Tips at the Table 45: Most Real Answer (March 2021)

Transcriber: robotchangeling

Austin: Welcome to Tips at the Table, an RPG podcast focused on critical questions, hopefully smart answers, and fun interactions between good friends. I am your host, Austin Walker.

Art: [scoffs] We'll try.

Austin: Yeah, we'll do our best. I am joined today by Art Martinez-Tebbel. [laughs]

Art: Hey, how you doing? You can find me on Twitter at @atebbel.

Austin: And Ali Acampora.

Ali: Um, hi. You can find me over at @ali_west, and you can find the show over at @friends_table.

Austin: All right. Yeah, so this is our first Tips of the Sangfielle era, as in we have a new color scheme on the thing.

Ali: Yeah.

Austin: Which is fun. And, uh, and we're just gonna get into it here. Mary writes in and says:

> I've been playing tabletop games with my friends since I was 14, and my favorite part has always been character creation. Often the games we play have character creation that takes quite a bit of time, and I like to take my time filling out small details about my characters and sketching them out while I wait for everyone else to finish creating characters and for us to begin play. The thing is that many times I've become really attached to a character during the process of creation, and then, for any number of reasons, our games never actually begin. I understand why our games don't get off the ground, and it's always circumstances beyond our control that prevents us from playing, but I still end up feeling bad that I wasn't able to explore my characters in play. Is there a way to get over this bad feeling, or am I just stuck with it until another opportunity to play a game arises?

Austin: Has this happened to y'all? I mean, I know it's happened to Art, so. [Austin and Ali laugh] I'm presuming, you know?

Art: Yeah. I mean, this happens. This has happened to me a thousand times. I think it's like…do you remember the first time you lied to your parents? [Ali laughs]

Austin: Specifically?

Art: But like…no, I don’t—

Austin: I remember the era.

Art: Yeah.

Austin: I remember the era at which that became like a thing I would do. Yeah.

Ali: Yeah.

Art: And that you felt awful and like you were gonna die and that like nothing would ever feel good again.

Austin: Mm, this part I don’t—

Art: And then by the t—

Austin: This part I'm not, I don't relate to so much.

Ali: Yeah, no. [laughs]

Art: Well, the— or the first time you did it.

Austin: Getting caught felt terrible, certainly.

Ali: Yeah.

Art: Well. Okay. Well, the first time you did—

Austin: [laughing] But that was well after I started lying to them.

Ali: Yeah. I remember getting into— it wasn’t like an argument with Drew, but I was like, “Why don't you lie to them?” and— [Ali and Austin laugh] Anyway.

Austin: Ahh.

Art: Well. *I* experienced lying to my parents as a source of guilt. [Ali laughs]

Austin: Mm.

Art: Much like how I felt about abandoning tabletop RPG characters. But by the time you're in your 20s, you can just lie to your parents like it's water, right? [Austin laughs] It's just like, it's nothing. [Ali laughs]

Austin: Right, sure.

Art: "Going out tonight. Not gonna drink, 'cause it's not legal." Nudge nudge. [Austin and Ali laugh] You know?

Austin: Wait, you said 20s. It is absolutely mostly legal in your 20s.

Art: It's not when you're actually 20.

Austin: Okay, you know what, yeah. [laughs softly]

Art: You know, "gonna have safe fun times in Greenpoint tonight."

Austin: Yeah, uh huh.

Ali: Mm.

Austin: There you go. Yes.

Art: I was— when I was that age, Greenpoint was different.

Austin: Uh huh. [laughs]

Art: It was unpermitted lofts [Austin laughs] and dangerous staircases.

Ali: Mm.

Art: This might not be a universal experience.

Austin: No.

Art: But the thing is, eventually, [Ali laughs] you will discard a character and you won't remember it. And you won't even— you won't feel anything anymore. [Austin laughs softly] It's just you have to develop this callus on your soul, is what I'm saying.

Austin: I see. [laughs softly]

Ali: Yeah.

Austin: Ali, has this happened to you in any way?

Ali: Um, not really, just ‘cause I don't have the same like tabletop experience as y'all do?

Austin: Mm, mm-hmm.

Ali: And then like, even with roleplaying, and like, there's definitely like…what— [laughs] What me and the person I roleplay with have done sometimes is like, we'll plan out a scene or we'll be like, “At the end of this big arc, we'll end up doing this thing.”

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Ali: And it will fade out, and we end up not doing that thing or like the interaction won't happen, and there's disappointment around that. But like, in general, of just like having underused characters or like someone that you're still attached to…I mean, I know that these are like easy answers and it's not the same thing as like playing a tabletop game, but I’ll make that person in *Dark Souls*, you know? Like, that’s…

Austin: Yeah. Hell yeah.

Ali: That'll be my *Dragon Age* character, and like, I'll try to play them as like close to what I thought I would at the time.

Austin: Mm.

Ali: Or just like writing.

Austin: Writing. Writing is my answer.

Ali: You know?

Austin: Yeah.

Ali: [laughs] It's hard to do that. Like, I— it's not the same as doing it as a group. But like, it scratches the same itch.

Art: Mm.

Austin: Yeah. It lets you inhabit their state of being and explore some of the sort of like vibes with them.

Ali: Yeah.

Austin: Boot up an *AI Dungeon* game, as someone who's dipped into *AI Dungeon* recently. [Ali and Art laugh] That can be fun. Um…here's my other answer. Here's like the classic "Let me spin this around on you" thing.

Ali: Ooh.

Austin: Practice not writing characters so deep before you start playing them. And I'm someone who's guilty of this, [Ali laughs softly] as anyone who listened to *Good Society* knows, that like very much, like I definitely enjoy the idea of like, yeah, I've invested a lot of time in this character even before I started playing them. But as someone who mostly GMs at this point, the thing I've gotten very good at is sketching out the loosest idea of a character and being like, if they come up, they come up. And if they do, they could be really cool, you know? And if they don't, then they don't. And, and that practice ends up letting you stumble into characters you end up really liking, which can be fun. And I've done that in the tabletop space also, where it's just like, I don't know, I'm like…I'm just like someone with a stat, like my character from *Stewpot*. I did not spend a lot of time on that. I was like, what's an aesthetic I sort of like?

Ali: Yeah.

Austin: And now I really like Roan, and I played that character like twice in those *Stewpot* games, and I hope I get to play— get to play them in *Quest* at some point. But like, that's it. Like, and I in some ways would be heartbroken if like I didn't get to go back and play them at this point. But also, if I had spent a lot of time developing them, I might not have been satisfied with just playing the *Stewpot* game. And so I think getting that practice in, of just like sketching a character instead of doing a portrait before you start playing, can still reward you but keep you from that feeling of like, you know, lack of satisfaction if you don't get to inhabit them in that, in that way. So. I feel you. I feel you though, Mary. [Ali laughs] Definitely been there. I'm trying to think if there's anything else, but I think that's the big stuff for me. Also, if you're an artist…you know, I'm not. But, uh… [laughs]

Ali: Oh, yeah.

Austin: Like, drawing character stuff. Making playlists is definitely a thing I've done. I'm trying to think if there's anything else in that space. But, you know, other ways of experiencing that stuff, for sure. And then, and the other thing is, you're also not wrong about like, can I just double dip with them when I play a different game later. Let me tell you about Paisley Moon, Public Person—

Ali: Oh?

Austin: —and Sloe Uplight, who are… [Ali and Art laugh] just like hot fixers.

Ali: Mmm.

Austin: That's what they are. And it's like, well, what if I…

Ali: Yeah.

Austin: I hope I get to play a hot fixer at some point this season.

Ali: Ooh.

Austin: They're all very similar characters in terms of their like affect and positioning. They have different backgrounds. They're not the same person, obviously. [Art coughs] But they're also like three of the most out-there name-wise things. Also, are you okay, whoever's coughing? Is it Art?

Art: Yeah, I just swallowed wrong.

Austin: Okay.

Ali: Oh.

Art: Just didn't do a good job of it.

Austin: Okay. I was making sure. We were just talking about being sick, [laughs] so I wanted to pause and check. [Ali and Art laugh] But like, but like, that's a type of character I like to play and don't get a chance to, and so I'm like, okay, well, I'm gonna drop this type of character in again. And if if it lines up right, then it lines up right, you know? And I think that that can be a thing in tabletop too, where it's like, hey, I really want to play like a smart-talking, you know, roguelike char— rogue type character. [all laugh] And, and if you get the chance to do it, then awesome. And if you don't, like, that style of character does not have to disappear. And I think this is the other part of like starting with a sketch instead of a portrait, is it opens you up to being able to adapt that general idea into different settings and stuff, in a way that a very well developed character might not.

Art: And for a roguelike type character, I recommend the movie, uh, *Memento*. [Austin and Ali laugh]

Austin: Yes. Or *Edge of Tomorrow* I feel like is kind of roguelike.

Art: Mm, sure.

Ali: Oh, yeah.

Art: Yeah, kinda.

Austin: Well, I guess not, 'cause the world stays the same.

Art: It’s a different— it's a different take on the genre.

Austin: Right, yeah, uh huh. [laughs softly] Yeah, yes, definitely.

Ali: Yeah. This is just killing me, 'cause like, who's gonna be our hot fixer in Sangfielle?

Austin: I don't know. Um, I have ideas. I have ideas.

Ali: Good. I’m glad. I’m just, you know.

Austin: Well, the thing is, the like fantasy stuff that we do…we've Hieron, we've done Marielda. I feel like that space, Quest so far, does not have like that archetype as much?

Ali: Yeah.

Austin: They show up now and then. They’re— they've been evil, right? It's, um… [Ali laughs] It's the Ordennan like ninja type is kind of in that space. I forget what that character is and what their name was.

Ali: Oh.

