we talking about changing core design about the Forged in the Dark game for instance, the way downtime works? The way combat works? The way clocks work? Or are we talking about tweaks to moves, tweaks to playbooks, tweaks to the setting, or something. Y'know think about early Beam— some of the early Beam Saber stuff didn't have, uh, y'know, have all the core mechanics there but maybe some of the setting material wasn't one hundred percent there. At that point you can play that game and fill in the gaps yourself, y'know?"

KEITH: I'll also say if you're worried about the next version coming out and then deciding to wait for another new version and again and again there— maybe there's some other reason why you're not starting the game.

AUSTIN: Boom. Psychoanalysis. Let's go.

KEITH: Yeah. Yeah.

[01:15:00]

AUSTIN: [laughs] Like—

KEITH: Let me— let me get out my therapist pipe.

AUSTIN: [laughing] Yeah. Is there something else that's holding you back from it and if so interrogate that and say, "Okay wait maybe we're not as excited for this thing as we thought we'd be excited about." And that's okay! It's okay to not have that drive necessarily, y'know. But otherwise I think generally, um, run it. Run it and see how it goes. Maybe don't conceptualise it as a huge campaign from the jump because you're not sure yet and maybe just do a one shot, y'know? Cole in the chat says: "It's nice to play one shots with their Friends at the Table fans who are super chill about everything." That's about a previous question but I think that's a good way of thinking about this question too. Find some people to play the game with. See if it clicks for you. If it doesn't click for you then maybe check in on a later edition. Sort of like an early access video game. Y'know, like, ah, I can see that this is almost there. Let's not do a whole campaign of it yet, y'know?

Um, alright. I think that's our last question. If you have questions you can send them to tipsatthetable@gmail.com. We're going to try to do another one of these soon-ish because we're still on catch-up mode. As a reminder, you can go get new merch at tinyurl.com/fattmerch. And, uh, I think that's it. Thanks for joining us.

KEITH: I've said it before. The merch is sick. This is really great. It's a really good batch.

AUSTIN: It's really good merch. I'm really into it. Um, any other final words? [pause] I think that's it. I'm going to go eat dinner.

KEITH: That's it.

ART: I think we did good work here.

AUSTIN: Me too! Let's go to time.is for a clap. Thanks for joining us everybody. We will be back this week with another episode. Uh, 30 seconds?

KEITH: Yep.

ART: That depends on— okay, yeah.

AUSTIN: You got time. You got time. I gave us a lot.

[simultaneous clapping]

AUSTIN: Hm. It's fine. [laughs] Alright everybody. Have a good one.

[01:16:44] END