Austin: And then it's, um…it’s the super shitty, uh…this is what happens. Let me tell you, people out in the world are like, “I'm sure Austin's mind is like a vault, understand— remembers *everything* from these worlds.” [Ali laughs] [clicks tongue] There’s a major Marielda and Hieron character whose name has completely slipped my mind right now in such a way that is embarrassing, but you know, don't worry about it.

Art: [chuckles] Yeah, you know when people like—

Ali: Wait, who—

Art: —send those viruses that like encrypt your hard drive unless you pay them money?

Austin: Yeah.

Art: If people wanted to do that to us, they would just need to encrypt the fan wikis of our own show.

Austin: [laughs] That is exactly— that is exactly it.

Ali: You're not talking about Maelgwyn.

Austin: No, I'm not talking about Maelgwyn. Jesus, no.

Ali: Okay, I was like… [laughs]

Austin: Absolutely not. Maelgwyn is not that type.

Ali: No, no, no.

Austin: Maelgyn is too…

Ali: No, no, no. Yeah.

Austin: Maelgwyn is too nuanced to be that.

Ali: There's a version of him that like could have been that, but not…

Austin: Uh, it is, uh…

Ali: In his like superhero days.

Austin: Yeah. Ah, see, he's too…he's too noble, though. He's too, like…

Ali: Yeah.

Austin: Uh, Snitch is who I was talking about, Snitch Nightly.

Ali: Oh, gosh, okay.

Austin: Is a hundred percent in that— is in that space. And, and…

Ali: Oh, but with the, like, jackass meter all the way up.

Austin: Yeah. All the way up. All the way up.

Ali: Whereas Paisley and the other ones like were a little…Paisley, on the other hand.

Austin: Yeah. Well, like, the thing is we never got to develop Public Person who only shows up for like two scenes in the beginning of Twilight Mirage.

Ali: Oh, that's true.

Austin: And we barely got to develop Sloe Uplight, who shows up in Millennium Break and then briefly before the final pre-finale arc in PARTIZAN.

Ali: [laughs] They didn't get romantically stabbed.

Austin: Right, they did not.

Ali: [laughing] So we really don't know much about them!

Austin: Exactly. Correct. Correct. So. But you know, I'm chasing that— I've been chasing that high, that Paisley Moon high all that time. [Ali laughs] Anyway, we should go to the next question.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Austin: Ali, do you want to read this from T(???)?

[0:10:53]

Ali: Um, sure, from T.

> I've been running a game with a group of five for a Forged in the Dark game. I went in expecting at least two of those players to be out most weeks. However, they've been attending every session. [Austin laughs softly] I'm glad that they've been able to play, but a large group is a bit rough. Any tips for running a game over capacity?

Austin: Five is like the limit.

Art: [unclear]

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Austin: Art, what were you gonna say?

Art: You can't count on people missing games during pandemic times. [Ali laughs] No one's got anything to do. You really…

Austin: They're gonna show up.

Art: Your popular friends aren't popular anymore.

Austin: [laughs] Damn, get 'em. [Ali laughs] The…I do think you're right that like, don't count on people not showing up. And I know that there's a model—we've talked about this, the kind of like open table model, it's built around that concept. Don't count…don't count on it. But given that you're here, I've definitely run games for more than five people, not just on *Friends at the Table*, before *Friends at the Table* definitely was running more traditional, just like, "Yeah, there's seven people here, and we're gonna play L5R, we're gonna play whatever," right? There are things you can do, and I think they start with having lower expectations about what your sessions are going to be. Not lower, different expectations. [Art laughs] Because, because those games can

be a lot of fun, but you have to make a really big ask for the…for attention, between five players, six people at a table, to all be dialed in all the time with that much dead air between their, like, their attention, their spotlight moments. You can mitigate that by pairing characters off. If you have five people, you can do a subgroup of two and a subgroup of three. I would very rarely do one by themselves, because that's a time when four other people at the table will, their attention will slowly drip to their phones and be like, “Hmm, what's going on on social media right now?” These are your players. [Art laughs] This is what your players sound like too.

Ali: Mm.

Austin: [laughs] They sound like a 1992 Black comic’s version of a white guy. [Ali snorts] No offense to your players, I'm just, I’m intuiting. [Art chuckles] The…and so that ends up being tough, right? So it's like, thinking about that, and so your— my options are like try to mitigate the downtime between the spotlight hitting different players, but also just be okay with it being a little more loosey goosey, a little less super drama focused. Recognize that you're going to have to summarize things for players whose attention has drifted when they weren't in a scene. And, and like prep for…emotionally prep yourself for that, because it's going to happen, and that is just like part of the truth of it to some degree. And also, I guess you're probably not doing this in person, but I would say try to mitigate— also try to mitigate the amount of distractions around. Don't have the TV on. Don't have like, hey, when it's not my, when it's not my scene, can I go play *Diablo* or whatever? Like. The answer is no. Like, we should try to be as present as possible. [laughs softly] But, but at the same time, recognize that there will be some drift. That's how I feel like it's worked for me. Mostly not on Friends at— I'm mostly not talking about *Friends at the Table*, because *Friends at the Table*’s weird, ‘cause it's like we're all talking into microphones and like it's our jobs.

Art: Mm-hmm.

Austin: So it's a little easier to manage, I think.

Ali: Right.

Austin: But this—

Ali: Also, we…

Austin: Yeah.

Ali: We have a lot of people, but we either split them up really often—

Austin: Yeah.

Ali: Or we make it a big event if everybody's gonna be on call and like plan around that in a specific way.

Austin: Great, actually, incredible point. Prepping for what do you— there should— everyone should come to the table with some plans in terms of— if there's gonna be free play or open time. You know, if you're not— let's talk about it's a Forged in the Dark game. Let's say that you're going into a downtime, uh, not episode, but a downtime session. Or, you know, you're gonna wrap up a mission, a score, and then go back to a downtime in that, uh, that recording. Or not recording, geez, in that play session. If that's the case, ideally, ask your players to like have in mind what downtime actions they're gonna do after the score, the mission, or whatever. Ahead of time, have them prep that stuff, because that will cut down on people flipping through the book and being like, "Uh, I'm not sure." If they know they want to have scenes with other players, being able to be like, "Hey, I really want to have a scene with player Y," and having that player agree and think about that scene a little bit will help keep things moving, for sure. So I think prepping in some ways is a great— is a great additional element of this.

Art: Yeah, and I think you touched on this a little, but you have to have like…like, everyone has to be willing to pass the ball.

Austin: Yeah.

Art: And you, as the GM, have to be ready for like a looser, jokier game.

Austin: Totally.

Art: You know, five people is five more…is more people who are gonna like think something's funny and laugh about it for a few minutes and like—

Austin: Totally.

Art: —go and riff on whatever that idea is. I think you see, like…when we do like holiday special games or finales, those are like big series affairs where we're all like sitting down and drilled in, and that's like hard work.

Austin: Yeah.

Art: And if you look at like what we're doing right now, with the worldbuilding…

Austin: Yeah, like these world building episodes. Yeah.

Art: They're much looser, and we're much looser, and it's a very different vibe than like a normal game, where just like, we're pinging a lot more, you know?

Austin: Yeah, totally.

Ali: Yeah.

Austin: There's a little more…little more play in the, in like the mechanical sense, you know? [laughs softly] Like, there's more play in the…in the, like, joints of the machine. Machines have joints. Don't— don't @ me.

Ali: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm!

Art: They do.

Austin: Any other thoughts on big groups?

Ali: Good luck.

Austin: Good luck. That's a good one. Good luck, honestly.

Ali: [laughs] It isn't easy.

Austin: You know what, I'm gonna just— I'm just gonna note we got another question in, like, at the…at the like finishing mark before we closed these off, where someone else literally mentioned— I'm just gonna try to answer this super quick, 'cause it's related. The sum— I'm not gonna read the whole thing, but Joey wrote in and basically said: Hey, we're having a great game. We're doing, you know, semi-regular sessions. There are seven of us, in total, who've been part of the game so far. And there are some other people who want to join the setting, because we've done like a 50 year time skip, we've…we started with, uh, *I'm Sorry, Did You Say Street Magic?* to build a city, we like— they did the whole thing, right? They've built a cool setting, and now lots of people want to play. And, and Joey has asked basically like, how do you fit more than the recommended amount of players into a game, which we've done plenty of times. And then also split party games, how do you— any advice on split party games? And I want to note, on that side of things, and likewise for T, let's say you add another player. Don't be afraid of doing—especially if you're playing online—doing, splitting the party and having the party members go off and do different things in different like sessions. There's a…I think one of my favorite set of arcs in all of *Friends at the Table* is the pr— is the last set of arcs in Twilight Mirage before the Feast of Patina? I want to say it's before the Feast of Patina. Or is it Feast of Patina and then this? It must be…it must be…it must be before Feast of Patina. Where there were…there was a Janine and Ali arc.

Ali: Mm.

Austin: There was a Keith, Darcy,[1] and Sylvi arc. And then there was an Art and Jack arc. And those were like, we'd only ever done a split by two by then at that point. And that three part person split where we were completely willing to do a two person game in *Scum and Villainy*. All of those sessions ripped, [laughs] and were able to give the characters a ton of space for deep characterization. And you lose part of the fun of it, because you don't have the full audience

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

there for everyone to see, but that added focus is really good. So if you have a big setting, like Joey who wants to like share that with more people, don't be afraid of splitting that up into smaller games. And likewise, T, even with five, if you ever get a situation where you're like, hey, three of these players want to go raid the docks and these other two players are not— their characters are not particularly interested in it? Set up a schedule for that three person crew to go run the docs and for those other two people to do something else a different time. That is completely acceptable. It's more work for you [laughs] as the GM, but don't be afraid of that solution. I think we would be a much worse show if we tried to do full party. Even if we had— even if, going back to, you know, Autumn in Hieron, where we started with…we would have had, what? Six people at the table? What's…what were those parties? I'm like blanking on those parties now. It was, um, Fantasmo…

Ali: Oh, it was Keith, Jack, me, and then Nick…

Austin: Keith, Jack, you, and then…

Ali: Darcy.

Austin: Nick, Art, Darcy?

Ali: Yeah.

Art: So, seven total?

Austin: Plus me.

Art: Yeah, 'cause we went up two, and…but then we lost Nick, yeah.

Austin: Right. Okay.

Ali: Yeah.

Austin: Even that six— even at six, it felt— I mean, the opening arc of Hieron had five, and that felt like it was really pushing how much characterization we could get in. It was, you know, and obviously that arc is very puzzly— not puzzly, but it's much more traditional than a lot of what other Hieron arcs ended up being, in terms of doing kind of a pseudo dungeon crawl thing up the tower. But, but the…you could see that— I could tell that, at that point, that there was not going to be enough time to zero in on who these characters were. And so even with five, don't be afraid of occasionally mixing it up by breaking it up into smaller groups. Okay, next question comes in from Rothko. Oh, that's not true at all. My notes are wrong. That comes in from Arp. Hi, Arp. Arp says:

[0:21:31]

> Hello. I'm in two games now, and I find myself playing my newer character similarly to my more established character, despite having a very clear idea of how I want to play the new one. They end up making similar choices, which is fine—one's a selfish jerk, and the other's a man-eating fish, so neither are inclined to sympathize with the people around them. But that makes it very easy to carry the prickly personality of the first over to my lovely fish, Museum Quality—I'm very proud of the name— [Ali giggles] who I want to play as an energetic and— who I want to play as energetic and friendly, presuming he's not hungry, and enthusiastically curious about humans. For example, in dialogue, I often find myself playing Museum Quality as rude with intent rather than rude by ignorance, actively careless rather than passively careless, et cetera. I think about each character for most of the day before a session and do my best to get into character but slip up a lot. Is this just a practice thing, or do y'all have methods of readjusting characterization in play?

Art: It's both.

Austin: Yeah? [laughs softly]

Art: Yeah.

Austin: Like most things.

Art: And I think— yeah. It's definitely a practice thing. I think— I think the thing that jumps out to me here is that, like, rude with intent and rude by ignorance are really close.

Austin: Mm.

Art: And if you're like, well, I'm really used to doing this, and I'm trying to do this, and having them be so…you're gonna, you're gonna slip by accident a lot more here. It's like, I'm sick of being green, so I'm gonna be yellow for a while, you know?

Austin: Right.

Ali: Mm. [laughs]

Austin: Those two things are not far enough away that you won't stumble between them.

Ali: Yeah.

Austin: That's interesting.

Art: Yeah.

Austin: I feel like this mostly comes up for players on *Friends at the Table* around like deep Bluff City arcs or something like that, where we've definitely had sessions where it's like, okay, play Bluff City, and then immediately after, go play, you know, a completely different person or something. But I feel like most of you have gotten a pretty good handle on it. And it's, I think it's by answering— or by doing the thing Art just said, which is like, really broad differences between people.

Ali: Yeah. I feel like even if it's like smaller differences, or if it's just like, these like splitting hairs sort of— I don't know that that's fully splitting hairs, but. [Austin chuckles] You know. [laughs softly] This is a thing that I try to do and I feel like Janine is also really good at, that like, you can't fight the impulse to say the thing that you want to say. But like, if you say that or you say like, “They don't say that. What they do is actually this.”

Austin: Yeah.

Ali: Or if you, like, if you take the time like to say like, “Okay, I'm not gonna go through this conversation, but I'm gonna explain like this person's intention in this conversation.”

Austin: [overlapping] Right, right.

Ali: It becomes easier to, like, sort of talk about the specifics, talk about tone, talk about the like, the like, um…the goal of that conversation rather than like the beat by beat of it, makes it easier to like figure out the differences of those…that character.

Austin: Yeah.

Ali: And then over time, I feel like getting into the like, the gap between the two of them will be easier, ‘cause you'll have more or as much experience with Museum Quality as you do with your other character.

Austin: [laughs softly] This just happened.

Ali: ‘Cause the like, newness…

Austin: Go ahead, sorry.

Ali: Yeah. Yeah, just to say the like newness of Museum is also gonna play into this, if they're like a character that you've been playing less, and you already have the like—

Austin: Right.

Ali: Quote, unquote, “muscle memory” of like improv-ing in a specific way.

Austin: Totally. This just happened in a Sangfielle recording with Janine, literally, where at a certain point, Janine was like, “That's not my intent. Here’s what my intent is.” And and that's the other thing, is like, don't ever feel bad about saying, “Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait. Museum Quality would not have said that. Let me— can I redo that line?” Fine, yes, you can redo that line. Hopefully your table will be fine with that, because they should be. [Austin and Ali laugh] I am not the principal of GMs, but, uh, if you need to record me saying that, here's me again: Let Arp say the thing again, but better this time. [Ali laughs]

Art: Yeah, let people have two takes, you know? It’s not…

Austin: Let people have two takes.

Ali: Yeah.

Austin: And so I think that's another thing, is just like being able to slow down in that way. And again, the opposite is, for me, it's prep. Like, there is…there are phrases I will write down for characters. And again, I'm a GM, so this is like a different situation. Or I mostly play as a GM, which means I'm controlling many characters, and that means like a little bit different in terms of how deep into the kind of interiority of a lot of characters I get. But sometimes with a character who I’m like, I can't quite get my head around how to play them, I will write a little phrase out that will be something…a way they introduce themselves, a way that they think about something, a way that they might phrase what their relationship is to another character or to, you know, some MacGuffin in the world or some organization. That stuff ends up helping me find who they are, not just their voice, but just like, oh, this is the characterization of them. This is who they— this is the mode that I get to be in. And that's the other big one here is… [laughs softly] I'm not saying do an accent. We don't do many accents on the show. [Ali laughs] But if Museum Quality talks like this, and your other character talks like this, you're going to blend them more easily. [speaking slow and measured] If Museum Quality talks like this, [speaking rapidly] and your other character talks like this, [back to normal] then you're— and that's not like, that's just cadence, that just slow talk— that's just, [slowly] slow that big fish down a little bit. [Ali and Art laugh] Let that big fish soak, soak in the atmosphere, make slow decisions until it's time to [sudden] bite! right? And then, and suddenly, you have a different character, and you give yourself a little more space to…to kind of evoke how you want to differ MQ from your other characters. And so I think that's the other thing, is just like finding other ways to…to bring that character to bear and other modes of literally physically being will bring you to inhabit who they are a little bit better. I had a— that's a good— that was a good voice. I liked that. That was fun. I gotta bring…

Ali: Yeah, that was… [laughs]

Austin: I gotta bring that person back.

Art: Yeah.

Ali: That is really good ad—

Art: Good voice for a fish. [Ali laughs]

Austin: That's a— yeah, right?

Ali: That is really good advice, though, ‘cause I don't…I don't like doing accents. I don't know that I ever will. But like, I'll definitely do different pitches. Like, [high-pitched and peppy] I have characters who talk like this, ‘cause it's my customer service voice.

Austin: Right. [laughs] Yes.

Ali: [laughing] And then I have people who just talk normally, which is the way that I talk.

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Ali: And then like I'll get slower, depending on like the scene or the emotion or the character, but like…

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Ali: You don't have to do the whole like, you know. [laughs]

Austin: You don’t need a full accent, but…

Ali: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Austin: Yeah, just speed, tempo.

Ali: Uh huh. Mm-hmm.

Austin: Yeah. Just play with it a little bit, you know?

Ali: Yeah. [laughs]

Austin: What are the people who the— who your character grew up around? What do they sound like?

Ali: Mm.

Austin: And then how did that make them change how they sound, you know? [laughs] Heidi in the chat says, “I heard Declan Corrective, and all my nerves activated like a car being unlocked.” [Ali and Art laugh] Yeah. Ah, Declan was a good voice to do. Anyway.

Ali: [sighs] Yeah.

Austin: Declan's, I guess.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Austin: Next question?

Ali: Yeah.

Austin: All right.

Art: Yeah.

Austin: This one is from Doug. Art, this is a special for us. I want you to read this one. I feel—no offense, Ali. [Ali laughs] I mean, Ali, I guess…have we played?

Ali: Oh, yeah, I…I mean, I earmarked this.

Austin: You did earmark it.

Ali: I'm gonna have some advice. I'm gonna let you guys go first.

Austin: Okay. Okay.

Ali: But let's… [laughs]

Austin: Art?

Art: All right.

Austin: Go ahead, from Doug.

[0:29:24]

Art:

> Me and my friends played a mini campaign of *The Sprawl* a few years ago now, and while we enjoyed it and plan on doing another sequel campaign sometime in the future, we never really figured out slash enjoyed the hacking part of the game. I once tossed out the idea of just playing a run of *Netrunner* in its place as a joke, but that got me thinking: could we actually do that maybe? I don't remember who, if anyone, on the show was a *Netrunner* player.

Art: Hi.

Austin: Hi. [Ali laughs]

Art:

> But I'd be interested to hear how you might do this or if it could be done effectively at all. If no one's familiar with that particular example, can you talk a bit about any time you might have done something similar, if it was successful, and any kind of advice for this kind of thing?

Austin: I want to know what Ali's…Ali, it sounded like you had a thing even though you're not a *Netrunner* person. I'm curious, like more broadly, before Art and I talk *Netrunner*.

Ali: Oh, sure. I mean, yeah, I didn't play *Netrunner*, but like those, those cards were definitely so like within a universe—

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Ali: That it felt like it was sort of easy to think of like a character behind them. And I think like, especially when you're like building a deck and like thinking of like the ins and outs of how it works, it's similar to like thinking of like a character's moveset or whatever.

Austin: Totally, yeah.

Ali: So like, it feels like this is a one to one thing. Also, like, you know, y'all already want to play *The Sprawl*, so you don't have to worry about the thing of like, oh, we all want to play *Netrunner* but also have these characters attached, where you could just like have a discord or like a text chat or whatever.

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Ali: I feel like this becomes easier since you know the systems that you want to do. But yeah, I'll let y'all talk. [laughs]

Austin: Art, I'm curious for you. I will say, when we were playing *The Sprawl* is probably around when I was most in love with *Netrunner*, and this had to have crossed our minds at least once. [laughs softly] But, but Art—

Art: I mean—

Austin: You were way deeper into *Netrunner* than I ever was, even.

Art: Yeah, I think I'm the only person who's…

Austin: Because you had people to play with, and I was living in Canada away from everything.

Art: Yeah, that…

Austin: No, like, I mean, there are famous Canadian *Netrunner* podcasts, so I don't know what the fuck I'm talking about.

Ali: Oh.

Austin: But. [laughs] But near me, I was the only person I knew playing, so.

Art: But I've played in a continental championship tournament.

Austin: Okay. [Ali gasps]

Art: That I dropped out of after I got the participation prize, 'cause I wanted to do other things that day. [Ali laughs]

Austin: Ah, I see. [laughs softly]

Art: There's two problems with this idea, as I see it.

Austin: Yeah.

Art: That are both like, one is like about the idea of hacking it, and one is about the like, what the game of *Netrunner* really is. And I'm gonna take the first part first, which is like… [Austin laughs softly] You could do it, but it's very hard to translate, um, state effects in the game into card game effects? Like…

Austin: You don't want to get Scorched Earthed, for instance.

Art: Sure.

Austin: Scorched Earth is like— so this is, again, like showing myself as like when I was actually playing *Netrunner* online a bunch and shit. But like Scorched Earth was one of the cards from the early set of like the— it was from the base set of *Netrunner*, right?

Art: It's a core set card, yeah.

Austin: It's a core set card.

Art: You couldn't do it in the core set with any sort of reliability.

Austin: No, no, right.

Art: They got there.

Austin: You had to get all sorts of other tags and shit, right? Tagged stuff.

Art: Yeah.

Austin: But basically, it was like, hey, if you can— if the corporation can tag the runner, can identify where the runner is in the world basically, do a bunch of physical damage to them as you blow their apartment up, basically. [Ali laughs]

Art: Yeah.

Austin: And like, [clicks tongue] maybe that shouldn't be part of the way…like, *Netrunner* is the story of weeks or days or something in a runner's life, in some ways, right?

Art: Yeah. But even just like other things, like what in the game represents what icebreakers you have?

Austin: Right.

Art: What represents other, you know, other equipment you might have? What represents how many credits you have? You know, credits are the most important part of like the straight up run as defined in the rulebook.

Austin: Yeah.

Art: Like, there's, there's so many things you do before you run, and like getting those in the…in the game, feels very tricky. Like, it's a lot of translation to do.

Austin: You can abstract it and just say this is the hack, right?

Art: Yeah.

Austin: This whole game represents a push and pull, and like, we're not going to translate it directly. We're going to think about it as like, you know, the way an interpretive dance performance can be very much about a narrative event, even if you don't necessarily see the, you know, setting and the particular moments as direct analogies. But I think you're also— I do think— I do agree with you.

Art: Well, but it doesn't say a game of *Netrunner*. It says a run of *Netrunner*.

Austin: Oh, you're right.

Art: And, and that, I think—

Austin: Yeah.

Art: —is like the bigger problem with this, which is that like, if you buy *Netrunner* the core set—and good luck— [Austin chuckles]

Ali: Aw.

Art: The rulebook like lays out what a run is. Like, you have your icebreakers, and you approach the ice—

Austin: Yeah.

Art: And you pay to boost the strength, and then you pay to break the subroutines, then you get in. And that is a wonderful fairy tale—

Austin: That's a fiction.

Art: —that they told in that rulebook.

Austin: [laughs] Yeah.

Art: Because the entire history of that game is runners figuring out how to not engage with the run.

Austin: Interact in any way, yeah. And vice versa, most of the time, right?

Art: Yeah, you only run when you a hundred percent can get in, usually by not engaging the ice.

Austin: Right.

Art: And so, you just have this like, you have this game that's supposed to work this way, but how it really works is this other way, and the way the game really works isn't gonna work for this at all.

Austin: Because the way the game really works is about being three turns in and knowing what the other player probably has in their hand, what might be at the top of their deck, what could be in their discard pile, and anticipating whether or not they're feinting at you based on what they did last turn, and wondering if you're going to draw the thing you need if you spend resources to draw some extra cards right now. And all of that stuff is like…is a multi turn thing, right? And is about like…is about a sort of meta that like— I really love this idea conceptually, because I think that *Netrunner* is a game filled with characterization, and I think that like—

Art: Mm-hmm.

Austin: If you look at the way different players, different deck types, archetypes play, they have a different character, they have a different mode of character or they have a different type of character to them. And I'd love to be able to capture that. But I don't know that it…I don't know that it maps that cleanly. I think more importantly for me…sorry, Art, did you have a second thing?

Art: No, no, that was it.

Austin: Okay.

Art: It's just like, yeah, if you look at the decks that one *Netrunner* tournament—

Austin: Yeah.

Art: On runner's side, they did not engage with running and ice and icebreakers in the way that like would make for a fun thing here. They were doing something else.

Austin: To be fair, I feel like the way Mako hacked things in *The Sprawl* [Ali laughs] is exactly like the way like an anarch deck might hack things in *Netrunner*. [laughs softly]

Art: Mm.

Austin: But no, you're totally right. The other thing for me actually, though, is games…it is true that there is an agonism between the hacking character in *The Sprawl* and the network set up by the GM to be hacked. However, I don't know that the thing I would want…I don't think playing a game of skill and in the sense of *Netrunner* is the best way to represent a character's capacity and to arrive at narrative points. It's a way to do it. I'm not saying you can't do it that way. Certainly, when I think about the history of card games I've cared about, stuff like *Netrunner* and L5R both used tournament results, for instance, to drive narrative, and that's a thing I really love about them. But at a table, what I wouldn't want is for a character or for a player who is not very good at this game perhaps, to feel like if only they'd left it up to dice rolls and building a character the smart way and anticipating, you know, basic ideas around how networks are built inside of *The Sprawl* or whatever, then maybe they could have succeeded, or feel like my character should have won this. And the GM feeling like whew, I just got a lucky draw. Sometimes that happens. I got a lucky draw, [Ali and Art laugh softly] and they got fucked.

I don't like leaving that up to a game like *Netrunner*, when it moves us out of the sort of…the sort of play, like the sort of world logic of being in a game. I've always said that when I—when we do leave games behind, it's almost as if the world has changed. This has…this happens in everything except, I think, *Technoir* to *The Sprawl*. Though even there, I think, you think about how much more noir, how much more that noir feeling was there in those first two arcs of COUNTER/weight. And we do just like lose that with *The Sprawl*. Like, there's still some sort of like world of kind of crime and intrigue, but that sort of like slow, like, you know, ominous

like saxophone vibe, [Ali laughs] is gone by the time we get to *The Sprawl*. So I do think that like, whenever you change a game, you're changing like the ontology of the fictional world that you're in. And I think there's value in staying within it to some degree.

The other much more important thing, though I think I see why you— now that I realized it's just a run and not a game. But the thing that this does not solve is the, you know, perennial problem with cyberpunk games and hacking mini games is the reason people hate them isn't just that like they're hard to design well or hard to engage with at a high level of play. It's that four people at the table get to be bored while two people are having a good time. It's that the hacker is engaged in this whole other world of play that no one else is involved with. And this does not address that. I guess, I guess if you're just doing one run, it addresses it by making it quicker, theoretically? But at that point, just play war. Just play rock paper scissors. [Art laughs]

Ali: Yeah. [laughs]

Austin: Like, there are other quick…because, because at that, at the level of *Netrunner* you would be playing if you're doing a single run, you may as well be playing a game of war. You may as well be playing a game of, you know, rock paper scissors or something. So. Also, weregazelle in the chat notes that someone did make some new hacking rules for *The Sprawl* recently, so maybe go look those up. Maybe that's a good idea. So.

Art: Go bother Hamish on…

Austin: Yeah, [laughs softly] go ping Hamish. [Ali laughs softly] Hamish will tell you. Yeah, so, and I do hope you find a solution that makes stuff like more exciting for you. I think by the end of it, we had basically…I can think of two hacking runs, maybe? But basically, we had really reduced the degree to which hacking was a thing that was happening in networks and not just in the world, right? And I think by the time we got to Twilight Mirage, we were fully in the world of here are visual, like, representations of the…to hack is to be in a place, and so that way, you don't have to, like—

Ali: Yeah.

Austin: —have that separation from your traditional moveset, basically, you know?

Art: Yeah, and there's also this, like, this idea in cyberpunk fiction that then bled into cyberpunk games, that somehow hacking would be like an interesting thing.

Austin: Uh huh. [laughs]

Art: And I think the real world has shown that hacking is not an interesting thing. It's just like… [Ali laughs] They just like sit like—

Austin: Sounds like a motherfucker who's about to be hacked.

Ali: Yeah. [Austin laughs]

Art: But like, you watch the movie *Hackers*, for example, and they're like doing all this shit, you know? [Ali laughs]

Austin: Yeah.

Art: And that's not what it is.

Austin: Yeah.

Art: It's just like sort of sitting at your computer, brute forcing passwords and shit. Or even just like buying the passwords. Like, there's no…

Austin: Right, well, it's— yeah. Uh huh. It's a lot, especially once you talk about like, the most successful hackers are people who are just like talking their way into networks and into IDs and stuff like that, right?

Art: Yeah, it's, there's no…there's no drama in it, really.

Austin: Yeah. Yeah. Well, I hope that— I'm sorry that we were downers on that one, Doug. My other thought is just like…my favorite example of things like this are when we've found some new rule take, where like, the court scene in season one of Hieron, right? Where it's like, yeah, I cooked up some rules. I don't even know if these rules are good, but they're fun because they're novel. And doing that around a particular hack could be fun, you know? The other thing is like, you know, *The Sprawl* has clocks in it. It doesn't have *Blades in the Dark* style clocks, where like the player advances them for projects to finish, but it could.

Ali: Oh, sure.

Austin: And that's a very easy hack for like making progress on a hack, over…ugh. [Ali and Art laughs softly] It's very easy rule change for like framing hacking something over a long time, and that might be, that might be a fun way of doing it. I don't know.

Ali: Doug, don't listen to them. Do your *Netrunner* tournament, [Austin laughs softly] and then see who won against who, and then do like a really fun Blades downtime.

Austin: Uh huh.

Ali: Or just write those people making out with other people. It'll completely work.

Austin: There you go. That's fine. Yeah.

Ali: Don't worry about it. This is a good idea. [Austin and Ali laugh quietly]

Art: Ali's escalating to a whole tournament now.

Austin: Yeah. [Ali laughs] Doug wanted to do—

Art: Seven hours at the game store—

Austin: Yeah.

Art: And the owner wants you all to get out of there. That's what Ali's doing now.

Ali: [laughs] But like, other people could doing while we're playing that. Like, it seems like the people in this group just like want to be playing *Netrunner*. [Art laughs softly] And like, if that's what you want to do, just do it. [laughs]

Austin: They should do that. That's fun. Yeah. *Netrunner* already has hot people in it too, Ali.

Ali: Yeah!

Austin: You don't need to come up with your own. You could just start…

Ali: Yeah.

Austin: Yeah. All right.

Art: Yeah. Ah, *Netrunner* is the only game where like— uh, only game is rough, but like…

Austin: Uh huh. [Ali laughs]

Art: It's a game where like, they really like explored the space of hot people in a way that like—

Austin: [laughs] They did.

Ali: Mm. [laughs]

Art: —no one else is doing it, like…

Austin: Bring it back. I guess NISEI is about to drop their new thing, right? Their, their…

Art: Yeah. And maybe someday Wizards of the Coast will put out *Netrunner* again.

Austin: [unenthused] That'll happen.

Ali: Fingers crossed.

Art: And it'll be bad. Because I've seen who they think is hot. [Austin and Ali laugh] And it's the same six skinny people.

Austin: Uh huh. It sure is.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

[0:44:02]

Austin: All right. Next question comes in from Rothko, who says:

> I've dealt with some pretty heavy things in the past few years, but recently, I've been tossing around the idea of using tabletop RPGs as a way to think through loss, trauma, et cetera. Specifically, I've been thinking about trying to play characters that are either way outside of my comfort zone—self destructive characters in particular—or characters that are going through similar things to what I've been going through. I'm very upfront with my tabletop RPG groups about my triggers, and I know when I would be safe— uh, that I would be safe to pump the brakes on any difficult or upsetting scenes. My main question is: how do you prepare yourself for potentially sad or upsetting RP? I guess the main obvious examples from *Friends at the Table* is a major Hieron narrative arc that finished in Spring, but I'm wondering if any of you have experience or advice when it comes to delving into emotionally difficult and personally relevant narratives, and how you prepare yourselves for that or take care of yourselves afterwards.

Austin: What do y'all think?

Art: I mean, my first advice to this is have all of your characters be about the same trauma for several years. [Austin and Ali laugh] And then have your wife point it out to you like five years in.

Ali: Oh.

Art: And then you do that…that Wired GIF about your own life.

Austin: Yeah, uh huh. The Wee-Bey.

Ali: Uh huh.

Austin: Wee-Bey dot GIF.

Art: Yeah, Wee-Bey…

Austin: Uh huh. Looks around and goes, "Oh shit." Yeah.

Art: Yeah. [Ali laughs] Yeah, I guess that's a meme that may have grown beyond its source material.

Austin: Yeah, it did. Do you have a real answer? I mean, that's a real answer.

Art: It's a real— it's what I did.

Austin: It's maybe the most real answer. But did you— given that, have you started to think about it in a more active instead of like backgroundy way?

Art: No, I'm really excited to find out what my last few characters have been about. [Austin and Ali laugh] When Jess gets around to it.

Ali: It's tough. This is something I feel like I have accidental experience in. We didn't plan for it this way, and I haven't really spoken about it publicly, but I was at a funeral the day that the [laughs softly] the episode that Valence died released. And then… [Austin sighs] Yeah, we. [laughs] Yep! And then, um, I, you know, just, you know, the going through like, oh, are we gonna…am I gonna have to do Valence's wake as like a scene? Am I gonna have to…

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Ali: [laughs] Am I gonna have to do like a, um…pff, what is the thing that I'm thinking of? When you like say something at someone's…?

Austin: Like a, like a…

Art: A eulogy.

Austin: Eulogy.

Ali: A eulogy.

Austin: There we go. Thank you.

Ali: Yeah, yeah. I kept thinking, like, I should think about this in advance if I have to do it. And it was just like, it was a lot of thinking about it that way, right? Where it was like, needing to separate the like actual reality of what I'm going through from like what the character reality was, because those are two different things. [Austin laughs softly]There's overlap, but like…

Austin: Yes, yes.

Ali: The more that you can separate them, [laughs softly] the better you can, you know, sort of switch it on and off when you're like not at the table or like, you know, being able to, like, temper

your own reactions when you're like playing as a character. So it was— [laughs softly] it was a lot of that sort of thing of like, you know, realistically, if Broun is in the situation, how do I think that they would react? Or how do I think that they would talk about this thing, you know, that's [laughs] either similar or something different from the way that I would do it. And it requires like a lot of thinking about that, so this isn't like, an easy thing. But it will certainly help you work through some of those things, if that's like the goal of what you're doing this for?

Austin: Yeah.

Ali: I feel like I've done this, like, in smaller ways, too. [laughs] There was definitely like…this isn't the sadness version of this, but there's also like, I remember being in college and like playing someone who was like, definitely more self destructive and more outgoing and like, doing things that were unhealthy for them, because I was like, oh, I'm studying a lot, but like, [laughs] there's the like, there's the, um, the stereotype of like a, quote, unquote, “party person.”

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Ali: And what if I just play in this character for a little bit and sort of push it to its ends. And that was a version of doing that that was really [laughs] just a joke, but you know.

Austin: Totally.

Ali: Yeah, I…

Austin: In both of those cases, I would say like that— or not both of those cases, but in any case, however you go about it, one thing I think it's probably worth saying is talking to your— talk to your group about wanting to explore this space, and see how they feel about it and if they're cool with it, because…

Art: Mm.

Austin: You do not…if you don't feel comfortable having that conversation with them, then maybe it's not a good idea to draft them into your play session in which you will be going through very intense emotions about these topics that they don't even know that you're engaging with at this deeper level, right? And that's not to say that, like, you're…you're a bad person if you've stumbled into this before, [laughs softly] or that like there isn't character bleed. That's like a classic thing in the world of tabletop games and LARPs and stuff. That stuff happens. And it's good to be conscious of it. And it's also good to be able to— and I'm not saying that you need to give every person you play with a list of the themes you're looking to go through every session. [laughs softly] You know what I mean? I think that you're allowed to be more organic than that. But I do think that if you're saying, hey— it was not…it was not a secret at the table that part of what Hieron was about for me was about cancer and about climate change, right? And both of those things in really fatalistic ways because of experiences that I'd had. It was not a secret that like, you know, I have lost two grandfathers to cancer and both of

them within the years just before *Friends at the Table* started. And, and, you know, that part of that conversation I think was out there enough that I felt okay when I touched on those topics in the game. And, and because of that, I think we were able to get into a deeper place and because we had lots of conversations about… [laughs softly] Coming into Spring especially, we had so many conversations, it was just like, what is the season? Right? Like, what are we…if this…if this beat hits, which who knows if it does, how was that not the end of the season? How— and is that the tone we want to go out on, is that— so having those conversations upfront was really helpful.

And I think it's doubly necessary— or just as necessary, maybe not doubly. It's just as necessary if you're a player in a game, you're playing a player character in a game, where you don't necessarily…it is, it can be unfair to the other players for them to suddenly have to realize, "Oh, I'm playing a game with someone who is engaged with this at a level I did not expect them to be, and, and in order for— in order for them to have the experience they want, I need to be able to make the space and time to engage at that level, or to give them the space to do that. I wanted to kick down some doors and fight some robots." And so being really clear about that, I think, is super important. Beyond just listing triggers, beyond just knowing you can pump your brakes, or pump the brakes at the scene, but like, "Hey, here's what— here's the type of thing I want to do this campaign," I think will go a long way to letting you actually do that and not hitting a speed bump that makes you feel bad halfway through, you know? So.

Art: Yeah, I want to— there's a couple good comments in the chat I want to— I want to shout out. Heidi says—

Austin: Mm.

Art: "You gotta be conscious of how the character impacts other players at the table. Dealing with self destructive people in game can be just as exhausting as in real life."

Austin: [laughs] Yeah, sure.

Art: And that's absolutely true.

Austin: Hey, Grand Magnificent. [Ali snorts]

Art: And Thomas say, "Tabletop can be therapy, but do not bring friends to therapy without clearing it with them first."

Austin: Totally. Totally. That's exactly it.

Art: And yeah, those are both things to keep in mind.

Austin: Which doesn't mean you can't go— you can't go here. It just means be…it again, for me, the thing I think about a lot is like, if you're not comfortable saying this to someone else, then it probably is unfair to try to sneak it past them, you know?

Art: Yeah. And I guess to address like, the main— the, quote, main question here, “How do you prepare yourself for potentially sad or upsetting RP?”

Austin: Yeah.

Art: By giving myself space afterwards—

Austin: Mm, mm-hmm.

Art: —to like, deal with the fact that I had to, like, bring up that kind of emotional space. Like, time to…time afterwards to like discharge it, to get back into like, quote, unquote, “regular.”

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Art: 'Cause you don't want to like…

Austin: It can be hard.

Art: You don't want to bring up emotions for a game and then just like, well, that's my emotional state in life now. [Austin and Ali laugh] Like…

Austin: Nope. Yep. It can be hard to just have a good time in a game and come down from that.

Art: Yeah.

Austin: Let alone when you're doing heavy shit.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Austin: Or like big stuff, you know? So. I hope that that helps, at the very least. And I hope, I hope you're able to do this work, because it can be really— it *can* be really, really productive to be able to find that space and work through those ideas and feelings with people who you can trust and who trust you. So I do hope it works out for you. Siobhan writes in, uh…Ali, do you want to read this one?

[0:53:37]

Ali: Um, sure!

My group has decided that we want to have our TTRGB characters— RGB. [laughs]

Austin: Our red green blue characters.

Ali: Our tabletop characters. [Austin and Ali laugh]

> We want to have our tabletop characters play a tabletop game as a fun aside from our actual play podcast. The idea came from two characters mentioning that they'd played *Dungeons and Dragons* before, but we know we don't want to make a D&D AP in the year 2021. We've been in discussions for which games we'd like to— for which game we'd have the characters play in a one shot as a side episode, and I was curious if you had any suggestions. One of our GMs has mentioned *Lancer*, a D20 system, while the other has been considering *World Wide Wrestling RPG* or *Impulse Drive*, both Powered by the Apocalypse. The character— [laughs softly] the characters that we will be playing are *Masks: A New Generation* teenage superheroes and a friend of ours suggests that we— and a friend of ours suggested that they play *Masks* too.

Austin: Art, you had such a negative re— not negative. [Ali laughs] Such a troubled…

Art: This is gonna be so hard.

Ali: No, it isn't.

Art: You're gonna really struggle to do this. [Ali laughs] I'm not telling you not to do it.

Austin: I don't think that's true.

Art: But like I told the last person, you need to be like, when this is over, you have to…you have to be done for the day. Can't be like…I'm gonna do this, and then I'm gonna go for like…

Austin: You can't imagine Hadrian sitting down and like playing some sort of simple fantasy game with the rest of the Hieron crew? [laughs]

Art: Um…

Ali: Yeah.

Art: And then like—

Austin: It's nothing.

Art: My first advice is like, maybe you should just do D&D, you know?

Austin: What if you like…if you're gonna do D&D, you should do fourth edition, where it's basically a combat game.

Art: Yeah.

Austin: That's fun.

Art: You definitely shouldn't do a different D20 game. That's just…

Austin: Well, I don't think that—

Art: You're just…

Austin: They're not doing…is that group doing D&D now? I think they're not doing D&D now. They're doing *Masks*.

Art: No, but—

Ali: They're playing *Masks* now, and then it would've been *Masks* players playing *Lancer*.

Austin: Right.

Art: But yeah, one of the suggestions is a different D20 game, and don't do that. If you're gonna do a D20 game, just play D&D. [Ali laughs] It's like…don't do it, but like, if you're gonna get that close, just do it.

Austin: [laughs softly] Uh huh.

Art: You know, it's…yeah, I don't— and I wouldn't do *Masks* on *Masks*. I feel like that's too…

Ali: No.

Art: Too cute, you know?

Austin: [quoting song???] Masks on masks on masks on masks. [Ali laughs]

Art: But like, the trick here is you're playing two characters. You're playing a character playing a character, and like, you might not appreciate how hard that is.

Austin: That's fair.

Ali: I…I don't feel like it's that hard. [laughs] I feel like this would be a fun thing to do. Especially because the like, character development part of it is gonna be so front loaded, like, off mic quote, unquote—

Austin: Mm-hmm.

Ali: That like, in the process of like, okay, I'm sitting down with the *Lancer* book. What appeals to me here? What kind of mech do I want to make? What kind of wrestler do I want to make? You can think within the, like, bounds of what you think that character would make. Like, it's…it feels close to me of like, again, making a a tabletop RPG character in like Dark Souls.

Austin: Right.

Ali: Or like, you know, making them in like a Picrew or something. You could like, are they gonna wear shorts or are they gonna wear these overalls? Like, it's just like… [laughs] It's fun to think about that sort of thing.

Austin: *World Wide Wrestling* is the one— *World Wide Wrestling* is my favorite one and also the one that breaks my brain the most, [Ali laughs] because you'd be playing a character who is playing an actor—

Art: Playing a…

Austin: Or a wrestler, [Ali laughs] who then has to play the character who they are in kayfabe.

Art: Right. Yeah.

Austin: That sounds great.

Ali: But I feel—

Art: Yeah, that's that's hardest bit.

Austin: But that's the most thematically…that's the most thematically dense and powerful thing. The thing that I was— I just want to recommend really quick, is one, I do think staying…I think that the way that this has to work is the way that— it doesn't have to work this way. But if you said these characters have played D&D before, it should probably be a fantasy RPG of some sort that is like straightforward and filled with archetypes, because you can use those archetypes as a palette for doing characterization of the players, of the characters who are players who are now playing. And for that, what I was gonna say is there's that great Riley Rethal, Jay Dragon *Venture*/*Dungeon* two pack. *Venture* is a— they're both No Dice, No Masters games, which means like, you're not doing a lot of rolling. So like, character creation is not— you're not doing any rolling. You're not doing like, you're not gonna have to build a character and like balance them and like spend all that time. Though that can be fun. I know that that can be fun. [Ali laughs softly] But also like, *Dungeon* is explicitly about being kids playing D&D, and, and if your characters can map to *Dungeon* archetypes, then that could be a blast. Because in that game, it is like, half of your moves are…your moves are about, you know, being the class that you are, but they're also about who you are at the table and like who you are in the world beyond the table. And that could be a really, really good way of doing it, because

you're already in that— it's a game built to explore this exact dynamic. I'm trying to find my copy of *Dungeon* now so that I can read a move from it so that I can explain what the fuck I'm talking about. [typing] [Ali laughs softly] But it turns out that's harder for me to do than I thought it would be, because I have a bunch of stuff in my downloads folder and I'm a bad— oh, here we go, *Dungeon* playtest sheets. Thank you. [Ali laughs softly] Here we go. So, for instance—

Art: But are you suggesting that you play *Dungeon* as these characters playing *Dungeon*?

Austin: No.

Art: Or use *Dungeon* to play these characters?

Austin: You're right. You're right. I'm suggesting playing *Dungeon* to play these characters playing a game. You're right, that's a different thing.

Art: Yeah.

Austin: But like, for instance, the wizard is an excited kid playing a heroic character. Their powers are arcane, controlling, and intellectual. And their moves are things like cast a spell you don't have access to normally, but also like provide clarity in a moment of uncertainty, but also things like argue about the specifics of the rules to get what you want. [Ali laughs] Which is great. Fail to learn your lesson. Perfect, fantastic. And that stuff is cool.

Art: Yeah, and those are the signposts you need, right?

Austin: Yes.

Art: Because to do this, especially at a show, you need the characters to have these out of character moments, and then you are by necessity going to have your own out of character moments. There's like…that's where I feel like the real difficulty. Playing the game isn't hard. It's playing the playing. And so something like *Dungeon* which is set up to play the playing is gonna, I think, guide you there a little nicer.

Austin: Yeah. People are saying that they don't know if *Venture* and *Dungeon* are available, and they are. They're on Itch.io. I'll link it in the chat. But, but yeah. Or something else light. I think I just saw, and I can't find the chat again. The chat's just gone now. I've lost it. There it is. Thomas Whitney in the chat says, "Maybe like a *Lasers and Feelings* or another one pager where you can keep that second layer of PCs really light and fun." I think my impulse is to go light and fun and to allow for just focusing on the characterization. But there is part of me that is like, what would my character choose when they were building a warlock? [Austin and Ali laugh] What spells would they take? And that's fun. So, I don't know. I think you really—

Art: Just go all the way and play *Mage: The Ascension*, why don't you? Why don't we just…

Austin: [laughs] God. Ah, I was just talking about *Mage: The Ascension* and how it's the Matrix.

Art: Is Ascension the one I mean? Do I mean Awakening? Which— what do I mean?

Austin: What's the first one? You mean the first one?

Art: Yeah, that's the one I mean.

Austin: I don't know which one it is.

Art: Mage…

Austin: Is it…whooh. [Ali laughs softly]

Art: Mage where there's no mag— where the magic is what you say it is. That one.

Austin: Yeah, uh huh. That one. Is that not the new one? The new one didn't do that?

Art: Ah, I don't know.

Austin: Okay.

Art: Who can—

Austin: Who could say?

Art: Who can pay attention anymore?

Austin: Who follows it? Yeah, uh huh.

Art: Do you know how many games there are to pay attention to 2021?

Austin: A lot.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Austin: A lot.

Art: I think infinity.

Ali: (??? 1:01:47)

Austin: Because new ones keep coming out, is the thing.

Ali: Yeah.

Art: (???)

Austin: That's how that works.

Ali: There's new music. There's new pineapples. You can't escape from it.

Austin: There's new pineapples?

Ali: I linked this in the chat.

Austin: [typing] New pineapples.

Ali: The pink pineapple that was like—

Austin: [intrigued] Oh.

Ali: The website about it was just really intense. We'll talk after.

Austin: Okay.

Ali: It's like especially juicy and like apparently sweeter, and it's pink on the inside.

Austin: Huh.

Ali: And they've like been developing it for a really long time, but like they didn't really talk about why they were doing that or like…

Austin: It looks like ham, to me.

Ali: It looks like a ham! [laughs]

Austin: It looks like ham to me.

Ali: I can not get over…

Austin: I do like like a ham steak with pineapple is the thing, so maybe that's fine by me.

Ali: That's the thing. I was thinking like, how funny would it be to like make the Easter ham but with the pink pineapple— [laughs]

Austin: That would be very funny.

Ali: —thingy on top of it.

Austin: That's good.

Ali: But it's just a lot.

Austin: That's good!

Art: With little slices of ham on it.

Austin: Yeah.

Ali: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Art: Developing a fruit sounds like a very fun, very time consuming process, right? 'Cause like, you have a fruit idea, and you gotta wait years, right?

Ali: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Art: You're tweaking a fruit a little bit, and you gotta…

Austin: Not if you're playing *The Ground Itself*, where you just decide, what if they're just big pomegranates?

Ali: [laughs] Yeah, uh huh. The magic of imagination. Which is why this question is really easy. Just embody your character [laughs] and fucking play the game! It'll be fun to do. Just do it.

Austin: [laughs softly] All right.

Art: I mean, I would— [Ali laughs] I'd definitely— I would say a hundred percent just do it, if it was like your home game, but as a show, as a…

Ali: Sure. [Austin sighs]

Art: As an outward facing item, you have to…

Austin: Yeah.

Art: You know, if Austin came to me and was like, "This is what we're doing next week on Bluff City," I'd be like, "Are you sure?" [Ali laughs] So I have to say that to these people too.

Austin: Yeah, we could do it. The, I mean…

Ali: We could— yeah, we could do Hella and Hadrian—

Austin: I badly want to do…I badly want to do *Dungeon* on…*Dungeon*? *Venture*? I get them confused every fucking time, and I need to double check it. *Dungeon* with kids in Bluff City so bad. And, you know, we're playing a game right now in Bluff City that has kids in it, so it's not off the table.

Art: We do good kids, though. We're a good kid..

Austin: Well, yeah.

Ali: Mm.

Austin: I've enjoyed the kids we've played. I feel like they've been— we've done— what have we done? We've done ECH0. We've done, um miss, miss…what's the youth one? Miserable— not miserable youth. That's not right, is it?

Ali: Um, missepent? Is that it?

Austin: Misspent, misspent.

Ali: Misspent.

Austin: *Misspent Youth*, yes. What other kids? We're doing— we're doing a kids thing now. More a teens thing, but they're young. They're young. Maybe they are kids. One of them's very young, now that I think about it. You haven't heard this at all yet, Ali, right?

Ali: No, no, no, no. I should download it.

Austin: Mm-hmm. It's good.

Ali: Okay. [laughs]

Austin: And then…god, are there any other kids that we've played? I think those are the ones that come to mind.

Ali: Oh, the *BFF* kids.

Austin: *BFF* kids! *BFF* kids are fun.

Ali: We could do— [audio cuts out] probably playing a RPG right now, today. I believe it. No, I couldn't do that.

Austin: I believe it too. I think I'm— Ali, I'm with you, but again, I think I'm already of that mode of juggling characters in that way.

Ali: Sure.

Austin: Whereas it sounds like Art comes from a different more method school. [Ali laughs] Though you would think that like, with enough method, you'd be able to get there.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

[1:04:50]

Austin: I finished the Snyder Cut today, and…

Ali: Oh? [laughs]

Austin: The little bit that has Jared Leto…Jared Leto? [pronounced: LEE-toh] Is that who it was, is the Joker? is miserable.

Art: Yeah, Jared Leto [LEH-toh] is the Joker.

Austin: Leto [LEH-toh]. Terrible. Miserable. Shouldn't be in the movie.

Ali: Oh.

Art: Have you— yeah, you've seen *Suicide Squad*.

Austin: I've now seen that, yes. Also bad.

Ali: I can't believe— [laughs] I can't believe you like…

Art: He's—

Austin: I did it this week. I was just like, let me just do it.

Ali: You were like, I gotta watch all of this shit so I can watch this four hour movie. [laughs softly]

Austin: It was fun to do. I wasn't…

Ali: Yeah.

Austin: I wasn't like…it was all engaging, because it's— they're all— because it's not like the model, you know what I mean?

Ali: Oh, sure, sure, sure. I get bored really easily once I know the— once I know the model of a thing, and these things are— [laughs softly] defy comprehension in some ways, [Ali and Art laugh] which makes them fascinating.

Art: I'm not sure that I would say that Snyder's…

Austin: No. No. [Ali laughs]

Art: Defies modeling.

Austin: I think— well, no.

Art: It defies Marvel model, but I think he just has a model.

Austin: I don't think he has a model for *Man of Steel*. I think he has four models for *Man of Steel*, and he bounces between them randomly [laughs] depending on what scene it is. [Ali laughs] And then, yeah, *Batman v Superman*. I just had these conversations on Waypoint. I don't need to do it again. But I do want to say the Joker stuff in Snyder Cut is bad.

Art: Well, I'm not on Waypoint! [Austin and Ali laugh]

Austin: It's bad. It's— I— From what I've seen, though, I don't think I'm gonna go watch the Whedon Cut. But whew, that thing looked like shit, and all the dialogue I've heard from it is terrible. And having now seen them, seen the Snyder Cut and then watching clips from the Joss Whedon version of it—which, by the way, fuck Joss Whedon.

Art: Sure, yeah.

Ali: Mm.

Austin: Is you can see where they've ADRed in quips, where they've added quips to scenes where they— the character wasn't moving their mouth, because— or like it was shot from the back, like, oh, here's Superman flying in to save the day or whatever. Spoilers, Superman's in that movie. And—

Art: That's not a spoiler. He's on the poster. [Ali laughs]

Austin: Okay. Well, he— okay. Last time I paid attention to that movie was—

Ali: Didn't know he was flying around. [Austin and Art laugh]

Art: That would be a fucking bold filmmaking choice, [Ali laughs] where Superman walks around now on…

Austin: Yeah, he…

Ali: They're breaking the mold.

Art: Superman in a cab.

Austin: That would be great. [Ali laughs] They've done that in comics, right? They've taken powers away.

Art: Yeah, definitely. Anything Superman can do, he's done in a comic.

Austin: And not done. He's done— it's gone all the way, both ways. [Ali laughs] Anyway, that movie, phew. But no, there's a— the thing I was gonna say is, yeah, there's a sequence where Superman's flying in to save the day or whatever, and in the reg— in the Snyder Cut, it's just like Superman's flying in and there's like, you know, operatic music playing. And in…in the fucking Whedon Cut he's like, "Did ya miss me?" or something like that. [laughs]

Ali: No.

Austin: And it's miserable! [Ali laughs] It's so fucking bad! [sighs]

Ali: Well.

Art: What I think, what I want to get out of this week in HBO Max superhero content is they uploaded the 90s Superman cartoon?

Austin: Oh. Huh.

Ali: Oh.

Art: The Paul Dini—

Austin: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Art: Bruce Timm—

Austin: Bruce Timm.

Art: Superman cartoon.

Austin: Yeah, mm-hmm.

Art: And I think I'd rather revisit that than…

Austin: Sure. I didn't love that as a kid. I really—

Art: …let Zack Snyder take up any more of my time.

Austin: Yeah, that's fair. Certainly not four hours.

Art: I saw *Sucker Punch* in theaters.

Austin: Nope.

Art: I don't owe that man a thing. [Ali laughs]

Austin: I started it once. Never finished it, never will.

Art: It's so bad.

Ali: Okay. Question.

Austin: Yes.

Art: Yeah.

Ali: How adjacent to *Batman: The Animated Series* is that Superman cartoon?

Austin: It's the same team. It's the same…

Ali: Oh.

Austin: It looks the same.

Art: Yeah, it’s directly adjacent.

Austin: Yeah.

Ali: Ooh.

Austin: They like came one after another. They're different in tone, because Metropolis is so different than Gotham.

Ali: Yeah.

Austin: And because Superman isn't Batman, but like, you know.

Art: Yeah. And they've got that, the…they've got that weird ‘90s Supergirl. Like, they were like, we don't want what Supergirl looks like, so now this is what Supergirl looks like. [Ali laughs softly]

Austin: Mm.

Art: Which was fun. But yeah—

Austin: Yeah.

Art: And it's…it also gets to a lot of the material that, uh, Snyder’s Superman, uh, Justice League gets into and also ends up being very big on the Kirby material.

Austin: Oh, sure. Right.

Art: But it's written by people who like Jack Kirby instead of…

Austin: Uh huh. [Austin and Ali laugh]

Art: You know.

Austin: I want you to see this, ‘cause I actually really…I really am curious what you think of the Darkseid stuff and the Anti-Life Equation stuff.

Art: Yeah.

Austin: And Steppenwolf.

Art: I mean, I’ve—

Austin: Steppenwolf was kind of interesting. I think Steppenwolf is like a good version of a stupid big epic, like, supervillain for one of these like, this is a superhero movie, by the way of Lord of the Rings. Do you know what I mean?

Art: Mm.

Austin: ‘Cause that's what this.

Art: I mean, I— my take away from this. I've only seen the Whedon Cut, and I watched it on an airplane, and I think I've said this before—

Austin: Yes.

Art: But I was on an airplane with literally nothing else to do, and this movie could not keep my attention.

Austin: And also, let's be clear—

Art: I was like—

Austin: You are…you are a DC Comics person.

Art: Yes.

Austin: You're a child of the comic book industry.

Art: Yeah. My mother worked for DC Comics for a good long while. It was a big part of my life.

Austin: Your mom killed Superman.

Art: My mom killed Superman.

Austin: Your mom— the first time that I can draw a line between Arthur Martinez-Tebbel and Austin Walker, I can tell you the day, which is a strange thing to say.

Art: That is a strange thing.

Austin: [typing] Uh, Superman. Uh, let's see here. Uh, comics. Here we go. “The Death of Superman” is published— when is this published? Art, do you know off the top of your head when this is published? Published…here we go. Publication date.

Art: Uh, “Death of Superman” is ‘94? Is that right? ‘94, ‘95?

Austin: ‘93. ‘93.

Art: Ah!

Austin: Close. Oh, wait, 90…mm. The arc ends January ‘93. So sometime in January 1993, I am getting out of a car in a parking—

Art: I like that you're narrating this like it's *Watchmen*. Please go on. [Austin and Ali laugh]

Austin: Out of a car, out of my father's car. In New York City, walking out of a parking lot, one of those self park ones. Um, actually, it’s probably one of the ones that has the like, you know, things that raise the cars, you know what I’m talking about?

Art: Yeah, uh huh.

Austin: And it's like one of those.

Art: The monthly cars go up on the rack, yeah.

Austin: Right, exactly. And it's near— it was in Midtown, probably near Hell's Kitchen. We were walking out towards Times Square. My dad, at the time, was running, or owned, a couple of clothing stores that would eventually be, you know, pushed out by bigger clothing stores with better money that could bring in kind of the emerging hip-hop clothing market to the Atlantic City area. Different time. [Austin and Art laugh] And so he would— we would often go into the city for him to like meet up with merchants and wholesalers to buy just like literal boxes of like shirts to then drive back to Atlantic City to sell. And that was always a nice excuse just to like go into the city with him for a day. And while walking under one of those…over those kind of scaffolds where the, you know, there's like work going on to the facade of a building and you get the kind of construction, the green construction scaffolding with the metal pipes that are all over New York. I'm walking through one of those, and I hear someone say, "Extra, extra. Superman is dead." And I look up, and there's a person, a young kid, you know, someone probably in their young, 19, 20, 21, 21, somewhere in their kind of, you know, 20s, early 20s. Holding out kind of fake Daily Planet papers with the headline that Superman had been killed and giving them out across the kind of Midtown New York. And I would come to learn, many, many years later, that that was a brainchild of Art's mom who was at DC at the time.

Art: She was the publicist of DC Comics.

Austin: Great idea. You know what? It got— [Ali and Art laugh] it fucking made it public to me. And so, and so that is— that moment is the first time our paths indirectly crossed, was Superman dying. I was very upset. [laughs] I was like, wait a second.

Ali: No!

Austin: How's Superman— Dad, what do you mean Superman is dead? [laughs] So.

Art: And I think— I think if you go to the…yeah, the Wikipedia article on "The Death of Superman" or the Wikipedia article on the comics crash of the '90s.

Austin: Yeah.

Art: Specifically blames my mother.

Austin: Incredible.

Art: Which I think is hilarious.

Austin: Oh my god. [Ali laughs]

Art: That she had that kind of power at DC. But, but the point, the point of this original thing is, um…so I'm watch— this movie can't keep my attention, and what really stuck with me about it though, is ‘cause I assume that Joss Whedon did not redo all of the effects.

Austin: Right.

Art: Is that these Kirby characters don't look right.

Austin: Mm.

Art: And after watching him do *300* and *Watchmen* with this slavish devotion—

Austin: Uh huh, yeah.

Art: —to what the source material looks like, for him to do these Kirby characters as these metallic ugly things, that's just disrespectful. [Austin laughs] You know? I feel disrespected. [Ali laughs]

Austin: Yeah. I— yeah.

Art: And I don't want to let that disrespect into my home, where I live.

Austin: Where you live.

Ali: Mm.

Austin: Maybe that’s why I should watch it here, in this in between space, but…

Austin: That's a good idea.

Ali: Oh, sure.

Austin: Yeah, Steppenwolf just looks like a— it's super weird what Steppenwolf looks like. Steppenwolf in the comics is like basically a dude, right? Like, a dude with a helmet?

Art: Yeah, I think he looks like a Shakespeare character a little.

Austin: Yeah. In this, he's a troll. He's like a big— he's like a Qunari from Dragon Age. He has like big horns built into his head. Which is not the case for— I guess maybe those— mm, I'm pretty sure they're built in, based on some stuff that happens in that movie. [Austin and Art laugh] I think he looks better than he did in the Whedon thing. I'll pull that up. I don't know if you’ve seen those comparisons. But I don't know— I think the Whedon one actually is meant to

look more like the comic character, but he looks like a little baby. He looks like a little troll baby in there.

Art: Mm.

Austin: And it's not— it's not good. So. But the—

Art: It'll be a real shame if Marvel with their *Eternals* movie ends up doing—

Austin: Cosmic Kirby stuff better?

Art: —space Kirby stuff better than…

Austin: Yeah.

Art: ‘Cause DC has the better material.

Austin: Agreed, yeah. It doesn't get better.

Art: And they sort of have like the better space to do it. And they just like…

Austin: Well, it's not gonna happen now. Right? Like, unless this version of the movie ends up being super popular, which it cannot be, because it's on a streaming service very— not very few people have, but it's not gonna be a blockbuster, because it can't be at this point. Like, they're not gonna do another one of these movies.

Art: Wait, which is which on this side by side?

Ali: Isn’t [audio cuts out] gonna do…?

Austin: Left is Whedon. Right is…

Art: Yeah, that’s closer.

Austin: Yeah.

Art: These are both ugly things, but…

Austin: Yes.

Ali: They— but there's a new hashtag that's like—

Austin: Of course. Let him do the—

Ali: You know, reestablish the Snyder universe.

Austin: I can't imagine. They paid him so much money— they gave him so much money to make this fucking movie, and I cannot imagine it does the money that it needs to like make Warner Brothers eat that much crow. Also, it sucked. It sucked that the like…the like Snyder Cut fanboys were so, like, deeply toxic and angry at the world over this shit. It was just miserable.

Ali: Right.

Art: And they're gonna lose all these actors.

Austin: Yes.

Art: They're gonna have to recast.

Austin: But there's a new Batman like in a year who's not Ben Affleck, right?

Ali: Oh.

Austin: Like, they've moved on. That's the thing, right? They've moved on. They made that bad Wonder Woman movie. [laughs]

Ali: Yeah, I have not paid attention to any of this, aside from knowing that like… [Austin sighs] the very (??? 1:16:39)

Austin: Did you watch that clip I sent you today, Ali?

Ali: I did not, ‘cause I was— sometimes— [laughing] sometimes I have to sit at my desk with sunglasses on, because of the way my desk is pointed.

Austin: Because of how cool you are? [Art laughs]

Ali: [laughing] Also 'cause I’m an extremely cool person.

Austin: Uh huh.

Ali: And I couldn't really see the video, ‘cause that was happening. [laughs]

Austin: Also it’s the darkest shit in the world, so I don't blame you for that. It's just dark— it's just— Snyder does not like to have lights ever, apparently. But I did send you a clip that I said, “I don't think Justice League is very good, but if you ever just want Jason— to see— to watch Jason Momoa be a bro,” and then sent you a clip in which he just like [Ali and Austin laugh quietly] is doing action movie shit and then being like, you know, “Go get ‘em, big man!”

Ali: (??? 1:17:27)

Austin: It's great.

Ali: Bro for bro.

Austin: It’s, yeah, that stuff.

Art: The Aquaman movie was also not good. Geoff Johns I think is the secret villain in the entire Warner Brothers universe here.

Austin: That's what it seems like. Yeah.

Art: 'Cause he seems to have fucked up that second Wonder Woman movie. Zack Snyder didn't touch that. I’ve been blaming Zack Snyder for things might be Geoff Johns's fault. But like—

Austin: Also, Ray Fisher's like absolute, like, going nuclear on him seems entirely deserved.

Art: Mm-hmm.

Austin: Because I was like, okay, well, so what's different about these movies? And the answer seems to be that Cyborg existed in that first version of the movie to, uh, have a dick, have a robot dick.

Ali: Mm.

Austin: And all— or maybe it's a real, I don't know if it's a physical dick or— I mean, they're both physical. [Ali laughs softly] I don't know if it's an organic or a robot dick, but it's one of them. And then also to say like, slang, to be like…I forget what the slang is he uses, but it's basically to be a punchline. And he might be the most powerful character in the Snyder Cut and certainly the one with the most time spent on his emotional arc.

Art: Mm.

Austin: And so I cannot imagine being that dude and being like, “Hey, did you really take this movie in which I was going to be able to launch my stardom for?” not that he…he’d been in other shit, you know what I mean? but he had not been in that much other shit. And, and have that career just utterly undercut by Joss Whedon. Man. You’d have to meet me in the streets on that one. [Ali laughs]

Art: I don't know what people are complain— I mean, if you watch all the Buffy and Angel stuff, there was one Black character. And—

Austin: [laughs softly] And his name— [feigning ignorance] well, what's his name?

Art: His name was Gunn.

Austin: Uh huh.

Art: And he was in a gang. [Austin laughs softly] So, he's basically—

Austin: But he was one of the good ones, Art. You're forgetting this.

Art: —Martin Luther King.

Austin: Uh huh. [laughs softly]
Art: Yeah, he leaves his gang. He goes and lives with the white people. [Austin sighs] And then he becomes a lawyer. Made it out.

Ali: [laughs] Aw, yeah.

Austin: Mm.

Ali: Yeah.

Art: He didn't get become a lawyer by his own work. [Austin laughs] He got the…the smarts magically put in his head. [laughs softly]

Austin: Fuck Joss Whedon. All right. On that note, thank you. The email address tipsatthetable@gmail.com. [Ali laughs softly] You can support us by going to friendsatthetable.cash. Thank you as always for your support. We'll be back with another episode of Tips at the Table in a month or so.